

CHAPTER 2:

SCENIC RESOURCES – FRANKLIN COUNTY

To assess the scenic resources of the Byway, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) staff traveled the road and systematically rated the landscape along the Byway corridor and the long-range views. The scoring system is based upon a very similar landscape assessment procedure used by the FRCOG to assess the scenic resources along the Connecticut River Scenic Byway and the Mohawk Trail West Scenic Byway corridors. Some modifications were made to suit the different characteristics of the Route 112 corridor. The assessment procedure is described below, and a sample of the Scenic Assessment Evaluation Form is included at the end of this chapter.

Step 1

Each ½-mile segment within the corridor was evaluated twice, once driving south and once driving north, using the Scenic Assessment Evaluation Form found at the end of this chapter. All features along each side of the ½-mile road segment were included. All features, both scenic and detracting, are included in the segment ranking. Scenic features that were present with any ½-mile section of a segment received a score of +1, and detracting features with the ½-mile segment received a -1. In addition, for the landscape features, all topography that could be seen from the byway, not just topography within the ½-mile study area was noted. This accounts for the many long-range views that can be seen from the Byway. For example, if a farm field were present with a mountain range in the background, both flat and mountainous would each receive a score of +1. These figures were added together for either a south or north directional total. After the same assessment was completed in the opposite direction, the two directional totals were added together and divided by 2 to give a "segment score." The evaluators conducting the landscape assessment drove the entire roadway in one direction filling out segment evaluation forms and then repeated the process in the opposite direction.

Step 2

The entire corridor was then divided into "visual segments" which share common visual characteristics as determined while driving along the length of the byway. The following six categories were used to divide the byway into "visual segments": Farmland/Open Land (defined as crop fields, orchards, hayfields, pasture land, and non-forested open land including recreation areas); Forest (defined as forest land including both mature and successional); Village/Town Center (densely populated residential, commercial and civic buildings); Developed Land (including residential subdivisions, commercial development and industrial areas); and Farmland/Developed (defined as a mix of farmland with scattered residential development often in lots along Route 112).

For visual segments that have two different characteristics, for example residential development along one side of the road and agricultural land with a historic farm house on the other side, the evaluator made a judgment about which is the dominant visual feature. Each “visual segment” was evaluated every ½ mile according to the procedure detailed in Step 1 and a separate Scenic Assessment Evaluation Form was completed for each of these ½ mile sections. The “visual segments” were sequentially numbered using the following format: the “visual segment” identification number is defined as the regional planning commission identifier/visual segment number/category (an example is FRCOG/1/ farmland).

Step 3

The “visual segment” score was calculated by adding the total score from each of the Scenic Evaluation Forms completed (one for each ½-mile section) within that “visual segment”, and dividing by the number of ½-mile sections within the particular “visual segment”. For example, if a particular “visual segment” is two miles long, four Scenic Evaluation Forms would be filled out, and these four segment scores would be averaged to calculate the visual assessment score. The “visual segment” was then ranked based on the following categories:

Outstanding (Score Range: 10 or greater)

Distinctive (Score Range: 7 - 9)

Noteworthy (Score Range: 4 - 6)

Average (Score Range: less than 4)

Scenic Assessment of Franklin County

The Franklin County section of the Route 112 Scenic Byway is twenty-two miles long. This section was divided into nineteen visual segments. The segments begin at the Vermont/Massachusetts State Line in Colrain and are described sequentially from north to south, ending at the Ashfield/Goshen town border.

Segment 1 (Farmland Open) – from the Vermont/Massachusetts State Line in Colrain to the Colrain Central Elementary School (mile 0 to mile 4 .5)

Outstanding Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This 4 ½ -mile segment is located in northern central Colrain within the floodplain valley of the East Branch of the North River. To the east are



wooded slopes of Franklin, Barber, Calwell, Avery, Everett, and Taggard Hills and to the west are Fairbanks Hill and an unnamed hill. This segment is further characterized by several consecutive long-range and panoramic scenic views of active farmland and farms including Fort Morrison Farm, breathtaking fall foliage, gravel river beds and sycamore trees along the East Branch, farmsteads, and far-off views of the Meeting House steeple.

