

SPERRYVILLE at a Crossroads

SPERRYVILLE

From Page 1

Tom Junk, a former Rappahannock County planning commissioner. “Folks could run a tab at the grocery store and get items delivered. Sperryville used to be called ‘Little Apple,’ but today we are probably going through another chapter in the village’s history.”

Indeed, as other residents and visitors attest, Sperryville — population 342 — is evolving, with a different vibe. The general stores, lunchrooms, gas stations and apple operations have been replaced with boutique jewelry shops, art galleries, bed and breakfasts, breweries, upscale restaurants and bars, even a full-service gym.

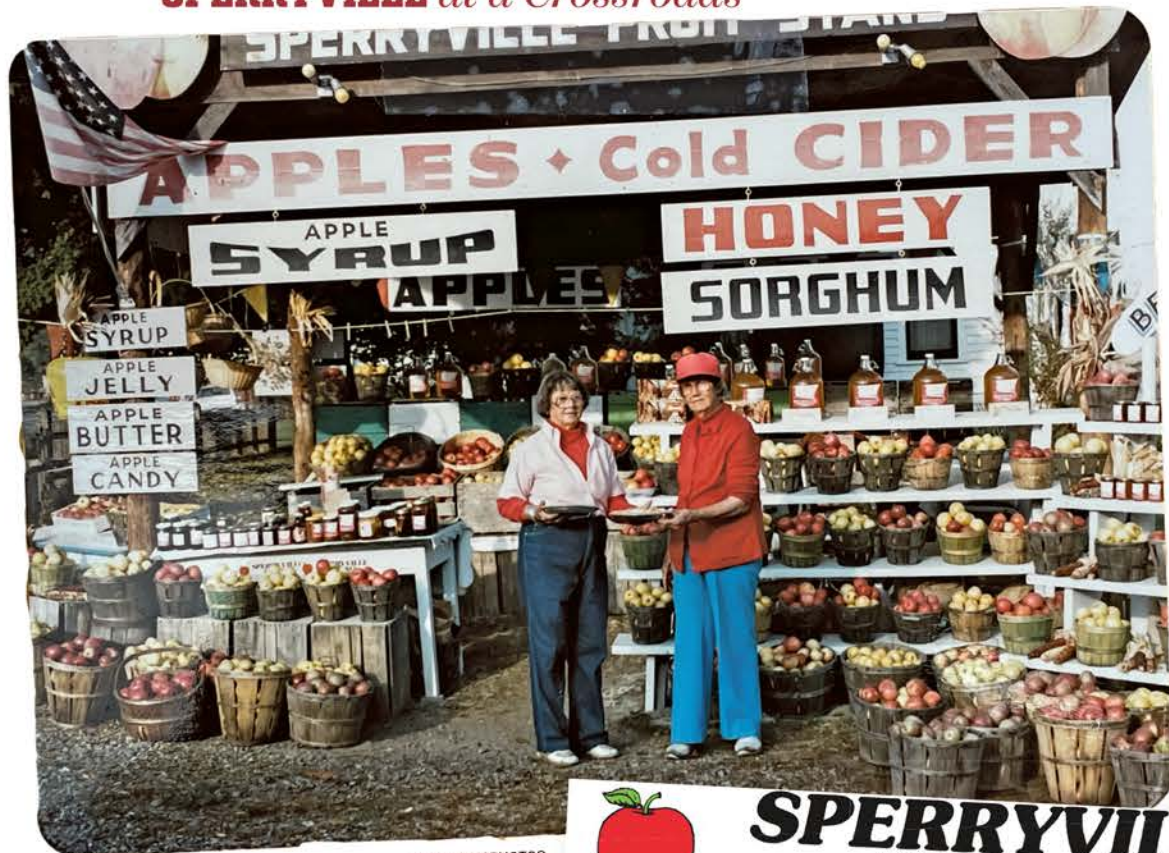
Strong interest in the village’s future has been generated by the Sperryville Community Association (SCA), a nonprofit formed in 2019 by a group of local business owners and community members. The SCA sponsored a survey and study released this summer that asked residents and visitors about the village’s future. SCA president Kerry Sutten, proprietor of the coffee shop Before & After, noted key takeaways from the survey included the need for more business establishments, community-building social activities, and traffic and pedestrian safety.

Recent SCA sponsored community events include a summer concert series and the Sperryville Bicentennial Plus One, a street celebration that turned out hundreds of longtime community residents and newcomers.

But major challenges — and opportunities — lie ahead as the village and its residents seek to define its future.

Planning...

The pandemic drove demand for rural property close to the Washington, D.C., metro area. “With low housing



COURTESY PHOTOS



SPERRYVILLE VIRGINIA
THE LITTLE APPLE

SPERRYVILLE REWIND:

Emma Estes Swindler and Annabelle Estes Swindler at the Sperryville Fruit Stand (across from the bridge from the Sperryville Rescue Squad), circa 1980. Below, a bumper sticker with the village’s old nickname.

inventory and interest rates, I see that strong demand continuing, even in a post-pandemic environment,” said Rick Kohler, a local Realtor and Planning Commission member. “Once we increase broadband coverage, I think interest in living here will only grow.”

