

Grayson County Virginia

# Comprehensive Plan

2018



This planning document was prepared by the Grayson County Planning Commission, the Grayson County Board of Supervisors, and the Citizens of the Grayson County. The background research, writing, and assembly of the document were completed by County staff and staff of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission.



*A different side of Virginia*



## **Acknowledgements**

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This plan does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation, rather a vision for the future of Grayson County.

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Mount Rogers Planning District Commission



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# Chapter One: Introduction

## Background and Purpose of Plan

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The County's comprehensive plan is an official public document adopted by Board of Supervisors. The plan is to be used as a long-term guide for land use decisions related to growth and development and to assist the County in determining when and where new public facilities and improvements are needed. Recommendations of the comprehensive plan are typically general and long-range to outline a vision of the County over a 20 –year period.

## Legal Basis for the Plan

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The comprehensive plan was developed in accordance with Title 15.2 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended. The local planning commission is authorized to prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction. Every governing body is required to adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction. The Plan is to be general in nature and designate the general location, character, and extent of public facilities.

## Updating the Plan

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### Annual Report

The Grayson County Planning Commission recommends conducting an annual review of the comprehensive plan in coordination with the annual budget, as well as other financial, planning and regulatory tools.

### Five-Year Updates

The Code of Virginia requires that the comprehensive plan be reviewed at least every five years.

### Amendments

As with any document, amendments may be needed over time depending on new initiatives, more detailed planning, or changes in governmental policy. Examples of possible future amendments include neighborhood plans, transportation improvement plans, housing plans, parks plans, or other strategic or Master plans.





### **Plan Implementation**

The plan can be implemented through a variety of regulatory and financial tools. Generally, comprehensive plans are implemented primarily through the Zoning Ordinance, Operating Budget, Capital Improvements Plan, and Master Plans for specific areas.

### **Understanding and Using the Plan**

Comprehensive planning is a process that determines community goals and aspirations in terms of community development. The outcome of comprehensive planning is the Comprehensive Plan, which dictates public policy in terms of transportation, utilities, land use, recreation, economy and housing. The Comprehensive plan encompasses the entire county, a broad range of topics, and covers a long-term time horizon.

The Comprehensive Plan can be a tool for planning the future growth of the local community. The document is official in nature, meaning it is designed to be adopted by the governing body (Grayson County Board of Supervisors). The document can then serve as a policy guide to decisions about community development.

The Plan can be used to assist the governing body, committees, and County staff with strategic planning, visioning and project development. The Plan may also be used for solicitation of new business and industrial development.



## Chapter Two: History

### Introduction

The rich history of Grayson County includes hundreds of families and dozens of communities. These pages are a brief summary of the major events that have occurred since the county's inception over the last two hundred years<sup>1</sup>. More information about the history of Grayson County can be found in the resources below:

- Grayson County Historical Society-  
<http://www.graysonvahistsoc.com/index.html>
- Grayson County Virginia Heritage Foundation, Inc -  
<http://www.graysonheritage.org/>
- Grayson County History -  
<http://www.graysoncountyva.com/history-of-grayson>
- Historical Markers -  
<http://www.markerhistory.com/tag/grayson-county/>
- Grayson County A History in Words and Pictures. Grayson County Historical Society, 1976.
- Bicentennial Heritage Grayson County, Virginia 1793. 1908 Courthouse Foundation, 1995.
- New River Notes -  
[http://www.newrivernotes.com/grayson\\_index.htm](http://www.newrivernotes.com/grayson_index.htm)

### Grayson County Pre-1800

The first inhabitants of Grayson County were believed to be Native Americans known as Xualans and/or Mohetan Indians, who may have been conquered by the Iroquois, Cherokee or Shawnee who used this area as hunting grounds. The last known settlement of Native Americans lived peacefully near the New River at Mouth of Wilson during the 1850s.

European explorers traveled throughout Southwestern Virginia, starting with DeSoto in 1540, Abraham Wood (Woods River now the New River was named for) in 1653 and later the Jefferson/Frye surveying expedition in 1751, traveled through Grayson County expanding the boundaries of European exploration and preparing the way for western expansion.



Figure 1-3: Courthouse at Oldtown -1800s



Figure 1-3: Historic 1908 Courthouse- Independence



Figure 1-3: Grayson County Courthouse -Today

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Planning & Community Development worked with members of the Grayson County Historical Society & The Historic 1908 Courthouse Foundation to develop the History Chapter for the 2013 Comprehensive Plan. Every attempt was made to factually portray the history of the Grayson County.



1750 - 1780s -The Colonial Governor issued land grants which were later sold to the pioneers who settled here. The first settlers included the Hales of Elk Creek who came over Iron Mountain, William Bourne and family who settled in the Spring Valley area, Capt. John Cox and Lieut. David Cox who set up a fort on Peach Bottom Creek/New River and the Enoch Osborne Fort near Bridle Creek. Some of these pioneers participated in the French/Indian War and later in the Revolutionary War. Historical evidence of Revolutionary War battles between settlers and Tory's in what is now Baywood (Round Meadows) and Fairview (The Glades) show us that Grayson County was part of our young country's efforts to break free from European dominance.

The immigrants came from the wagon road (current I-81, Hwy 11), followed the New River or came over Iron Mountain from Wythe County, some arrived here from the Yadkin Road which was a corridor (Roanoke - North Carolina) through the mountain gaps. Those who made it into the county were true pioneers as the major wagon roads were left behind and the paths into the county were traveled with pack animals carrying the few items needed to start new homesteads in Grayson County.

1787- The first industry was established by Matthew Dickey at the Falls of Peach Bottom Creek. Point Hope Furnace, an iron furnace and forge which was essential to the settlers for supplies began operation there, remnants of which can still be seen at "the falls" on Powerhouse Road. The first road order of the County was issued to connect this enterprise to the community of Blair's (now known as Cliffview). William Bourne becomes the owner of the Furnace in 1797. The grist and saw mill, mine and stores of this operation were a huge asset to the formation of Grayson County.

1792- Grayson County was formed out of Wythe County and officially became its own county in 1793 when the first court is held in William Bourne's barn on the Knob Fork of the New River. In 1794, the new log courthouse is built in Greenville (Old Town), where a brick courthouse replaced it in 1811 and again the courthouse was rebuilt of brick at the same site in 1838.

Grayson County is named for William Grayson, who was one of the first two U.S. Senators from Virginia.

Before 1800, over 100 families had settled in Grayson County. These were self-sufficient pioneer families who made, built, grew or bartered for everything they owned.

## Grayson County 1800-1900

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The year is 1800 and approximately 100 families are living in Grayson County, the transition from pioneer to permanent settlements had begun. Communities have developed with schools, churches, post-offices, banks and general stores throughout the county. A mill was found on just about every major stream in the County. Communities formed near these waterways and also at major transportation routes or ferries/fords across the New River. Fox Creek had a 3-story grain/flour mill and a saw mill, Reavis had a rolling mill, Gordon's Woolen Mill on Meadow Creek, and the mill at Brush Creek were in operation. In 1844, a textile mill was



established on Wilson Creek by Col. Fields J. McMillian. Various mills were also found on Elk, Wilson, Saddle and Peach Bottom Creeks.

Church and faith were central to the communities of Grayson County and is witnessed today by the many churches that dot the landscape. The Methodist circuit rider Francis Asbury visited the area in the late 1700s' and his work combined with the faith of many denominations spurred church development at a phenomenal rate during this time period. Old Bethel Church in 1812, Mt Zion UMC in 1831, Cox's Chapel UMC in 1832; and many more were built throughout the 1800s, along with places of worship for Lutherans, Baptists, Quakers, Dunkards and more.

The county saw healthy population growth during this century. Carroll County separated from Grayson County to form its own County in 1842. As a result of this shift in county lines, the leaders decided to relocate the county seat more central to the county. The Town of Independence developed, named after "the Independents" who won the new location of the county seat, Independence, VA, established in 1850.

In 1860, the slave schedule recorded a total of 560 slaves in Grayson County. Records show that slavery was not the main issue driving local secession efforts that led up to the Civil War. In fact, some claim that up until the first shots were fired in South Carolina the county had yet to formally support Virginia's decision to secede from the Union. When the war began in 1861 hardships overcame the county. While no major battles were fought here, the impact of labor shortages, union raids for provisions, and supply shortages were felt across the county. Some Grayson County men were active in Confederate Units such as the Grayson Dare Devils and the Grayson Rifles. When the war ended in 1865 Grayson County resumed its pace to develop infrastructure and communities. This century saw the development of academies and schools; Oak Hill, Bridle Creek, Elk Creek, High Point at Grant and Spring Valley just to name a few.

In 1897, Boyd's Survey Map (on display at the Historic 1908 Courthouse) was commissioned by the Grayson Board of Supervisors and accompanied a guide to the natural resources of the county. By this time the county was interested in development of the county's natural wealth and labor resources. By the late 1800s telephone lines had developed along major corridors, The Grayson Gazette and other local newspapers were established, railroads were under development, timber was being harvested on a large scale and the county was optimistic about the future.

Some would claim that the local economy was not close enough to major cities and transportation routes to keep pace with other areas of the country (Northeast and Mississippi Valley) who were rapidly expanding because of the capital resources gained during this time of growth for the entire nation. When outside interest did invest in the county during the latter part of this century and into the 1900s, these



Figure 2-4: Powerhouse falls circa 1880s, Photo courtesy of the Grayson County Historical Society



investments were often short lived and lacked long term sustainable development. Subsistence farming and a resourceful community provided for farm and family. The rapid pace of innovation and modern amenities was typical for the American life at the turn of the century.

## Grayson County 1900-1950

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1900 - 1950 would have been an exciting time to live in Grayson County. Railroads were built on both ends of the county; 1902 in Fries, in 1906 the same line was connected to Galax. In the early 1900s the railroad extended to the Troutdale area with the Marion and Rye Railroad and also in Whitetop with connections to Abingdon and West Jefferson. The rails were used for timber extraction and for shipping agricultural products out of the county. The timber extraction on the western end of the county transformed the landscape dramatically. In 1929 Fields Dam was built on the New River in Mouth of Wilson, the power was used for a woolen mill and for electricity in the Mouth of Wilson community. The communities of Fries, Galax, Troutdale, Whitetop, Mouth of Wilson, and Independence were all booming town centers due to the supply of electricity produced by hydro-electric dams and the influence of the railway along with the wages that supported off farm income in these communities. The mill town Fries was highly notable during this time period as one of the most modern communities in Southwestern Virginia. With public water and sewer, electricity, recreation and commercial activity, many people traveled to Fries for a taste of “modern life”.

In 1905, the Grayson County Board of Supervisors ordered that a new courthouse be built to meet the state standards for a fire-proof vault. As a result, the Historic 1908 Courthouse began construction in 1906 and was completed in 1908. This unique structure, preserved by the Historic 1908 Courthouse Foundation, is a surviving tribute to this time in our county’s history.

The period from 1910-1920 presented hardships with the negative effects from WWI, major floods in 1916 and 1917 impacting both Fries and Mouth of Wilson and the major flu epidemic of 1918. Effects of the Great Depression were felt in the 1930s as financial resources were scarce and migration patterns of people leaving the area looking for work and returning home to “live off the land” were felt across the county.

From the 1930s to 1950s, dairies and creameries were established, schools, churches, post offices and banks were popping up across the county and infrastructure was developing. The Byrd Act of the 1930s transferred the responsibility of roads away from the county. The Lakes to Florida road, now Hwy 21 and Hwy 58 were paved during this time period. Independence received electricity, public water and sewer in the 1930s. During this time, big screen movie theatres and automobiles were bringing the outside world to the lives of Graysonites.

This time period may also be remembered for the effect of federal projects on our local communities. The Jefferson National Forest was created, absorbing large tracts on the western edge of the county. The Civilian Conservation Corps, NYA and WPA projects created infrastructure in the national forest and in the community. The programs developed a trade school in Baywood, provided employment through construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway and other innovative initiatives. Because of these projects the Mt. Rogers School, Bridle Creek School, Grant School (Grange) and Becker Library were built.



In 1940 over 10" of rain fell in 24 hours. Major flood damage occurred across the county. In 1941 when WWII began, many citizens left the county to join the military forces or work in the factories supporting the war effort. After WWII, Grayson County experienced accelerated growth. The Grayson County Regional Library System was up and running and Grange Halls/Community Centers had formed across the county.

In the 1940s, local business leaders began small scale sewing factories in one room shops across the county. These become the foundation of the larger hosiery and textile operations yet to come. Furniture manufacturing begins in the Galax area. Grayson County continued the march toward modern life and while agricultural income was still important; wage dollars from developing industry enable discretionary spending important to the post war generation.

## Grayson County 1950-2000

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The 1950s through the 1980s was a period of growth for the county. The smaller textile and garment operations were replaced by larger operations such as Grayson Garment, Kayser Roth Hosiery, Mr. Casuals/Perry Manufacturing, Inc, Anvil Brand Inc., Grayson Millis Hosiery Mills, Hampton Knitting Mills, Klear Knit Inc., Parsons & Rives, and Washington Mill (later Fries Mill/Reigel Textiles) all together this established Grayson County as a textile manufacturing locale. Furniture manufacturing in Galax and Dairy Industries such as Foremost Dairies, Clover Creamery and later Kraft Food blossomed in the 1950s. Other industries such as Camcar Textron, Robertshaw Controls, Comp Air Kellogg, Nautilus, Darco Southern, McAllister Mills, Grayson Mountain Water, Michelin Tire developed later during this time period. The economic impact of these industries increased local wages that further supported retail and service industries across the county.

In the 1950s, agriculture production increased as mechanization and modern tractors took hold, agricultural organizations could be found in every community from Cox's Chapel to Comers Rock and the commodity prices were high enough for farm success throughout the 1950s.

In 1952, Galax became an independent city. The overall population of the county declined with the physical land that was now a part of Galax City. A significant percentage of the county's tax base was reduced because of this. Independence High School opened in 1956 ushering in the new age of school consolidation as smaller schools merged.

In 1962, Appalachian Power Company applied for the Blue Ridge Dam Project. The proposed dam was to flood 14,500 acres of the county on the New River west of Independence. After much controversy the project was abandoned in 1977. During this debate the county's land was in a state of flux as citizens didn't know whether to buy or sell and some would claim that this debate caused many long-established farms and families to relocate.

During the years 1965 - 1966 both Grayson Highlands State Park and the Mount Rogers National Recreation area were formed of lands in western Grayson, thus transferring land to the State and Federal governments



In 1977, the rail line through Whitetop was closed and in 1984 rail service was abandoned on the Fries/Galax line. Interstate I-77 opened in the mid-70s, this reduced traffic on the “Great Lakes to Florida” Highway 21, a major east/west corridor that came through Elk Creek and Independence. The loss of thru traffic was a revenue loss for local businesses and several businesses closed as a result.

In 1973, the new Grayson County library was built and shortly after in 1979 the new Grayson County Courthouse began construction and was completed in 1981. The Historic 1908 Courthouse Foundation secured the old courthouse in 1985 and has kept the building operational as a community facility to this day. In 1983/84, the Grayson County Recreation Park was completed with a swimming pool and athletic facilities for the community.

Fries and the county experienced hardship in the 1980s when the Fries Mill/Mount Vernon Mill closed in 1989 (the mill was the largest taxpayer in Grayson County). In 1989, Fries High School was consolidated with Grayson County High School. Local manufacturing began a decline in the late 80s -90s as free trade and other factors caused textile and furniture industries to close down. During this same time period, growth in the real estate market from second home and recreational lots occurred. These economic issues (high unemployment and low capital reserves) are still prevalent to this day. In general, those who can afford to live in the county enjoy the benefits of strong community and family ties, a moderate climate with bountiful natural resources and a clean and safe environment.

## The Communities of Grayson County

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The communities of Grayson County developed around transportation and resources. Transportation routes and crossroads, creeks and the New River provided natural areas for churches, schools, general stores, banks and post offices. The waters of Grayson were areas of development due to the water-powered mills, which provided essential products for business, home and farm. In general, communities formed in areas where nearby residents could travel the distance to the community center and back to the homestead in one day. As the modern automobile became prevalent, the close proximity of products and services became less



important. Today, only a handful of the original communities of Grayson County provide products and services.



Figure 2-8: Washington Mills at Fries, Virginia on the New River (Photo courtesy of the Grayson County Historical Society)



Figure 2-7: Elk Creek after the construction of the Elk Creek Training School (in the far right of photo), circa 1900 (Photo courtesy of Grayson County Historical Society)



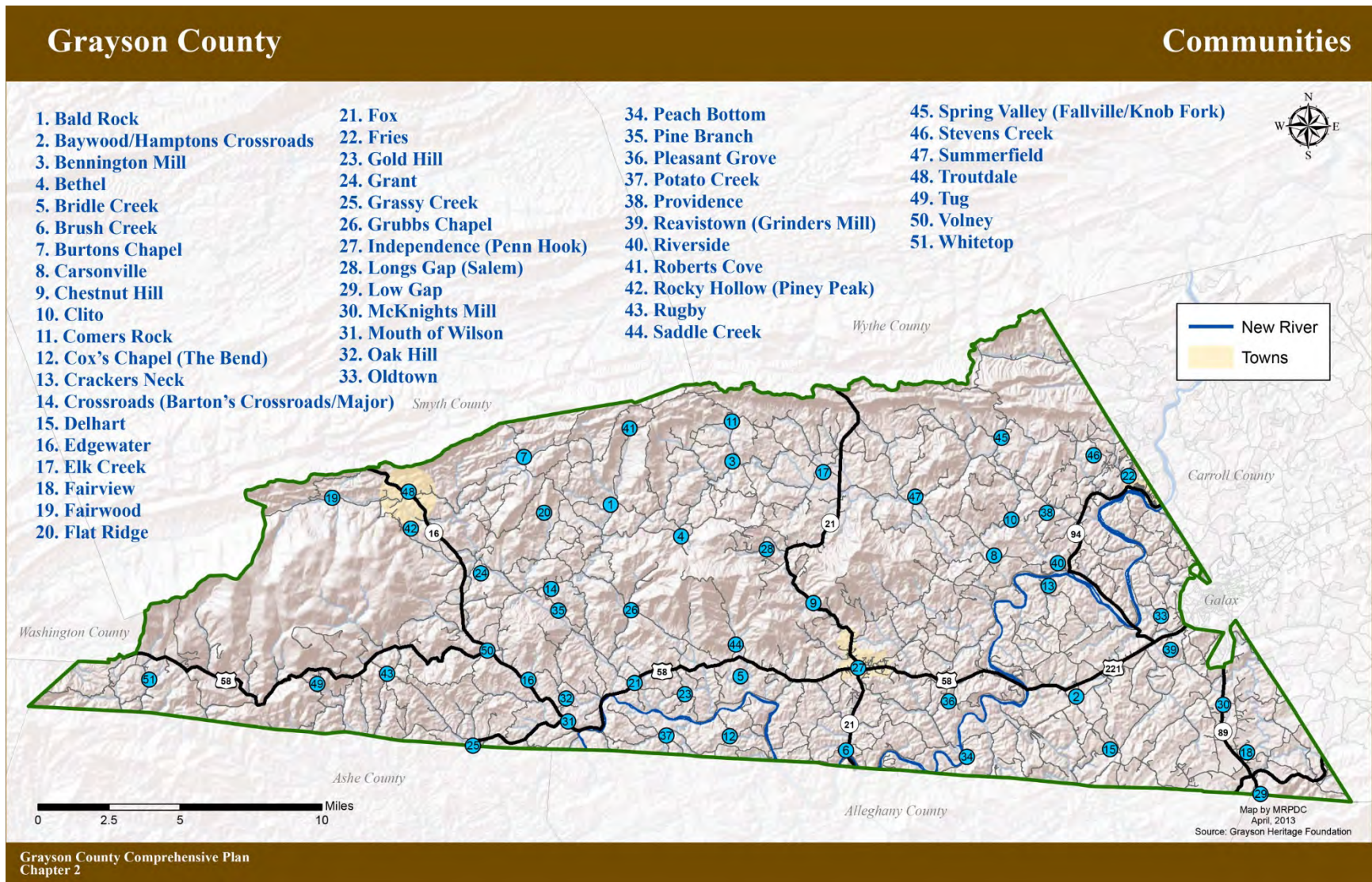
Figure 2-6: Flour Mill in Flatridge (Photo courtesy of Grayson County Historical Society)



Figure 2-5: Motor Company and Grocery, Mouth of Wilson in the 1930s, (Photo courtesy of Grayson County Historical Society)







Grayson County Comprehensive Plan  
Chapter 2



## Chapter Three: Population and Housing

**Goal:** Enhance neighborhoods within Grayson County through preservation, revitalization, and quality infill development, and create quality affordable housing and mixed-use development in higher population areas.

### Introduction

Grayson County’s estimated population as of July 1, 2017 was 15,669, according to the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, which puts out annual population estimates for each of Virginia’s localities. After a sharp fall in the population between the 1950s and 1970s, Grayson County’s population has remained relatively steady since 1970, staying between 15,500 and 16,500 people.

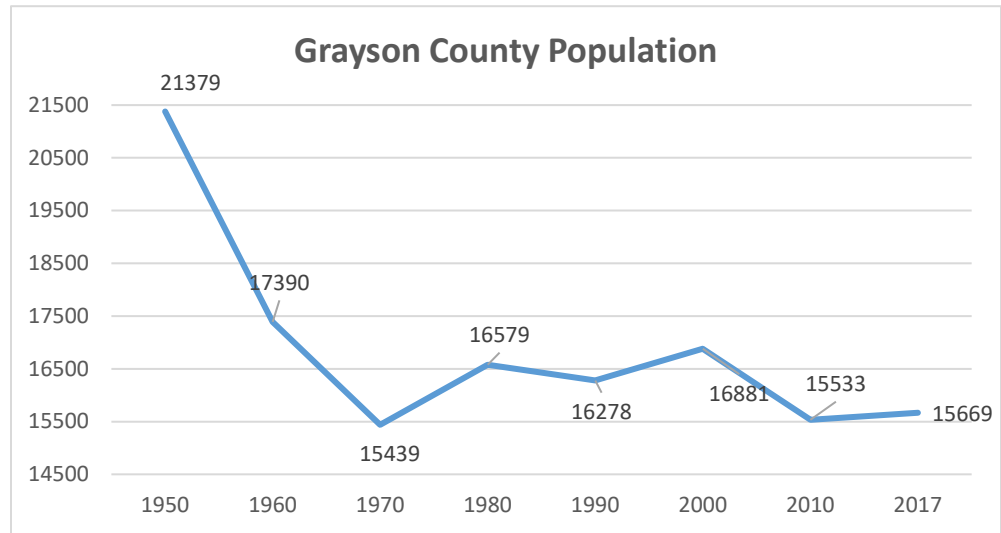


Figure 3-1: Grayson County Population

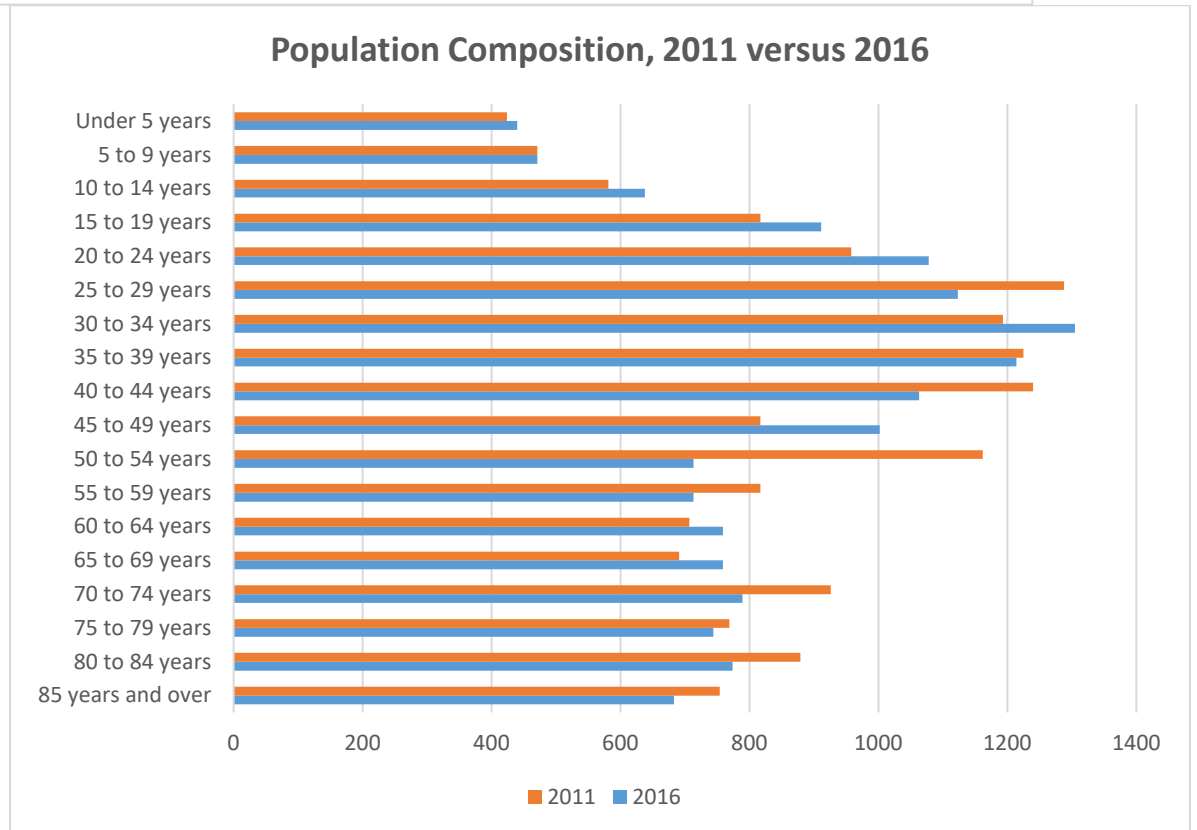
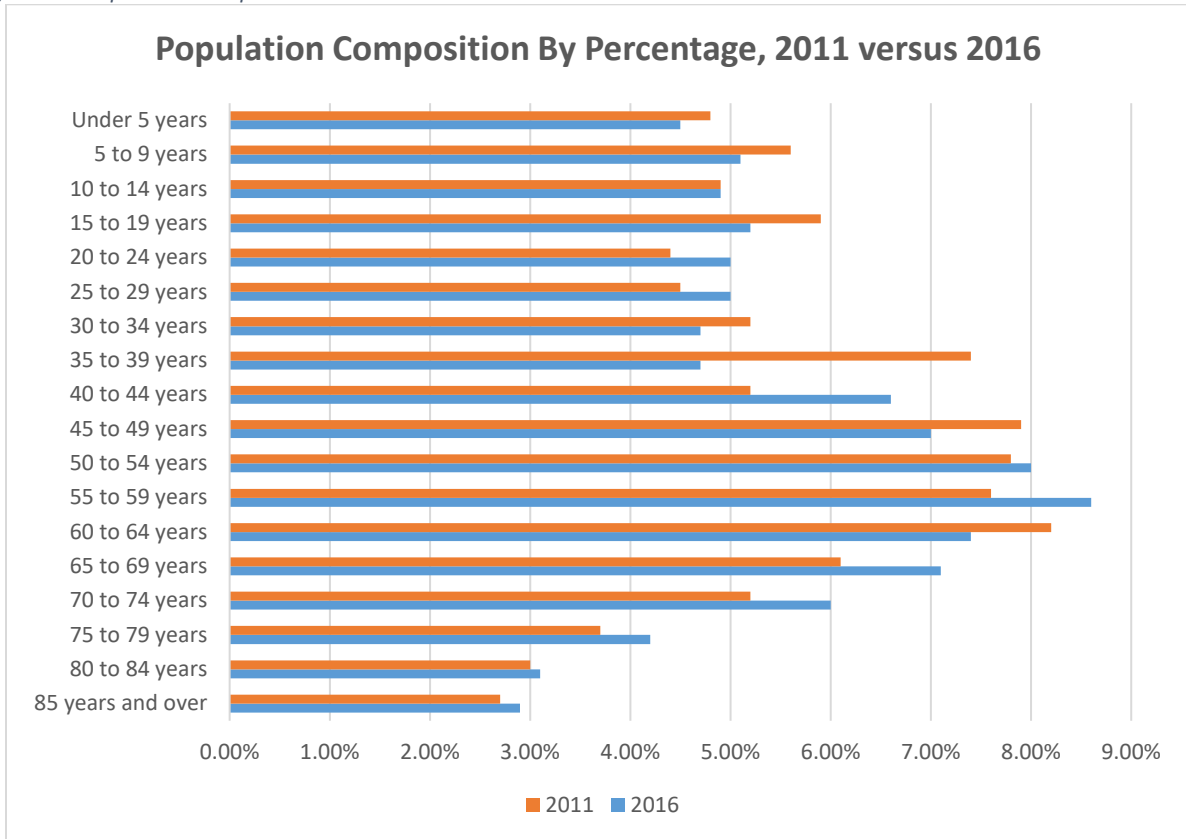
### Population

#### Population Composition by Age and Race

The following chart shows the population composition of Grayson County for 2011 and 2016, according to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates. The percentages show the aging population in Grayson County and explain the rise in median age from 46.6 in 2011 to 48.2 in 2016. The percentage of the population age 50 and over has risen by 3% to 47.3% in 2016.



Figure 3-2: Population Composition



Grayson County’s population in 2016 continued to be predominantly white. This is a fairly consistent characteristic of every locality across the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission and Southwest Virginia. The minority population represented only 4.2 percent of the total population in 2016 (638 persons). The majority of the non-white population are African American residents, with only 0.6 percent of the population composed of other minorities.

Figure 3-3: Population by Race

Population of Grayson County by Race		
	2016	2011
White alone	95.8%	96.4%
Black or African American alone	2.3%	2.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.0%	0.0%
Asian alone	0.1%	0.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.7%
Some other race alone	0.5%	0.2%
Two or more races	1.1%	0.4%

**Population Growth Factors**

There are a number of key factors that have an impact on population growth or decline, and there are a number of variables that are predictors of future population change.

The following table shows an analysis of natural increase in population (births minus deaths) and net migration (movement in and out of the county) between 2000 and 2014, both natural increase and net migration in Grayson County followed the same trends experienced in the Mount Rogers Planning District.

Figure 3-4: Population Change

Change in Population from 2010 to 2016						
Locality	Total	% Change	Natural Increase		Net Migration	
			No.	% Change	No.	% Change
Grayson County	(445)	-2.9%	(433)	-2.8%	(9)	-0.001%
MRPD	(2,653)	-1.4%	(2,291)	-1.2%	(262)	-0.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Population figures are estimated between census years.)



### Population Trends and Projections

Figure 3-5: Population Projections

**Population Projections  
2020—2040**

Year	Projection
2010	15,533
2017	15,669
2020	16,574
2030	15,248
2040	13,738

Population projections published by the Weldon Cooper Center project a decline in Grayson County’s population, but some of this decline can likely be linked to the county’s aging population. Thirty-year population projections predict Grayson County will experience a decrease of almost 1,800 persons between 2010 and 2040. It is important to note that these are only estimates of growth, which change yearly and are based on the American Community Survey’s population estimates

Projecting population for a community the size of Grayson County can be an almost impossible task because of the vulnerability to change based upon outside forces. For example, decision-making at the county level can have a profound effect. For example, the construction of public water and sewer infrastructures, while not spurring automatic population growth, can have a pro-growth affect as the county looks to the future. These services alone are critical public health improvements and will provide the opportunities for future residential and industrial expansion. To spur potential growth, the county will continue to support basic infrastructure improvements, expand local tourism attractions, retain and recruit industry, and nurture small business development.



## Housing

Figure 3-6: Housing Characteristics

Grayson County had a total of 9,166 housing units according to the 2016 Five-Year American Community Survey. Of these, approximately 5,294 (57.8%) were owner occupied. In comparison, Virginia’s home ownership rate was 66%, however, Grayson County’s homeownership numbers show a high rate of vacancies (26.8%), which can be attributed to the high number of vacation and seasonal homes.

The majority of the housing units in Grayson County are single-family homes (74.7%). Multi-family units (apartments and duplexes) comprise only 4.6% of the housing stock, while 20% are manufactured homes. Another small portion of the housing stock (0.3%) was included in the “Other” housing type, which is comprised of Recreational Vehicle homes and boats. Additionally, most of the housing stock consists of older homes, as approximately 42.8% of homes in the county were built prior to 1970.

The median value of an owner-occupied home in Grayson County is approximately \$91,500, which is approximately one-third of the Commonwealth’s median value of \$248,400. With respect to housing affordability, approximately one in five homeowners are paying less than thirty percent of their incomes for housing costs; however, over 40 percent of the rental tenants, pay more than thirty percent of their income for housing. This may indicate that there needs to be more affordable rental housing in the County to meet the needs of residents.

Grayson County Housing Characteristics		
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	9,166	
Owner Occupied	5,294	57.8%
Renter Occupied	1,416	15.4%
Vacant	2,456	26.8%
<b>Housing Type</b>	2,934	
Single-family	6,844	74.7%
Multi-family	420	4.6%
Manufactured Home	1,874	20.4%
Other (Boat, RV, Van, etc.)	28	0.3%
<b>Housing Age, (Year Built)</b>	9,166	
2011-2017	85	0.9%
2000-2010	867	9.5%
1990-1999	1,675	18.3%
1980-1989	1,041	11.4%
1970-1979	1,573	17.2%
1960-1969	1,067	11.6%
1950-1959	915	10.0%
1940-1949	586	6.4%
Before 1940	1,357	14.8%
Avg. Household Size (Owner Occupied)	2.14	
Median Value (Owner Occupied)	\$91,500	
Median Gross Rent (Renter Occupied)	\$525	
Median Mortgage Cost	\$867	
Housing Owner Costs > 30% of income	20.3%	
Rental Costs >30% of income	42.5%	
<i>Source: US Census, 2012-2016 American Community Survey</i>		



## Strategies

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In order to achieve Grayson County's housing goals, the County has several guiding principles in regard to housing and development:

- Ensure a variety of quality housing types for all income levels
- Encourage a sense of community by incorporating features that enhance interaction
- Ensure neighborhoods are inclusive of all races, ages, and incomes
- Foster a climate that is hospitable to affordable housing developments
- Support public-private partnerships for the provision of affordable housing
- Recognize local community plans and include them in countywide planning efforts
- Protect historic resources and the natural environment
- Preserve character of individual communities within the county

These principles help support the individual strategies that the County has set forth to as targets for this Comprehensive Plan. The strategies listed below depict the County's goals for the future:

- 3-1 Support private investment in Assisted Living Developments and other housing infrastructure needed for elderly and aging, where possible.
- 3-2 Create information clearinghouse for citizens in need of building repair and energy improvements by connecting them with established organizations such as Rooftop Community Action, People Inc., Rural Development, HUD, and others.
- 3-3 Consider incentive program to remove pre-1976 manufactured homes that may be unable to meet current building codes.
- 3-4 Create a task force to analyze the environmental health of the county as it relates to septic tank issues, straight-piping, and the lack of a full-time environmental health officer. Ensure that the programs offered by the Health Department align with the needs of the county. *(See 9-2)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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In comparison to the rest of the Commonwealth, Grayson County is generally a more affordable location to live, whether renting or owning. Grayson County's housing stock generally consists of single unit, detached homes and mobile homes. With only 3% of housing stock being multi-unit attached homes, there may be a need for multifamily housing within the county. Grayson County also has a higher vacancy rate than the state, due to the high number of homes used for seasonal or recreational purposes.

Similar to the rest of the region, Grayson County's population is aging with the median age rising significantly from 2011 to 2016. Almost half of all residents (47.3%) are age 50 or older, which is something that the County must take into consider when determining the needs of the community. The County should pursue programs and strategies to provide for the needs of this aging population and ensure a high quality of life. Additionally, strategies that encourage younger populations to remain in or relocate to Grayson County should be high priorities, as the younger population ensures a viable workforce and steady future population growth.



