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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Purpose and Use of the Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan provides direction and guidance for the growth and development of Wythe County over the next 10-20 years. The Commonwealth of Virginia requires that communities develop a long-range plan guiding the development of land within their jurisdiction for the purposes of planning public facilities, infrastructure, and managing land use and development. In particular, the Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for managing how land should be developed within the community and serves as a foundation for recommending various land management tools that should be considered.

Public bodies use the plan to make informed decisions for their communities on public projects such as roads, utilities, schools, and community buildings. Private developers use the plan to make informed decisions on investment for business and residential development. Citizens use the plan to understand the overall direction of the County and to be informed on community conditions.

This plan should be used as a guide for making decisions and should be reviewed every five years for applicability and needed update.

1.2 Overview of Wythe County

Wythe County is strategically located in Southwestern Virginia at the junction of Interstates 77 and 81, two critical transportation connectors to West Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. The scenic New River runs through the center of the County and is one of the oldest in North America recognized for its recreational opportunities and spectacular mountain scenery, rock cliffs, and gorges. Wythe County also hosts portions of the Jefferson National Forest along its northern and southern borders.

From the 1750s, Wythe County has been a crossroads for travelers. Settlers and early industry were drawn to the fertile lands and abundant mineral resources. Today, Wythe County still maintains an extensive agricultural heritage and retains much of its forests, fields, and scenic landscapes. County officials have been proactive in planning for public utilities and continued expansion of economic opportunities. It is recognized as a growing community in Southwest Virginia that is centrally located in the region.



1.3 Vision and Goals for the Future

The following vision and goals for Wythe County were influenced by the input received from citizens, officials, and stakeholders during the development of this Comprehensive Plan.

VISION WYTHE COUNTY 2040

In 2040, Wythe County will be recognized as a peaceful, friendly, healthy, and scenic community with a vibrant, diverse agricultural, industrial, and small business economy. Productive farmlands and scenic rural views surround established communities and small towns positioned along two interstate corridors. Modern public infrastructure is available in developed areas, as well as affordable, quality housing choices in rural areas or in traditional neighborhoods. The County hosts excellent school facilities and quality opportunities for advanced education, trade/technical skills, and continued learning. The revitalized downtowns, connected trails, heritage areas, national forests, and scenic rivers offer outstanding recreation and cultural opportunities for residents and visitors. All of this has been achieved through thoughtful planning and a fundamental understanding that the citizens of Wythe County cherish their simple, country lifestyle and natural surroundings and desire to sustain their communities and quality of life for their children, families, and future generations.

GOALS WYTHE COUNTY 2040

ECONOMY

Agriculture – Sustain, nurture, and strengthen agriculture as an economic engine for Wythe County, providing emphasis on preserving operating family farms, enhancing business opportunities for farmers, and facilitating agritourism.

Industry – Proactively plan for, prepare, and facilitate suitable business areas and sites that will attract clean, quality industry and provide competitive wages, enhance workforce skills, increase public revenue, and improve the quality of life for citizens of Wythe County.

Downtowns – Facilitate and support downtown revitalization and improved gateway connections between rural and developed areas to enhance business development for retail and consumer services, expand cultural activities and events, and encourage regional tourism.

Community & Interstate Commerce – Guide and enhance commercial development and retail/service business investment in appropriate areas within established communities and along interstate corridors and exits.



Tourism – Support and expand opportunities for tourism that will enhance the local and regional economy, preserve environmental assets, and benefit the citizens of Wythe County.

PEOPLE & QUALITY OF LIFE

Housing – Facilitate and encourage safe, quality residential development of varied housing types, choices, and prices in suitable areas that have the public infrastructure to support the housing density.

Education – Invest in, support, and improve the public schools in Wythe County to provide quality programming, state of the art facilities, and outstanding educational opportunities for residents.

Recreation – Support and invest in public recreational facilities and programming that addresses community recreation needs and improves the overall quality of life of residents.

Community and Social Services – Ensure that essential community services for the health and well-being of residents are readily available and accessible.

Community and Social Connectivity – Support and invest in community facilities and cultural systems that build social interaction among residents and strengthen community connections.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Natural Resources – Manage, conserve, and protect the natural resources and scenic, rural landscapes of Wythe County.

Outdoor Recreation – Foster, promote, and invest in expanded outdoor recreational opportunities in Wythe County that take advantage of the unique environmental amenities of the area (rivers, trails, forests, historical sites, etc.).

Farmland Preservation – Celebrate the farming heritage of Wythe County and proactively support and nurture local farmers and family farming.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL SITES

Historic and Cultural Sites – Increase public awareness and promote preservation of historic and cultural properties on National and State Historic Registers, as well as other important cultural or historic properties identified through historic survey.



INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC SERVICES

Transportation – Plan for and provide a safe and efficient transportation system with multi-modal components, as appropriate, that accommodates the projected growth and planned future land use.

Public Utilities – Plan for and expand public infrastructure (water, sewer, energy) to meet projected future demands and extend services to areas aligned for development while employing appropriate environmental protection methodologies and measures to minimize impact on natural features.

Internet/Broadband Access – Expand internet and broadband services throughout the County to address defined critical communication needs (i.e., priority areas for schools, developed areas, and business/industrial centers).

Public Safety – Ensure equitable, timely, and quality public safety response throughout the County for sheriff, fire, and emergency medical responders. Support and facilitate volunteer public safety personnel.

GOVERNMENT

Public Communications – Practice and ensure consistent, comprehensive public communications and use of diverse community outreach methods to ensure sufficient public participation in local government events, public meetings, and decisions.

LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT

Managed, Orderly Growth – Implement the Comprehensive Plan through partnership approaches and creative land management tools authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the citizens of Wythe County.



1.4 Direction for the Future: Opportunities and Actions

To achieve the vision for Wythe County in 2040, there are several initiatives that are set forth in this long-range plan to move the community forward. These include initiatives in the following categories:

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Providing quality, affordable housing is critical to the future of Wythe County and its continued economic growth. Employers need to be assured that there is suitable housing available for employees. Residents also need sufficient quality residential housing choices. This plan recommends focusing new housing development in the more populated areas of Wythe County where there are available public utilities, facilities, and services. Areas such as Wytheville, Rural Retreat, Max Meadows, Fort Chiswell, and Austinville provide opportunities for housing rehabilitation and new housing development that is accessible from major transportation corridors.

RECREATION

Outdoor recreation in Southwest Virginia is a growing industry. Wythe County hosts an immense inventory of resources including natural areas, scenic landscapes, historic sites, and accessible watercourses. This plan recommends expansion of outdoor recreational amenities and collaboration with various Federal, State, and local partners to boost recreational tourism opportunities, particularly with blueway corridors like Reed Creek, Cripple Creek, and the New River.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

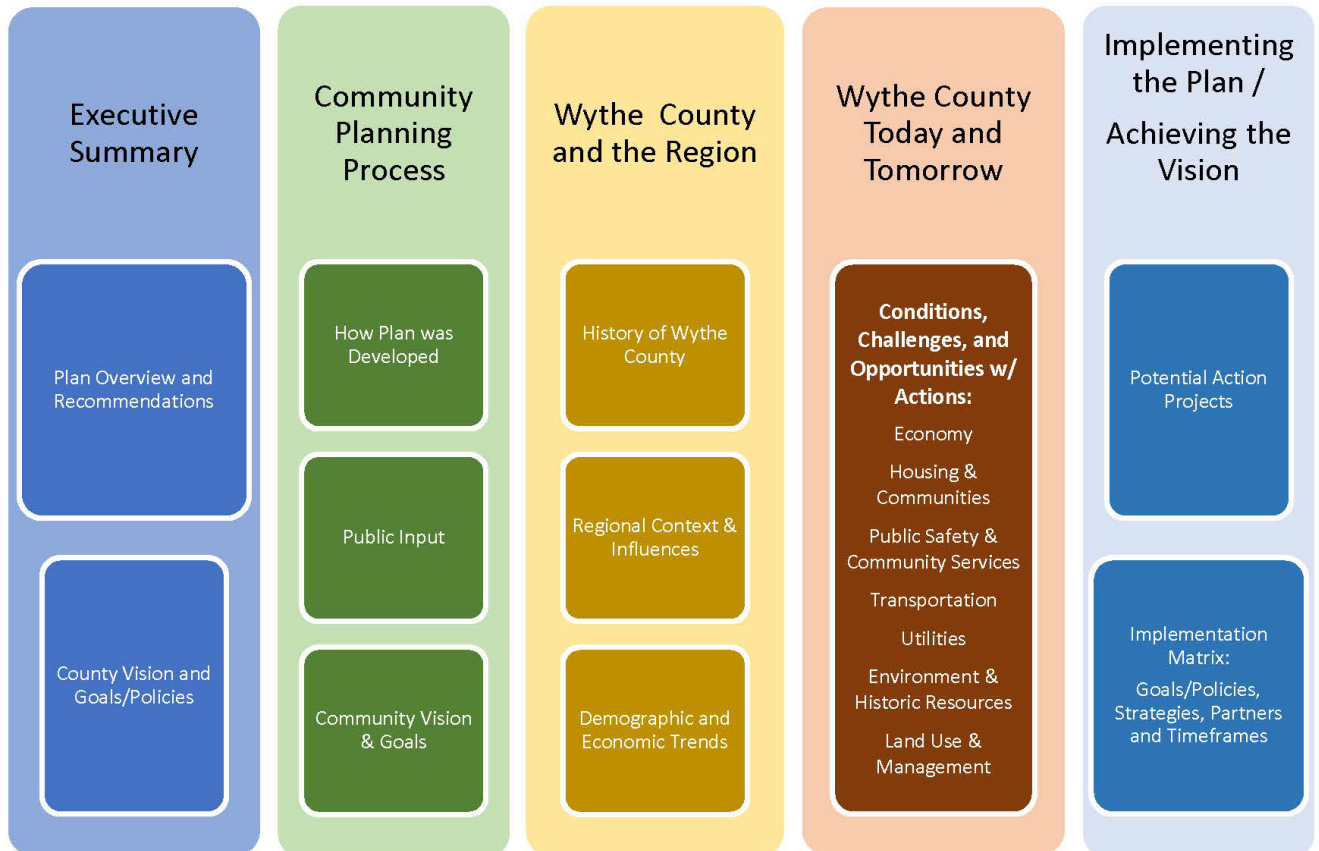
Wythe County has been very proactive in developing signature industrial parks within the County and planning for and implementing an impressive public utility network to support economic growth. Continued leadership in ensuring a balanced tax base of commercial and industrial businesses will benefit citizens by keeping taxes low and enabling financial opportunities for improvements to public facilities. This plan recommends provides some thoughtful development concepts for enhancing APEX Center and Rural Retreat Lake. These concepts offer opportunities for private development partners that can be facilitated and guided by County leaders.



1.5 Organization of Connect Wythe 2040

The following graphic provides an overview of the format and organization of this Comprehensive Plan.

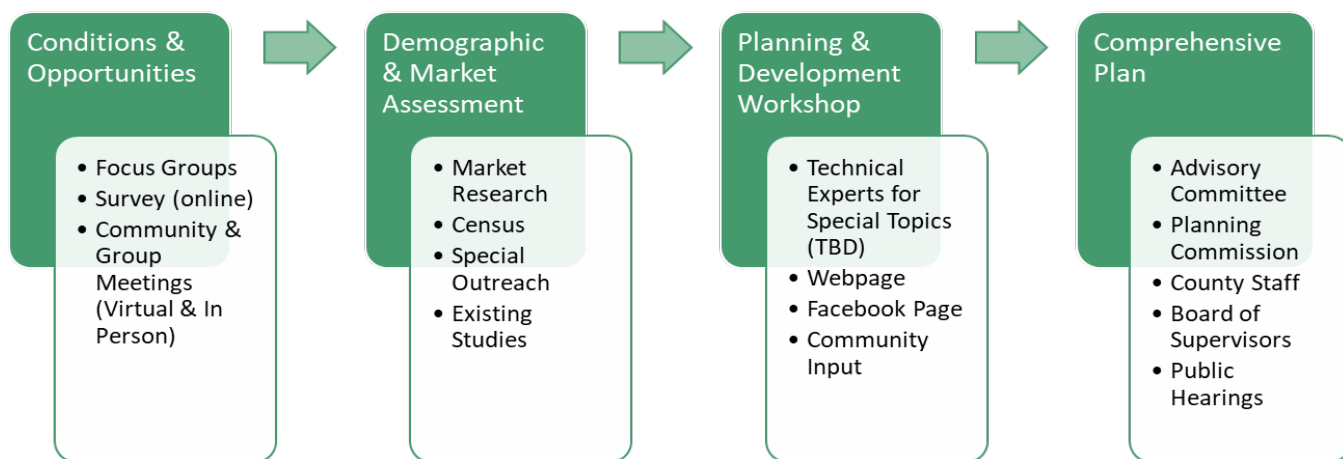
Comprehensive Plan Outline



II. PLANNING PROCESS


2.1 Development of the plan

Connect Wythe 2040 was developed over a one-year period using community meetings, selected stakeholder meetings, a project Facebook page, special community outreach for underserved populations, and an on-line public survey. A flow chart summarizing the public outreach efforts for work tasks is shown below.



Planning Process showing public outreach efforts for Comprehensive Plan Project.


Over the past year, the project team worked with the County Planning Commission and County officials to understand existing conditions and future challenges within the County. Group stakeholder meetings provided insight for a variety of topics including historic properties, community growth, housing, agriculture, economic development, tourism, recreation, and alternative energy. Regular work sessions with the Planning Commission provided opportunities to share project progress, demographic and economic trends, and draft vision, goals and opportunities for the future. An on-line citizen survey provided additional insight into conditions and goals for the future.



Public Meeting #1
Monday, August 9
5:30 to 7:00 PM

Historic Rural Retreat Depot
 1105 W Railroad Ave
 Rural Retreat, VA 24368

Each meeting will provide information on the Comprehensive Planning Project and enable citizens to share their views for the future of the County. Please share your thoughts on community challenges and opportunities for growth and prosperity.



Public Meeting #2
Tuesday, August 10
5:30 to 7:00 PM

Speedwell Elementary School
 6820 Cedar Springs Rd, Speedwell, VA 24374
 OR
Fort Chiswell High School
 764 Fort Chiswell Rd, Max Meadows, VA 24360

Each meeting will provide information on the Comprehensive Planning Project and enable citizens to share their views for the future of the County. Please share your thoughts on challenges and opportunities.



2.2 Citizen Survey

The on-line community survey provided feedback and insight from citizens regarding community vision, conditions, and challenges for Wythe County. As of March 2022, approximately 800 citizens responded to questions that have informed the vision, goals and future direction discussed in this plan. To ensure sufficient outreach to rural areas, these survey results were supplemented with in-person interviews with citizens at several community store locations, including Wythe Produce, Dutch Pantry, Cathy's General Store, Fort Chiswell Food Country, and Speedwell Market.

The graphics and comments shown below share some of the most consistent public thoughts received.

What we heard...

From stakeholder discussions:

- Need to maintain community places for social connectivity (i.e., fire departments)
- Updated schools important
- Need quality, affordable housing (supply limited for rent or sale)
- Travel sports could be an economic opportunity (APEX)
- Expand tourism opportunities (revitalized downtowns, Rural Retreat Lake)
- Huge increase in business and interest in outdoor recreation, camping, etc.
- Great opportunities for the blueways along New River and Reed Creek with more outdoor recreation opportunities at Big Survey and Crystal Springs Recreation Area
- Keep agricultural lands, expand products
- Need to address utility scale solar farms and industrial farming
- More quality jobs desired (there is a lack of skilled workforce)
- Expanded activities and shopping, eating places, etc. desired
- Possibly consider land development controls for certain parts of the County
- Need for expansion of utilities such as broadband throughout the County



What should be considered by the County in the Comprehensive Plan Update?

“A well thought out Vision for growth and development over the next 20 years. What do we want this County to be 20 years from now and how do we get there? Such a vision should include a path for attracting residential, commercial, and open space management to assure improvements in the qualities of our County over the next 20 years and beyond. A good plan requires management and direction and must be followed and revised as appropriate.”



<div data-bbox="358 583 597 705" data-label="Section-Header"> <h2 style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Survey Feedback</h2> </div> <div data-bbox="342 884 610 1037" data-label="Image"> </div>	<div data-bbox="776 306 985 336" data-label="Section-Header"> <p><u>Special Features:</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="862 344 1419 436" data-label="List-Group"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenic beauty and conservation/agricultural land • Location and access to interstates • Historic, cultural, and natural resources </div> <div data-bbox="776 472 917 501" data-label="Section-Header"> <p><u>Challenges:</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="862 508 1432 630" data-label="List-Group"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited land use or development controls • Higher density housing options • Utilities and services limited in rural areas outside of developed core areas </div> <div data-bbox="776 661 953 690" data-label="Section-Header"> <p><u>Opportunities:</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="862 697 1422 819" data-label="List-Group"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade/technical educational training • Modern, public infrastructure in developed areas • Natural features and outdoor recreation as tourism destination </div> <div data-bbox="776 852 990 882" data-label="Section-Header"> <p><u>Vision for County:</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="862 888 1435 984" data-label="List-Group"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable, quality housing choices • Connected trails and greater recreation promotion • Revitalized downtowns and amenity options </div>
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In summary, survey responses focused consistently on certain relevant themes that influenced the planning recommendations and strategies discussed this plan. In general, these themes include:

- Enhancing public services and infrastructure, especially utilities and broadband
- Encouraging additional commercial activity and attractions in populated areas
- Encouraging agriculture as an economic driver and managing agricultural land
- Guiding residential and housing development
- Improving transportation corridors and gateway entrances
- Increasing tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Encouraging managed growth, particularly in the more populated areas (i.e., Wytheville, Rural Retreat, Fort Chiswell, Max Meadows)



III. WYTHE COUNTY AND THE REGION

3.1 Brief History of Wythe County

For centuries, Wythe County has been a crossroads for travelers through the Alleghany and Blue Ridge Mountains to the west. Fort Chiswell was constructed in 1758 during the French and Indian War as a military outpost on the western frontier of Virginia. As early as 1775, Daniel Boone, blazed a trail from Fort Chiswell to the Cumberland Gap (Wilderness Road) enabling settlers to travel The Great Road from Pennsylvania, through the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and Roanoke (Big Lick), west to Tennessee and Kentucky. In 1790, Wythe County was formed from Montgomery County and Wytheville named the County Seat.



Historic Wytheville, County Seat, Established 1790.

With expansion of the railroads in the middle of the nineteenth century, Wythe County became a hub for transporting agricultural commodities and mining ores. Rural Retreat was a major producer of agricultural products. The historic lead mines in eastern Wythe County played a vital role in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. The extraction of lead, iron, zinc, and coal provided employment in Wythe County for more than two centuries. Today, Wythe County continues to serve as a crossroads for travelers and as a central hub for the region's industry. The Towns of Rural Retreat and Wytheville have evolved over the years developing central business service districts to support the growing population.

3.2 Wythe County and the Regional Context

A map of Wythe County shown on the following page provides information on its location in the State of Virginia and its relationship to surrounding counties. Wythe County is strategically located in Southwestern Virginia at the junction of Interstates 77 and 81, two critical transportation connectors to West Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. The scenic New River runs through the center of the County and is one of the oldest in North America recognized for its recreational opportunities and spectacular mountain scenery, rock cliffs, and gorges. Wythe County also hosts portions of the Jefferson National Forest along its northern and southern borders.

Wythe County is primarily rural agricultural land in terms of developed land area, except for its incorporated towns and census designated places. This Southwest portion of Virginia also is rural, and the surrounding Counties of Bland, Pulaski, Carroll, Grayson, and Smyth portray similar agrarian landscapes, forests, and low-density land development patterns. The interstate systems and the New River distinguish Wythe County as a crossroads and logical center for agriculture, settlement, industry, and outdoor recreation.

3.3 Influencing Regional Plans and Entities

MOUNT ROGERS PLANNING DISTRICT

Wythe County is a member of the Mount Rogers Planning District which is one of 21 districts in Virginia that assist communities in regional planning efforts. The District Commission essentially serves all of this part of Southwest Virginia including the Counties of Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, and Washington Counties, and the Cities of Bristol and Galax. Some of the regional plans that have been completed that are relevant to the Wythe County comprehensive planning effort include:

- 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy – This adopted plan sets forth an inventory of economic development partners and a coordinated strategy for furthering regional economic development. The strategy included an industry cluster analysis for the region that identified growing “star” clusters in manufacturing, transportation equipment manufacturing, agribusiness and food processing, apparel and textiles, chemicals and chemical based products, advanced materials, and advanced metal manufacturing. The plan includes goals for Tourism, Agribusiness, Manufacturing, and Community Enhancement. Projects included for Wythe County include: transportation improvements for Progress Park, expansion of County broadband, various water and wastewater improvement projects, and additional investment in the Regional Exposition (APEX) Center and commercial properties at Exit 77. Progress Park is listed as a Strategic Industrial Site.



Insert Regional Map showing location of Wythe County in Virginia and surrounding counties.

Wythe County Regional Location



- 2019 Mount Rogers Hazard Mitigation Plan – This regional plan, required by FEMA, addresses natural hazards (e.g., dams, karst, winds, drought, flooding, etc.) and recommends mitigation measures. For Wythe County, the primary natural hazards identified include flooding (Town of Wytheville, Max Meadows), severe winter storms, high winds, karst terrain (30% of the county), and one dam (Rural Retreat Lake).
- 2011-2035 Mount Rogers Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan – This regional plan for transportation provides a list of desired future transportation projects by locality. For Wythe County, the plan provides recommendations for 71 transportation projects that include improvements to interstate, primary and secondary roads.
- 2021 Mount Rogers Virginia Telecommunication Initiative – The Mount Rogers Planning District continues to coordinate projects for expanding telecommunication fiber infrastructure to unserved areas in the region. The state-wide initiative is managed by Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and combines federal, state, local, and private investment to expand broadband fiber to areas.
- The Crooked Road, Virginia Music Heritage Trail and 'Round the Mountain Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network – Wythe County is part of this regional economic development initiative for Southwest Virginia (2005) that celebrates and promotes the rich heritage of music and artisan crafts. These two non-profit entities contribute significantly to regional tourism.

REGIONAL ENTITIES AND AUTHORITIES

Wythe County participates in a variety of regional authorities with other surrounding counties to provide important public services. These include the following:

- Virginia Industrial Advancement Alliance – This entity is a regional economic development organization responsible for prospect development, project management, and outreach marketing of industrial sites in the I-81 and I-77 Corridors for its member localities (Wythe, Carroll, Bland, Grayson, Smyth, and Washington Counties, and the City of Galax). Targeted industrial sectors include plastics and advanced materials, automotive and transportation equipment, food and beverage processing, and information technology. The entity is financed by its member localities and private sector contributions.
- Wytheville-Wythe-Bland Chamber of Commerce – The regional chamber of commerce works with two counties and the Town of Wytheville to further economic development and investment in the participating communities.
- New River / Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board – This board addresses employment training needs in the region. It receives funding from the Workforce Investment Act (U.S. Department of Labor) and facilitates data collection and important career training paths to ensure a skilled workforce for targeted industry sectors. The Board partners with Wytheville Community College to help serve the region for workforce development.



- Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing – This entity furthers advanced manufacturing in the region through training and testing at the Southwest Virginia Center of Excellence located at Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator campus in Abingdon. This training and testing facility was funded by the Virginia Tobacco Commission and offers three programs in welding, machining, and industrial machinery mechanics.
- New River Valley Regional Jail Authority – This regional authority manages an incarceration facility located in Dublin, Virginia that serves the Counties of Wythe, Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, and Pulaski, and the City of Radford. The facility opened in 1999 and was expanded in 2005 and 2010. It has capacity to hold 860-1180 inmates, depending on bed arrangements.
- Wythe-Grayson Regional Library System – Wythe County participates in a regional library system with Grayson County. The system includes two libraries in Wythe County and three libraries in Grayson County. The library system is managed by a Board of Trustees representing each community. It also has an established Regional Library Foundation that assists with funding.
- Joint Public Service Authority of Wythe and Bland Counties – This entity manages solid waste for the two counties.

SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA CULTURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION / FRIENDS OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

These two entities represent 19 counties (including Wythe County), four cities and 53 small towns in Southwest Virginia. The Foundation was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2008. Later, the Friends group was established as a non-profit support organization. These organizations work to develop and coordinate the creative economy in Southwest Virginia (cultural heritage, natural resources, arts and crafts, music, and storytelling). They are instrumental in a planning for and funding a variety of initiatives including the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Marketplace (formerly Heartwood, Abingdon), The Crooked Road – Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail and ‘Round the Mountain Artisan Network. In particular, the organizations are active in branding and marketing for the region, promoting outdoor recreation opportunities, and facilitating downtown revitalization.

JEFFERSON NATIONAL FOREST

The Jefferson National Forest is part of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests which were combined in 1995 and now managed as one unit of over 1.6 million acres in Virginia. This national forest lies in Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Much of the forest area consists of wilderness and outdoor recreation areas. Parts of Jefferson National Forest lie within Wythe County, as well as neighboring Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Pulaski, and Smyth counties. The *Land and Resource Management Plan* (2004) establishes future goals and land use (forest, timber, recreation, wilderness, etc.) based on land suitability.



NEW RIVER TRAIL STATE PARK

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation operates the New River Trail State Park (57 miles) in Wythe, Carroll, Grayson, and Pulaski Counties and the City of Galax. Within Wythe County, the park hosts its headquarters at Foster Falls and manages outdoor recreation facilities at the historic Shot Tower, Austinville, Ivanhoe, and Foster Falls.

The liner park along the New River offers amenities for hiking, biking, boating, fishing, camping, and horseback riding. In 2018, visitors for the park numbered almost 1.1 million. A 2020 *Master Plan* for the Park indicates that future improvements are planned for Foster Falls (renovated buildings, bathhouse, bathroom, picnic shelter, and contact station), as well as other improvements in adjacent counties (camping at Horseshoe Bend, visitor center in Galax, picnic shelter and restroom in Fries).

3.4 Long-Range Planning in Surrounding Counties

PULASKI COUNTY

Like Wythe County, neighboring Pulaski County (2020 population 33,800, U.S. Census) hosts a rural forested and agrarian landscape along the I-81 corridor. The Fairlawn Community adjacent to Montgomery County is designated as an area for growth, in addition to the incorporated Towns of Pulaski and Dublin, where regional employers (manufacturing, health care, transportation/warehousing) and downtown revitalization efforts continue investment. Agriculture and recreation (New River, Claytor Lake, National Forest, parks) contribute to existing and future economic and tourism opportunities for the County.

The *Pulaski County Comprehensive Plan 2030* (adopted 2019) establishes future goals for more diverse population growth, improved economy, expanded infrastructure (water, sewer, broadband), increased workforce education opportunities, and improved, affordable housing choices. Pulaski County has adopted zoning and subdivision regulations.



CARROLL COUNTY

Carroll County (2020 population 29,155, U.S. Census) hosts both established communities (Town of Hillsville and several small communities like Woodlawn, Cana, and Fancy Gap) and large rural, agricultural areas. The independent City of Galax centrally sited on U.S. Rt. 58 lies on the western edge of the County and has greatly influenced development and growth in the community, as well as I-77 which runs north-south through the center of the County. Agriculture is the dominant economic driver and historically, has been the foundation of the County since its formation in 1842.

