



THE SHANNOCK ROAD STEWARDSHIP PLAN

PREPARED FOR THE

Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board

PREPARED BY

Gates Leighton & Associates, Inc.

AND

Whiteman & Taintor



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Prepare For The
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Shannock Road

I. Overview:

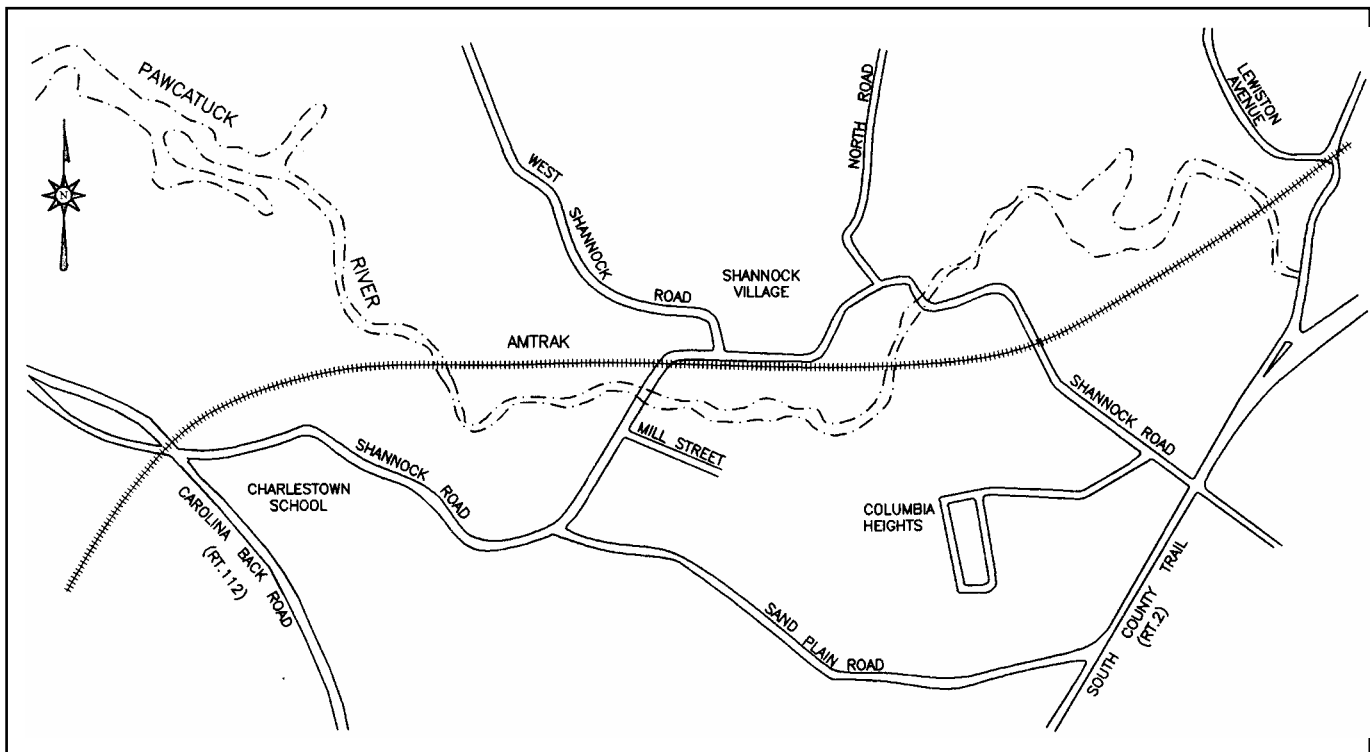
Purpose of this Stewardship Plan

Shannock Road was one of the first roads designated under Rhode Island's scenic roadways program and this Stewardship Plan is intended to assess how local citizens and government might work to protect and manage Shannock Road and thus ensure that future generations of Rhode Islanders will be able to experience the historic river mill village character of this special South County place.

Boundaries

Shannock Road is shown *below in the Map of Shannock Road*. The portion of Shannock Road that is designated as a scenic roadway begins at the road's southeastern intersection with Route 2 and extends westerly to the intersection with Route 112. The road begins and ends in the Town of Charlestown, but the middle section (north of the Pawcatuck River) lies in the Town of Richmond.