If apparent demand for rural real estate continues, will an influx of new residents, or changes in the zoning laws to accommodate growth, alter the character and culture of the community?

The high-profile decision in July by the Board of Supervisors to deny rezoning of the Mt. Airy Field, LLC parcel is the latest such turn of events. Builder Tom Taylor and his wife Cheryl sought to rezone 35 acre on Woodward Road from five-acre to two-acre residential zoning that would accommodate construction of 13 single family homes. Taylor’s

application, the first major proposal for the village following the 2020 update of the county’s Comprehensive Plan, sparked a robust debate about future development before it was halted by a 4-1 vote.

“It would have been such a bad example for the BOS to approve the rezoning request without meaningful proffers,” said Sally Haynes, organizer of the Sperryville Coalition Against Rezoning. “Why wouldn’t everyone then come in and request rezoning based on their ‘vision’ instead of what the community benefit would be?”

“The Comprehensive Plan talks about again and again about preserving the rural nature and open spaces of the county,” said Bobette Swindler, a fourth-generation village resident and owner of Beech Spring Gift Shop. “You take that away and we are Culpeper

and Warrenton. We need some development here, but not a suburb,” she said.

Christine Smith, running for re-election to the Piedmont District BOS seat, foresees the village looking much the same over the next five years. “It will continue to be a vibrant and thriving village, filled with many homes and diverse businesses and likely look much like it does now,” she said. Smith acknowledged that possible changes to a handful of properties may impact the village greatly, including Glassworks Gallery, River District Arts, nearby Eldon Farms, as well as other properties on Main Street. But, she said, “I hope people are still sitting on their porches in the evening, waving at their neighbors.”

...And Zoning

According to the Commissioner of Revenue’s office, some 60 lots in and around Sperryville of five acres or less have the potential to be developed for residential homes. Zoning rules would limit development to one home per parcel, but would not set restrictions for building size or height. Eighty-seven commercial parcels along U.S. 211 from the village to the national park boundary could accommodate businesses ranging from fast food outlets to gas stations to hotels.

The Mt. Airy rezoning request sparked strong interest in the county’s zoning ordinance and planning process. More than 400 county residents and visitors, including 151 from Sperryville, signed a petition opposing the rezoning. “When we circulated that petition,” said Haynes, “we found a lot of people were concerned about development. I feel we only scraped the surface, and if we worked harder, I’m sure we would have gotten more signatures.”

“There are a whole lot of [zoned] Rural Residential lots around the village area that could be developed for single-family homes,” said Diane Bruce, who served as county and circuit court clerk for 33 years and was a leader in the effort to halt the Mt. Airy rezoning. “We should absolutely revisit the subdivision zoning ordinance. Future growth isn’t just a Sperryville issue, it’s a countywide issue.”

In an email sent to the Board of Supervisors last month, Bruce wrote, “The future is at stake and the county needs to bring itself into the 21st Century by establishing a Planning Department with educated/trained staff that can write, create, prepare, review and make recommendations to our various boards, commissions and authorities so they can each make informed, defensible decisions.”

James Hoben, a Sperryville resident



PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR FOOTHILLS FORUM

“We need some development here, but not a suburb.”

— **BOBETTE SWINDLER**, fourth-generation village resident and owner of Beech Spring Gift Shop who opposed the Mt. Airy rezoning request



“We should absolutely revisit the subdivision zoning ordinance. Future growth isn’t just a Sperryville issue, it’s a countywide issue.”

— **DIANE BRUCE**, former county and circuit court clerk and longtime Sperryville resident

since 1977 and retired community planner, also wrote to the board stating that the Comprehensive Plan “provides general guidelines for scenic and agricultural lands and mentions general principles for our few urbanized areas. It is not particularly specific for unincorporated communities such as Flint Hill, Amissville or Sperryville.” He called for development of a “concept” plan for Sperryville that would “include goals for housing type, densities and possibly prices, plus other important community land uses.”

Keir Whitson, BOS member and chair of the Planning Commission, is supportive of bringing on legal and planning experts who can assist the planning board with revisions to the zoning ordinance, zoning maps and comprehensive plan. “We can do a better job from the long-term planning perspective perhaps with the help of outside consultants who can help us articulate what exactly we are trying to do and [answer] what does growth in around the villages really mean,” Whitson said.

“It doesn’t matter if you’ve lived in the county a long time or are a newcomer,” he continued. “We all know that our land use policy is what makes Rappahannock County a unique place. If you accept that, we shouldn’t be ‘B-teaming’ with our planning and zoning work. As lay people on the various boards and commissions, we do our best to figure things out, but we should have the best that we can afford to advise us on how we can protect what we have here.”

Infrastructure

The Sperryville wastewater system sewage pipe stretches from the national park boundary east to about a quarter mile past the village area. Collector pipes run up the hollows

See **SPERRYVILLE**, Page 14

Sperryville: Gateway to the West

While Sperryville’s “village” is concentrated at the crossroads of highways 211 and 522, the larger Sperryville community stretches to the Shenandoah National Park boundary. The town’s past and future are tied to the park’s tourism, traffic and recreation.



Sperryville: Stretching to the East

Development is not limited to the village. Sperryville has many businesses in the River District and beyond, with a golf course, a distillery, shopping and a brewery.