The *2030 Carrol County Plan* (adopted 2010) focuses on protecting and supporting agriculture and expanding utility and transportation infrastructure in growth areas (U.S. 58 and North I-77). The County is home to the Southwest Virginia Farmers Market and local community supported agriculture is promoted as a tool for farmland preservation. The plan identifies tourism (ecotourism, heritage tourism, outdoor recreation) as economic development opportunities. In addition, the plan encourages continued support of the Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority and the Blue Ridge Crossroads Small Business Development Center, a joint venture of Carroll and Grayson Counties. Carroll County has adopted zoning and subdivision regulations.

BLAND COUNTY

In 2020, according to the U.S. Census, Bland County had a population 6,270. Established small communities within the County include Bland, Rocky Gap, and Mechanicsburg. The County is predominantly rural agricultural land; only a small portion (approximately five percent) is used for commercial, industrial, or dense residential development. Approximately 75% of the land in Bland County has a slope of 20 percent or greater which affects its suitability for development. Like Wythe County, Interstate 77 runs north-south through Bland County, providing potential development opportunities at approximately six interchange exits.

The *Bland County Comprehensive Plan* was adopted in 2018 and encourages protection of sensitive natural areas and development that makes efficient use of Bland County's limited suitable land. The plan encourages the preservation and protection of farmlands and agricultural enterprises; it also encourages the attraction of new businesses and employment opportunities that build on the interstate transportation corridor access. Bland County has adopted zoning and subdivision regulations.



SMYTH COUNTY

Like Wythe County, I-81 runs through the center of the Smyth County (2020 population 29,800, U.S. Census). The County hosts three incorporated towns – Marion (County seat), Chilhowie, and Saltville with much of the County population concentrated around these communities along the interstate corridor. Smyth County hosts Hungry Mother State Park (3,300 acres), a large portion of the Mount Rogers National Recreational Area, Jefferson National Forest (200,000 acres), Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and three forks of the Holston River.

The *Smyth County Comprehensive Plan 2019 Update* encourages development in and around existing Towns of Marion, Chilhowie and Saltville and in areas served by infrastructure. Various economic initiatives underway in the County include downtown revitalization and expanded tourism efforts focused on outdoor recreation. In addition, housing has been a topic of discussion, with respect to affordability, quality, and type. Smyth County has adopted zoning and subdivision regulations.

TAZEWELL COUNTY

According to U.S. Census Bureau, Tazewell County had a population of 40,429 in 2020. While the topography of Tazewell County is more mountainous than Wythe County, fertile agricultural and pasture lands also are prominent. The County hosts three incorporated towns spaced evenly within the boundaries along U.S. Route 460 – Town of Bluefield, Town of Tazewell (County seat), and Town of Richlands. The fertile Burkes Garden (32,000 acres) is an important cultural and agricultural asset of the County. Natural resource mining of coal has been a major economic driver in Tazewell County for many decades. Timber is also a significant resource.

The *Tazewell County 2008 Comprehensive Plan* encourages economic growth that does not impair or diminish the rural character of the County. The plan supports expansion of utilities and telecommunication services for aggressive recruitment of businesses and encourages the growth of tourism as an economic generator to build on the cultural, scenic, and natural heritage assets of Tazewell County (Burkes Garden, Clinch River Basin, East River Mountain, Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, etc.). Tazewell County has adopted subdivision regulations and has considered zoning, but as of 2022 has not adopted zoning for any portion of the County.



3.5 Established Communities in Wythe County

Wythe County hosts two incorporated towns (Wytheville, Rural Retreat), three census designated places (Fort Chiswell, Max Meadows, Ivanhoe) and several other established communities (Austinville, Speedwell, Barren Springs) which have evolved as populated centers for community services, business, housing and activities.

TOWN OF WYTHEVILLE

The Town of Wytheville serves as the County Seat hosting governmental offices for Wythe County and other important county-wide operations. Originally known as the Town of Evansham, it was renamed Wytheville in 1839 after George Wythe, a signer of the United States Declaration of Independence.

Historically, the Town of Wytheville was an early crossroads for settlers heading towards the western frontier. Today, Wytheville is one of few localities within intersecting interstates – I-77 (Ohio to South Carolina) and I-81 (New York to Tennessee). These interstate connections have contributed greatly to the economy of the town and to development of Wytheville as a community with attractive residential neighborhoods.

Downtown Wytheville is a designated historic district and is a successful example of downtown revitalization that exhibits street and pedestrian improvements with rehabilitated retail and commercial spaces, a restored hotel, churches, stately public buildings, and a diversity of community services. Historic sites on the National Register of Historic Places complement the area and include The Crockett's Cove Presbyterian Church, Haller-Gibboney Rock House, Loretto, St. John's Episcopal Church, St. John's Lutheran Church and Cemetery, and Wythe County Poorhouse Farm.

The 2013 *Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wytheville* sets forth the following vision:

“Wytheville will be a place where our small-town atmosphere, historic resources, cultural heritage, rural character and natural environment will be preserved and promoted. We will create a positive environment for business and industry by developing and expanding educational and economic opportunities. We will encourage orderly growth and development. Our Town will be a place where all generations of families can enjoy a quality community in which to live, work, and play.”

The Plan establishes goals for eight focus areas that build on the community’s heritage, housing stock, and desire for new investment and growth:

- **Environmental:** Enhance the environmental quality of the town and its natural resources and promote the positive scenic attributes of the area.
- **Land Use:** Promote orderly growth and development through sound land use practices consistent with our small-town atmosphere, natural setting, and cultural and historical heritage.



- Transportation: Provide a balanced and efficient transportation system that will expand to shape and serve the Town’s growth.
- Housing: Provide quality housing for all the citizens of the town.
- Public Facilities: Expand present utility systems to serve both present and future needs of the Wytheville population.
- Community Facilities: Provide community facilities for the governmental, cultural, and recreational needs of the present and future populations.
- Public Services: Provide public services that make Wytheville a safe and caring community.
- Economic: Collaborate to create a diversified economy that encourages entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, support of existing businesses and industry, and a vital downtown.

TOWN OF RURAL RETREAT

The Town of Rural Retreat (1911) was initially known as Mount Airy prior to the formation of Wythe County. Following railroad construction through the community in the mid-1850s, the area evolved from a frontier settlement to a farming center. By 1910, the community was known as the “cabbage center of the world,” producing the world’s largest cabbage market until the 1930s. Today, livestock and dairy farming are popular and many farms in Rural Retreat have been passed down from generation to generation.



Town of Rural Retreat, street view.

In the late 1800s, Dr. Charles Pepper, a pharmacist, owned and operated a drugstore in Rural Retreat.

He developed a medicinal remedy that later became marketed as the well-known Dr. Pepper soft drink. The Rural Retreat Depot (circa 1870) was built by the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad and is one of the oldest railroad stations in Southwest Virginia. It is recognized and most known from the iconic 1957 railroad photograph by O. Winston Link.

Downtown Rural Retreat has seen reinvestment in buildings, businesses, and infrastructure. Investments include renovation of the Train Depot, farmers market, downtown winery and purchase of the former Dr. Pepper pharmacy site. Transportation Enhancement funds have improved downtown sidewalks and streets for pedestrians. A 2001 Historic Survey identified many of the buildings in Rural Retreat as potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Other local attractions are Rural Retreat Lake, Wythe Raceway, and the community fairgrounds.



FORT CHISWELL

Fort Chiswell is a “census-designated place” and identifiable community located along the I-81 corridor near its junction with I-77. The name Fort Chiswell refers to a historic fort / outpost established to guard lead mines during the French and Indian War (1754 – 1763). Much of the historic fort and surrounding buildings were covered over during construction of I-77. Only a pyramid-shaped sandstone marker remains today near the original fort site. One visible landmark along the I-81 corridor in this part of Wythe County is the McGavock Mansion (1840), often referred to as the Fort Chiswell Mansion, which prominently overlooks the rolling landscape.

The populated center of Fort Chiswell lies at the junction of U.S. 52 and Rt. 94 (Ivanhoe Rd.) where community elements include a high school, middle school, various churches, several commercial establishments, and a local rescue squad. Because of its central location in the County, connected transportation corridors, available utilities, and supporting community facilities, Fort Chiswell is well positioned for additional housing and commercial investment.

MAX MEADOWS

Max Meadows is a “census designated place” and identifiable community located north of Fort Chiswell and the I-81 corridor. The rural center of the community contains a post office, volunteer fire department, park, elementary school, several churches, Ruritan Club, convenience / grocery store, and recreation opportunities



Max Meadows community.

along beautiful Reed Creek. Max Meadows is conveniently situated in Wythe County with easy transportation access to Progress Park (via Peppers Ferry Road). Because of its central location in the County, connected transportation corridors, community structure, and accessible utilities, Max Meadows is positioned for additional residential and small business growth.

IVANHOE

Ivanhoe evolved as a settlement in the 1800s with the mining industries in Wythe County (lead, zinc, iron ore, limestone). Located adjacent to the New River, the prominent industrial community once included several hotels, an opera house, and an iron furnace company. There have been several books

written on the history of Ivanhoe and its early settlers. Today, Ivanhoe is quite different. While not as vibrant as it once was, the community exhibits clusters of residential homes, a post office, volunteer fire department, churches, and several commercial establishments.

AUSTINVILLE

Austinville is an established community adjacent to the New River in southeastern Wythe County. The community has a long history and settlement associated with the operation of lead and zinc mines that began operating there around 1760. The community exhibits established neighborhoods, a former school, and an early sewage treatment plant of historic significance. In addition, the community includes the Historic Shot Tower (1870) and State Park on the New River Trail and Stephen F. Austin Park, honoring the “Father of Texas” who was born in Austinville in 1793.



Austinville community view.

BARREN SPRINGS

Barren Springs is a rural crossroads community situated south of the New River. It hosts a post office, volunteer fire department, church, and a few retail establishments.

SPEEDWELL

The rural crossroads community of Speedwell occupies a peaceful setting in the southwestern corner of the County on the northern edge of the Jefferson National Forest. Speedwell has several elements that allow it to function well as a small community including an elementary school, post office, volunteer fire department, churches, convenience / grocery stores, and other small commercial businesses.

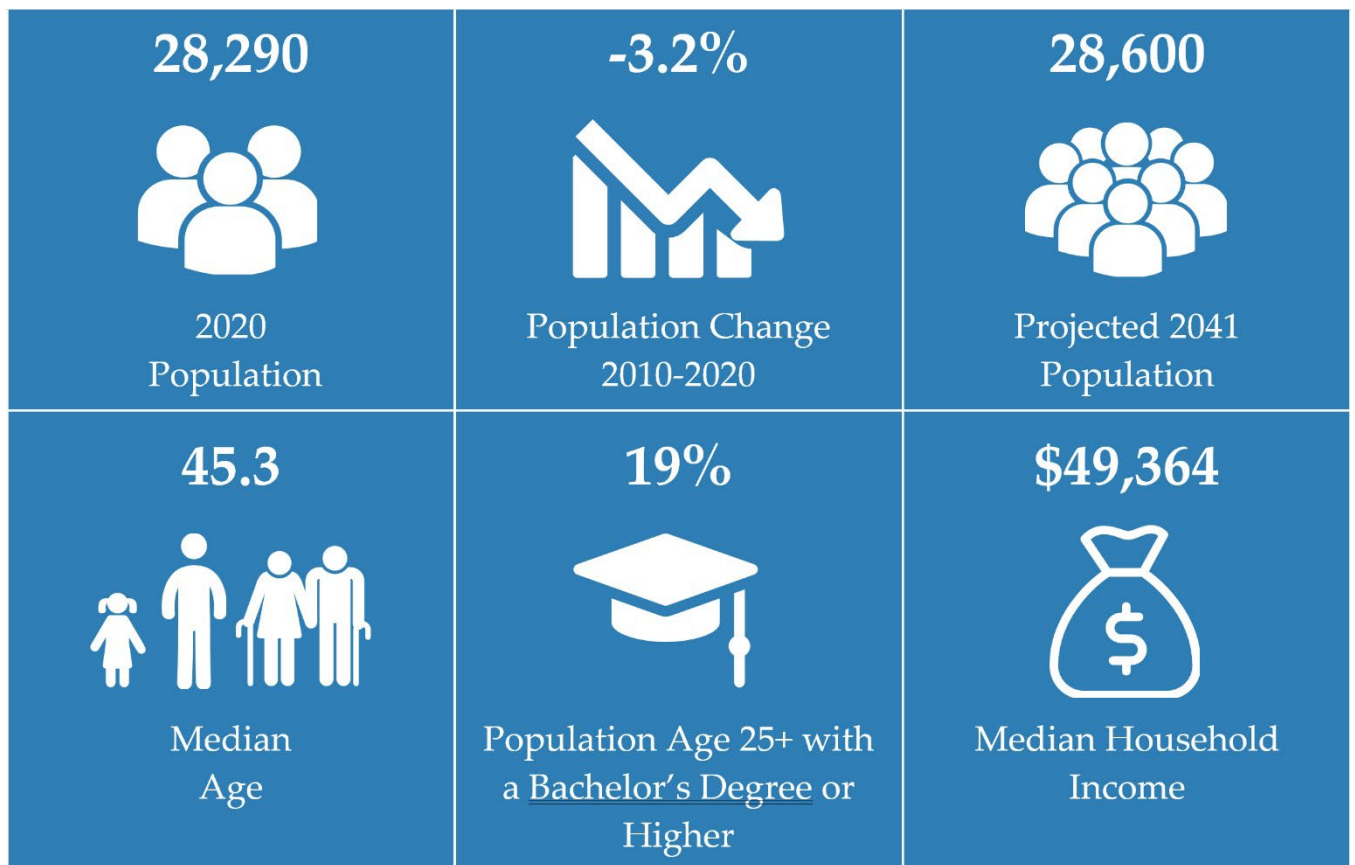
3.6 Wythe County Demographic and Economic Trends

As part of the planning process to update the comprehensive plan for 2040, the project team’s economist, Arnett Muldrow, conducted a demographic and economic analysis of Wythe County to understand trends and identify opportunities for future growth and investment. An overview of their results is summarized in the following paragraphs. The full analysis and additional details are included as Appendix A.

Please note that at the time of this report, the US Census has released limited data for 2020 including total population and race. Other demographic data comes from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) from US Census Bureau and represents a 5-year average estimate of each data point. This is the most up to date and accurate counting until more complete data is released by the Census Bureau. These and other sources are noted where presented in the report.

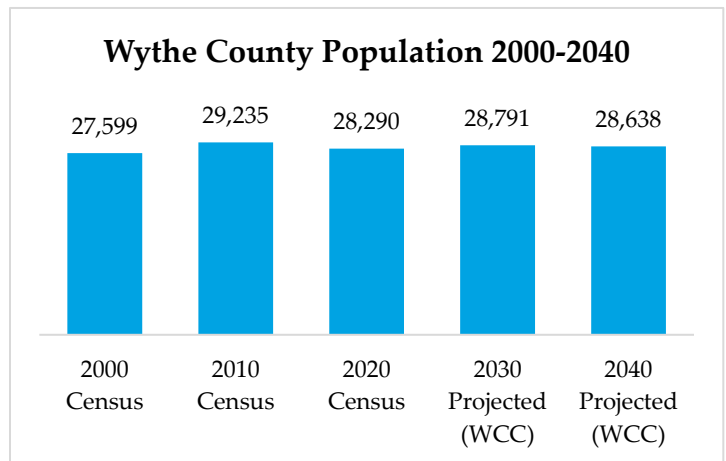
DEMOGRAPHICS

The following chart summarizes demographic information for Wythe County.



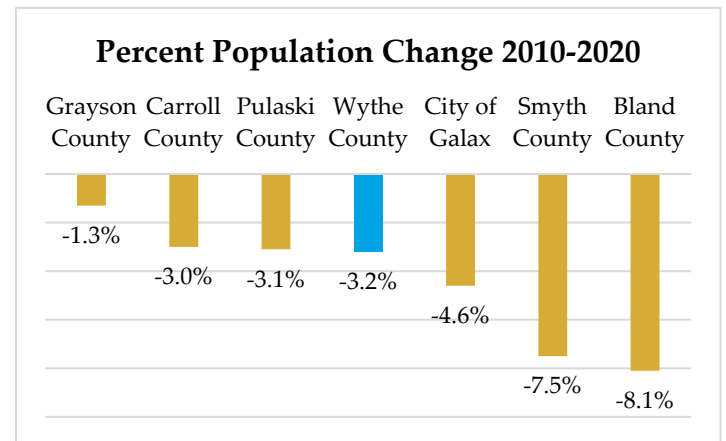
POPULATION

The 2020 population of Wythe County is 28,290. While the population in the county grew by 5.9% from 2000 to 2010, population declined by 3.2% from 2010 to 2020, mirroring a regional trend in population decline.

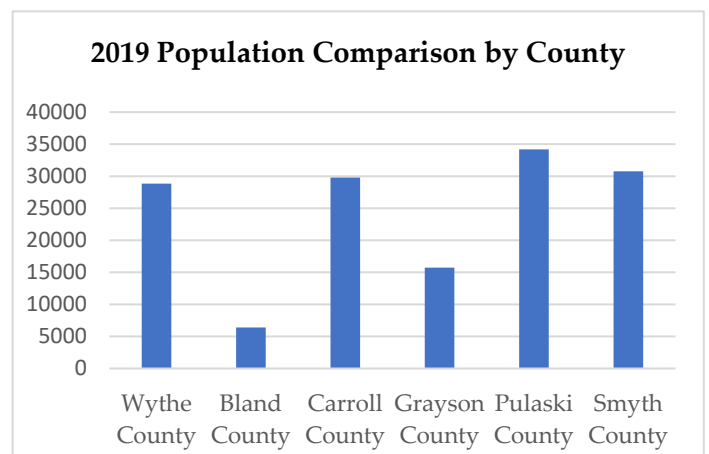


Wythe County Population 2000-2040 (Sources: U.S. Census, Weldon Cooper Center)

The population in Wythe County is expected to remain stable between 2000 and 2040, reaching approximately 28,600 in 2040. Growth in Wythe County is expected to continue over the next ten years, with the population nearing 28,800 by 2030. The population may see slight decline after 2030 due to an aging population. This figure is based on historic growth and rates and projections provided by the Weldon Cooper Center. It is likely a conservative estimate, as Wythe employment growth is expected to increase demand for housing in the County.

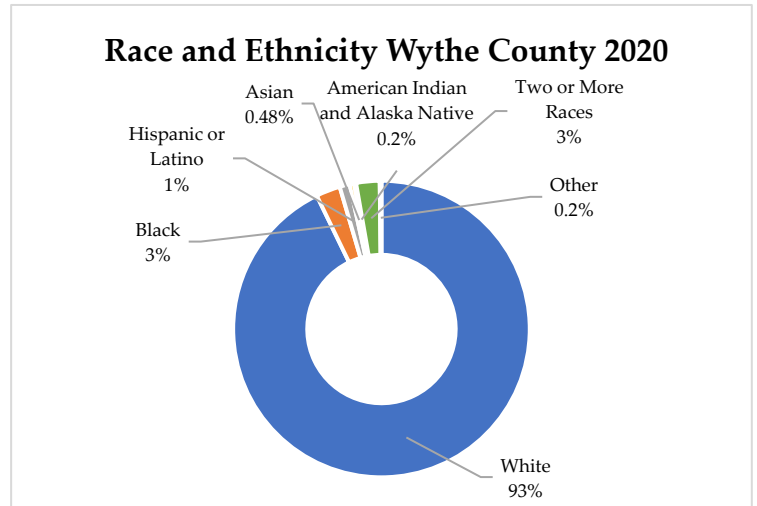


Percent Population Change 2010-2020 in Wythe County and Surrounding Counties (Source: U.S. Census)



RACE AND ETHNICITY

The 2020 population of Wythe County primarily white (93%). Minorities represent the remaining percentage (7%).

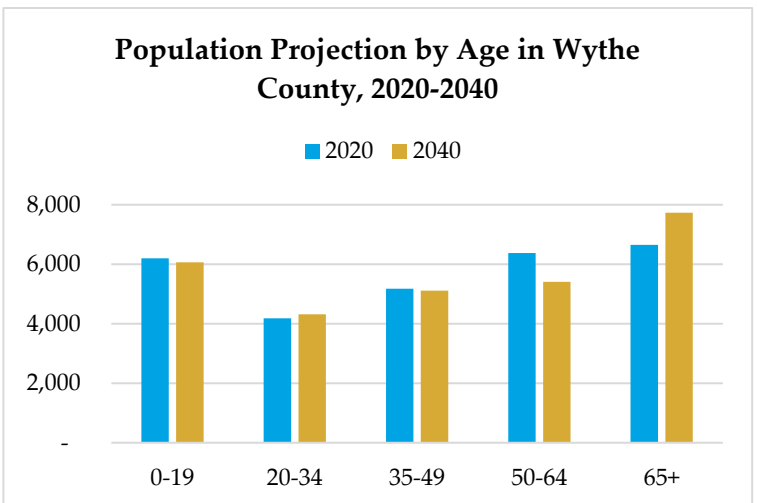
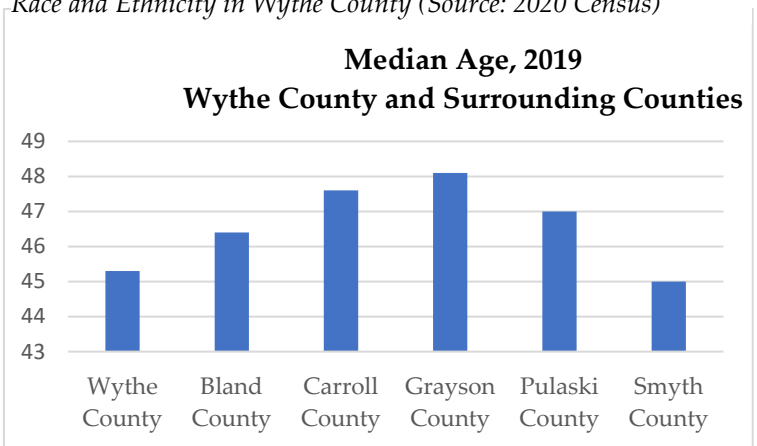


Race and Ethnicity in Wythe County (Source: 2020 Census)

AGE

In 2019, the median age in Wythe County was 45.3. Children and teens under the age of 20 made up 22% of the population and 28% of the population was 60 years old or over.

Population projections by age published by the Weldon Cooper Center suggest that Wythe County's population will age over the next two decades, with growth concentrated in the population age 65 years and older.

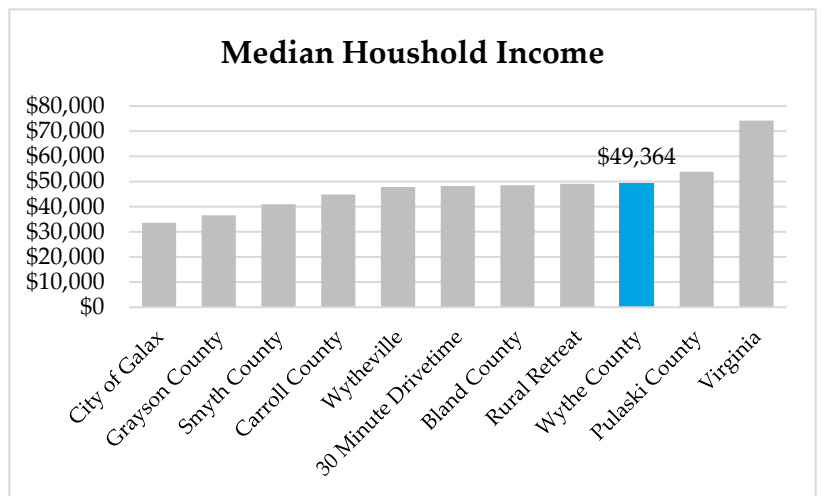


Population Projections by Age, 2020-2040 (Source: University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center)



INCOME

The median household income in Wythe County is \$49,364. Median household incomes in Wythe County are higher than in most of the surrounding counties except for Pulaski County (\$53,866). However, incomes are significantly lower than the median household income in Virginia (\$74,222). In 2019, 11% of the families in Wythe County were in poverty.

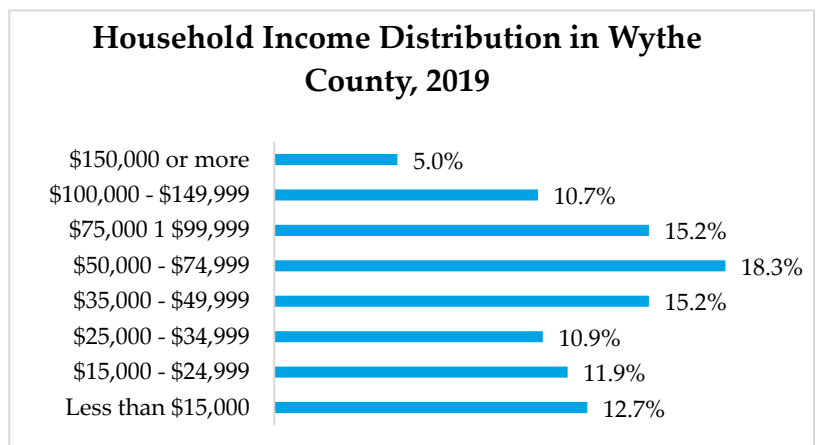


Median Household Income in Wythe County and Region
(Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates)

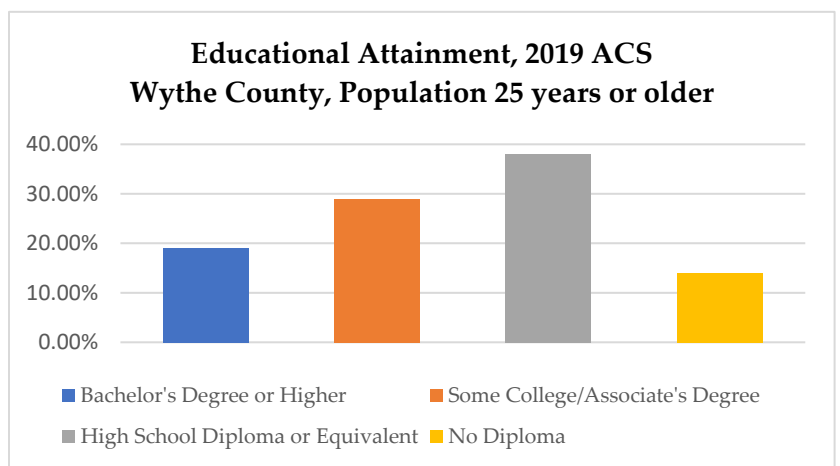
EDUCATION

Of the population in Wythe County age 25 years or older:

- 86% have at least a high school diploma,
- 48% have at least some amount of college education, and
- 19% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher.