## Chapter Four: Education

**Goal: Support “K-to-Gray” educational opportunities, including career and technical education, long-distance learning, and lifelong learning.**

### Introduction

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There are numerous educational opportunities for Grayson County’s citizens of all ages, despite the rural location of the county. Rooftop of Virginia provides Early Head Start assistance to income-eligible families with children as young as six weeks and approximately thirty higher and/or technical education institutions are located within sixty miles of Grayson County, including several branches of the Virginia and North Carolina Community College Systems. Grayson County has a robust public school system, with schools that are all Level One accredited by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the highest accreditation offered by the Commonwealth.

### Early Childhood Education

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#### Early Head Start and Head Start

Rooftop of Virginia provides Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) services within Grayson and Carroll Counties and the City of Galax, serving children from ages six weeks until they are ready for kindergarten.

Early Head Start (EHS) is designed to nurture healthy attachments between parent and child. Rooftop’s Early Head Start programs, including Home-Based Early Head Start, serve infants and toddlers under the age of 3, and pregnant women, providing intensive comprehensive child development and family support services.

Head Start (HS) provides early childhood education preparing 221 three- and four-year-olds to meet responsibilities in school and life. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher and provides a learning environment that supports children's growth in many areas such as language, literacy, and social and emotional development.

#### Virginia Preschool Initiative

The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) provides state funds to community-based organizations that provide preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds unserved by Head Start. The Virginia Department of Education and the Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood Programs establish measurable standards in order to prepare preschool age children for entry into Kindergarten. For a preschool program to receive funding from the VDE, they must provide services that include: quality preschool education, parental involvement, comprehensive child health services, comprehensive social services and transportation. See Figure 4-1 for the number of children in Grayson County that have been served by the VPI in the last ten years.





Figure 4-1: Students Served by Virginia Preschool Initiative

Students Served by Virginia Preschool Initiative										
School Year	17-18	16-17	15-16	14-15	13-14	12-13	11-12	10-11	09-10	08-09
Number of Students	35	37	34	42	33	33	33	33	17	17
<i>Source: Virginia Department of Education</i>										

## Grayson County Schools

The Grayson County Public School System manages primary and secondary schools in the county. The Grayson County School Board is elected by the citizens of the county and the five members represent each voting district and an at large member. The primary role of the school board is to develop policy as it relates to the management of the school system. The School Superintendent is the executive officer of the school system and is in charge of managing personnel, financial considerations, school budgets, facilities and reporting to the school board.

Grayson County School System is composed of six schools and the Career & Technical Education Center at the Grayson County High School Campus. There are many programs offered beyond standard curriculum that includes: The Cate Center - credentials in Nursing (CNA), Cosmetology (State Board Certification), Auto Mechanics (ASE), Business Information Systems (MOS), and various National Occupational Competency Testing Initiative (NOCTI). Grayson County High School offers Associate Degree Programs and numerous offerings for Dual Enrollment.

Following the Public Schools Facility Study in 2006, which assessed the condition of buildings and determined the feasibility of renovation and/or construction, the School System made changes to protect the County’s investment in the system’s facilities and buildings. Two schools consolidated, and the Grayson Highlands School was constructed. Three of the schools currently in use were built before 1950, although Fries School, built in 1922, was renovated in 2010. The study determined that these schools may be near the end of their useful life and that maintenance issues will increasingly become problematic for these schools, which is one reason for the closure of Baywood Elementary in 2018. The ability of these schools to meet building codes and energy efficiency standards is difficult for these older structures, and without major capital investment the “band aid” approach used to keep the buildings operational will only delay the substantial capital investment needed to replace these buildings. Furthermore, the aging school system may impair local economic development where as young professionals prefer modern and high performing structures.



Figure 4-2: Student Enrollment in Grayson County 2008-2018

<b>Student Enrollment in Grayson County</b>														
School Name	Year Built	Last Addition/ Renovation	Square Feet (1,000)	Grades	2017 -18	2016 -17	2015 -16	2014 -15	2013 -14	2012 -13	2011 -12	2010 -11	2009 -10	2008 -09
Fairview Elementary	1942	1957/N/A	25.7	KG - 5	102	102	106	109	120	121	105	105	106	128
Fries School*	1922	2010		PK - 7	238	231	250	262	242	261	265	265	144**	160**
Grayson County High	1955	1989	55.5	9 - 12	502	517	676	702	726	742	753	753	788	657
Independence Elem	1983	N/A	30.4	KG - 5	222	245	224	225	250	276	269	269	268	277
Independence Middle	1936	2005	38	6 - 8	249	273	159	178	176	169	182	182	217	398
Grayson Highlands**	2010	N/A	67	PK - 7	146	143	159	160	164	165	169	169	***	***
Baywood Elementary***	Closed			PK - 5	125	133	110	133	134	119	121	121	131	137
Homeschooled****	N/A			KG-12	93	86	75	77	71	78	54	44	47	54

\* Providence Elementary (PK-3) closed in 2010 and students from the area the school served now attend Fries School. Fries School numbers from 2008-10 includes only grades 4-7.

\*\* Grayson Highlands was built in 2010 and serves as a consolidation of Bridle Creek Elementary and Mount Rogers Combined School. In its first year of operation, the school served grades PK-12, but in 2011 the school became PK-7.

\*\*\* Baywood Elementary closed in 2018

\*\*\*\* Number of children homeschooled within the County, as reported to the Virginia Department of Education

Source: Virginia Department of Education, Fall Membership Reports, 2008-2009 to 2017-2018 School Years, [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics\\_reports/enrollment/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/enrollment/index.shtml)



## Higher Education

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Despite the seemingly rural nature of Grayson County, within a short drive higher, education options are abundant.

### Community Colleges and Technical Schools

Virginia's Community College System offers a variety of Associate Degree Programs, Work Force Development and Occupational & Technical Programs, and includes the Manufacturing Technology Center which is a cooperation of five community colleges in Southwest Virginia and various industries throughout the region. College courses are provided at the Crossroads Institute (see more information below) in Galax and there are three locations for classes within a sixty-mile radius: Wytheville, Virginia Highlands (Abingdon), and New River (Dublin). North Carolina also has nearby options, including several campuses of Wilkes Community College, Davidson County, Surry, and Forsyth Technical.

### Universities and Other Schools Offering Four-Year Degrees and Higher

Within sixty miles of Grayson County are various universities, including Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech), Radford University, Emory & Henry College, Appalachian State University, King University, Bluefield State, and Wake Forest University. Additionally, Old Dominion University (ODU) partners with Virginia's Community College System, including Wytheville Community College, to provide opportunities for students to receive a Bachelor's or advanced degree from ODU while staying local.

## Additional Education Resources

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### The Crossroads Institute

Opened in 2005 in Galax, the Crossroads Rural Entrepreneurial Institute provides a variety of resources to the surrounding area, including a mixed-use small business incubator, modular work spaces with high flexibility, a Computer Emporium with student and public access, an Idea Lab for pre-incubator small business planning, Technical and Occupational Lab Space, Electronics and Computer Networking Labs (Health Science and Wet Labs, Teaching Kitchen, Building Technologies Lab), Classrooms and two seminar rooms with video teleconferencing capabilities, a Learning Assistance Center with student access, an exhibit hall and atrium also serves as a café and social area, and a modern conference room

### Grayson Agricultural and Technical Education (GATE) Center

Located in the heart of Independence, once construction is completed, the GATE Center will provide a meeting center and small business incubator, including office spaces and a technology-enhanced conference room, making distance learning opportunities more readily-available. The facility's commercial kitchen will provide access for prospective entrepreneurs who may be interested in starting restaurants or other business ventures.



## Strategies

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- 4-1 Provide advanced technology and technology infrastructure to schools and students. Consider grant opportunities and donation infrastructure.
- 4-2 Offer diverse after-school programs to include non-athletic activities such as ag/forestry, career readiness, arts and craft internships, college courses, leadership training, trade skills and advance degree programs.
- 4-3 Consider performance-based salaries and incentive salaries to attract/keep high performing teachers.
- 4-4 Increase Career & Tech Education Program and consider other trade-based youth/adult programs to educate “workforce ready” population for local employment or for small business development. To include: AC & Refrigeration, Masonry, Landscaping, Building Trades, EMT, Criminal Justice, Corrections, Property Management, Agriculture/Forestry, Home Health/Medical, and Culinary Arts
- 4-5 Partner with established colleges to offer a “satellite campus” in Grayson County for advanced degrees and long-distance learning.
- 4-6 Consider vacant spaces/buildings to utilize for advanced learning, trade education, small business development, community centers, mentorship/internship headquarters, and other programs.
- 4-7 Conduct Feasibility Study for school system "Early Diversion Program". Program will identify students who may benefit from career/ technical training programs.
- 4-8 Continue to support the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service and public libraries as valuable educational opportunities for the county.
- 4-9 Develop internship/mentorship program for youth to gain experience/build resumes. Combine with leadership training.
- 4-10 Reach out to second home, retirees, professionals and other potential volunteers to lead education programs in; trades, business, leadership /after school/intern etc.
- 4-11 Provide education for repeat offenders emphasize the needs for those in the Criminal Justice System to re-enter society as productive citizens.
- 4-12 Develop an information system/network for county residents to learn about lifelong learning opportunities already offered by area organizations. Support workshops and programs already offered for lifelong learning. For example: Provide set open-use hours in the agriculture shop to local residents outside of school hours.
- 4-13 Work with agencies and educational institutions to develop job skill training programs to meet identified gaps in the local workforce. (See 5-12)
- 4-14 Work with the school system to provide afterschool leadership development academy to encourage the next generation of leaders.

## Summary and Conclusions

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As a high performing school system can be used as a tool to attract potential industry and business investment and young professional families, Grayson County can continue to maintain



and improve its schools' competitiveness and ability to meet the needs of residents. Additionally, with improved technology, it is becoming easier for more rural areas to provide distance education opportunities, and Grayson County can continue to improve its higher education and career and technical education opportunities. Along with its more traditional education opportunities, the County can also tap into the resources of its many retirees and second-home professionals who may be willing to share their expertise through volunteer instructional programs. Hands-on training for business development, renewable energy, agricultural and forestry education, and other lifestyle and small business learning experiences would provide new skills for residents regardless of age or experience and continue to improve quality of life.



## Chapter Five: Economy

**Goal: Support and expand existing businesses, attract new businesses, and provide a broad range of employment opportunities and a high quality of life for residents of, and those employed in, Grayson County.**

### Introduction

As the primary driving force for quality of life, the economic health of the community has been identified as a primary concern for the future of Grayson County. In order to thrive and grow, residents need employment opportunities and the administration of the County is committed

### Income and Poverty Characteristics

Figure 5-1 shows the estimated income of households in Grayson County and in the Commonwealth of Virginia and delineates the large differences between earnings in the County and the Commonwealth.

Figure 5-1: Income and Benefits

Income and Benefits (In 2016 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)				
	Grayson County		Virginia	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Total households	6,710	6,710	3,090,178	3,090,178
Less than \$10,000	650	9.7%	175,989	5.7%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	838	12.5%	123,543	4.0%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	1,169	17.4%	250,577	8.1%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	1,017	15.2%	256,795	8.3%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	956	14.2%	370,726	12.0%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1,053	15.7%	534,344	17.3%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	510	7.6%	394,504	12.8%
\$100,000 or more	517	7.6%	983,700	31.8%
Median household income (dollars)	31,002	(X)	66,149	(X)
Mean household income (dollars)	44,785	(X)	90,881	(X)
Per capita income (dollars)	20,190	(X)	34,967	(X)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2012-2016



Figure 5-2 shows the percentage of people whose income in the past twelve months has placed them below the poverty level. Grayson County shows numbers that are multiples of the Commonwealth of Virginia's and shows the need for assistance, especially for families with children under the age of five.

Figure 5-2: Percentage of Families and People in Poverty

<b>Percentage of Families and People Whose Income in the Past 12 Months Is Below the Poverty Level</b>		
	<b>Grayson County</b>	<b>Virginia</b>
All families	16.10%	8.10%
With related children of the householder under 18 years	31.70%	12.80%
With related children of the householder under 5 years only	45.90%	12.70%
Married couple families	8.80%	3.60%
With related children of the householder under 18 years	15.50%	4.80%
With related children of the householder under 5 years only	15.90%	4.20%
Families with female householder, no husband present	46.10%	25.20%
With related children of the householder under 18 years	64.50%	34.20%
With related children of the householder under 5 years only	88.00%	38.30%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2012-2016*

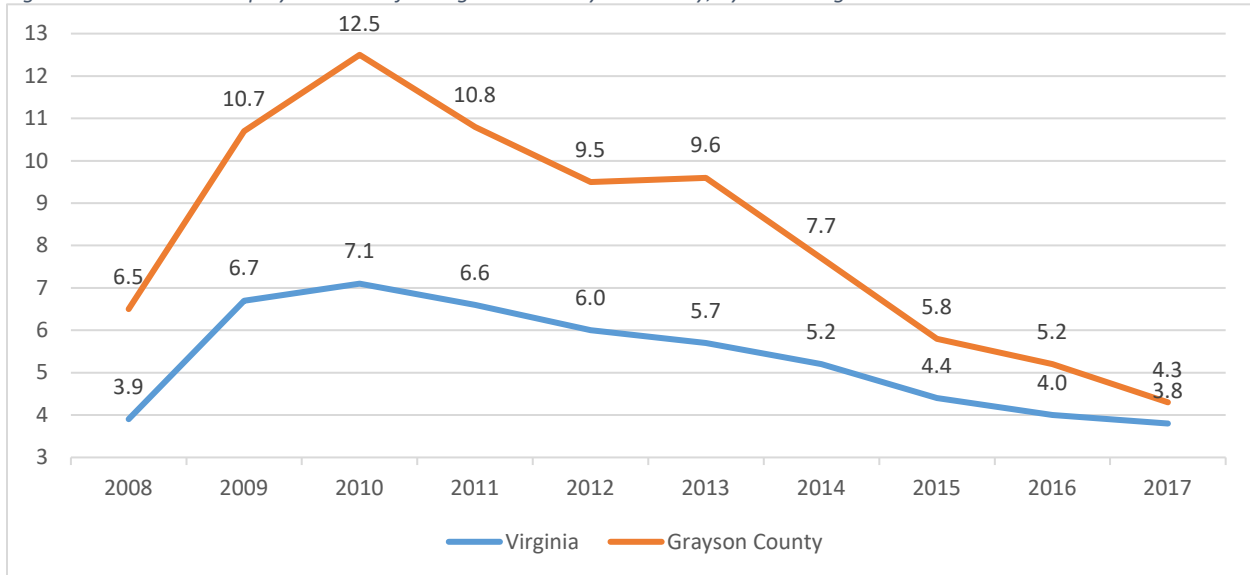
## Employment Characteristics

### Unemployment Rate

Figure 5-3 shows the annual employment rate for Grayson County and the Commonwealth of Virginia over the ten-year period from 2008-2017. Represented graphically, it is readily apparent that the recession hit the County harder than the Commonwealth as a whole, but in recent years the county has been closing the gap and, as of 2017, only lags behind by 0.5 percent.



Figure 5-3: Annual Unemployment Rate for Virginia and Grayson County, by Percentage

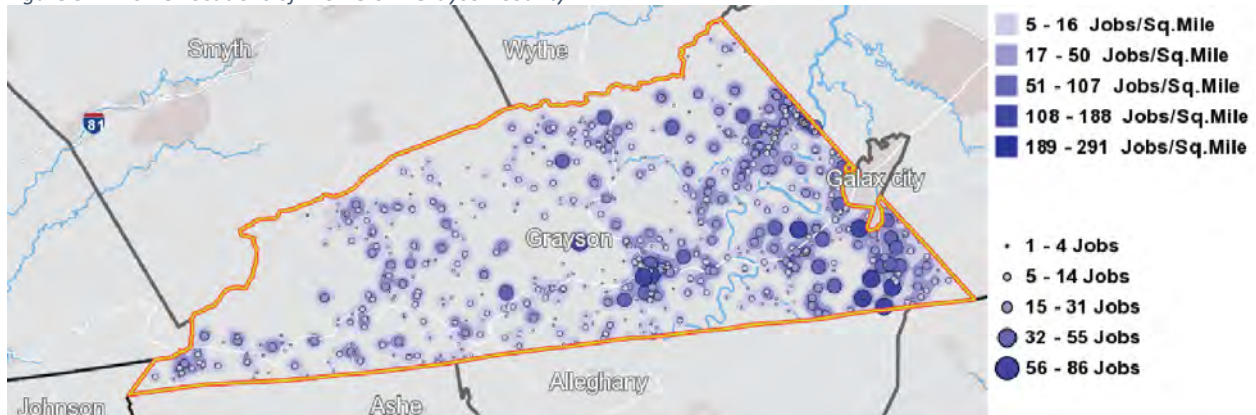


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

### Commuting Patterns<sup>2</sup>

Figure 5-4 shows the home locations of workers within Grayson County in 2015. The information is updated annually by the U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies and shows from where those employed outside the home are commuting. As expected, the majority of pockets of employees are located in the more populated and less mountainous Eastern section of the county.

Figure 5-4: Home Locations of Workers in Grayson County



Grayson County’s inflow/outflow job counts (shown in Figure 5-5) show that many more residents are going outside of the county to find employment (80.5%) than are able to live and work within the County (19.5%). Almost 1 in 4 residents are commuting to Galax (23.1%), while 7.3% commute to Carroll County and 6.3% commute to Wythe County. A total of 6.0% of residents commute to either Alleghany or Ashe County, North Carolina. These commuter

<sup>2</sup> All commuting data is from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies and its OnTheMap Employment Mapping Tool <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>





numbers show the potential for new industries locating in Grayson County to find employees within the county. The average travel time to place of employment for residents is 28.5 minutes, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2016 Five-Year American Community Survey.

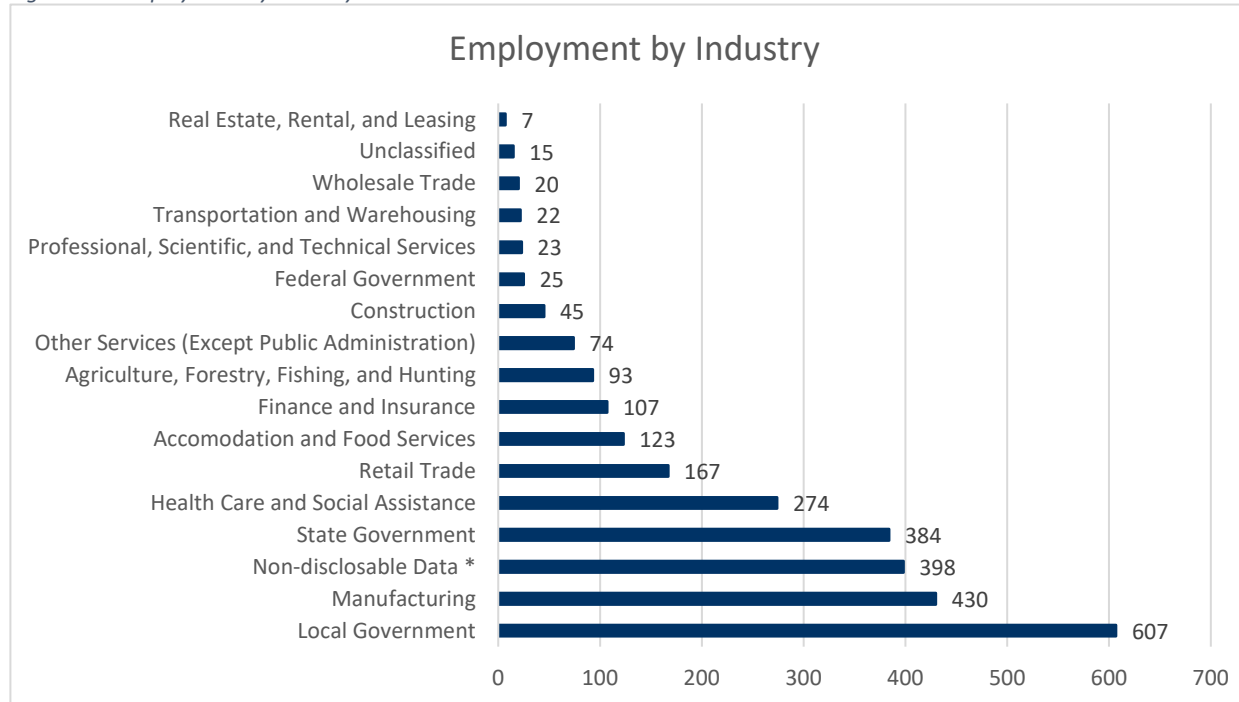
Figure 5-5: Inflow/Outflow of Workers in Grayson County



Jobs Counts by Counties Where Workers are Employed, 2015		
	Count	%
Galax City, VA	1,444	23.1%
Grayson County, VA	1,217	19.5%
Carroll County, VA	456	7.3%
Wythe County, VA	393	6.3%
Smyth County, VA	320	5.1%
Alleghany County, NC	215	3.4%
Ashe County, NC	161	2.6%
Washington County, VA	158	2.5%
Pulaski County, VA	147	2.4%
All Other Locations	1,744	27.9%

### Employment by Industry and Largest Employers

Figure 5-6: Employment by Industry



\*Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction; Utilities; Information; Management of Companies and Enterprises; Administration and Support and Waste Management; Educational Services; and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation are totaled in together as to avoid disclosing non-disclosable employer data.

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 3rd Quarter (July, August, September) 2017.



The largest employment sector in Grayson County is local government, with over 21.6% of employees (607). If reviewing the total number of government employees, including local, federal, and state, approximately 1,000 people, or 36.1%, work for some government entity. Figure 5-6 shows the distribution of employment by industry within the county, which shows that after local government employment, manufacturing employs the next highest number: 430 people or 15.3%.

Figure 5-7: Largest Employers in Grayson County

Largest Employers in Grayson County					
Rank	Employer	Size	Rank	Employer	Size
1	Grayson County School Board	07	13	Hansen Turbine Assemblies	04
2	Select A Service LLC (Blue Ridge Energy)	07	14	Darco Southern	04
3	Grayson County Correctional Center (River North Correctional Center)	07	15	C & B Lumber	04
			16	Virginia Department of Conservation	04
4	Grayson County	06	17	Grayson County Public Welfare	04
5	Independence Lumber Company	06	18	Town of Independence	04
6	Core Health and Fitness	06	19	Postal Service	04
7	Grayson Nursing & Rehab Center	06	20	Independence Volunteer Rescue Squad Inc.	04
			21	Meriwether Godsey	04
8	Skyline National Bank	05	22	Wythe Grayson Regional Library	04
9	Oak Hill Academy	05	23	Healthcare Services Group	04
10	McAllister Mills	04	24	Pizza Plus	03
11	Oak Hall Industries	04	25	Aunt Bea's Family Restaurant	03
12	Food City	04			

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter (April, May, June) 2018.  
 Size Codes: 07: 250 to 499 employees, 06: 100 to 249 employees, 05: 50 to 99 employees, 04: 20 to 49 employees, 03: 10 to 19 employees, 02: 5 to 9 employees, 01: 0 to 4 employees

### Large and Notable Employers

Some of the notable employers in Grayson County include:

- Grayson County School System - Public school system in Grayson County that employs teachers, administrators and other personnel. <http://www.grayson.k12.va.us/>
- Grayson County - Administration of government services, facilities, constitutional offices, public safety, elected officials and all county personnel. <http://www.graysoncountyyva.gov/>
- Independence Lumber – Operates forestry, harvesting, and milling operations in Southwest Virginia and Northern North Carolina for local, regional, and global uses. <https://www.independencelumberinc.com/>



- Core Health and Fitness - Manufacturer of various fitness and wellness machinery (including Nautilus Commercial Products) and products for the clinical and long-term markets of rehabilitation and senior solutions. <https://corehandf.com/>
- Grayson Nursing & Rehab Center - A 120-bed facility that employs or contracts with 100 full time equivalent positions at the Independence facility. <http://www.consulatehealthcare.com/>
- Skyline National Bank – Formed from the merger of Grayson National Bank and Bank of Floyd in 2016, Skyline offers business and personal financial services to residents of Southwest Virginia and Northwestern North Carolina. <https://www.skylinenationalbank.bank/>
- Oak Hill Academy - This co-ed private institution offers college preparation from grades 8-12. Enrollment varies from 150 to 160 per year. <http://www.oak-hill.net/>
- Food City - Regional grocery chain with a store in Independence. <http://www.foodcity.com/>
- Oak Hall Cap and Gown– Family run business with three sewing factories and warehouses in Southwest Virginia that employs over 350 with full-time, permanent positions. <https://oakhalli.com/>
- C & B Lumber Inc. - Originally, C & B started as a sawmill in 1988, now C & B Lumber provides customized hand cut lumber. Specializing in log home lumber and products including chinking, rustic railings, log home siding, and more. <http://www.candblumber.com/about-Log-home-siding.html>
- Darco Southern - Fabricating high Temperature Industrial Gasketing Solutions, Darco Southern services steel, aluminum, petrochemical, shipbuilding, brick, pulp and paper, and boiler industries. Products include Tetraglas (Fiberglass), Tetraglas 3000 (Silica) cloths, tapes, sleeving and ropes. <http://www.darcosouthern.com/coprofile.php>
- McAllister Mills - A leading manufacturer of safe, heat-resistant materials for industries. Products include insulation blankets, fabrics, tapes, ropes, and custom fabricated parts. <http://mcallistermills.com/>
- Tritex LLC - Located in Independence since 2000, Tritex offers high temperature alternatives to ceramic fiber. Their products are used in various industries and applications including chimneys, automotive, foundries, power gens, primary alum, petrochemical, appliance, and fire protection. <http://www.tritexllc.com>

### Niche and Specialty Manufacturing

- Stewart Furniture Design, LLC – Builder of custom, high-quality, “made to order” upholstered furniture. <https://www.stewartfurniture.com>
- Fox Creek Leather Company – Family-owned company designing and producing custom-made leather goods. <https://www.foxcreekleather.com/>



- Grayson Natural Farms – Manufacturer of all natural, grass-fed beef products sourced from local farms. <https://graysonnatural.com/>
- Grayson Millworks – Family-owned operation producing high-end furniture, hardwood flooring, millwork, molding, mantels and structural and non-structural beams. <http://www.graysonmillworks.com/>

### River North Correctional Center

River North Correctional Center, a Security Level 4 facility managed by the Virginia Department of Corrections and located outside the Town of Independence, opened in October 2013. River North employs approximately 300-325 individuals at any given time, including security, support, and administrative employees.

Housing is separated into four central housing buildings with a capacity for 1,000 inmates, which includes 942 general population beds, 48 segregation beds, six medical observation beds and two medical isolation beds. The Inside Support Building contains Special Housing, Property, Intake, Commissary, Medical, Food Service, DCE and Vocational Training, Treatment, Laundry, Offender Gymnasium, and Offender Visitation.

Inmates are offered a variety of program and educational opportunities including substance abuse classes, vocational classes, and high school completion or GED, all of which are geared toward reducing recidivism, so offenders can become productive members of society after their release from institutionalization.

River North participates in Virginia Department of Corrections' Administrative Segregation Step-Down Program, which began in 2011 and aims to reduce the number of offenders in restrictive housing/solitary confinement. The program uses a "step down" method that take offenders from segregation to lower security levels by providing lesser controls, increased privileges, including giving them an opportunity to participate in activities like cognitive behavioral journaling before they return to the general prison population. In 2010, Virginia released 57 offenders from restrictive housing to the community without receiving any type of cognitive behavioral therapy, whereas by 2015 that number had been reduced to three, making release easier and more stable for offender, ensuring public safety, and reducing long-term recidivism rates.

## Economic Development Organizations and Partnerships

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- Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority (BRCEDA) and the Small Business Development Center was formed in 2004, after the Virginia Assembly designated Carroll and Grayson Counties and the City of Galax as "Virginia's Entrepreneurial Region." BRCEDA became an important catalyst for small business growth in the region and is recognized as one of the best industrial development authorities in Virginia. <http://www.brceda.org/>
- Grayson County Economic Development Authority (EDA) is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia that is comprised of a 7-member Board who are appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The EDA is charged with facilitating the creation, attraction,



retention, expansion and support of business and industry and is also responsible for managing the County's two revolving loan programs that are designed to support both industry and small business. <https://www.graysoncountyva.gov/eda/>

- Virginia's Industrial Advancement Alliance (VIAA, formerly known as aCorridor) and its Board of Directors has been a central resource for recruitment efforts in attracting new and expanding industries to the region. VIAA has provided the link to the state's Virginia Economic Development Partnership and the marketing representatives and broad array of services available to local areas for economic development. <http://viaalliance.org/>
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership is dedicated to increasing international trade and business for Virginia businesses. The VEDP identifies potential new markets and market entry strategies for new businesses in Virginia that will lead to more international trade. VEDP has assisted more than 500 companies by expanding their global sales. <http://exportvirginia.org/>
- The three Small Business Development Centers, located at Virginia Highlands Community College, Wytheville Community College, and the Crossroads Institute in Galax, serve in an advisory and technical resource capacity to assist new and expanding businesses and entrepreneurs with business plans, financial analysis, and training in operating business. <http://www.vhcc.edu/sbdc>, <http://www.wcc.vccs.edu/>, <http://crossroadsva.org/ci/>
- Virginia's Department of Business Assistance - <http://vdba.virginia.gov/contactus.shtml>
- Mount Rogers Planning District Commission - <http://www.mrpdc.org/>
- District Three Governmental Cooperative - <http://www.district-three.org/>
- Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program - <http://mrraep.com/>
- People Incorporated of Virginia - <http://www.peopleinc.net/>
- New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board - <http://www.nrmrwib.org/>
- Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services - <http://www.vadrs.org/>
- Virginia Employment Commission - <http://www.vec.virginia.gov/>
- Wytheville Community College - <http://www.wcc.vccs.edu/>
- Goodwill Work and Training Services - <http://www.goodwill.org/goodwill-for-you/jobs-and-careers/>

## Industrial Opportunities

Industrial/Business sites are available at three public sponsored industrial parks: the Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park; the Grayson County Industrial Park; and the Wildwood Commerce Park. Private sites are available across the county such as the Fries Mill Site. One strategy to consider is to inventory available public and private sites, ensure adequate infrastructure is available when possible, and to increase the marketing of these sites to encourage private investment/employment opportunities throughout the community.

### Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park



Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park is located on the jurisdictional boundary of Grayson County and Galax. This Commerce Park has resulted from a partnership of Grayson County and Galax with the assistance of Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority (BRCEDA). The site sits strategically located next to Highway 58, a prominent four lane east/west corridor connecting the communities of Grayson County and Galax. Public water, sewer, high speed internet, and a developed entrance make this site suitable for a large variety of uses. The 30-acre site is mostly level with rolling hills and compatible with zoning district designations for business or commercial use.

### Grayson County Industrial Park

Grayson County Industrial Park is located at the corner of Industrial Ln. and the Grayson Parkway in Independence, just off U.S. Route 58 and within 23 miles of I-77. The Town of Independence provides water and sewer, American Electric Power provides electric power, and CenturyLink provides telecommunications.

### Wildwood Commerce Park

Wildwood Commerce Park, located at Exit 19 off of I-77, is one of seven “mega sites” in Southwest Virginia. The Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority purchased the property in 2011 for Carroll and Grayson Counties and the City of Galax for development as an industrial park. Desired potential business and industrial sectors include agricultural & food products processing, information technology & professional services, advanced wood & fabric products manufacturing, components manufacturing (automotive, aerospace, medical, communications), and distribution & logistics.

## Asset-based Development

### Tourism

Asset-based economic development embraces the local cultural and natural assets of a community and strategically markets these assets. The greater Southwest Virginia region, which stretches from Lee County to Montgomery County has made a cooperative effort to find common assets and has created a regional brand. Important assets of Grayson County include cultural staples like traditional music and other assets tied to traditional music like the Crooked Road, the Blue Ridge Music Center, local theaters, and jams/conventions/festivals. Other cultural icons include historical buildings and sites. An example is the 1908 Courthouse and other local museums. Natural assets, such as Grayson Highlands State Park, mountain peaks, trails, parkways and of course the New River are extremely important assets to Grayson County’s economy. See the Tourism Chapter (Chapter 10) for a more comprehensive listing of asset-based development within the region.

The economic impact of tourism is important for small businesses, for generation of employment and for county revenue by sales tax and transient occupancy tax. The impact on tourism activity to country stores and restaurants should not be underestimated; as many of



these locations see an increase in business activity during the tourism season in Grayson County.

In the unincorporated area of Grayson County, sales tax and transient occupancy tax are the two public revenue generators as it relates to tourism. In the towns of Fries and Independence, additional revenue may be generated from fuel, cigarette and alcohol taxes and these areas will collect and record their own sales and transient occupancy tax.

Table 5-1 shows the economic impact of tourism within Grayson County as represented by locality-specific travel-related data kept by the U.S Travel Association. The impact relies on 5 unique pieces of information:

- 1) Expenditures within the area
- 2) Payroll associated with tourism industry employment
- 3) Number of people employed by the tourism industry
- 4) State tax receipts
- 5) Local Tax receipts

Table 5-1: Economic Impact of Tourism in Grayson County 2013-2017

<b>Economic Impact of Tourism in Grayson County</b>						
	<b>% Change, 2017/16</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>	4.8%	\$15,865,201	\$15,140,692	\$14,787,869	\$14,403,303	\$13,953,845
<b>Payroll</b>	5.0%	\$3,692,295	\$3,515,866	\$3,363,421	\$3,198,053	\$3,111,310
<b>Employment</b>	1.8%	152	149	147	142	140
<b>State Tax Receipts</b>	3.5%	\$670,487	\$647,684	\$621,191	\$584,088	\$559,913
<b>Local Tax Receipts</b>	3.0%	\$466,262	\$ 452,588	\$433,575	\$408,839	\$403,369

**Source: U.S. Travel Association**

### Agriculture

As agriculture is Grayson County’s major economic driver, agriculture and forestry products shipped outside of the county represent a major stream for external dollars to flow into the county. There are numerous opportunities for expanded education and training to local entrepreneurs, farmers, and foresters that will also support increased economic impact within the county. The rising trends of agritourism, value-added products, and local foods initiatives are promoting agriculture and local products to new audiences, expanding the demand for local products, and increasing value in local communities.

Table 5-2: Average Farm Characteristics

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Land in Farms (acres)</b>	131,922	136,752	-3.5%
<b>Average Size of Farm (Acres)</b>	173	161	7.5%
<b>Market Value of Products Sold (\$1,000)</b>	31,636	23,389	35.3%
<b>Crop Sales (\$1,000)</b>	\$ 5,968		
<b>Livestock Sales (\$1,000)</b>	\$25,668		
<b>Average per Farm</b>	\$41,409	\$27,452	50.8%



Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture 2012 and 2007

Table 5-3: Farms by Value of Sales

Farms by value of sales:	Number	%
Less than \$1,000	153	20.0%
\$1,000 to \$2,499	79	10.3%
\$2,500 to \$4,999	93	12.2%
\$5,000 to \$9,999	112	14.7%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	100	13.1%
\$20,000 to \$24,999	29	3.8%
\$25,000 to \$39,999	57	7.5%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	25	3.3%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	63	8.2%
\$100,000 to \$249,999	31	4.1%
\$250,000 to \$499,999	6	0.8%
\$500,000 or more	16	2.1%
Total farm production expenses* (\$1,000)	30,505	
Average per farm (\$)	39,928	
Net cash farm income of operation (\$1,000)	2,874	
Average per farm (\$)	3,762	
<i>*The most common expense categories across farms are property taxes, petroleum-based fuel, oil and lubricants, farm supplies, repairs and maintenance, livestock feed, and fertilizer.</i>		
Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture 2012		

### Top Production Crops and Livestock

Unsurprisingly, Grayson County produces the most cut Christmas trees of any of the 98 counties in the Commonwealth and ranks as the 13<sup>th</sup> highest producer nationwide. Approximately 65 farms grow Fraser fir Christmas trees on over 11,000 acres with annual sales of over 1 million trees and gross sales of more than \$15 million.