Findings:

- This segment contains a number of active farms, which highlight Colrain’s agricultural heritage as well as some of the byway’s most scenic views. In addition, the river floodplain in this segment contains much of the town’s prime farmland soils.
- From the North River Bridge to Colrain Center, residents have expressed a need for changing the location and concentration of traffic signs along the byway.
- A great deal of roadside litter is seen by residents as diminishing the scenic value of the byway.

Segment 2 (Village Town Center) – from the Colrain Central Elementary School to the eastern-most entrance to Coburn Street (mile 4 .5 to mile 5.0)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This ½ -mile segment of Route 112 crosses a cement bridge over the East Branch where historic homes are located along River Road to the east, which runs parallel to the route. Route 112 then enters the center of Colrain passing through the National Historic District containing the former Congregational Church/ Town Hall (1834) with a prominent steeple, the former Methodist- Episcopal Church (1836), Memorial Hall (1895) and Griswold Memorial Library (1908), the Town Common, and numerous single family and multi-family homes.



Findings:

- Signs, scaffolding, and the disrepair of a few buildings may be detracting from the scenic context of this otherwise well maintained historic village center.

Segment 3 (Developed Land) – from Coburn Street to Lyonsville Road (mile 5.0 to mile 6.0)

Noteworthy Scenic Value

Characteristics:

The landscape of this 1-mile segment is first characterized by far-off views of hills to the north and forest along both sides of the highway with views of single-family residences off Coburn Street. After Foundry Village Road, the forest opens up to views of the yard of Component Building Systems, Inc., and an historic red brick house (Daniel Willis House (ca. 1812)) and a stretch of roadside commercial development including a market and gas station. In the distance to the northwest, a view of Foundry Village can be seen, including the steeple of (First Baptist Church (1848)) and the Arthur A. Smith Covered Bridge. In this segment are also the Town of Colrain’s Highway Garage, Fire Department Garage and Town Offices.



Findings:

- One type of feature that may detract from the scenic value of this segment includes an area where multiple abandoned cars are visible from Route 112.

Segment 4 (Farmland Development) – from Lyonsville Road to the north end of the Canal (mile 6.0 to mile 6.5)

Noteworthy Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This ½ -mile segment has scattered roadside homes with farm fields visible to the west of Route 112 as well as long range views of clustered village homes along the West Branch of the North River.

Findings:

- Power line towers stretch across the river floodplain near the confluence of the East and West Branch of the North River.

Segment 5 (Village Town Center) – from the north end of the canal to Colrain Community Church (mile 6.5 to mile 7.5)

Noteworthy Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This 1-mile segment begins with the power canal, which runs along the eastern edge of the highway. The North River is visible down below and to the west and also flows parallel with Route 112 at this point. A green-painted iron truss bridge is visible to the west and allows passage across the North River via Adamsville Road. Following the bridge, St. John’s Church is located east of Route 112 at a slightly elevated position. Further on is Griswoldville with its quaint historic homes along Church and Griswoldville Streets to the



east at the base of Mt. Hope. The homes are in a pattern typical of small factory village centers. Across the street are the large blue-painted buildings of BBA Fiberweb’s Griswoldville plant. Route 112 crosses the North River via a cement and steel rail bridge. The route is bracketed by roadside commercial development to the immediate west and views of a small cluster of homes/village to the southeast at the base of the hills.

Findings:

- None

Segment 6 (Farmland Developed) – from the Community Church to a small garage of #381, located on the west side of Route 112 (mile 7.5 to mile 8)

Outstanding Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This ½-mile segment has extraordinary views of farm fields stretched out to the east below broad west-facing forested slopes. Along the western side of Route 112, there is a magnificent and rustic, historic stone retaining wall.

Findings:

- None

Segment 7 (Village Town Center) – from a small garage of #381 to a “Do Not Pass” sign also on the western side of Route 112 (mile 8 to mile 8.5)

Outstanding Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This ½ mile segment is dominated by expansive scenic views of farm fields to the east along the North River, surrounded by forest hills and a stretch of closely nested historic homes in Shattuckville immediately along the western foothills of Houghton Hill.