Distribution of Household Incomes in Wythe County (Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates)



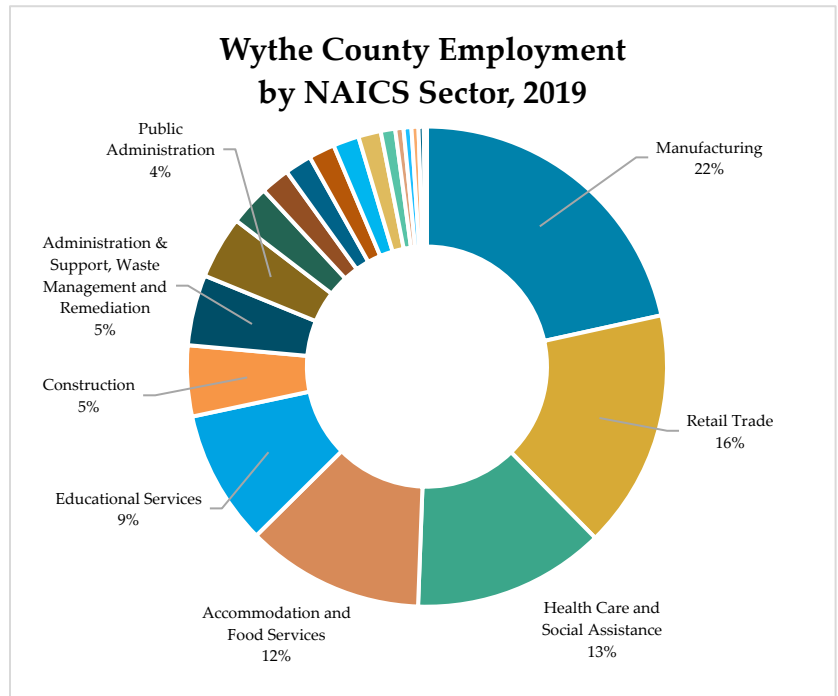
ECONOMIC TRENDS

ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

In 2019, approximately 11,465 people were employed in Wythe County. The largest industries by number of people employed in the County include:

- Manufacturing (22% of jobs),
- Retail Trade (16%),
- Health Care and Social Assistance (13%), and
- Accommodation and Food Services (12%).

Major industrial employers in the County include Wythe County School Board, Somic America Inc, The Gatorade Co, Mount Rogers Community Services, Wythe County Hospital, Wal Mart, and Klockner Pentaplast America.

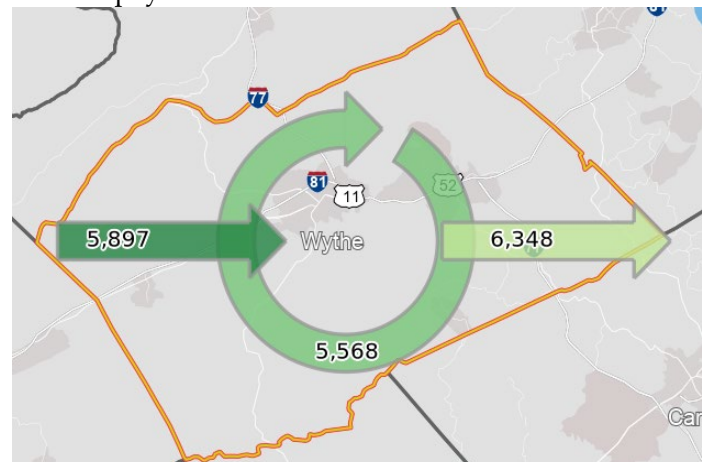


Source: On the Map

In addition to industry, agriculture plays an important economic and employment role in Wythe County. In 2017, there were 819 farms in Wythe County totaling over 150,000 acres and selling over \$65 million in agricultural products. The 2017 Census of Agriculture reported 504 hired workers on farms across Wythe County, generating \$3.3 million in annual payroll.

Wythe County serves as an employment center in the region, but still has a slight net export of jobs, meaning that more people commute out of the county for work than commute in.

- 5,568 people live and work in Wythe County.
- 5,897 people commute into Wythe County to work each day - many commuting from Smyth County and Carroll County.
- 6,348 Wythe County residents commute outside of the county each day - many commuting northeast to Pulaski County or west to Smyth County.



Inflow and Outflow of Jobs in Wythe County (Source: 2019 US Census On the Map)

In October 2021, the unemployment rate in Wythe County was 3.0%, the same as Virginia's unemployment rate. Like communities across the nation, unemployment was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching a high of 18.2% in

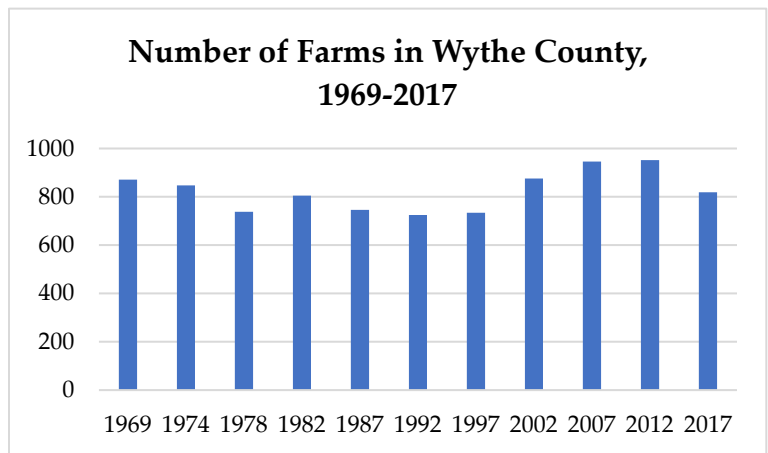


Wythe County in April 2020. However, by the fall of 2021, the unemployment rate returned to pre-pandemic levels.

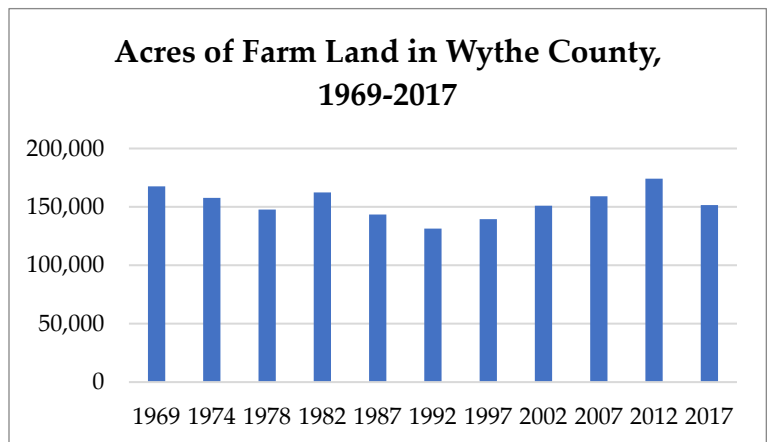
AGRICULTURE MARKET TRENDS

Agriculture plays an important role in Wythe County both economically and culturally. According to an economic impact study by the Weldon Cooper Center in 2017, agriculture in Wythe County had a direct economic impact of \$619.5 million and a total economic impact of \$691.8 million. Some of the current agricultural trends in Wythe County in the context of the surrounding region are discussed in the following paragraphs. (Note that the majority of data is from the United States Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, which was last conducted in 2017.)

The number of farms and acres of farm land in Wythe County decreased by 4.8% and 10% respectively between 2007 and 2017. However, an examination of historic trend data indicates that the number of farms and farm land in the county has remained relatively flat over the past 50 years. In fact, there were more farms and acres of farm land recorded in 2012 than there were in 1969. In 2017, approximately 51% of Wythe County's total land area was comprised of farm land.



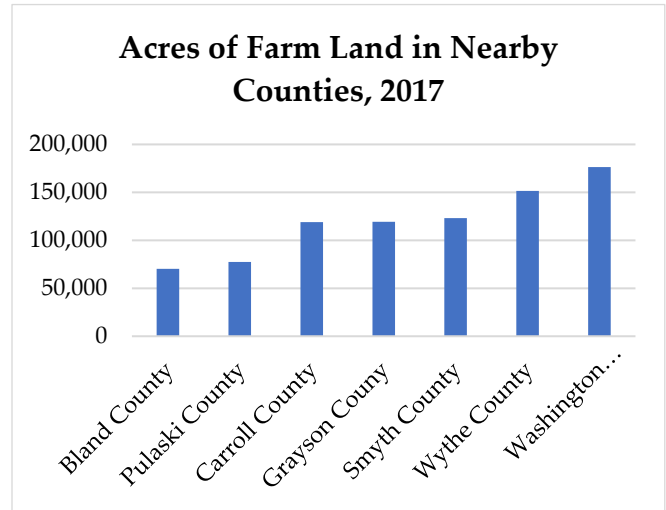
Farms in Wythe County 1969-2017 (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)



Acres of Farm Land in Wythe County (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)

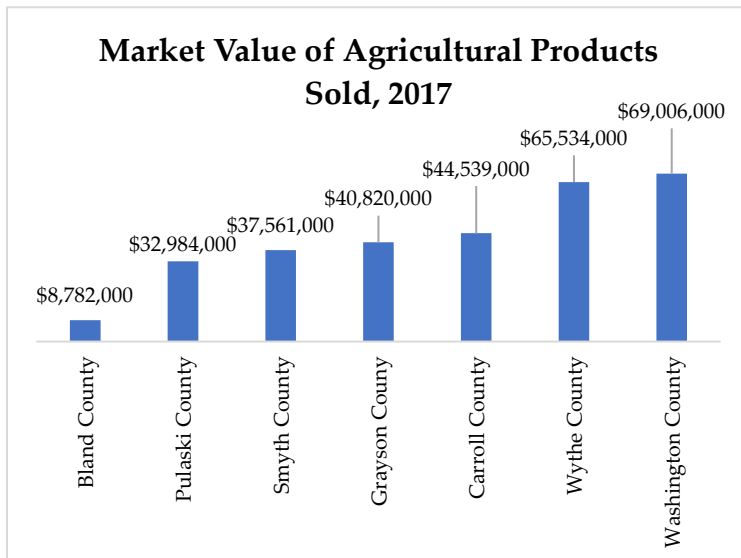


Wythe County has more acres of farm land than most of the surrounding counties, except for Washington County with 176,344 acres. Some surrounding counties – specifically Bland, Grayson and Washington Counties – have experienced a decline in the number acres of farm land over the past twenty years.

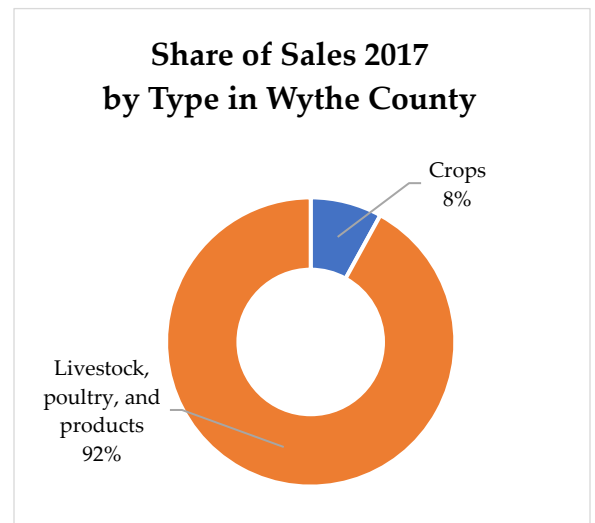


Acres of Farm Land in Wythe County and Nearby Counties, 2017 (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)

In 2017, the total market value of agricultural products sold in Wythe County \$65.6 million, 92% of which came from livestock, poultry and products while 8% came from crops. The market value of agricultural products sold has steadily increased over the past 50 years, increasing by 78% from 2007 to 2017. The market value of agricultural products sold in Wythe County is higher than in most of the surrounding counties except for Washington County (\$69 million).



Total Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold in Surrounding Counties (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)



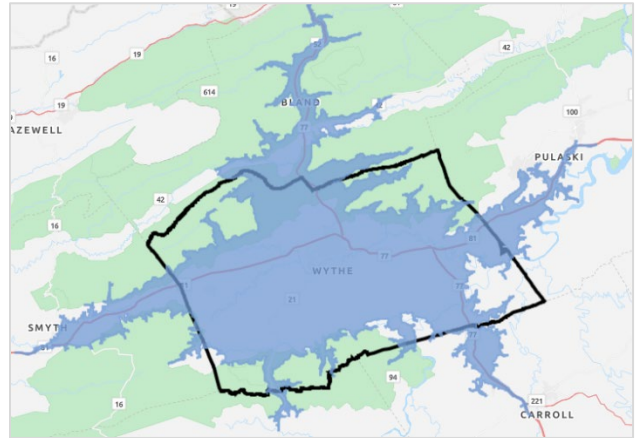
Share of Agricultural Sales by Type in Wythe County (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)



RETAIL MARKET TRENDS

In conjunction with this planning effort, the project team economist conducted a retail analysis to provide insight into the retail patterns (consumer expenditures, retail sales, retail leakage or gain, and projected demand growth) in Wythe County and the surrounding area.

“Retail Leakage” refers to the difference between the retail expenditures by residents living in a particular area and the retail sales produced by the stores located in the same area. The retail leakage analysis was performed on Wythe County, the Towns of Wytheville and Rural Retreat, and a 30-Minute Drivetime Area from downtown Wytheville.



30-Minute Drivetime Area from the Center of Downtown Wytheville (Blue) and Wythe County Boundary (Black)

The retail leakage analysis summarized below confirms that Wythe County serves as a regional commercial draw. Stores in Wythe County sold \$1.24 billion in merchandise in the previous year. During the same time period, Wythe County residents spent \$555.1 million, indicating a retail gain of \$682.3 million.

	WYTHE COUNTY	WYTHEVILLE	RURAL RETREAT	30-MINUTE DRIVETIME
Stores Sell	\$1.24 B	\$740.4 M	\$33.15 M	\$1.38 B
Consumers Buy	\$555.1 M	\$165.9 M	\$31.82 M	\$715.4 M
Market Leaks / (Gains)	(\$682.3 M)	(\$574.5 M)	(\$1.33 M)	(\$663.9 M)

2020 Retail Sales, Consumer Expenditures, and Market Leakage/Gain for Wythe County, Wytheville, Rural Retreat, and 30-Minute Drivetime (Source: Claritas and EnviroNics Analytics)



IV. WYTHE COUNTY TODAY AND TOMORROW - PLANNING ELEMENTS

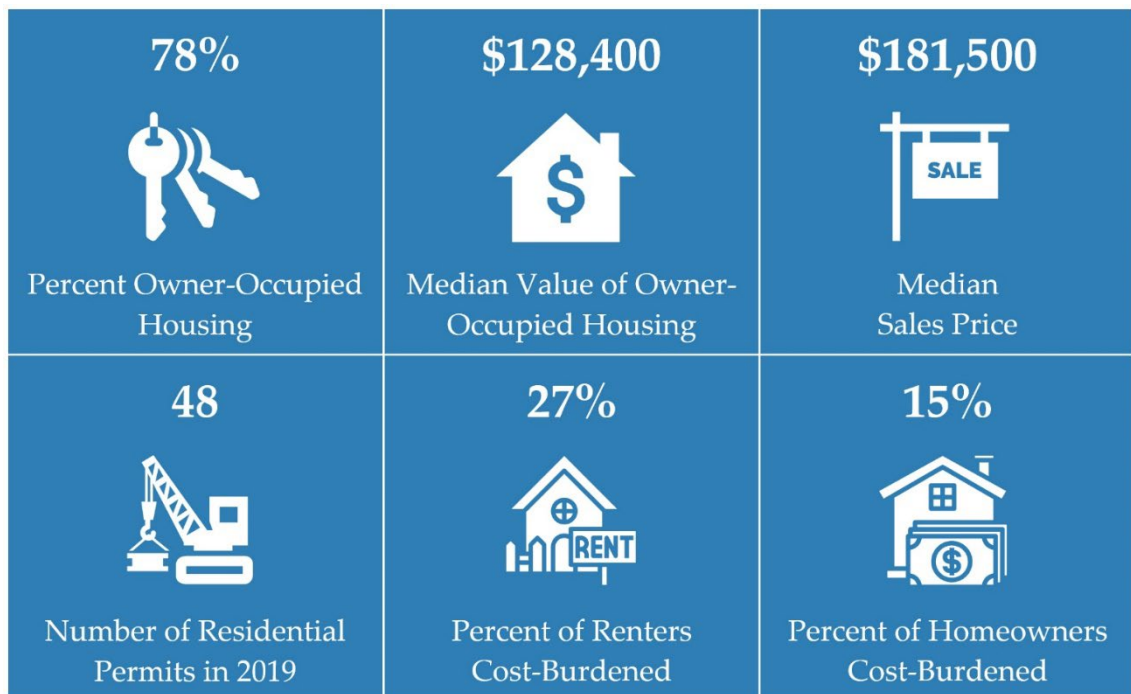
The planning elements discussed in Section IV are grouped in five categories for organization purposes – People and Community Facilities, Economy, Public Infrastructure, Natural and Historic Resources, and Land Use and Development. Each of the categories discuss relevant topics and provide information on existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities for the future. Potential action projects are discussed for each category to help the County achieve the desired community vision and goals for 2040.

4.1 People and Community Facilities

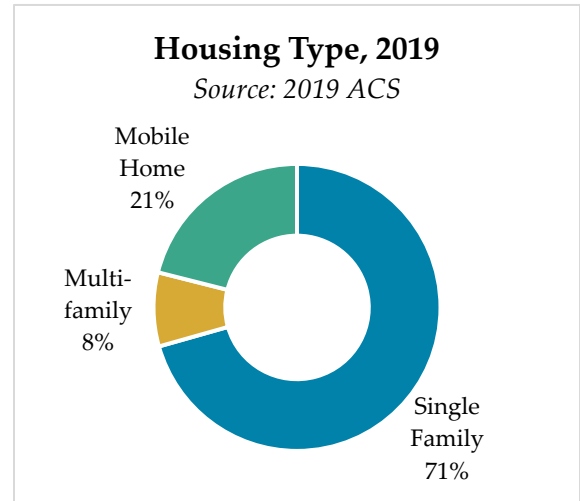
4.1.1 HOUSING

HOUSING: EXISTING CONDITIONS

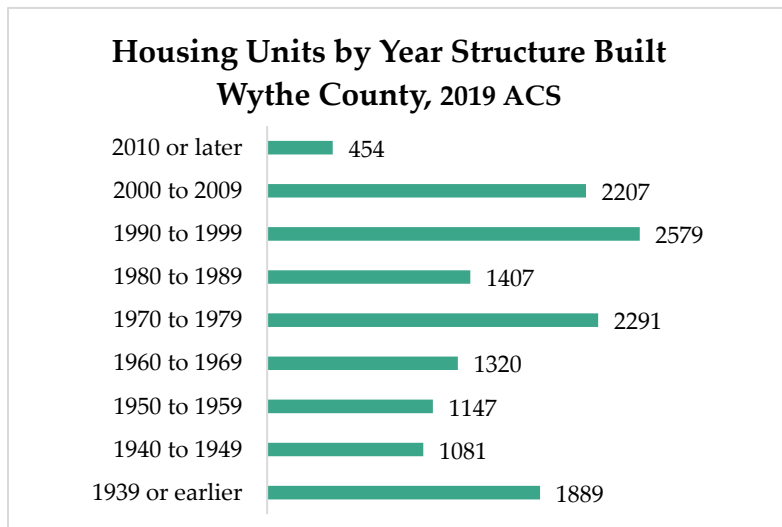
A summary of the housing characteristics for Wythe County (2019) is presented in the graphic below.



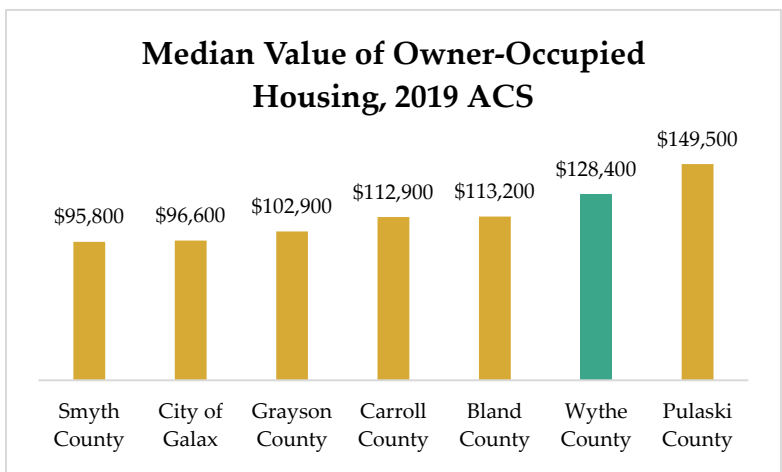
As of 2019, the U.S. Census American Community Survey reported that Wythe County had a total of 14,375 housing units. The majority of occupied housing in the county is owner occupied (78%), while 22% is renter occupied.



- Most of the housing stock consists of single-family detached homes (71%), followed by mobile homes (21%) and multi-family (8%).
- In 2019, 17 percent of the housing stock was vacant. While this is a significant percentage, and higher than the average for the State, it is consistent with surrounding counties which range from 16-30%. The vacancy rate could be because of the age of the housing stock or the fact that mobile homes comprise a good amount of the stock. Of note, is that the vacancy rate in Town of Wytheville in 2019 was 11.6%.



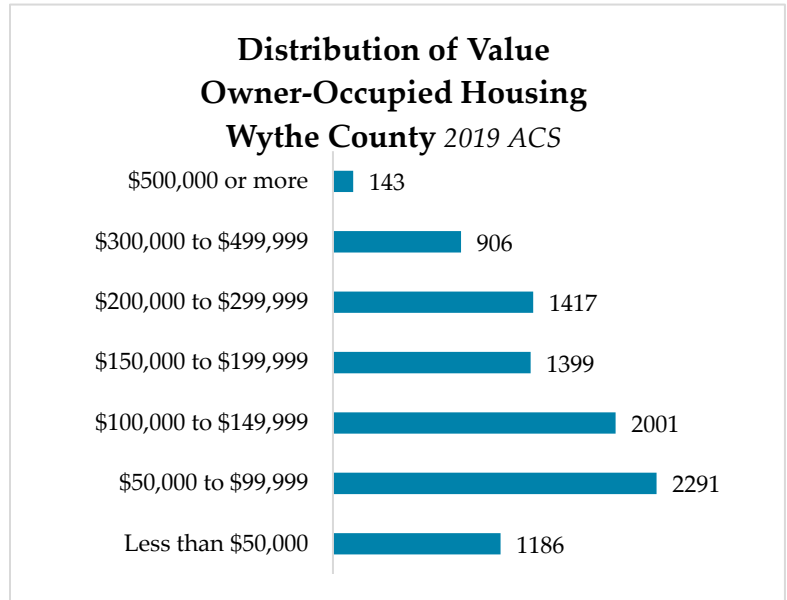
- Approximately one-third of the housing stock in Wythe County was built between 1990 and 2010. (This was a period when population in the county was increasing.)
- There have been a limited number of housing units built since 2010. However, the value of housing permits has increased. In 2019, there were 48 building permits issued for approximately \$10 million in overall value.



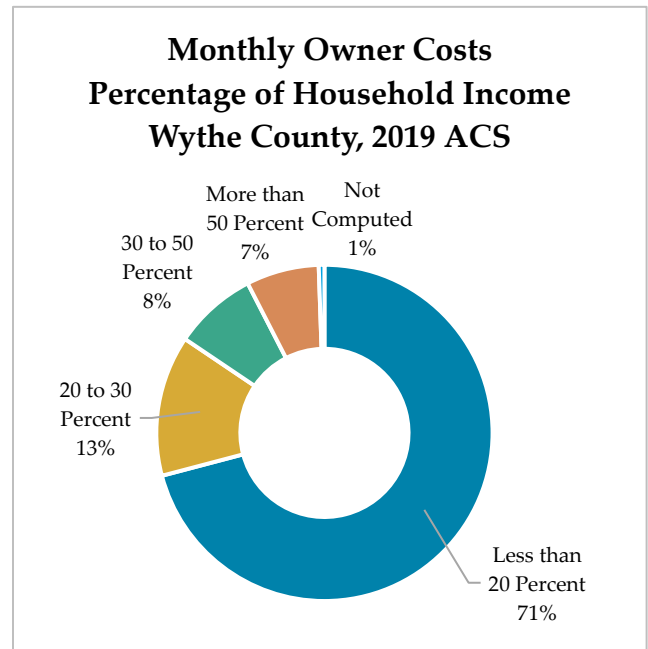
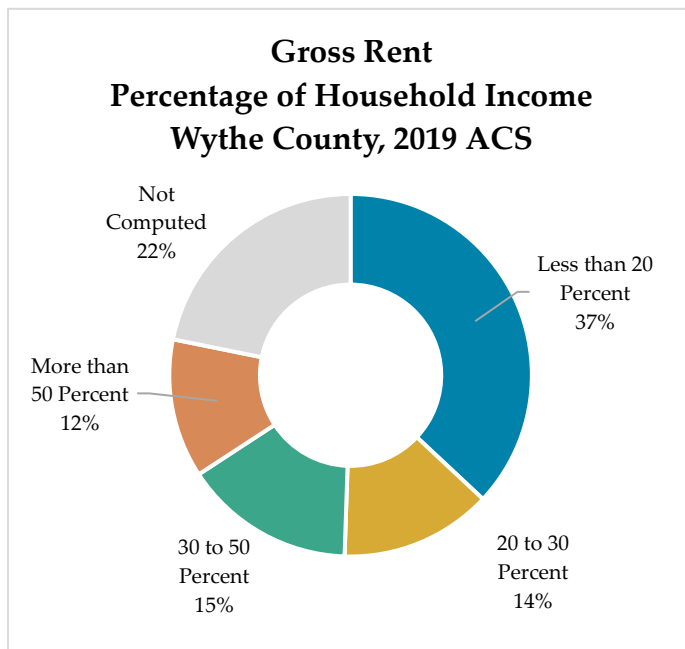
- The median value of owner-occupied housing in Wythe County over the last five years was \$128,400. While this is higher than most surrounding counties, it is lower than the state average of \$273,000.



- 37 percent of homes in Wythe County are valued at less than \$100,000 and 25 percent are valued at \$200,000 or more.



Housing affordability is an additional factor of interest when looking at existing housing conditions.



- In Wythe County, 27 percent of renters are cost burdened (spending over 30 percent of their income on housing) and 12 percent are extremely cost burdened (spending over 50 percent of their income on housing). [It is important to note that 22 percent of renters were not included in the data pool, so the cost-burdened percentages are likely higher.]
- In Wythe County, 15 percent of homeowners are considered cost burdened.



