

Mendota, VA: Conceptual Redevelopment Plan  
for the Mendota Trailhead



Prepared for Mountain Heritage, Inc.  
April 2019

Mendota, VA: Conceptual Redevelopment Plan  
for the Mendota Trailhead

Project funding provided through a Brownfields Assessment grant through the  
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)



Mendota, VA: Conceptual Redevelopment Plan  
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## Project Team

**Elizabeth Gilboy**  
Director

**Nick Proctor**  
Project Manager

**Joe Morici**  
Cardno

**Shruti Singh**  
Architecture Student  
Graduate



CDAC student designer Shruti Singh (right) presents to community members during the preliminary design presentation on November 8, 2018.

Not Pictured: Elizabeth Gilboy, Nick Proctor, Joe Morici

**The Community Design Assistance Center (CDAC)** is an outreach center in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech that assists communities, neighborhood groups and non-profit organizations in improving the natural and built environments. Assistance is provided in the areas of landscape architecture, architecture, planning, and interior design. Working with communities, the conceptual planning and design provides communities with a graphic vision of their project that can then be used for grant applications and fundraising for the next steps toward implementation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The CDAC team would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their contributions throughout the project:

**Mountain Heritage, Inc.**  
Property Owner

**Katie Harris**  
Community Member

**Oscar Harris**  
Community Member

**Dottie Dye**  
Community Member

**Helene Holbrook**  
Community Member

and

Those who volunteered time for the betterment of their community

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Introduction

The Community Design Assistance Center (CDAC) of Virginia Tech received a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Assessment grant to assess properties and help communities develop conceptual redevelopment plans for potentially contaminated sites in southwest Virginia communities.

The EPA Assessment Grant provides funding for CDAC to help communities determine if a site is contaminated and then to plan for the possible redevelopment of that site through conceptual design development. EPA does not require or commit communities to any cleanup if the community participates in this process.

EPA's goals are to:

- protect human health and the environment
- sustain reuse
- promote partnerships, and
- strengthen the marketplace

The EPA describes Brownfields as:

"A brownfield is a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

The purpose of this EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant project is to conduct a Phase I Environmental Assessment (conducted by Cardno, the environmental consultant working with CDAC) and conceptual redevelopment plan for the Laura K Harris property located at the corner of Mendota Road and Civil Drive (referred to in the proposal as the Harris property and the former Benfield Grocery Store). It is comprised of parcel numbers 095A1-A-34, 095A1-A-35, and 095A1-A-36. Parcel #34 previously served as a general store and gas station with two gas pumps while parcels 35 and 36 had a bank building, which has since fallen down.

Immediately across Mendota Road from the Harris property is the site of a former train depot, now the proposed location for a trailhead site for the Mendota Trail. The site is currently owned by Mountain Heritage, Inc., a local non-profit interested in enhancing public access to the outdoors. Due to the immediate proximity to the Harris property and the proposed trailhead's expected contributions to the successful redevelopment of the Harris property, CDAC worked with a stakeholders committee to create a conceptual master plan for redevelopment of the former depot site to be used as a public trailhead and outdoor gathering area for the Mendota Trail.

The grant does not require cleanup, but rather is an opportunity to work with the stakeholders committee to develop conceptual redevelopment plans that help create a vision for the property's future. A summary of the conceptual redevelopment concepts can be found in the following pages.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Project Overview

The purpose of this project was to work with a stakeholders committee, including individuals representing the interests of Mountain Heritage, Inc. The CDAC team then created a conceptual redevelopment plan for the property as a trailhead for the Mendota Trail (see p.10).

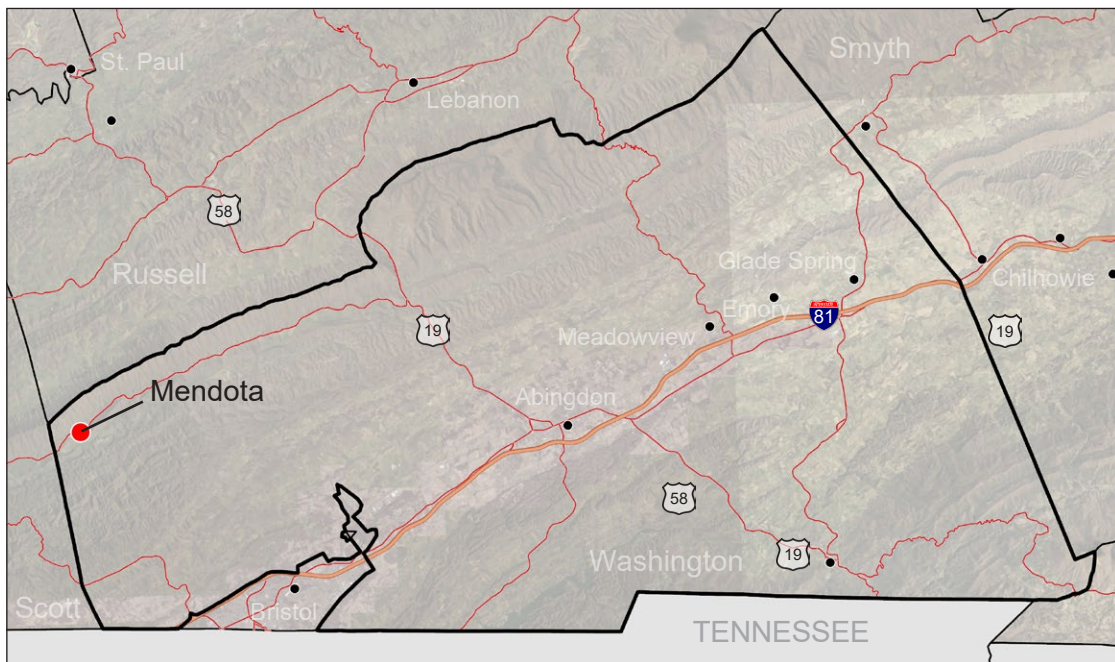
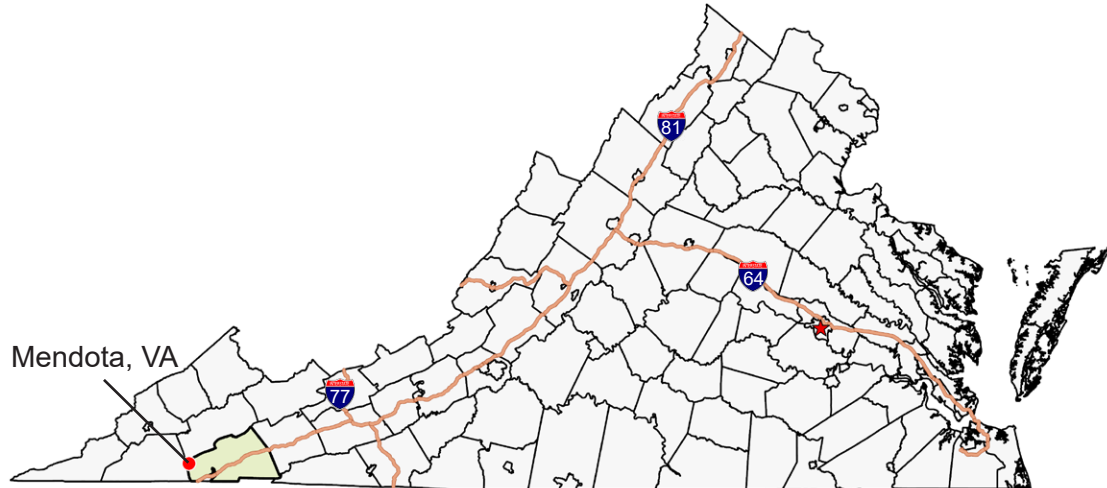
The depot site is in a central location to other surrounding community assets. The former Benfield Store is immediately across Mendota Road and is actively working with a local entrepreneur to reopen as a general store and sandwich shop. The north fork of the Holston River, an emerging destination for outdoor recreation, is 0.3 miles south on Civil Drive. Additionally, the Mendota Community Center is 0.25 miles east on Mendota Road.