Grayson is uniquely adapted to Fraser fir production due to the elevation and access to indigenous Fraser fir parent material that grows naturally on Mount Rogers and Whitetop mountains. The county maintains seed production from two seed orchards, one located in Grayson Highlands State Park, and another at the Old Flat State Forest. These orchards are managed by the Mount Rogers Christmas Tree Growers Association.

Primary marketing outlets include wholesale distribution to major box stores, retail sales, Christmas tree lots secured by the growers, and local choose-and-cut farms. Christmas trees are typically marketed as cut trees in the 6 to 8-foot-tall range 7 to 10 years after planting in the field. Increasingly, 36-38 “table top” trees are being sold due to a faster economic return since trees are sold younger, and more trees are harvested per acre. Alternative marketing includes wreaths, garland, and balled-and-burlap trees sold for landscape plantings. Locally grown white pine tips and boxwood cuttings complement the Fraser fir greenery trade.





Excluding pasture, Grayson has over 19,000 acres of hay and haylage production with an annual yield of over 45,000 dry tons of hay equivalent valued at over \$3 million. The significant local cattle, small ruminant, and horse industries are the main users of this resource. Corn for silage encompassing about 1,100 acres resulting in about 20,000 tons of dairy and beef cattle forage valued close to \$1 million.

Table 5-4: Top Crops in Grayson County

Top Crops per Acreage	Quantity	State Rank
Forage-land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage, and green chop	19,326	29
Cut Christmas trees*	3,564	1
Corn for silage	1,081	25
Nursery stock crops	73	26
Tobacco	47	24
* Grayson County ranks 13th in the U.S. in cut Christmas trees		
Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture 2012		

Grayson County ranks in the top 20<sup>th</sup> percentile in both Cattle and Sheep, with over thirty thousand cattle and almost 1,900 sheep being reported as inventory within the County during 2012. Grayson’s beef industry is one of its largest sectors based on revenue, acreage involved, and number of farms, despite not having a traditional livestock market in the county. Most cattle are sold from the field direct to buyers while others are sold through state graded auctions or direct to slaughter. Recent years have seen an increase in multi-farm calf marketing pools of weaned calves with process verified health programs.

Most beef operations are commercial cow/calf, meaning the farm owns cows to produce calves for sale. Historically, calves were born in February and March and sold in October. Recently, the trend has been for calves to be born in September and October and sold the next summer or fall. Stocker operations tend to handle substantial quantities of young beef animals. They purchase calves from various sources, add weight and value, and resale in hopes of realized gains. Several order buyers acquire cattle for landowners and then buy them back at a later date. Some even have arrangements where ownership with the order buyer is shared and payment is based on profit from weight gain during the grazing season. This is a significant revenue stream for absentee or retired landowners trying to cover real estate property taxes.

Table 5-5: Top Livestock Inventory in Grayson County

Top Livestock Inventory per Head	Quantity	State Rank
Cattle and calves	30,499	18
Sheep and lambs	1,863	15
Layers	1,560	48
Horses and ponies	1,146	26
Goats, all	383	49
Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture 2012		

## Strategies



- 5-1 Continue support of regional economic development authorities and small business incubators/development centers.
- 5-2 Continue recruitment efforts of industries to the Wildwood Industrial Park, Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park and the Grayson County Industrial Park.
- 5-3 Encourage efforts to ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place and operating at the Wildwood Industrial Park, Grayson County Industrial Park, Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park, and other industrial developments where they align with Grayson County's best interest.
- 5-4 Create inventory of the privately-owned commercial and industrial sites and assist, where possible, with infrastructure needs or marketing to spur economic development.
- 5-5 Promote small business development by encouraging creative financing programs such as revolving loan funds.
- 5-6 Encourage small businesses and other types of economic development through asset-based development.
- 5-7 Survey small business owners to understand the needs of these businesses and leverage resources to assist these needs.
- 5-8 Consider participation in regional Enterprise Zone to encourage local investment and business development.
- 5-9 Gauge the support for a local office park to accommodate those without internet who may need personal office and when space is needed for business development.
- 5-10 Support initiatives that create employment through value-added processing of local agriculture and forestry resources. *(See 6-4)*
- 5-11 Support and encourage the development of advanced communication infrastructure; broadband, wireless internet, and cell coverage/towers. *(See 8-1)*
- 5-12 Work with agencies and educational institutions to develop job skill training programs to meet identified gaps in the local workforce. *(See 4-13)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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Expansion in educational opportunities will help support a strong workforce that meets the needs of employers. To retain existing industries and attract new businesses, the County needs to continue to support infrastructure improvements and try to expand infrastructure in areas where business development is expected. Fiber or wireless internet expansion will impact small business development, especially for small businesses that operate outside of major corridors and towns. Grayson County's transitioning economy continues to convey the importance of the region's natural and cultural assets and the need to support local entrepreneurs.



## Chapter Six: Agriculture and Forestry

**Goal: Preserve, protect, and enhance the quality of Grayson County’s agricultural areas and promote rural lifestyles, farmland, agricultural and forestry enterprises, open space, recreation, and historic resources within the county.**

### Introduction

As the largest segment of Grayson County’s industry, agriculture and forestry pursuits involve a large portion of the county’s residents. Most of the County’s agricultural products are consumed outside of the county and represent a major stream for external dollars to flow back into the county. The rising trends of agritourism, value-added products, and local foods initiatives are promoting agriculture and local products to new audiences, expanding the demand for local products, and increasing value in local communities. There are numerous opportunities for expanded education and training to local entrepreneurs, farmers, and foresters that will also support increased economic impact within the county.

### USDA Agricultural Census

The most recent Agriculture Census was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2017 and 2018, however, data from the survey will not be released until after the adoption of the Grayson County Comprehensive Plan, therefore the Census data referenced will be from the 2012 Census.

### Farm Demographics

Table 6-1: Demographics of Farms in Grayson County

	2012	2007	% Change
<b>Number of Farms/Operators</b>	764	852	-10.3%
<b>Principal Operators - Male</b>	696	768	-9.4%
<b>Principal Operators - Female</b>	68	84	-19.0%
<b>Farming as Primary Occupation</b>	44.2%	40.0%	10.6%
<b>Average Operator Age</b>	58.9	57.5	2.4%

Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture 2012 and 2007

Grayson County continues to follow the national trends of aging farmers and larger, but fewer farms. One surprising statistic is the increase in the percentage of operators with farming as their primary occupation.



## Farm Economics

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Goats, all	383	49

*Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture 2012*

## Local Food Initiative

Local Food, a growing trend across the country, has recently established itself in Grayson County creating a new and vibrant agricultural interest. Local food or the local food movement is a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies - one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place. It is part of the concept of local purchasing and local economies; a preference to buy locally produced goods and services rather than those produced by corporatized institutions.

### Grayson LandCare

In Grayson County, the Local Food movement is organized as a “food hub” structure called the Local Food Initiative by the non-profit community-oriented group, Grayson LandCare. Acting as fiduciary agent, Grayson LandCare partnered with the Alleghany Agricultural Coalition, a multi-state organization to form the Appalachian Food Hub in order to assess the region’s local food system. The geographical area impacted by the study included Grayson and Carroll Counties, and the City of Galax in Virginia and neighboring Alleghany and Ashe Counties in North Carolina. The Appalachian Food Hub, now referred to as The Local Food Initiative in Grayson County, aggregates, markets, stores, and sells local foods, primarily through the Independence Farmers Market On-line Market. The goal of the Local Food Initiative is to connect producers, distributors, retailers, restaurants, institutions and consumers. A key feature of The Local Food Initiative is that the consumer and retailers know the farm where the produce or meat is produced, adding a sense of community to all the participants in the food system.

### The Independence Farmers Market

The Independence Farmers Market, a vibrant community asset, has become the cornerstone of the Local Food Initiative. In 2012, vendors at the market formed a small group in order to formalize market operations. With facilitation provide by Grayson County’s Tourism Department, the group formed a Board of Directors, By-laws and a marketing strategy. Partnering with Grayson LandCare, they achieved 501(c) status which allowed the market to conduct fundraising activities and apply for grants to fund a market manager position. The Independence Farmers Market is open 22 weeks out of the year and operates every Friday from the middle of May until the middle of October across from the 1908 Courthouse in Town Park in Independence. The Market also offers a year-round On-line Market with pick up of pre-ordered products Wednesdays from 4-6 pm. Products offered at the Independence Farmers



Market must be grown or produced locally (typically within a 100-mile radius of the market) and include vegetables, fruits, meats, cheeses, honey, baked goods, jams, pickles and local handcrafted items.

## Food Deserts

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The USDA has designated Grayson County as a “Food Desert”. This designation means that a large portion of the population lacks access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up a full and healthy diet. Many of our citizens living in rural, minority, or low-income areas are subjected to food deserts and may be unable to access affordable, healthy foods, leaving their diets lacking essential nutrients.

The County’s rural and low-income population combine to create the perfect conditions of a food deserts because of the lack large, retail food markets and the higher number of convenience stores, where healthy foods are less available. Studies have shown that food deserts can negatively affect health outcomes, but more research must be done to show how that influence occurs. There appears to be a link between access to affordable nutritious foods and the eating of these foods, meaning less access may lead to less incorporation of healthy foods into the populations’ diets.

Food deserts can be improved through several different types of efforts. Establishing community gardens, school gardens or gardens in low income areas where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden and organizing local farmers markets are two efforts that community members themselves can do. Local governments can improve local transportation like buses, bike paths and sidewalks to allow for easier access to established markets. They can also change zoning codes and offer economic or tax incentives to attract retailers with healthier food offerings to the area.



Figure 6-4: Prime Agricultural Soils

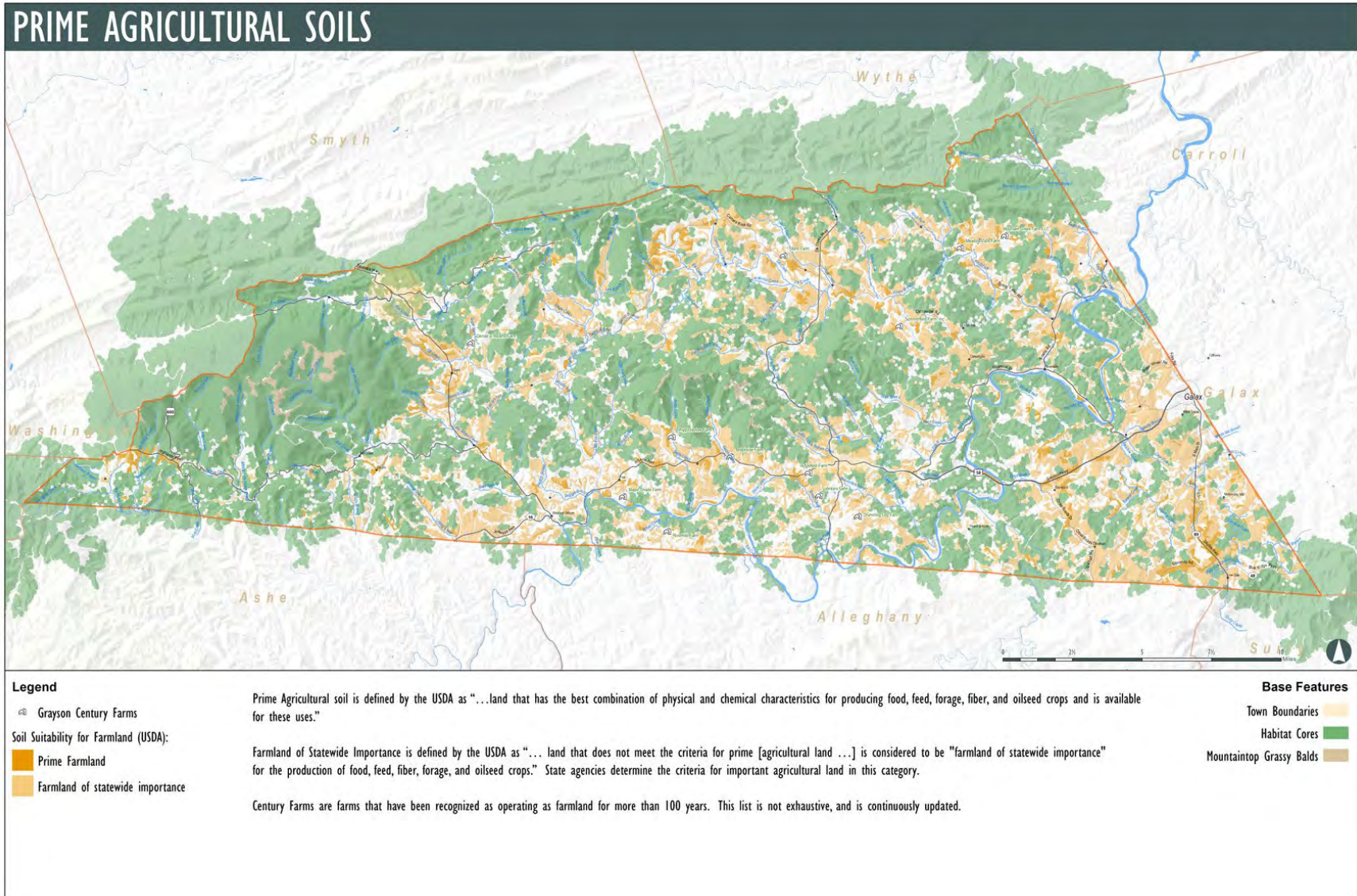
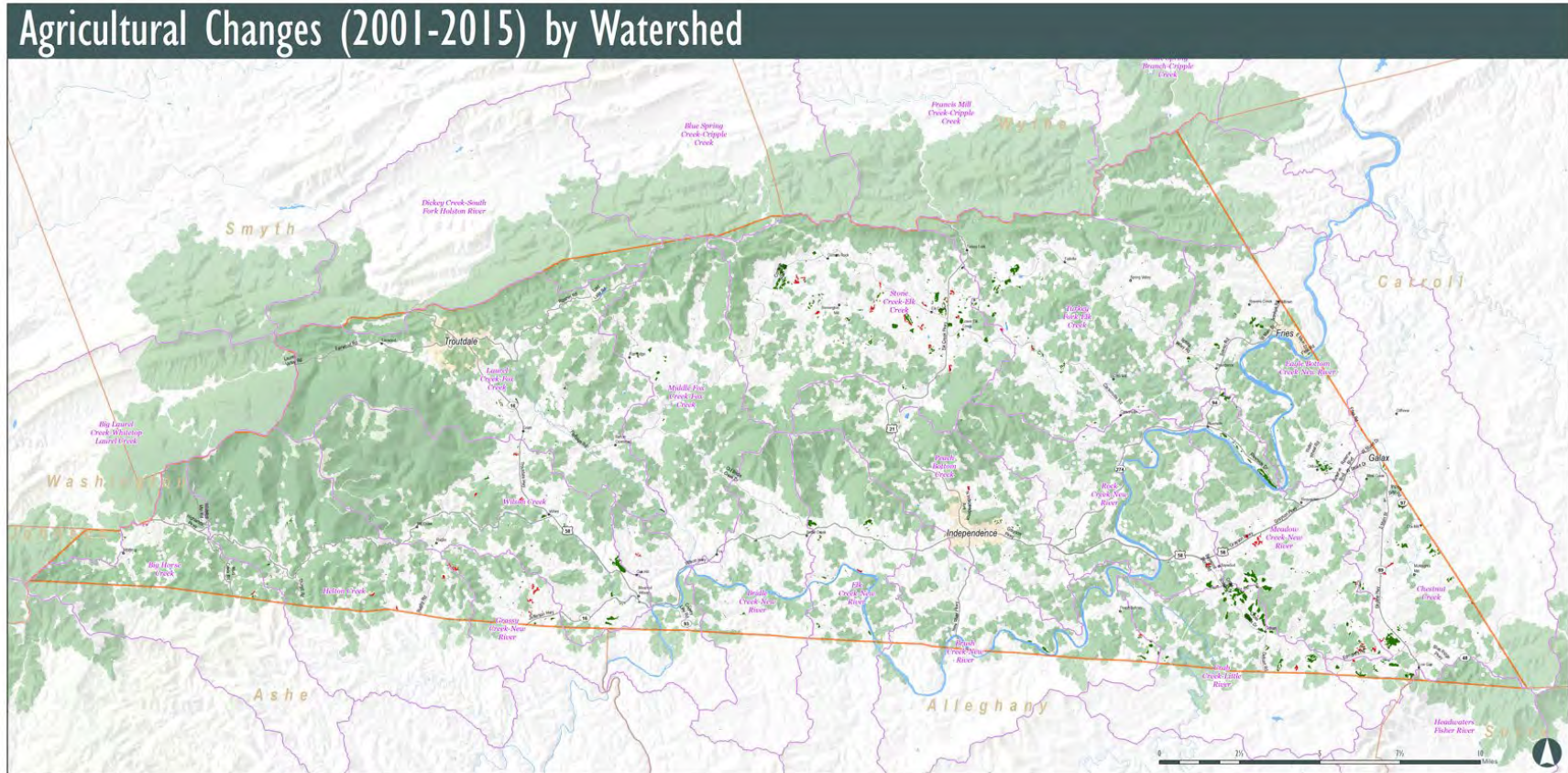




Figure 6-5: Agricultural Changes by Watershed



**Legend**

Grayson Watersheds (HUC12 level)

- Watershed Agriculture Change 2001-2015 (in Acres)
- +287: Crab Creek-Little River
  - +226: Stone Creek-Elk Creek
  - +209: Chestnut Creek
  - +195: Meadow Creek-New River
  - +124: Turkey Fork-Elk Creek
  - +111: Eagle Bottom Creek-New River
  - +100: Wilson Creek
  - +65: Elk Creek-New River
  - +40: Brush Creek-New River
  - +37: Rock Creek-New River
  - +35: Laurel Creek-Fox Creek
  - +34: Middle Fox Creek-Fox Creek
  - +17: Peach Bottom Creek
  - +16: Bridle Creek-New River
  - +7: Helton Creek
  - +5: Big Horse Creek
  - +3: Brush Creek-New River

- 0: Francis Mill Creek-Cripple Creek
- 0: Blue Spring Creek-Cripple Creek
- 0: Dickey Creek-South Fork Holston River
- 0: Headwaters Fisher River
- 0: Slate Spring Branch-Cripple Creek
- 1: Big Laurel Creek-Whitstop Laurel Creek
- 10: Grassy Creek-New River

Agricultural Land Use Differences (USDA Cropland Data Layer 2001-2015)

- Lost Agricultural Land
- Gained Agricultural Land

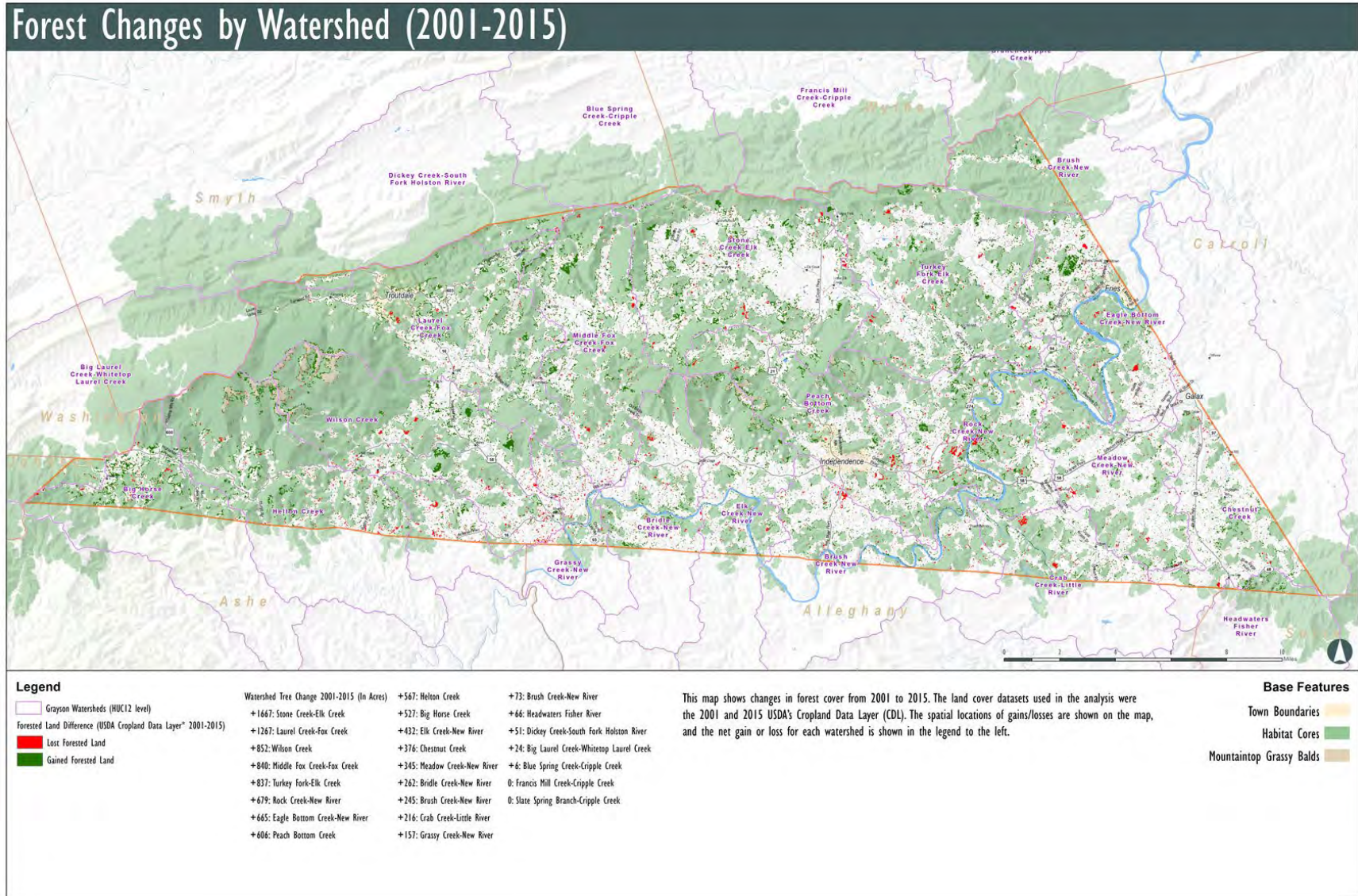
Change in agricultural acres are shown as net forest changes based on the Cropscape Data Layer. This data, created by the USDA, is a land cover dataset at 1000 sqft resolution. The cultivated land cover from 2001 to 2015 was compared to find net agricultural changes in that time period.

**Base Features**

- Town Boundaries
- Habitat Cores
- Mountaintop Grassy Balds



Figure 6-6: Forest Changes by Watershed



## Green Infrastructure Maps

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Figure 6-4, Figure 6-5, and Figure 6-6 on the preceding pages show agricultural soils and changes to the forests and agricultural lands occurred between 2001 and 2015. These maps can be viewed on the County's website for a greater level of detail.

## Agriculture Resources

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### Agriculture Support Groups and Agencies

#### Governmental Support Agencies

- **USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** provide technical and financial assistance to new farmers, farmers who have suffered from natural disasters, and those wanting to participate in federal conservation efforts.
- **New River Soil and Water Conservation District** helps conserve and protect soil and water resources. Primary best management practices (BMP's) supported by the program include livestock stream exclusion, alternative livestock watering systems, animal waste storage, pesticide handling facilities, and cover crops on highly erodible land. The District also supports the Grayson Erosion and Sediment Control Plan review process.
- **Virginia Cooperative Extension** encompasses science-based agriculture and community development, and 4-H youth development through its association with Virginia's two land grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University.
- **Virginia Department of Forestry** provides technical oversight to logging operations, fights forest fires, and provides advice to woodlot owners. Also, it manages two state forests located in the county totaling over 800 acres.
- **Virginia Department Agriculture and Consumer Service** oversees most state regulations and programs related to agriculture production and marketing. Regulatory services include meat and milk inspections, certification of point-of-sale scales, pesticide investigations, veterinary diagnostic services and animal disease monitoring, animal feed and fertilizer quality monitoring, endangered species protection, and plant inspections for nurseries and interstate trade. Market services include: export trade assistance, branded programs such as Virginia Grown and Virginia's Finest programs, livestock and commodity price reporting, support for farmer's markets and farm-to-school programs, and many more.
- **Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries** regulate recreational hunting and fishing. They monitor wildlife and fish populations, and their health and habitat.
- **Virginia Department of Environmental Quality** is responsible for monitoring air and water point-source pollution. Most agricultural practices are not regulated by DEQ, but special situations may apply such as large confined livestock feeding areas. DEQ monitors stream health based upon Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standards.

#### Agriculture & Forestry Non-Profit and Industry Support Groups



- The **Grayson County Farm Bureau** is located in Independence and serves as the local link to both Virginia and the American Farm Bureau Federations. Farm Bureau is one of the largest lobbies for agriculture and rural interests at the local, state, and federal level.
- **Grayson LandCare** is a grassroots effort of locally organized group of citizens, farmers, and landowners who strive to improve the economic, environmental and social well-being of Grayson County.
- **Jack and Claire Matthews Foundation** was started by the late Judge Jack Matthews and his wife Claire to support educational initiatives, particularly in the area of forestry and agriculture.
- **Carroll Grayson Cattle Producers Association** supports the local beef industry through educational programs, marketing efforts, advocacy, and bulk purchasing of animal health products. The association represents all segments of the local beef industry.
- **Mount Rogers Christmas Tree Growers Association** was formed to support the local Christmas tree industry. Primarily, the association is charged with preserving and protecting the native Fraser fir genetic pool that is severely threatened by the balsam wooly adelgid. In return, the association collects seed from mature Fraser fir for use in the nursery and Christmas tree industries. The association manages two Fraser fir orchards and is actively involved in marketing and advocacy efforts in support of the industry.
- **Mountain Empire Bee Keepers Association** supports local beekeepers through education and mentoring. They provide information on beekeeping supplies and attain grants for new and beginning beekeepers.
- **Southwest Virginia Ag Association** advocates for rural Southwest Virginia on policy issues of importance. It provides input to the Southwest Virginia Delegates and Senators who represent this area in Richmond. Grayson citizens serve on the various committees such as dairy, beef, vegetable crops, youth, and others. Their resolutions reflect the common voice of farmers and citizens of Southwest Virginia.

## Forest Resources

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The forest has been an important resource to Grayson County since settlement. Today over 50% of the land in Grayson County remains in timberland. While the woodland has changed due to insect, disease, fire and timber harvesting they continue to be very important to the local economy.

Grayson Counties forests are one of its most important natural resources. Planning that will set guidelines to maintain a viable forest resource is essential to insuring a quality environment for Grayson County residents. The forests provide a functional asset to the community both socially and ecologically.

The area of forest land in Grayson county is 155,557 acres, private forest land is 124,287 acres, USFS 23,088, State 6,152 and County 2013, with a total make up of 75% mixed hardwood and 25% pine. Threats include Hemlock Wooly Adelgid, Gypsy Moth, Emerald Ash Borer and Balsam Wooly Adelgid.



Ecologically, woodlands help maintain good water quality. By filtering and trapping sediments they absorb pollutants from overload and runoff and subsurface flow. Woodlands act as natural buffers along the New River, its major tributaries, and smaller perennial and intermittent streams by preventing excess nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorous, from entering and polluting our waterways. Tree roots help maintain clean ground water and trapping harmful pollutants. Forest areas provide essential ecosystems for a variety of plants and animals. They provide food, shelter, cover, nesting and bedding areas for a wide variety of wildlife.

The forest of Grayson County plays an important economic role in the community. Based on Timber Severance Taxes paid from 2011 to 2016 seven million per year was paid to Grayson County landowners for timber sold. The 2017 publication “The Economic Impact of Virginia’s Agriculture and Forest Industries” shows direct economic impacts of Forestry related industries in 2015 for Grayson county to be \$48.6 million with direct employment of 189 people. This information is for direct and does not include the indirect impact on the local economy. The timber industry is a major component of the local economy.

Trees harvested for saw timber such as mature hardwood species and White Pine are processed for hardwood flooring, furniture, wood components, structural boards and plywood, log cabin beams and other items. Processed wood is also export overseas from the area. Three major sawmills service the area. Two of these have significant capital and operations in Grayson County.

Several portable, privately owned sawmills also can be found in Grayson. Much of the wood products is used for building materials in a rough unfinished manner.

The timber industry also supports a small, but thriving, wood craft industry centered on instrument making and custom-made furniture. These are highly skilled niche enterprises such as Grayson Millworks. Wayne Henderson and the late Albert Hash represent the tradition of luthiers in the area and festivals in their honor are held each year. Chestnut Creek Scholl of the Arts supports the study of woodcrafts based on this tremendous local resource.

## Strategies

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- 6-1 Create a committee of stakeholders and volunteers to analyze the causes of different types of agricultural damages, recommend policies/strategies to encourage farming, agriculture land retention, and strategies to improve ag/economics.
  - 6-2 Educate residents about opportunities to protect prime farmland and encourage the farming of this land in future land-use decisions.
  - 6-3 Support local food initiatives and consider collaborating with local farmers and regional agricultural organizations to create a regional food hub that will transport and market local agricultural products.
  - 6-4 Support initiatives that create employment through value-added/processing of local agriculture and forestry resources. *(See 5-10)*
  - 6-5 Consider expanding efforts of agritourism initiatives. *(See 10-11)*



- 6-6 Consider workforce development program to meet the local farm/forestry labor needs and plan accordingly.
- 6-7 Evaluate the need for web-based clearinghouse of ag/forestry assets and networks to promote this economy. (producers, value-added products, active farms, local food infrastructure & transportation options for food products)
- 6-8 Encourage tourism visitation by supporting the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Matthews Farm Museum, the 1908 Courthouse, State Park, and/or other natural & cultural history museums as tourism development. *(See 10-10)*
- 6-9 Develop internship/mentorship program for youth to gain experience/build resumes. Combine with leadership training. *(See 4-9)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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Grayson County's predominant land use is farms and forest, whether publicly or privately owned. Much of the public lands such as the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Appalachian Trail, and several state parks are dedicated to recreational enjoyment and contribute significantly to tourism and aesthetic qualities of the county. Private land zoned agricultural or forested, whether in active production or not, is the single largest revenue stream for the county through real estate taxes.

Farming and forestry revenue is the largest industry segment, with significant participation from many citizens in the county. Because most of the goods produced on Grayson's farms and in Grayson's forests are consumed outside the county, they represent a major conduit for external dollars to flow into the county.



## Chapter Seven: Transportation

**Goal: Support a sustainable transportation system that links highways, transit, greenways, sidewalks and bike trails to provide multimodal transportation options.**

### Introduction

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Grayson County's primary method of transportation is the road system, of which a large portion is supported by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). VDOT maintains, supports, and develops state roads and road infrastructure within the county. The SMART SCALE transportation program has shown how imperative it is for the County to work closely with VDOT to develop the most economical and common-sense solutions to solve transportation issues. The County's collaboration with District Three Governmental Cooperative and its Mountain Lynx public transit are instrumental in providing public transportation options to residents and have the potential to be expanded within the county. In addition to roads and public transit, the rise in outdoor recreation and tourism in recent years has created numerous opportunities for the County to improve bicycling and pedestrian transportation.

### Transportation Planning

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The primary mode of transportation in Grayson County is the road system and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) maintains, improves and develops state roads and road infrastructure. Transportation planning is a necessary component of maintaining the transportation infrastructure and the planning occurs on a statewide, regional and local level.

#### State Highway Plan and Long Range Plan

Virginia's State Highway Plan includes components of each region's 2035 Rural Long Range Plan and the 2040 plan is currently under development. Grayson County is part of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission's Rural Long Range Transportation Plan. An important component of this plan is to identify local system deficiencies based on safety concerns, infrastructure improvements and meeting travel demands of each locality. A list of these recommendations can be found on the System Deficiency page in this chapter.

#### Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP)

The Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) is a document that outlines planned spending for transportation projects proposed for construction development or study for the next six years. The SYIP is updated annually and is the means by which the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) meets its statutory obligation under the Code of Virginia to allocate funds to interstate, primary, secondary and urban highway systems, public transit, ports and airports and other programs for the immediate fiscal year. The SYIP also identifies planned program funding for the succeeding five fiscal years. The CTB allocates funds for the first fiscal year of the SYIP but the remaining five years are estimates of future allocations. The CTB updates the SYIP each year as revenue estimates are updated, priorities are revised, project schedules and costs change, and study results are known.



State law requires the development and publication of separate programs for the secondary system of state highways in each county, known as the Secondary Six-Year Plan. This plan is administered differently from the SYIP, as each county oversees their own secondary roads plan. Approved each year by the local Board of Supervisors or legislative body the Secondary Six-Year Plan reflects the needs of local citizens. Decisions on which projects are included in the plan are based on traffic counts, immediate safety needs, and projects that provide the most benefit for dollars spent. Funding allocations for the Secondary Six Year Plan for each locality is often insufficient to meet the needs of the locality. Even after a project is approved for the Secondary Six Year Plan, the project might be delayed for numerous reasons, including changes in local government priorities and needs, funding availability, escalating land costs and environmental concerns. Changes to both the Six Year Improvement Plan and the Secondary Six Year Plan may occur each year, so these plans are constantly changing. The best source of information for understanding which projects are planned for the locality and the region is to visit the VDOT website or to contact the VDOT representative for the area.

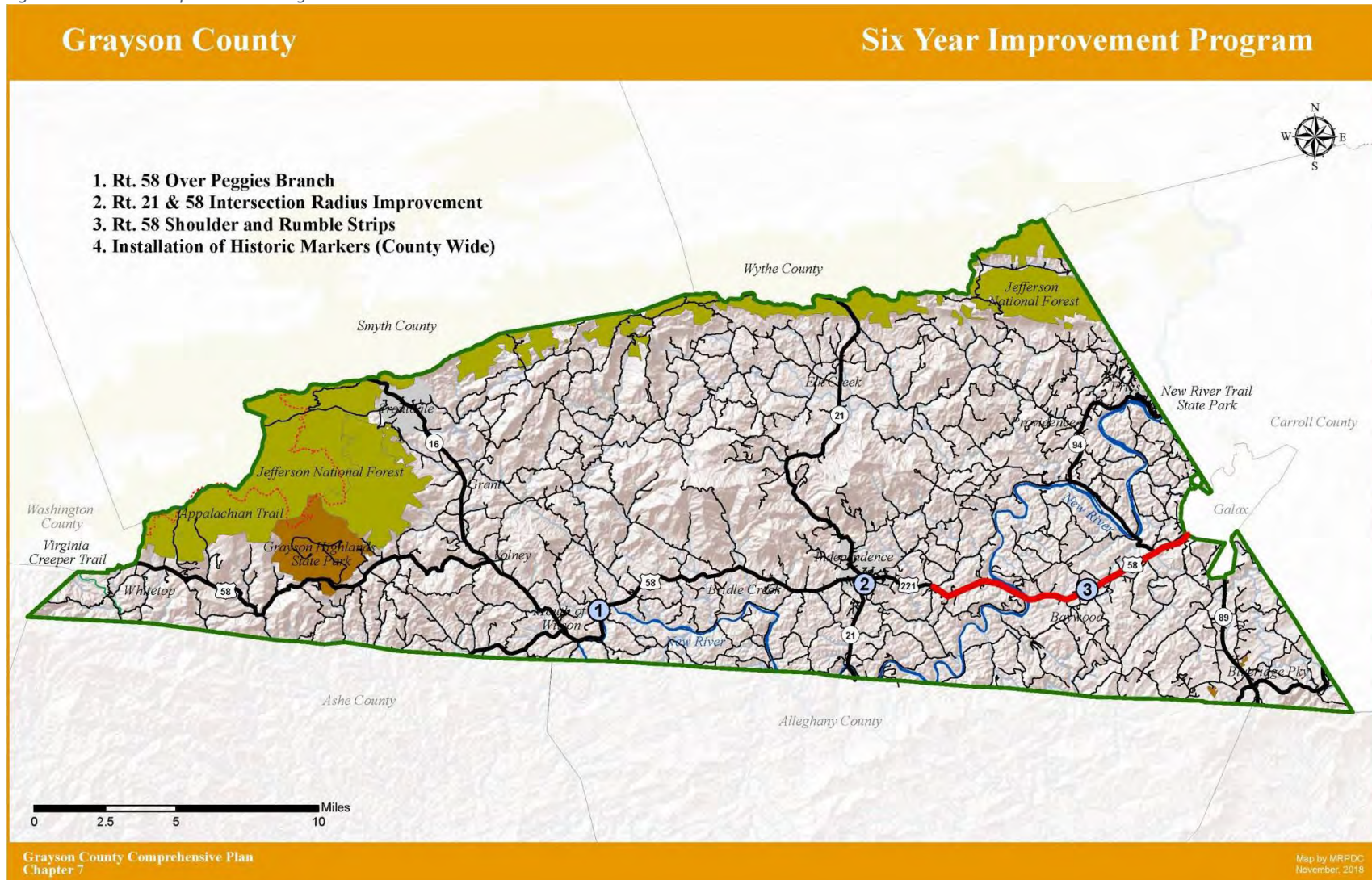
To ensure that the state roads across Grayson County can meet the future needs of its residents, the Virginia Department of Transportation should consider supporting and funding recommended projects for Grayson County in the Six Year Improvement Program, the Secondary Six Year Plan and those projects determined System Deficiencies as outlined in the 2035 Mount Rogers Regional Plan.