HOUSING: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Over the past several decades there has been increasing interest in addressing substandard housing and providing more moderately priced housing. Based on discussions with stakeholders and responses from citizens, this concern persists and there appears to be a general shortage of housing, particularly single-family homes (for purchase or rent), as well as limited alternative housing types. While some new construction is occurring, most of these single-family homes are being built by respective property owners (with the ability to pay for higher priced homes). The need for quality, affordable homes is expected to continue and increase as new employers become established in the County (i.e., Blue Star-AGI will be operating as a major employer in Wythe County by 2023). Some potential measures to consider for addressing future housing needs could include:

- Focus Housing in Established Communities** - To maintain the rural character and landscape of Wythe County, concentrate new housing in developed areas where there is existing infrastructure and services. Increasing community density in built areas focuses development within existing communities, rather than building new residential subdivisions in areas without supporting infrastructure (utilities, roads, services, etc.). Depending on the characteristics of the community, there may be varying types of housing and patterns of development that are appropriate. Examples of some of the areas within Wythe County that could be considered for additional community investment and housing development are discussed in Housing Development Concepts on the following page.
- Consider Various Housing Types and Price Range Options** – There should be expanded options in housing types, price ranges, and multifamily housing units to meet consumer demand. During the community survey, residents advised that they would like to see a broader range of housing options. Wythe County should explore expanded opportunities for housing choices, including multifamily, in central areas served by utilities that can accommodate growth, such as Wytheville, Max Meadows, and Fort Chiswell. This can include rehabilitation of existing structures, as well as new construction, and multiple community partners could be engaged.
- Ensure Quality Rental Housing Options** – In 2022, there are limited options for those persons needing or seeking quality rental housing. In addition, there is demand for short-term rentals for individuals who work in the County during the week. Rental housing can be a challenge for communities, especially with respect to quality. The rehabilitation of existing housing stock can be effective in providing additional housing options. This is especially applicable in existing communities like Wytheville, Rural Retreat, Fort Chiswell, Max Meadows, and

Connect Wythe - 2021 Citizen Survey Responses	
Types of Housing Desired	Respondents
Single-family homes	34.61%
Senior housing	21.00%
Townhomes/condominiums	16.25%
Apartments	11.89%
Universally accessible housing	13.74%
Other	2.51%



Insert Housing Concept Board + blank page back

Housing Development Concepts



Austinville where there are modest housing units that can be improved, or former public or commercial buildings retrofitted for residential use. County incentives for rehabilitation could be an opportunity for assisting investment (e.g., rehabilitation tax credits, low-interest rehabilitation loans for certain housing types, historic tax credits for properties within National Register Historic Districts, etc.)

- **Encourage Additional New Home Construction in Targeted Areas** - In recent years, housing construction in the County has been slow. Construction costs have been high and there have been workforce shortages in the construction industry. Advocating for and facilitating additional, and easily accessible vocational/trade programs in the region could benefit the workforce and construction employers. During discussions with stakeholders for this planning project, builders and developers advised that it is increasingly difficult to secure labor and finance new construction. Partnership approaches to facilitating resolution of issues are warranted (e.g., financial incentives and partners, streamlined construction permits and procedures, labor supply initiatives, and general coordination of projects and efforts, etc.). Certainly, an additional challenge will be to focus new development in areas with utilities, thereby preserving rural farmland for agricultural use and productivity.
- **Consider Opportunities for Relocation and Remote Workers** – Increase in remote working means that people from urban areas could relocate to Wythe County where the cost of living and lifestyle may be preferable. Already, retirees are moving to Wythe County and building or purchasing homes. This demand for a better and slower-paced quality of life seems to be increasing and could be a means for increasing residency. With expanded broadband facilities and a focused housing development strategy, the County could recruit new residents and build its networking economy.
- **Focus Efforts on Existing Housing Rehabilitation** – In 2019, it was reported that 17 percent of the existing housing stock in the County was vacant. This presents an opportunity to renovate, remodel, and rehabilitate existing structures in settled areas (likely with existing utilities and supporting services).
- **Encourage and Facilitate More Affordable Housing** – Data from 2019 indicate many households in Wythe County were cost-burdened or extremely cost-burdened. Local builders and real estate agents are seeing more demand for homes in the \$100,000-\$200,000 range, particularly for the general workforce and first-time homebuyers. Many of the new homes that have been constructed in recent years are in the \$300,000- \$500,000 range, and generally have been built specifically for the property owner. By developing a more detailed and coordinated housing strategy and engaging multiple partners (contractors, educators, financial entities, and local government), Wythe County could strengthen its housing market and fill gaps in housing demand.



Potential Action Project

Detailed Housing Assessment and Strategic Plan

Wythe County needs additional quality housing of various types and price ranges to meet existing and anticipated consumer demands. New housing construction has been slow, and it has been difficult in recent years for consumers to secure quality, affordable housing.

While this Comprehensive Plan provides a general overview of housing conditions, it is not intended to provide a detailed housing strategy for addressing housing needs. A more detailed assessment is required to understand specific housing conditions, user needs, market trends, and possible recommendations for strengthening housing and encouraging investment. Typically, such a study takes a closer look at available housing (type, tenure, price, condition, etc.) and at user and employer needs, including affordability. In addition, the study would identify gaps and recommend strategic steps for resolution and phased action.



4.1.2 EDUCATION

EDUCATION: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Wythe County Public Schools

Over the past two decades, Wythe County has invested in educational quality and learning environments and has allocated significant public expenditures for school improvements. In 2020, the Virginia Department of Education reported that approximately \$12,427 was spent per pupil in the Wythe County School System, and of that amount, the County contributed 42.3% of the costs and state/federal sources provided the remaining amount. This local contribution was equivalent to the state average. Since 2000, two new schools have been constructed (Rural Retreat Elementary and Fort Chiswell Middle School) and renovations have been undertaken at most schools. Additional school construction is planned in 2022-23 (Fort Chiswell High School and Scott Memorial Middle School).

As of 2022, the public school system in Wythe County hosts six elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, and one technical school for high school students. The middle schools and high schools are co-located on joint campuses. In addition, Wythe County Public Schools offers advanced educational programs to junior and senior high school students at the Southwest Virginia Governor's School (Pulaski) and dual credit classes to students at Wytheville Community College.

The *2020 Strategic Plan for Wythe County Public Schools* establishes various goals and top priorities for the future. Some of the key items identified in the plan include:

- Updating technology and facilities for students, teachers, and staff,
- Developing and implementing additional facility improvements,
- Increasing academic achievement and relevant programming,
- Building enhanced career, business, and vocational opportunities for students, and
- Maintaining competitive salaries and benefits for employees.

A table summarizing the educational facilities operated by Wythe County is shown on the following page. In addition, a map of school locations and other public governmental facilities follows the table.

Other School Facilities

Approximately 3.4 percent or 131 total Wythe County public school-age students are enrolled in the five private schools located within the county. These schools include:

- Appalachian Christian Academy (Rural Retreat)
- Baptist Academy (Rural Retreat)
- Grace Christian Academy (Max Meadows)
- Granite Christian Academy (Wytheville), and
- Minnick Education Center/Presbyterian Children's Home of the Highlands (Wytheville).



Educational Facility	Relevant Information, 2021
General Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment all schools: 3,858 (decreasing) • Student/Teacher Ratios –10.96:1 (K-7), 14.87:1 (8-12) • 12 schools fully accredited 2019; waived 2020-21
Jackson Memorial Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PK-5 grades, Austinville • Enrollment: 200 • Built 1935, Renovations + expansion 48,000 sf 2003
Max Meadows Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PK-5 grades, Max Meadows • Enrollment: 199 • Built 1951, additions 1957 and 1970, renovations 2006
Rural Retreat Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PK-5 grades, Rural Retreat • Enrollment: 342 • Built 2003
Sheffey Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PK-5 grades, Wytheville • Enrollment: 239 • Built 1952, addition 1974, renovated 2015
Speedwell Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PK-5 grades, Speedwell • Enrollment: 142 • Built 1935, additions 1949 and 1974
Spiller Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PK-5 grades, Wytheville • Enrollment: 581 • Built 1958, additions 1970 and 2003
Scott Memorial Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 grades, Wytheville • Enrollment: 354 • Built 1952, addition 1970, renovations 2022-23
Rural Retreat Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 grades, Rural Retreat • Enrollment: 233 • Built ----, renovations 2015



Educational Facility	Relevant Information, 2021
Fort Chiswell Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 grades, Fort Chiswell • Constructed 2002 • Enrollment: 313 • Built 2003, renovations 2021
George Wythe High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12 grades, Wytheville • Enrollment: 452 • Built 1951, addition 1986
Rural Retreat High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12 grades, Rural Retreat • Enrollment: 333 • Built 1954, additions 1962 and 1983, renovations 2003, 2010 • Established in 1887
Fort Chiswell High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12 grades, Fort Chiswell • Enrollment: 470 • Built 1960, addition 1992, renovations 2021-22
Wythe County Technology Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and technical training for grades 9-12 • Built 1969, Wytheville • Serves Wythe County and Bland County • Enrollment: 200 students, avg. • Programs adapted to meet demands of economy. In 2022 programs included nursing, cosmetology, culinary arts, computer aided drafting, automotive technology, building trades, engineering, welding, criminal justice, and JROTC. • Additional offerings – New Horizons Program for Alternative Education, Wythe County Cannery.



Insert Map of Public/Government Facilities + blank back page

Public Government Facilities



In 2021-22, the Virginia Department of Education reported that 165 students in Wythe County were home schooled.

For general education development (GED) classes and testing, the Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program serves multiple school divisions in Southwest Virginia, including Wythe County. General equivalency classes and basic job skills classes are offered at Wytheville Training School and Cultural Center, Wytheville Community College, and other regional locations.

Higher Education

Wytheville Community College offers two-year associate degree programs or technical certificates and typically enrolls over 3,350 students annually.

- In addition to traditional educational programs (business, education, sciences, etc.), the college offers specialized career and technical programs (nursing, emergency medical services, business management, law enforcement, machine technology, etc.) and workforce development (truck driving, welding, powerlines, automotive systems, etc.).
- Several collegiate partners (Old Dominion University, Lindsey Wilson College) offer continuing education toward four-year degrees in arts and sciences programs via satellite.
- The community college also hosts the Manufacturing Technology Center which is an engineering extension service training program affiliated with multiple community colleges in Southwest Virginia.

In addition, several other higher education institutions are within an hour's drive of Wythe County. These include Virginia Tech (Montgomery County), Radford University (City of Radford), and Emory and Henry College (Washington County).

The Manufacturing Technology Center at Wytheville Community College

Special Education and Childcare Facilities

In 2021, there were 18 daycare facilities operating in Wythe County in Wytheville, Max Meadows, Rural Retreat and Fort Chiswell. Head Start, a federally funded preschool program, operates two head start programs in Rural Retreat and Max Meadows.

Educational facilities for children with special needs include a regional autism program at Speedwell Elementary School and a school operated by Cooperative Centers for Exceptional Children in Wytheville.



EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Based on feedback from the Comprehensive Plan Survey, citizens responded that they want to see continued improvements in education and upgraded, modernized facilities. Also, citizens appreciate and cherish the small schools located within their communities.

Wythe County, like other rural school systems throughout Virginia, face continued challenges in funding improvements to educational facilities and operations. While consolidation of smaller schools can be more cost effective, governmental leaders also recognize the value of smaller schools and community vitality. Economic growth is crucial to financial sustainability and balancing the tax base so that the cost of public services and facilities remain reasonable for residential property owners. Expanded broadband infrastructure will be critical to continued educational investment and progress.

Fortunately, Wythe County has been diligent in programming upgrades, budgeting responsibly, and prioritizing education as important for both social and economic well-being. In 2021, County officials noted that there was \$3.2 million outstanding in current debt service and that an additional \$15 million in capital school facility needs had been identified.

Potential Action Project

Enhanced Higher Educational Opportunities

Continued workforce education is critical to the social and economic prosperity of a community. Wytheville Technology Center and Wytheville Community College can be an important partner in furthering workforce and continuing adult education.

While there are several four-year colleges in the region, it would be advantageous to expand partnerships with Wytheville Community College to offer advanced degrees using telecommunication opportunities. For example, especially with the proximity of Virginia Tech in the region, advanced studies in modernized agriculture could be very beneficial in advancing agriculture as an economic driver in Wythe County.

In addition, there may be opportunities to enhance building construction skillsets to address workforce shortages described by homebuilding contractors. There may be interest in increased classes in trade construction and/or enhanced programming with other regional partners (Wythe County Technology Center, Crossroads Institute, etc.).



4.1.3 RECREATION

RECREATION: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Public Parks

Wythe County operates and manages two parks that provide recreational facilities and programs for youth sports (football, cheerleading, baseball, and soccer). In addition, the Town of Wytheville operates several parks and recreational facilities.

- Ager Park is in Fairview Industrial Park in Wytheville and features two ball fields, tennis courts, a batting cage, a picnic pavilion, a basketball court, playground, bathrooms, and parking areas.
- Max Meadows Ball Field is located on Max Meadows Road and features 2 grass ball fields, a walking track, bathrooms, a stage for special events, a concession stand, parking areas, and a veteran memorial.
- Wytheville Recreation Facilities include: Elizabeth Brown Memorial Park, Withers Park, several small playgrounds, McWane Pool (outdoor), Crystal Springs Recreation Area (1,800 acres with hiking/biking trails, reservoir, and primitive camping), and Wytheville Community Center (cardio/weight center, aquatic center, climbing wall, youth/teen center, two basketball gymnasiums, track, multi-purpose rooms, and adult/senior lounge).

Both the County and the Town have established Parks and Recreation Departments responsible for management of the facilities and coordination of programming. In addition, the County has an appointed seven-member Recreation Commission that provides guidance and direction for recreational facilities and endeavors.

The 2018 *Virginia Outdoors Plan* prepared by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation includes Wythe County as part of Region 3 - Mount Rogers. Based on a user demand survey, respondents wanted to see increased trail access to natural scenic areas, parks, and water for fishing and boating, as well as activities such as hiking, fishing, swimming, and scenic excursions. According to the 2018 plan, Wythe County spent fewer dollars-per-capita on parks and recreation than other counties in the region.

Outdoor Recreation Areas

In addition to recreation facilities operated by the Wythe County and the Town of Wytheville, there are additional opportunities for recreation in facilities operated by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (State Parks) and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and Jefferson National Forest. Both residents and visitors attracted to outdoor recreational experiences such as trails for hiking, biking, and horseback-riding, fishing, camping, agritourism (farms, wineries, breweries, etc.), and scenic by-ways. Some of the outdoor recreation assets that exist in Wythe County include:



-
- New River Trail State Park - This 57-mile linear state park along the New River offers recreational facilities in Wythe County at the historic Shot Tower and Foster Falls. The multi-use trail extends through four counties - Carroll, Grayson, Pulaski and Wythe – providing opportunities for hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding. In addition, the park offers areas designated for camping, canoeing/kayaking, and fishing. The park has an adopted Master Plan (2020) that identifies phased improvements in Wythe County at Foster Falls (dormitory, picnic shelter, bath house, building renovations) and Shot Tower (bike racks, utility connections) and future vault toilets at Ivanhoe and Austinville.
 - George Washington and Jefferson National Forest - Portions of the Jefferson National Forest surround the northern and southern boundaries of Wythe County. The National Forest operates Stony Fork Campground at the foot of Big Walker Mountain off of U.S. Route 52 north of Wytheville. The campground offers both RV and tent camping with showers/toilet facilities and electric hookups. In addition to camping, recreational activities include hiking, biking, fishing, and hunting (when permitted). The Appalachian Trail runs through the northwestern part of the County (approximately ten miles from the Stony Fork Campground). The Forest Service also operates the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (approximately 200,000 acres) in Smyth and Grayson Counties (west and south of Wythe County). This recreational area offers a multitude of outdoor recreation facilities including camping, cabins, fishing, picnic areas, swimming, and trails for biking, hiking, and horseback riding.
 - Rural Retreat Lake and Campground – This recreational amenity features a 90-acre lake and trout pond, owned and operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Fishing is available year-round (license and trout stamp required) and non-motorized boats as well as boats with electric motors are allowed on the lake. The lake is surrounded by Rural Retreat Lake Park which is owned and operated by Wythe County. The Park property hosts a 75-site campground, outdoor pool, and picnic pavilions on approximately 240 acres. The campground hosts primitive camping sites and RV sites with electricity and water hook ups, bath house, dump station, and camp store.
 - Big Survey Wildlife Management Area – This 7,300-acre natural area at the southern edge of the Town of Wytheville is managed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Access to the area is managed by permit or a “Restore the Wild Membership.” Facilities include nature trails (Tower Trail and High Rocks Trail) and primitive camping (with written authorization). Activities include hiking, horseback riding, fishing, and hunting.
 - New River, Cripple Creek, Reed Creek – The New River and its tributaries provide excellent opportunities for fishing, boating, canoeing and kayaking. The small streams are well known for their outstanding trout fishing opportunities. Several private operators offer camping, water access points and shuttle facilities. Of particular note is that the Wytheville State Fish Hatchery, operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, raises rainbow and brown trout (eggs to fingerlings) that stock hatcheries throughout the Commonwealth and regional streams.



RECREATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Outdoor recreation could be an important economic driver for Wythe County and a significant social amenity for attracting residents and employers. Healthy communities with authentic environmental features and opportunities for outdoor experiences are a draw for today's workforce and families, especially when combined with increased broadband internet capabilities that enable the remote workplace and working from home.

Additional investment in and proactive planning for County and Town facilities such as Crystal Springs Recreation Area and Rural Retreat Lake and Campground would be very beneficial both socially and economically for residents and visitors. The New River, Reed Creek, and Cripple Creek are unique recreational assets that could be featured as a blueway initiative to further outdoor recreation experiences.

In addition, strengthened partnerships and initiatives with state and federal agencies for natural outdoor recreation areas (New River Trail State Park, Big Survey Wildlife Management Area, and Jefferson National Forest) could greatly benefit outdoor recreational experiences and use of these special regional assets. There is great potential for increased economic prosperity and investment. A summary of some potential ideas for strengthening recreational opportunities is presented in the Outdoor Recreation Concepts on the following page.

Finally, the Friends of Southwest Virginia, Inc. continue to be active in strengthening the economy of the region especially with respect to tourism and outdoor recreation. A *Mount Rogers Outdoor Recreation Master Plan* is expected to be completed in 2022 that includes recommended capital improvements to further outdoor recreation and tourism in Wythe County and the larger region. More specifically, the plan includes proposed recommendations for the Crystal Springs Recreation Area (new plan for recreational concepts and programming) and a signature outdoor adventure park along I-81 in Smyth County near Exit 54. These initiatives, and others, expected to be funded by future grants, will serve as a blueprint for furthering the outdoor recreation economy for Southwest Virginia.



Potential Action Project

Blueways System

The New River, Reed Creek, and Cripple Creek offer a unique opportunity to develop a blueways system of waterway connections, like that of a greenway trail system, to link and expand recreational opportunities in Wythe County. During discussions with private recreational businesses and state park representatives during development of this Comprehensive Plan, participants noted increased tourism and opportunities for camping and small craft access (canoes, kayaks, float tubes, etc.) particularly along the lower portions of Reed Creek and Cripple Creek near the intersections with the New River. It will be important to manage types of watercraft and maintain the peaceful environment along the streams. Coordination of activities with property owners and recreational providers is key to the success of a system that maintains the environmental integrity and sustains it for the future. Additional needs identified include improved and additional water access points, an RV dump station, outdoor facility to accommodate groups, and surface treatment of Foster Falls Road (heavily used for recreational access).



Insert Outdoor Recreation Concept Board 11x17 + back page

Outdoor Recreation Concepts



4.1.4 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Community facilities and support services are important to the social and physical health and wellbeing of a population. A sufficient network of accessible, convenient community facilities and services provide a necessary foundation for maintaining and sustaining the health, welfare, and safety of Wythe County residents.

Libraries

Wythe County participates in the Wythe-Grayson Regional Library System, which operates five facilities in the two counties – three in Grayson County and two in Wythe County. The branch library facilities in Wythe County are located in Rural Retreat and Wytheville. The libraries have a variety of inhouse resources (books, magazines, newspapers, videos, database access, etc.) and public computers for research. The library system participates in an inter-library loan program, the Southwest Virginia Overdrive Consortium, and the Galax-Carroll Regional Library to offer expanded circulation materials and database services to library card holders.

The Regional Library System has an eight-member Board of Trustees with representatives from each of the counties that provide direction for facility improvements, operations, and programming. In addition, the Wythe-Grayson Regional Library Foundation support the branch libraries through fundraising, advocacy, and special programs.

Health, Wellness and Social Services

Wythe County is part of the Mount Rogers Public Health District (Virginia Department of Health) which has its administrative headquarters in Marion and operates service facilities in Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Wythe, and Washington Counties, as well as the Cities of Bristol and Galax. The Wythe County Health Department in Wytheville monitors public health risks, enforces public health standards, monitors environmental health standards for water and restaurants, and coordinates vital public health records. In addition, the department provides immunizations and operates a sliding fee scale clinic for general health screenings.

The Virginia Department of Social Services provides funding for social services throughout the state including medical assistance, temporary assistance, food and nutrition assistance, child support, foster care and adoption, and protective services. Wythe County is served by the Western Regional District office in Abingdon, as well as the Wythe County Department of Social Services in Wytheville. The Department of Social Services works with other community agencies to promote the wellbeing of children and families.

Medical services in Wythe County include a diversity of medical care providers and pharmacies in established population centers, and several specialized medical facilities including:



- Wythe County Community Hospital - This private, 100-bed hospital in Wytheville is operated by Apollo Global Management and serves Wythe and Bland Counties. The hospital provides emergency medicine, heart care, maternity care, surgical services, laboratory and radiology services, and sleep lab. The hospital employs over 350 full-time personnel and is staffed by over 80 physicians.
- Brock Hughes Medical Center - This health clinic in Wytheville provides low cost general health services to local vulnerable residents including low income, uninsured, Medicaid, and Medicare patients.
- Adult Care Facilities - Carrington Place provides adult service facilities in Wytheville and Rural Retreat that offer assisted living, short-term and long-term rehabilitation, independent living, Alzheimer's and dementia care, and hospice services. In addition, there are several agencies that offer home health care and personal care services in the region.

Other community service agencies providing wellness and outreach care include:

- The *Mount Rogers Community Services* is a regional not-for-profit organization that serves Wythe, Bland, Carroll, Grayson, and Smyth Counties and the City of Galax. Guided by a fourteen-member board, the organization provides counseling services for mental health and substance abuse, as well as disability services. In Wytheville, the organization operates the Wythe Youth and Family Services, Wytheville Counseling Center, Wythe Crisis Care Center, Mount Rogers Industrial & Development Center, and congregate group homes for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. In 2020, Mount Rogers Community Services received a \$4 Million grant from the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to expand crisis care services and staffing to become a "certified community behavioral health clinic."
- The *District Three Governmental Cooperative* is a designated area agency on aging in the Mount Rogers Planning District that serves Wythe County and other regional jurisdictions. The program provides transportation and senior citizen services including meals, health screenings, Medicare and Medicaid outreach, legal aid services, caregiver counseling, and nutrition programs.
- *Multiple non-profit agencies* also provide community outreach and services to citizens throughout Wythe County. Some of these agencies include various churches, United Way, and Helping Overcome Poverty's Existence, Inc. (HOPE).

Public Safety - Sheriff, Police, Fire and Emergency Services

Wythe County has an elected County sheriff that is responsible for law enforcement and emergency services. In addition, the Towns of Wytheville and Rural Retreat operate local police departments within their jurisdictions. The County participates in a regional jail system. The New River Valley Regional Jail in Dublin, Virginia serves Wythe County, as well as the Counties of Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Pulaski, Wythe and the City of Radford.



A map showing locations of Public Safety and Emergency Facilities is presented on the following page. Fire services in Wythe County is provided by six fire departments that operate within six service areas. Emergency Services in the County are served by three service areas. These six fire departments are strategically located in Rural Retreat, Barren Springs, Ivanhoe, Max Meadows, Speedwell, and Wytheville. In addition, there are mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties. Service district maps for Fire Service and Emergency Services follow the map of facilities.

Wythe County Fire/EMS Facilities	General Information, Staffing
Barren Springs Volunteer Fire Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 20 firefighters, volunteer ▪ Emergency response services
Ivanhoe Volunteer Fire Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 35 firefighters, volunteer ▪ 20 non-firefighting, volunteer ▪ Emergency response services
Max Meadows Volunteer Fire Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 25 firefighters, volunteer
Rural Retreat Volunteer Fire Department (Rural Retreat Volunteer EMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 30 firefighters, volunteer ▪ Emergency response services
Speedwell Volunteer Fire Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 28 firefighters, volunteer
Wytheville Fire & Rescue Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6 firefighters, full time, paid ▪ 25 firefighters, part-time, volunteer ▪ Emergency response services
Lead Mines Rescue Squad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emergency response services
<i>Sources:www.Firedepartment.net</i>	

Confirm/add details of services to table. Provide overview of 2021 response/incident reports if available.

Wythe County also operates several internal departments that provide other public safety services:

- *Wythe County Animal Control Department* provides animal control services throughout the County and manages an animal shelter in Wytheville.
- *Wythe County Department of Emergency Services* provides emergency planning and mitigation and coordinates emergency responses and recovery for natural and man-made disasters. The department oversees and maintains the Wythe County Emergency Operations Center, facilitates training programs for emergency response, manages public notifications for emergencies, and is responsible for preparing and updating the Wythe County Emergency Operation Plan (2020). According to the 2020 plan, the most significant hazards that may occur are flooding, winter storms/ice, wildfire, transportation incidents; other moderate hazards that may occur include windstorms, drought and chemical incidents.



Insert map of Public Facilities – Safety & Emergency + blank back

Public Facilities – Safety and Emergency Services



Insert map of Fire Service Districts + blank back page

Fire Service Districts



Insert map of Emergency Service Districts + blank page back

Emergency Service Districts



COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Libraries

Today, community libraries are evolving into unique social centers that go beyond literary resources. Community rooms and spaces for programs (both indoor and outdoor) are becoming more prevalent, especially for families and children. Typically, library systems undertake a facility master plan to determine facility needs, programming needs, and changes in user preferences. In the future, additional analysis and planning may be appropriate for the regional system and worthy of discussion by the Board of Trustees and the Library Director.

Health, Wellness and Social Services

During development of this plan, residents expressed concerns for increasing crime due to substance abuse. Like many communities throughout Virginia, the prevention of substance abuse and mental illness continue to be primary topics of discussion. Enhanced coordination among agencies (state, regional and local), specialized training for personnel, and continued emphasis on proactive education and programming can be beneficial in addressing community needs and improving crisis response. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services works as a coordinator and liaison between regional community service boards and behavioral health facilities. In the past few years there has been emphasis on providing an integrated system of care to coordinate community service boards, education/training, and use of state facilities. Continued attention to agency coordination and expanded facilities will be important in the future.

Public Safety

Like many other rural communities, Wythe County struggles to meet the demands of a growing population while trying to provide equitable, quality emergency services throughout the County. Fortunately, Wythe County has a substantial number of volunteers that serve within its six fire departments. In 2021, volunteers accounted for over 180 of the fire and emergency responders providing service to the County. These personnel enable the County to be responsive in providing cost-effective public safety services to its citizens. In addition, these volunteer crew stations are critical hubs for social connection and community identity. However, these volunteer fire departments face increasing challenges – costly equipment and decreased numbers of active volunteers. Retaining and recruiting members is a challenge because of the increased dedicated time requirements, especially for state required technical training.* Finally, the dilemma of paid and unpaid staffing continues to be a challenge for local government and for the responders. As the County population increases, Wythe County must find the right balance for paid/volunteer staff and strategically position facilities within its jurisdiction to meet the needs of its growing communities. Continued partnership efforts will be extremely important.



