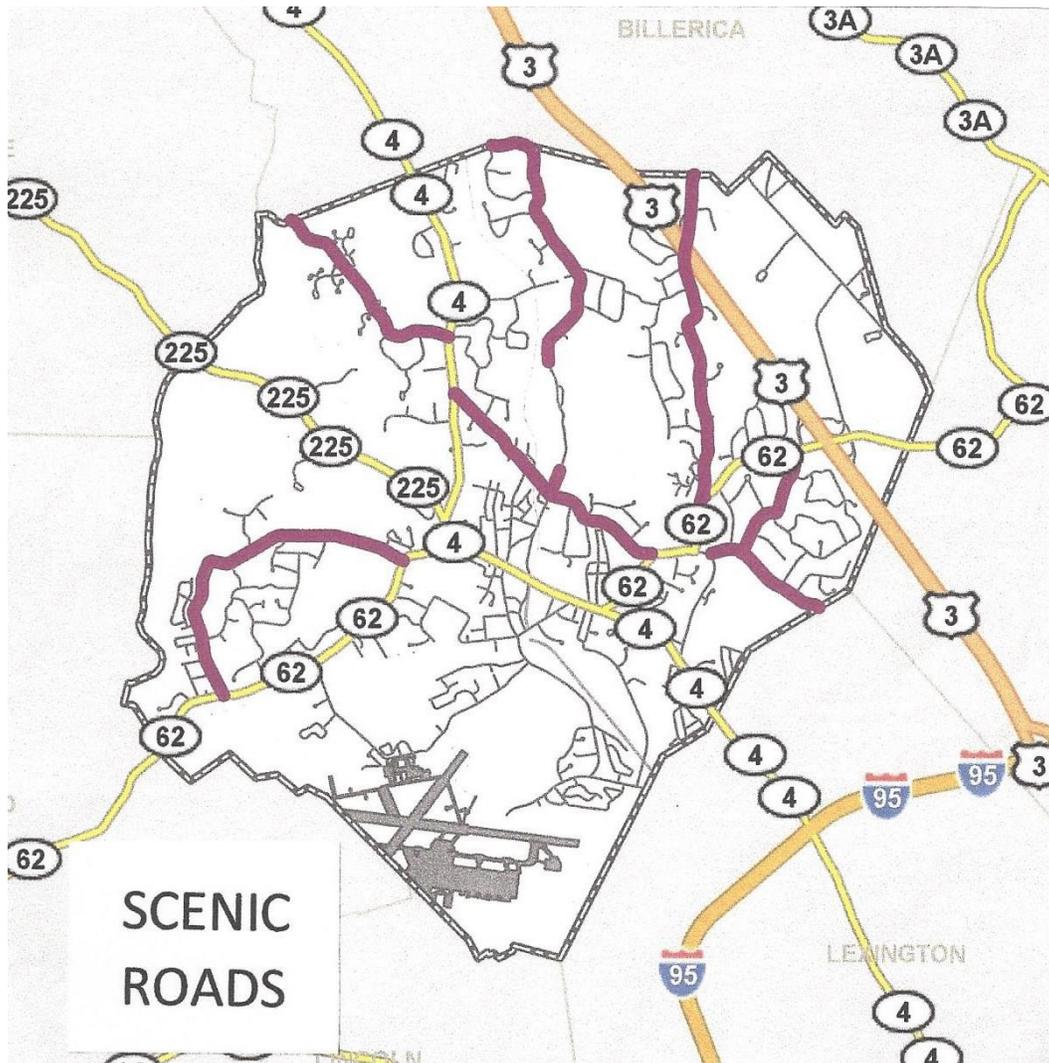


# Bedford's Scenic Roads

by Catherine Perry, Planning Department



Map supplied by DPW

Do you live on one of these roads?

- Davis Road
- Dudley Road
- Springs Road, from Page Road to the Billerica town line (except portion owned by Veterans Administration)
- Wilson Road
- Old Billerica Road, from Burlington Road to the Billerica town line
- Page Road, from Springs Road to Brooksbie Road, and from Shawsheen Road to the Lexington town line
- Pine Hill Road

If so, you should be aware that they are designated by the Town as Scenic Roads. This means that any trees and stone walls within the Right of Way, or partly within it, are protected. Planning Board approval is needed for cutting or removing trees or tearing down or destroying stone walls (or portions of them).

Since approval is needed also from the Tree Warden (Department of Public Works) under the Shade Trees Act for the cutting or removal of trees on all town roads, the two approval processes can be combined on a Scenic Road.



View along Dudley Road

Bedford's stone walls are an important piece of our history as well as adding character to the view from the road. When the first settlers arrived in New England, they began clearing the forests to use the wood and to establish agriculture. Concord was the first inland town to be established (in 1635) and its initial boundaries included part of what is now Bedford. After the fields were established, over time, stones began to appear on the surface due to being pushed up from the underlying glacial till by freeze and thaw cycles. The farmers used oxen to haul the stones to the edges of their pasture and tillage lands.

The earliest walls were loosely dumped but later more craft was applied, to build neater single or double walls. The latter have two outer skins of large stones with a filling of smaller stones or rubble. The main wall building period was 1775-1825. These walls were useful for separating crops and animals and for marking property boundaries, and during this period of agrarian prosperity, the farmers took pride in them. Later, as agriculture in New England declined, many fields returned to forest but the walls remained. Along the old country roads, many are still visible.



Single wall with large stones



Double wall with large stones on the outside, infilled with small ones

The legal framework for scenic roads is in the Massachusetts General Laws (Ch. 40 S. 15C) and the specific road designations are made in Bedford's General Bylaws (Art 45). State numbered routes are not covered because they are excluded by the statute.

Many residents ask how they can tell where the Right of Way line falls at the front of their property, since their grass or groundcover usually extends across it to the edge of the paved road. This line usually has to be determined from a plan of your property, prepared by a surveyor. You may have one available from a past sale, mortgage or construction project. If you don't have one at home, you may be able to locate a copy on the Registry of Deeds website or at the Town's Code Enforcement Department. Such a plan may show a boundary marker such as a drilled granite post that can be located on the ground and used as a starting point for measurement, or it may show stone walls directly, or if it shows buildings it may allow you to estimate the distance of the Right of Way/front lot line from the house. Please note that the paved road is not always in the center of the Right of Way, so there is no standard measurement from the edge of the paving.

Another source of information is the Town's Geographic Information System (GIS) on the website, [www.bedfordma.gov](http://www.bedfordma.gov). Open the *Property Finder* and zoom in to the relevant area. These maps show the Right of Way lines, the other lot lines and buildings, at least approximately. You can turn on the layer for Fences and walls and look for any wall symbols on the map. This information was derived from aerial photographs. In cases of doubt, you can hire a surveyor or consult the Department of Public Works.

If you are contemplating a project that will affect stone walls on a Scenic Road, please contact the Planning Department on 781-275-1548 to discuss filing an application. In the case of work affecting street trees, the application should be made to the Tree Warden c/o the Department of Public Works; on a Scenic Road that department will arrange for the Planning Board to be involved. The process requires an advertised public hearing, with a few weeks' lead time. Emergency work is exempted, if determined as such by the DPW Director or his designee. Typically, in determining an application for Scenic Road approval, the Planning Board will wish to see that the impact on the protected features is minimized, and it may require suitable compensatory relocation of stones or tree planting.

Finally, if you will be doing construction work such as digging or paving within any street Right of Way, perhaps to widen a driveway, you are likely to need insurance and a Street Opening Permit from the DPW.