

# Vinton Area Wayfinding and Public Signage Study



Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan  
Planning Organization

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## Background

### Purpose and Study Area

Town of Vinton staff requested that the Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) conduct a Wayfinding Sign Study in early 2008. The primary goal of the study was designed to examine existing signage to points of interest in the Vinton area. A secondary element of the study was to note other public signage issues that were observed in the field. The field work would be conducted from the viewpoint of a visitor to the Town of Vinton. Staff conducted field work in 2009 to identify existing conditions. Map 1 displays the existing wayfinding signs in the study area.

### Traffic Control Devices and Signage

Traffic control devices are defined as all signs, signals, markings, and other devices used to regulate, warn, or guide traffic, placed on, over, or adjacent to a street, highway, pedestrian facility, or bikeway by authority of a public agency having jurisdiction.

Traffic signs are devices placed along, beside, or above a highway, roadway, pathway, or other route to guide, warn, and regulate the flow of traffic, including motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, equestrians, and other travelers.

According to federal guidelines, there are five requirements for effective traffic control devices:

- Fulfill a need
- Command attention
- Convey a clear and simple meaning
- Command respect from road users
- Give adequate time for proper response

Signs should be placed only where warranted by facts and engineering studies. Studies have shown that signs that are unwarranted or ineffective may distract road users from more important traffic control devices, may breed disrespect for all signs in the area, and unnecessarily use public agency and taxpayers' resources.

Signs should be placed as necessary for safety and proper regulation of traffic. However, the use of too many signs in a given location may reduce the

effectiveness of all the signs at that location. (*Manual of Traffic Signs, Richard C. Moeur*)

## **Sign Functions**

Signs are defined by their function as follows:

- A. Regulatory signs give notice of traffic laws or regulations.
- B. Warning signs give notice of a situation that might not be readily apparent.
- C. Guide signs show route designations, destinations, directions, distances, services, points of interest, and other geographical, recreational, or cultural information.

This study focused on “GUIDE” signage.

## **Signage Standards**

The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is the national standard for all traffic control devices installed on any street, highway, or bicycle facility open to public use. However, the application of these standards varies and is dependent on the agency or government body responsible for the roads maintenance. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) publishes the MUTCD.

The MUTCD is a national standard, intended to ensure that signing is consistent throughout the United States. The standards apply to items such as sign color, size, and lettering. Each state has adopted either the Federal MUTCD, or the Federal MUTCD modified with a state supplement. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the MUTCD is accepted, but there is also an older state supplement; available only in hardcopy.

The MUTCD is developed and modified by FHWA through the Federal Register rulemaking process. As a part of this process, the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (NCUTCD), a private non-profit organization, submits suggestions and recommendations to FHWA for consideration for inclusion in the MUTCD. The MUTCD is updated every few years.

As previously mentioned, the agency or government responsible for the road maintenance performs the application of the standards. While locally maintained roads are not subject to the standards, any road that receives federal construction or maintenance funds is subject to the MUTCD standards according to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

Wayfinding and guide signs have historically been placed by local governments in a piecemeal fashion, and without consistent standards. Increasingly, communities are designing and adopting local wayfinding sign standards.

## Wayfinding Signage Inventory and Field Observations

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in the early part of 2009. Vinton has an existing wayfinding sign system, and plans improvements as funding allows. The Town of Vinton does not have a wayfinding sign standard, guidelines or plan.

Map 1 shows the existing wayfinding signage. While staff inventoried the “Gateway” signs to the Town of Vinton, these are being addressed in another section of this study. Table 1 also displays an inventory of existing signs by destination.

**Table 1. Wayfinding Signage Inventory**

<b>Signed Feature</b>	<b>Number of signs of corridors</b>	<b>Able to Find?</b>
Historical Museum	6	no
MA Banks Park	1	yes
Craig Avenue Recreation Center	1	yes
Farmers Market	2	maybe
Municipal Pool	2	maybe
Gerhart Park	1	yes
Library	2	yes
Vinyard Park	2	yes
Business District from Washington Ave.	1	maybe
Downtown from Gus Nicks Blvd	1	yes
Business District from Virginia Ave.	2	yes
Downtown from Virginia	1	yes
Vinton Business Center	3	no
Vinton War Memorial	1	yes
Charles R. Hill Senior Center	0	no
Roland C Cook Elementary	1	yes
Herman L Horn Elementary	1	yes
Roanoke County Central Middle School	1	maybe
Wolf Creek Greenway (Washington)	2	yes
Wolf Creek Greenway (Hardy)	0	no
Vinton from Blue Ridge Parkway	2	yes
Birding and Wildlife Trail	2	yes
Blue Ridge Parkway	2	likely
Smith Mountain Lake	2	likely
W. E. Cundiff Elementary	1	yes
William Byrd Middle/High	2	yes

## Wayfinding Signage Inventory by Destination

The following section details each destination in Vinton as currently signed.

