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## **Chesapeake aims to shift corridor into a destination**

Reported by John Hopkins at the Virginian-Pilot

CHESAPEAKE - The seven-mile stretch of South Military Highway is a journey along an uninspiring thoroughfare of old buildings, motels, mobile-home parks, and various industries - not to mention big metal cargo containers stacked tree high.

But city officials have a vision that would turn the drab, neglected corridor through Deep Creek and Bowers Hill into a pedestrian-friendly destination. After a recent study, economic development officials see great potential.

Imagine trees, recreational greenways, bike lanes and trails, and retail shops lining 10-foot-wide sidewalks. Imagine improved street lighting, a wider six-lane road and back streets that pull motorists from the main road to shop and dine.

"It can be revitalized, and it should be revitalized," said Tom Elder, assistant director of Economic Development for Chesapeake.

At the eastern end of the corridor, the undersized Gilmerton Bridge, built in 1938, would be replaced. The George Washington Highway intersection would be reconfigured to improve traffic flow and free up significant pieces of land for office buildings and retail shops.

New interconnected streets would link existing neighborhoods to the core of the corridor - between George Washington Highway and Canal Drive - which would be a commercial and retail center.

"We want to create a destination place, a place where Deep Creek residents can go to, either by walking or riding bikes," said Mark Woodward, senior planner for the city and the study's project manager.

Urban Design Associates and Kimley-Horn and Associates were hired by the city to develop the plan. There have been no changes to zoning along the corridor, Woodward said.

The corridor study is seen as "a guidepost and unified vision for future land use," he said.

The city sees private developers and property owners working within the study's guidelines to invest in changes to the corridor over time. Public resources also will help. The changes have no set time frame.

"This is something that's going to happen gradually over time," Woodward said.

Gary Szymanski, a Bowers Hill resident, has been concerned for some time about lighting and traffic control along South Military Highway. He knew people who have died in traffic wrecks on the road.

"Anything that would improve the safety and the potential for upgrades for the corridor is a positive thing," Szymanski said.

The city's focus on the area is welcomed, Szymanski said.

"I think the fact that this area is getting some attention is long overdue," he said.

The study divides the corridor into three areas - Gilmerton, the Core and Bowers Hill.

The Gilmerton section, from Canal Drive east to the Interstate 464 interchange, should be home to industry that uses deep-water access, the study suggests.

City officials hope to encourage a mix of residential and commercial development in the Core area, where businesses would have front and rear entrances to take advantage of back-street traffic. The study suggests a traffic plan to move industrial truck traffic away from the Core area.

The Bowers Hill section, from George Washington Highway west to Interstate 664 and U.S. 58, would remain rural and be used for light industry.

Trees and other buffers would be used to hide industry, which would be set back from the road .

Maintaining South Military Highway as a major traffic thoroughfare while significantly changing its character will be key.

"We believe that it can work," Woodward said.



**URBAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES RENDERING** A study of South [Military Highway](#) recommends a pedestrian-friendly commercial and retail center in the heart of the [corridor](#) between Canal Drive and George Washington [Highway](#) with greenways, wide sidewalks and streets linking the area to existing