The general design process involved creating two preliminary design concepts, obtaining feedback from the stakeholders committee, and revising the designs into a final redevelopment plan. The final redevelopment plan focused on transforming the largely open and flat site into a destination for large and small community gathering with a large pavilion with restrooms, a mural, patio, open green space, and individual picnic shelters with grills.



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Project Location

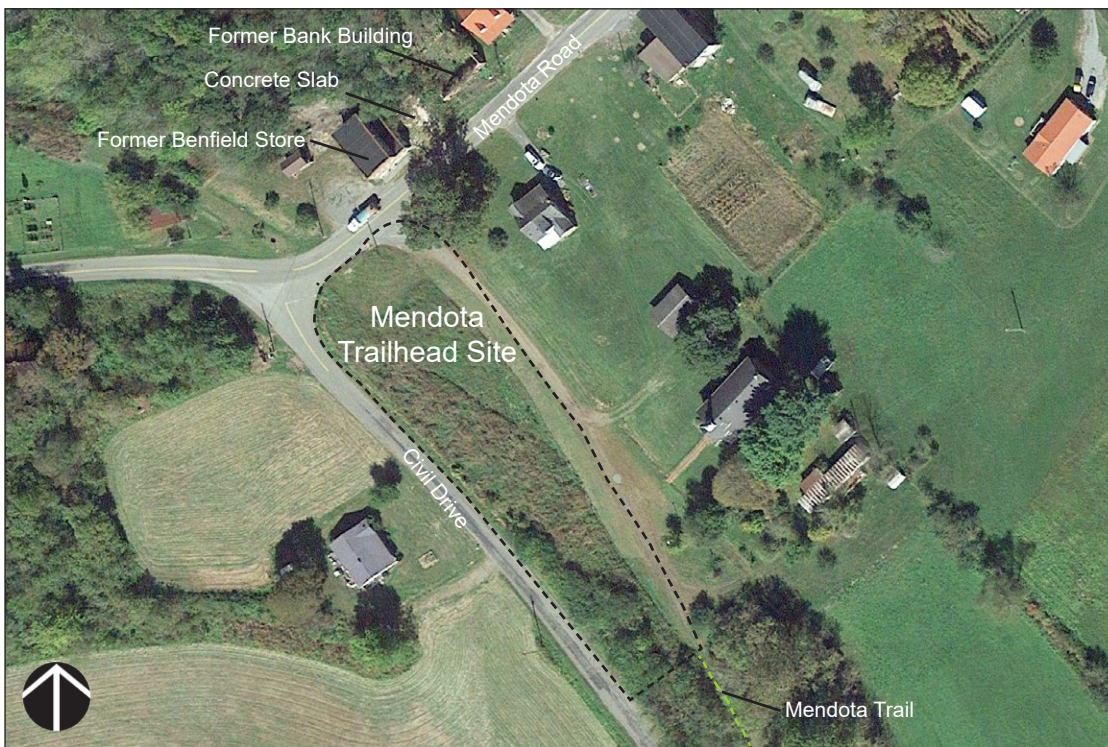


The maps above and the aerials on the following page show the location of Washington County within southwest Virginia, where the community of Mendota is located within the county, and the location of the site at the corner of Civil Drive and Mendota Road.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION



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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Background of Mendota

The Town of Mendota is located in southwest Virginia along the North Fork of the Holston River. The nearest major communities are Abingdon and Bristol, VA. Mendota served as a thriving agricultural community with stores offering general merchandise with a rail line connecting Mendota and Bristol. The trains first carried coal, then a passenger train, then later an excursion train. The train would stop in Mendota at the depot which was located at the current trailhead site. The depot was removed and the railroad has been inactive since the 1970s or 80s.

The Mendota General Store was a wooden structure at the corner of Mendota Road and Civil Drive built in the late 1880s. Frazier Shepherd purchased the store around 1928, tore it down, and built the current brick building. There is a sign on the building that reads "A. F. Shepherd Store Built 1928". Harold Benfield later purchased the building and renamed it the Benfield Grocery Store. Two gas pumps were added around 1968 and operated as a Shell station until about 1979. Benfield Grocery Store was open until around 1998.