This Stewardship Plan addresses the land that abuts Shannock Road as well as two areas lying along streets that intersect with Shannock (e.g., Columbia Heights Road and Mill Street.)



Map of Shannock Road



Shannock Village's historic streetscape.

The History of Designation

Shannock Road was designated as a scenic roadway under the Scenic Roadways Act in response to state plans - and ensuing citizen opposition - to repave, repair and significantly alter Shannock Road. Citizen opposition resulted in extensive work on the part of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation to create a modifications plan that would improve road safety, address drainage problems and repair road deterioration, but also improve the character of Shannock Village through sidewalks and streetscape improvements. A combination of stalled state-local negotiations and the loss of federal construction funds resulted in the project never reaching the implementation phase. Today, there are no monies immediately available to work on Shannock Road.

The design and planning work performed in the mid 1990's for Shannock Road concentrated on the roadway, not the adjacent lands. This Stewardship Strategy is intended to fill that gap by creating a corridor plan that will mesh with road improvement plans and thus serve to protect and manage the character of what one sees along Shannock Road.



Railroad electrification will change the Village.

Community Goals

In its most successful form, this Stewardship Plan will reach the following goals.

Most Critical Goal

The primary goal of this strategy is to protect Shannock Village from and mitigate the potentially negative impacts that may accompany the Amtrak electrification project of the Northeast Corridor. This project has the potential to damage the visual character of the village and the appeal of the village as a place to live and/or do business.

Secondary Goals

- Attempt to find ways to bring the previous Shannock Road Improvement Plan to the state TIP list and on to construction;
- Define objectives to guide new development that may occur along Shannock Road and at its gateways as that such development enhances rather than detracts from the character of the road;
- Encourage the revitalization of the village with particular emphasis on maintaining or enhancing property values, strengthening the business areas and finding reuse strategies for the burned mill;
- Create safer and more numerous walking and bicycling space and routes along the road;
- Create more public spaces and public recreation space within the Village;
- Make the Pawcatuck River more accessible from the Village and a more integral part of the Village experience.



The mills should be re-used in some form.



Shannock Mill Village

II. General Conditions – Background for the Plan:



Fields are part of Shannock's historic character.



Fencing provides interest and continuity throughout the village.

General Character

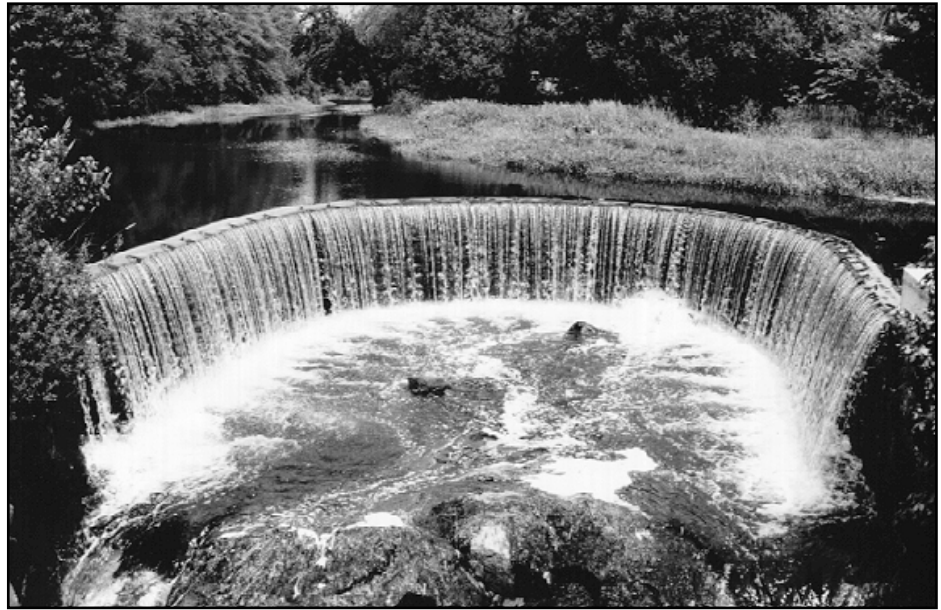
Shannock Road displays an unusually clear perspective on a part of Rhode Island's industrial history -- the small mill village or mill hamlet. The nearby farms, utopian mill worker housing, the railroad, the river, the dam, the mills, the mill owner's home, village businesses, classic architecture and the original road layout are all well preserved in Shannock Village. The main aesthetic qualities of the roadway are noted below.