### Vinton Downtown

Local signage in the form of wooden wayfinding signs directs drivers to downtown. These wooded signs are placed on eastbound Virginia Avenue, and eastbound Gus Nicks Boulevard. Several westbound locations also include signs to the “Business District”. These plain green signs are not “branded” and visitors focused on a visit to Roanoke may misinterpret the sign.



Additionally, the downtown area is not signed to westbound traffic on Washington Avenue. The downtown signage should be branded with a common name (downtown or business district) and should be Vinton specific in name or sign theme. At a minimum, the downtown signs should be placed in four locations, for both directions of traffic, on Washington and Virginia Avenues. (More specific details are provided in the recommendations section.)



### Historical Museum

The Vinton Historical Museum has six signs throughout Vinton, more than any other destination. A majority of the signs direct vehicles onto Pollard Street, however, the museum is not located on Pollard Street. Visitors are unlikely to find the museum based on the signs alone. Additionally, the museum was found to be closed on several visits. It would also be useful to use a more descriptive name since most museums are historical. Perhaps “Vinton History Museum” or “Vinton Museum” may be more suitable for wayfinding signs.



## **Farmers Market**

The Farmers Market is signed from Gus W. Nicks Boulevard and Virginia Avenue. It is not signed from westbound Washington Avenue. The facility is not signed from Pollard Street, but most visitors would assume that it is near the downtown area and would likely find the area. The Farmers Market sign is cluttered by other signs in both directions. Enhancing this area with better landscaping and sign placement would make the “gateway” to the market area more appealing.



## **Schools**

There are six schools in the study area. Five schools have adequate signs for identification. Roanoke County Central Middle School has a sign on Highland Road, but the sign is difficult to see from Gus W. Nicks Boulevard. A sign that faces Gus W. Nicks Boulevard would be more desirable.

## **Parks and Recreation Facilities**



The study area included signs to Goode Park, MA Banks Park, Craig Avenue Recreation Center, Vinyard Park, and Gerhart Park. Each park could easily be found with the existing signage. As will be mentioned in the recommendations section, many of these signs could benefit from a re-design to a town-specific wayfinding standard. Also of note was the entrance to Goode Park. The wooden sign placed by the Roanoke County Parks and Recreation, while attractive, is cramped by three other sign posts, a guardrail and large bush. This Park entrance could be improved by reducing the visual clutter and increasing the visibility of the main sign.



## **Municipal Pool**

The Municipal Pool has adequate signage on Washington Avenue. It is important to note that the sign color and style differs from those of other recreation signs in the Town which have a brown background. However, first time visitors would be unable to find the pool from Meadow Street because there is no sign at the pool entrance. This may not be an issue for Town residents that already know the location. There are plans to close the pool, and if so, then all signs should be removed.



## **Vinton War Memorial**

The Vinton War Memorial is situated and signed adequately. No changes are recommended.



## **Vinton Municipal Building**

The municipal building did not have any wayfinding related signage. Additionally, the existing sign for the municipal building is difficult to see from the street.

## **C. R. Hill Senior Center**

The Senior Center is located behind the Vinton War Memorial, but is not signed from the road. This may not be an issue if it is primarily used by local residents.

## **Library**

The library has appropriate signs on Washington Avenue. If a wayfinding system is designed, the signs could be changed to a town-wide uniform standard as needed.

## **Vinton Business Center**

The Vinton Business Center has small signs on Hardy Avenue at three appropriate locations. It is not clear if the signs are large enough to meet MUTCD standards which call for 6" lettering. The Town is aware that the Business Center entrance has no signage. It is possible to drive right past the entrance.



### **Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail**

Wolf Creek Greenway is designated as part of Virginia's Birding and Wildlife Trails. Signs direct visitors to Goode Park. The Park has a kiosk that could be better utilized. Up-to-date maps and interpretive information could be added to the kiosk for a better visitor experience.