Down the street from the former Benfield Grocery Store was a public school, which closed in the 1980s. The former school building is currently used as a branch location of the Washington County Public Library and as the Mendota Community Center. The Community Center also serves as a museum and repository of the area's history and stories of the people of Mendota.

After the railroad ceased operation, the City of Bristol, VA purchased the railroad property. In 2016 it was deeded to Mountain Heritage, Inc., a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to the improvement of education, health, and natural resource conservation in the Appalachian Mountains, to develop a rails-to-trails hiking and biking trail along the old Southern Railway property from Bristol, VA through Mendota to the Scott County line. The Mendota Trail has been a priority project for the community for the last 40 years.

Due to its location along the north fork of the Holston River and the Mendota Trail coming into town along the former rail bed, Mendota has been the site of increased interest for outdoor recreation. The Mendota Trail will improve the quality of life in Mendota and be a potential local economic development driver bringing visitors into town and providing an asset to locals.

The location of the proposed trailhead site is immediately across Mendota Road from the former Benfield Store. The proposed trailhead site is a prime location with great potential of linking the trail to the Mendota Community Center. Its proximity to the former Benfield Grocery Store offers a great opportunity for redevelopment. Additional gathering and open space will support a future business in the former Benfield Store as well as enhance the overall streetscape of Mendota.

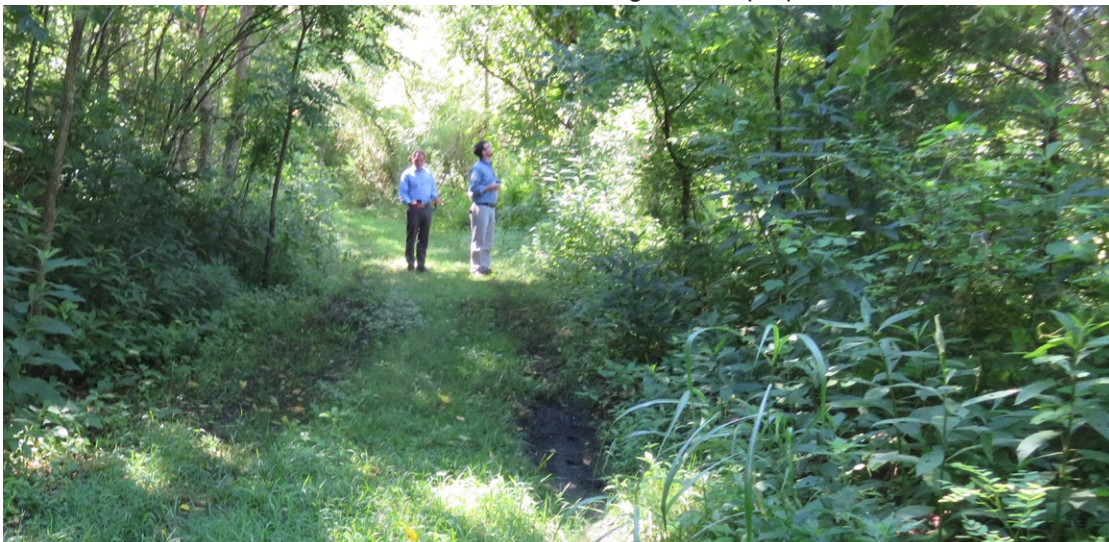
## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Design Process

The design process began with a stakeholder input session on September 11, 2018 on the property of the proposed trailhead site. During that visit the CDAC team facilitated a discussion with community members to discuss the broad vision of Mendota and the redevelopment of their community's former downtown area. CDAC also visited several key sites surrounding the site including the Mendota Trail, the former Benfield Store, and a public access point to the north fork of the Holston River. A site visit, photographs, early sketches, and input from the stakeholders created a comprehensive foundation that the CDAC team used to develop two preliminary conceptual designs. The team returned to Mendota on November 8, 2018 to present two preliminary design concepts for the proposed Mendota Trail trailhead.



CDAC team members (left to right) Brianne Clark, Kontessa Roebuck, Elizabeth Gilboy, Joe Morici (Cardno), and Shruti Singh meet with community member Mike Beaulé (far right) to discuss connections between the former bank building and the proposed Mendota trailhead.



CDAC project manager Nick Proctor (right) and Joe Morici of Cardno (left) walk a portion of the Mendota Trail. The Mendota Trail connects to the site from the southeast.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Following the presentation, stakeholders provided feedback about what they (dis)liked and what they thought might have been missing.

The team revised the two preliminary design concepts into a final design with supporting drawings, which were presented to the Mendota stakeholders on December 3, 2018.

Meeting notes from the input sessions and presentations can be found in the Appendix.



CDAC project manager Nick Proctor presents the final design concept for the trailhead to the stakeholders committee on December 3, 2018.



**PART 1:**  
**FINAL DESIGN CONCEPT**

## FINAL DESIGN CONCEPT

### Design Description

The Mendota trailhead is located at the corner of Civil Drive and Mendota Road and is a prominent location when entering the community of Mendota. The trailhead's close proximity to the former Benfield Store and gardens at the former bank building, both immediately across the street, creates a centralized core of attractions in Mendota's downtown. The trailhead provides ample opportunities for the community groups of varying sizes to gather for outdoor activities. The trailhead is also an exciting begin/end to the Mendota Trail recreation experience

A large community pavilion marks the entrance to the site. This pavilion has a large mural that is visually prominent, adding color to the streetscape as visitors come in to town. This mural can also be a great photo opportunity for visitors as they come and go along the trail, which then can add to the promotion and awareness of Mendota as a place to visit.

The design of the pavilion is adapted from the traditional architecture of train depots in the region, specifically the depot that is currently located in nearby Hiltons, VA. This design combines a functional need for large, open-air gathering while recognizing the historical characteristics of the site as the location of the former Mendota train depot.

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The large pavilion is located near Mendota Road and has public restrooms, storage, and a community fire pit. The fire pit, uniquely situated in the middle of the pavilion has a custom smoke hood suspended from the ceiling to draw smoke through a traditional flue through the roof. A seat wall surrounds portions of the fire pit. Picnic tables are placed throughout the entire extent of the pavilion and can accommodate up to 72 people using 6' standard picnic tables. Additional tables with umbrellas are located on the patio in between the pavilion and Civil Drive and provide additional seating with wonderful views of the surrounding mountains.