*Note: Financial assistance for training is available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency through a competitive grants program known as SAFER [Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response], which helps train personnel in accordance with codes and standards adopted by the National Fire Protection Association

<https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/safer>

Additional financial assistance for training is available from the Virginia Department of Fire Programs <https://www.vafire.com/grants-and-local-aid/2017-annual-package/>



4.2 Economy

As a central interstate crossroads in Southwest Virginia, Wythe County offers unique economic attributes for residents, businesses, and the traveling public. The economy of Wythe County consists of a diverse mix of agriculture, industry, and service and retail commerce. In addition, the natural and historic features of the County provide draws for recreational and heritage tourism.

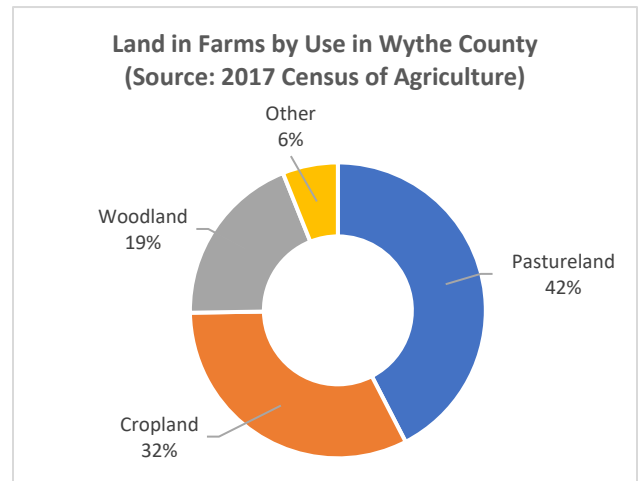
4.2.1 AGRICULTURE

AGRICULTURE: EXISTING CONDITIONS

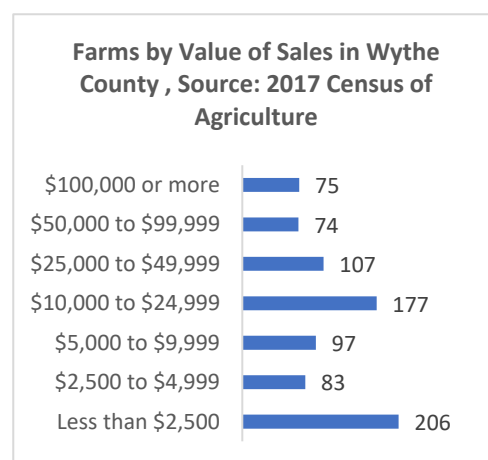
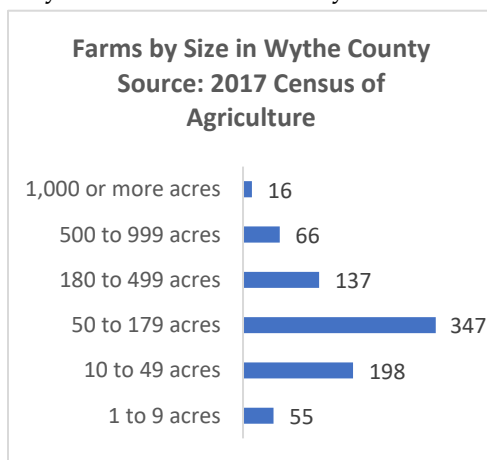
Agriculture is a significant contributor to the overall economy of Wythe County. In addition, it contributes to the overall quality of life for residents and is responsible for the scenic landscapes that are so valued in the County. There are 14 registered Century Farms in Wythe County that have been in operation in the same family for at least 100 years.

Farms and Agricultural Land

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 2017 Census of Agriculture indicates that there are 819 farms in Wythe County totaling 151,563 acres. A farm is defined by the USDA as any place with \$1,000 annual sales in produced agricultural products. Approximately 42% of farm land in Wythe County is pastureland, 32% is cropland, and 19% is woodland. The average farm size in Wythe County is 185 acres. Wythe County is home to farms of a variety of sizes, with the most common size (42%) being between 50 and 179 acres. 97% of farms in Wythe County are classified as family farms.



Land in Farms by Use in Wythe County (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)



Number of Farms by Size (Left) and Value of Sales (Right) in Wythe County.



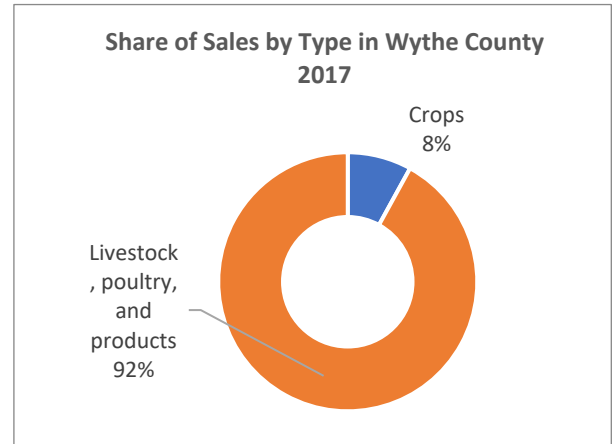
Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold

The total market value of agricultural products sold in Wythe County in 2017 was \$65.6 million, 92% of which came from livestock, poultry and products while 8% came from crops.

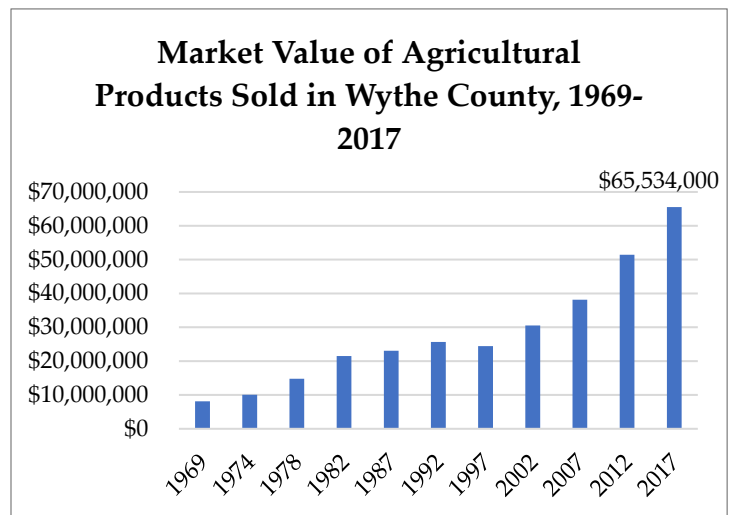
Market value of agricultural products sold has steadily increased over the past 50 years, and increased by 78% from 2007 to 2017. The total market value of agricultural products sold in Wythe County is higher than in most of the surrounding counties with the exception of Washington County with \$69 million in sales.

In 2020, the Virginia Department of Taxation reported that crop production in Wythe County generated \$170,523 in taxable sales.

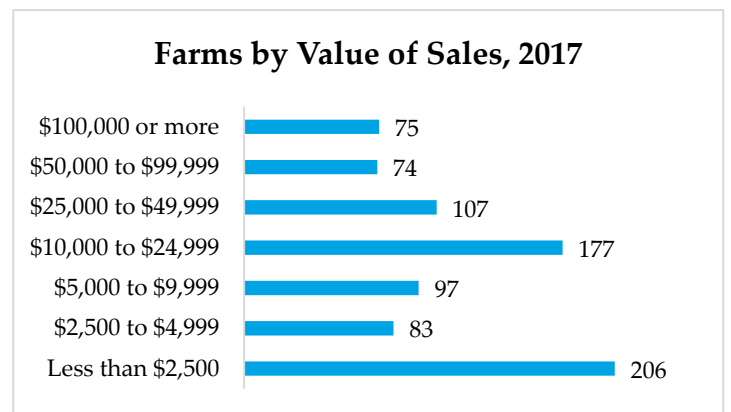
It is important to note that while the average sales per farm in Wythe County is \$80,000, agricultural sales vary among farms across the county. A quarter of the farms in Wythe County have less than \$2,500 in annual sales, 69% of farms have less than \$25,000 in annual sales, and only about 9% have over \$100,000 in annual sales.



Share of Agricultural Sales by Type in Wythe County (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)



Total Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold in Wythe County, 1969-2017 (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)

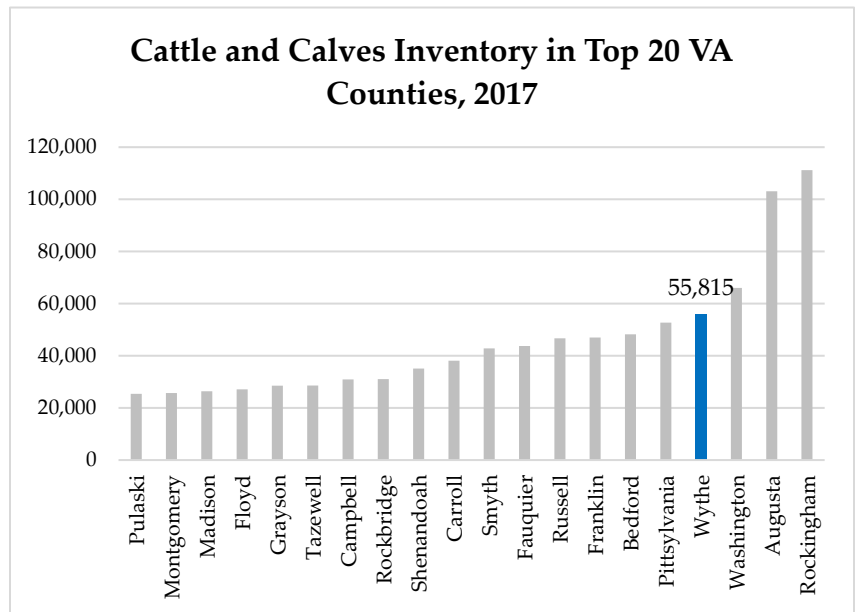


Wythe County Farms by Value of Sales (Source: 2017, USDA Census of Agriculture)



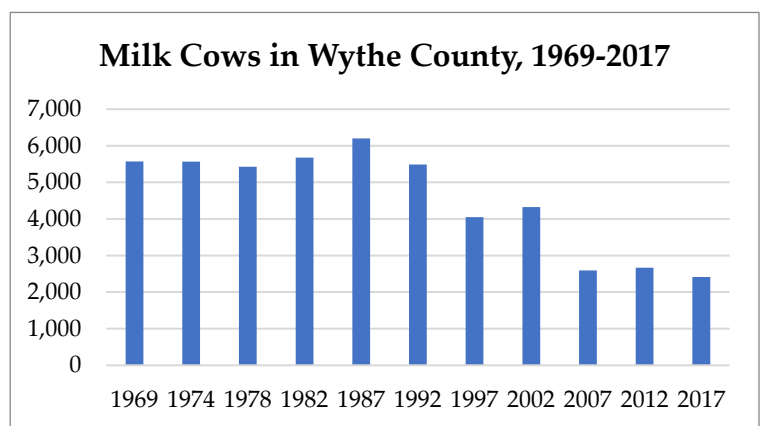
Cattle and calves are a major agricultural industry for Wythe County:

- A majority of the county's total agricultural sales is from cattle and calves (\$50 million or 75% of the total market value of all agricultural products sold) and milk from cows generated \$8.6 million in 2017 (13% of total agricultural market value).
- Wythe County consistently ranks in the top five counties in Virginia for cattle and calves and in the top ten percent of counties across the nation. In 2017, there were only three other counties in Virginia (Washington, Augusta, and Rockingham) that had a larger inventory of cattle and calves than Wythe County.



Inventory of Cattle and Calves in the Top 20 Counties in Virginia, 2017 (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)

- In terms of market value of products sold, Wythe County ranked 2nd in the state of Virginia and 284th out of 3,055 counties producing cattle and calves, reaching the top 10% of counties nationwide.
- According to the Virginia Farm Bureau, the number of dairy farms in Wythe County has decreased significantly in recent years. Historic data from the USDA Census of Agriculture indicates that while beef cattle in Wythe County have increased, the inventory of milk cows in the county is half of what it was twenty years ago. The 2018 Virginia Cooperative Extension Situation Analysis Report for Wythe County noted concerns regarding the loss of profit in the dairy sector and the ripple effect it has on industries such as feed, seed, fuel, and machinery dealers.



Inventory of Milk Cow in Wythe County, 1969 to 2017 (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)



APEX Center

The Appalachian Regional Exposition Center opened in 2019 operates as a regional venue for agricultural shows and trade and sports events. Over the past several years event programming has been a challenge for the County due to the Covid pandemic and timing with respect to financial expenditures and returns.

Significant Agricultural and Forestal Districts

Wythe County has adopted provisions enabled by the Commonwealth of Virginia under the Agricultural and Forestal Districts Act for establishing special districts to identify significant agricultural and forestal areas worthy of conservation and protection for the production of food and agricultural and forestal products. These districts are particularly beneficial in sustaining open space, protecting watersheds, providing wildlife habitat, and furthering agriculture as an important economic and environmental resource. Owners apply for inclusion in the district provided they meet established acreage requirements (minimum combined 20 acres) and agricultural and/or forestal use provisions in exchange for special land use considerations (e.g., taxation, conservation planning, etc.). Properties within the district agree to inclusion of the property for a 10-year period. As of 2022, Wythe County has four recognized districts which are shown on the map on the following page.

- Crockett's Cove – 2,166.8 acres
- East Crockett's Cove – 3,927.8 acres
- Fairview – 2,655.3 acres
- Gunton Park – 202.8 acres



Insert map of Agricultural and Forestal Districts + blank back page

Agricultural and Forestal Districts



AGRICULTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A 2017 report from the Weldon Cooper Center [*The Economic Impact of Virginia's Agriculture and Forest Industries*, T. Rephann] reported that agriculture in Wythe County had a direct annual economic impact of \$619.5 Million (this includes agricultural product sales + core and extended processes + distribution). Looking to the future, Wythe County needs to support, expand, and invest in agriculture as a viable and valuable economic development tool. This requires increased awareness of the its contribution to the local economy, as well as continued educational opportunities to encourage and train new farmers and share technological advances in agriculture.

In fostering agriculture and preserving significant agricultural lands for farms and forestry, Wythe County can add substantial value to its economy and sustain its agricultural landscapes and cultural farming heritage. Creative expansion of agribusiness (economic activities derived from or connected to farm products, including production, transportation and distribution) will strengthen local agricultural operations and encourage new opportunities for investment in agriculture.

Preserving Agricultural Lands

Some concepts for strategies to sustain and preserve agricultural lands for agriculture are shared on the following page.

Agribusiness Opportunities

- Cattle: The topography and pastoral landscapes of Wythe County are well suited to raising cattle. In particular, beef cattle have been a productive commodity that has experienced growth in Wythe County and the region. Across the nation, the dairy industry has faced significant challenges in terms of pricing, alternative products, and selective consumers. Perhaps there is value in considering methods and future markets that promote alternative dairy products (i.e. butter, cheese, yogurt) to boost demand for dairy farming. Virginia Tech is a leading research and resource institution that could be a valuable partner.
- New Agricultural Opportunities:
 - Aquaculture is an agribusiness is a growing and emerging industry within Wythe County and Southwestern Virginia. Based on information from the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Wythe County had \$804,000 in sales in aquaculture in 2017, representing only 1% of the county's total sales. However, Wythe County ranked 147th out of 1,251 counties across the nation in aquaculture, placing the county in the top 12%. Given the emergence of this industry, it appears that there are opportunities for the continued growth of aquaculture.
 - Additional opportunities for the region identified during discussions with stakeholders include hemp, cannabis, and poultry.



Insert Agriculture Preservation Concept Board + blank back page

Agriculture Preservation Concepts



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- Agritourism - Today, many small farmers look creatively for alternative revenue streams to benefit their agricultural production business. Many rural areas have successfully enabled special farm events and venues to assist farmers in supplementing income through agritourism efforts such as crop festivals, pick your own gardens, music/wedding event spaces, farm markets, etc. Local and regional coordination of agritourism activities and farm markets can be especially effective in raising awareness of agriculture, boosting business, and sharing opportunities for authentic experiences.
 - Agricultural Processing and Distribution – To sustain agriculture and expand the agricultural markets in Wythe County, there may be opportunities to add agricultural processing facilities and transportation distribution options for locally produced goods. In recent years Virginia and other states across the nation have focused attention and funding for “value-added agriculture” to extend agricultural products to the marketplace. For example in rural areas, USDA Rural Development operates a Value added Producer Grant Program that can be used for planning or capital expenses related to producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product [<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/value-added-producer-grants/va>]

Challenges of Housing Development

A major challenge for the future will be managing future residential development so that the rural landscape and productive agricultural land is managed and reserved for agriculture. Residential subdivisions are most appropriate in areas served by utilities and community services (schools, health care, shopping, etc.). Scattered housing development within the agricultural landscape often results in conflicts between new residents wanting to live in the country and active, working farming operations. For Wythe County, agriculture is important as an economic industry and will require effective land use management, responsible actions, and community education for a successful future.

APEX Center

In recent years, the Appalachian Regional Exposition Center has struggled with programming and conflicting views on continued public investment. This facility is a unique asset for celebrating and enhancing agriculture and agricultural experiences. In addition, it offers other opportunities for activities and tourism, not only as a public facility, but also for private investment. To be successful in the future, it is essential that there be careful guidance by the public sector to ensure that the public investment is protected and that any new development compliments the existing facility and its programming. As part of this comprehensive planning effort, the project team took a look at some potential opportunities for enhancing the property around APEX Center to maximize economic return. A summary of these potential development opportunities is presented on the following page.



Potential Action Project

Strategic Plan for Agriculture as Economic Engine

Agriculture is often overlooked as an economic driver in community development. In Wythe County, agriculture represents a significant cultural and economic asset that needs to be understood by both officials and residents, and celebrated. Public awareness is important, as well as educational opportunities that provide training and encourage entrepreneurship. Planning for economic growth and development should include agriculture as well as industry. While Wythe County economic development organizations (e.g., IDA, Chamber of Commerce) do well in promoting and recruiting industry, small business, and tourism, there is an opportunity to expand economic thinking to include agriculture as a contributing economic engine. This could be accomplished by initially establishing a formal committee to develop a more detailed strategy for integrating agriculture into economic decision-making and planning. This would be followed by implementing various priority recommendations to further coordination and investment in agriculture (e.g. more formal representation on specific boards, special development initiatives or programs, forestal and agricultural districts, engagement of educational partners for workforce or technical development, community outreach communication initiatives, etc.)



Insert Concept Board for APEX Center + blank back page

Potential Development Concepts for APEX Center



4.2.1 BUSINESS CENTERS AND CORRIDORS

The economy of Wythe County benefits from the accessible dual interstate system across Wythe County and the established commercial centers in the towns of Rural Retreat and Wytheville. Residents and visitors frequent these business centers and corridor commercial areas generating substantial economic activity.

BUSINESS CENTERS AND CORRIDORS: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Business Centers

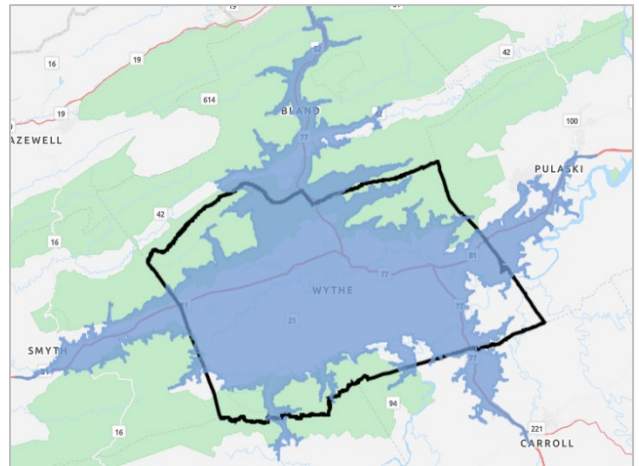
The primary business centers within Wythe County are the established town centers of Wytheville and Rural Retreat and the commercial crossroad centers that have developed at interstate interchanges (especially between Fort Chiswell and Wytheville). In addition, some corridors near the interstate have developed commercially along U.S. Route 11 (Lee Highway) and U.S. Route 52. While the commercial development at exits and along the commercial corridors near these exits do provide important businesses, services, and revenue to the County they have not developed well in terms of welcoming development, managed access, thoughtful site planning, landscaping, and quality building design. Development at the exits consist primarily of automotive related establishments (fast food, gas stations, truck stops, lodging, and paved parking lots). Access is often congested and confusing for customers. This is partially attributable to the fact that Wythe County has not adopted zoning which typically addresses various site development parameters (building setback, parking, pedestrian circulation, access, signage, lighting, landscaping, etc.) and the limited ability of Virginia Department of Transportation to manage anything other than interstate access safety.

The Towns of Rural Retreat and Wytheville have evolved differently over the years having started as small communities with pedestrian activity and central shopping and service areas. Both communities have undertaken successful downtown revitalization efforts in recent years that have resulted in improved downtown business areas, renovated buildings, and attractive streetscapes that encourage pedestrian activity.



Retail Market Analysis

As part of this comprehensive planning project, a retail analysis was conducted to understand retail patterns (consumer expenditures, retail sales, retail leakage or gain, and projected demand growth) in Wythe County and the surrounding area. Such an analysis also provides an understanding of market opportunities for growth. “Retail Leakage” refers to the difference between the retail expenditures by residents living in a particular area and the retail sales produced by the stores located in the same area. The retail leakage analysis was performed on Wythe County, the Towns of Wytheville and Rural Retreat, and a 30-Minute Drivetime Area from downtown Wytheville.



30-Minute drivetime area from the center of downtown Wytheville and Wythe County boundary (black)

The retail leakage analysis confirms that Wythe County serves as a regional commercial draw. As shown in the following table, stores in Wythe County sold \$1.24 billion in merchandise in the previous year. During the same time period, Wythe residents spent \$555.1 million, indicating a retail gain of \$682.3 million.

	WYTHE COUNTY	WYTHEVILLE	RURAL RETREAT	30-MINUTE DRIVETIME
Stores Sell	\$1.24 B	\$740.4 M	\$33.15 M	\$1.38 B
Consumers Buy	\$555.1 M	\$165.9 M	\$31.82 M	\$715.4 M
Market Leaks / (Gains)	(\$682.3 M)	(\$574.5 M)	(\$1.33 M)	(\$663.9 M)

2020 Retail Sales, Consumer Expenditures, and Market Leakage/Gain for Wythe County, Wytheville, Rural Retreat, and 30-Minute Drivetime (Source: Claritas and Environics Analytics)

The retail leakage analysis confirms that Wythe County serves as a regional commercial draw. Stores in Wythe County sold \$1.24 billion in merchandise in the previous year. During the same time period, Wythe residents spent \$555.1 million, indicating a retail gain of \$682.3 million.

An examination of retail sales by category furthers the understanding of the retail landscape in Wythe County, serving both local residents and a regional market with highway-oriented retail. Nearly 53% of all retail sales in Wythe County (\$651.9 million) were from gasoline stations. This high percentage is not typical, but is indicative of Wythe’s regionally significant location at the crossroads of Interstate



77 and Interstate 81. Additional regional and highway-oriented commercial uses fill out the top retail categories, including motor vehicle and parts dealers, general merchandise, and restaurants.

BUSINESS CENTERS AND CORRIDORS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Commercial Corridor Development

Enhancement of the commercial development along corridors and at interstate exits will continue to be a challenge without some type of oversight for future site development and some type of program for encouraging improvements to existing business storefronts, signage, or landscaping. As an alternative, a well-organized educational effort to encourage better quality development or site improvements could be beneficial. For example, a simple reference guide may help contractors and developers, particularly if it provides an overview of recommended standards for development (building placement, landscaping frontages and parking, lighting, signage, pedestrian/vehicular circulation, etc.). In addition, some communities have had success with offering business development incentives for property improvements in targeted revitalization areas.

Retail Market

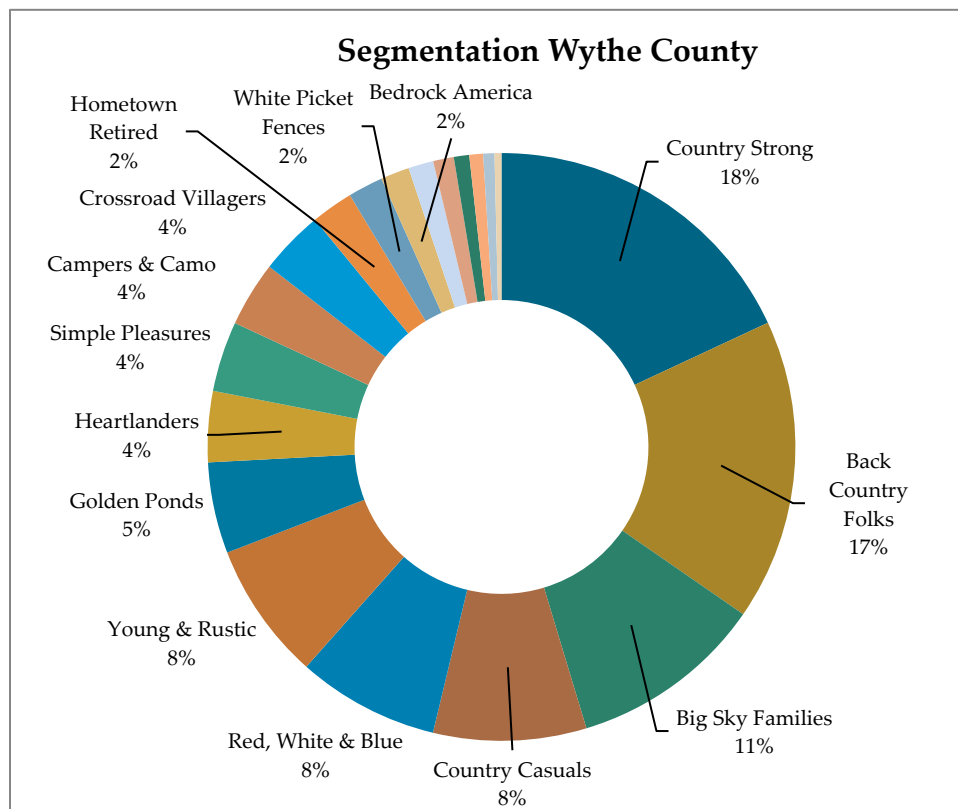
While Wythe County experiences an overall retail gain, the detailed breakdown of the retail leakage analysis identifies individual retail categories that have leakage. This leakage translates into existing consumer demand. While some of this demand may be accommodated within the larger region, opportunities may exist to capture a portion of the retail leakage through new or expanded retail offerings. Based on existing demand and projected future demand growth, key opportunities for Wythe County retail include capturing a portion of the leakage in grocery stores, sporting goods, beauty supply, alcoholic beverages, and coffee shops; leveraging retail clusters like restaurants and general merchandise; and meeting future growth demands across various retail categories.



Market Segmentation Opportunities

Market segmentation examines the makeup of existing and target markets in Wythe County by analyzing the behavioral traits, consumer patterns and lifestyle characteristics of various “segments” defined by the national market research firm Claritas. Segmentation shows the overall makeup of the market and indicates the potential customer base for local businesses. Segments used in the analysis are based on demographic data and categorized by life stage (age, income, family structure) and social group (urbanization). The economic planning team conducted a segmentation analysis for Wythe County, Wytheville, and a 30-minute drivetime area from downtown Wytheville.

