I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Albemarle County has a rich heritage that is reflected in both the natural and built environments. Albemarle has a scenic environment that derives from its rolling terrain and mountains, river and stream valleys, and wooded and open areas. An architecturally and historically significant place, the built environment of Albemarle reflects not only the influence of Thomas Jefferson and the work of master builders following his example, but also the works of other significant architects and builders, expressed in the variety of architectural styles. There is a wealth of interesting public and vernacular buildings that supports the exceptional environment of the County. These abundant resources are viewed as ensembles of buildings, land, and vegetation and it is this collection of resources in the broader landscape that establish the unique character of Albemarle.

Entrance Corridors

Entrance Corridors are established to implement the Comprehensive Plan goal of protecting and conserving the County’s wealth of natural and built resources. They are established to ensure a quality of development that is compatible with the significant resources of the County and to protect its character. These promote the public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the County and the visitors thereto.

As major tourist routes, the Entrance Corridors are the first impressions that welcome visitors to Albemarle County. They also function as major commercial corridors to serve the citizens of the County. It is recognized that signs within a community not only advertise the businesses located along highways, but also help establish the character of the community and, when appropriately designed, can enhance its physical setting.
How to Use This Document

1. Refer to the *Albemarle County Architectural Review Board Design Guidelines* for an explanation of the Architectural Review Board process and for guidelines for the design of developments other than Corridor signs.

2. Refer to *Albemarle County Code*, Chapter 18 Zoning, Section 4.15, for sign design standards and regulations.

3. Review the design guidelines in this document and use the information contained herein as you design your sign(s).

   **Section II: General Sign Guidelines** should be referred to for all proposed types of signs.

   **Section III: Guidelines for Specific Sign Types** contains guidelines for various sign types. Find the sign type you want to install (freestanding, wall-mounted, and etc.) and review the guidelines for that specific type. Refer to Appendix B for definitions. Guidelines for fuel pump canopies are contained in the *Albemarle County Architectural Review Board Design Guidelines*.

   **Appendix A: Illustrations** in this section are visual examples of wall signs that explain the design themes used in the guidelines. These should be referred to for examples of appropriate and inappropriate sign design.

   **Appendix B: Glossary**

   **Appendix C: Harmonious Colors Diagrams**

4. Refer to ‘ARB Entrance Corridor Map 11 x 17.pdf’ located in the ARB Applications Form Center.
II. GENERAL SIGN GUIDELINES

Purpose of Sign Guidelines for Entrance Corridors

The sign guidelines in this document are part of the Albemarle County Architectural Review Board Design Guidelines. They provide direction to maintain the unique character and quality of the County’s Entrance Corridors. These sign guidelines balance the recognized need for business identification with the Comprehensive Plan goal of protecting and enhancing the visual qualities of the County. They seek to establish a visual balance between commercial needs and the aesthetic priorities of our community, harmony between what we build and the natural beauty of this place. The purposes of these Sign Guidelines are to:

1. **Create a consistent and unified design approach along the Entrance Corridors.** The placement, size, illumination and colors of signs can create unity along the corridor, or they can create a disjointed, visually competitive environment. Consistent and unified sign design allows the businesses located along the Corridor to have equal standing in visibility. It also provides a pattern of sign placement that makes the business locations and entrances more easily recognizable to both vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

2. **Establish simplicity and reserve as preferred characteristics** for sign design in these areas. This reflects the historic character of the area and enhances the aesthetic qualities of the Corridor. To this end, the overall design of a sign will be evaluated concurrently with that of the building on which it will be installed. The design of a building’s walls, window locations, parapets and other architectural features will influence the Board’s evaluation of appropriate signage. Likewise, a freestanding sign is evaluated in the context of the overall development in which it will be placed. Because each site is composed of a variety of elements that work together to create a unique character and appearance, ARB review of each sign proposal is guided by these sign guidelines within the context of the specific site for which the proposal is made.