Beyond the large community pavilion are three picnic shelters intended for smaller groups up to 20 people each. Each picnic shelter comes complete with two picnic tables, a bike rack, trash cans, and a charcoal grill. The small picnic shelters are surrounded by ample open space, trees for shade, and nearby parking.

A linear parking lot with drop-off circle connects the community pavilion, picnic shelters, and trail entrance. There are 27 standard parking spots (angled) and 2 ADA spaces. Bicycle outfitter businesses need additional room for turning their 15-passenger van + bicycle trailer which is provided for in the design. Two pull-through spaces designated for bicycle outfitters are located at the southeast corner of the parking to help meet their parking, unloading and loading needs. Some of the parking closest to the church can be used on Sundays should it be needed. Finally, access to the private residence southeast of the church is maintained (label J). A drop-off circle is located at the south end of the parking lot, making it convenient to load and unload bicycles near the trailhead.

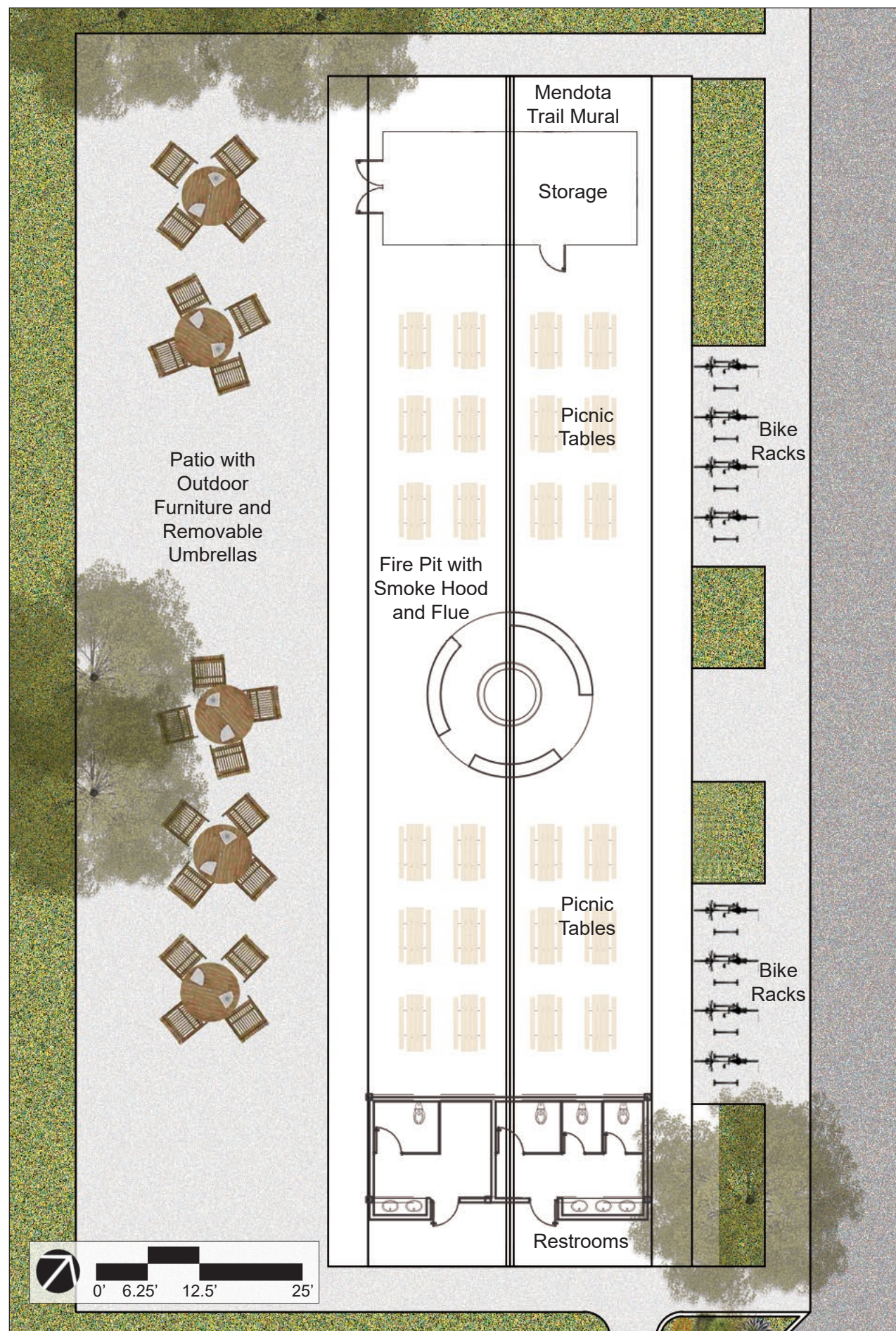
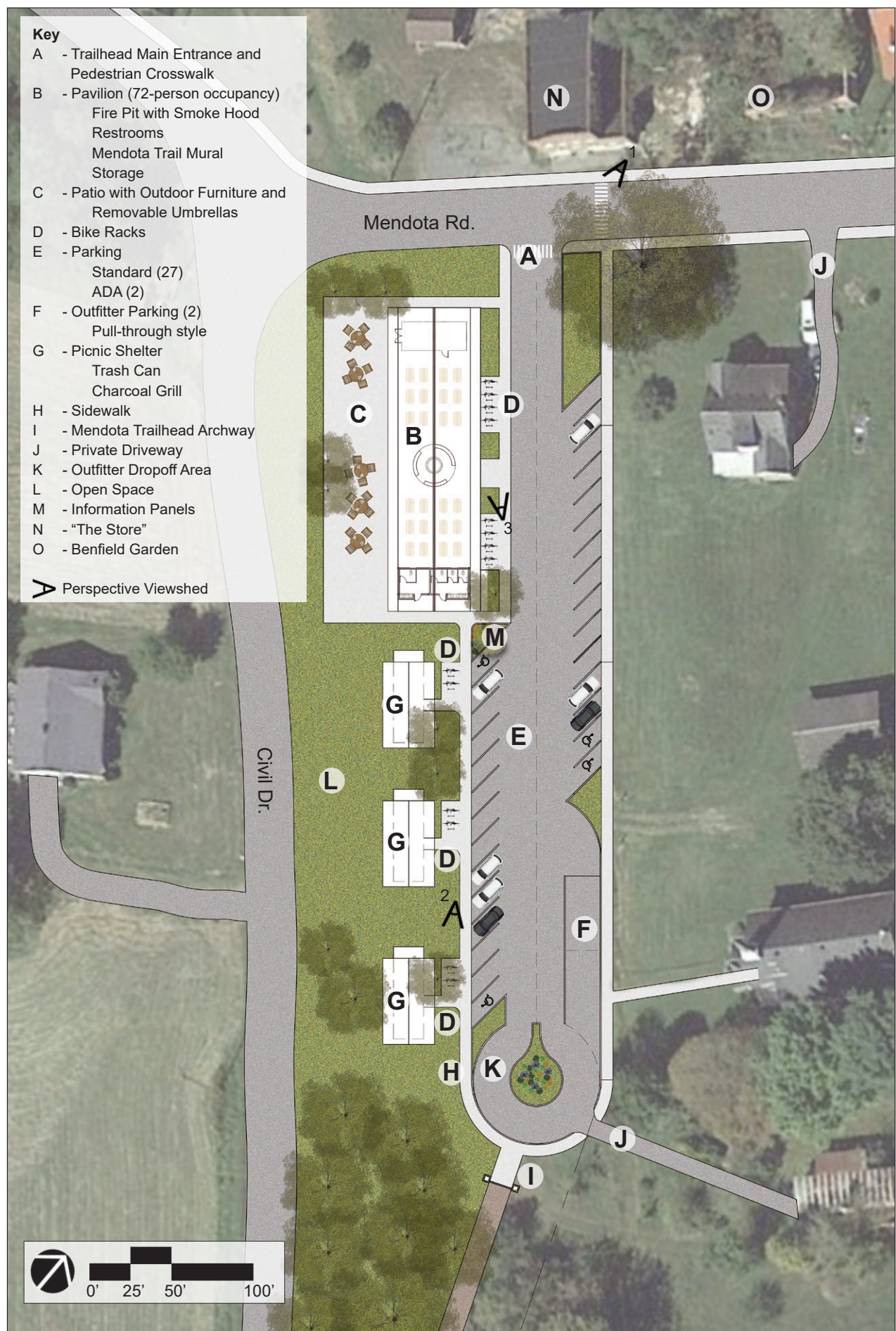