Findings:

- None

Segment 8 (Developed Land) – from the “Do Not Pass” sign to the Route 2 overpass on Route 112 (mile 8.5 to mile 10.3)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This 2 ½ -mile segment runs from Shattuckville south across the town line it shares with Shelburne to the Route 2 overpass. Throughout the entire length of the segment, hills frame the views to the east and west and to the north and south. At one point the hills of four towns are part of the same panoramic view (Charlemont and Buckland to the west and Colrain and Shelburne to the east). The segment begins by crossing the North River over a relatively new cement bridge. Forest occurs up alongside the eastern side of Route 112, with scattered development and roadside parking to the town line. Once in Shelburne, the North River continues to run along the western side of the highway with large distinctive rock outcrops and ledge along the river’s banks. Then further south, dramatic views of the Deerfield River open up to the southwest. Following this is a power substation with utility lines running across the river with residential development situated along the road to the east. At about this point long range views of Mt. Massamet are visible as are the hills of Buckland and Charlemont and Route 2 with its associated infrastructure.



Findings:

- Flood debris tangled up in the river bed branches of the North River appears as litter.

Segment 9 (Village Town Center) – from the Route 2 overpass on Route 112 to the western side of the Deerfield River on Route2 (mile 10.3 to mile 10.8)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This short ½-mile segment begins under the Route 2 overpass. The views east and west of Route 112 at this point are of the northern neighborhoods of Shelburne Falls. Colonial style homes on either side of the road are well-maintained, with winter views of the Deerfield River possible to the west from the road. At the same time, Mt. Maseamett’s forested slopes dominate views to the east above a densely settled village grid. Route 112 follows east onto Hope Street and then



turns north towards Route 2. The houses on either side of Route 112 have small side and front yards. Route 112 intersects with Route2 and this visual segment includes the portion of Rte 2 that crosses the Deerfield River. Here views of Shelburne Falls and of the surrounding hills are dominant. There are excellent views of the Deerfield River south towards Shelburne Falls as well.

Findings:

- None

Segment 10 (Developed) – from the western side of the Deerfield River on Route2 to Rand Road (mile 10.8 to mile 11.5)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This segment follows Route2/112 west under the Route 112 overpass after passing railroad infrastructure to the south and a large rock cut to the north. Once under the Route 112 bridge, there are long-range western views of distant hills in Charlemont and Hawley. This segment follows Route 112 as an exit off of Route 2,



curving around to the right to head south crossing the bridge back over Route 2 and then on for a short distance to end where Rand Road intersects Route 112 from the south.

Findings:

- A tall, black metal mesh fence/wall attached to the Route 112 bridge over Route 2 results in blocking the scenic views which would otherwise show the surrounding hills.

Segment 11 (Forest) – from Rand Road to the Mohawk Regional High School (mile 11.5 to mile 12.0)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This is a short wooded segment which follows the Deerfield River in the beginning. The backyards of houses along Rand Road (which parallels Route 112) are visible to the southeast. Long-range views open up to a degree within view of the Regional High School.

Findings:

- None

Segment 12 (Farmland Developed) – from the Mohawk Regional High School to Clark Brook Bridge (mile 12.0 to mile 12.7)

Outstanding Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This segment begins with the open fields up the hill across the highway from the Regional School, and continues with views of fields interspersed among residential development. Once one passes the school and the Buckland Recreational Area, the highway begins turning south and the view opens up. In the distance are views of farm fields running to the base of Walnut Hill.



Findings:

- None

Segment 13 (Farmland Open) – from Clark Brook Bridge to Cross Street. (mile 12.7 to mile 14.6)

Outstanding Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This is a very scenic segment of Route 112 that begins with views of the hills of Charlemont to the northwest. The corridor then turns further south with Walnut Hill and Lone Tree Hill to the west. The highway gently curves to follow along Clesson Brook and at one point crosses the waterway. Walnut Hill Farm, a well-situated and scenic working dairy farm, dominates the view of the land at the base of the forested hills to the west, while views of the gravel beds of Clesson Brook are visible to the southeast. Several other farming operations are located within this segment, including Atherton Farm with lands that stretch to the lower wooded slopes of Putnum Hill and Johnson Hill.