3. **Encourage creative design.** The County encourages imaginative and innovative signs consistent with the purposes expressed above and in conformance with the regulations of the Albemarle County Code.
The following guidelines are applicable to signs of all types in the County’s Entrance Corridors.

4. Design Compatibility

a. Placement:

The design of a building’s walls, window locations, parapets and other architectural features shall influence the Board’s evaluation of appropriate signage. Wall signs can help establish rhythm, scale and proportion across the façade of a building.

See the Illustrations on pages 21 & 23-26 for examples of sign placement coordinated with architecture.

b. Scale and Size:

Signs located within the Entrance Corridor may not exceed the size, height and setback requirements as outlined in Section 4.15 of the Albemarle County Zoning Ordinance (unless the sign has received a variance).

See the Illustrations on pages 17-18 & 23-26 for examples of over-scaled, under-scaled and well-scaled signs.

c. Materials:

Materials used in both the sign and support structures should complement the building and/or multiple business center (see page 14) being served by the sign.
d. **Sign Lettering and Typeface:**

Lettering should be in proportion to the sign and the building for visual clarity and overall balance. Proportion of lettering includes font (size) and typeface (style). The use of three typefaces or fewer is more appropriate for signs in the Entrance Corridor. Additional typefaces may be approved only if they contribute to a balanced, legible, unified sign design.

See the Illustrations on pages 19-20 for variations of font or color examples.

e. **Color:**

Colors must be harmonious with each other. (For more information on harmonious colors, go to Appendix C). Colors must not clash with other elements on the site, both when viewed in daylight and at night, whether the signs are externally or internally lit. Overly intense color, such as but not limited to dayglo or fluorescent colors, are prohibited.

The use of three colors or fewer is more appropriate for signs in the Entrance Corridor. Black and white are counted as colors. Additional colors may be approved if they contribute to a balanced and unified sign design.

For raceway-mounted channel letters, raceways shall match the wall color.

f. **Trademarks, Corporate Logos and Graphics:**

The ARB may require that the color and scale of standard templates for trademarks, service marks, corporate logos and graphics be modified. When used, trademarks, service marks, corporate logos and/or graphics should be incorporated as an integral part of the overall sign.

See the Illustrations on page 22 for examples of logo placement.
5. Lighting

The purpose of ARB review is to ensure that new development in the Entrance Corridors is compatible with the historic architecture of the County and to promote orderly and attractive development. There is no historical precedent for internally illuminated signs. However, the ARB recognizes the need to identify businesses to help the traveling public find their destination and exit the highway safely.

a. When illumination is required, the preferred solution is to externally illuminate the sign – in other words, to shine a light on the sign. External illumination is preferred because it allows consistency with the daytime image of the sign. External lighting appears to the viewer as reflected light and allows the focus of the sign to be the original overall shape, color and complete design of the sign. Internal lighting produces a fragmented, rather than unified, sign image at night compared to external lighting and may project light that is distracting to the viewer. Similarly, exposed light sources that form the body of a sign (such as, but not limited to, exposed or bare neon) are not appropriate for the Entrance Corridors. They can produce glare and, generally, do not achieve the subtle character and compatibility that is the goal for the Entrance Corridors.

b. Since external illumination does not fit every case, individual channel letters – a type of internally illuminated sign that has less visual clutter impact on the Entrance Corridors – may also be approved. Channel letters are generally the preferred type of internally illuminated wall sign because they project the total sign and are identifiable with the daytime image of the sign. When channel letters cannot be adequately accommodated, internally illuminated cabinet signs may be considered. If cabinet signs are utilized, the backgrounds of such signs must be made opaque (zero light transmission).
c. External illumination is also preferred for approved graphics/logos; internal illumination may be considered for approval on a case-by-case basis. The Board will evaluate the specific design for size (adjusted in proportion to the accompanying lettering), balance, complexity, and distance from and relationship to the Entrance Corridor. These factors will determine the extent of internal illumination that can be approved.