Figure 7-1 shows the most recent iteration of the Six Year Improvement Program, last updated for allocations in Fiscal Year 2019 and allocations set aside for Fiscal Years 2020 to 2024.





Figure 7-1: Six Year Improvement Program



## System Deficiencies

- 1 US 58/VA 16 Mid-term reconstruct intersection to improve sight distance and add turn lanes.
- 2 Proposed Independence Bypass from VA 703 to VA 888-Mid-term construct proposed Independence Bypass.
- 3 US 58 (Highlands Pkwy.) from VA 751 E. to VA 703-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 4 VA 16 (Troutdale Hwy.) from US 58 N. to 0.21 Mi. N. VA 735-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 5 VA 16 (Troutdale Hwy.) from 0.21 Mi. N. VA 735 to 0.20 Mi. S. VA 735-Short-term install guardrails; Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 6 VA 16 (Troutdale Hwy.) from 0.20 Mi. S. VA 735 to Smyth Co. Line-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 7 VA 89 (Skyline Hwy.) from VA 613 to SCL of Galax-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 8 US 58 (E. Main St.) from ECL of Independence to VA 888-Long-term monitor traffic flow after construction of Independence Bypass.
- 9 VA 821 from VA 89 S. (Skyline Hwy.) to VA 89 N. (Skyline Hwy.)-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 10 VA 622 from VA 624 to VA 617-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 11 VA 607 from NCL of Galax to Carroll Co.-Line Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders).
- 12 VA 815 (Tanglewood Rd.) from VA 94 (J.E.B Stuart Hwy.) to VA 647 (Stevens Creek)-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 13 VA 647 (Stevens Creek) from VA 815 (Tanglewood Rd.) to VA 759-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 14 VA 647 (Stevens Creek) from VA 759 to VA 644-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 15 VA 647 from VA 644 to VA 770-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 16 VA 648 from VA 770 to VA 604-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 17 VA 644 (Freedom Ln.) from VA 94 (J.E.B Stuart Hwy.) to VA 770-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 18 VA 644 from VA 770 to VA 647 (Stevens Creek)-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 19 VA 770 from VA 644 to VA 647-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 20 VA 777 (Liberty Hill Rd.) from VA 805 (Spring Valley Rd.) to VA 760-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 21 VA 760 from VA 777 (Liberty Hill Rd.) to VA 604 (Jerusalem Rd.)-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 22 VA 604 (Jerusalem Rd.) from VA 760 to VA 644-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 23 VA 604 from VA 644 to VA 647-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 24 VA 660 from US 21 to VA 691-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 25 VA 654 (Peach Bottom Rd.) from US 21 to VA 686 W.-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 26 VA 654 (Peach Bottom Rd.) from VA 686 W. to VA 695-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 27 VA 636 from 0.16 Mi. N. of US 58 to VA 623-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 28 VA 636 from VA 636 W. to VA 636 E.-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 29 VA 602 from VA 653 to Carroll Co.-Line Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 30 VA 658 (Flatridge Rd.) from VA 731 W. to VA 601 S.-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 31 VA 658 (Flatridge Rd.) from VA 601 N. to VA 670-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 32 VA 601 from VA 680 to VA 658 S. (Flatridge Rd.)-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (11-foot lanes).
- 33 VA 601 from S. VA 603 to Smyth Co. Line-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 34 VA 708 from VA 766 W. to VA 766 E.-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (9-foot lanes).
- 35 VA 601 (Bridge Creek Road) from VA 708 S. to VA 711 N.-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 36 VA 743 from N. Carolina State Line to VA 725 S.-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 37 VA 743 from VA 723 to US 58 (Highlands Pkwy.)-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (10-foot lanes).
- 38 US 58 Over Big Wilson Creek/Volney-Short-term replace bridge.
- 39 VA 94 Over New River, near VA 634-Short-term replace bridge.
- 40 US 58 over M. Fork Helton Creek-Short-term replace bridge.
- 41 VA 758 from VA 1001 (W. Main) to Carroll Co. Line-Long-term reconstruct road to address geometric deficiencies (including full-width lanes and shoulders). (Fries)
- 42 US 58/US 21-Mid-term reconstruct intersection to improve turn radius for trucks. (Independence)
- 43 US 58 (E. Main St.) from VA 802 to ECL of Independence-Long-term monitor traffic flow after construction of Independence Bypass. (Independence)

**GRAYSON COUNTY DEFICIENCIES**

- |                           |                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ● Intersection Deficiency | ● Segment Deficiency                 |
| ● Operation Deficiency    | ● Operation Deficiency               |
| ● Safety Deficiency       | ● Safety Deficiency                  |
| ● Both Deficiencies       | ● Geometric Deficiency               |
| ● Other Deficiency        | ● Both Operation & Safety Deficiency |



**GRAYSON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**



## **SMART SCALE**

Transportation needs will almost always be greater than the funds available to address them. In 2013, the signing of House Bill 2313 (HB 2313) created a more sustainable revenue source supporting transportation funding. While passage of this bill enabled the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to add significant revenues to Virginia’s transportation program, there are still many transportation needs that cannot be addressed with available revenues. To find a way to better balance transportation needs and prioritize investments for both urban and rural communities throughout the Commonwealth, new legislation – House Bill 2 – was signed into law in 2014. In 2016, the process was renamed “SMART SCALE, Funding the Right Transportation Projects in Virginia.” SMART SCALE stands for System Management and Allocation of Resources for Transportation: Safety, Congestion, Accessibility, Land Use, Economic Development and Environment.

The purpose of SMART SCALE is to fund the right transportation projects through a prioritization process that evaluates each project’s merits using key factors, including: improvements to safety, congestion reduction, accessibility, land use, economic development and the environment. The evaluation focuses on the degree to which a project addresses a problem or need relative to the requested funding for the project. With the latest updates to the program’s design and project scoring and evaluation, SMART SCALE is moving to a biennial application process, with applications being due in August of years ending in even numbers.

### **Round Five**

Figure 7-2 in the following pages show Grayson County SMART SCALE project priorities om Round Five to be submitted in August 2022. The project will involve extending the turn lanes at the intersection of US Route 58 at Delhart to meet minimum VDOT standards. The proposed turn lane improvements will improve the safety of this intersection by providing more room for vehicles to queue without impacting the adjacent through movements. As of the summer of 2022, the turn lane improvements are projected to cost approximately \$4 to \$5 million.

### **Round Four**

Figure 7-2 and Figure 7-3 on the following pages show Grayson County’s SMART SCALE project priorities in Round Four, to be submitted in August 2020. Both projects involved extending turn lanes to meet Virginia Department of Transportation minimum standards. As of summer 2020, The US 58 at Delhart Rd Turn Lane Improvements is projected to cost approximately \$2.3 million and the US 58 at State Route 94 Turn Lane Improvements is projected to cost \$2 million.

### **Round Three**

Figure 7-4 and Figure 7-5 show Grayson County’s SMART SCALE project priorities in Round Three of funding. The State Route 89 AT State Route 613 Realignment was fully funded for \$4,068,990 and barring no changes from the original scope, the project should be completed in late 2028. The proposed project will improve the intersection of State Route 613 at State Route 89 by realigning the westbound approach of Snow Hill Road (State Route 613) and adding left-turn lanes on State Route 89.



Figure 7-2: US 58 at Delhart Road Turn Lane Improvements

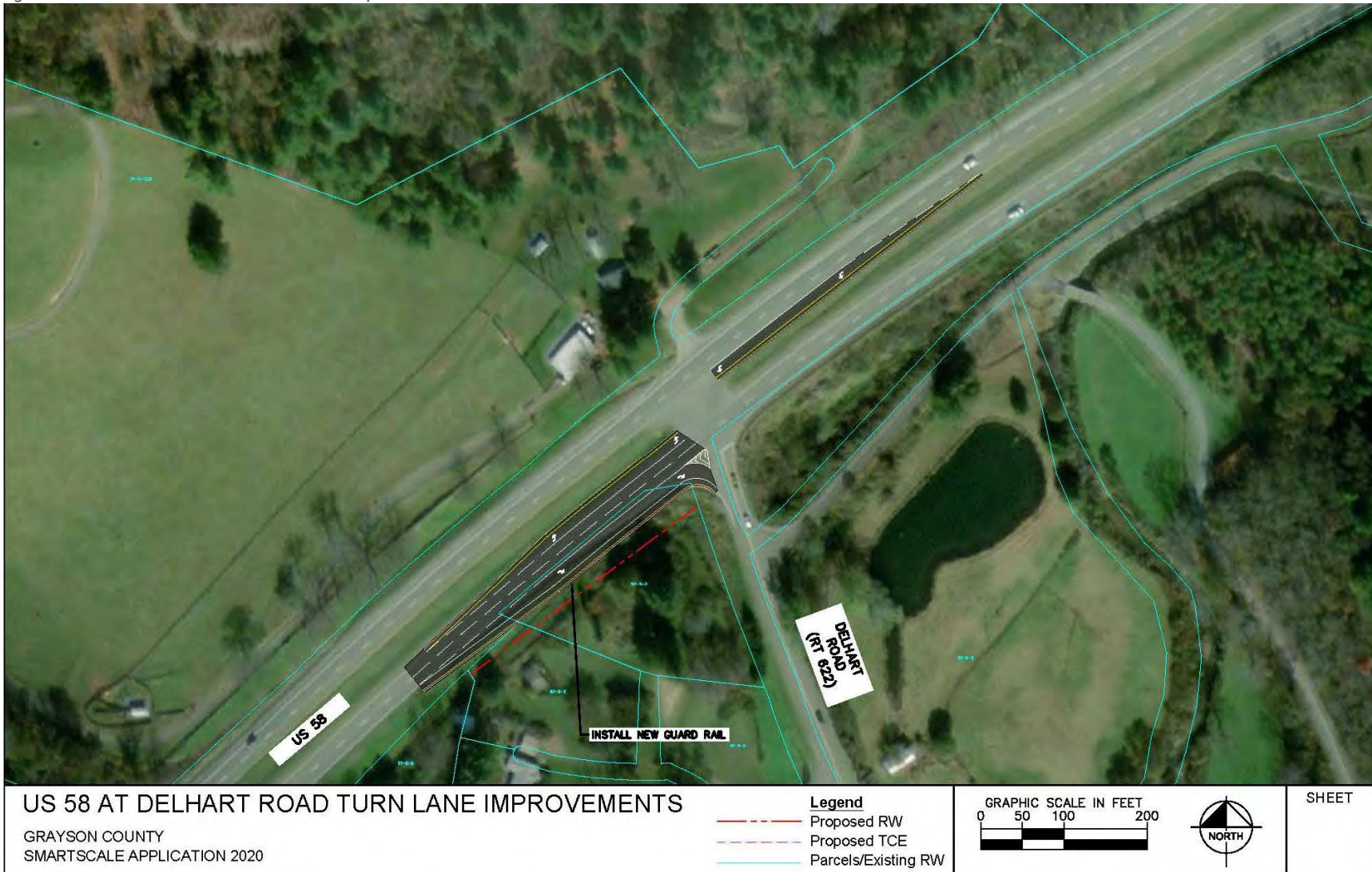


Figure 7-3: US 58 at State Route 94 Turn Lane Improvements

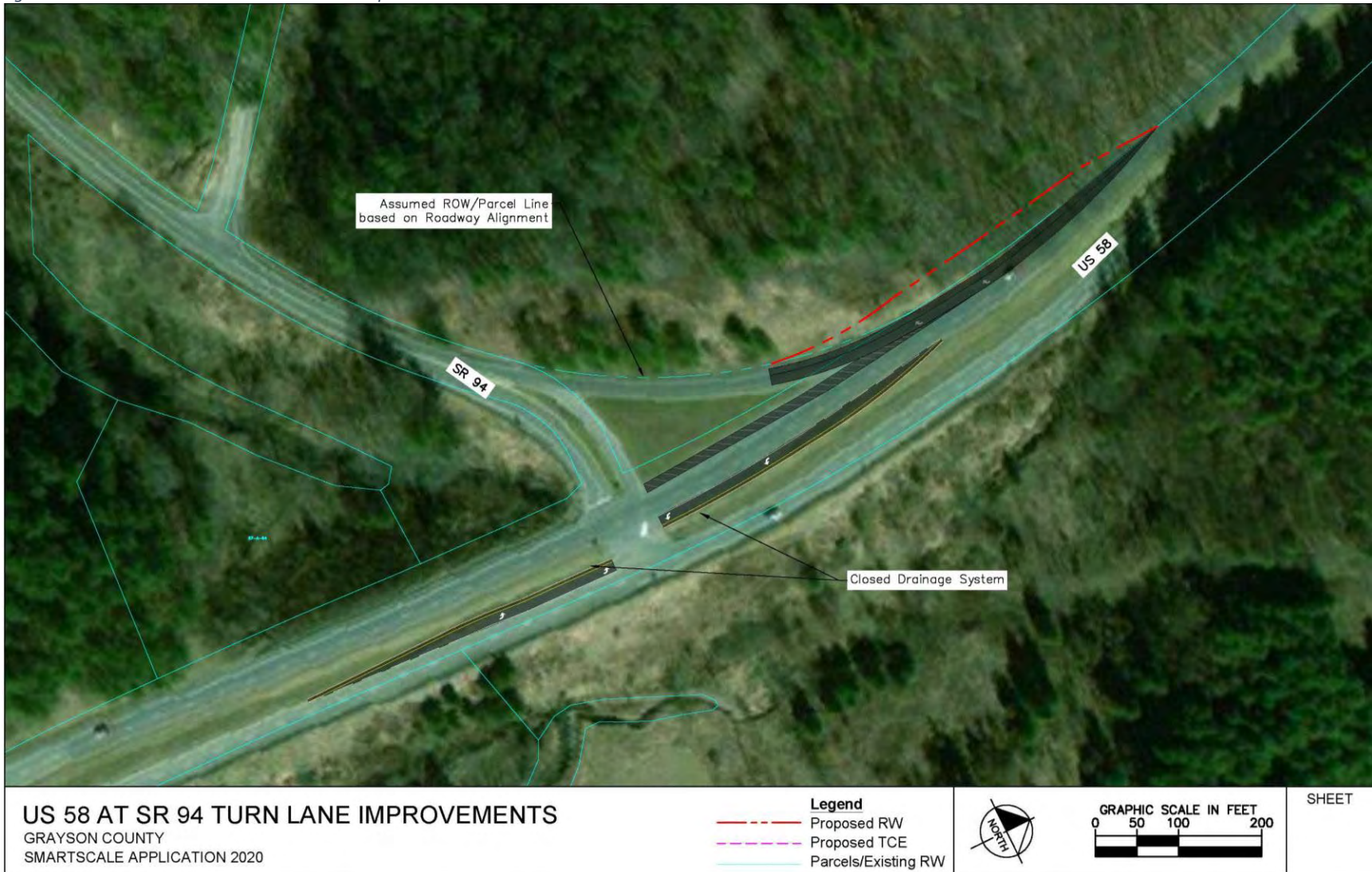


Figure 7-4: SMART SCALE Projects Priorities

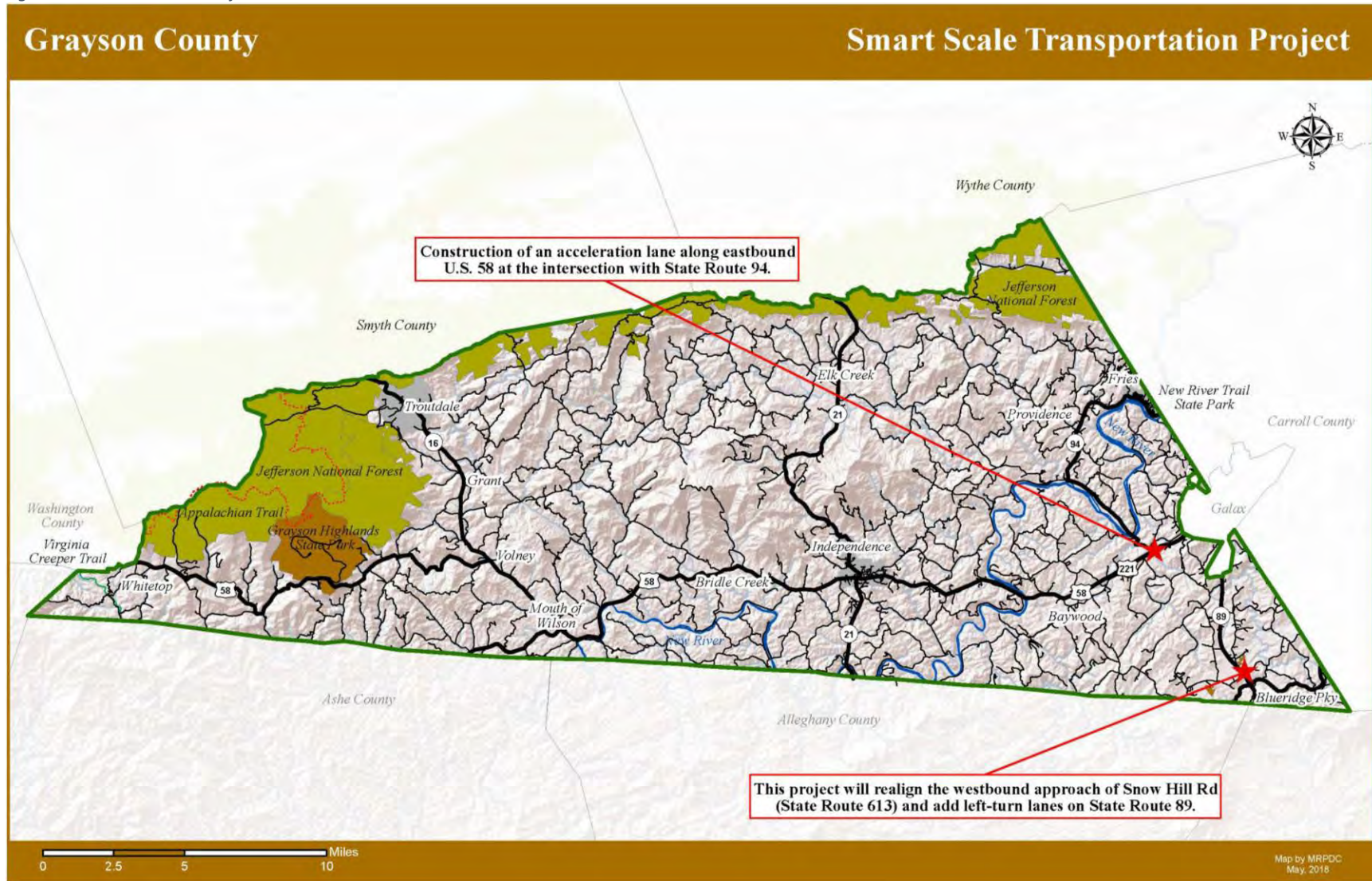
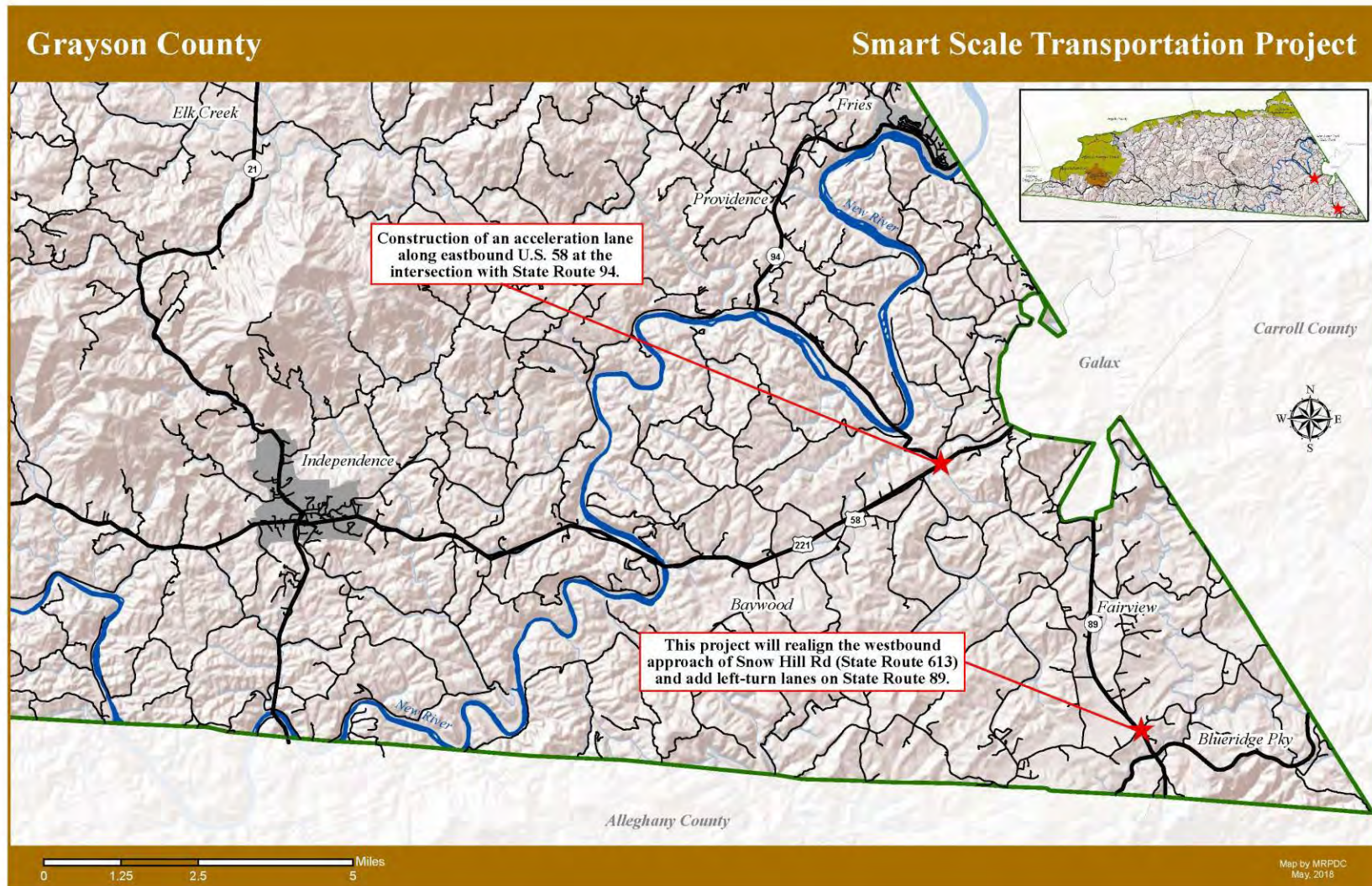


Figure 7-5: SMART SCALE Projects Map, Enlarged to Project Area



## Roadways

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### Interstate System

The primary transportation mode for Grayson County is the road system. This system utilizes a combination of interstate (through nearby access points), primary, and secondary roads to serve the needs of residents. Road classifications and road locations in the county influence development and economic activity. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) manages the public road system.

Interstate 81 & 77- In Virginia, Interstate 81 extends for a total of 325 miles from the Virginia-Tennessee border near Bristol to the Virginia-West Virginia state line near Winchester. In Virginia, Interstate 77 extends approximately 69 miles, from the North Carolina border in Carroll County to the West Virginia border in Bland County. Interstate 77 includes a high volume, eight-mile overlap with Interstate 81 in Wytheville/Wythe County. Grayson County Interstate access is available at; in Marion at Exit 45 to Interstate 81, eight miles east of Galax, at Exit 14, to Interstate 77, and access to the Interstate 77/81 overlap in Wytheville at Exits 73 and 80.

### Local Roads

#### **Primary**

Rural primary (arterial) highways are defined as roads that range from two-lane, multi-lane, and divided highways with controlled points of access. The US 58, 221/21 routes, and the VA 16, 89, 93, 94, 97, and 274 routes serve Grayson County as its key arterial primary highways. Of these roads, US 58 (Southside Corridor of Statewide Significance) and US 16 provide travelers the most favorable east-west route, while US 221/21 and 94 provide the preferred means to move via north and south.

#### **Secondary**

A rural secondary road or “collector” can have two to four lanes and is usually undivided. Secondary roads absorb traffic from lightly traveled local roads and busier primary roads. Generally, these facilities have fewer restricted access points to adjacent properties than either the primary or interstate systems. In Grayson County there are approximately 338 secondary roads in the study area.

#### **Private**

Private streets and right of ways can be developed for access to individual parcels with the understanding that these areas will be privately maintained and are not under the control of the Virginia Department of Transportation.





## Scenic Routes

Virginia offers beautiful scenery year-round and can be enjoyed on most of the roadways in the Grayson County. The closest National Scenic Byway to Grayson County is the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Blue Ridge Parkway was constructed during the Great Depression and is the nation's longest rural roadway as it extends 469 miles along the crests of the Southern Appalachian Mountains between the Shenandoah and Great Smokey Mountain National Parks.

### The Blue Ridge Parkway

In Virginia, the Parkway offers spectacular views and interesting examples of Appalachian culture at places such as Humpback Rocks and Mabry Mill. The Appalachian Trail can also be reached from the Parkway at more than 20 overlooks and parking areas in the Commonwealth and provides opportunities to hike sections of this popular national scenic trail.

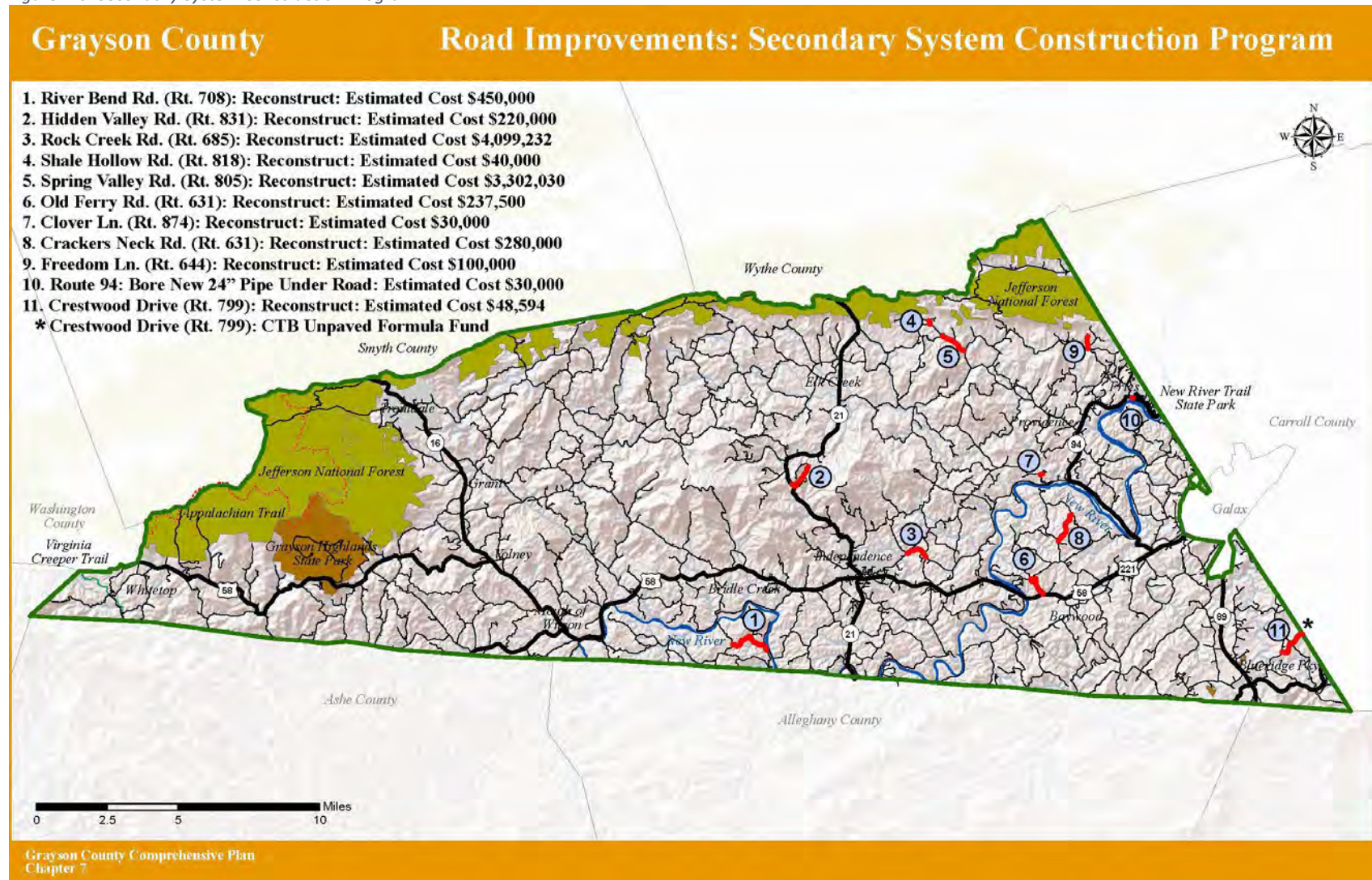
### Virginia Scenic Byways

The Virginia Byways program began in 1972 and mirrors the federal program as a way to promote the Commonwealth's substantial natural beauty, historical places, and areas of social significance to travelers who desire a pace that will enhance their experience. Currently, about 2,600 miles of roads have received Virginia Byway designation.

Two designated scenic byways pass through the Jefferson National Forest and the Mount Rogers Planning District region. These are the Mount Rogers and the Big Walker Mountain Scenic Byways. The Mount Rogers Scenic Byway is divided in two sections. The first begins at the Town of Troutdale and goes west along Va. 603 and Va. 600 for approximately 13 miles through Grayson and Smyth counties to Rt. 58. This scenic route traverses the heart of the Mount Rogers National Recreational Area with scenic, open, rural countryside characteristics. The second section leads 32 miles east from the Town of Damascus to the community of Volney. This section follows US 58 in Grayson and Washington counties. The route offers excellent access to the "High Country" of the national recreation area as it passes the southwest slopes of Whitetop Mountain at 5,570 feet.



Figure 7-6: Secondary System Construction Program



### Traffic Counts

Figure 7-7: Traffic Counts in Grayson County, 2017, See following page for abbreviations.

Route Name	Link (mi)	Start to End	AADT	QA	% 2 & 4 Tire	% Bus	% 2 Axle	% 3+ Axle	% 1 Trailer	% 2+ Trailer	QC	K Factor	Direction Factor	AAWDT	QW
VA 16/Jefferson Hwy	4.06	North Carolina State Line to US 58 Troutdale Hwy	930	F	89.1%	0.4%	1.9%	1.8%	6.8%	0.0%	C	0.099	0.653	970	F
US 58, VA 16/Troutdale Hwy	3.99	US 58 Mouth of Wilson to US 58 Volney	1500	F	91.3%	1.1%	2.5%	0.9%	4.1%	0.1%	C	0.104	0.503	1500	F
VA 16/Troutdale Hwy	5.66	US 58 Highlands Pkwy to ECL Troutdale	1300	F	90.6%	0.9%	3.3%	0.3%	4.9%	0.0%	C	0.113	0.595	1300	F
VA 16/Troutdale Hwy	2.26	ECL Troutdale to WCL Troutdale	940	F	91.3%	1.1%	2.5%	0.9%	4.1%	0.1%	F	0.113	0.592	970	F
VA 16/Troutdale Hwy	0.82	WCL Troutdale to Smyth County Line	940	N	91.3%	1.1%	2.5%	0.9%	4.1%	0.1%	N	0.113	0.592	970	N
US 21, US 221/New River Pkwy	3.39	North Carolina State Line to SCL Independence	1900	F	93.7%	0.5%	1.1%	0.7%	4.1%	0.0%	C	0.101	0.568	2000	F
US 21, US 221	0.47	SCL Independence to US 58 Main St	1900	N	93.7%	0.5%	1.1%	0.7%	4.1%	0.0%	N	0.101	0.568	2000	N
US 21	1.64	US 58 Main St to NCL Independence	1900	A	95.9%	0.4%	0.9%	0.9%	2.0%	0.0%	C	0.115	0.619	2000	A
US 21	8.72	NCL Independence to 38-791 Country Ln	1900	N	95.9%	0.4%	0.9%	0.9%	2.0%	0.0%	N	0.115	0.619	2000	N
US 21/Elk Creek Pkwy	1.45	38-791 Country Ln to 38-805 Spring Valley Rd	1300	F	95.9%	0.4%	0.9%	0.9%	2.0%	0.0%	F	0.109	0.547	1300	F
US 21/Elk Creek Pkwy	1.37	38-805 Spring Valley Rd to Wythe County Line	1200	F	95.9%	0.4%	0.9%	0.9%	2.0%	0.0%	F	0.102	0.642	1300	F
VA 48/Blue Ridge Parkway	1.13	North Carolina State Line to SR 89 Skyline Hwy	560	O							X	-	-		
VA 48/Blue Ridge Parkway	3.56	SR 89 Skyline Hwy to Grayson County Line	560	O							X	-	-		
US 58/Highlands Pkwy; Jeb Stuart Hwy	9.57	Washington County Line to SR 362 Grayson Highlands SP	480	F	95.5%	0.3%	3.0%	0.2%	1.0%	0.0%	C	0.092	0.551	500	F
US 58/Highlands Pkwy	3.76	SR 362 Grayson Highlands SP to 38-740 North of Rugby	310	F	96.5%	0.2%	2.7%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	C	0.123	0.539	320	F
US 58/Highlands Pkwy	3.99	38-740 North of Rugby to SR 16 Troutdale Hwy	450	F	97.7%	0.0%	1.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.0%	C	0.124	0.561	470	F
US 58, VA 16/Troutdale Hwy	3.99	SR 16 Highlands Pkwy to SR 16 Jefferson Hwy	1500	F	91.3%	1.1%	2.5%	0.9%	4.1%	0.1%	C	0.104	0.503	1500	F
US 58/Wilson Hwy	3.79	SR 16 Jefferson Hwy to 38-711 Fox Creek Rd	1800	F	90.4%	0.7%	2.8%	1.7%	4.4%	0.0%	C	0.093	0.515	1800	F
US 58/Wilson Hwy	8.04	38-711 Fox Creek Rd to WCL Independence	2300	F	91.8%	0.7%	1.9%	2.2%	3.4%	0.0%	C	0.094	0.607	2400	F
US 58/W Main St	0.86	WCL Independence to US 21 Independence Ave	2300	N	91.8%	0.7%	1.9%	2.2%	3.4%	0.0%	N	0.094	0.607	2400	N
US 58, US 221/E Main St	1.20	US 21 Independence Ave to ECL Independence	6900	F	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	F	0.110	0.621	7100	F
US 58, US 221/Grayson Pkwy	1.55	ECL Independence to SR 274 Riverside Dr	6900	N	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	N	0.110	0.621	7100	N
US 58, US 221/Grayson Pkwy	8.68	SR 274 Riverside Dr to SR 94 Riverside Dr	7600	F	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	C	0.094	0.527	7900	F
US 58, US 221/Grayson Pkwy	1.36	SR 94 Riverside Dr to WCL Galax	8800	F	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	F	0.099	0.561	9100	F
VA 89/Skyline Hwy	4.89	North Carolina State Line to SCL Galax	5100	F	97.5%	0.3%	0.9%	0.4%	1.0%	0.0%	C	0.094	0.558	5300	F
VA 93/Wilson Hwy	0.92	North Carolina State Line to US 58 Near Mouth of Wilson	610	F	83.9%	0.4%	1.4%	7.9%	6.4%	0.0%	C	0.125	0.663	630	F
VA 94/Riverside Dr	4.22	US 58 West of Galax to SR 274 Riverside Dr	1800	F	97.4%	0.2%	0.8%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	C	0.106	0.652	1900	F
VA 94/Scenic Rd	2.05	SR 274 Riverside Dr to 38-805 SW of Fries Spring Valley	1900	F	95.8%	1.2%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	F	0.110	0.591	2000	F
VA 94/Scenic Rd	2.20	38-805 Spring Valley Rd to WCL Fries	1700	F	95.8%	1.2%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	C	0.100	0.509	1800	F
VA 94	0.48	WCL Fries to 38-1001 W Main St	1700	N	95.8%	1.2%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	N	0.100	0.509	1800	N
VA 94/Scenic Rd	0.56	38-1001 W Main St to NCL Fries	1600	F	95.8%	1.2%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	F	0.102	0.550	1700	F
VA 94	0.63	NCL Fries to Carroll County Line	1600	N	95.8%	1.2%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	N	0.102	0.550	1700	N
VA 97/Pipers Gap Rd	0.78	ECL Galax to Carroll County Line	2300	F	99.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	C	0.097	0.598	2400	F
US 21, US 221/New River Pkwy	3.39	North Carolina State Line to CL Independence	1900	F	93.7%	0.5%	1.1%	0.7%	4.1%	0.0%	C	0.101	0.568	2000	F
US 21, US 221/	0.47	CL Independence to US 58 Independence	1900	N	93.7%	0.5%	1.1%	0.7%	4.1%	0.0%	N	0.101	0.568	2000	N
US 58, US 221/E Main St	1.20	US 58 Independence to CL Independence	6900	F	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	F	0.110	0.621	7100	F
US 58, US 221/Grayson Pkwy	1.55	CL Independence to SR 274 East of Independence	6900	N	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	N	0.110	0.621	7100	N
US 58, US 221/Grayson Pkwy	8.68	SR 274 East of Independence to SR 94 West of Galax	7600	F	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	C	0.094	0.527	7900	F
US 58, US 221/Grayson Pkwy	1.36	SR 94 West of Galax to WCL Galax	8800	F	94.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	F	0.099	0.561	9100	F
VA 274/Riverside Dr	7.36	US 58 Grayson Pkwy to SR 94 Scenic Rd; Riverside Dr	820	F	96.9%	0.8%	1.6%	0.2%	0.6%	0.0%	C	0.116	0.808	850	F



## Traffic Count Abbreviation Explanations

**AADT:** Annual Average Daily Traffic. The Estimate of typical daily traffic on a road segment for all days of the week, Sunday through Saturday, over the period of one year.