Findings:

- None

Segment 14 (Village Town Center) – from Cross Street to Upper Road (mile 14.6 to mile 15.6)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

At the intersection of Route 112 and Cross Street is a crossroads village, with farmhouses and barns. Older and more recently built homes are situated on either side of the road with varied setbacks. Views of Buckland Center to the west are possible in the winter months with sightings of historic homes in a village pattern with barns and outbuildings. To the east, upland fields run along the western aspect of Mary Lyons Hill. Further south, woodlands crowd the eastern side of Route 112 while Clesson Brook is visible flowing to the west.

Findings:

- None

Segment 15 (Farmland Open) – from the Upper Road to the Buckland/Ashfield Town Line (mile 15.6 to mile 16.5)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This segment bisects farmland of the Clesson River Farm with cornfields east and west of Route 112. Long range views of multiple hills to the north and south are visible within this stretch of the valley. There is a small area of clustered homes and a commercial business near the Buckland Four Corners area close to the border with Ashfield and yet here still are views of cropland surrounded by majestic hills.



Findings:

- None

Segment 16 (Forest) – from the Buckland/Ashfield Town Line to Smith Road (mile 16.5 to mile 18.8)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

Route 112 begins to climb, meandering along the western aspect of Ridge Hill with views of Smith Brook Valley to the east. There are prominent rock cuts along the eastern side of Route 112 with views west towards the hills overlooking the valley. Very few houses are visible. Route 112 crests and then descends towards Ashfield Pond and the intersection with Route 116.

Findings:

- Two features that could be considered as detracting from the scenic quality of the byway include the cement retaining walls along Route 112, which are very prominent along the eastern side of the roadway, and the Ashfield Transfer Station.

Segment 17 (Farmland Open) – from Smith Road to Bug Hill Road (mile 18.8 to mile 20.0)

Outstanding Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This segment is predominantly characterized by a magnificent and picturesque farmland setting with historic farmhouses clustered along Steady Lane east of Route 112 within the valley of



Creamery Brook. Long range views of distant mountains and forest are visible to the east behind the farmhouses. More fields are visible to the west. The open farm landscapes transition to forest near Bug Hill Road.

Findings:

- There is a galvanized steel guardrail near the intersection of Route 112 and Route 116, which seems out of place within the context of the surrounding rural scenic landscapes.

Segment 18 (mix of Forest/ Developed) – from Bug Hill Road to Sanderson Academy (mile 20.0 to mile 20.5)

Noteworthy Scenic Value

Characteristics:

This segment is a mix of forest and development comprised of roadside residential development and Sanderson Academy.

Findings:

- None

Segment 19 (Forest) – from Sanderson Academy to Ashfield/Goshen Town Line (mile 20.5 to mile 22.8)

Distinctive Scenic Value

Characteristics:

The landscape of this segment is characterized by forest. There is some scattered residential development through this segment and houses are typically located well away from the roadway. There are open fields and a rich diversity of wetlands both open and wooded, with short and long range views of forested hill tops.



Findings:

- None

Table 1.1: Visual Segment Category and Evaluation – Franklin County Area

Segment Number	Starting/Ending Points	Approx. Length (miles)	Segment Category	Segment Evaluation
1	<i>Vermont/Massachusetts State Line in Colrain/Colrain Central Elementary School</i>	4.5	Farmland/Open Space	Outstanding*
2	<i>Colrain Central Elementary School/the eastern-most entrance to Coburn Street</i>	0.5	Village Town Center	Distinctive
3	<i>Coburn Street/Lyonsville Road</i>	1.0	Developed Land	Noteworthy
4	<i>Lyonsville Road/North end of the Canal</i>	0.5	Farmland/Developed	Noteworthy
5	<i>North end of the Canal to Colrain Community Church</i>	1.0	Village Town Center	Noteworthy
6	<i>Community Church / small garage of #381</i>	0.5	Farmland/Developed	Outstanding
7	<i>Garage of #381 / “Do Not Pass” sign</i>	0.5	Village Town Center	Outstanding
8	<i>“Do Not Pass” sign / the Rte. 2 underpass on Rte. 112</i>	0.8	Developed Land	Distinctive
9	<i>Rte. 2 underpass on Rte. 112 / Western side of the Deerfield River on Rte.2</i>	0.5	Village Town Center	Distinctive
10	<i>Western side of the Deerfield River on Rte.2/Rand Road</i>	0.7	Developed Land	Distinctive
11	<i>Rand Road / Mohawk Regional High School</i>	0.5	Farmland/Open Space	Distinctive
12	<i>Mohawk Regional High School/ Clark Brook Bridge</i>	0.7	Farmland/Developed	Outstanding
13	<i>Clark Brook Bridge/ Cross Street</i>	1.9	Farmland/Open Space	Outstanding
14	<i>Cross Street/ Upper Road</i>	1.0	Village Town Center	Distinctive
15	<i>Upper Road / Buckland/Ashfield Town Line</i>	0.9	Farmland/Open Space	Distinctive
16	<i>Buckland/Ashfield Town Line /Smith Road</i>	2.3	Forest	Distinctive
17	<i>Smith Road/Bug Hill Road</i>	1.2	Farmland/Open Space	Outstanding*
18	<i>Bug Hill Road / Sanderson Academy</i>	0.5	Forest/Developed	Noteworthy
19	<i>Sanderson Academy/ Ashfield/Goshen Town Line</i>	2.3	Forest	Distinctive