d. These solutions are intended to reduce glare, visual clutter and distraction along the streetscape, to provide for coordinated appearances along the Entrance Corridors, to increase visual continuity, to achieve a balance of business identification with order and continuity, and to limit negative impacts along the County’s Entrance Corridors.

e. External Illumination:

Lighting should be shielded and not create glare. Lighting should be aimed so as not to project illumination beyond the sign. All external light sources shall be white.

f. Internal Illumination:

Any internal illumination is considered to contribute to visual clutter and will be limited.

g. All Illumination shall be non-blinking.

h. Exposed Light Sources:

An exposed light source that forms the body of a sign, such as but not limited to signs formed of exposed neon, as opposed to a light shining on a sign, shall not be used in the Entrance Corridors.
III. GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC SIGN TYPES

Guidelines for sign design may differ for the type of sign proposed. Sign types addressed in these guidelines include WINDOW SIGNS, FREESTANDING SIGNS (monument or pole), WALL SIGNS (on buildings), and FUEL PUMP CANOPY SIGNS.

For the purposes of these guidelines, projecting signs and awning signs should follow the guidelines for wall signs. See Section 4.15.2 of the Zoning Ordinance for definitions of these types of signs.

6. Reader boards are discouraged. Their typical structure, style, color and location add an element to the site that is often incompatible with other design elements that establish the overall appearance of the site. They do not contribute to a cohesive image on site. Their general appearance is typically temporary in nature; temporary sign permits are available if a business requires the display of a temporary message.

SIGN TYPES:
7. WINDOW SIGNS*

a. Signs that are placed on the outside or inside face of a window or storefront, or within a distance of three (3) feet inside the window or storefront, and that can be viewed from the Entrance Corridors, are regulated by the Architectural Review Board.

b. Total area of such signs should not exceed nine (9) square feet maximum per business frontage.

c. Such signs must remain in proper proportion to the window and storefront.

d. Interior display of merchandise is not regulated by the Board.

e. Two window signs, not exceeding 12” x 18” in size each, that substantially maintain the trans-parent quality of the window or storefront, are exempt from ARB review.

f. Illumination of window signs is discouraged when the window sign is not the only sign because it is distracting and competitive with the main wall sign.

*Please see Chapter 18, Section 4.15 of the Albemarle County Code for window sign regulations updated on 3/14/2012. As of that date, window signs are no longer subject to ARB review.
8. FREESTANDING SIGNS

a. Monument signs are preferred to pole-mounted signs because they are often of a smaller scale and can be more fully integrated into the overall development. Pole signs may be considered for approval if existing site conditions rule out the ability to use a monument sign, and only when the pole is in proportion to the sign cabinet or panel.

b. Materials used in both the sign and support structures should be complementary. They should also support the aesthetics of the building and/or complex being served by the sign, although a direct duplication is not necessary. It is preferred that the base material match one of the primary building materials unless the design of the sign represents itself as a freestanding element complementing the building.

c. The structure of a monument sign shall not overwhelm the sign. The structure and the sign that it supports must be in proportion to each other.

d. Landscaping: Use ground cover, shrubs and/or trees to integrate freestanding signs into the overall landscape development of the site. Refer to the Albemarle County Recommended Plants List, which is included in the Albemarle County Architectural Review Board Design Guidelines and is available on-line at www.albemarle.org.
e. Lighting:

i. External illumination is preferred for freestanding signs.

ii. External Illumination:

Landscaping for monument and pole signs should be designed to shield ground mounted lighting so that it is not visible from any adjacent property or right-of-way.

iii. Internal Illumination:

Channel letters with translucent faces shall be constructed such that no light spills outward from the top, bottom, sides or back. If back-lit (halo-lit), the faces and returns of channel letters shall be opaque.

iv. Cabinet signs shall have a non-illuminated background, or an opaque (zero light transmission) background. Cabinet signs shall be constructed such that no light spills outward from the top, bottom, sides or back. If outlines of letters are proposed, the width of the outline must be in proportion to the width of the letter. An outline width of 1/8” has been found to be an appropriate dimension for signs in the Entrance Corridors.