**AAWDT:** Average Annual Weekday Traffic. The estimate of typical traffic over the period of one year for the days between Monday through Thursday.

### QA – Quality of AADT:

- A - Average of Complete Continuous Count Data
- B - Average of Selected Continuous Count Data
- F - Factored Short-Term Traffic Count Data
- G - Factored Short-Term Traffic Count Data with Growth Element
- H - Historical Estimate
- M - Manual Uncounted Estimate
- N - AADT of Similar Neighboring Traffic Link
- O- Provided by External Source
- R - Raw Traffic Count, Unfactored

### QW: Quality of AAWDT:

- A - Average of Complete Continuous Count Data
- B - Average of Selected Continuous Count Data
- F - Factored Short-Term Traffic Count Data
- G - Factored Short-Term Traffic Count Data with Growth Element
- M - Manual Uncounted Estimate
- N - AAWDT of Similar Neighboring Traffic Link
- O- Provided by External Source

### QC: Quality of Classification Data:

- A - Average of Complete Continuous Count Data
- B - Average of Selected Continuous Count Data
- C - Short Term Classified Traffic Count Data
- F - Factored Short-Term Traffic Count Data
- H - Historical Estimate
- M - Mass Collective Average
- N - Classification Estimates of Similar Neighboring Traffic Link
- K - Factor: The estimated portion of traffic volume traveling during the peak hour or design hour.

### QK: Quality of the K Factor estimate:

- A - Factor based on 30th highest hour observed during at least 250 days of continuous traffic data
- B - Factor based on other hour observed during less than 250 days of continuous traffic data
- F - Factor based on highest hour collected at in a 48-hour weekday period
- F - Factor based on highest hour collected at in a 48-hour weekday period
- N - Design Hour Factor (K Factor) of Similar Neighboring Traffic Link
- O - Provided by external source



## Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel

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Recreational hiking trails and bicycling opportunities are available at the Grayson County Recreation Park, New River Trail State Park, Grayson Highlands State Park, Jefferson National Forest/Mount Rogers National Recreational Area, Matthews State Forest, Virginia Creeper Trail, Appalachian Trail, and the US Bicycle Route 76. Biking and walking for transportation is limited by the number of bike lanes and sidewalks in the county. The Independence Pedestrian & Bike Trail provides a safe mode of travel within the Town of Independence, along with other sidewalks in the Town of Fries and Independence.

### Trails, Parks, and Recreation Areas

#### **New River Trail State Park**

New River Trail State Park is the state's only linear park and is 57 miles in length. The park is a rail conversion of a former Norfolk & Southern railroad line. The park stretches from the City of Galax to Fries and on to Pulaski, as it parallels the banks of the New River for approximately 39 miles. Access is provided at Fries Park for Grayson County.

#### **Grayson Highlands State Park**

Grayson Highlands State Park is next to the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The 4,822-acre park is located on US 58 between Independence and Damascus. Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail facilities are available for year-round use.

#### **Jefferson National Forest / Mount Rogers National Recreational Area**

Jefferson National Forest / Mount Rogers National Recreational Area extends east to west across the entire length of Grayson County's northern boundary. This area includes many easy access points to the forest and its numerous campgrounds, picnic areas, and 400 miles of recreational trail facilities.

#### **Virginia Creeper National Recreational Trail**

Virginia Creeper National Recreational Trail is a 33.4-mile, multi-use facility, which connects the Virginia / North Carolina state line one mile east of Whitetop Station to the Towns of Damascus and Abingdon. It is available for use by hikers, cyclists, and equestrians.

#### **Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT)**

Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT) is a public footpath across over 2,000 miles of Appalachian Mountain ridgeline from Maine to Georgia. A beautiful section of this trail is located in the Mount Rogers NRA.

#### **US Bike Route 76**

US Bike Route 76, a.k.a., the Transamerica Trail, is a well-known bicycle route that stretches 4,300 miles from the coast of Virginia to the coast of Oregon. Bike Route 76, a shared-use facility, is widely recognized as the greatest and most traveled bike trail in America. The trail's route passes through the Town of Troutdale, on State Road 603 after leaving Damascus on Rt. 58. It leaves Troutdale north on State Rt. 16 to Sugar Grove, then to Cedar Springs and Rural Retreat.



## Public Transit and Taxi Services

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For a non-driver, transportation is available through District Three Public Transit or from cab services out of Galax or Marion. Regional Greyhound Bus stops are located in Fort Chiswell at Exit 80 and in the Town of Marion, both approximately 30 miles from the Town of Independence.

### **District Three Public Transit**

District Three Public Transit is operated by the District Three Governmental Cooperative and is the public transit provider for Abingdon, Galax, Marion, Wytheville, and the Counties of Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe. This service includes shopping routes, transportation to congregate nutrition sites operated by District Three Senior Services. District Three Senior Services also provides limited, on-demand response for medical transit service to eligible clientele in Grayson County to local medical facilities.

Grayson County Public Transit, a service of District Three Public Transit in the Town of Marion, operates a limited schedule of bus service for a reasonable fare to the citizens of Grayson County. Regular routes are available for the Towns of Fries, Independence, Troutdale, and the Whitetop community.

New Freedom is a weekly, fixed roundtrip schedule to regional medical centers and shopping malls. Two of the routes serve citizens of Grayson County. The service is open to the general public, not just low income, seniors or disabled individuals. One route originates in Marion and has scheduled stops in Troutdale, Volney, Mouth of Wilson, Independence, Galax, and Hillsville with a destination of Winston-Salem, NC medical facilities and Hanes Mall. A second route originates in Troutdale every Wednesday and follows the same pick up locations, but travels to the Roanoke area medical facilities and the Valley View Mall.

## Rail Service

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The nearest passenger service (Amtrak) station opened in October 2017 and is located in Roanoke with a direct bus connection via Blacksburg daily. However, the United States Congress has approved legislation that directs Amtrak to partner with the Commonwealth of Virginia and freight railroad corporations to construct the operating agreements necessary to launch passenger rail service via Bristol, Richmond and Washington, D.C. The Appalachian Regional Commission has helped fund a passenger rail study for the City of Bristol and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation allocated funding in its FY2019 budget to begin a passenger rail feasibility study for the Roanoke to Bristol corridor.

Commercial Freight Rail Service is not available in Grayson County. However, the Norfolk Southern Railway Corporation operates a Class A Mainline that passes through the nearby towns of Wytheville, Rural Retreat, and Marion. Numerous rail sidings and spurs are available to serve industrial customers throughout the region. Regional terminal facilities for the main line are based at Bristol and Radford. Norfolk Southern provides bulk, mixed freight, containerized piggyback and team track services



## Air Travel

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Air travel for Grayson County is provided through regional airports. These range in size from one of the largest in the world, to small, locally owned air strips and hangars. Regional airports connect to larger airports such as Charlotte/Douglas International, reaching national and international destinations.

### **International Airports**

Charlotte/Douglas International Airport (CLT) is the region's premier airport. CLT is located 115 miles from Independence and is sited seven miles west of uptown Charlotte. The airport offers non-stop domestic and international passenger service and averages over 700 flights daily and served nearly 46 million travelers in 2017. CLT is one of the fastest growing airports in the world and as of 2018 is under a \$2.5 billion development plan.

Piedmont Triad International Airport, located approximately 102 miles southeast of Independence, about seven miles west of Greensboro, North Carolina, primarily serves the Piedmont area of North Carolina and portions of Southwest Virginia.

### **Regional Airports**

Tri-Cities Regional Airport, located approximately 95 miles southwest of Independence, near Blountville, Tennessee, is another of the region's primary full-service commercial airports and serves as a gateway to Southwest Virginia, East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and parts of Kentucky.

The Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport (ROA), located approximately 109 miles northeast of Independence, is another full-service airport that offers a wide range of services for all aviation types and is the primary commercial airport serving a large portion of Western Virginia. ROA offers non-stop service to a dozen major cities, as well as connecting services to major air-transportation hubs.

Concord-Padgett Regional Airport is located approximately 110 miles south of Independence in Concord, North Carolina. As of the end of 2018, Allegiant is the only airline providing passenger flights through the airport, however, the airport provides a variety of services including aircraft storage, charter services, and freight services.

### **Local Airports**

The Twin County Airport (TCA) provides general aviation services locally and is jointly owned by Grayson County, Carroll County and the City of Galax. The airport is approximately 27 miles east of Independence near Hillsville, Virginia.

The Ashe County Airport (KGEV) is a county-owned, public use airport located three miles east of Jefferson, North Carolina, and approximately 30 drive miles from Independence.

The Mountain Empire Airport (MEA) provides general aviation services locally and is jointly owned by Smyth County, Wythe County and the Towns of Marion and Wytheville. It is located about 35 miles north of Independence, near the Town of Rural Retreat.



## Strategies

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- 7-1 Continue to work with Virginia Department of Transportation to develop, design, and implement transportation projects, including, but not limited to, SMART SCALE, Highway Safety, Bike Pedestrian Safety, and Transportation Alternatives projects.
- 7-2 Continue efforts to support the Twin County Airport (TCA).
- 7-3 Develop School System Capital Improvement Plan to prioritize transportation and facility improvement projects.
- 7-4 Partner with Towns to expand bicycling and pedestrian transportation options.
- 7-5 Analyze the need for Park & Ride locations and support public transit/ridesharing infrastructure when cost effective.
- 7-6 Consider policy that reduces strip development and multiple entrances to the state highways for safety concerns.
- 7-7 Proceed with Phase III of the Independence Pedestrian and Bike Trail. *(See 8-4)*
- 7-8 Use GIS to understand guardrail needs for reoccurring safety concerns.
- 7-9 Amend administrative process for rezones to include site plans and review/interaction with VDOT for rezone applications. *(See 11-9)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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Grayson County's partnerships with state and other local agencies are essential for meeting its transportation demands. Working with VDOT and providing local involvement in the Six Year Improvement Program and other regional and state planning processes is necessary to ensure that the needs of Grayson County are known to funding agencies. As funding becomes more difficult to secure for projects in rural areas, it is becoming increasingly important to have well-developed, cost-effective projects with a common-sense engineering focus that have strong support from the local VDOT offices and employees.

Grayson should continue to support regional transportation efforts and development, including the District Three 's public transportation services and any potential planned expansions. Additionally, the county should support the expansion of passenger rail into the Mount Rogers Region with the potential opening of a Bristol Amtrak station, which would provide more diversified economic development within the region.





# Chapter Eight: Public Services, Facilities, and Utilities

**Goal: Expand access to improved and enhanced community services, facilities, and infrastructure for all; and expanded opportunities for social equity among diverse community groups.**

## Introduction

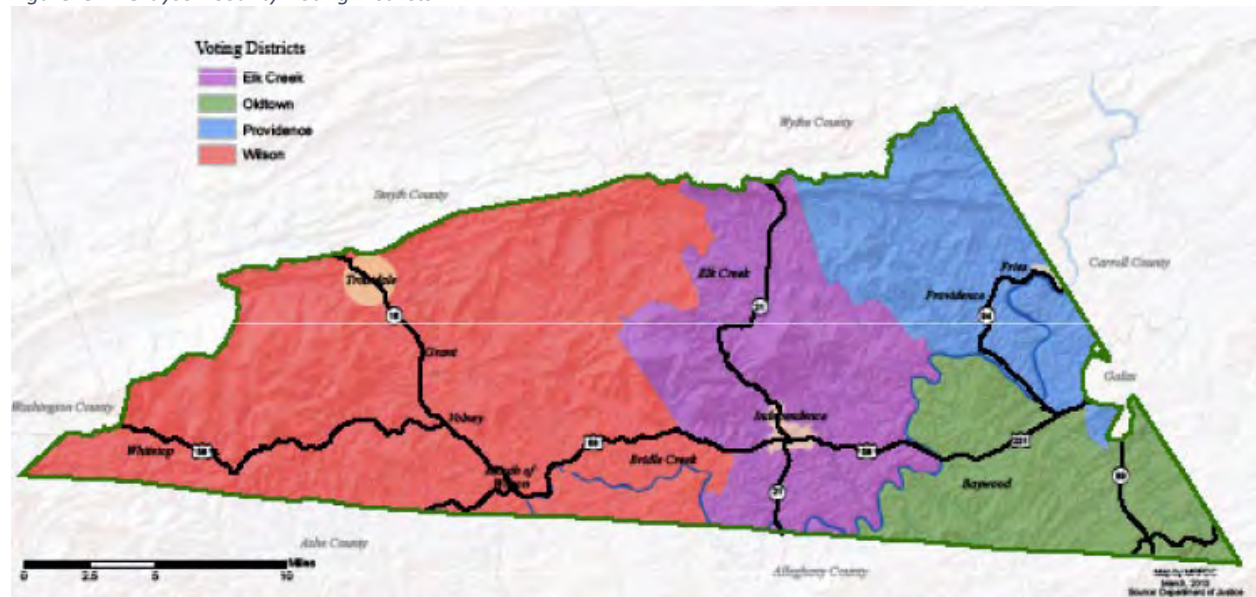
The cooperation of state, federal and local partners, governmental and non-governmental agencies, religious, civic and volunteer organizations of all shapes and sizes cannot be underestimated as this cooperation plays a large factor in determining the general wellbeing of our community. Grayson County tries to use public improvements to catalyze investment, increase revenues, minimize public expenditures, increase the county’s competitiveness in the global marketplace, and improve the county’s quality of life.

## Local Government

### Board of Supervisors

The Grayson County Board of Supervisors serves as the chief governing body for the county. There are five members of the board, with four representing the local magisterial districts and one at-large member. The magisterial districts are Elk Creek, Oldtown, Providence, and Wilson. Each supervisor serves a four-year term, and the terms have been staggered since 1979 to smooth out the transition process.

Figure 8-1: Grayson County Voting Districts



### Capital Improvement Program

The Grayson County Board of Supervisors' Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is an instrument for prioritizing capital expenditures and a means of appropriate planning for the funding of county facilities, equipment, vehicles and such, with a unit cost greater than \$24,900 or a project cost greater than \$34,900 over the next five (5) fiscal years. The Board of Supervisors reviews and approves the Capital Improvement Plan each year during the budget review process.

### Administration

The policies and programs set by the Board of Supervisors are carried out by the County Administrator, an appointed employee who serves at the pleasure of the Board. The County Administrator has day-to-day supervision of county departments. The administrator along with the Board of Supervisors is responsible each year for setting the county budget. The administrator performs other functions as directed by the Board and may suggest policy recommendations from time to time.

### Commissioner of the Revenue

The Commissioner of the Revenue is a state constitutional officer as set forth in the Constitution of Virginia as the chief assessing officer of the local government. The Commissioner of the Revenue represents the closest link between citizens, elected government and the Virginia Department of Taxation. The Commissioner's office plays a vital role in the multitude of services offered to taxpayers at the local level. The Commissioner of the Revenue's office is responsible for fairly assessing taxes on real estate; personal property (including vehicles, boats, trailers, campers, mobile homes, etc.); business personal property (including equipment, furniture & fixtures); merchant's capital; machinery & tools; bank franchise; and public service corporation taxes. All real estate is subject to taxation, except those specifically exempt by state code. As required by Virginia Code, Grayson County conducts a general reassessment on all real estate (currently every six years), in which a professional and independent appraisal company hired by the Board of Supervisors carries out this task. The Commissioner's office is responsible for maintaining a record for each parcel of property in Grayson County, transferring property as recorded by deed or will in the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office, assigning map numbers, updating addresses of property owners and new assessment changes for billing, producing the annual real estate and personal property book, which is the basis for the Treasurer's office tax bills.

### County Treasurer

The Treasurer is the official responsible for the collection and custody of county funds. The Treasurer reports all activities involving county funds and collections to the Board of Supervisors. The tax billing and collection is the sole responsibility of the Treasurer's office. Assessment values are determined by the Commissioner of Revenue and the tax levy is set by the Board of Supervisors. It is imperative that collections be done in a timely manner; it is the responsibility of the Treasurer's office to do current and delinquent collections; without local collections, the local county's obligations would not be met.



## Public Services and Facilities

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### Law Enforcement: Grayson County Sherriff's Office

The Sheriff is a constitutional officer elected by the citizens of the county. Providing law enforcement and emergency services, the Grayson County Sherriff's Office consist of 25 sworn officers and 8 civilians. The Sheriff's Office receives an average of over 450 calls each month. Grayson County participates in the New River Valley Regional Jail, which is located in Dublin, Virginia and also serves the Counties of Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Pulaski, Wythe, and the City of Radford.

### Emergency Services

There are ten volunteer fire and rescue squads that provide emergency services to Grayson County. The map below shows the independent fire and rescue departments and their allocated EMS zones. The Galax-Grayson EMS provides additional services through paid staff and support from the City of Galax and Grayson County. Figure 8-2Figure 8-2 shows the distribution of emergency services throughout the County.

The Twin County E-911 Regional Dispatch Center is in Galax and the E-911 Service is organized, maintained and administered by the Twin County E-911 Regional Commission, which is comprised of two members from Grayson and Carroll Counties and the City of Galax. The E-911 service receives all 911 emergency calls from Grayson and Carroll County and the City of Galax.

### Building Development

The Grayson County Building Department is responsible for permitting and inspection of new construction, modifications and building related activities. The Building Department reviews plans prior to construction and inspects the construction process to ensure compliance with local and state standards and codes. The Grayson County Building Code Ordinance along with the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code and the Virginia Maintenance Code provide guidance for the Building Department. The Building Department provides guidance on safe building practices, contractor licensing information, and promotes fire safety and safe living environments.

### Erosion & Sediment Control and Stormwater Management

The Building Department is responsible for the administration of the Grayson County Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance and implements the Stormwater Management Pollution Prevention Program (SMPPP). Both of these programs will work together to prevent soil erosion and to protect water quality in Grayson County.

### Planning & Community Development

The Department of Planning & Community Development is where you can find information about: Land-Use Planning, Subdividing land, Zone Districts and the Zone Map, Zoning Permits, The Zoning Ordinance, The Subdivision Ordinance, The Planning Commission or The Board of Zoning Appeals and the Grayson County Comprehensive Plan. The Director of Planning & Community Development serves as the administrative agent of these functions as part of



County Administration and serves as the clerk to both the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals.

### **Tourism Department**

Grayson County's Tourism Department is responsible for marketing and promoting the County's assets to increase the number of visitors and the tax revenues. The Department works closely with the Virginia Tourism Corporation and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

### **Department of Social Services**

The Department of Social Services provides financial assistance to help people triumph over poverty, abuse and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities by providing access to adequate, affordable services. DSS provides services for vulnerable populations and helps connect individuals to resources within their community.

### **Grayson County Health Department**

The Grayson County Health Department is part of the Virginia Department of Health as well as the Mount Rogers Health District which serves the counties of Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington and Wythe and the cities of Bristol and Galax. The Health Department offers some free services based on income levels and others require certain payment rates. The Wellness Team provides worksite health promotion, including on-site health screenings aboard a mobile medical unit. Staff members attend health fairs, trainings and provide health education programs for other agencies and community groups and serve on local coalitions that promote services to the public.



Figure 8-2: Grayson County Emergency Services

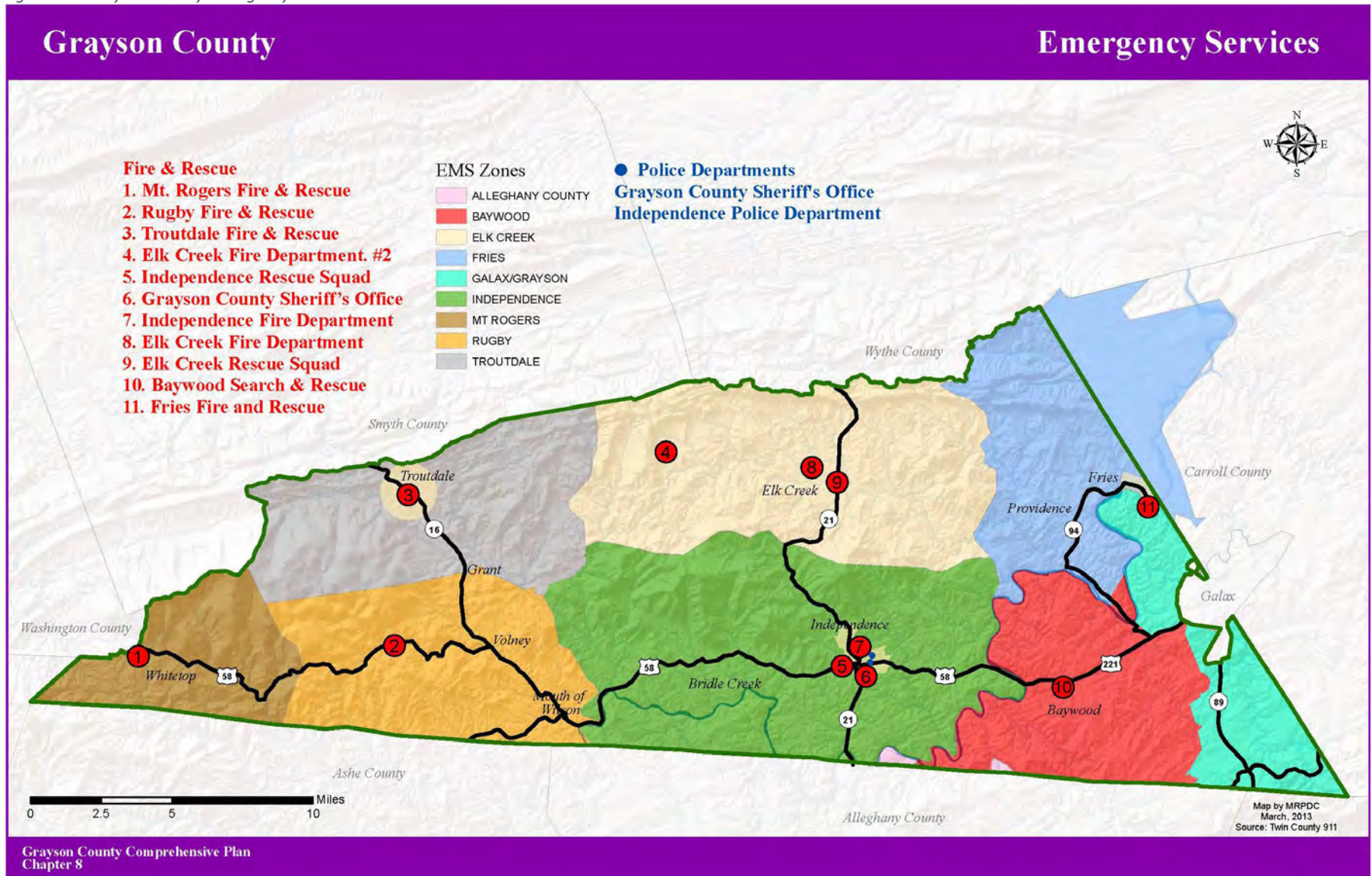


Figure 8-3: Grayson County Water and Sewer Lines

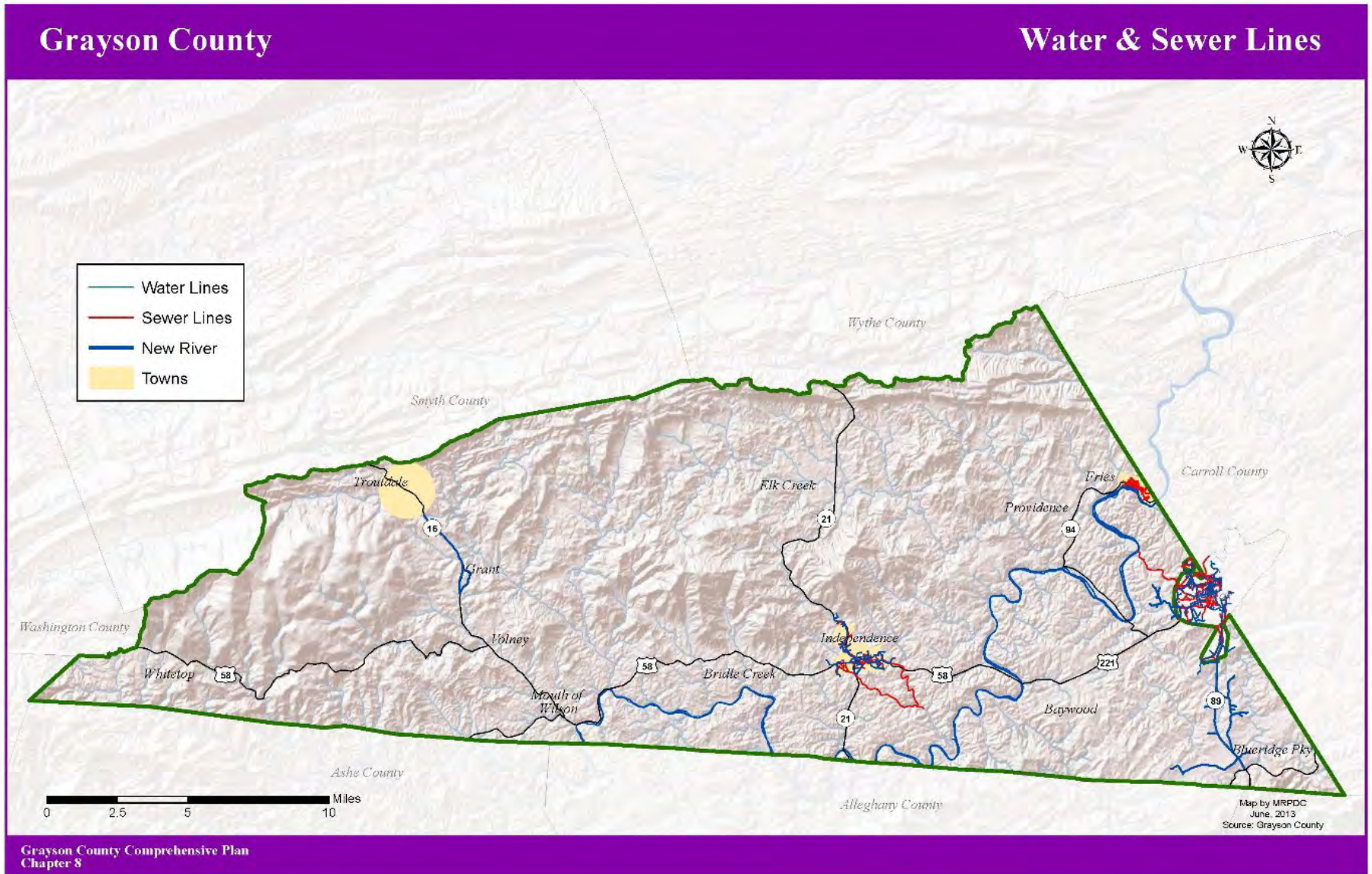
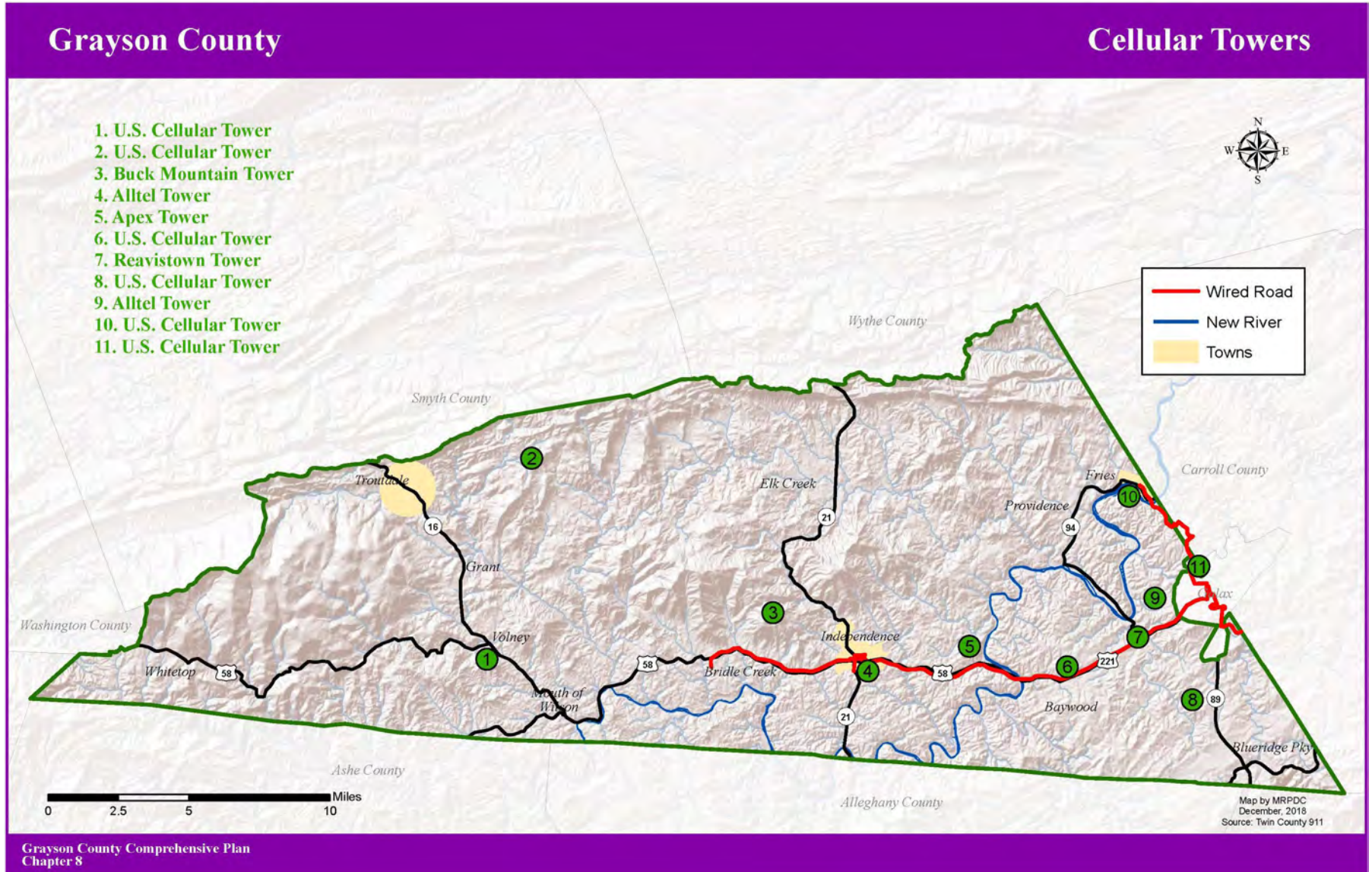


Figure 8-4: Location of Cellular Towers within Grayson County



### **Animal Control & Local Shelters**

Grayson County Department of Animal Control's mission is to balance the health, safety and welfare needs of the people and animals in accordance with Virginia State and Local Ordinances. The department investigates animal cruelty cases, finds homes for many abandoned animals, and humanely euthanize the unwanted animals in our community in accordance with state law.

### **Public Libraries & Computer Centers**

The Wythe-Grayson Regional Library has five branch locations, three of which are in Grayson County: Whitetop Public Library, Fries Public Library, and Grayson County Public Library (Independence) and offers a variety of events and programs for the public. The Outreach Program brings library resources by van to citizens who may not have the ability or means to access the library branches.

### **Grant Community Center**

The Wired Road's Grant Community Computing Center offers free public access to a computer lab and provides high speed broadband internet. This computer center has been designed as a high quality facility with business class equipment and amenities to support not only training, but telework, small business and entrepreneur startups.

This facility is located in Troutdale and offers educational (free classes and workshops), business (training and "business class" workstations), and research (genealogy, hobby, and self-help) resources and opportunities. Services also include free advice on general computing any time the lab is open.

## **Utilities**

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### **Water and Sewer**

Water and sewer facilities across the county consist of independent systems such as private wells and onsite sewage/septic treatment systems. Figure 8-3 shows the location of water and sewer lines throughout the County. The Town of Independence and the Town of Fries maintain and operate water and sewage lines from within their jurisdictions. The county water system includes lines in the areas of Oldtown, Fairview and Volney/Grant communities. Troutdale has its own water system. The partnership of Sparta, Independence and Grayson County to create the Virginia Carolina Water Authority Water supply has increased supply by over 900 gallons of water per minute from the New River.