Scenic Assessment Rating System:

Outstanding: 10 or greater

Distinctive: 7 – 9

Noteworthy: 4 – 6

Average: Less than 4

*Denotes the two highest scoring segments.

Findings

- Roadway features such as guardrails and retaining walls have not always been completed in a manner that is sensitive to the scenic nature of the Byway.
- Farming greatly contributes to the towns' retention of significant historic landscapes, scenic beauty, and a sustainable source of economic base (e.g. jobs, tourism, etc.).
- The river floodplain area represents much of the region's productive prime farmland soils.
- In some instances, site planning for development along the Byway has not been completed in a manner which retains the natural landscape features such as the existing vegetation and slopes. Alternative site planning and development layouts could have been completed in a manner to preserve the natural vegetation features of the area.
- Oversized signs, scaffolding, and the disrepair of some buildings may detract from the scenic context of historic village centers.
- Certain industrial uses including vehicle repair yards, transfer stations, and junked cars in the woods which are visible from the highway could be seen as reducing the scenic quality of the Route 112 Scenic Byway.
- There is an industrial use at the northern intersection of Routes 112 and 116 in Ashfield which would benefit from additional screening to improve the scenic character of the Byway.
- Above-ground utility lines and towers often detract from the scenic quality of the views along the Byway.

Recommendations

- Since agricultural businesses in the region sustain landscapes with high scenic value as well as maintain economic activities creating jobs, tax base, and access to fresh produce and food products, towns could consider a number of initiatives to help retain active farm businesses in their community including *(some of the following recommendations may reside in other chapters as appropriate)*:
 - Developing a website or pamphlet highlighting all the locally-grown products and services available at roadside stands and at local retail outlets.
 - Coordinating efforts between B&Bs, agricultural retailers, and bike-touring clubs to promote the region as a destination for sustainable travel and eco-tourism.
 - Encourage the Agricultural Commissions in each town to meet with their Planning Boards to determine how they might work together to support agriculture in a way that would benefit farmers.

- As roadway improvement projects are completed, encourage the use of roadway features such as guardrails and retaining walls that are sensitive to the scenic nature of the Byway. Consider alternatives such as core ten and steel back timber guardrails as an alternative to the galvanized steel guardrails that are typically used.
- Consider adoption of site plan review bylaws in order to support development that is sensitive to the natural scenic feature of the Byway. Site plan review procedures can address the layout of a development and encourage projects to retain natural vegetation and other landscape features.
- Consider adoption of sign review bylaws to discourage the installation of oversized signs and too many signs placed close to one another which can cause confusion for Byway travelers and detract from the scenic qualities of the corridor.
- Request that MassHighway conduct a sign inventory study or work to explore how the Towns can improve the placement and concentration of signs along the Route 112 Byway.
- Work with the owners of historically significant structures to maintain their landmarks. Assist in securing loans, grants or tax credits for restoration of these important structures.
- Survey those farmers and landowners interested in protecting their land and pursue funding to purchase scenic easements or conservation restrictions to permanently protect important scenic vistas along the Byway.
- Bury above-ground utility lines along the Byway where feasible.