The analysis indicated that most consumers in the area are mature in years or of a family life stage. Of the 68 unique market segments identified in the analysis, approximately six segments offer expanded marketing opportunities for businesses. The specific market characteristics for these key market segments are discussed in greater detail in Appendix A. In general, there are expanded business opportunities to recruit middle-income consumers ranging from singles to rural families to empty-nesters who are interested in outdoor recreation and associated “country” activities such as hunting, fishing, outdoor events, and sports.



Overall Market Segmentation in Wythe County (Source: Claritas)



4.2.3 INDUSTRY

INDUSTRY: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Over the past two decades, Wythe County has been proactive in planning for industry, constructing infrastructure (utilities, broadband), and recruiting employers within identified clusters (manufacturing, transportation equipment manufacturing, agribusiness and food processing, apparel and textiles, chemicals and chemical-based products, advanced materials, and advanced metal manufacturing). A seven-member Joint Industrial Development Authority provides economic development marketing and recruiting and assists Wythe County and the Towns of Rural Retreat and Wytheville with strategic planning for economic development. The IDA also provides support to small business.

Its signature regional park for industry, Progress Park, is strategically accessible to Interstates 77 and 81 and consists of over 1,200 acres of gently rolling land that is development ready and serviced by public utilities (electric, natural gas, water, sewer, and high-capacity fiber/broadband). In addition, there is rail access. Progress Park is within a designated Virginia Enterprise Zone and an Opportunity Zone which offer financial incentives for job creation and investment. As of 2022, the industrial park hosts multiple manufacturing companies including PepsiCo/Blue Ridge Gatorade, Amcor Rigid Plastics, Atsumi Car Equipment, Somic America (auto parts), Lane Enterprises, Coalfield Services, Inc./CSE Industrial Contractors, and Branch Botanicals. In 2021, two new industrial investments of over \$750 Million were announced - STS Group AG (commercial vehicle parts manufacturer) and Blue Star Manufacturing and American Glove Innovations (nitrile glove manufacturer). These employers expect to add a total of over 2,500 jobs. The Blue Star industry will occupy the last vacant parcel in Progress Park.

Is there an adopted IDA Strategic Plan for business/industrial development? One study was noted in stakeholders discussions in early 2021, but never supplied to the consulting team.

The Town of Rural Retreat hosts the Rural Retreat Industrial Park (163 acres) within the town limits. Some of the primary businesses operating there include Klockner Pentaplast (plastic packaging manufacturer), Mid-Atlantic Manufacturing and Hydraulics (hydraulic turbine manufacturing), and Crisp Manufacturing (parts manufacturer for mining equipment). In 2021, Traeger Pellet Grills announced that they would locate their operation in Rural Retreat. The park is a designated Enterprise Zone.

The Town of Wytheville hosts the Fairview Industrial Park (61 acres) within the town limits. Some of the primary businesses operating there include Schaffner MTC (electrical equipment manufacturing), Longwood Elastomers (rubber manufacturing), and American Tire. The park is a designated Enterprise Zone.



Ivanhoe also hosts a 175-acre industrial park which was established prior to 1940 for the operations of New Jersey Zinc Company/National Carbide. In 1986, industrial operations ceased, and the land was transferred to Wythe and Carroll County for industrial development. The property has been identified by EPA as a Brownfield site.

Current status and industries? Commonwealth Manufacturing and Shell Building 2004?

INDUSTRY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There is great competition in the Southwest Virginia region for productive industry and quality employers.

- Housing - During discussions with stakeholders, business leaders identified housing and aging school facilities as challenges for recruiting large employers. The location of Wythe County is central to Southwest Virginia and has beneficial transportation and public infrastructure, but it is hard to sell a 60-mile commute in order to meet the employee housing needs for a significant employer.
- Broadband - In addition, the continued expansion of broadband fiber throughout the County was identified as critical for small business and work from home options.
- Development Ready Sites - Finally, with the sale and development of the last parcel in Progress Park, Wythe County now needs additional development ready sites to continue recruiting employers and furthering economic development.



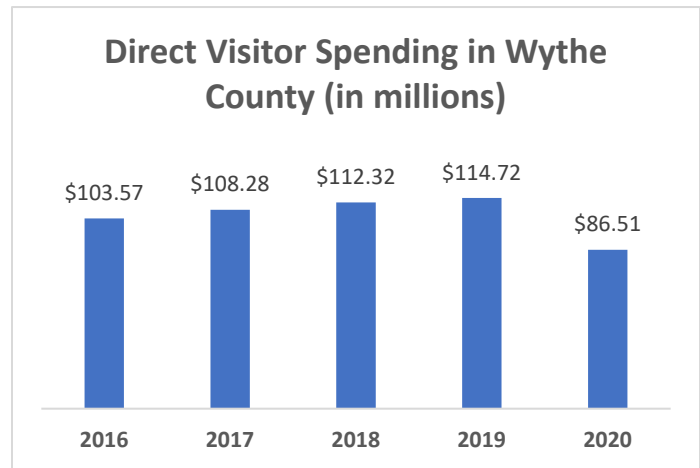
4.2.4 TOURISM

TOURISM: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Economic Impact of Tourism

In 2019, The Virginia Tourism Corporation estimated that there was \$114.7 million in direct visitor spending in Wythe County.

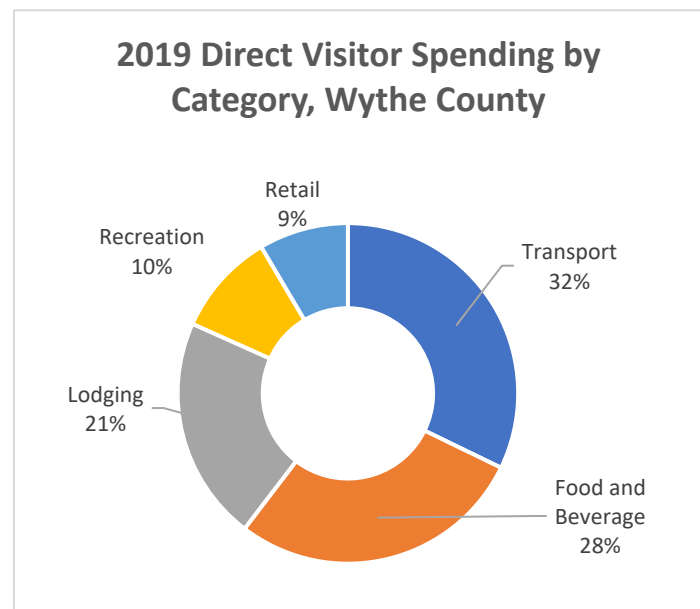
In 2019, travel related expenditures supported 1,341 jobs across Wythe County, generating \$29.77 million in labor income and contributing approximately \$3.2 million to state taxes and \$5.87 million to local taxes.



Direct Visitor Spending in Wythe County (in millions) from 2016 to 2020 (Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation)

The visitor spending by category is shown in the chart to the right. A more detailed expenditure table is provided on the following page.

- Transportation accounts for about a third of direct visitor spending in Wythe County, with \$36.93 million in spending in 2019.
- Food and beverage brought in \$32.33 million (28% of total direct visitor spending) and
- Lodging brought in \$24.45 million (21% of total direct visitor spending).



Direct Visitor Spending in Wythe County by Category, 2019 (Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation)

Direct Visitor Spending 2016-2020, Wythe County (in millions)						
Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation						
Year	Lodging	Food and Beverage	Retail	Recreation	Transport	Total Spending
2016	\$22.26	\$29.05	\$8.71	\$10.26	\$33.29	\$103.57
2017	\$23.51	\$30.06	\$9.00	\$10.70	\$35.00	\$108.28
2018	\$24.30	\$31.02	\$9.73	\$11.13	\$36.15	\$112.32
2019	\$24.45	\$32.33	\$9.75	\$11.24	\$36.93	\$114.72
2020	\$17.04	\$26.95	\$7.38	\$9.79	\$25.34	\$86.51

Regional Strategic Tourism Plan

Virginia Tourism Corporation’s *DRIVE 2.0 Statewide Tourism Plan* is a strategic tourism plan for Virginia that outlines strategies for each of the State’s tourism regions for 2020-2025. Wythe County is included in the Southwest Virginia Blue Ridge Highlands regional plan. Key highlights of the regional plan include:

- Attractions - The region’s lures include its natural assets, outdoor recreational opportunities, arts and culture, heritage, small towns, and agritourism.
- Primary Regional Focus - The primary focus for the Southwest Virginia Blue Ridge Highlands region should be nature and outdoor recreation, arts and music, culinary (agritourism, dining, libations), town/city centers, and lodging.
- Secondary Regional Focus - The secondary focus for the Southwest Virginia Blue Ridge Highlands region should be history and heritage, meetings and conferences, sports, and events.
- Profile Expenditures - Travel profile data provided by VTC shows that visitors to the Blue Ridge Highlands region spend an average of \$587 per trip and spend an average of 3.4 nights per trip. Average age of a traveler is 44 and 29% are traveling with children.
- Recommendations - Connect and collectively promote the Blue Ridge Highlands’ outdoor experiences.



The table below shows direct visitor spending in all localities in the Southwest Virginia Blue Ridge Highlands region. Montgomery County leads the region in direct visitor spending, followed by Wythe County.

Locality	Direct Visitor Spending (in millions)				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
BLAND COUNTY	\$4.04	\$4.31	\$4.64	\$4.85	\$4.17
BRISTOL CITY	\$63.52	\$64.78	\$67.79	\$70.03	\$54.18
CARROLL COUNTY	\$37.87	\$41.41	\$43.47	\$42.03	\$33.56
FLOYD COUNTY	\$14.98	\$16.07	\$16.36	\$16.14	\$11.16
GALAX CITY	\$14.54	\$14.65	\$15.50	\$15.74	\$11.58
GILES COUNTY	\$25.55	\$26.78	\$28.43	\$29.63	\$21.38
GRAYSON COUNTY	\$9.02	\$9.53	\$9.58	\$10.33	\$9.80
MONTGOMERY COUNTY	\$186.25	\$193.19	\$209.67	\$222.05	\$145.87
PATRICK COUNTY	\$19.71	\$20.60	\$22.18	\$21.53	\$17.26
PULASKI COUNTY	\$65.09	\$66.17	\$70.30	\$74.15	\$56.37
RADFORD CITY	\$19.93	\$20.30	\$20.91	\$21.44	\$13.25
SMYTH COUNTY	\$22.58	\$22.42	\$23.90	\$25.82	\$20.60
WASHINGTON COUNTY	\$94.58	\$98.18	\$102.51	\$103.15	\$76.38
WYTHE COUNTY	\$103.57	\$108.28	\$112.32	\$114.72	\$86.51
Regional Total	\$681.24	\$706.66	\$747.53	\$771.61	\$562.07



Tourism Assets

Some of the tourism assets that attract locals and visitors include:

- APEX Center
- Beagle Ridge Herb Farm
- Big Walker Century Ride
- Big Walker Lookout
- Bluecat on the New
- Brackens Trout Hatchery
- Cedar Spring Trout Farm
- Chautauqua Festival
- Collins Cove Horse Camp
- Deer Trail Park and Cabins
- Dr. Pepper Rural Retreat Heritage Day
- Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum
- Flying Flowers Butterfly House
- Fort Chiswell Animal Park
- Gerta's House of Music
- Hussy Mountain Horse Camp
- KOA Campground
- Lick Mountain Excursions
- Mansion at Fort Chiswell
- Major Graham Mansion
- Max Meadows Heritage Day
- Music on Big Walker Lookout
- New River Trail State Park
- New River Trail Challenge and Family Fest
- Pioneer Village Campground
- Pleasant Hill Farm and Field of Flowers
- Raven Cliff Campground and Picnic Area
- Rural Retreat Lake Park and Campground
- Serendipity Event Center
- Shot Tower Historical State Park
- Thomas J Boyd Museum
- Trinkle Mansion
- WCC Bluegrass and Old Time Jamboree
- Williams Orchard
- Wohlfahrt Haus Dinner Theater
- Wythe Raceway
- Wytheville Downtown Festival and Cruise-In
- Wytheville State Fish Hatchery
- Wytheville Training School Cultural Center



TOURISM: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While tourism numbers and expenditures decreased 2020-2021 because of the COVID pandemic, the Virginia Tourism Corporation projects that 2022 visitor spending in the Southwest Blue Ridge Highlands Region will continue to increase and return to pre-pandemic levels.

Wythe County hosts a diverse collection of outdoor recreation amenities which offer tremendous tourism potential in the future, especially combined with the various facilities, shopping and retail opportunities, and special events. State and Federal agencies can be instrumental partners in helping Wythe County achieve future economic success from tourism. Examples of some of the potential collaborative initiatives are discussed in the Recreation and Agriculture sections of this plan (see Concepts for Outdoor Recreation, Rural Retreat Lake, and APEX Center).



4.3 Public Infrastructure

This section discusses the supporting public infrastructure and public service facilities within Wythe County - water and sewer utilities, solid waste facilities, transportation, energy supplies, and broadband.

4.3.1 PUBLIC UTILITIES

PUBLIC UTILITIES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

In 2021, Wythe County completed a Water and Wastewater Facilities Study (*Water and Wastewater Study, Wythe County*, Prepared by Peed & Bortz, December 2021). The study provides a detailed assessment of existing conditions of water and wastewater systems serving Wythe County and provides recommendations for improvements, priority projects, and financing. In addition, the plan projects demand for 25 years and provides direction to 2045. The study did not include review of town systems. Maps showing the general water and the wastewater systems in Wythe County are provided following the text discussion for water and wastewater.

Water

The Town of Rural Retreat and the Town of Wytheville operate complete water systems within their jurisdictions (water source, treatment facilities, distribution mains, and storage facilities). These two water systems also supply water to a portion of the County.

The primary public water source for most of Wythe County is from the New River. Other sources of public water are Reed Creek (Wytheville) and two groundwater wells in Max Meadows and Speedwell. Wythe County has 13 water storage tanks throughout the County which provide storage capacities from approximately 55,000 gallons to 1.5 million gallons. In most rural areas, private wells supply potable water for households and businesses. These private well systems are regulated by the Virginia Department of Health.

- Rural Retreat Water Treatment Plant – The Town of Rural Retreat serves properties within town limits and a portion of the County. The water source is the Phillippi well and spring. The water source is directly influenced by surface water. The treatment plant has a permitted capacity of 500,000 GPD. The Town hosts three storage tanks with a total storage capacity of 1.1 million gallons. In 2021, the Town served approximately 2,500 water customers.
- New River Regional Water Authority – This regional authority serves Wythe and Carroll Counties and the Town of Wytheville and distributes water throughout much of the county. The regional authority treats water from the New River (reliable water supply source with high volume capacity) at a 4 MGD capacity plant in Austinville. The plant has the capability of being expanded to 16 MGD. The system includes a 24-inch waterline from the plant across the New River Bridge (connects to the Wythe County system in Austinville). The authority has three water storage tanks with a total storage volume of approximately 4.5 million gallons.



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- Wytheville Water Treatment Plant – The Town of Wytheville operates a water treatment plant (circa 1950, Grayson Road) on Reed Creek which provides water to the Town of Wytheville and parts of Wythe County. The Wytheville water treatment plant has a capacity of 4 MGD and as of 2021 produces approximately 2.6 MGD for its roughly 4,400 customers (including industries within Progress Park). The town hosts four water storage tanks with a total storage capacity of 6.2 million gallons.

Over the past two decades, Wythe County has extended over 70 miles of water mains throughout the County from the New River Regional Water Authority Plant. The Town of Wytheville and the Town Rural Retreat maintain water lines within each of their jurisdictions.

Wythe County has eleven major service areas for water – Raper Ridge, Fort Chiswell/Grahams Forge, Max Meadows, Pleasant View, Swecker Town, Poplar Camp, Big Survey, Ivanhoe, Rakestown, Radio Drive/Grayson Road, and Speedwell. In general, these water service areas can be more simply described as serving the eastern and western portions of the County.

- Wythe County East - This water system serves Ivanhoe, Max Meadows, Grahams Forge and Austinville. The water sources for this system are the New River, Reed Creek and one well in Max Meadows.
- Wythe County West – This water system serves the West Lee Highway corridor, Crockett, and Speedwell. The water sources for this system are the New River, Reed Creek, and one well in Speedwell.

The 2020 *Annual Drinking Water Quality Report* prepared by the Virginia Department of Health for the Wythe County East and West Water Systems indicated that water supply sources had a high susceptibility to contamination due to potential contaminants from runoff and erosion of natural deposits; however, the levels detected in the water supply were within acceptable levels considered safe for drinking water consumption.

Wastewater

The Town of Rural Retreat and the Town of Wytheville operate wastewater systems with treatment facilities and distribution lines. Wythe County operates two wastewater treatment plants. Most rural areas in the County use septic systems which are maintained privately and regulated by the state health department.

- Rural Retreat Wastewater Treatment Plant – As of 2022, this facility is near its capacity and has significant infiltration and inflow from aging sewer lines.
- Wytheville Wastewater Treatment Plant – This facility on Reed Creek (Atkins Mill Road) is designed to treat 4.0 MGD of wastewater and has an average daily flow of 2.0 MGD.
- Fort Chiswell Wastewater Treatment Plant (1995) – This facility is designed to treat up to 1.25 MGD. As of 2022, Wythe County plans to expand the facility to a minimum of 2.5 MGD.
- Fort Chiswell/Poplar Camp/Shorts Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant (2017) – This facility has a capacity of 400,000 GPD.
- Austinville Wastewater Treatment Plant (1947) – This facility consists of older components constructed by the New Jersey Zinc Company. It has a treatment capacity of 200,00 GPD.



Insert Map of Water System + blank back page

Water Utilities



Insert Wastewater Facilities Map + blank back page

Wastewater Utilities



Solid Waste Management

A Joint Public Service Authority manages solid waste in Wythe and Bland Counties, as well as the Towns of Rural Retreat and Wytheville. The authority operates the Wythe/Bland Solid Waste Transfer Station east of Wytheville (Kents Lane) that accepts most household, commercial, construction, or commercial solid waste. The facility does not accept hazardous waste, pesticides, soil, or oil. The facility operates during the day Monday through Friday and is closed on Saturday and Sunday. Waste from the transfer station is hauled to a private landfill outside of Wythe County. **The County still owns a former public landfill near Speedwell which has been closed.**

The County provides twelve convenience centers throughout the County for household trash collection and recycling. In addition, solid waste collection throughout the county is available through private sector providers. Rural Retreat and Wytheville collect trash weekly from residents and small businesses. A map of the facilities is provided on the following page.

Internet / Broadband Fiber

Several commercial internet providers offer services within Wythe County including CenturyLink, Citizens, and Shentel. In addition, high speed fiber service is available in Progress Park.

The Covid pandemic over the past two years has elevated the need for improved quality internet for citizens and businesses. While Wythe County has been successful in expanding high-speed fiber networks to industrial parks, in 2021 many households throughout the County were underserved or unserved for quality internet services. Based on a 2020 broadband needs survey conducted by Design Nine for Wythe County, approximately 93 percent of respondents wanted better quality internet services and approximately 40% of the respondents indicated that the availability of broadband internet was affecting where they choose to live. In addition, approximately 17 percent of the households had no access to internet. The final broadband report recommended improvements to the wireless network using sixteen new tower locations throughout Wythe County and working with partnering internet service providers. In 2021, the County and Mount Rogers Planning District Commission successfully partnered with Point Broadband to improve regional broadband access and was awarded approximately \$66 Million to expand services to underserved areas in Wythe, Smyth, and Washington Counties (funding appropriated from the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative and the American Rescue Plan Act). This broadband initiative is expected to reach approximately 27,450 households.

Energy

As a regional crossroads with two interstate corridors, Wythe County is served by an impressive system of electrical transmission lines traversing the County operated by American Electric Power. A map of the major power lines serving Wythe County is provided on the following page. Dominion Energy also operates solar renewable utility generation facilities in Wythe County. Natural gas service is available in Wythe County, as well. Progress Park hosts a natural gas distribution station and a 24" transmission line operated by Atmos Energy. In addition, natural gas is available in the Town of Rural Retreat (East Tennessee Natural Gas Company/Enbridge) and in the Town of Wytheville (Atmos Energy).



Insert Map of Public Service Facilities + back page

Public Service Facilities



Insert map of Electric Transmission Lines + blank back page

Electricity Transmission Lines



PUBLIC UTILITIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORUTNITIES

Water and Wastewater

Improvements to address current issues and projected water and wastewater demands must be carefully planned, prioritized, and managed. The list of recommended improvements is extensive and the immediate needs for Progress Park to accommodate its latest tenant, Blue Star NBR, will greatly affect facility improvements. Multiple state and federal funding sources are available to assist Wythe County in addressing the upgraded infrastructure needs.

The water and wastewater facilities plan completed in December 2021 notes the following items:

- Waterlines – The waterlines constructed by the Wythe-Bland Water and Sewer Authority were thin-walled PVC pipe that continue to be a problem for Wythe County. These are particularly troublesome in the old lines serving Speedwell. (See exhibit 8 in facilities study)
- Max Meadows well – Water from this well continues to be a concern for the County. Water from this source is high in alkalinity and hardness.
- Wastewater inflow and infiltration – There are continuing inflow and infiltration issues noted for the Max Meadows and Austinville wastewater collection systems. Repair and rehabilitation studies are underway.
- Progress Park – While there will be some rural growth in the County over the next 20 years, development in this major industrial park will have the greatest impact on future utility needs. Since 2000 the park infrastructure has been improved several times. By 2045, it is estimated that the water demand in Progress Park will be approximately 1.9 MGD.
- Future Water Demand – Based on future projections, the water demand in 2045 for Wythe County (not including Progress Park) is expected to be approximately 1.1 MGD (versus 700,000 GPD in 2020). It is expected that these future demands can be met by the New River Regional Water Authority plant in Austinville with recommended improvements.
- Wastewater – Like water use, Progress Park will have the most impact on future utility needs. By 2045, it is projected that Progress Park would have a daily discharge of 767,000 GPD (versus 321,000 GPD in 2020). Wastewater demands by 2045 for Wythe County are anticipated to double from approximately 500,000 GPD in 2020 to 1.0 MGD in 2045. Most of this additional wastewater flow can be treated at the Fort Chiswell Wastewater Treatment facility which can be expanded to address future needs.
- Capital Water Projects – The facilities study identified a total of 38 water projects for implementation to address current issues and meet projected future demands. Most of these are transmission related improvements that extend water lines to certain areas. Four projects replace aging water lines. One new water tank is planned (Lots Gap). The total estimated cost for all the identified water improvements was \$103.2 Million. The study prioritized projects based on benefits and needs. [See 2021 Water and Wastewater Study, p. 56, for more details.]. Within the next five years, improvements



are expected for Barrett Mill (extension of lines) and construction of the Lot Gap water storage tank (serves Progress Park).

- Capital Wastewater Projects – The facilities study identified 13 wastewater projects throughout the County to address current issues and meet projected future demands. The total estimated cost for all the identified wastewater improvements was \$55.8 Million. Development at Progress Park is expected to influence wastewater improvements over the next five years. [See 2021 Water and Wastewater Study, p. 57, for more details.]

The expansion of public utility systems in rural areas is especially challenging and costly. To effectively manage infrastructure costs and facilitate best land development practices, Wythe County must focus future expansion of utilities to areas targeted for development and population density. Preserving the rural character and agricultural landscape of the County was identified by citizens as a primary goal for the future. To accomplish this, development (particularly new housing, commerce, and industry) should occur in designated areas, with public utilities and supporting services, and not be scattered.

Internet / Broadband Fiber

Reliable and affordable access to high-speed internet is crucial for continued business development and community life (schools, healthcare, work from home, etc.). The 2021 funding from the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative and the American Rescue Plan Act for expanded broadband in Wythe County will improve internet access; however, additional funding for the needed infrastructure may be required. County officials and partner internet providers must be diligent in monitoring community needs and continue to work toward implementation of more responsible telecommunication network.

Energy

Over the past several years changing federal and state legislation has enhanced opportunities to reduce carbon pollution and invest in carbon-free renewable energy sources (solar, wind, biomass, etc.). In 2020, the state legislature adopted the Virginia Clean Economy Act which established renewable energy standards and production targets for public utility providers to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In addition, the legislation enables energy credits and financial incentives for providers, host communities, and property owners/citizens.

Like many communities across the Commonwealth, Wythe County must consider alternative energy sources that are environmentally cleaner and sustainable in order to meet the increasing energy needs of the future. The 2020 Virginia legislative changes allow for shared energy benefits, revenues, and cooperative agreements with providers. With these changes, there are many benefits (and challenges) that must be carefully evaluated by County officials in planning for this enhanced utility infrastructure.

Managing the siting of facilities (from small to utility scale) and balancing the costs, impacts, and benefits of various projects will be important for the long-term. A well thought out, adopted strategy that provides uniform guidance to County officials, investors, and property owners is essential to successfully achieving the desired clean energy goals for the future. With respect to compliance with this comprehensive plan, any



new energy project should fit within the adopted community vision and goals set forth in Section I. In addition, decisions should consider the effects on important environmental resources such as prime farmland, protected wildlife and natural areas, sensitive environmental areas, historic and cultural sites, and designated scenic rivers, byways and viewsheds. Economic and energy production factors are also relevant, but they should not be the primary considerations for siting utility scale facilities.

Potential Action Project

Adopted Strategy for Decisions on Renewable Energy Source Projects

Over the past several decades, the use of fossil fuels for energy production has resulted in significant environmental impact on air and environmental quality and influenced changes in climate and global warming. As of 2022, there are national and state mandates directing communities and energy providers to substitute the use of fossil fuels with carbon-free alternative, renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and biomass.

Across Virginia, the community discussions regarding some of these projects have been intensive and even controversial, especially with respect to utility scale projects that involve very large acreages of solar panels or wind turbines. In addition, there is a lack of public information and coordination regarding processes, effects, and operations. During discussions with stakeholders as part of this comprehensive planning process, property owners and residents expressed concerns and frustrations with solar projects underway in Wythe County. Other communities are experiencing similar feelings and questioning how to address citizen concerns.

The Large-Scale Solar Development Playbook for Southwest Virginia (2020) is particularly relevant as a guide for developing a tailored community strategy for making decisions regarding large alternative energy projects. [<https://swvasolar.org/swva-solar-playbook-online/>]

For example, an effective written strategy could:

- Outline the general pros/cons of an alternative energy source (solar, wind, biomass)
- Identify a list of site factors and impacts to be evaluated (checklist and resource maps)
- Identify a list of economic and financial impacts (jobs, energy improvements, revenue)
- Define the review processes (local, state, agreement provisions checklist)
- Provide a checklist for required community communications and outreach
- Identify important technical resource materials.



4.3.2 TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Roads and Highways

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) maintains all public roads within Wythe County. Roads are classified by their function and service (interstate, arterial, collector, local). A map showing the transportation system by functional classification is presented on the following page.