## Mendota, VA: Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead

The Mendota Trail itself is marked by a metal archway with a tumbled stone base. The archway is designed so that it is low enough that trail-goers can take pictures underneath it to remember their visit. The large mural on the side of the community pavilion and the trail archway at the trailhead gives multiple opportunities to share Mendota's community brand and logo. Additionally people driving by will notice the great improvements in the community.

The following pages contain the site plan, perspectives, and precedent images supporting the description above.

- Key**
- A - Trailhead Main Entrance and Pedestrian Crosswalk
  - B - Pavilion (72-person occupancy)  
Fire Pit with Smoke Hood  
Restrooms  
Mendota Trail Mural  
Storage
  - C - Patio with Outdoor Furniture and Removable Umbrellas
  - D - Bike Racks
  - E - Parking  
Standard (27)  
ADA (2)
  - F - Outfitter Parking (2)  
Pull-through style
  - G - Picnic Shelter  
Trash Can  
Charcoal Grill
  - H - Sidewalk
  - I - Mendota Trailhead Archway
  - J - Private Driveway
  - K - Outfitter Dropoff Area
  - L - Open Space
  - M - Information Panels
  - N - "The Store"
  - O - Benfield Garden
- V Perspective Viewshed



Disclaimer: This drawing is conceptual and was prepared to show approximate location, arrangement, and dimensions of site features. It is subject to change and is not intended to replace the use of construction documents. The client should consult appropriate professionals before any construction or site work is undertaken. The Community Design Assistance Center is not responsible for the inappropriate use of this drawing.

**Mendota, VA:**  
**Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead**

Final Design Concept  
Site Plan and Pavilion Detail  
December 3, 2018



Perspective # 1: Pavilion and Mural

A view of the proposed Mendota Trailhead from across Mendota Road at The Store. The design of the pavilion is inspired by the Hiltons Depot and includes horizontal wood siding, a slate grey metal roof, a roof line with two angles, and similar style roof trusses. The structure includes a large mural for photo opportunities, restrooms, an enclosed storage area, and a fire pit. Picnic tables are located under and around the structure as well as under three other picnic shelters. Parking and bike racks are also proposed. In the distance under the arch (left) is the entrance to the Mendota Trail.



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Mendota, VA:  
Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead

Final Design Concept  
Perspective #1: Pavilion and Mural  
December 3, 2018



Perspective # 2: Picnic Shelter, Grill, Mendota Trail Archway

A view of the main entrance to the Mendota Trail and one of three proposed picnic shelters. The entrance features an arched sign to both draw attention to the location of the entrance and provide a spot for taking photographs. The design of the picnic shelters is inspired by architectural features of the Hiltons Depot. The picnic areas include grills and bike racks adjacent to each picnic shelter.



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Mendota, VA:  
Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead

Final Design Concept  
Perspective #2: Picnic Shelter, Grill, Mendota Trail Archway  
December 3, 2018



Perspective # 3: Pavilion, Storage, Renovated Facade of "The Store"  
 A view from the Mendota trailhead looking toward "The Store". The design of the pavilion is inspired by the Hiltons Depot. The pavilion includes, in part, restrooms on one end (beyond the picnic tables in this view), an area for additional picnic tables/furniture on an adjacent patio (far left), and a fire pit with smoke hood.



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Mendota, VA:  
 Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead

Final Design Concept  
 Perspective #3: Pavilion, Storage, Renovated Facade of "The Store"  
 December 3, 2018



Mural-style map on the end of the pavilion.



Post-card-style mural for photo opportunities and community promotion.



Metal archway example for over the Mendota Trail. The brick bases can alternatively be constructed with a tumbled mountain stone for a more local aesthetic.