Aesthetics

The character of Shannock Road is primarily defined by the historic village of Shannock. Also of importance are the open fields and farm land to the east of the village and the wooded residential section found west of the village. The following aesthetic qualities reinforce the character of the roadway and are important considerations when discussing corridor management. These qualities are as follows:

- *Historic Structures:* Shannock Village has a number of historic structures which make up the village. These buildings include mill workers' homes (single and multi-family), commercial buildings and other support structures;
- *Archeological Features:* The remains of Shannock Mill and the site of a battle between the Narragansett Indians and the Pequots are significant resources;
- *Fences and Walls:* Throughout the project corridor numerous types of fences and walls can be found at the road edge. The great variety of materials used support the historic character and reinforce the uniqueness of this village;

- *The Horseshoe Falls:* This man-made falls on the Pawcatuck River is a unique structure (horseshoe shaped) constructed to divert water from the Pawcatuck River to the mill's raceway;
- *The Pawcatuck River:* Views to the river, both within the village area and at its approaches, add to the historical context of this traditional New England mill village;
- *Bridge Over Amtrak Railroad Lines:* This structure, unique in its wood construction, is an artifact which reinforces the historical character of the village. This bridge will be removed and replaced as the Amtrak project proceeds. Road realignment will also change the immediate landscape;
- *Open Fields:* At the eastern limits of the project, two to three open fields provide wide vistas beyond the road edge. These fields, though no longer farmed, support the rural character of the roadway;
- *Road Edge Vegetation:* Existing vegetation lining the roadway reinforces the rural character of the road West of the Shannock Village this vegetation is significant and emphasizes the sharp changes in both the vertical and horizontal alignment of the roadway;
- *Overhang Vegetation:* Existing vegetation overhanging the western portion of Shannock Road is found in many locations. This vegetation encloses the roadway and restricts views to along the road corridor itself;



The Horseshoe Falls



Roadside vegetation

- *Roadway Qualities:* The narrowness and the many changes to the vertical and horizontal alignment of the road are supporting elements of this rural roadway. In many cases the lack of road shoulder and the resulting shoulder stripe at the edge of pavement.

III. The Major Problems and Opportunities Facing Shannock Road:

This section explains why a Stewardship Plan is needed for Shannock Road by citing the existing and potential impacts that could change the character of the roadway and the village.

The Problem: The Amtrak Electrification

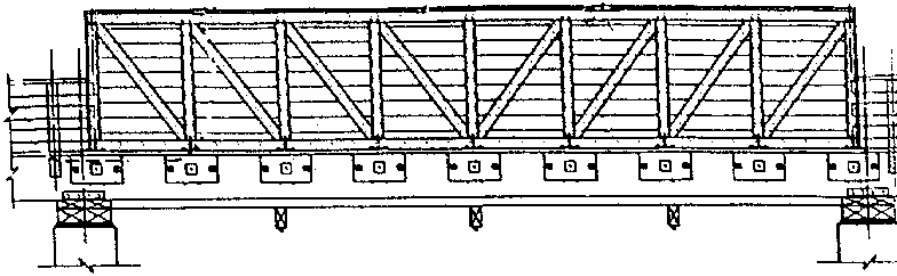
- The rail's electric power poles and wires will become a dominant feature in the landscape. They will be constantly obvious and will negatively impact the visual character of the village due to their incongruity with the historic structures and pattern of Shannock. These poles are being installed as this Plan is written and they will be present for decades to come. While it is not the intention of this Plan to suggest their removal, it is the Plan's objective to find ways to lessen the visual impact of these features on the character of the Village;
- While not currently proposed or planned, it is highly likely that Amtrak will install a fence along the railway to protect local residents and prevent objects or animals from obstructing the trains. This Plan takes the position that the Village should plan now for the potential that Amtrak will install such fences and to define the type of fence and purpose that the fence might serve. Ideally, such a fence should do more than protect the public safety, but perhaps also enhance the landscape;



The narrow, curving character of Shannock Road.



Power lines will rise above the railroad visually defining the narrowness of the roadway.



Plans for the new bridge.



The Shannock Mill in ruins.