- Corridors of Statewide Significance include Interstate 81 (North/South, Crescent Corridor) and Interstate 77 (North/South, Western Mountain Corridor). These significant corridors are multimodal (passenger and freight) connections to the Commonwealth's major activity centers. Of note is that in 2020, the combined average daily traffic volume on I-81 and I-77 was over 50,000 vehicles.
- Important arterials and collectors include U.S. Route 11, U.S. Route 21 and U.S. Route 52 and State Route 94 (to Carroll County) and State Route 90 (to Rural Retreat).
- Route 76 is a U.S. Bicycle Route and part of the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail that extends from eastern Virginia to Colorado.

Wythe County is located midway between the Bristol and Salem VDOT Districts but is officially part of the Bristol District. Both of these districts heavily influence the transportation systems relevant to Wythe County. Often, there are challenges in addressing needed improvements because of competing priorities in the primary metropolitan areas (e.g., Roanoke and Bristol).

Communities throughout Virginia work with VDOT and regional planning agencies to develop short and long-term transportation plans for the future. The following information provides an overview of existing transportation projects underway and additional details on others that have been identified, but not funded.

As of 2022, the major transportation projects underway in Wythe County include:

- **Interstate 77, Exit 41 Peppers Ferry Road** – This improvement project will address interchange improvements to improve traffic flow and minimize congestion at the interchange and align with planned improvements for Nye Road. The project is under design and has a total estimated cost of \$22.1 million. Construction is expected to start in late 2023.
- **Progress Park Connector** – This improvement project is a 2.3-mile connector to Progress Park. It is proposed as a two-lane road, from Lee Trinkle Drive (Route 792) to Nye Road and is funded as Smart-Scale Project. As of 2022, the project is in design and has a total estimated cost of \$23.3 million. **Construction is expected to start in Spring 2024.**

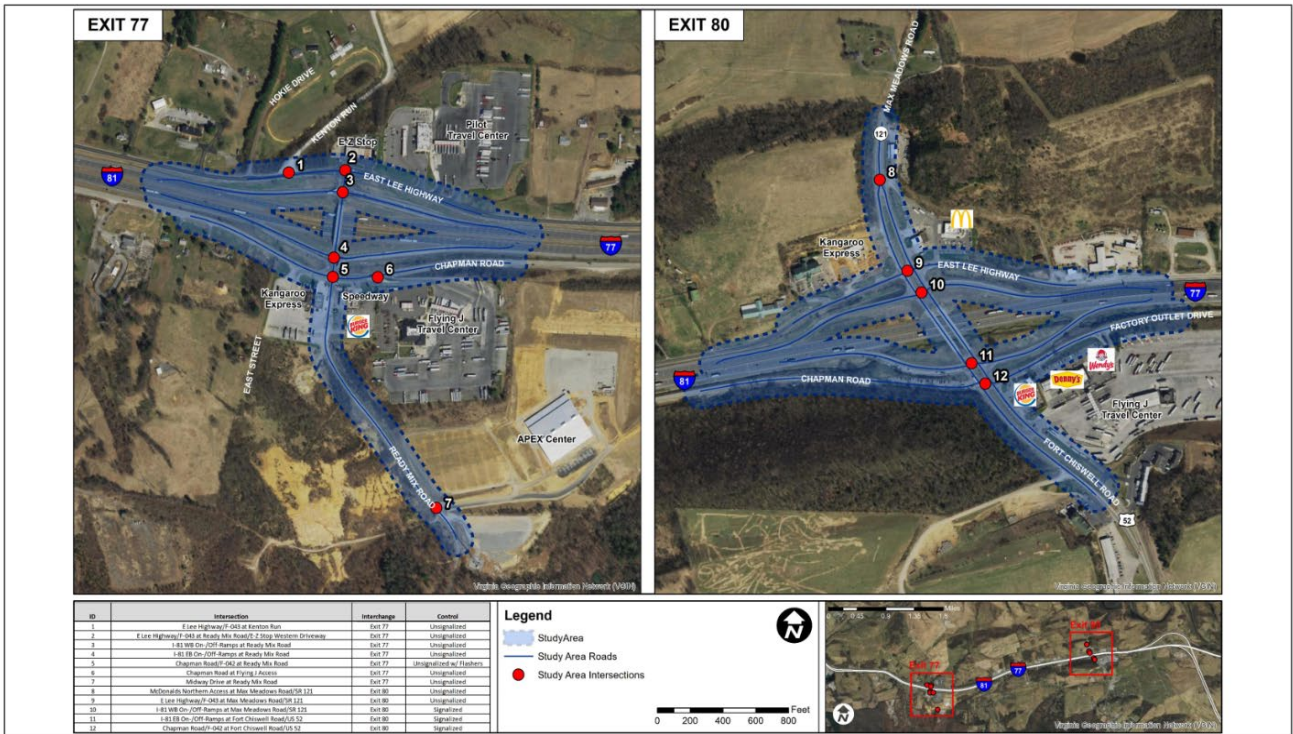


Insert Transportation Map + blank back page

VDOT Roads by Functional Classification



- Interstate 81, Exits 77 and 80** - VDOT is conducting an “Interchange Alternative” study to evaluate operational and safety conditions, develop potential projects to improve safety, improve access management, and identify improvements that can be advanced for funding in the Six-Year Improvement Program. Over the years, these intersections have been developed with gas stations, truck stops, and support services for travelers (i.e., restaurants). The existing frontage road, poor access management, and intersection spacing has created unsafe and operational deficiencies at the interchanges. As of 2022, the project is in the planning and analysis stage.



Study Area
I-81 Exit-77 and Exit-80 Interchange Improvement Operational Analysis and Safety Study
 Wythe County, VA

FIGURE 1

VDOT Study Areas for I-81 Interchanges. Source: VDOT

- Additional planned I-81 Corridor Improvements:**
 - I-81 Exits 72 and 73, Wytheville (Mile marker 73.2-73.8) – add auxiliary lane southbound; estimated construction 2026-2028.
 - I-81, Exit 72, Wytheville (Mile marker 72.7-72.9) – extend deceleration lane northbound; estimated construction 2026-2028.
 - I-81 Exit 71, I-77 Exit 40 – extend acceleration lane southbound; estimated construction 2026-2028.
 - I-81 Exit 81 (Mile marker 81.7-81.9) – extend deceleration lane southbound; estimated construction 2026-2028



The Six Year Highway Improvement Plan is short-term plan for needed transportation improvements that is reviewed and updated annually by the County and the VDOT District. Priority projects are considered annually for funding as part of the VDOT “Smart Scale Program” which ranks projects based on available state funding and project benefits (safety, reduced congestion, accessibility, environmental benefits, and economic development). Wythe County recently updated the *2023-2028 Six-year Transportation Plan*. Current projects underway or planned in the future include:

- Five additional projects for I-77 and I-81 (bridge replacements, lane extensions)
- One rail crossing improvement (Rt. 803) and
- 24 projects for secondary road improvements (reconstruction, ditches, surface treatment, etc.).

The Long-Range Transportation Plan is a long-term (20 year) plan that is typically adopted as a regional plan for rural counties. The *2035 Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan* for the Mount Rogers Planning District was developed in 2011. It identified 71 projects for Wythe County and prioritized them based on operational and safety deficiencies. The regional plan is due for an update. Since this plan was developed, funding for state transportation projects has become extremely competitive due to community needs and available funds. For a complete listing of projects recommended for the County, see the full document at [https://www.mrpdc.org/docs/Mount Rogers RL RTP.pdf](https://www.mrpdc.org/docs/Mount_Rogers_RL RTP.pdf). The top five projects recommended for improvements in the 2035 long-range plan included:

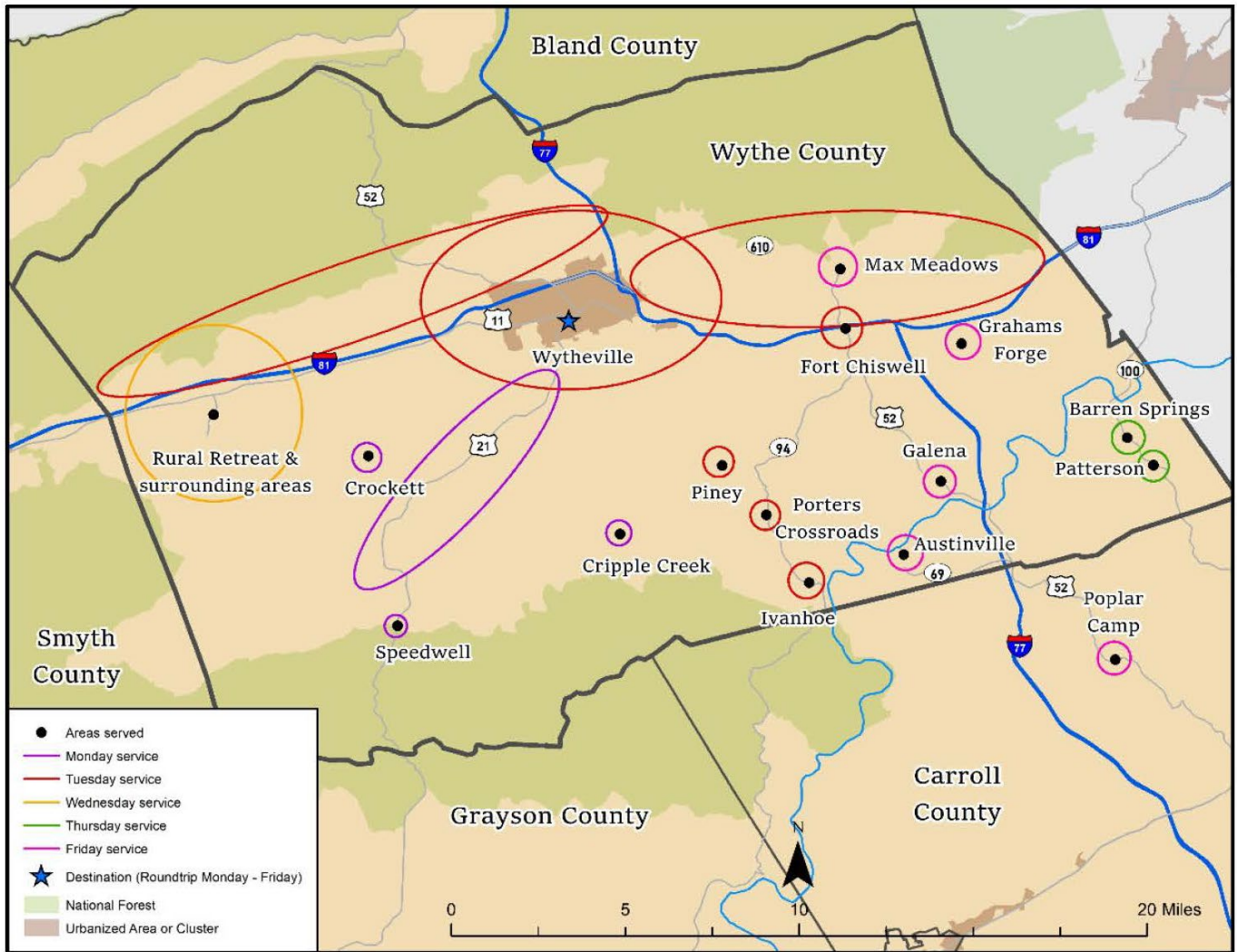
- U.S. Route 11/North Main Street (turn lanes)
- U.S. Route 52/State Route 94 (entrance improvements at high school)
- U.S. Route 21/Cedar Spring Road/St. Peters Road (access management and turn lanes)
- I-81/State Route 90 (signage, reconstruct interchange)
- State Route 100/Foster Falls Road (intersection improvements, turn lanes)

VDOT also operates a park and ride lot for commuters in Max Meadows (Chapman Road).



Public Transportation

The District Three Governmental Cooperative in Marion operates Mountain Lynx Transit, a bus service system in Wythe County and Wytheville. In general, service is available on weekdays in Wytheville on a fixed bus route. In addition, this transportation service is available by request and appointment for areas outside Wytheville (according to weekly service schedule). The cooperative serves citizens of Southwest Virginia – Wythe, Bland, Carroll, Smyth, Washington, and the communities of Wytheville, Abingdon, Bristol, Galax, and Marion. A map of the service areas in Wythe County is provided below.



Wythe County Service, District Tree Governmental Cooperative, Mountain Lynx Transit Development Plan 2020-2030.



Airports

There are no commercial airports located within Wythe County. Servicing airports in the region include:

- Mountain Empire Airport is located in Smyth County, approximately 15 miles from Wytheville. The airport is owned and operated by the Smyth Wythe Airport Commission. It has a single runway and accommodates small aircraft.
- Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport is located in Roanoke, approximately 75 miles from Wytheville. This airport is the nearest commercial airport with approximately ten major air carriers and general aviation services. In addition, the airport provides air cargo services through several major carriers.
- Charlotte/Douglas International Airport is located in Charlotte, approximately 150 miles from Wytheville. This airport is the nearest regional hub for passenger and cargo air operations.

Rail

In addition to hosting two major highway corridors, Wythe County also hosts a primary rail corridor operated by Norfolk Southern Railway Company through the center of the County. Norfolk Southern serves most of the eastern United States with north-south connections from New York to Florida and east-west connections from the east coast to Illinois, Kansas, and Louisiana. Also, Norfolk Southern has a passenger rail agreement with Amtrak which also serves the region. A passenger station exists in Roanoke, and one is planned in Christiansburg (estimated construction 2024-2026).

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Pedestrian and bicycle facilities in Wythe County are located primarily in established downtowns (Wytheville, Rural Retreat) and in designated parks and recreational areas.

- Downtown Wytheville and Rural Retreat have pedestrian sidewalks within their historic downtown areas. Both communities have made recent improvement to the pedestrian systems.
- The Appalachian Trail extends through the Jefferson National Forest and traverses through the northwest corner of Wythe County.
- The New River Trail extends along the New River in eastern Wythe County.
- Greenways and trails exist in several park facilities in Wytheville and Rural Retreat. In particular, the Crystal Springs Recreation Area hosts multiple trail systems. Other State and Federal properties (i.e., Big Survey, Jefferson National Forest) also offer trails for hiking and biking.
- U.S. Bicycle Route 76 extends east to west through Wythe County. The route aligns with U.S. Route 11 and is part of the TransAmerica Bike Route that extends from the east coast to Colorado.



TRANSPORTATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Roads and Highways

Like many rural counties in Virginia, road maintenance is a continuing challenge with limited funding from VDOT and great competition for transportation needs across the Commonwealth. During the citizen survey for this comprehensive plan, citizens expressed concerns for road maintenance in the County. Public education and communication are essential in understanding how public projects are evaluated and funded. State and local governments receive a good portion of their revenues for maintaining public infrastructure from taxes (and people want to keep taxes low). VDOT maintains all roads within the County; Wythe County coordinates with VDOT regarding needs but does not provide capital expenditures for general road maintenance. Maintaining an open dialogue with citizens regarding specific transportation needs and sharing the process for transportation planning and project implementation will help build a better understanding of how needed improvements can be accomplished. Consistent, shared dialogue will achieve consensus on the priority projects for inclusion in Wythe County's Six Year Transportation Plan and the Long-Range Transportation Plan, which is due for an update.

Alternative Transportation Opportunities

Expanded options for transportation could greatly benefit Wythe County citizens in the future. Over the past two years many households across the nation have experienced significant challenges and had to re-evaluate living conditions, jobs, financial expenditures, and family priorities. Communities can help strengthen the quality of life for residents by extending affordable transportation services, recruiting passenger rail service, adding more park and ride locations for commuters, and increasing pedestrian and bicycle connections in populated areas (i.e., bike lanes, sidewalks, and trails). An improved transportation network will assist residents in meeting transportation needs for work and school as well as increase community access to important public facilities and services.



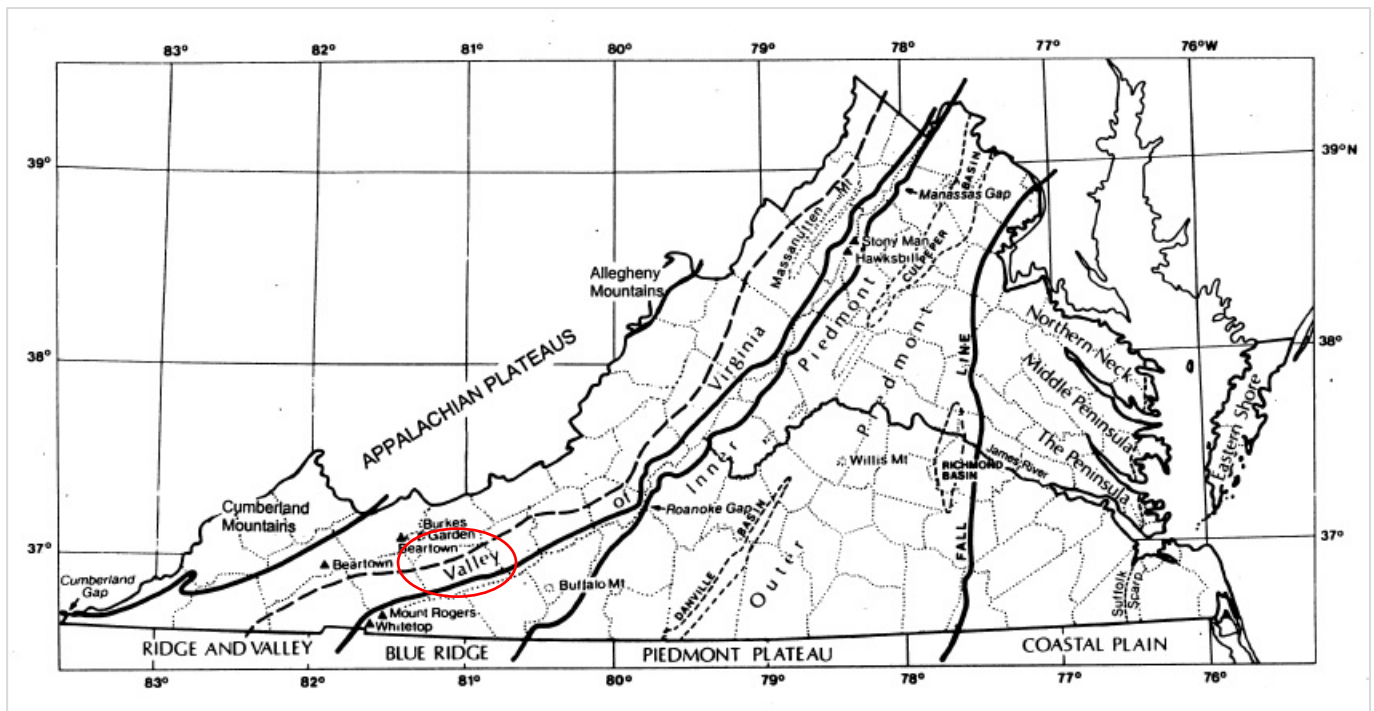
4.4 Natural and Historic Resources

4.4.1 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Natural Features

Wythe County lies primarily within the Ridge and Valley Physiographic Province of Virginia and borders the Blue Ridge Physiographic Province. These physiographic regions of the Commonwealth exhibit common geological, climatic, and biological resources characteristic of the region.



Physiographic Provinces of Virginia. Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Mixed evergreen pine and deciduous hardwood forests are found throughout Wythe County and support a variety of native species and is also a key resource for migrating birds and other wildlife. The county is home to over 297,000 acres of forested land, with over 55,000 acres located in the Jefferson National Forest. A major forest and wildlife resource for the county is the 8,300-acre Big Survey Wildlife Management Area south of Wytheville. The Big Survey bounds an additional 1,850 acres owned by the Town of Wytheville and known as Crystal Springs Recreation Area. It serves as a protected watershed for the town and is managed for conservation and recreation purposes.



Environmental Quality - Water and Air

The primary surface watercourse in Wythe County is the New River, which is one of the oldest river systems in North America. Unlike most major rivers in the state, the New River flows north, rather than south, toward West Virginia. The river serves as a primary water source for the County and the region and is cherished for its recreational and scenic value. Other major tributaries include Reed and Cripple Creek which traverse much of the County. Both creeks are recognized for their recreational value. Reed Creek serves as a water source for the Town of Wytheville. These surface waters are monitored frequently by Wythe County and other officials because of their use as a public water supply. Although they may be subject to contamination from sediment erosion and stormwater runoff from developed and agricultural areas, they have been found to be generally safe as a potable water source and in compliance with established water quality standards. A map of the flood hazard areas in Wythe County is provided on the following page.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality monitors particulate matter in various locations throughout Southwest Virginia in accordance with adopted emission standards put in place regarding greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, ozone, and other toxic particulates. Rural Retreat hosts an air quality monitoring station for ozone at the water treatment plant. Based on historical data reported by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in the *Virginia Ambient Air Monitoring 2020 Annual Report*, Wythe County had no days in which ozone levels exceeded the established standard for ozone. As of 2022, historical data indicates that air quality has been within established standards and considered good.

Soils and Prime Farmland

Based on soil survey information published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (1992), Wythe County exhibits six general soil units that share a distinctive pattern of composition, relief and drainage. These six units are described below:

- Frederick-Hagerstown - These soils are typically found the Great Valley of Virginia and account for approximately 31 percent of the soils in Wythe County. They are very deep, well-drained and permeable soils found on uplands. Most of these soils have been cleared for cultivated crops, pasture, or development. Slope and erosion are the main limitations of this soil type.
- Chiswell-Groseclose-Litz - These soils are typically found in the Great Valley of Virginia and comprise approximately 31 percent of soils in Wythe County. These soils are well-drained and can be shallow to deep, sloping, and include a high content of fragmented rock. They have limitations for cultivated crops because of their slope, water capacity, and erosion potential and are mostly suitable for hardwood tree growth. However, in Wythe County, a good portion of these soils on southern facing slopes have been cleared for cultivated crops.
- Jefferson-Weikert-Berks - These soils found in the Alleghany Mountains account for about 13 percent of the soils in Wythe County. Most of these soils are woodland soils that support hardwoods. These soils are shallow to deep and found on slopes with a loamy subsoil and high content of rock fragments. These soils are most suited for trees, rather than for cultivated crops, because of their slope, water capacity, low fertility, and erosion potential.



Insert map of Flood Hazard Floodplain areas + blank back page

Flood Hazard Areas



-
- Shottower-Austinville-Frederick – These soils are typically found in the Great Valley and represent about 13 percent of the soils in Wythe County. They are very deep, gently to steeply sloping with a clayey subsoil. Most of the acreage has been cleared and is used for cultivated crops, pasture, or hay. Those areas that have not yet been cleared have steep slopes or rock outcrops.
 - Mateneflat - These soils are found on Lick Mountain and account for about 10 percent of the soils in Wythe County. They consist of very deep, sloping to steep soils, well drained, and stony. They are not well suited for cultivated crops. Most of the land in the County exhibiting this soil unit is wooded (both hardwood and pine).
 - Sylvatus-Jefferson-Sylco – These soils are soils found in the Blue Ridge Province and comprise about 2 percent of the soils in Wythe County. These soils range from shallow to very deep and have a loamy subsoil and a high content of rock. Most of the acreage in Wythe County is woodland (hardwood and pine). They are generally unsuitable for cultivated crops because of their slope, water capacity, low fertility, and high erosion potential.

Prime farmland is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as being land with best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. The natural resource is recognized as a significant environmental feature and typically, is considered for conservation and protection by federal, state, and local authorities in managing land use and development. A map of the prime farmland soils in Wythe County is provided on the following page.

Conservation Lands

Wythe County hosts many protected natural areas that are under the ownership or oversight of multiple State, Federal and local entities, such as the Jefferson National Forest, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, and the Town of Wytheville. In addition, conservation easements exist throughout the County on private property that are managed by various conservation entities in the Commonwealth. A map of the land in Wythe County that are designated as managed conservation lands is provided on the following page.

Endangered Species

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources is responsible for managing threatened and endangered species in Virginia. Species are listed by the federal government as well as the state government. As of 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists 77 species in Virginia that are protected under the Endangered Species Act. These include fish, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, birds, mammals, and plants.

The 2015 *Virginia Wildlife Action Plan* prepared by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries notes that there are 167 species needing conservation in Virginia that occur in the Mount Rogers Planning Region. Some of those priority conservation species in the region include the greenfin darter, incurved cave isopod, purple Lilliput, fatlips minnow, Blue Ridge two-lined salamander, flat button snail, red crossbill, and Carolina northern flying squirrel. Maintenance of important habitats is key to survival of the species.



Insert map of Prime Farmland + blank back page

Prime Farmland



Insert map of Conservation Lands + blank back page

Conservation Land



NATURAL RESOURCES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The natural features and resources of Wythe County contribute significantly to the overall quality of life and scenic environs for residents. These features sustain the environmental quality of the region and are fundamental factors that lure visitors and business. Some recommendations for protecting and managing natural resources include:

- Ensure careful maintenance and management of the agricultural and forestal lands and surface waters. Encourage development in defined areas to maintain these resources.
- Focus agriculture and development in areas that best support these uses. Certain soils have limitations for building site development and sanitary facilities (generally those on steep slopes, with a shallow subsoil, or high in clay content). Karst topography exists in Wythe County and can be a challenge.
- Plan for and proactively address continuing change in climate, as it will likely be a challenge that can affect water quality, vegetation, and habitat.
- Encourage protection of conservation lands and manage development to control sprawl to help minimize the growth impacts and encourage the most productive use of agricultural lands.



4.4.2 CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Wythe County boasts a wealth of cultural and historic resources. Created from Montgomery County and established in 1790, Wythe County was named in honor of George Wythe, the first Virginian signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Wythe County has a rich history that predates its 1790 formation. Historians have recorded early Native American settlements, as well as colonial era frontier settlements in the county. In the 1750s the region was the western frontier. European settlers were attracted by its fertile farmlands and came to the area along long-established migration routes, including the Great Wagon Road (from Pennsylvania through the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke) west to the Wilderness Road (from Montgomery County west to Tennessee and Kentucky).

The history and architecture of Wythe County reflect the traditions of these farm settlers and the early industries associated with mineral deposits in the region. Agriculture, livestock, and the mining of lead, iron, zinc, and manganese have played significant roles in development of the County which are evident in the historic farms, grist mills, and early industrial structures and mines.

National and State Register Properties

Wythe County has twenty-two properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Listed properties include houses, churches, cemeteries, farms, mills, an iron furnace, a train depot, archaeological sites, and two historic districts: Downtown Wytheville and Foster Falls. A brief description of these properties is included on the following pages, along with a map showing their location.

In addition to those properties listed on the National Register, two other areas – Rural Retreat Historic District and Huddle Farm near Speedwell - have been determined to be eligible for listing by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. A formal nomination for those areas has not been prepared.



Insert Historic Resources Map + blank back page

Historic Resources



Cornett Archaeological Site is a prehistoric archaeological site in southern Wythe County. The oval-shaped site is less than 5 acres and contains extensive cultural debris that has been significant in ceramic studies for Southwest Virginia and neighboring areas to the south. The site is also important for studying demography, subsistence, community organization, and settlement patterns in the region during the Late Woodland Period.



Cornett Archaeological Site. VDHR.

