

How Waterford Got Their House Numbers

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Residents of the National Historic Landmark village of Waterford have long been accustomed to giving house directions that are dictated by local geography rather than a logical numbering system.

"Eighth house down on the left, opposite an old bam with a broken down spout covered in poison ivy" has not been an uncommon street direction.

Under a county ordinance that requires residents to post highly visible dwelling street addresses for use by county law enforcement and fire and rescue services, citizens of Waterford were last week were told that they must now display new 5-digit street address numbers.

The irony of house numbers in the tens of thousands was not lost on local citizens when the subject was first aired some four years ago in a village where there are only some 80 buildings.

Representatives of the Waterford Citizens Association and the Waterford Foundation met with the Education and Public Safety Committee chaired by supervisor Richard L. Roberts (R-Catoctin) in September 1992 to try to obtain either a waiver from the ordinance or at least a numbering system more in keeping with the actual number of structures. Also present at the committee meeting were representatives of police, fire and rescue services and the mapping division of the Department of Environmental Resources.

The Waterford representatives hoped to gain the waiver on several grounds, including the historic character and landmark status of the village, the seeming mismatch of five-digit numbers for only 80 structures and the fact that Waterford had once been incorporated.

Incorporated towns in Loudoun are exempted from the county numbering requirement and may have their own system.

While the committee agreed that the computer could handle different numbering such as a three-digit system, the exemption failed to pass the Loudoun Board of Supervisors, which would have had to vote to change the county ordinance.

Roberts recalled that the board on the first vote approved the exemption but, because a member was absent, a second vote was required, which failed.

Citizens greeted the requirements, which were hand delivered to each house last week, with a mixture of dismay and resignation. The Waterford Citizens Association held a special meeting to discuss the matter last Sunday and agreed to try to come with up a uniform numbering system that would be in character with the historic district.

While some local residents greeted the requirement-which had been expected for some time-with derision at its anomalies, others took the opportunity to have a little fun. Some citizens said that Waterford is just living up to its reputation for always being different, noting that properties numbered in the 15000s were located next to houses in the 40000s and that numbering seemed to start in the middle of a block rather than at the end under the new county system.

One ingenious resident marked the occasion by placing a giant-sized purple sign with large numbers against a large rock at the corner of his driveway. Another made plans to display his address using Roman Numerals.