Wooden archway example for over the Mendota Trail. The stone bases can be shorter with different supports if desired.



Metal bike rack that can hold several bikes as well as be bolted down for additional security.



Sculpture-style bike rack that incorporates local art.



The existing Hiltons depot used for architectural inspiration when designing the community pavilion.



Open-air pavilion with restrooms and fire place on the end.



Metal patio furniture with removable umbrellas for easy storage.



Small picnic shelter with trash can and charcoal grill for private gatherings.



Movable picnic tables underneath an open-air pavilion.



Suspended smoke hood for pavilion fire pit.

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# PART 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Summary

The site is located at the corner of Mendota Road and Civil Drive. The site is predominantly flat with an informal driveway delineating its eastern boundary. This informal driveway leads approximately to the present begin/end of the Mendota Trail. The site does not have any structures and lacks any mature vegetation. It is currently mowed. A steep bank drops between the proposed trailhead site and Civil Drive. Future construction should maintain an appropriate distance from the steep bank.

A church and private residence sit beyond the southeast boundary of the site that share the informal driveway. Future designs should be mindful of these two structures and their users. Additionally there are various overhead utility lines that will require special protection throughout the implementation of any design.

A mature tree is located near the present informal driveway that marks the entrance to the site. Considerations should be made during design and construction to preserve this significant tree for its desirable qualities which include, in part, size/shade, form, and general good health. Consult with local representatives of the VA Department of Forestry to establish a tree protection plan based on the final construction documents developed by licensed professionals.





Proposed trailhead site is primarily flat and without any structures. An informal road (left) borders the site on the east side. A steep bank (right; orange dashed line) creates a boundary between the site and Civil Dr., which is located on the west side of the site.



Current Mendota Trail information kiosk.



View from the Benfield Store of the entrance to proposed trailhead site; limited wayfinding signage makes finding the trail (red dashed box) difficult.



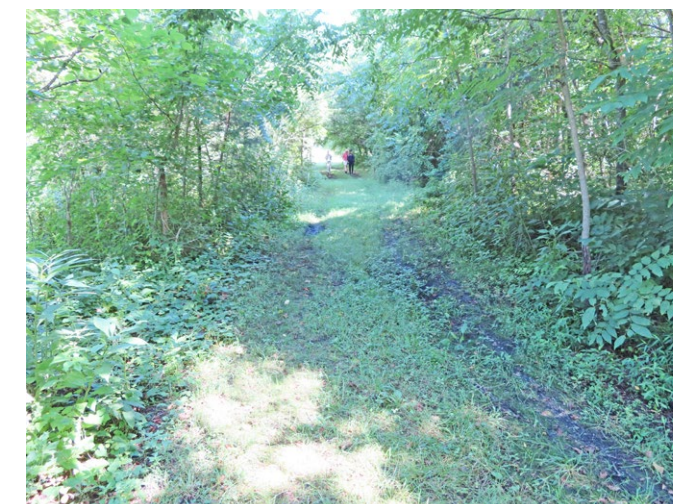
Connection to Mendota Trail from the south side of the proposed trailhead site.



Road to private residence (left) on the south end of the proposed trailhead site; potentially need to maintain vehicle access.



View of the former Benfield Store from the proposed trailhead site. A pedestrian crossing is needed between the store and the trailhead site.



The Mendota Trail is in moderate condition with a loose crushed cinder base. Wayfinding signage and trail improvements are planned to enhance the trail experience.



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Mendota, VA:  
Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead

Existing Conditions  
Site Images  
October 16, 2018

**PART 3:  
PRELIMINARY  
DESIGN CONCEPTS**

## PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONCEPTS

### Preliminary Design Concept 1

#### Design Description

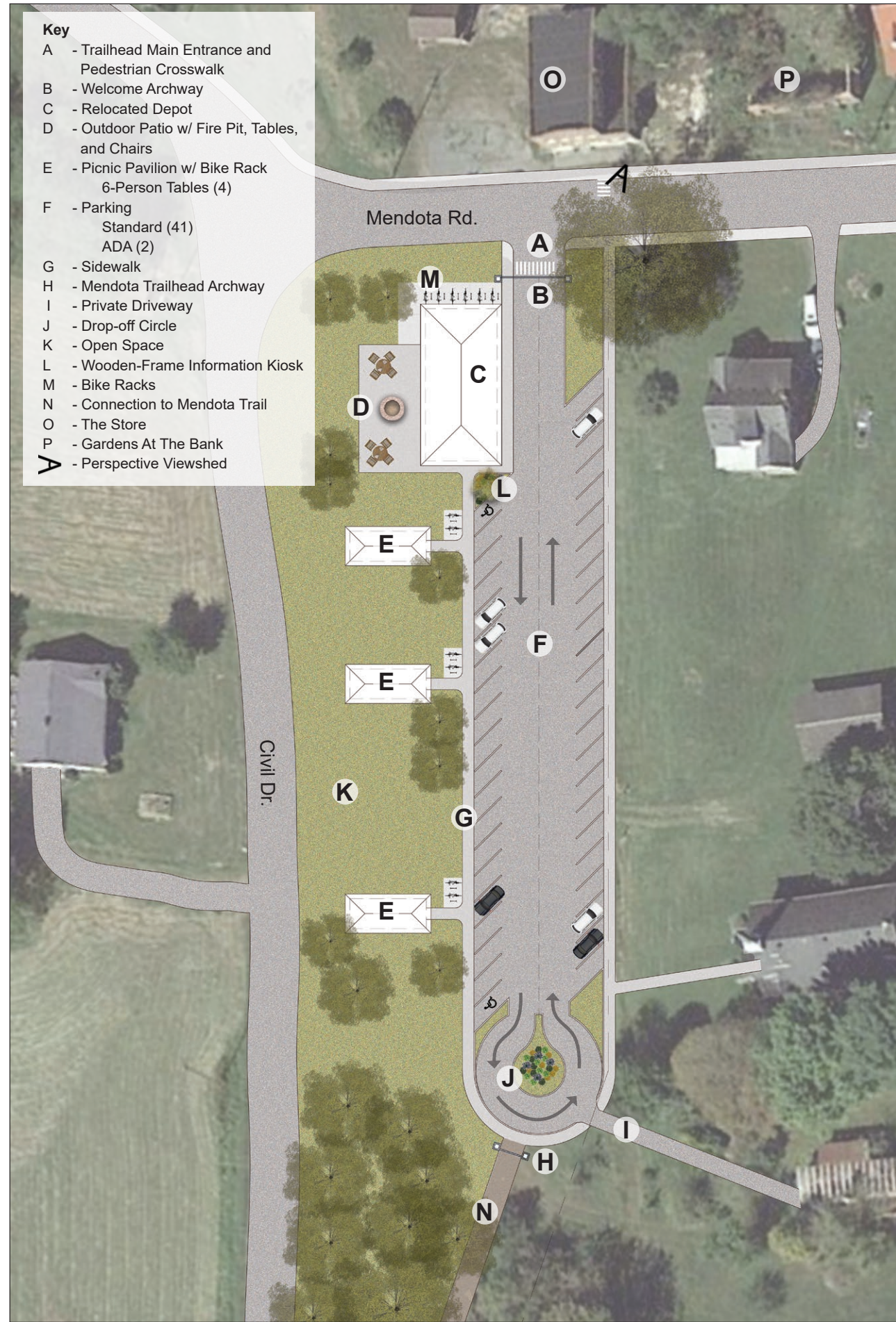
The proposed trailhead site is the location of where the Mendota train depot once stood. Though the original depot has since been removed and the railroad tracks pulled up, the railroad is an important piece of Mendota's history. Preliminary design concept 1 explores the possibility of relocating the nearby Hiltons depot to this site to be transformed into a trail center for the Mendota Trail. Once relocated, the depot will be an iconic backdrop to people coming and going as they enjoy the trail.