### **Broadband Network and Cellular Services**

Grayson County recognizes the need to develop an effect and efficient telecommunications infrastructure, which will support and promote economic development, education, quality of life, and public safety of its citizens. The County continues efforts to increase wireless and broadband communication to improve the quality of life for its citizens and to encourage economic development. Challenges include lack of cell phone coverage and limited wireless





capabilities in some areas of the county. Figure 8-4 shows the location of cellular towers in the County. In 2018, the county put out a request for proposals for broadband services and is working to expand coverage areas and services to residents.

### The Wired Road

Efforts to improve the broadband communication include expanding on the capabilities of the Wired Road. The Wired Road is a fully integrated fiber and wireless broadband network offering 100 megabit and gigabit fiber connections and multi-megabit wireless connections throughout Grayson and Carroll Counties and the City of Galax. The Wired Road is a collaborative effort by the counties of Grayson and Carroll, the City of Galax, the Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority and private sector service providers. The service provides the region with critically advanced technology that will continue to attract businesses along with aspiring entrepreneurs.

### Solid Waste Management

The Grayson County Public Works Department conducts weekly solid waste pick up and disposal for businesses and residents of Grayson County. Waste materials are brought by truck to the regional landfill in Hillsville, VA. The Grayson County Solid Waste Ordinance guides the operation of these services and the role of both the residents and the county in conducting efficient solid waste disposal. Large item pick-up for the residents is offered in the spring of the year; this program collects appliances, furniture and other large items.

Transportation costs are a large part of the public works budget. With the average distance from Grayson County solid waste collection routes to the regional landfill at over 60 miles roundtrip, fuel, employee time and maintenance costs create a real challenge. Recycling and the potential for other resourceful ways to deal with the waste stream are a priority for the Grayson County Public Works Department.

The recycling program offers collection centers across the county at sites in Whitetop, Bridle Creek, Elk Creek, Providence, Fries, Baywood, Fairview, Independence at the Courthouse and at Grayson Highlands School, Volney, Troutdale and Rugby. Materials collected include; cardboard, office paper, newspaper, magazines, plastic (with recycling symbol) aluminum & steel cans and containers.

### Carroll-Grayson-Galax Solid Waste Authority

The Carroll-Grayson-Galax Solid Waste Authority is a nine-member board represented by three individuals from each jurisdiction, which manages the regional landfill. The regional landfill includes two tracts of land. The first tract of 72 acres was acquired in 1987 and encompasses six cells, which closed in 2014, but will be monitored for thirty years according to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality regulations. The second 155-acre tract adjoins the first tract and was acquired in 1998 to accommodate future expansion of the landfill. This site has six cells, of which five are available and based on current disposal rates of six years per cell, this portion of the landfill has approximately 30 years left in service to the region. On average the regional landfill takes in approximately 119 tons of waste per day from Grayson & Carroll Counties and the City of Galax. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality regulates



solid waste disposal statewide. The regional landfill is required to issue annual reports regarding the amount of solid waste collected. In 2017, the Carroll-Grayson-Galax Regional Landfill collected 37,584 tons of solid waste according to this report<sup>3</sup>.

The Carroll-Grayson-Galax Solid Waste Planning Unit is also responsible for reporting the amount of recycled materials or recycling rates to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. In 2016 the statewide recycling rate (average of all planning units) was 42.6%, whereas the Twin Counties recycled 33.3%.

## Strategies

- 8-1 Support and encourage the development of advanced communication infrastructure; broadband, wireless internet, and cell coverage/towers. *(See 5-14)*
- 8-2 Support volunteer emergency services to ensure that all residents can receive timely emergency assistance.
- 8-3 Continue working with the Senior Advocacy Committee to assess the unmet needs of the elderly and develop strategies to mitigate concerns and meet future needs. *(See 9-4)*
- 8-4 Proceed with Phase III of the Independence Pedestrian and Bike Trail. *(See 7-7)*
- 8-5 Conduct education and outreach to floodplain property owners. *(See 11-15)*
- 8-6 Create a multidisciplinary committee to research techniques/programs that prevent the cycle of poverty. The study should include how poverty relates to lack of employment, education, lifestyle choices, substance abuse, personal responsibility/work ethic and social services.
- 8-7 Reduce long term cost to the county by improving efficiency of facilities, services, and work flows.
- 8-8 Consider the extension of water and sewer lines to communities with gaps in service or when environmental health threats necessitate action
- 8-9 Evaluate county water infrastructure throughout the county and develop a maintenance schedule to ensure that services remain viable.
- 8-10 Support efforts to reduce crime and substance abuse in Grayson County.
- 8-11 Encourage countywide efforts to reduce waste and increase recycling.
- 8-12 Support strategies to prolong the life of the regional landfill by increasing recycling/reuse of materials for all partners in the Solid Waste Authority.
- 8-13 Evaluate local incineration of trash and/or transfer station as an option to reduce trips to the landfill.
- 8-14 Support initiatives that expand the recycling program and the ability to collect revenue. Consider investing in a truck to haul products and a glass recycling/crushing process to capture revenue from this waste stream.
- 8-15 Achieve Certified Crime Prevention Community Status

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Annual Solid Waste Reports. <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/LandProtectionRevitalization/ReportsPublications/AnnualSolidWasteReports.aspx>



- 8-16 Expand the Recreation Department programs and facilities to include adult/senior programs and outdoor recreation.
- 8-17 Assist citizens seeking assistance with high cost projects such as home and septic system repair assistance through Community Action Agencies, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and other service providers. Promote foster parenting in the community. *(See 11-13)*
- 8-18 Continue improving the government website to facilitate the exchange of information in an accurate and efficient way.
- 8-19 Support educational programs about responsible animal ownership.
- 8-20 Explore successful models/programs that break the cycle of poverty and replicate these programs.
- 8-21 Support and expand activities of the Day Report Program to prevent repeat offenders and assist them with transitioning back into the community.
- 8-22 Utilize crime statistic data and GIS to identify, prescribe and treat areas of acute criminal activity.
- 8-23 Expand DARE program into the higher grades in conjunction with School Resource Officer program.
- 8-24 Build social capital by encouraging the formation and growth of civic clubs that address community needs. Topics may include scholarships, affordable housing, and other social issues.
- 8-25 Study how lighting choices impact the night sky and encourage citizens and businesses to utilize proper lighting choices, as to have minimal impact on the night sky. and consider policy to protect dark skies as a local asset.
- 8-26 Consider resolution for “Clean Grayson Month” to promote civic and public actions to clean up the county.
- 8-27 Support the Independence Community Initiative for development of McKnight Park as part of tourism development. *(See 10-3)*
- 8-28 Encourage community members to participate in and/or support volunteer and emergency services in their communities.

## Summary and Conclusions

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High quality public services, facilities, and utilities are imperative to the sustained quality of life in Grayson County. The County’s efforts to expand services and infrastructure to support a greater percentage of the county are often hampered by terrain and inaccessibility of some areas of the county, so advances in technology stand to have a great impact upon the availability of these services in the future. The County understands the challenges of meeting the needs of different age groups, including creating age-friendly communities and services for children and seniors.





# Chapter Nine: Health and Wellness

**Goal: Improve health and wellness services and facilities within Grayson County and enhance resident access.**

## Introduction

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Grayson County's higher than average percentage of residents age 65 or older places increased pressure upon the County to determine solutions to increasing access to medical care and wellness services. Various studies, which by this point have become common sense, indicate the need for physical activity and a healthy diet to maintain and/or improve one's health, yet the general public's increasingly sedentary lives and poor diets continue to take a toll on health. The County has placed an intensified focus on health care with since the last iteration of the comprehensive plan and continues to work toward meeting the health and wellness needs of the community.

## Health Care

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*The 2018 Community Health Rankings for the Commonwealth of Virginia, which is a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, shows positive factors about Grayson County and other areas that the county can assist residents in improving upon. Of the 133 cities and county in Virginia, Grayson County ranked number 20 in a having a healthy physical environment, taking into account air and water quality and housing and transit. However, social and economic factors, which takes into account education, employment, income, family and social support, and community safety, ranked at 103, likely due to the lower income/ education levels and higher rate of unemployment in the county as opposed to the Commonwealth overall. The County's Health Behaviors, which take into account tobacco use, diet and exercise, alcohol and drug use, and sexual activity, ranked at 92. Figure 9-1 shows some notable variables from the Health Rankings and compares the rates from Grayson County to the rates from the United States, overall.*

Figure 9-2 shows the locations of medical clinics and hospitals within Grayson County or that are likely to be frequented by its residents.



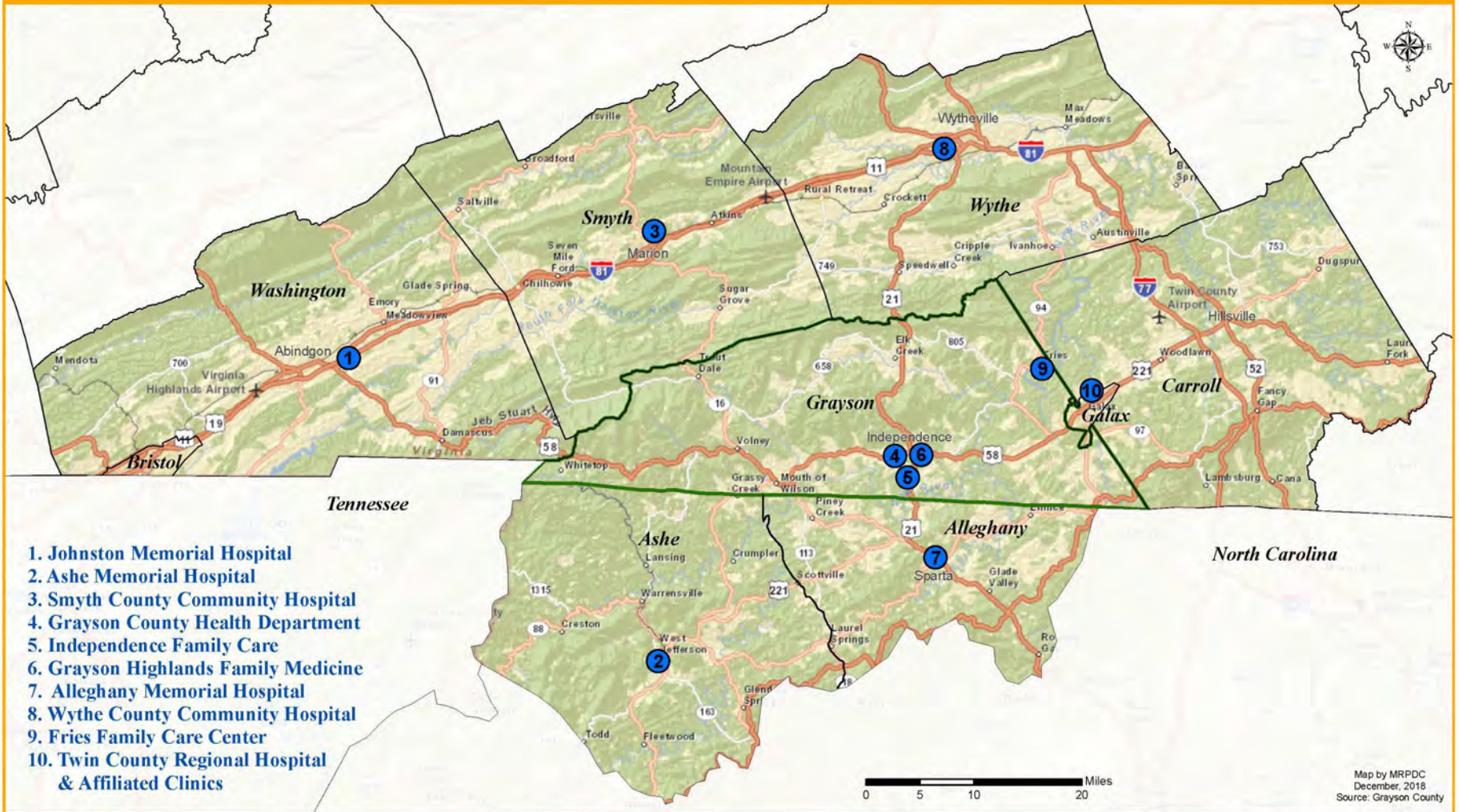
Figure 9-1: 2018 Community Health Rankings

**Grayson County 2018 Community Health Rankings, Selected Variables**

Area	Description	Measurement	Grayson	US
Poor or fair health	Percentage of adults that report fair or poor health	% Fair/Poor	18	16
Poor mental health days	Average # reported mentally unhealthy days per month	Mentally Unhealthy Days	4.1	3.7
Low Birthweight	% births with low birth weight (<2500g)	% LBW	7	8
Adult smoking	% adults who are current smokers	% Smokers	18	17
Adult Obesity	% adults that report a BMI of 30 or more	% Obese	30	28
Physical inactivity	% adults age 20+ reporting no leisure-time physical activity	% Physically Inactive	29	23
Access to exercise opportunities	% population with adequate access to locations for physical activity	% With Access	78	83
Excessive drinking	% adults reporting binge or heavy drinking	% Excessive Drinking	14	18
Teen Births	# births per 1,000 female population ages 15-19	Teen Birth Rate	35	27
Uninsured	% population under age 65 without health insurance	% Uninsured	13	11
Primary care physicians	Ratio of population to primary care physicians	PCP Ratio	4003:1	1320:1
Dentists	Ratio of population to dentists	Dentist Ratio	5036:1	1480:1
Mental health providers	Ratio of population to mental health providers	MHP Ratio	14107:1	470:1
Preventable hospital stays	# hospital stays for ambulatory-care sensitive conditions per 1,000 Medicare enrollees	Preventable Hosp. Rate	42	49
High school graduation	% ninth-grade cohort that graduates in four years	Graduation Rate	83	83
Unemployment	% population ages 16 and older unemployed but seeking work	% Unemployed	5.2	4.9
Children in poverty	% children under age 18 in poverty	% Children in Poverty	26	20
Severe housing problems	% households with at least 1 of 4 housing problems: overcrowding, high housing costs, or lack of kitchen or plumbing facilities	% Severe Housing Problems	13	19
Air pollution - particulate matter	Average daily density of fine particulate matter in micrograms per cubic meter (PM2.5)	Average Daily PM2.5	8.4	8.7
Driving alone to work	% the workforce that drives alone to work	% Drive Alone	83	76

Figure 9-2: Location of Medical Clinics in Grayson County and the surrounding areas





## Wellness and Physical Fitness

The general public's desire for a wellness center, which was overwhelming in the 2013 public survey, is at the forefront of the County's plans for development of new facilities and services. The County continues to work with local and state agencies and partners to determine the best location for a wellness center and the most economical and realistic methods to fund its construction and operations.

## Child Care

Figure 9-3 shows licensed providers of child day care services within Grayson. It is notable that outside of the area surrounding Fairview Baptist Church, there is only one provider who offers child care for children above the age of six or until 5:00 p.m., and the capacity at that facility is capped at twelve children. This shows that there may be a need for additional child care centers within the county. Please see Chapter Four: Education for more information about Early Head Start and Head Start.

Figure 9-3: Child Day Care Providers in Grayson County

Child Day Care Providers					
	Center Name	Location	Capacity	Ages	Business Hours
<b>Licensed Centers</b>					
	Independence Early Head Start Center	Independence	8	1 month - 3 years 11 months	6:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., Monday - Friday
	Independence Head Start Center	Independence	17	2 years 11 months - 5 years 11 months	8 :15 AM - 3:15 PM, Monday - Friday
<b>Religious Exempt Centers*</b>					
	Fairview Baptist Church	Galax	125	1 month - 12 years 11 months	6:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m., Monday - Friday
* Religious Exempt Centers are child care centers operated by religious institutions that are exempt from licensure if the facility is sponsored by an institution that is exempt from federal taxes for religious purposes or is exempt from paying local real estate taxes on the property owned by the sponsoring religious institution. regulated, but not required to obtain a license for child care					
Source: Virginia Department of Social Services					





## Senior Care

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### District Three Governmental Cooperative

District Three provides public transportation and senior services within Grayson County. The agency offers volunteer and paid jobs to people age 55 and older and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) provides services to the community at hospitals, libraries, senior centers, and other public facilities. Seniors with limited income can apply for job training and other community service employment. In addition,

#### Health and Nutrition

District Three offers nutrition sites in partnerships with other organizations, where a variety of activities for social opportunities are offered. Home delivered meals, visits, and phone calls are some of the ways volunteers reach out to elders in order to encourage their independence and well-being.

Health screenings, flu shots, and informational programs for senior groups are offered by District Three through their disease prevention and health promotion programs. Chronic disease self-management classes are one of the programs offered.

#### Financial, Legal, and Housing Assistance

District Three provides assistance to seniors to find the appropriate organizations if they need help with direct emergency financial assistance, help with civic legal matters, health insurance counseling, chores, and minor home repair. Insurance counseling and assistance programs provide information on helping people obtain benefits and filing claims for Medicare and Medicaid programs.

#### In-home and Advocacy Services

Services are provided for the frail and home-bound elderly to encourage independence and family caregiving. District Three advocates for the elderly advocates against elder abuse and there is an Ombudsman Program set up to resolve conflicts regarding nursing homes, adult care residents, and in-home services. A Guardianship Program assists indigent adult clients whom do not have the capacity to make decisions themselves. Care Managers are assigned clients in order to assess their needs and coordinate plans or resources for them.

#### Medical Transportation

One-on-one medical transportation is available for eligible clients of District Three Senior Services. Clients are picked up at home and taken directly to the doctor. Transportation is offered through the towns and counties with flexible-fixed routes that will pick up at or near their homes.



## Strategies

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- 9-1 Support the development of a Community Fitness/Wellness Center to provide opportunity for exercise and physical fitness.
- 9-2 Create a task force to analyze the environmental health of the county. As it relates to septic tank issues/straight-piping, the lack of a full-time environmental health officer. Ensure that the programs offered by the Health Department align with the needs of the county. *(See 3-4)*
- 9-3 Survey other communities to gather input on strategies for attracting medical clinics and services. Support private investment in medical services and clinics where possible.
- 9-4 Continue working with the Senior Advocacy Committee to assess the unmet needs of the elderly and develop strategies to mitigate concerns and meet future needs. *(See 8-3)*
- 9-5 Expand the Recreation Department programs and facilities to include adult/senior programs and outdoor recreation. *(See 8-16)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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As it is the foundation of any successful community, maintaining a healthy population is a major concern for Grayson County. “Lifestyle illnesses,” or those related to negative lifestyle choices, seem to be the primary health concern for residents, and the county is working to expand community access to health care and fitness activities. As there has been overwhelming support for improved access to wellness activities, including construction of trails and creation of a wellness center, this need remains a key concern of the County. Proximity to affordable health and dental care is another major concern of the County as it is often difficult for residents to access needed services.



## Chapter Ten: Tourism

**Goal: Preserve, enhance, and protect Grayson County's environmental resources to maintain high quality of life for residents and sustainable development for the future**

### Introduction

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Grayson County's varied outdoor recreation assets, traditional music, historical assets, and agrarian landscape have made it a popular destination for tourists. As outdoor tourism has expanded, available resources have been devoted to help promote the County, but certain challenges have placed limitations on tourism's ability to bring in additional funds, including the shortage of restaurants and tourism related businesses, limited staff time, and the lack of a fulltime visitor information center. The County is looking at numerous ways to help tourism become a viable economic option for the future. Partnerships with local and regional tourism initiatives are key for the expansion of the tourism economy in the County.

The objectives of Grayson County's Tourism Department were used when creating tourism strategies and include:

- Interaction with and promotion of local tourism related businesses
- Revenue generation for the county, through transient occupancy and sales tax
- Development of tourism infrastructure/attractions/businesses
- Tourism metrics including travel trends and statistics
- Mailing of information and online interaction with prospective visitors
- Maintaining accurate information about tourism assets and offerings for the tourism website at <http://www.graysoncountyva.com/>
- Marketing the county through promotional materials and advertising
- Festival promotion to market the major festivals of the county
- Tourism business trainings/development of internal marketing/promotions
- Management of tourism grants and creative funding for tourism initiatives
- Building positive relationships with potential investors and prospective residents to promote overall growth in employment and opportunities for the county

### Economic Impact of Tourism

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The economic impact of tourism is important for small businesses, for generation of employment and for county revenue by sales tax and transient occupancy tax. The impact on tourism activity to country stores and restaurants should not be underestimated; as many of these locations see an increase in business activity during the tourism season in Grayson County.

In the unincorporated area of Grayson County, sales tax and transient occupancy tax are the two public revenue generators as it relates to tourism. In the towns of Fries and Independence, additional revenue may be generated from fuel, cigarette and alcohol taxes and these areas will collect and record their own sales and transient occupancy tax.



Figure 10-1 shows the economic impact of tourism within Grayson County as represented by locality-specific travel-related data kept by the U.S Travel Association. The impact relies on 5 unique pieces of information:

- 6) Expenditures within the area
- 7) Payroll associated with tourism industry employment
- 8) Number of people employed by the tourism industry
- 9) State tax receipts
- 10) Local Tax receipts

Figure 10-1: Economic Impact of Tourism in Grayson County 2013-2017

<b>Economic Impact of Tourism in Grayson County</b>						
	<b>% Change, 2017/16</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>	4.8%	\$15,865,201	\$15,140,692	\$14,787,869	\$14,403,303	\$13,953,845
<b>Payroll</b>	5.0%	\$3,692,295	\$3,515,866	\$3,363,421	\$3,198,053	\$3,111,310
<b>Employment</b>	1.8%	152	149	147	142	140
<b>State Tax Receipts</b>	3.5%	\$670,487	\$647,684	\$621,191	\$584,088	\$559,913
<b>Local Tax Receipts</b>	3.0%	\$466,262	\$ 452,588	\$433,575	\$408,839	\$403,369

*Source: U.S. Travel Association*

## Tourism Sectors and Destinations

### Public Lands and Outdoor Recreation

Grayson Highlands State Park, Jefferson National Forest, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Mathews State Forest, New River Trail State Park, The Virginia Creeper Trail, Blue Ridge Parkway and the Grayson County Recreation Park are available to the public for outdoor recreation opportunities. All together there is 39,584 acres of public land in Grayson County, totaling 14 percent of all county land.

Each of these public lands is managed by separate entities and each of these has different regulations for public use. Together these public lands comprise thousands of acres of land with hundreds of miles of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross country skiing and cross country running. Fishing, hunting, bird watching, picnicking, bouldering, swimming, camping, interpretive programs, festivals, events and trail runs, are additional amenities at some of these public lands. Visitation of these public lands is a primary driver for tourism visitation to Grayson County. Partnerships with these public lands and promoting businesses that can provide amenities/services and additional attractions to round out the visitor experience will greatly improve the tourism experience in Grayson County.

Highlights include; Highest Peak in Virginia- Mt. Rogers (5,728 feet), located in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The New River Trail State Park begins in Fries, VA, located on the scenic New River. The Virginia Creeper Trail begins at Whitetop where many tourists begin an exhilarating 20 +mile downhill bike trip and Grayson Highlands State Park where wild ponies roam.



## The New River

The New River (337 miles long) is the second oldest river in the world, beginning in North Carolina and traveling north until it reaches West Virginia and eventually becoming part of the Mississippi River. The New River enters Grayson County on the western end near Mouth of Wilson; travels within several miles of Independence as it weaves in and out of North Carolina and then continues into the Town of Fries. This American Heritage river is well known for recreational boating and fishing. Outfitters operate on the river in Grayson County, and there are countless vacation rental options including cabins and vacation homes located on the river and one riverside campground. There are numerous public boat landings available to access the river located throughout the county. In the future, development of river related attractions and services could greatly improve the ability of this resource to attract visitation to the county.

## Arts & Culture

The Blue Ridge Highlands have inspired artisans for generations. Clay for pots, wood for guitars, wool for yarn, nature becomes art. Five organizations operate locally to inspire artisans, teach art, promote performing arts and assist with marketing works of art. Independence offers three locations where local arts and crafts can be purchased, Round the Mountain offers an artisans' trail where local studios are open to the public and works of art can be commissioned or purchased.

### **Arts Council of the Twin Counties**

Serving the City of Galax, Carroll County and Grayson County, the Arts Council promotes events such as children's theatre, winter concert series, arts in the schools, holiday extravaganzas and partnerships to promote arts throughout the region. <http://artsculturalcouncil.org/>

### **Chestnut Creek School of the Arts**

Located in Galax, VA, Chestnut Creek serves the Twin County area by providing instructional workshops and by promoting the traditional and contemporary forms of arts. <http://www.chestnutcreekarts.org/>

### **Round the Mountain - Woven Mountains River Bends**

The Artisans Trail for Grayson County provides an avenue for local crafts stores, artisan studios, lodging, restaurants and more to showcase the best of Grayson County. Travelers can visit all the sites on the trail or custom tailor their spots along the way. More information is available at <http://www.roundthemountain.org/map/woven-mountains-and-river-bends>

### **The Historic 1908 Courthouse**

The Historic 1908 Courthouse serves as the Art & Cultural Center of Grayson County, Virginia and promotes the arts by providing the Baldwin Auditorium for performances, serving as a site for local festivals, selling handmade arts and crafts at The Treasury Gift Shop and by sponsoring the Wednesday Night Traditional Music Jam. <http://www.historic1908courthouse.org/>

The Historic 1908 Courthouse Foundation is a non-profit, corporation whose mission is to preserve and maintain the 1908 Courthouse in Independence, VA for future generations. The Foundation also operates the building for the benefit of the people of Grayson County.



Additional resources at the 1908 Courthouse include:

- The Grayson Crossroads Museum- display artifacts spanning the history of the regions and specifically Grayson County. The Vault (a portion of our museum that was literally the vital records vault) shows many of the household items you would have found in a homestead in the region.
- The Baldwin Auditorium- What used to be the courtroom is now the Baldwin Auditorium, named for Dan Baldwin, the man who bought the 1908 Courthouse to preserve it. It is the scene of many events such as concerts, plays, meetings, parties, receptions, and civic events. There is seating for over 200.
- The Treasury Gift Shop- The Foundation operates a gift shop in the 1908 Courthouse. Most of the items in the gift shop are made by local artisans and crafts people. Other items are books about the area and souvenir items of the 1908 Courthouse.

### Traditional Music

Travelers visit Grayson County to experience traditional music, otherwise known as “Old Time”. Along with bluegrass, traditional music laid the foundation for modern country music and is composed of traditional instruments such as the fiddle, banjo, guitar, dulcimer and more. The ballads and songs originate from European folk songs and storytelling culture. Sometimes the music is used to accompany dance such as flat footing. Traditional music venues include:

- The 1908 Courthouse Jam at the Historic 1908 Courthouse, Main Street, Independence
- The Mt. Rogers Community Jam and Music Lessons at Mt. Rogers Combined School in Whitetop
- The Fairview Ruritan - Bluegrass Music Concerts- <http://www.fairviewruritan.com/>
- The Fries Jam Session at The Fries Recreation Center Theatre, Fries
- The Rex Theater - Downtown Galax <http://retheatergalax.com/>
- Fiddler’s Conventions and Festivals: <http://www.graysoncountyva.com/festivals>
- Grayson County Fiddler’s Convention- Every summer the Elk Creek Volunteer Fire and Rescue Squad sponsors a fiddler’s convention at the old Elk Creek School Grounds.
- Henry Whitter Festival - Every May Fries celebrates this local musical legend on the banks of the New River with traditional music and festivities for all.
- Fries Fiddler’s Convention-The Fries Fiddlers Convention traditionally occurs the weekend after the Galax Fiddlers Convention and is sponsored by the Fries Volunteer Fire Department.
- Old Fiddler’s Convention- Beginning on the second week end in August, the Galax Fiddler’s Convention is the oldest, and largest of its kind in the world.
- Wayne C. Henderson Music Festival- Held every third Saturday in June at Grayson Highlands State Park, the winner of the guitar competition receiving a new W.C. Henderson guitar.
- Albert Hash Memorial- Festival in celebration of Albert Hash, a Grayson fiddler and luthier, this festival offers great music and entertainment for everyone.



### Local Luthiers

Grayson County is home to many well know luthiers such as Wayne Henderson, Gerald Anderson, Spencer Strickland, Jimmy Edmonds and, the late, Albert Hash. These handcrafted instruments reflect the quality craftsman and musicians of the area. Local youth mastering traditional music with help from the local school program and mentors, ensure that traditional music will remain alive in Grayson County.

### The Crooked Road

Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, winds through the mountains of Southwest Virginia. Here, the Bluegrass, Old Time, and Traditional Country music is as beautiful and rugged as the landscape itself. The Crooked Road travels the entire length of Grayson County, occasionally following along the New River and then climbing in hairpin turns to the high country.

<http://www.crookedroad.org/>

### The Blue Ridge Music Center

celebrates the music and musicians of the Blue Ridge. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1985, the site includes an outdoor amphitheater and indoor interpretive center used to highlight an important strand of American musical culture, which is still alive and thriving in the region.

<http://www.blueridgemusiccenter.org/>

### Locations of Assets and Resources

Figure 10-2 and Figure 10-3 are part of the County's Green Infrastructure maps, which can be found on the County's website to be viewed in greater detail, and show the location for important tourism assets within the county including historical and cultural sites, scenic views, and recreation activity areas.



Figure 10-2: Historic, Cultural, and Scenic Resources

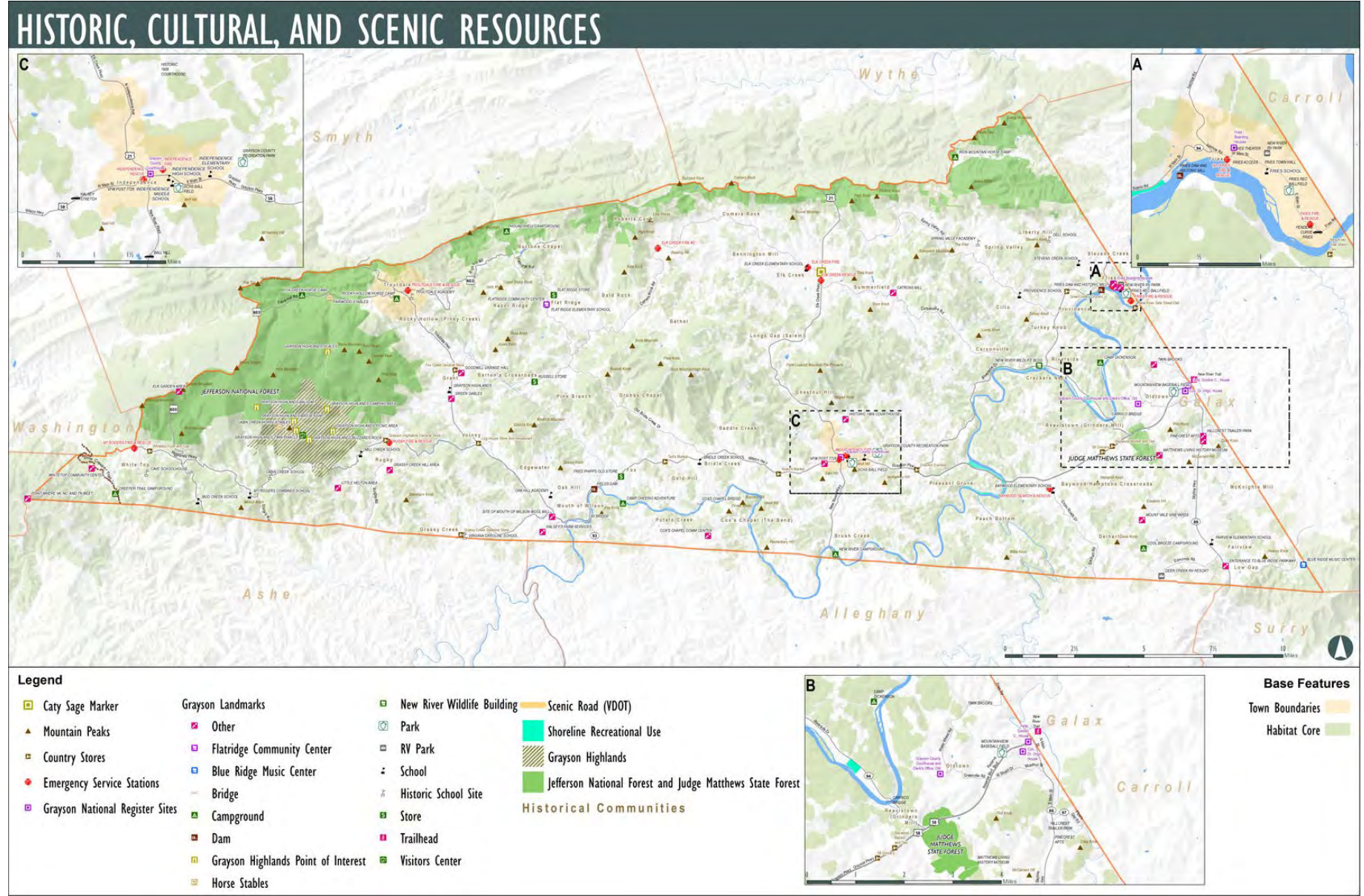
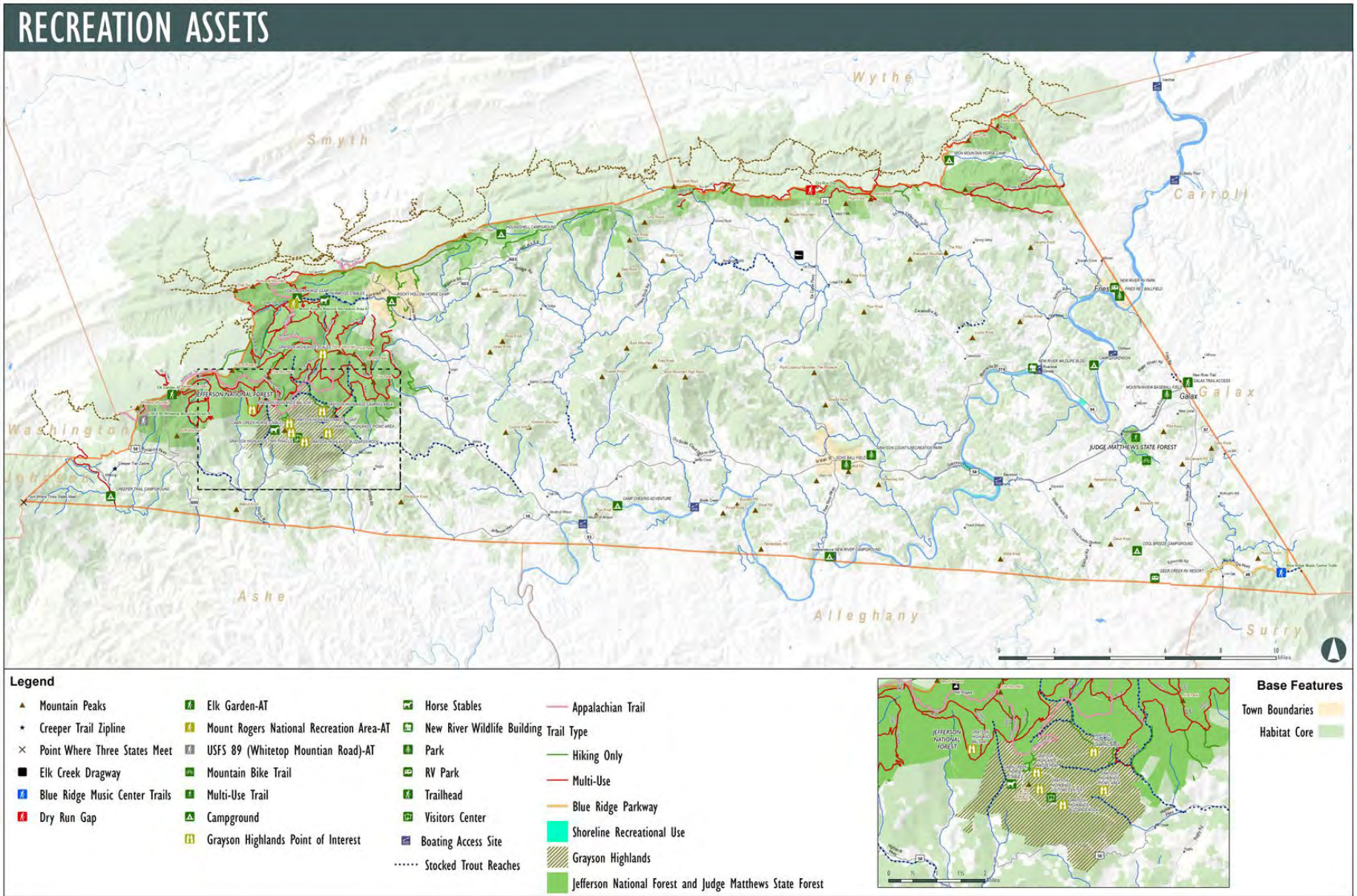




Figure 10-3: Recreation Assets



## Strategies

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- 10-1 Partner with regional tourism initiatives such as The Crooked Road, Round the Mountain, and other organizations accountable for increasing tourism.
- 10-2 Actively promote cultural events such as festivals, markets, music and other communal activities that are regional attractions to Grayson County.
- 10-3 Support the Independence Community Initiative for development of McKnight Park as part of tourism development. *(See 8-27)*
- 10-4 Create a tourism brand for outdoor recreational assets on the western end of Grayson County to promote tourism and small business development.
- 10-5 Complete an inventory and a review of natural and cultural assets of the community.
- 10-6 Consider a full-time visitor/tourism center.
- 10-7 Consider collaboration between Grayson County and local historical societies/organizations to promote important historical/cultural resources of the county.
- 10-8 Consider creating a tourism business network to improve professionalism and networking of businesses associated with tourism.
- 10-9 Bridge the Tourism and Recreation Departments to ensure that visitors can access local recreational offerings.
- 10-10 Encourage tourism by supporting the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Matthews Farm Museum, the 1908 Courthouse, Grayson Highlands State Park, The New River, and/or other natural & cultural history museums as tourism development. *(See 6-8)*
- 10-11 Consider expanding efforts of agritourism initiatives. *(See 6-5)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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Grayson County is a unique destination and enjoys a large variety of outdoor recreation assets. The Crooked Road and other traditional music drivers are increasingly becoming a larger percentage of visitors. Tourism efforts will also begin to focus on agritourism, historical related travel and continue the work of promoting local festivals as attractions. Bringing the outdoor recreation traveler into our towns and business establishments remains a primary focus, as will increasing occupancy for cabin/B&B lodging.