### **Wolf Creek Greenway**

The Wolf Creek Greenway has parking at Goode Park and two other unsigned areas. Parking is available adjacent to the Lynn Haven Baptist Church on Washington Avenue, but the existing sign is placed after the entrance to the parking area. One might infer that the parking



area is at the Shell gas station, which is the next entrance on the right. The sign should be placed to indicate the availability of greenway parking in the church parking lot. The second unsigned parking area is behind a business on Hardy Road. The lot is very difficult to find and is located behind the “Best Little Hair House in Town”. Appropriate signs should be placed on Hardy Road, and at the back of the private parking behind the business. It is not clear that you have to drive down the road/greenway to get to the parking lot.



### **Town of Vinton and Other Destinations**



The Town of Vinton is signed from I-581/Route 220 in the City of Roanoke, and from the Blue Ridge Parkway. Most visitors should be able to “find” the town based on this signage. Many visitors may be passing through Vinton on their way to other destinations. The Town made an effort to provide additional signs to the Blue Ridge Parkway and Smith Mountain Lake. There is also a sign in Roanoke

County indicating a route to Booker T. Washington National Monument. The Town should consider if these outside destinations should be part of a new wayfinding system.

## Other Public Sign Field Observations

While performing the sign inventory and driving other major roads in the area, staff noted other signage issues that should be addressed.

### Parking Signs



Staff noted a large number of parking related signs, especially in downtown. Typically, parking signs are needed every 100-200 feet, or at distances that make them visible to parking vehicles. The Town of Vinton should coordinate with the Police Department, Town Attorney, Public Works, and Planning Departments to determine if all existing signage is required. The MUTCD provides guidance for such parking signs. In particular the guidelines state:

*“To minimize the number of parking signs, blanket regulations that apply to a given district may, if legal, be posted at district boundary lines. As an alternate to the use of arrows to show designated restriction zones, word messages such as BEGIN, END, HERE TO CORNER, HERE TO ALLEY, THIS SIDE OF SIGN, or BETWEEN SIGNS may be used.” (Source: Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, 2003. Federal Highway Administration)*

See below for examples of **No Parking** signs:



Source: [www.outskirts.com](http://www.outskirts.com)





### **Sign Size/Font Size**

According to the MUTCD standards: “ *The principal legend on guide signs shall be in letters and numerals at least 150 mm (6 in) in height for all capital letters, or a combination of 150 mm (6 in) in height for upper-case letters with 113 mm (4.5 in) in height for lower-case letters. On low-volume roads, and on urban streets with speeds of 40 km/h (25 mph) or less, the principal legend shall be in letters at least 100 mm (4 in) in height. However, with an aging population, consideration should be given to making all type at least 6 inches in height.*”

Overall sign size may require compromises. For example, the City of Roanoke uses a smaller font on their wayfinding signs to reduce sign size.

### **Sign Colors**

The MUTCD standards provide clear guidelines on the use of color in sign design (see below). While local governments may have limited resources, compromises should not be made on regulatory signs that may affect road safety.



*Mis-matched sign colors. All regulatory signage should meet MUTCD color criteria.*

### **Sign Color Standards:**

1. Black—regulation
2. Blue—road user services guidance, tourist information, and evacuation route
3. Brown—recreational and cultural interest area guidance
4. Coral—unassigned
5. Fluorescent Pink—incident management
6. Fluorescent Yellow-Green—pedestrian warning, bicycle warning, playground warning, school bus and school warning
7. Green—indicated movements permitted, direction guidance
8. Light Blue—unassigned
9. Orange—temporary traffic control
10. Purple—unassigned
11. Red—stop or prohibition
12. White—regulation
13. Yellow—warning

*(Source: Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, 2003. Federal Highway Administration)*

## Sign Placement

Signs should be placed in accordance with MUTCD standards whenever possible. This is in regards to heights, approach distances and proximity to other signs and obstructions. The Figure below illustrates some examples from the MUTCD of sign installation standards.



While desirable to have signs combined on a single signpost in some instances, this example illustrates a locally installed speed limit sign that is the incorrect height. Such regulatory signs in an urban area with sidewalk should be placed seven feet off the ground (**this has since been corrected**). The sign in the foreground is a better example of combining signs on a single signpost to avoid clutter. This regulatory sign has since been relocated.