Shannock Road is in poor condition.

- The high speed rail line will likely require that special structures be erected at the sides of the Shannock Bridge to ensure that no one and nothing can reach the electric wires powering the trains. These solid structures will be visually obtrusive to all persons using the road, the river and to those viewing the bridge from adjacent properties. Again, while the designs for these structures are complete, it is this Plan's intention to seek ways to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures.

Normally, it would be unreasonable for a Scenic Roadway Stewardship Plan to claim that economic decline could be the result of not pursuing some type of scenic management effort - but in the case of Shannock, this is true.

Shannock Village faces serious challenges. The mills buildings are in ruin; the roadway is in poor condition as repairs have not been made. The roadway, bridge and railway modifications that will accompany the Amtrak construction will change the character of the road. While consideration by designers has been given to lessening the negative impacts of these changes on Shannock, they will nonetheless change the Village and its personality.

The reason people still buy homes in Shannock Village is its physical and visual environment: a small, quaint, unusual, riverside village. If these qualities erode as a result of the Amtrak electrification project or due to continued delays in road repairs, then Shannock Village will be a much less appealing place to invest in a business , to buy a home or repair residential property.

The opportunity for Shannock is that it has such a fine inherent layout and character and that relatively modest public improvements in the road and in landscape aesthetics can return the Village to economic health. The most important investment will be road repair work followed by efforts to mitigate the impacts of the railroad, improve the streetscape and to protect the areas of Shannock Village most likely to change in the future. All of these issues fall within the scope of scenic roadway corridor planning.

The Major Challenge Facing Shannock Road

Given these significant problems, what direction should the Stewardship Plan take? One central challenge emerges.

Make Lemonade from Lemons - Shaping the Rail Project

Whether the residents of Shannock or other interested parties like it or not, the Amtrak electrification is happening. Structures are being built; rails are being strengthened. The highspeed train will come. Therefore, although the potential negative impacts from this project are great, the project will move ahead. Unfortunately, the time for public comment and input on the rail project has largely passed. We must now seek ways to manage the oncoming impacts.

Therefore, it is the position of this Stewardship Plan that our best approach is to mesh several of our community goals together and seek ways to minimize the problems and maximize the benefits we might obtain from the rail project.



Fields, mill and village: These historic and beautiful elements of the road must be enhanced to counteract the impacts of the Amtrak electrification.

Due to the potentially negative impacts of the rail line project on the Village, it is therefore the primary potential negative impact on the Scenic Roadway. Thus, this Stewardship Plan focuses on how Shannock Village can make the best of this situation.

Please note that this Plan also addresses a variety of other needs and issues raised by the community. But, they are in the context of seeing the Amtrak challenge as the first and foremost challenge. If that challenge can be met, then the other factors can and should be addressed. If the Amtrak project severely damages the Village, then these other goals should be re-evaluated.

IV. A Grand Scheme:

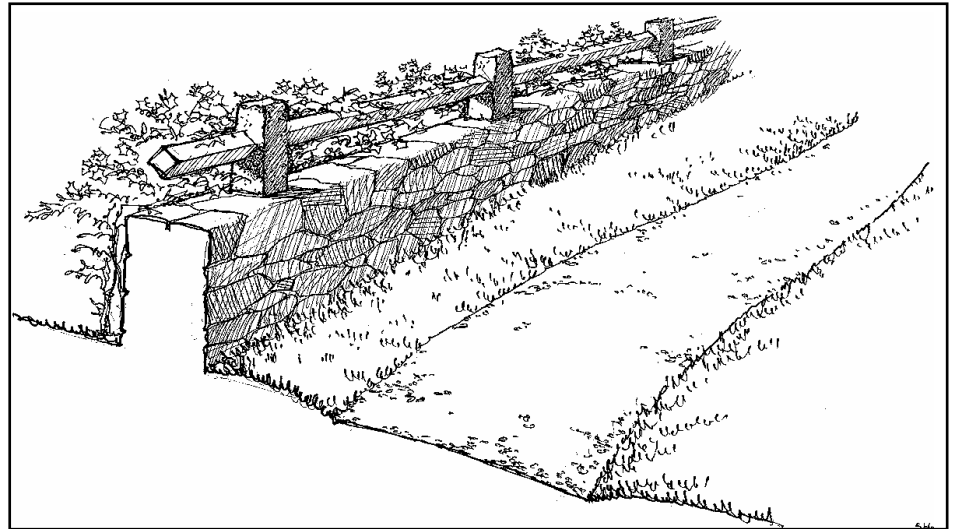
We believe that the only way to revitalize the Village is to shape the structures and spaces that provide separation between the railway and the Village. These spaces and structures need to ensure safety and efficiency, but they also need to conceptually draw the rail into the Village and draw people toward the rail rather than pushing each in opposite directions.