Tourism efforts in the last few years have steered marketing away from a traditionally print advertising focus into more television, online, radio and marketing to regional metropolitan centers. Also, small business development efforts are helping to improve tourism businesses, including networking & capacity of businesses will be a primary focus in the years ahead.

Grayson County is working to address its tourism challenges including limited staff time to devote to tourism, lack of a full-time Visitor Information Center, a shortage of restaurants and other tourism related businesses, a lack of tourism attractions aside from outdoor recreation assets and a need for professional front line tourism business staff. These challenges limit the ability of tourism to become a viable economic option for the future of the county, but the



County has recognized tourism and asset-based development as economic development focus areas and is devoting resources, including staff time, to meet the needs of the tourism sector.





## Chapter Eleven: Land Use

**Goal: Facilitate land use patterns that offer a variety of housing choices and convenient access to neighborhood shopping, schools, parks, and other services; protect property owners from incompatible land uses; make efficient use of Grayson County’s limited land capacity; and coordinate land uses with infrastructure needs.**

### Introduction

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Grayson County’s mountainous terrain, high acreage in forests, and pastoral landscape create the quality of life that is often cited as one of the reasons that residents love living in the County. The County recognizes the need to protect natural assets while at the same time maintaining a healthy climate for businesses. The County’s Land Use Ordinances and Codes guide the development of land and help maintain the balance between land development and conservation.

### Environmental Features

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Grayson County’s total land area is approximately 443 square miles, for a total of 283,305 acres of land. Of that total, more than 50 percent of all land is identified as “woodlands.” The general landscape of Grayson is characterized by high pastures and deep hollows, which are watered by the New River and its many tributaries.

#### Topography

Grayson County has 35 peaks with elevation over 4,000 feet. Mount Rogers is the highest peak in Virginia at 5,729 feet and attracts visitors from all over the world. Over 60 percent of the land in the county has slopes in excess of 20 percent. For development purposes, steep slopes present a building challenge and possible environmental consequences.

#### Hydrology

Grayson County crosses three major watershed areas; these are the Upper New, which drains Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee; the Upper Yadkin, which drains North Carolina and Virginia; and the South Fork Holston, which drains Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The largest drainage system crossing the study area is the Upper New.

Other significant drainage systems include the Fox Creek, and Elk Creek. Lesser drainage systems include Big Horse Creek, Helton Creek, Wilson Creek, Grassy Creek, Peach Bottom Creek, Brush Creek, Little River, Chestnut Creek, and Fisher River.

Due to the abundance of mountainous land, there are also 112 lesser streams/tributaries of the greater watershed systems. As a result of this great number of streams, isolated flash flooding is always possible and the majority of flood damage occurs as a result of rushing water, rather than rising water.



## Green Infrastructure Maps

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Figure 11-1, Figure 11-2, Figure 11-3, and Figure 11-4 on the following pages are part of the County's green infrastructure mapping and show various important factors within the county such as impaired streams, natural landscape, riparian forest cover, and protected lands. These maps can be viewed in greater detail on the County's website.

## Zoning Districts and the Zoning Map

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The Grayson County Zoning Map (Figure 11-5) is comprised of zoning districts. These include; Rural Farm, Rural Residence, General Commercial and General Commercial Light, Industrial, Highland Recreation and Highland Recreation Public, Service District and Shoreline Recreation. The purpose of zoning districts is to align compatible uses and areas of community character, protect the general health and welfare of the citizens and to promote appropriate land use planning. Each district establishes uses by right, special uses by permit, setbacks, allowable structures and lot dimensions among other characteristics.

Proposed changes to the zoning map are achieved through the rezone process. This process involves the evaluation of the rezone to ensure that the proposed uses/characteristics of the site can meet the standards of the zone district and that the proposed rezone is compatible with the goals of the zone district and surrounding community. The default zone for the unincorporated areas of Grayson County (towns have their own zoning) is the Rural Farm District. The Rural Farm District defines the majority of land in the county and is the district affiliated with residential, farm and recreational use of open land.

## Development

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### Patterns/Trends

The primary type of development occurring in Grayson County is the construction of single-family residential structures. Accessory structures that support residential construction such as storage sheds and garages are the majority of building types/ permits issued. Commercial construction activity has mainly consisted of additions and the remodeling of current structures.

Minimal road infrastructure development has occurred over the last decade as Virginia Department of Transportation's budget has tightened and their application processes have become more focused on population.



Figure 11-1: Protected Lands

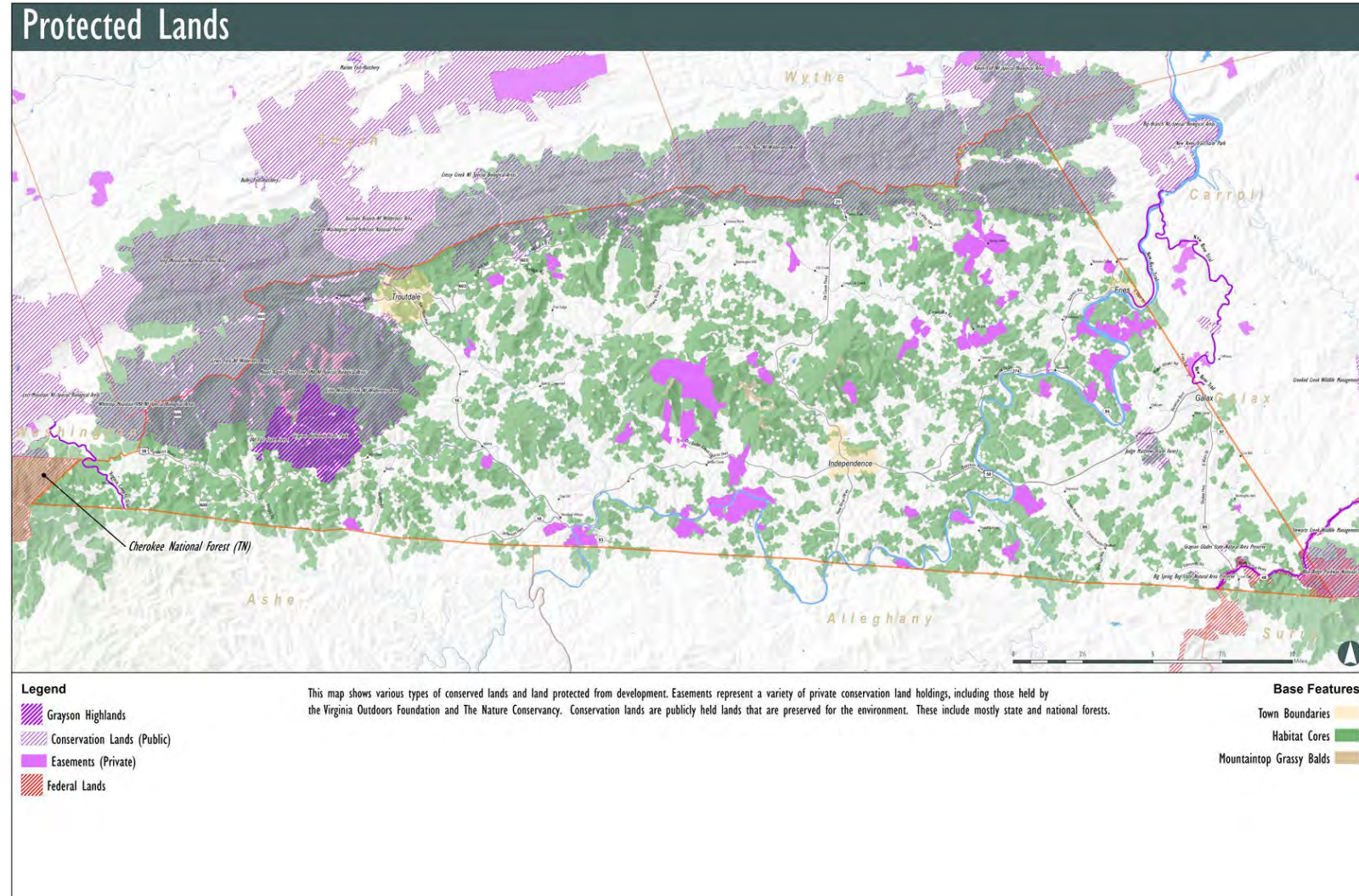


Figure 11-2: Natural Intact Landscapes

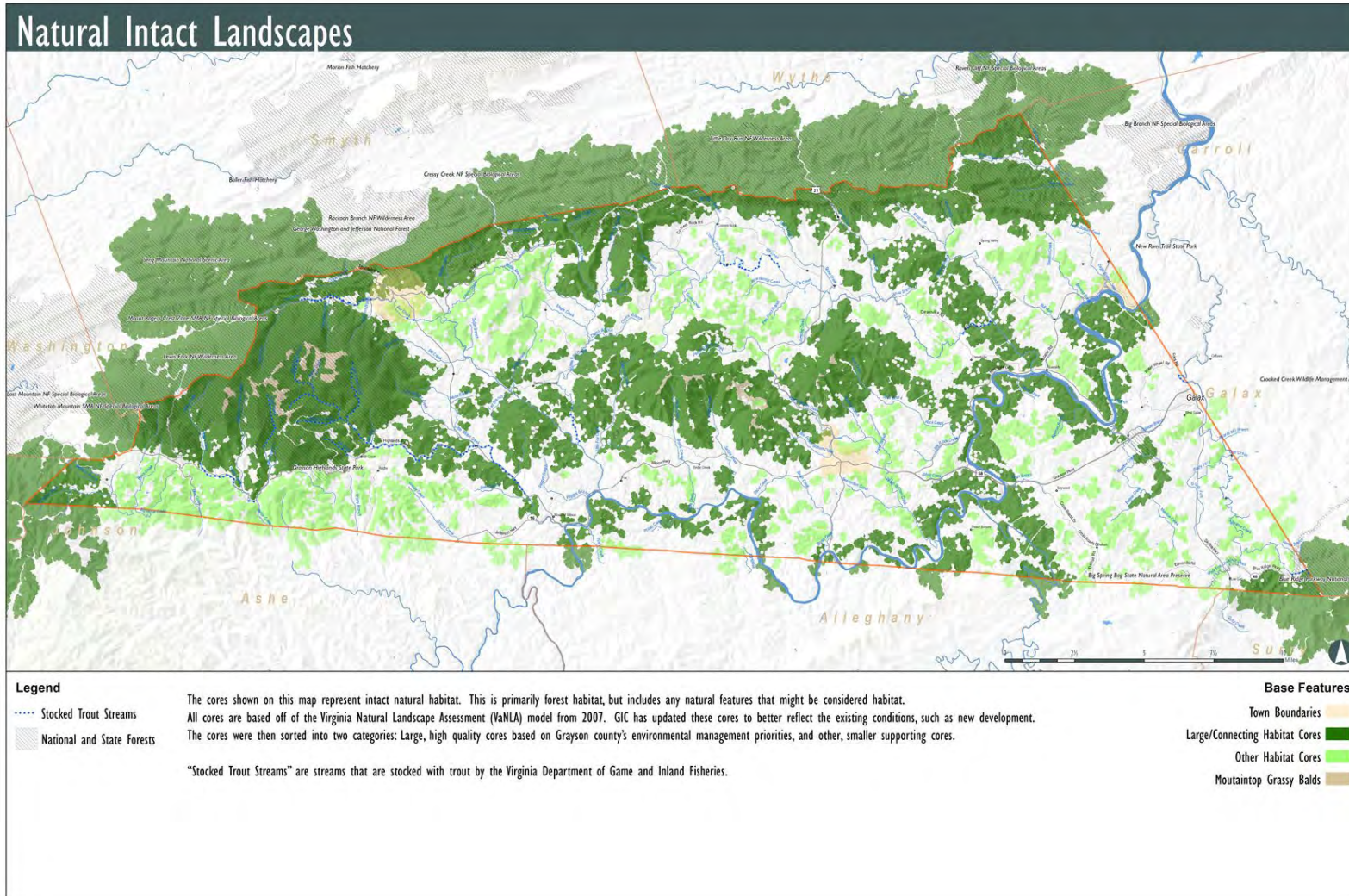




Figure 11-3: Riparian Forest Cover

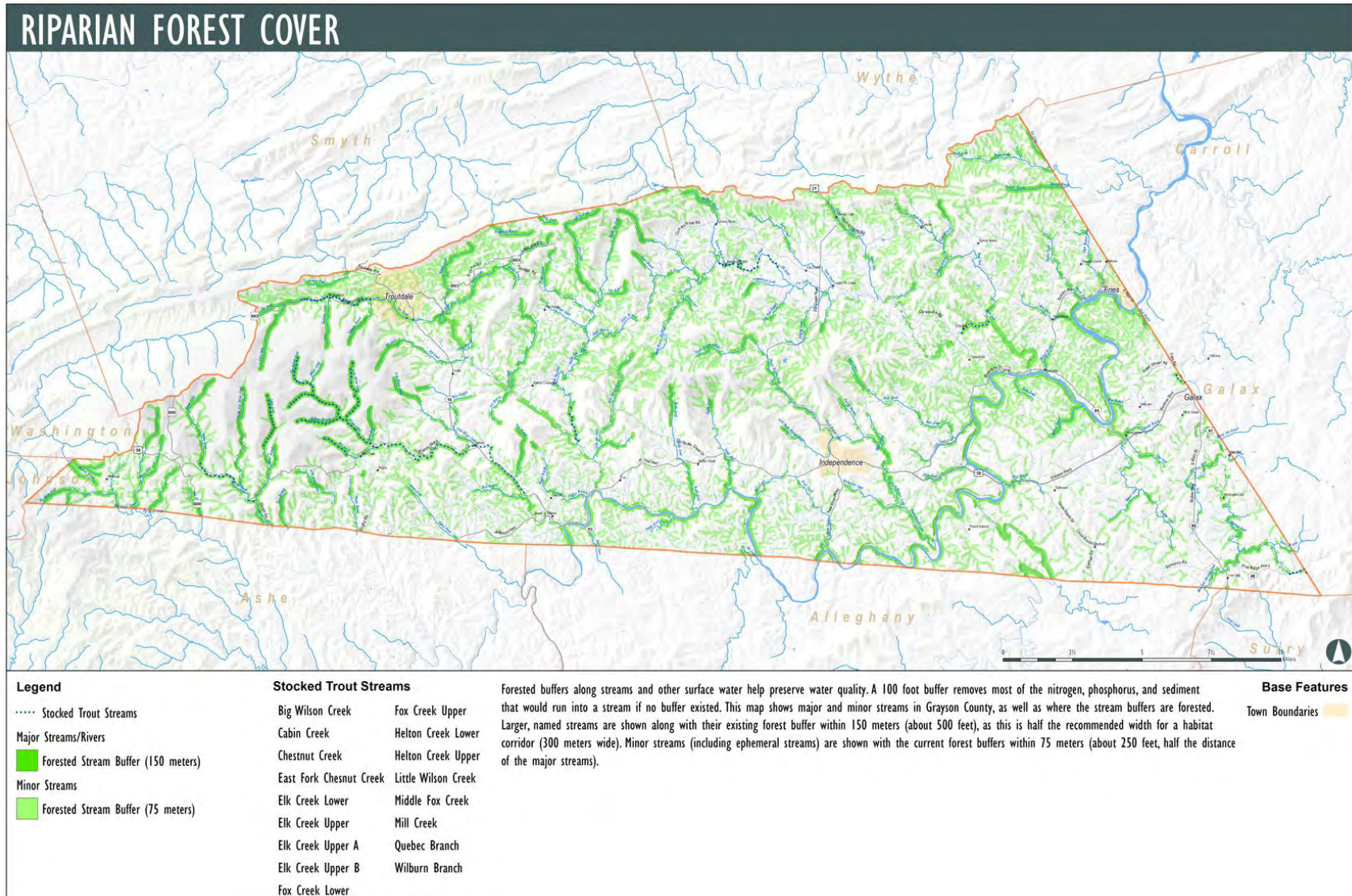


Figure 11-4: Impaired Streams

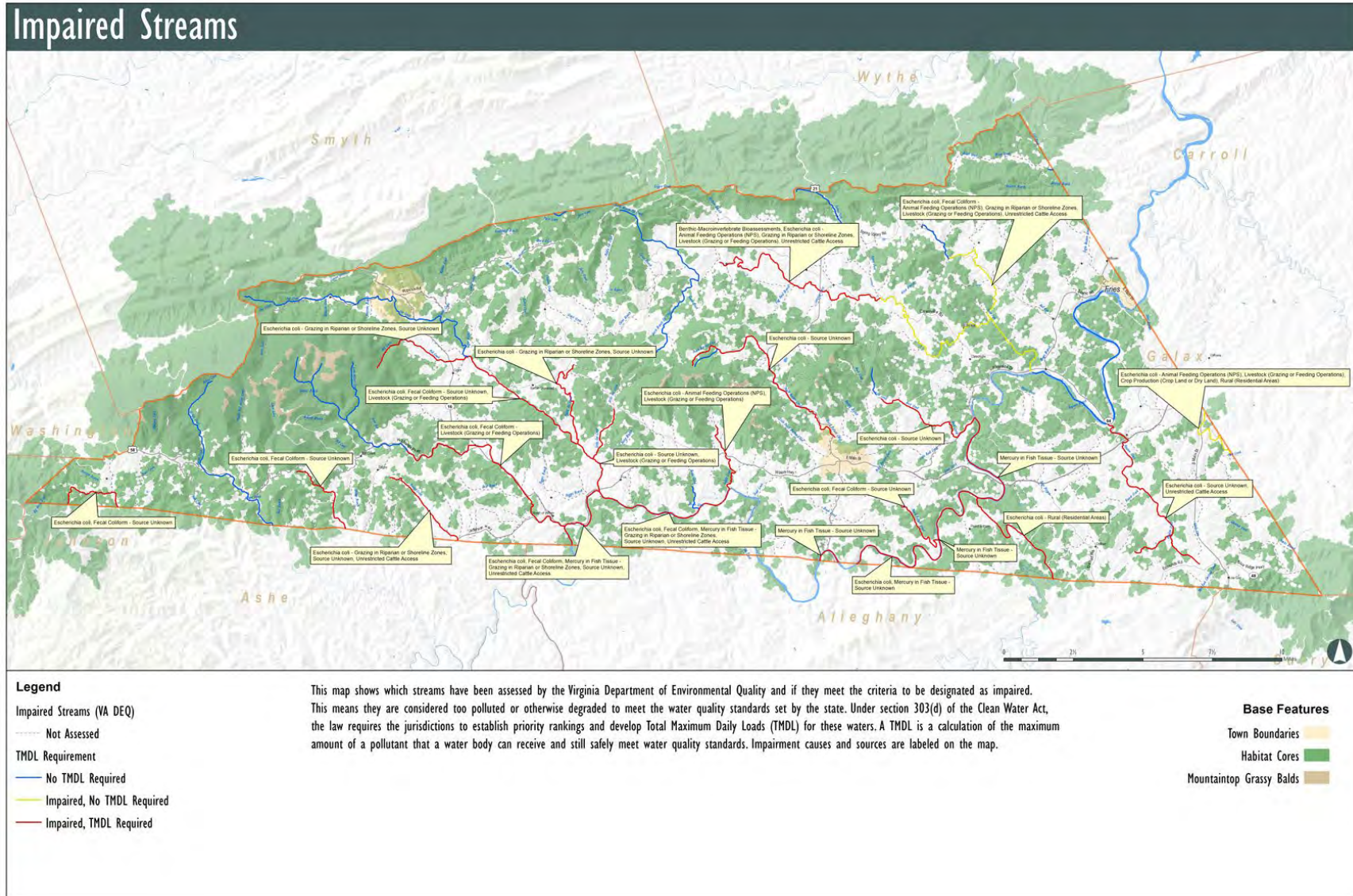
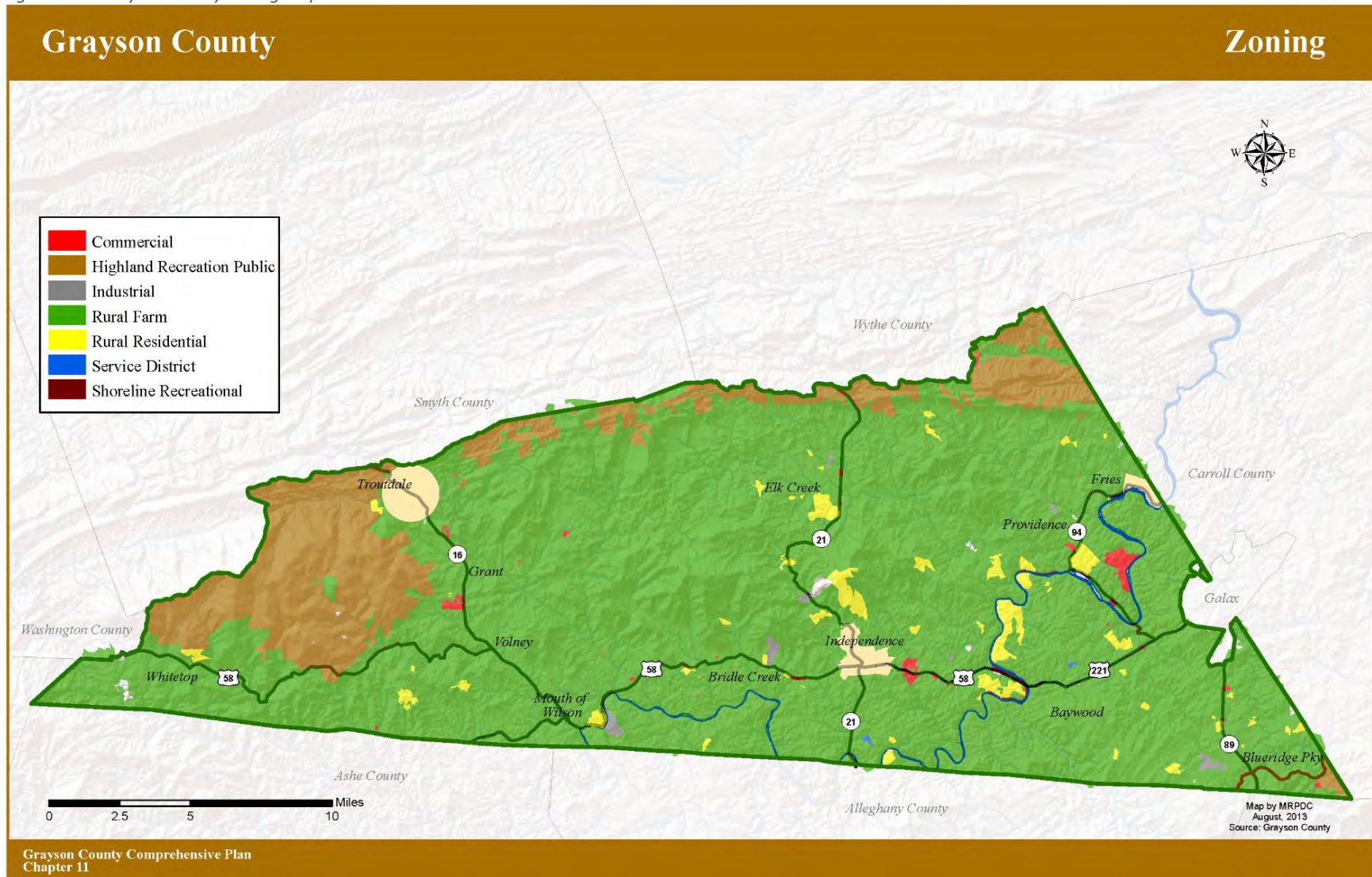


Figure 11-5: Grayson County Zoning Map



## Challenges

Grayson County's mountainous terrain provides a landscape that is truly unique and sought after by those who enjoy scenic drives and high mountain vistas, but with over 60% of the county classified as having slopes over 20% the terrain creates challenges for development of all types. Developing excessive slopes into a level grade required for development requires grading, cut and fill and unique challenges for addressing hydrological features, storm water runoff and prevention of erosion. Access roads and critical infrastructure for development face the same challenges.

## Floodplain Development & Shoreline Recreation

Flooding has been identified as the number one hazard for Grayson County and is listed as such in the 2018 Mount Rogers Hazard Mitigation Plan update. Appropriate development of the floodplain is necessary to mitigate these hazards. Protection of the New River and major tributaries to ensure good water quality and to promote the public use can coincide with hazard mitigation strategies for flood prone areas.

In the valleys that accompany the scenic New River and other major tributaries periodic flooding occurs as a natural function of the watershed. These areas which are subject to the 1% chance of flooding each year or commonly known as the 100-year floodplain or Special Flood Hazard Area by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are subject to periodic flooding events. Grayson County administers a Floodplain Program as part of the requirement for the National Flood Insurance Program. The program ensures that floodplain maps are shared with the public and mandates that the locality regulates development of flood prone areas mapped by FEMA. Land which lies in the Special Flood Hazard Area can be developed to some extent, but these areas are less than ideal for development due to the long-term hazards, negative impact to the capacity of the floodway channel and the extra costs associated with floodplain development.

Floodplain development in Grayson County has historically occurred in developed areas along the New River as part of Shoreline Recreation lots. Shoreline Recreation Zone District was created to guide the development of the New River shoreline for recreational purposes while protecting the capacity of the floodway to accommodate floodwaters and protect against the loss of life and property as a result of flooding. Improvements to account for water quality, unregulated onsite sewage, overdevelopment and future hazard mitigation from flooding events are of particular concern.

The Rural Farm Zone District entails the majority of floodplain properties in Grayson County. These areas are mostly wooded and agricultural lands with limited residential structures. Flood prone properties designated as Special Flood Hazard Areas occur along the New River and along major tributaries such as Elk Creek, Fox Creek, Big Wilson Creek, Little River and others. In all zone districts, floodplain development is guided by the Grayson County Floodplain Ordinance as mandated by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).



## Ordinances and Codes

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Grayson County guides the development of land and structures through local land use ordinances and codes.

### Floodplain Ordinance

Guides development in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) designated floodplain. The Floodplain Ordinance is a requirement for the locality's participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. The purpose of the ordinance is to prevent the loss of life and property, the creation of health and safety hazards, prevent the disruption of commerce and government services, and to avoid the extraordinary and unnecessary expenditure of public funds for flood protection and relief, and to prevent the impairment of the tax base. The county flood ordinance applies to all unincorporated areas that lie within a FEMA designated floodplain.

### Subdivision Ordinance

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires each locality to prepare and adopt a Subdivision Ordinance. The initial ordinance was adopted in July of 1977, since that time there has been five amendments with the most recent amendment in 2012. The Ordinance applies to the unincorporated areas of the county (towns excluded) and pertains to any division of property. The purpose of the ordinance is to establish subdivision standards and procedures for Grayson County and is part of a long-range plan to guide and facilitate the orderly growth of the county, and to promote the public safety, convenience, comfort, prosperity, and general welfare.

### Zoning Ordinance

Land use zoning was adopted in December of 1998. Since that time the ordinance has been amended thirteen times with the latest revision in February 2016. Each of the incorporated towns utilizes their own zoning ordinances and administers their own zoning. Guided by the land use goals included in the Comprehensive Plan, the Grayson County Zoning Ordinance is designed to carefully balance the fundamental property rights and interests of the citizens with the needs of the community. Policies to protect public health, safety and welfare in addition to the guiding principles of appropriate land use and future land use planning serve as the basis for zoning.



### Erosion & Sediment (E&S) Control Ordinance

The Grayson County Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance was initially adopted September of 1975, the latest draft occurred in January of 2008. The purpose of this ordinance is to administer the Erosion & Sediment Control Program, which prevents the degradation of properties, stream channels, waters and other natural resources of the County.

### Stormwater Management Ordinance

The Grayson County Stormwater Management Ordinance was adopted in June of 2014, after House Bill 1065 mandated that all counties and cities adopt and administer a local stormwater management program. The purpose of the program is to protect water quality and to ensure that adequate measures are in place to effectively handle stormwater flows in natural or manmade channels.

### Building Code

In accordance with Section 36-99 of the Code of Virginia, Grayson County adopted The Uniform Statewide Building Code in 1973. The purpose of the USBC is to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia, provided that the building and structures should be permitted to be constructed at the least possible cost consistent with the recognized standards of health, safety, energy conservation, and water conservation, including versions necessary to prevent overcrowding, rodent or insect infestation, and garbage accumulation; and barrier free provisions for the physically handicapped and aged.

## Land Conservation

A significant portion of Grayson County has been placed in either a public or private conservation area. The public lands within the county, including those areas in Grayson Highlands State Park, New River Trail State Park, Matthews State Forest and Old Flat State Forest, Jefferson National Forest and the Mt. Rogers National Recreational Area. Private conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a prospective easement holder such as; New River Land Trust or Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Conservation easements are used as a tool to preserve the tract for wildlife habitat, agricultural or forestry uses, to protect against development or to preserve open space, and can qualify the property for state tax credits and a local reduction in property tax valuation. Public lands and private conservation easements comprise approximately 17% of the total county area.



## Land Use Value Taxation

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In some localities use value taxation is used as a tool to preserve farm and forested lands. The theory is that by reducing the tax burden for these properties the locality encourages landowners to keep the property in an agricultural or forested use. The decision to adopt land use taxation by the locality can be a difficult decision and some claim that the tax break for certain landowners will unfairly place a tax burden on others. In some localities with limited sources of revenue for county expenditures the decision can be extremely difficult. Others would argue that a better method for reducing the tax burden is to keep the tax levy low for all use values. Each locality determines its tax levy based on \$1 per \$100 value of the assessed market rate as determined by a scheduled assessment

## Strategies

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- 11-1 Review existing zoning districts and consider new zoning districts to achieve community land use goals.
- 11-2 Continue Zoning Ordinance reviews and consider amendments for ease of use and to achieve land use goals, as necessary.
- 11-3 Continue to support web-based GIS for citizens' use.
- 11-4 Review and amend land use ordinances to ensure that they are aligned with each other and meet state and federal criteria. Align the ordinances with land use goals.
- 11-5 Improve county tax parcel boundaries and records to accurately reflect the county.
- 11-6 Bolster the county Geographic Information System (GIS) to improve land-use planning and county efficiency.
- 11-7 Host community meetings to gauge citizen input on land use and zoning restrictions.
- 11-8 Sponsor a suitability analysis for land-use types and develop a future land use map based on the recommendations of the suitability analysis.
- 11-9 Amend administrative process for rezones to include site plans and review/interaction with VDOT for rezone applications.
- 11-10 Collaborate with land use agencies who provide technical assistance such as the New River Soil & Water Conservation District, VDOF, USDA NRCS, USDA FSA, and other similar organizations.
- 11-11 Collect data on ridgetop development and analyze data to determine if future threats exist.
- 11-12 Consider amendments to the subdivision ordinance to require surveys and/or land division data in digital AutoCAD dxf files.
- 11-13 Assist citizens seeking assistance with high cost projects such as home and septic system repair assistance through Community Action Agencies, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and other service providers. *(See 8-17)*
- 11-14 Study how lighting choices impact the night sky and encourage citizens and businesses to utilize proper lighting choices, as to have minimal impact on the night sky. *(See 8-25)*



11-15 Conduct education and outreach to floodplain property owners. *(See 8-5)*

## Summary and Conclusions

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Grayson County's land development limitations create numerous challenges for the County and its residents in the strive to improve the County's economic development base. The County has set forth its recommendations through its planning and ordinances and strives to work with landowners to create the best economic climate for the County, while preserving the land to the best of its abilities.





## Chapter Twelve: Public Input

### Introduction

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With the last iteration of the comprehensive plan, an intensive study effort was conducted throughout the county, which included three types of input surveys: the Leadership Survey, the Citizen Survey and the Youth Survey. The Planning Commission determined that the survey results were still relevant to the vision for the community and in the interest of cost-savings, did not re-survey the community. Instead of a survey, during the spring and summer of 2018, public meetings were held throughout the county to gauge public input upon the comprehensive plan and the needs of the community. County staff and the Planning Commission led residents from each district through Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analyses to determine the needs for each community from the perspective of those living within that community.

### 2013 Community Input Process

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The Grayson County Planning Commission, in recognition that public input is important for the development of the Comprehensive Plan designed three types of public input surveys; the Leadership Survey, the Citizen Survey and the Youth Survey. For full results from these surveys, please contact the County's Planning and Community Development Department.

#### Overviews of Different Surveys

##### Leadership Survey

The Grayson County Planning Commission sponsored a leadership survey as a first-step approach to understanding the issues facing the county.

The Leadership Survey was presented to 173 community leaders in Grayson County who are involved professionally or through civic involvement in the content areas of housing, land use, economy/employment, civic/community, transportation, education, healthcare and recreation, public health and safety, public facilities and services, agriculture, forestry/wildlife and county leadership.

The purpose of the leadership survey was to identify the major issues facing the county and to fully understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to/for the county. The respondents were given the opportunity to present comments on Grayson County in general and to submit strategies for improving the quality of life in Grayson County.

Of the 173 individuals who received the survey, seventy-two survey responses were received with a forty-two percent rate of return. The Planning Commission used this information to develop the citizen survey, youth survey and the action plan component of the Comprehensive Plan.

##### Citizen Survey



The Citizen Survey evolved out of questions that the Planning Commission had about the residents of Grayson County such as:

- Where do people travel for work or school?
- What type of profession would they like to be employed in?
- What are the citizens recreational needs?
- What ideas can be utilized for improving education?