Crockett's Cove Presbyterian Church was built in 1858 and is the oldest surviving church in Wythe County. The simple brick church is typical of country Presbyterian meetinghouses, which emphasize function over ornament. It is a vernacular interpretation of the Greek Revival style. The church was used as a Union hospital during the Battle of Cove Mountain in 1864.



Crockett's Cove Presbyterian Church. VDHR.

Fort Chiswell Mansion dates to 1840 when the McGavock brothers, early settlers of Wythe County, built this impressive brick house on a bluff overlooking the Fort Chiswell settlement. It is designed in the Classical Revival style and features a two-story portico supported by Greek Doric columns, pairs of large, corbeled chimneys, and Palladian windows with tracery. A smokehouse and kitchen are also on the property.



Fort Chiswell Mansion. VDHR.

Fort Chiswell Site is an archaeological complex comprising the historic remains of a succession of settlements in the 18th century and prehistoric remains from the Middle Archaic Period. The 18th century remains include ca. 1752 chimney bases from two log cabins and evidence of an English military outpost established under Col. William Byrd III in 1760 during the French and Indian War.



Fort Chiswell Site. VDHR.

Foster Falls Historic District is located within the New River Trail State Park and encompasses the commercial and industrial area of a former farming village that grew quickly after the discovery of iron ore nearby and the construction of an iron furnace in 1881. The furnace ran until 1914 and was the last of the cold-blast, charcoal-fueled furnaces to operate in the region. At its peak, the village of Foster Falls boasted a hotel, a post office, gristmill and sawmill, general store, distillery, and about 100 houses, including a row of 27 company houses.



Foster Falls Historic District. VDHR.

Maj. David Graham House is an eclectic house representing the evolution of architectural styles from the mid- to late-20th century in Southwest Virginia. Owned by the locally prominent Graham family until 1944, the house features elements illustrating the Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles. The estate features nine outbuildings.



Maj. David Graham House. VDHR.

Graham's Forge Mill is a ca. 1890 mill complex with a remarkable level of architectural integrity. The five-story frame building that served as the flourmill was the nexus of the milling operation with ancillary buildings, such as a smokehouse and a grain storage facility.



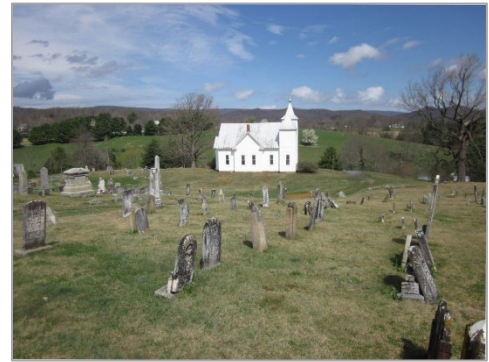
Graham's Forge Mill. VDHR.

Haller-Gibboney Rock House is a ca. 1823 stone house located in Wytheville. The house is notable as the best-preserved example of the stone houses built by settlers in the late-18th and early-19th centuries in Wythe County. These settlers used local limestone to build dwellings influenced by the Federal style.



Haller-Gibboney Rock House. VDHR.

Kimberling Lutheran Cemetery contains a significant collection of traditional Germanic gravestones dating from 1800 to 1850. The cemetery is a tangible expression of the early German settlers in Wythe County. The 1913 church is the third church building at this site.



Kimberling Lutheran Cemetery. VDHR.

Loretto is a ca. 1852 house in Wytheville that served as the home of several prominent families from the mid-19th century through 1992. The dwelling is the result of three building campaigns and represents the Greek Revival, Classical Revival, and Second Empire styles. The house features a mansard roof, Doric portico, and a portecochere. There are several historic outbuildings on the property.



Loretto. VDHR.

Martin Site is an archaeological site on the banks of the New River. It is a Native American site from the Late Woodland Period. Excavations determined that a Native American village, likely comprising a collection of domelike wigwams surrounded by a palisade, was located on this site. There is also indication of earlier settlements underneath the Native American village remains.



Martin Site. VDHR.

McGavock Family Cemetery is a family cemetery that comprises an impressive assemblage of 19th-century funerary art. The cemetery belonged to the prominent McGavock family, one of the earliest pioneer families in Wythe County. The collection of 15 Germanic gravestones were created by Laurence Krone, the preeminent Germanic carver in Southwest Virginia.



McGavock Family Cemetery. VDHR.

Raven Cliff Furnace, constructed ca. 1897, is located on the west bank of Cripple Creek, within the Jefferson National Forest. The trapezoidal iron furnace is constructed of local limestone and sandstone. The furnace was rebuilt several times over the 19th century.



Raven Cliff Furnace. VDHR.

Reed Creek Mill is a 4.8-acre mill complex that comprises several historic resources including a ca. 1902 gristmill, mill dam, head race, tail race, and a storage warehouse. The mill was the largest economic driver for the rural community of Reed Creek throughout the 20th century, producing flour, buckwheat, and cattle feed.



Reed Creek Mill. VDHR.

Rural Retreat Depot, built ca. 1870, is one of the oldest extant buildings associated with the railroad in Virginia. As an example of the Italianate style, this frame building features bracketed eaves, vertical board-and-batten siding with scalloped trim, and segmental-arched windows and doors.



Rural Retreat Depot. VDHR.

Sanders Farm, located near Foster Falls, is an approximately 170-acre farm encompassing a large collection of domestic, agricultural, and industrial resources. The primary building is the ca. 1880 brick farmhouse designed in the Victorian style. There are 24 outbuildings on the property including a stone springhouse, brick servants' quarters, log and frame farm buildings, and a cinder block store.



Sanders Farm. VDHR.

Shot Tower is a stone tower built by Thomas Jackson on a bluff overlooking the New River ca. 1807. The tower was used to manufacture ammunition for firearms used by frontier settlers. As one of few surviving resources of its kind, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation owns it and operates it as an interpretive site within Shot Tower State Park. Shot Tower was designated a Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 1981.



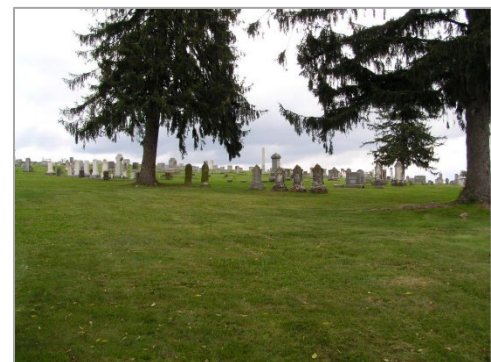
Shot Tower. VDHR.

St. John's Episcopal Church, an 1857 Episcopal church, is a vernacular expression of the Greek and Roman Revival styles. The mission of the Virginia Episcopal Church after the Civil War was to serve black communicants. St. John's Episcopal Church in Wytheville is significant for its role in offering Sunday School classes to black citizens as well as engaging a black minister to preach a sermon to the white congregation.



St. John's Episcopal Church. VDHR.

St. John's Lutheran Church and Cemetery is an 1845 church clad with weatherboards and simple in design and form. The cemetery contains a collection of German-style gravestones designed by Laurence Krone. The most significant of Krone's workmanship is the 1826 tomb for George Flohr, the first pastor for the Lutheran congregation. This church also served as the mother church for other Lutheran congregations in the area.



St. John's Lutheran Church & Cemetery. VDHR.

Wythe County Poorhouse Farm was the second poor farm established in Wythe County. This 340-acre farm was located northeast of Wytheville. The farm operated from 1825 to 1957 and is the only one of its kind remaining in the county. The nominated site comprises 9.09 acres as the rest of the land was subdivided and sold off by Wythe County when the poor farm closed. This smaller property includes the core of the original farm with the overseer's house, eight pauper dwellings, and five outbuildings.



Wythe County Poorhouse Farm. VDHR.

Wytheville Historic District is centrally located in the town of Wytheville and comprises the commercial, civic, institutional, and residential buildings that contributed to the growth of Wytheville as the largest town in Wythe County and its county seat. The district includes 293 resources, which are primarily commercial or residential building. The period of significance for the district extends from 1790 to 1944.



Wytheville Historic District. VDHR.

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery is located in southwestern Wythe County. The cemetery encompasses approximately between 250 to 300 gravestones, the most significant of which are the well-preserved 42 Germanic stones. These stones are thick slabs of sandstone with carvings on both sides and the edges of the stones. The existing brick church on the site was constructed 1940 and replaced an earlier frame building erected in 1856.



Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery. VDHR.

Other Significant Historic Resources

In 2013, William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research completed a *Comprehensive Survey Report: Survey of Architectural Resources in Wythe County, Virginia*. The study documented 376 resources at the reconnaissance level (exterior documentation only). The study identified the following properties and/or districts as potentially eligible for listing on the National Register.

- W.L. Arrington Stone House/Graystone (Wytheville)
- Corinth School (Blacklick)
- Stoots Corner Convenience Store
- Quaker Meeting House (Speedwell)
- Barn, Saint Peters Road (Speedwell)
- Carpenter's Grocery (Foster Falls)
- Charity Primitive Baptist Church (Foster Falls)
- House, 1078 Ramsey Mountain Road (Max Meadows)
- House, 3096 Major Grahams Road (Max Meadows)
- Huddle Farm (Cripple Creek, Speedwell)
- House, 468 Ward Branch Road (Speedwell)
- Hotel Sprinkle (Rural Retreat)
- Rural Retreat Historic District
- Ivanhoe Historic District
- Newtown Historic District
- Max Meadows Historic District

Preservation Tools and Partners

The Town of Wytheville has adopted a local historic preservation ordinance to protect its Downtown District. Wytheville's Downtown District. A Board of Architectural Review uses design review guidelines to review erection, renovation, modification, restoration, or demolition of buildings within the Downtown District.

Wythe County has several active community organizations that promote awareness and preservation of cultural and historic resources.

- Wythe County Historical Society - Founded in 1970, the historical society is active in preservation, collection, and interpretation of Wythe County history. Its mission is to educate the public through access to programming, archival materials, and physical artifacts. The Historical Society helps to manage two museums in Wytheville: the Haller-Gibboney House and the Thomas J. Boyd Museum.
- The Wythe County Genealogical and Historical Association - The Wythe County Genealogical and Historical Association operates a library in Wytheville that hosts a vast collection of historic materials related to Southwest Virginia history. The collection includes photos, books, and records.



-
- Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Foundation and Museum - The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Foundation and Museum in downtown Wytheville. Edith Bolling Wilson was First Lady to President Woodrow Wilson. She was born and raised in Wytheville. The museum interprets her role in the White House, particularly her involvement in presidential duties.

HISTORIC RESOURCES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Wythe County is fortunate to have a collection of cultural and historic resources worthy of preservation. While many resources were identified in the 2013 historic survey, a future survey of historic resources can help identify more modern resources and recognize thematic contexts of historic significance (i.e., landscapes and viewsheds, specialized commerce, etc.).

In addition, steps should be taken to follow up on the 2013 study recommendations to further evaluate and nominate the 16 eligible historic resources to the National Register of Historic Places. These properties and districts could benefit culturally and financially from listing and improvements facilitated by historic rehabilitation tax credits (20% federal and 25% state tax credits for qualifying projects completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation). The Virginia Department of Historic Resources routinely assists localities in survey and nomination activities through their Survey and Planning Cost Share Grant Program.

Heritage tourism offers excellent opportunities to raise awareness of historic and cultural resources. Wythe County could facilitate increased tourism programming by collaborating with preservation partners and owners of historically significant properties to develop tours and educational programs for residents and visitors. For example, thematic tours and programs could be developed around mining heritage or historic farms. Additional collaborative heritage tourism opportunities exist with regional initiatives such as The Wilderness Road: Virginia's Heritage Migration Route, The New River Trail, The Crooked Road, The Artisan Trails of Southwest Virginia, and interpretive programming at Foster Falls State Park.



4.5 Land Use and Development

Wythe County hosts an amazing inventory of natural resources, historic properties, scenic landscapes, productive agricultural lands, authentic recreational assets, impressive towns, and successful industrial businesses. The County is well positioned in Southwest Virginia for future growth with two interstate highways and an established infrastructure for public utilities. How Wythe County manages development and land assets over the next 10-20 years will have a dramatic impact on the economy of the County and the special quality of life enjoyed by residents, visitors, and businesses. Proactive planning and effective guidance for land use and development are critical for the future.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing Land Use

Much of the land in Wythe County contains forests, pastures, and cultivated fields. Only a small portion of the County is developed for business, towns, or industrial land. The table below provides an overview of the existing land cover of Wythe County as of 2019. A map showing the land cover is presented on the following page.

Land Cover Type	Area (Acres)	County Land Area
Forests	156,169	52.5 %
Pasture Land	109,988	37.0 %
Developed Land	18,913	6.4 %
Shrub Land	6,654	2.2 %
Cultivated Cropland	4,668	1.6 %
Open Water	829	0.3 %
Wetlands	224	< 0.1 %
Total	297,445	100 %

Source: U.S.G.S National Land Cover Dataset, 2019



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Land Cover



Managing Land Development

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, land use and development are typically guided by the long-range comprehensive plan (sets the vision and goals and provides direction for managing lands within the jurisdiction) and adopted land development regulations (zoning and subdivision codes establish rules for how and where development occurs). Wythe County is one of three counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia that does not have an adopted zoning ordinance to manage land development. Of the six surrounding rural counties – Pulaski, Bland, Tazewell, Smyth, Grayson, and Carroll – all but Tazewell County have adopted zoning.

Wythe County has successfully adopted other regulations that have been beneficial in guiding development. These ordinances are described in the table below.

Ordinance	Overview of Regulation
Subdivision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adopted 2012 ▪ Establishes standards and procedures for new subdivisions ▪ County review of streets, utilities, surface drainage, lot sizes and arrangement, land suitability (floodplains, adverse soils, karst, etc.) ▪ Major subdivisions, minor subdivisions, family subdivisions, townhouse subdivisions (area, density, setbacks, parking, ▪ Lot sizes: 10,000-25,000 sf minimum depending on availability of public utilities ▪ Lot frontages: public street frontages required - 100 feet typical ▪ Lot shape, configuration, orientation reviewed ▪ Building setback lines established from streets – 35 feet front; 10 feet side and back ▪ major subdivision >20 acres require public common areas 1-5 acres
Manufactured Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adopted 2002 ▪ Regulates the development of manufactured home parks and placement of individual manufactured homes (stand) ▪ Reviews suitability of land, environment, natural features, neighborhood, recreational use needs (25 lots or more), utilities, streets, lot size (min. 6,000 sf + 60 feet wide), setback from public road (min. 35 feet)
Erosion and Sediment Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Established 2007 ▪ Establishes requirements for control of soil erosion and runoff during land disturbing activities 10,000 sf or more ▪ Standards per Code of Virginia
Flood Plain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulates uses, activities and development in flood prone areas (floodway, 100-year floodplain as established by FEMA) ▪ Establishes standards for development in these areas



Ordinance	Overview of Regulation
Solid Waste Facility Siting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishes siting requirements and criteria for solid waste facilities ▪ Review by Planning Commission/Board of Supervisors – suitability, impact, access, safety, etc.
Agricultural & Forestal Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishes conservation districts for significant agricultural or forestal areas valued for natural and ecological resources for the purposes of protection and enhancement ▪ District terms of 10 years (
Airport Safety Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adopted 1991 ▪ Prevents structures that obstruct airport airspace operations, applies to nearby properties and towers > 50 feet ▪ Mountain Empire Airport / Smyth-Wythe Airport Commission
Nuisances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Various ordinances adopted to address nuisances e.g., noise, sexually oriented adult businesses, unsafe buildings, debris, etc.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Future Land Use

The comprehensive plan serves as a guide for future land development and growth. Typically, the plan includes a discussion of applicable land use types desired for the future and an accompanying map that depicts areas for development of those types of land uses. These elements become the foundation for updating land development regulations and for making decisions on public investments and land zoning changes.

Future Land Use Categories

The Future Land Use Categories recommended for 2040 are discussed in the table on the following pages. These general categories are intended to provide direction for managing land uses, identifying important development features, and defining development intensity.

Future Land Use Categories, Wythe County 2040

Conservation

Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This land use category provides for existing natural areas designated for conservation and managed by federal, state, or other entities. These areas include: Jefferson National Forest, Big Survey, private lands under conservation easement (agency oversight), and lands in Agricultural and Forestal Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undeveloped ▪ Natural areas ▪ Agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forested lands ▪ Rural, natural landscapes ▪ Passive outdoor recreation features (hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, etc.) ▪ Farmlands of significant value ▪ Historic landscapes ▪ Wildlife management

Agriculture

Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This category provides for lands used primarily for agriculture and forestry. It includes rural, low-density residential uses typically associated with this type of activity. Typically, these rural areas are without public infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very large lots ▪ 10+ acres typical, 5 acres minimum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rural agricultural landscapes ▪ Limited public services and distant public facilities ▪ Residential development is associated with farming or large lot homesteads

Residential, Low Density

Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This land use category provides for suburban residential land uses in areas serviced by public utilities or central systems. Typical land uses may include single-family homes, two-family dwellings, manufactured homes, and accessory dwellings. [Note: Multi-family development should be in medium-density residential areas.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1+ acre lots, typical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ These residential areas are serviced by public utilities or central systems. ▪ These areas are in close to the more developed areas of Wythe County (towns, established communities). ▪ Conservation subdivisions that preserve environmental or agricultural features may be applicable in designated areas where public utilities are available.

Residential, Medium Density

Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This land use category provides for more concentrated residential development in established areas that can accommodate growth, are serviced with public utility systems, and accessible to public facilities and community services. Land uses may include single-family homes, accessory dwellings, two-family homes, multi-family development (apartments, townhouses, condominiums), and mixed residential development above small commercial uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small to medium lots ▪ 15,000-30,000 sf lots typ. SF ▪ 2-4 dwelling units/acre SF ▪ 6-12 dwelling units/acre MF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Residential neighborhoods or areas with access to commercial centers ▪ Available public utilities and services ▪ Connected roads, sidewalks, trails ▪ Common community green space ▪ Attractive community landscaping and signage ▪ Managed pavement and parking



Commercial Corridor Business		
Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This land use category provides for business development along major transportation corridors. Typical land uses may include grocery stores, lodging, convenience/gas stations, offices, restaurants, and other similar commercial uses that typically would be associated with a primary highway. This category could include a “big box” store with special provisions for site development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated nodes of development along the corridor, rather than strip development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscaped corridors and entrances Managed site development and paving, signage, access, and attractive building features Pedestrian circulation and connections where applicable Street frontage landscaping Consolidated entrances
Commercial, Rural Business		
Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This land use category provides for small business development in key locations to serve the surrounding rural community. These areas could be crossroads locations or strategically located along a major highway. Typical land uses may include a grocery store, convenience store, gas station, or medical office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small business lots Buildings <5,000 sf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Node development at key crossroads on major roads and highways Architectural features compatible with rural area Managed, safe access Managed signage, lighting, outside storage, parking
Corporate Business / Industrial		
Description Land Uses	Density/Intensity	Development Character
This land use category provides for large-scale business development, industry, or major facilities with many employees. Typical land uses may include corporate offices, warehousing and distribution facilities, processing, manufacturing and assembly operations, large utility facilities, and planned business and industrial parks. Industrial operations may be segregated depending on use type and compatibility with other adjacent uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large areas designated for industry and corporate buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned business park/campus development Public utilities, roads, railroad access Landscaped entrances, common green spaces Screened operations areas, loading, employee parking, storage lots Coordinated signage, lighting, access points Business support services on site

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map developed for Connect Wythe 2040 is shown on the following page. This map serves as a general reference for guiding future land development in Wythe County. Key features of the Future Land Use Map are:

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- Conservation – These areas represent a considerable percentage of the existing and future land use in Wythe County. They include Federal and State lands, as well as properties under a conservation easement or within an established agricultural and forestal district.
 - Agriculture – These areas also represent a considerable percentage of the existing and future land use in Wythe County. Agriculture and forestry are major economic drivers for the County. Lands that are important to these industries should be sustained for agricultural production. Rural residential development associated with farming is very appropriate for these areas; however, scattered residential development and major residential subdivisions should be reserved for areas closer to developed communities.
 - Residential, Low Density – These areas surround the more populated areas of Wythe County. They are closer to available public utilities and near more urbanized centers with services and facilities. These areas are on the outskirts of Wytheville, Rural Retreat, Max Meadows, Fort Chiswell, and in crossroad communities like Speedwell.
 - Residential, Medium Density – These areas are adjacent to developed towns. They have access to public utilities, major transportation corridors, and are easily accessible to public services, facilities, and small businesses, as well as public transportation. These areas are on the periphery of established communities like Wytheville, Rural Retreat, Austinville, Max Meadows, and Fort Chiswell.
 - Commercial Corridor Business – These areas are adjacent to major highways that transverse Wythe County. These are established business corridors along U.S. Route 11, U.S. Route 52, and various interstate exits.
 - Commercial, Rural Business – These areas are located within established centers of rural communities usually at a common crossroads. These areas provide needed commercial services and products to rural residents that live in outlying areas. These areas are shown in Speedwell, Foster Falls Exit 24, add more? Ivanhoe, Austinville, Grahams Forge?
 - Corporate Business/Industry – These areas are in close proximity to major transportation corridors and central population areas (with available housing and services). They are planned business and industrial parks. In 2022, there are four established parks for industry in Wythe County – Rural Retreat, Progress Park, Ivanhoe, and Fairview.
 - Public – These areas are large parcels of publicly held lands that host public facilities or planned facilities – parks, landfill, vacant land for development.



Insert Future Land Use Map + blank back page

Future Land Use



Maintaining Rural Character and Managing Development

During the community survey and discussions with stakeholders, maintaining the rural character of Wythe County and its agricultural lands consistently received support. The rural character of the County is extremely important to the quality of life associated with living in Wythe County and the region. In addition, it is an important factor in the continued success of agriculture as an economic engine, as well as the success of outdoor recreation experiences.

Many communities try to maintain rural character through conservation measures (dedicated easements, environmental protection regulations, agricultural/forestral districts), special zoning provisions (planned development districts, historic districts, corridor overlays), creative subdivision provisions (clustering of development to preserve environmental features), and designated growth areas (with utilities and applicable zoning parameters). Success requires concentrated public and private efforts and development density in targeted areas through long-range planning and capital improvements.

For Wythe County, the topic of local government regulation of land use and development has been controversial. Wythe County has not adopted many of the land management controls used by communities across the Commonwealth to manage development in rural areas. However, the County has been responsive in adopting specific ordinances that help manage development patterns (i.e., subdivision ordinance, mobile home park ordinance, etc.).

With continued growth, perhaps citizens will see more of a need to consider adopting a simplified zoning code for that portion of Wythe County where more intensive development is expected to occur. Such a basic code could be very beneficial in establishing development standards for properties along the major transportation corridors (interstate exits, Routes 11 and 52) and within populated centers of the County (Max Meadows, Fort Chiswell, Wytheville, etc.). Development in the more populated areas without controls will continue to be cumbersome and could result in new investment choosing to locate in undisturbed areas, or even other communities. In addition, continued scattered development throughout Wythe County, especially residential subdivisions, will negatively affect the rural character and ultimately result in increased costs to taxpayers for expected/needed public services and facilities (schools, roads, utilities, emergency services, etc.).



V. IMPLEMENTING CONNECT WYTHE 2040: Achieving the Vision

This section provides an overview of recommendations, strategies, and potential action projects to engage public and private partners in implementing *Connect Wythe 2040*. There must be many partners committed to working toward future goals. These include both public and private interests. Local government does not have the financial resources or the staffing to take on all of the issues and challenges discussed in this plan; regional partnerships and leadership are essential. Wythe County Officials can guide public investment and land development decisions, but developers, citizens, and private interests must assist in furthering the strategies identified herein. Collaboration with Town officials of Rural Retreat and Wytheville, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and several State and Federal agencies will be essential in moving the plan forward.

5.1 Opportunity Action Projects

In developing *Connect Wythe 2040*, there were many potential projects identified to move Wythe County toward achieving the future vision and goals for positive growth and development. These projects can jump-start implementation and engage important partners. They are identified and discussed in this plan as “potential action projects.” Some of these initiatives are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Housing

Investment in housing is critical to meeting the future needs of existing residents and attracting new residents. Wythe County must provide leadership and facilitate collaborative partnerships with private developers and investors to rehabilitate existing structures and build new housing options in strategic, accessible locations within the County. This could be done through direct outreach and recruitment, financial incentives for rehabilitation, streamlined permitting processes, and sharing exemplary models from other communities. Investment should be guided to populated communities like Wytheville, Max Meadows, and Fort Chiswell. This plan includes several suggested housing opportunities for enhancing the existing neighborhood fabric of established communities. It also recommends a more detailed housing assessment to understand specific housing needs.

Recreation

The natural, recreational, and historic resources of Wythe County offer tremendous potential for expanded heritage and recreational tourism.

- Rural Retreat Lake is an underutilized asset that can be energized and expanded to become a great event space for local residents and a regional destination.
- The blueway corridors of Reed Creek, Cripple Creek, and the New River offer exceptional opportunities for increased outdoor recreation activities that can be effectively managed through collaboration with State agencies, private providers, and property owners.



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- The extensive natural areas in Wythe County offer many opportunities for hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, and scenic experiences. Collaboration among partners can provide guidance for programming, use, and marketing.
 - The existing New River Trail State Park and the Shot Tower can provide leverage for increased visitation to other recreational amenities within Wythe County.

Economic Development

Agriculture has been the foundation of economic development in Wythe County, and it continues to serve a significant role in the local and regional economy. This needs to be celebrated by the community and promoted to bridge understanding and sensitivity with respect to the significance of farming and care of agricultural lands. Developing a focused agricultural strategy will help bridge communication and build collaboration among economic partners.

Public Infrastructure

With continued economic growth, investment in public infrastructure is essential. The 2021 *Water and Wastewater Study for Wythe County* establishes an extensive list of recommended infrastructure improvements for consideration and prioritization. In addition, the 2020 *Broadband Study for Wythe County* established recommendations for providing broadband to underserved areas of the County. Finally, planned improvements to Interstate 81 and 77 and some of the exits are underway. Fortunately, all these infrastructure initiatives have successfully attracted funding for initial projects. These are all significant undertakings that require continued perseverance and attention, especially with respect to pursuing financial assistance opportunities.

Downtown Revitalization

The Towns of Wytheville and Rural Retreat have undertaken impressive downtown revitalization efforts in recent years. Continued investment in these unique small towns will be beneficial to the community, the County, and the region. They offer a centralized location for small business in a pedestrian-friendly setting with connected streets, public facilities, and a diversity of services.

5.2 Implementation Matrix

An implementation matrix, attached as **Appendix B**, provides recommended public policies and strategies to further the implementation of *Connect Wythe 2040*. The matrix is intended to be used a guide and management tool to help monitor and implement the long-term goals for the County. The matrix it is not a public directive; it is a tool for developing and updating annual work programs. Timeframes are suggested, but are meant to be flexible depending on priorities, available funding, and leadership from both the public and private sectors. Successful implementation of this plan and potential action projects will require multiple partners, collaborative discussion, and participative resources.

[The Implementation Matrix is in development. It is not included with this Draft Plan.]