There are several essential objectives that must be met to make this idea a reality.

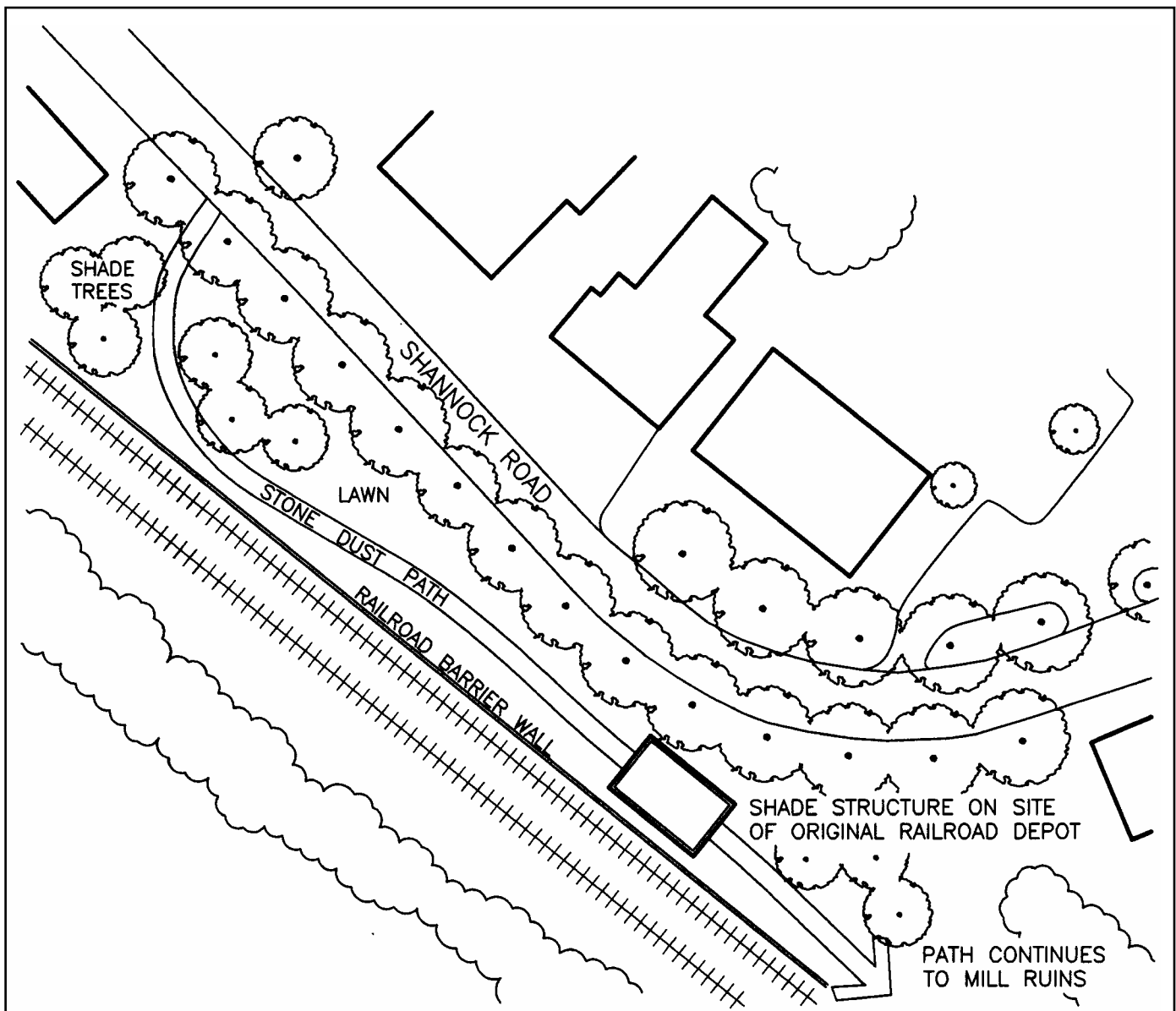
- *Build an Appealing Railside Wall:* Shape the size, thickness, materials and overall design of the fences that will provide safety and protection within the Village. Use brick, corten steel beams, timbers or other materials native to the village combined with the chain link to create a walled edge along the railroad that can be safely, extensively and creatively used by the public on the Village side of the wall. Benches, arbors, murals, photos, plantings and interpretive material on the village, the Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic River, railroad history, railroad electrification and on Rhode Island manufacturing should be integrated within and next to the wall so that people use the wall and it becomes part of a park;