An archway marks the formal entrance to the trailhead site. Located at the front end of the site towards Mendota road, the depot's deep eaves and intricate woodwork beautifully celebrate the common architecture style of train depot's throughout southwest Virginia. The depot will be renovated to include restrooms, a convenience store, and seating that opens onto the patio. A fire pit in the center of the patio is surrounded by additional tables with umbrellas for flexible, outdoor seating arrangements. The location of the depot near Mendota Road as well as a traditional cross walk help create a pedestrian friendly zone with the former Benfield Store and gardens at the former bank building located across the road.

Just beyond the depot is a parking lot with angled parking. The parking lot has 41 standard spots and 2 ADA parking spots. At the south end of the parking area is a one-way roundabout. This roundabout can be used as a temporary drop-off zone by outfitters when either picking up or dropping off trail cyclists. A sidewalk connects the depot with the trail itself. Next to the sidewalk are three smaller picnic pavilions that can be rented for private gatherings. Each pavilion has bike racks with plenty of open space for playing.

Before getting onto the trail, visitors will find a second archway. This archway over the trail is smaller than the Mendota Road one and creates a popular destination for photo opportunities.

The following pages contain the site plan with precedent images and a perspective.



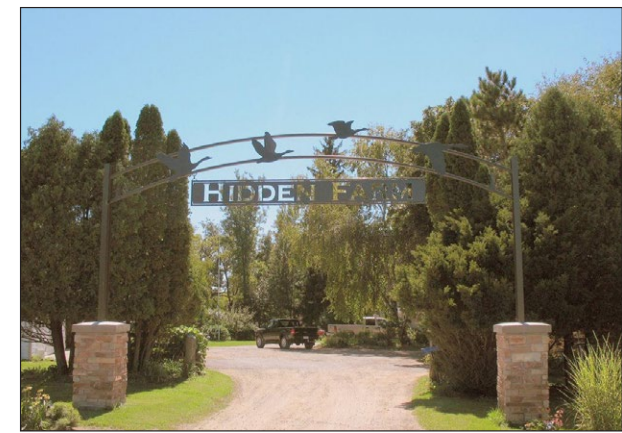
Hiltons Depot potentially relocated to the Mendota trailhead site



Wooden frame information kiosk with roof



Metal welcome archway with brick base



Metal welcome archway with stone base



Outdoor patio with fire pit and seating



Small picnic shelter with tables and trash can unit

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**Mendota, VA:**  
**Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead**  
 Preliminary Design Concept 1  
 Site Plan and Precedent Images  
 October 16, 2018



Perspective: Relocated Hiltons Depot, Welcome Archway, and Picnic Shelters  
 Seen from Mendota Rd., the relocated Hiltons Depot and welcome archway (right) create an exciting entrance to the proposed trailhead site. A pedestrian crossing creates a safe way for people to cross Mendota Rd. from the Benfield Store to the depot. New sidewalks connect the angled parking to the trailhead and depot. Picnic shelters (left; background) are available for smaller gatherings.



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**Mendota, VA:  
 Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead**

Preliminary Design Concept 1  
 Perspective: Relocated Hiltons Depot, Welcome Archway, and Picnic Shelters  
 October 16, 2018

## PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONCEPTS

### Preliminary Design Concept 2

#### Design Description

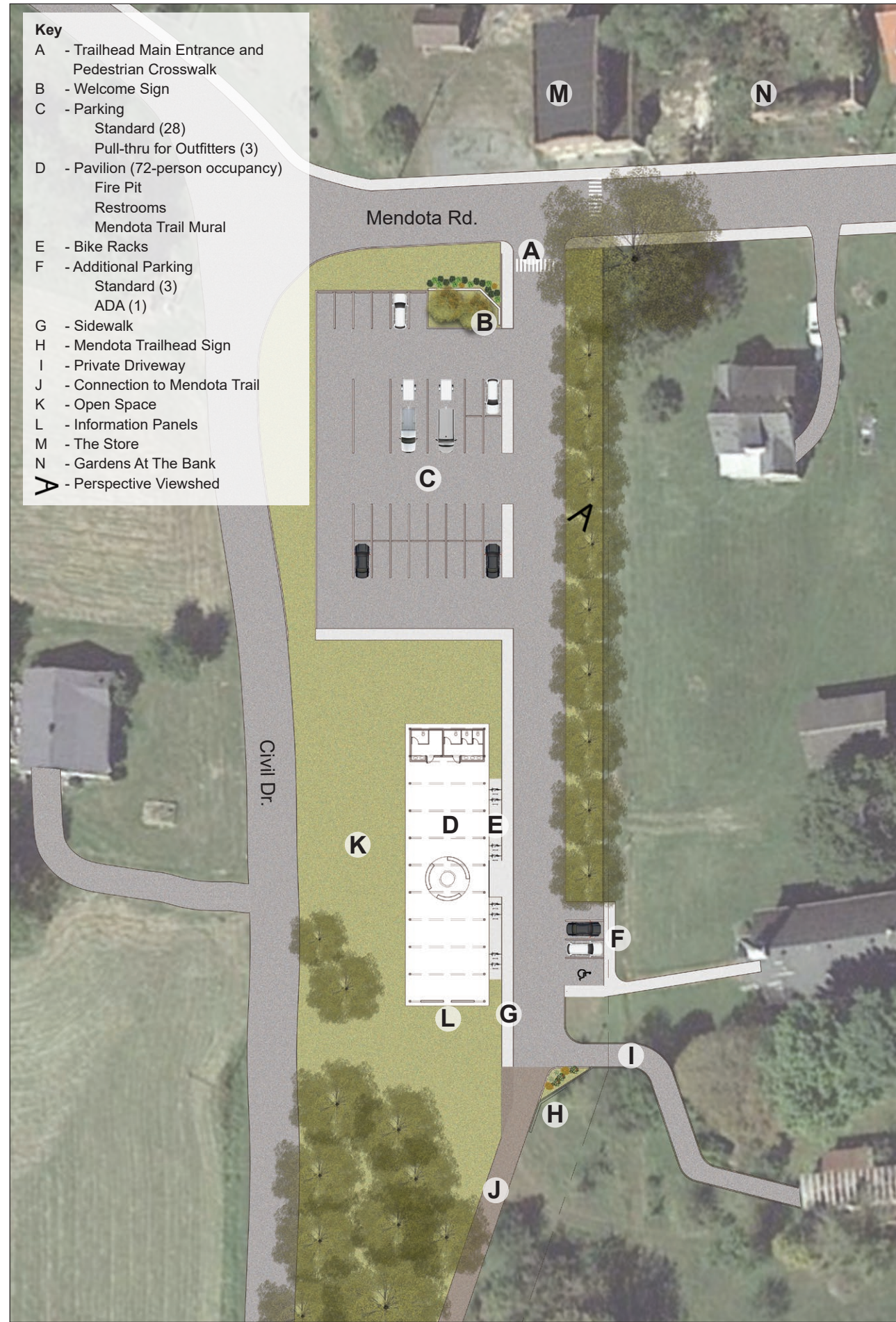
The second design concept redevelops the site into a space for community gathering using a new large pavilion. A low stone welcome sign greets visitors and marks the site entrance off of Mendota Road and can be used as a photo opportunity.

A centralized parking lot is located at the front end of the site. This larger parking lot can accommodate 28 vehicles with room for an additional three outfitters with pull-behind trailers. A small set of ADA parking is provided in front of the pavilion.

A large open air pavilion is located about half way into the site beyond the parking. The simple structure creates an opportunity to be in a covered space while enjoying the scenic beauty of the outdoors. The pavilion has restrooms, storage, and an information kiosk. A fire pit with seating sits in the middle of the pavilion. Additionally, there are bike racks located along the side of the pavilion.

The trail is complemented by another entryway sign that is similar to the one at the entrance, marking the entry into the trail.

The following pages contain the site plan with precedent images and a perspective.



Road side masonry welcome sign for the trailhead pavillion.



Masonry signage at the beginning of the trail



Timber frame pavilion with natural stone seating and picnic tables



Open-air pavilion with restrooms on the end



Stone fire pit with circular bench seating



Suspended smoke hood for pavilion fire pit

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**Mendota, VA:  
Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead**

Preliminary Design Concept 2  
Site Plan and Precedent Images  
October 16, 2018



Perspective: Pavilion, Mural, Fire Pit with Smoke Hood, Parking

A new pavilion welcomes trail users with a large and colorful mural. There is ample parking for standard vehicles as well as bike rental outfitters that use trailers to transport their bicycles. The pavilion has two bathrooms, a central fire pit with smoke hood, seating, and information kiosks. Beyond the pavilion is a second Mendota Trail welcome sign, additional parking, and the Mendota Trail itself.



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Mendota, VA:  
Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for the Mendota Trailhead

Preliminary Design Concept 1

Perspective: Pavilion, Mural, Fire Pit with Smoke Hood, Parking  
October 16, 2018



PART 5:  
APPENDIX

## MEETING NOTES

### Stakeholder Input Session

November 8, 2018; 11:45am-12:45pm  
Benfield General Store  
Mendota, VA 24270

#### General:

- Prefer concept 1 layout
- Like
  - Angled parking; like not having a wall of parking against the road as the first thing that you see
  - Linear sidewalk
  - Roundabout with drop-off zone

#### Add

- Pull-through outfitter parking
- Storage area in the pavilion for table umbrellas
- Grills to shelters and metal trash cans that are critter-proof and aesthetically pleasing

#### Change

- Archways need a tumbled, river stone base instead of the western red rock that was in the preliminary precedent images
- No arch at site entrance from Mendota Road; the mural at the end of the pavilion will work as a welcome sign
- Move archway over trail but have smaller so that it is better for photos!
  - o Community members need to consult with local EMS on height requirements before implementation
- Depot/Pavilion
  - o No depot
  - o Move proposed pavilion to the depot's proposed location near Mendota Rd.
  - o Like fireplace with smoke hood under pavilion
  - o Keep mural on the end of the pavilion
  - o Keep patio adjacent to large pavilion (formerly next to depot)
  - o Add grills to this patio, no extra fire pit on the patio
  - o Keep extra seating on the patio with umbrella tables
- Pavilion design
  - o Make pavilion look more like a train depot; pull inspiration from the Hiltons Depot
  - o Slate grey roof
- Picnic shelters
  - o Keep as many picnic shelters as possible
  - o Rotate 90 degrees so that they are in the same orientation as the pavilion