ENCOURAGED: Lighting integrated into the site landscaping

ENCOURAGED: Cabinet sign with an opaque background

ENCOURAGED: If an outline is used it must be in proportion to the width of the letter.
9. WALL SIGNS

a. Wall signs shall be integrated with the architecture of the building and the placement of such signs should not obscure architectural features or details, including but not limited to cornices, windows, columns, pilasters and paneling.

See the Illustrations on pages 23-26 for examples.

b. Channel lettering (mounted on a raceway or individual letters) is preferred to cabinet signs because cabinet signs tend to appear less integrated with the building. Channel letters overlay the wall material and allow the structure of the building to “read through” with less interruption. This results in a more coordinated overall appearance.

c. For raceway-mounted channel letters, the raceway shall match the wall color.

d. The size of a wall sign shall be coordinated with the size of the architectural element on which it is placed. The sign should not overcrowd the architectural element, the wall, or the sign area. (See Illustration 6 on page 26.) Buildings and building elements should not be used as a billboard. For example, an appropriate height for channel letters in a 30" high sign band is 18". This allows 6" of unoccupied space above and below the letters. Generally, 4" of clear space above, below, and to the sides of a channel letter sign is considered a minimum, with larger clearances required for larger sign bands. The ARB will consider the degree of visibility, the distance from the Entrance Corridor, and the architectural design of the building and the sign area in its determination of appropriate sizes and placement.
e. **Lighting:**

i. **External illumination is preferred for wall signs.**

ii. **External Illumination:**

Lighting directed toward a sign should be designed and shielded so that it illuminates the face of the sign and does not shine beyond the edge of the sign.

iii. **Internal Illumination:**

Channel letters with translucent faces shall be constructed such that no light spills outward from the top, bottom, sides or back. Faces and returns of channel letters shall be opaque when back-lit (halo-lit).

iv. **Cabinet signs shall have a non-illuminated background, or an opaque (zero light transmission) background.** Cabinet signs shall be constructed such that no light spills outward from the top, bottom, sides or back. If outlines of letters are proposed, the width of the outline must be in proportion to the width of the letter. An outline width of 1/8” has been found to be an appropriate dimension for signs in the Entrance Corridors.

**ENCOURAGED:** Lighting that illuminates only the face of the sign

Internally lit channel letters
10. WALL SIGNS FOR MULTIPLE BUSINESS CENTERS

For the purposes of these guidelines, a multiple business center is a single building that houses more than one business, or a group of buildings located in close proximity to each other and designed to be coordinated with each other, as part of a larger unit.

Coordination among signs is required for those signs installed in multiple business centers in the Entrance Corridors. Coordination can be achieved in sign type, size, placement, illumination, color, and/or font. All signs in a multiple business center must utilize the same sign type. (For example, all signs must be channel letters or all signs must be externally lit panels. A combination of channel letters and panels will not be approved.) Compatibility among signs must be maintained through color or font and typeface selection. Unified sign placement is required; signs must be placed on the building to establish a unified appearance. Coordination of these elements of sign design is sought to help unify a building or building complex, to reduce visual clutter and distraction along the Entrance Corridors, and to help maintain the architecture of the building as the focus of the development.

See the Illustrations on pages 19–21 for examples.

a. A complete sign package shall be provided as part of the submittal materials for the review of any new multiple business center. The proposal should address how compatibility among signs will be achieved, and how new signs will be coordinated with the architecture of the building(s); the first approved sign installed in a multiple business center will establish the standard for all future signs for that center. The future review of proposals for new signs in existing multiple business centers will take into consideration the character and appearance of the existing building(s) and with existing sign(s).
The following guidelines are provided to assist applicants in designing signs for multiple business centers:

b. Multiple business centers shall use a single sign type for all wall signs.

c. Compatibility among signs must be maintained through color or font and typeface selection.

