



**TOWN OF SOUTH KINGSTOWN
PLANNING DEPARTMENT
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Robert C. Zarnetske, Town Manager
FROM: Doug McLean, Senior Planner DM
SUBJECT: Route 1 Scenic Roadway Application - Public Hearing
DATE: March 19, 2018

Introduction:

This memorandum provides background information on the attached U.S. Route 1 Scenic Roadway Application for Town Council consideration through a public hearing scheduled on March 26, 2018. At this point, staff believes the application and supportive materials are complete and well-conceived. The discussion below outlines the background of the Town's efforts, past and present, and the process for formal consideration of the application.

Scenic U.S. Route 1:

The length of U.S. Route 1 through South Kingstown is approximately 11.8 miles with a total of 414 public and private lots directly abutting the State right-of-way. The predominant views from the roadway in South Kingstown are of open space, agricultural land, marinas, and forested areas. A short stretch of the roadway near the Wakefield cutoff passes through Narragansett in which a car dealership and a salt shed are visible. This brief section in Narragansett is not within the purview of this application.

The approximately eight miles of roadway south-west of the Wakefield cutoff takes motorists through tranquil, sparsely populated sections of the Town. This region contains a series of estuaries, salt ponds, and coastal lagoons. Several of the ponds are visible from the road. The southern portion of the U.S. Route 1 in South Kingstown passes numerous historic sites, farmland, areas of characteristic native plant communities, and significant geological features formed at the time of the last glaciations in New England. The approximate four miles of roadway north-east of the Wakefield cutoff takes motorist past a variety of abutting residential, commercial, and agricultural land uses including several historic and cultural points of interest. The diverse and active landscapes in the northern portion of U.S. Route 1 in South Kingstown are viewed as a good fit for the Scenic Roadways Program as it can be used to support and enhance dynamic built environments such as this. The Town's objective in seeking designation as a Scenic Roadway for the entirety of U.S. Route 1 in South Kingstown is to guide the future of this corridor to best support the variety of landscapes that it contains (both built and natural). The Town is particularly interested in achieving higher standards of design and maintenance from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) within the State right-of-way that would result from such a Scenic Roadway designation.

Application Background:

The Town submitted applications seeking designation for Route 1 as a Rhode Island Scenic Roadway in 1996 and 2003. In 1996, the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board, RIDOT administered through took no final action and recommended the Town re-submit the application. After the State promulgated new regulations for the program, the Town submitted a revised application in 2003 and worked with the State

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Scenic Roadways Board to address its ongoing feedback on application content. In 2005, when the Town had finalized its application submittal, the State Board was experiencing unexpected membership quorum issues. Although the State Board conducted a public hearing on the application, it was unable to provide a formal decision on the application due to lack of active members.

The South Kingstown Comprehensive Community Plan, most recently adopted in 2014, states that “The Town shall continue to pursue the designation of the entire length of Route 1 within the Town as a state recognized scenic highway. Following the potential designation as a scenic highway, the Town shall consider adoption of a management plan to address issues such as access, buffers, and aesthetics” (Circulation Element, Policy 3.4 - Implementation).

On January 23, 2018, the Planning Board made the attached motion to recommend the Town Council schedule a public hearing to formally consider this application. The Planning Board’s review of this matter took into account an advisory opinion from the Economic Development Committee who recommended proceeding with the application as proposed (advisory opinion attached). Additionally, the current membership of State Scenic Roadways Board (and its staff) have reviewed the draft application on an informal basis and they report that the application appears to meet the intent and guidelines of the State Scenic Roadways program.

On February 12, 2018, the Town Council reviewed the U.S. Route 1 Scenic Roadway Application on an informational basis and provided an order of notice to schedule a public hearing on March 26, 2018. The purpose of the public hearing is to receive citizen comments on the application. As required by the State Scenic Roadway Program, the Town has provided notice of this public hearing through an advertisement in the South County Independent (editions dated March 8th, 15th, and 22nd) and through a postcard mailing to every property owner abutting U.S. Route 1 and to the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation. See attached copy of newspaper advertisement, post card notice, mailing list of all abutting property owners, and a map showing all abutting properties.

Consideration of Next Steps:

In order to designate U.S. Route 1 as a Scenic Roadway, the Town Council must approve the submission of a formal application to the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board following its March 26, 2018 public hearing. If the Council is in agreement with the submission of an application, the next step in the process is for the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board to hold a public hearing on May 9, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in the South Kingstown Town Council Chambers in order to render a decision on the application.

Should the application receive approval from the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board following the aforementioned process, a U.S. Route 1 Stewardship Plan would be developed by the Planning Board and adopted by the Town Council. The purpose of the Stewardship Plan is to help guide the future maintenance and preservation of the roadway corridor. The Stewardship Plan would be largely focused on activities within the state right-of-way, addressing issues such as maintenance practices, landscaping and median treatments, and managing curb-cuts. The Stewardship Plan may also consider appropriate guidelines to address visual impacts on abutting properties moving forward such as access management, protection of stonewalls, maintenance of buffers to U.S. Route 1 on abutting properties, and other activities that may result in impacts to the scenic qualities of the roadway.

A draft of the U.S. Route 1 Stewardship Plan Outline is attached for informational purposes. This outline is intended to provide a brief summary of the topics that may be considered in the final Stewardship Plan

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to enhance the protection and preservation of U.S. Route 1. The process of developing the Stewardship Plan will engage roadway abutters and other interested parties to consider all stakeholder perspectives on the matter. Once the Stewardship Plan has been developed and received a positive recommendation from the Planning Board, the Town Council will have the final administrative action to review and consider adoption of the Plan.

It is important to note that neither designation of U.S. Route 1, nor adoption of the Stewardship Plan, will automatically result in additional regulation for private property owners. While the Stewardship Plan may recommend regulatory amendments, the amendments cannot be enacted without either adoption by the Town Council, for Zoning Ordinance amendments, or the Planning Board, for amendments to the South Kingstown Subdivision and Land Development Regulations. Additionally, adoption of new regulations by either body would require a public hearing process with proper notice.

The only immediate, and potentially the most important, aspect of designation as a Scenic Roadway is the required review of RIDOT projects by the Scenic Roadways Board. Guided by the goals and policies of the Stewardship Plan, the Scenic Roadways Board acts as the steward for the corridor, with the authority to require changes to RIDOT projects based on the Plan's contents. If the Plan calls for certain considerations, whether they be related to aesthetics, landscaping, maintenance, etc., the Scenic Roadways Board assists in preserving the scenic value of the corridor by requiring RIDOT adhere to the Plan's aspirations.

Requested Action:

The following motion is provided should the Town Council be in agreement with the submission of an application to designate U.S. Route 1 as a Scenic Roadway:

Resolved: "The South Kingstown Town Council hereby authorizes the Town Manager to file an application with the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board to designate U.S. Route 1 within the Town's corporate boundaries as a Scenic Roadway. The Town Manager is further authorized to provide any additional information or documents required by the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board or the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, to make any assurances required in connection with this application, and to otherwise act as the representative of the Town of South Kingstown in all matters relating to this application."

It is hoped this memorandum and attachments are useful to your consideration of this matter. Please advise if questions exist concerning these materials.

w/enclosures