*Good and poor examples of combining signs on a single signpost. The speed limit sign should be placed 7 feet off the ground. **This has now been corrected.***



*A series of five signs that are placed in a single line of sight. Such conflicts should be avoided through better sign placement.*



As previously mentioned, sign “clutter” is a problem in many urban areas. There is a fine line between giving enough information and giving too much information. Drivers can read only so much at any given speed. However, it is desirable to combine certain types of signs on a single signpost, eliminate unnecessary public signs, and have appropriate regulation on private signs.

Sign placement is also a key to avoiding clutter. Consideration of sight distances, proximity to other signs, and sign design should all be considered carefully and in accordance with MUTCD guidelines.

### **Street Sign and Stop Sign Coordination**

The Town of Vinton maintains their own street signs. There should be an attempt to co-locate street signs and stop signs on the same post when feasible. The co-location of signs saves resources and reduces sign clutter.



*Street sign and stop sign on separate posts.  
Street sign obscured.*



*Street sign and stop sign  
on single post*



## Overhead Street Signs



Major intersections (those with signals) in the study area could benefit greatly by overhead street signs as simulated in this photo. The Town has plans to add such signs, and this would be of great benefit especially to visitors and others not familiar with Vinton's major streets. It was also noted that Bypass Road was not identified at the intersection with Hardy.

## Unnecessary Signs



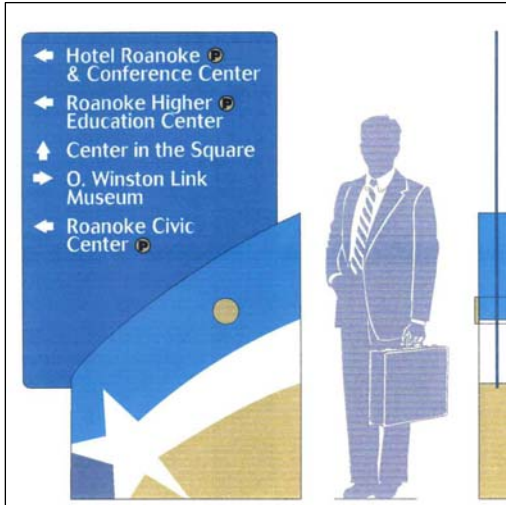
Signs should serve a specific purpose, provide information, regulate traffic, or provide warnings. While educational signs can serve a useful purpose, they are not advised for urban traffic conditions that already have many distractions. These types of signs also require maintenance resources which must be considered.

## Vegetation

Vegetation sometimes obscures signs. While requiring extra resources, efforts should be made to keep signs, especially regulatory signs, visible.

## Local Wayfinding and Guide Sign Examples

The Town of Vinton does not have a standardized wayfinding system. The Town should develop a branded or themed sign system that provides visitors with relevant and clear information on destinations in Vinton. Examples are provided below.



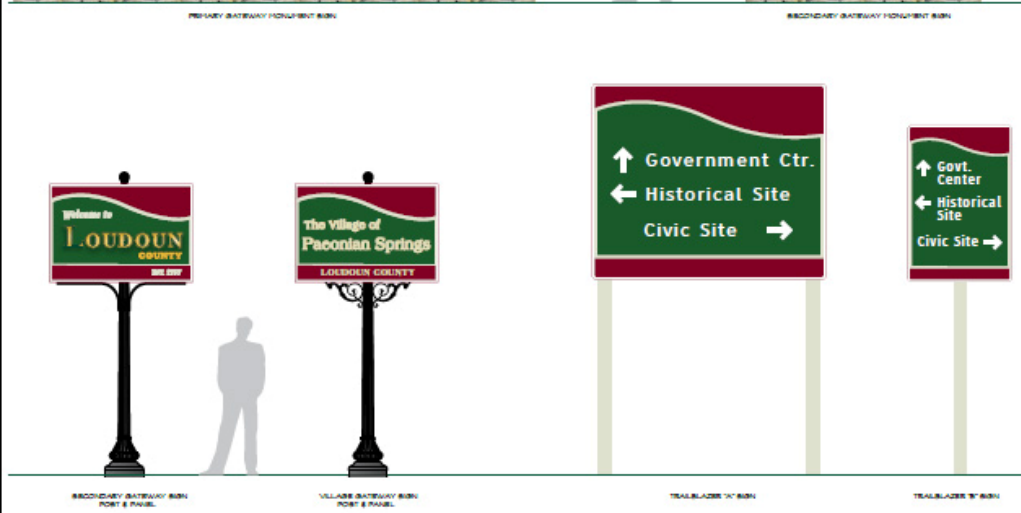
*Wayfinding sign form City of Roanoke, Virginia*