d. Signs must be placed on the building in a manner that establishes a unified appearance. (See pages 19-20.)

e. **Lighting:**

   i. External illumination is preferred for signs in multiple business centers.

   ii. External Illumination:

       Lighting should be aimed so as not to project illumination beyond the sign.

   iii. Internal Illumination:

       Channel letters with translucent faces shall be constructed such that no light spills outward from the top, bottom, sides or back. Faces and returns of channel letters shall be opaque when back-lit (halo-lit).

   iv. Cabinet signs shall have a non-illuminated background, or an opaque (zero light transmission) background. Cabinet signs shall be constructed such that no light spills outward from the top, bottom, sides or back. If outlines of letters are proposed, the width of the outline must be in proportion to the width of the letter. An outline width of 1/8” has been found to be an appropriate dimension for signs in the Entrance Corridors.

**ENCOURAGED:** Compatibility among signs establishes a unified appearance

**ENCOURAGED:** Uniform sign base, externally illuminated signs

**ENCOURAGED:** Channel letters mounted on a raceway
11. FUEL PUMP CANOPY SIGNS

Refer to the guidelines for fuel pump canopies in the *Albemarle County Architectural Review Board Design Guidelines.*

a. Sign Lettering and Typeface

The number of typefaces should be limited to one.

b. Color

The use of three colors or less is more appropriate for canopy signs in the Entrance Corridors. Black and white are counted as colors.

**ENCOURAGED:** Use three colors or less for canopy signs
A. Scale and Proportion (multiple businesses)

A proportioning system can establish a consistent set of visual relationships among the parts of a building. Such a system can visually unify the various elements in an architectural design. It can provide a sense of order and continuity in the building. If signs are sized and located within the system, the signs will likely appear to fit visually within the overall structure. Typically, a ratio of 1/3 text to 2/3 wall area or 1/4 text to 3/4 wall area is a good working proportioning system for placing a sign on a building like the one illustrated below. These ratios are general guidelines. Actual design and structural conditions could make other ratios acceptable, or could make these ratios inappropriate. The ARB will consider the degree of visibility, the distance from the Entrance Corridor, and the architectural design of the building and the sign area in its determination of appropriate proportions.

Scale can be described as how small or large something appears to be in relation to the size of things around it. The concept of scale can be applied to the size of a sign. A sign that is placed in a sign band with free space around it, as in examples #1 and 2, can be called appropriately scaled.

![Illustration of appropriate scale and proportion]

1. **Encouraged:** Appropriately scaled

2. **Encouraged:** Appropriately scaled
Numerous factors can affect our perception of scale: color, form, surface pattern, shape, and disposition of elements and openings in an architectural design. Such factors can impact the appearance of a sign on a building, and are considered by the ARB in their review of proposed signs.
B. Variation of Font or Color (multiple businesses)

When multiple signs must be located on a single building elevation, an organizing system is required to unify the overall appearance of the building and signage. An example of an organizing system is choosing two elements that all of the signs on a single building have in common, like font style and letter size. Once the signs all have these elements in common (i.e., once the organizing system is in place), varying other aspects of the signs will allow them to be different enough to identify individual businesses. The variations can add interest to the building elevation.

In example #1, the font, color, placement, and size are repeated with no variation. In this case, the signs “match” each other in every way, but there is no variation to differentiate one business from another or to allow for interest through contrast.

1. Discouraged

In example #2, the placement, font, and size remain consistent, while variations in color are added to introduce a second rhythm. This variation provides interest and allows each business its own identity within a unifying system.

2. Acceptable
In example #3, the unifying systems are consistent alignment and size. Again, by providing an element of unity, the variation in font provides interest and identifies individual businesses.

![Example #3](image1)

3. Encouraged

In example #4, there are no uniting elements or organizing systems, which creates the impression of random placement.

![Example #4](image2)

4. Discouraged

Example #5 illustrates how simple choices like aligning the bottom edge of signs and keeping them roughly the same size will help unify the overall elevation even when the signs are very different.