The edge of the railroad today at the site of the original rail station



The potential visual improvements of a well-designed railside wall.



A plan of the Railroad Park.

- Continue with this concept by creating a RAILSIDE PARK along the wall. This should be a public/private open space between the wall and the residences on Shannock Road. It should seek to interpret and relate to the railroad, the mill and the river. Specifically, renovate the burned mill to become a mill "ruin" open to the sky that provides space for outdoor activities such as fairs, concerts, educational programs and general public gathering. Provide public access to the Pawcatuck next to the mill;
- Create Gateways at Each End of the Village. Use the eastern bridge (by the Baptist Church) and the western bridge to create gateways to Shannock Village. Use design themes and materials similar to those used for the Railway Wall to make both bridges more attractive and to convey the idea that the traveler is entering a distinct place: Shannock Village. People should feel that they are stepping into a special place when they pass through or stand near these structures.

V. A Sequence of Actions:

The following is a preliminary set of actions to guide the Shannock Stewardship Plan:

- Negotiate with Amtrak through the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Office to shape the design and placement of the railside fencing. Specifically, work with Amtrak to erect a mixed material fence alongside the railway that meets the objectives outlined above and to design bridges and bridge elements that address the above Gateway concepts;
- Use this effort and energy to obtain Rhode Island Department of Transportation support and funds to begin an incremental effort to carry out the Shannock Road Improvement Strategy. Seek national Scenic Byway Funding to support this effort;
- Use public dollars to purchase and renovate the mill and associated lands (e.g., use ISTEA, Scenic Byway funds and private foundation sources, etc.);
- As a Wild and Scenic River, the Pawcatuck River and its communities would be eligible to receive a Technical Services Grant from the National Park Service (Boston Regional office) to help with planning and interpretation activities for the Railside Park. The Towns of Richmond and Charlestown should submit a joint application to receive these services;
- Work with Amtrak to gain their support for an interpretive display on the Northeast Corridor Project in the Railside Park. Seek to obtain funding from Amtrak to assist with this overall effort. Do the same with long time Rhode Island manufacturing firms that might sponsor a small display on their firms' history;
- Arrange a lease between a businessperson and the Town of Richmond to use the old mill site. Combine these uses with education programs on the river and railroad, general public picnicking and river access to create a new public open space for both residents and visitors to Shannock;
- Consider the creation of a strategy for the vacant fields that lie along Route 112 and Columbia Heights Road--some are zoned commercial and some are zoned residential. These open fields are important aspects of Shannock Road's character. While acquisition might be desirable in order to protect the lands as open space, consideration should also be given to flexible zoning approaches that would encourage eventual development to echo designs and densities of Shannock Village and/or Columbia Heights;
- If and when improvements to the Railside Park and Village are implemented, develop a set of affordable tourism promotion strategies for Shannock Road to modestly increase the number of visitors to the Village and thus provide more customers for local businesses. Provide recreational services and amenities--canoes, bikes, materials on natural resource interpretation--to encourage visitors to access and enjoy the river and surrounding countryside;
- Explore the feasibility and community interest in extending the Shannock Road designation to the south in order to create a state byway with sufficient length and interest to then be competitive for National Scenic Byway Designation. This designation would significantly increase the tourism impacts for Shannock as well as increase the likelihood of receiving federal funds for the noted improvements;
- Consider creation of a local tax betterment district in Shannock Village to assess a proportion of the streetscape improvements indicated in the Shannock Village Improvements Plan to property owners. In other words, local property owners would share the costs of these efforts with the state.