*Wayfinding Sign, City of Staunton, Virginia*



*Wayfinding Sign System, Loudoun County, Virginia. Fraser and Associates.*



## Sample Vinton Wayfinding Sign System

### Large Signs:

Eastbound  
Virginia  
Avenue  
and  
Westbound  
Virginia  
Avenue at  
Pollard St.



### Large Signs:

Westbound  
Washington  
Avenue  
and  
Westbound  
Gus Nicks  
Boulevard at  
Pollard Street



### Medium Signs:

Westbound  
Washington  
Avenue near  
Marshall  
Avenue  
and  
Eastbound  
Walnut Avenue



*Small Signs: For single purpose use-two examples shown*



The example wayfinding system above is for illustrative purposes only. A more comprehensive design and location plan should be developed with community input. Map 2 also shows the locations of the major signs in the example sign system. Smaller, single use signs could then be placed where appropriate.

**Table 2: Single Use Sign Inventory for Example Wayfinding System**

<b>Single Use Signs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Main Corridor</b>	<b>Notes</b>
MA Banks Park	3	2-Virginia Avenue	1 for Franklin/Pollard
Craig Avenue Recreation Center	3	2-Virginia Avenue	1 for Franklin/Pollard
Blue Ridge Parkway	3	various	could add on major signs
Vinton Historical Museum	2	Pollard Street	
Farmers Market	2	Pollard Street	
Gerhart Park	2	Gus Nicks Blvd.	
Library	0	Washington Avenue	existing ok
Vinyard Park	2	Washington Avenue	
Vinton Business Center	2	Bypass/Hardy	
Charles R. Hill Senior Center	2	Washington Avenue	or single large sign
Roland C Cook School	2	Pollard Street	
Herman L Horn Elementary	2	Washington Avenue	
Roanoke County Central Middle School	2	Gus Nicks Blvd.	or single large sign
Wolf Creek Greenway (Washington)	2	Washington Avenue	include parking signs at church
Wolf Creek Greenway (Hardy)	3	one behind business	
Birding and Wildlife Trail	0	Washington Avenue	existing ok
W.E. Cundiff Elementary	2	Bypass/Hardy	
William Byrd Middle/High	2	Washington Avenue	

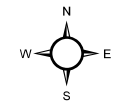
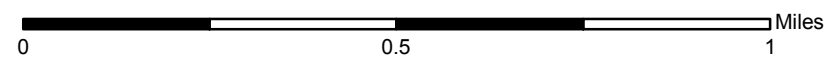
## General Recommendations

1. This study lists many site specific sign improvements that could be addressed by the Town of Vinton. These recommendations are made in the **Sign Inventory and Field Observations** section of this study, and most of these recommendations focus on reducing sign “clutter” and improving sign standards.
2. The Town of Vinton should establish and follow standards for the design and placement of regulatory, guide, and warning signs. This is easily accomplished by accepting the FHWA MUTCD standards as discussed in this report.
3. The Town of Vinton should develop a local wayfinding system for key attractions and destinations. The wayfinding system should address the following:
  - a. List of destinations.
  - b. Number and location of signs.
  - c. Sign designs. (Examples are given in the previous section). Signs should have similar theme and brand to match new Town of Vinton Gateway signs.
  - d. Sign placement in the field.
  - e. Removal of existing redundant signs.
  - f. Placement of overhead street-name-signs at major intersections.An example Wayfinding System is provided, but further work is recommended.
4. Reduce sign clutter by combining signs on a single post when feasible and in accordance to MUTCD standards. Develop a formal policy for combining street and stop signs when possible. Eliminate unnecessary signs that don't provide a specific purpose. Review existing sign placements for sight distances and aesthetic values. Consider updating private sign ordinances.
5. Establish a committee to review parking related signs and reduce the number of parking signs while striking a balance with enforcement issues.



# Existing Wayfinding Signage

Map 1 August 14, 2009





# Example Major Wayfinding Sign System

Map 2: August 14, 2009