![Example #5](image3)

5. Encouraged
C. Coordinated with Architectural Elements (multiple businesses)

1. **Encouraged**: Centered on columns

2. **Encouraged**: Centered between columns

3. **Encouraged**: Centered on doors
D. Logos (multiple businesses)

1. Encouraged: Logo related to lettering - Part of overall design

2. B. Unrelated logo, would not be internally illuminated

3. C. Overscaled logo, would not be internally illuminated
E. Scale and Location (single building / multiple story)

1. **Encouraged:** Lettering in scale and related to architecture (centered)

2. **Encouraged:** Logo related to lettering; both related to architecture (centered)

3. **Discouraged:** Signage overwhelms and is out of scale with the overall architecture
F. Appropriate and Inappropriate Signage  
(single building / single story)

1. **Encouraged:** Lettering in scale -  
   Related to architecture (centered)

2. **Encouraged:** Logo related to sign lettering -  
   Both related to architecture (centered)
F. Appropriate and Inappropriate Signage
(single building / single story, cont.)

3. **Encouraged:** Sign related to architecture -
   In proportion to pediment, centered

4. **Discouraged:** Lettering overwhelms sign band
   and conflicts with architecture
F. Appropriate and Inappropriate Signage
(single building / single story, cont.)

5. **Discouraged:** Logo unrelated to sign lettering
   Upper sign conflicts with architectural element
   Lower sign not related to architecture

6. **Discouraged:** Sign related to architecture
   (centered on pediment) but
   overscaled, approaching billboard
APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY *

Aesthetics that which deals with the beautiful

Balance an aesthetically pleasing integration of elements; a physical equilibrium; a harmonious or satisfying arrangement of parts or elements

Cabinet Sign a sign composed of one or more faces (some part of which is translucent), retained to a metal frame, with lamps contained inside the structure

Channel Letter Sign a sign composed of dimensional letters or shapes with self-contained illumination, the letters mounted directly to a wall or raceway

Complementary component elements related to each other and to the whole

Coordinated brought into harmony

Harmonious having component elements pleasingly or appropriately combined; exhibiting accord

Harmony just adaptation of parts to each other; agreement between the parts of design or composition giving unity of effect or an aesthetically pleasing whole

Multiple Business Center a single building that houses more than one business, or a group of buildings located in close proximity to each other and designed to be coordinated with each other, as part of a larger unit

Opaque not allowing light to pass through; zero light transmission; objects cannot be seen through an opaque material; when lit only from behind, the color of an opaque material as viewed in the day cannot be determined in the dark.

Proportion harmonious relation of parts to each other or to the whole; a part considered in relation to the whole

Raceway a channel designed to enclose and loosely hold electric conductors, such as those used for the installation of channel letter signs

Reader Board a type of internally illuminated cabinet sign that provides for changeable copy

Return the continuation of a molding or similar element in a different direction, usually at a right angle
APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY *(cont.)

Rhythm movement or fluctuation marked by the regular recurrence of related elements; a regular or harmonious pattern created by lines, forms and colors

Scale a proportion between two sets of dimensions; a distinctive relative size, extent or degree; according to the proportions of an established scale of measurement; proper proportion; the size of something compared to the size of something else

Translucent allowing light to pass through, but not allowing objects to be seen

Unified/ Unity made into a unit; in agreement; harmonious

* These definitions are based on Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth Edition; and information provided at www.signweb.com
APPENDIX C: HARMONIOUS COLORS

There are four types of color harmonies: monochromatic, analogous, triadic, and complementary

Monochromatic
Monochromatic relationships are formed by a range of light and dark variations (tints and shades) of the same color.

Analogous
Analogous relationships are formed by colors that are adjacent to one another on the color wheel.

Triadic
Triadic relationships are formed by three colors that are equally spaced around the color wheel.

Complementary
Complementary relationships are formed by colors that are located directly across from one another on the color wheel.