To ensure that all residents had an opportunity to participate, the survey was marketed and made available in various methods. Paper surveys were located at twelve survey station locations across the county - three survey stations per district, an online survey was available, a direct door flyer was mailed to every mailbox in the county, and several press releases were issued.

When the results were collected in April of 2013, 693 total surveys were used by Mount Rogers Planning District Commission to extrapolate the data.

- 450 Completed Surveys: 421 online and 29 paper
- 243 Incomplete Surveys (at least one question left unanswered): 50 online and 193 paper

### Youth Survey

In the Leadership Survey process the Planning Commission identified the issue of out migration of youth as a primary concern for the future of the county. The 2010 Census showed that the median age of citizens was higher than the typical U.S. county (46.7). A Youth Survey was designed to gauge input from young people on topics such as; preferred job types, businesses and services needed in the county, preferred methods for improving the public school system, youth programs, lifelong learning, recreation needs, strengths and weaknesses of the county, ideas for improving the county and where they saw themselves in 5 years and in 10 years. The Grayson County 4-H Extension Agent, Erin Farmer, facilitated the youth survey which was completed by thirty-nine high school seniors and juniors at Grayson County High School.

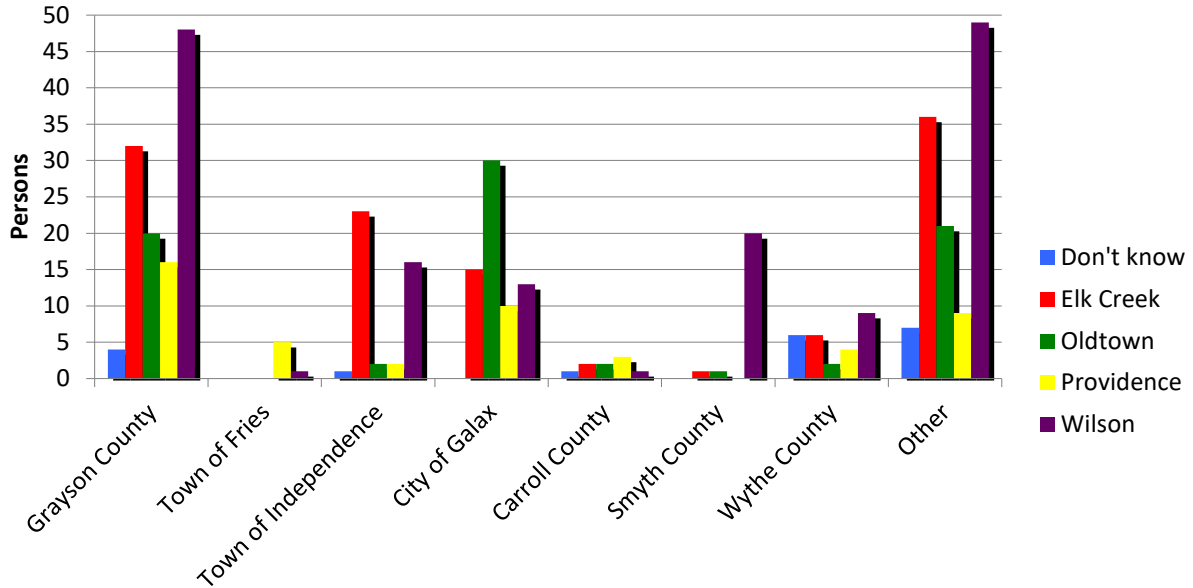
### Survey Results

Survey highlights of important factors such as available of medical services, broadband, and public utilities, support needed for agricultural producers, and county facilities needed are listed on the following pages. The County took these responses into great account when determining its goals and strategies.

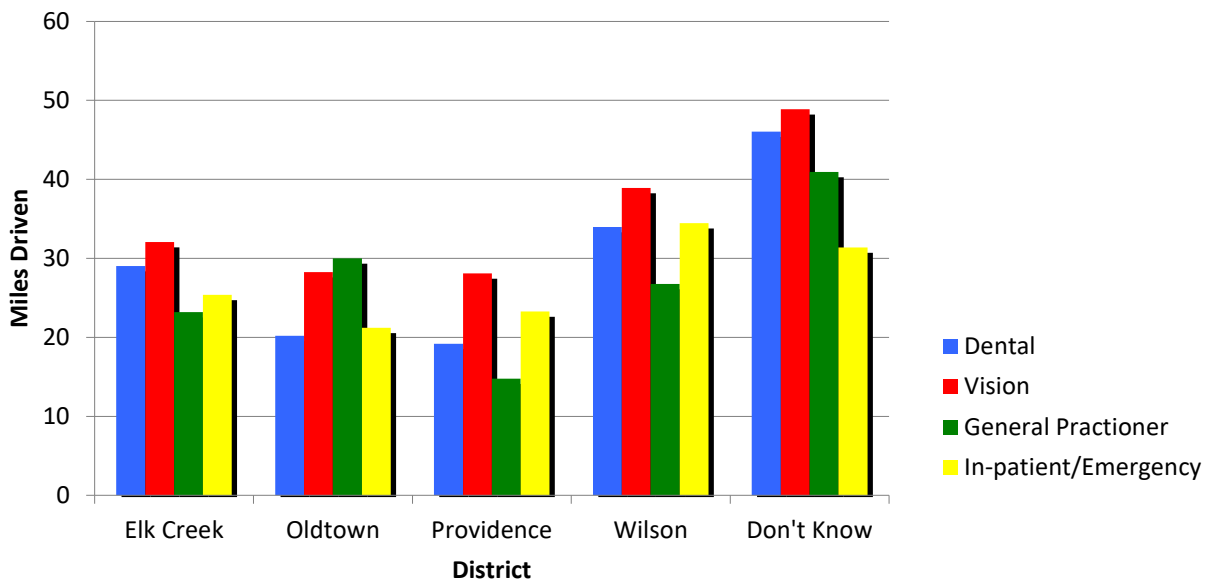


Availability of Employment, Medical Services, and Public Utilities

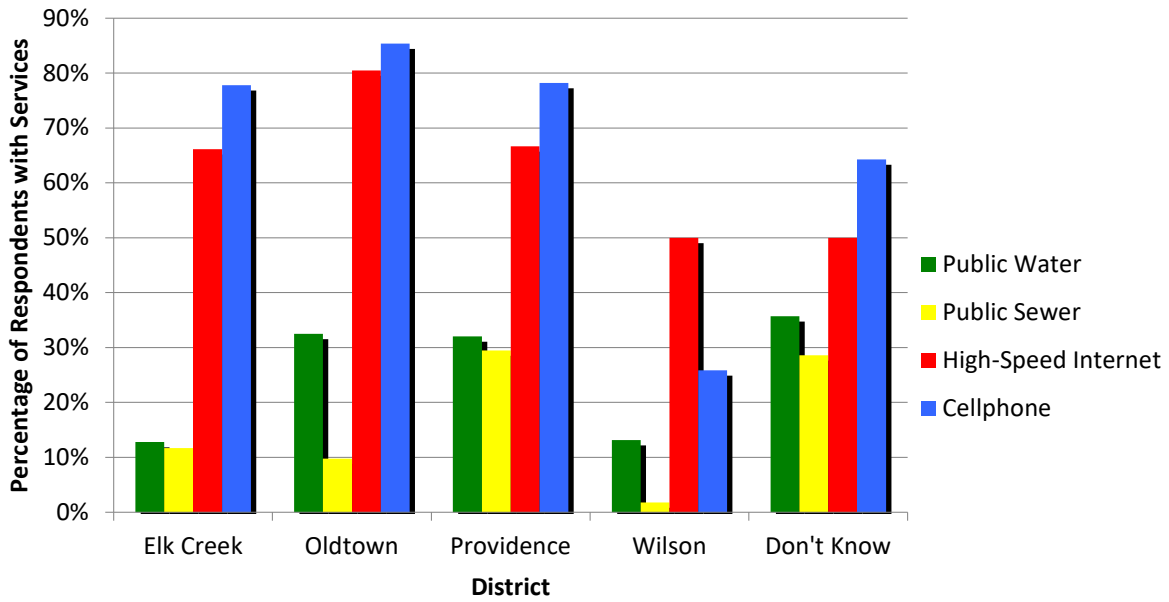
### Where Respondents Travel to for Employment or School, by District



### Average Miles Traveled (One Way) to Medical Services

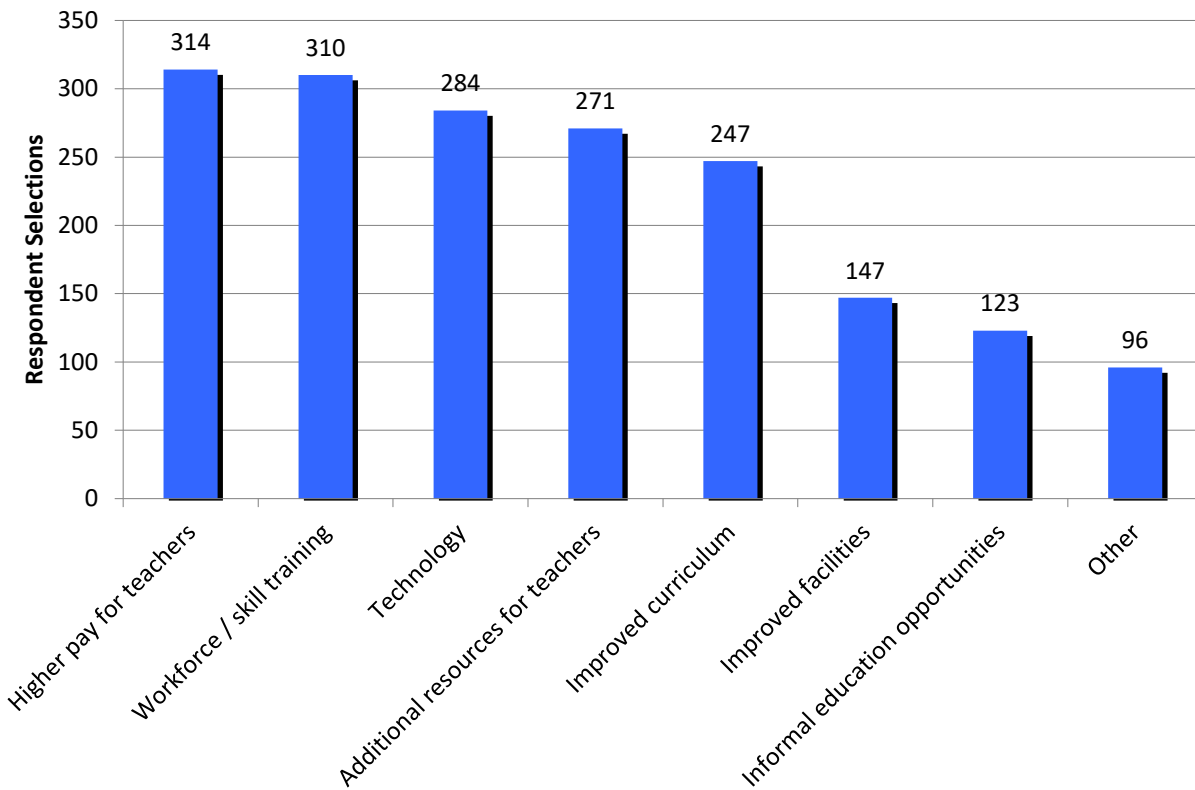


### Availability of Services

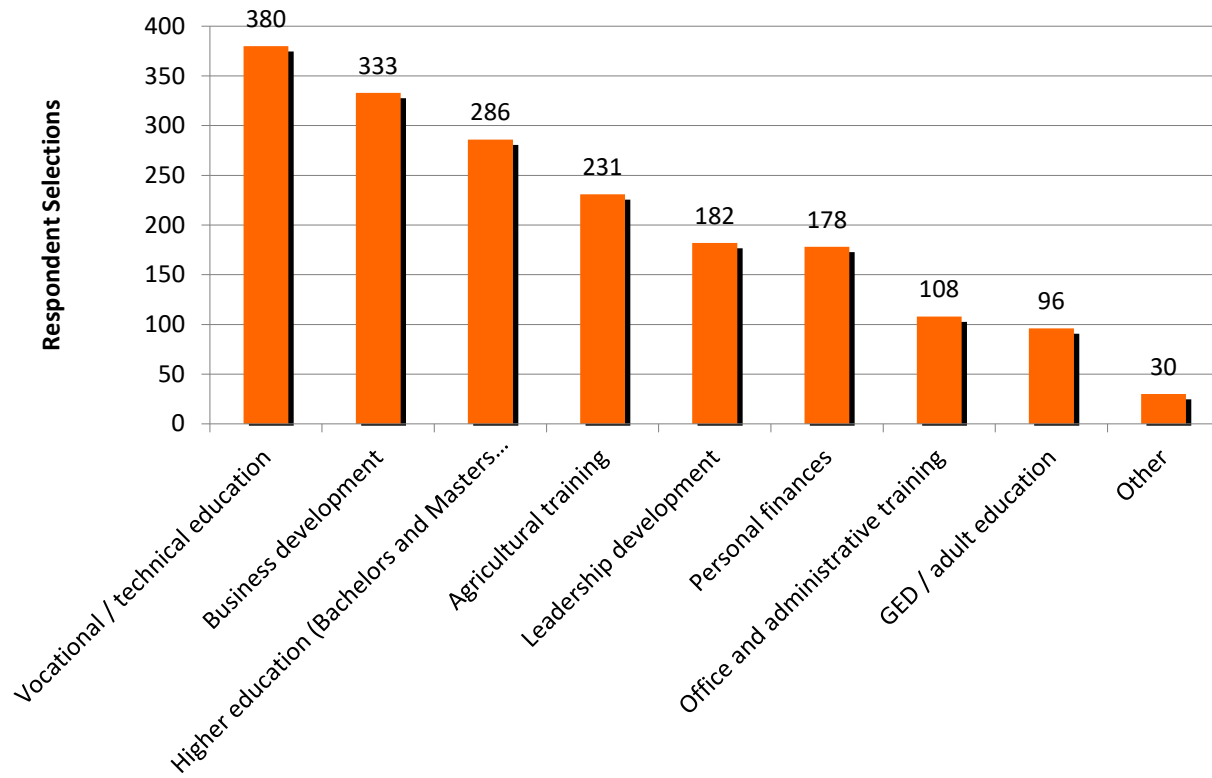


### Educational Needs

### Improvements to the Public School System

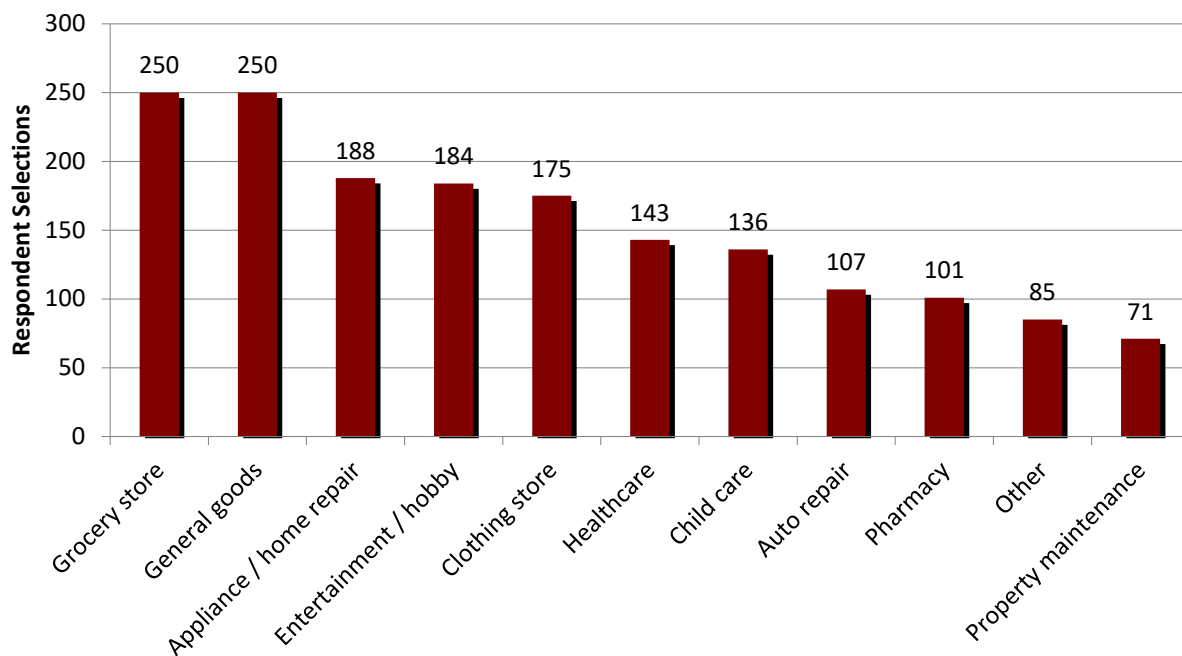


### Lifelong Learning Programs Needed



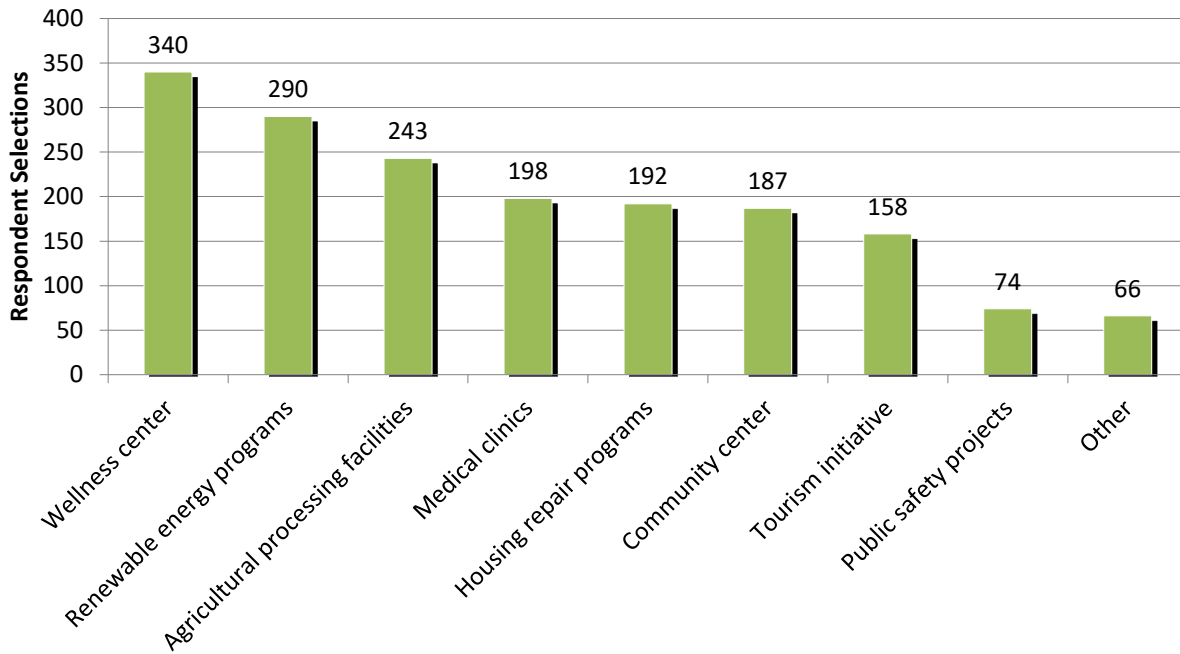
### Business Needs

#### Businesses Needed



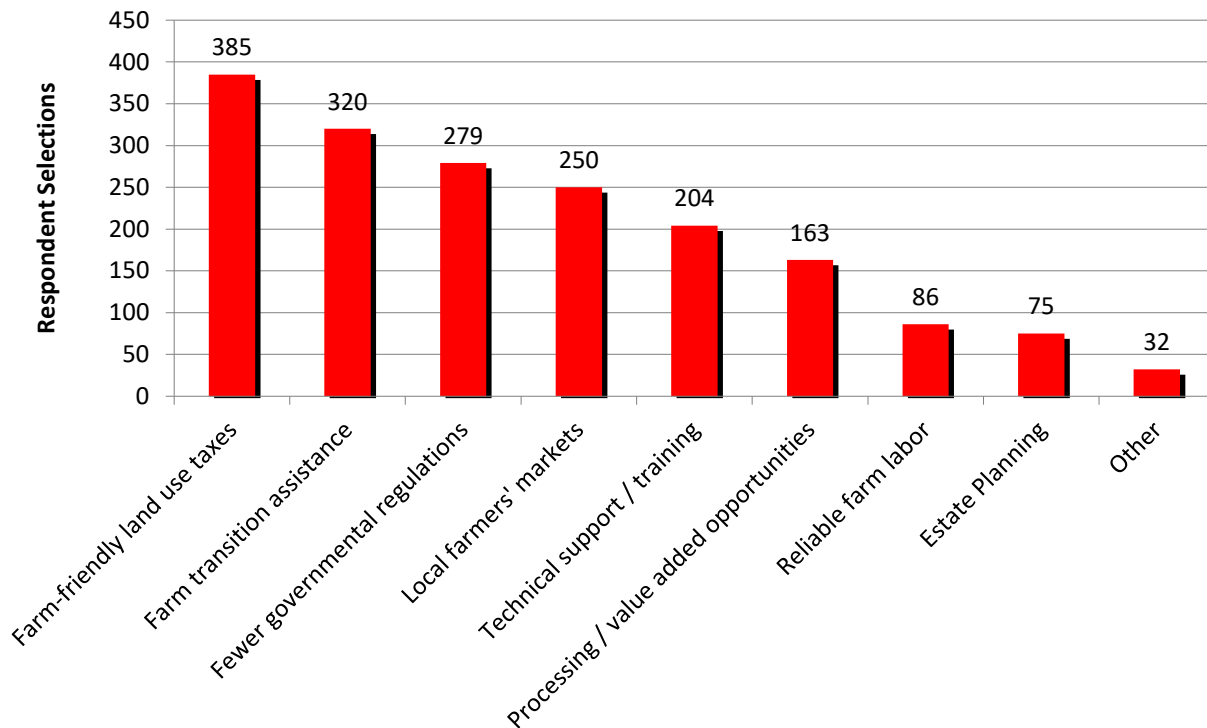
New Facilities Needed

Preferred New Facilities or Services



Agricultural Needs

Support the Agricultural Economy



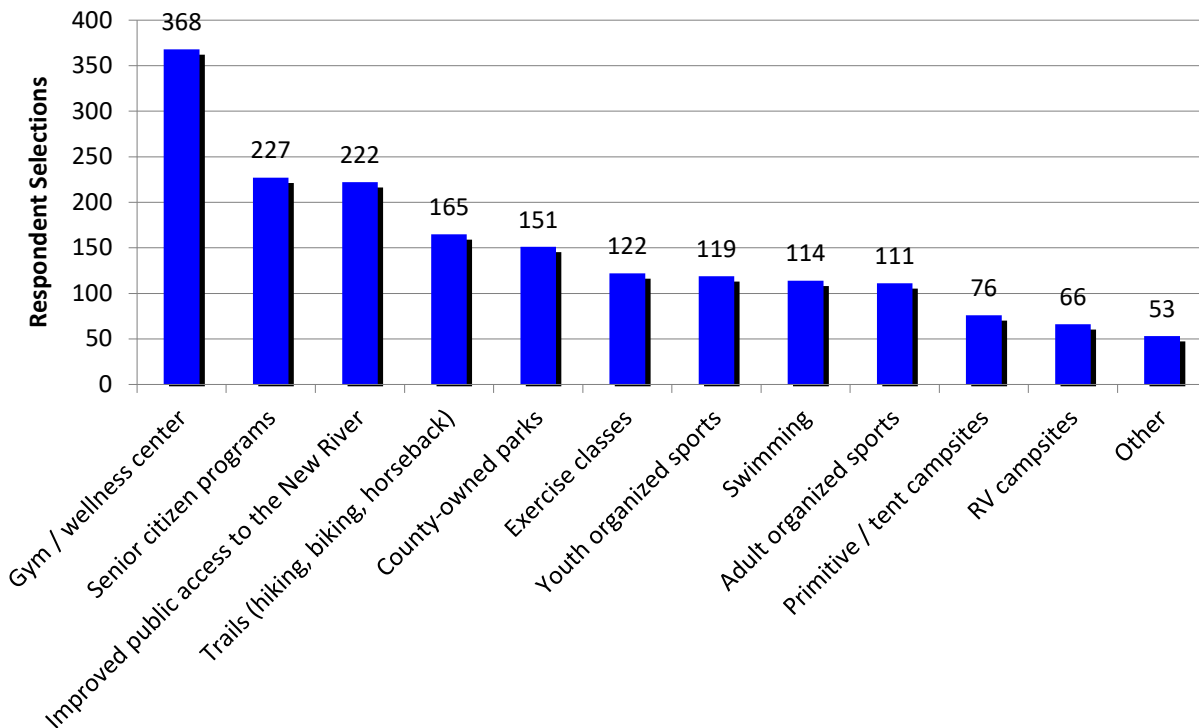
Youth Programs Needed

### Youth Programs



Recreation Needed

### Recreation Needs



## 2018 Community Input Process

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As referenced above, the Planning Commission deemed that the results of the 2013 survey were still relevant to the community's vision and used those results, in addition to input from public meetings to determine the needs for each community from the prospective of those living within that community.

Listed below are some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that resonated within the community meetings. It is important to note that an individual SWOT may not apply county-wide, as each community has different needs and resources; for example, while one community might be close to medical services and list that as a strength, another group might have the opposite situation in their community.

### Strengths

- Strong community/cultural ties
- Arts and music
- Mount Rogers School for redevelopment
- Natural assets for tourism
  - New River
  - Parks and recreation areas
  - Creeper Trail
  - Appalachian Trail
  - New River Trail
  - Hunting/fishing/kayaking
- Blue Ridge Discovery Center (BRDC)
- Have community engagement and support
- Events in the county including festivals and 5K runs
- Availability of District 3 Services
- Local products, including maple syrup

### Weaknesses

- Lack of connectivity in certain areas, be it roadway, cellular, or broadband
- Cost of living, due to long drive distances
- Aging population without connection to services
- Some youth lack connection to outdoor resources
- Availability of services/groceries/shopping
- Lack of jobs opportunities and/or industry
- Lack of law enforcement services
- Lack of radio communications for emergency services
- Need to pass on traditions
- Need for better communication between tourism marketing and local businesses and services
- Lack of gas stations/shopping





- Lack of accessible health care
- Lack of services for elderly (assisted living, etc.)

### Opportunities

- Connections to arts/music in surrounding communities
  - Rex Theatre
  - Henderson School
  - Lincoln Theatre
- Partnerships for tourism
  - MySWVA
  - Virginia Tourism Corp (VTC)
  - E&H Outdoor program
- BRDC—more local partnerships and youth activities in Grayson
  - After-school activities—trips in Grayson to create community pride/interest and reduce “brain drain”
- Capitalizing on natural assets for tourism
  - Dark Skies
  - Unique flora/fauna
- Internet facilities at Mt. Rogers School
- Health care at Whitetop and Fries
- Telecommunications expansion/improvements, including expansion of broadband for home-based jobs/businesses/agritourism/telemedicine
- Law enforcement substation/presence
- Senior citizen community activities
- Stronger community/county admin partnerships
- Marketing local products, including maple syrup
  - Apprenticeships to teach youth
- Mt. Rogers School as wellness center
  - Tie with E&H PA/PT programs
- Medical/dental facilities
- Available developable space
- Entrepreneurs and small manufacturers

### Threats

- Emergency Services availability/connectivity
- Lack of connectivity (cell phone, internet)
- Lack of connection to E. Grayson County
- Population decline
- Lack of law enforcement availability in more rural areas
- Absentee landowners/lack of interest in community
- Seasonality of businesses



## Summary and Conclusions

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The survey completed with the 2013 Comprehensive Plan update included information from almost 700 individuals that was used to create a list of strategies. (Results from the 2013 survey are available through the County upon request.) The Planning Commission revised the strategies for accuracy, clarity, and relevance before holding the public meetings and then again after the meetings to best represent the needs of the citizens and their communities. The various revisions resulted in assuring that the prevalent needs within the County are addressed through the strategies and that the county works toward rectifying the issues and/or achieving the goals most important to residents.



## Chapter Thirteen: Goals and Strategies Plan

### Goals and Strategies

Through the development of the chapters, the public input process from Grayson County citizens, and as a result of numerous planning commission meetings with department heads and community leaders; common themes emerged that were deemed critical to the future of Grayson County. The Grayson County Planning Commission identified a list of prevailing goals and their supporting strategies. The pages that follow recommend strategies that complement the following needs of the county:

- Support life-long learning opportunities.
- Educate and prepare tomorrow's youth for the regional workforce.
- Protect the natural and cultural assets of the county.
- Improve infrastructure throughout the county.
- Strengthen the local economy and increase job growth.
- Improve citizen's quality of life and promote healthy lifestyle choices.
- Continue efforts to provide safe communities.
- Establish reasonable, predictable, and sustainable land-use policy and tools.
- Prepare for issues relating to dynamic shifts in population demographics.
- Promote a responsible and efficient use of government resources.
- Utilize local and regional partnerships.

### Initiatives

In addition to and supporting the goals and strategies, County staff has also designated a list of initiatives to help support economic development and improve quality of life within Grayson County:

- Increase broadband throughout the county
- Build a Federally Qualified Healthcare Center
- Develop adaptive reuse for Mt. Rogers School
- Build a wellness center and support programs promoting healthy lifestyles
- Support redevelopment and adaptive reuse of vacant industrial and/or historical properties
- Secure a distribution center
- Support agriculture through improved communication and resources
- Support efforts to expand arts programs and attractions
- Build a small home retirement community
- Address "food desert" in West Grayson
- Develop Powerhouse Falls Amphitheater
- Enhance the outdoor recreation market
- Support activities that enhance the County's workforce
- Enhance the presence of Mtn. Lynx throughout the County



## Population and Housing

*See Chapter 3*

**Goal: Enhance neighborhoods through preservation, revitalization, and quality infill development and create quality affordable housing and mixed-use development in higher population areas.**

### Summary

In comparison to the rest of the Commonwealth, Grayson County is generally a more affordable location to live, whether renting or owning. Grayson County's housing stock generally consists of single unit, detached homes and mobile homes. With only 3% of housing stock being multi-unit attached homes, there may be a need for multifamily housing within the county. Grayson County also has a higher vacancy rate than the state, due to the high number of homes used for seasonal or recreational purposes.

Similar to the rest of the region, Grayson County's percentage of residents over 39 years of age has been increasing, with the largest gain in the population over 65 years of age. The County needs to pursue programs and strategies to provide for the needs of this aging population and ensure a high quality of life. Additionally, strategies that encourage younger populations to remain in or relocate to Grayson County should be high priorities, as the younger population ensures a viable workforce and steady population growth.

### Strategies

- 3-1 Support private investment in Assisted Living Developments and other housing infrastructure needed for elderly and aging, where possible.
- 3-2 Create information clearinghouse for citizens in need of building repair and energy improvements by connecting them with established organizations such as Rooftop Community Action Agency, Rural Development, HUD, and others.
- 3-3 Consider incentive program to remove pre-1976 manufactured homes that may be unable to meet current building codes.
- 3-4 Create a task force to analyze the environmental health of the county as it relates to septic tank issues, straight-piping, and the lack of a full-time environmental health officer. Ensure that the programs offered by the Health Department align with the needs of the county. *(See 9-2)*



## Education

See Chapter 4

**Goal: Support “K-to-Gray” educational opportunities, including career and technical education, long-distance learning, and lifelong learning.**

### Summary

As a high performing school system can be used as a tool to attract potential industry and business investment and young professional families, Grayson County can continue to maintain and improve its schools’ competitiveness and ability to meet the needs of residents. Additionally, with improved technology, it is becoming easier for more rural areas to provide distance education opportunities, and Grayson County can continue to improve its higher education and career and technical education opportunities. Along with its more traditional education opportunities, the County can also tap into the resources of its many retirees and second-home professionals who may be willing to share their expertise through volunteer instructional programs. Hands-on training for business development, renewable energy, agricultural and forestry education, and other lifestyle and small business learning experiences would provide new skills for residents regardless of age or experience and continue to improve quality of life.

### Strategies

- 4-1 Provide advanced technology and technology infrastructure to schools and students. Consider grant opportunities and donation infrastructure.
- 4-2 Offer diverse after-school programs to include non-athletic activities such as ag/forestry, career readiness, arts and craft internships, college courses, leadership training, trade skills and advance degree programs.
- 4-3 Consider performance-based salaries and incentive salaries to attract/keep high performing teachers.
- 4-4 Increase Career & Tech Education Program and consider other trade-based youth/adult programs to educate “workforce ready” population for local employment or for small business development. To include: AC & Refrigeration, Masonry, Landscaping, Building Trades, EMT, Criminal Justice, Corrections, Property Management, Agriculture/Forestry, Home Health/Medical, and Culinary Arts
- 4-5 Partner with established colleges to offer a “satellite campus” in Grayson County for advanced degrees and long-distance learning.
- 4-6 Consider vacant spaces/buildings to utilize for advanced learning, trade education, small business development, community centers, mentorship/internship headquarters, and other programs.
- 4-7 Conduct Feasibility Study for school system "Early Diversion Program". Program will identify students who may benefit from career/ technical training programs.
- 4-8 Continue to support the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service and public libraries as valuable educational opportunities for the county.



- 4-9 Develop internship/mentorship program for youth to gain experience/build resumes. Combine with leadership training. (See 6-9)
- 4-10 Reach out to second home, retirees, professionals and other potential volunteers to lead education programs in; trades, business, leadership /after school/intern etc.
- 4-11 Provide education for repeat offenders emphasize the needs for those in the Criminal Justice System to re-enter society as productive citizens.
- 4-12 Develop an information system/network for county residents to learn about lifelong learning opportunities already offered by area organizations. Support workshops and programs already offered for lifelong learning. For example: after-hours agriculture shop - explain
- 4-13 Work with agencies and educational institutions to develop job skill training programs to meet identified gaps in the local workforce. (See 5-12)
- 4-14 Work with the school system to provide afterschool leadership development academy to encourage the next generation of leaders.



## Economy

See Chapter 5

**Goal: Support and expand existing businesses, attract new businesses, and provide a broad range of employment opportunities and a high quality of life for residents of, and those employed in, Grayson County.**

### Summary

Expansion in educational opportunities will help support a strong workforce that meets the needs of employers. To retain existing industries and attract new businesses, the County needs to continue to support infrastructure improvements and try to expand infrastructure in areas where business development is expected. Fiber or wireless internet expansion will impact small business development, especially for small businesses that operate outside of major corridors and towns. Grayson County's transitioning economy continues to convey the importance of the region's natural and cultural assets and the need to support local entrepreneurs.

### Strategies

- 5-1 Continue support of regional economic development authorities and small business incubators/development centers.
- 5-2 Continue recruitment efforts of industries to the Wildwood Industrial Park, Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park and the Grayson County Industrial Park.
- 5-3 Encourage efforts to ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place and operating at the Wildwood Industrial Park, Grayson County Industrial Park, Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park, and other industrial developments where they align with Grayson County's best interest.
- 5-4 Create inventory of the privately owned commercial and industrial sites and assist, where possible, with infrastructure needs or marketing to spur economic development.
- 5-5 Promote small business development by encouraging creative financing programs such as revolving loan funds, grants, and small business plan challenges.
- 5-6 Encourage small businesses and other types of economic development through asset-based development, especially with a focus on diversification of outdoor recreation activities.
- 5-7 Survey small business owners to understand the needs of these businesses and leverage resources to assist these needs.
- 5-8 Consider participation in regional Enterprise Zone to encourage local investment and business development.
- 5-9 Gauge the support for a local office park to accommodate those without internet who may need personal office and when space is needed for business development.
- 5-10 Support initiatives that create employment through value-added processing of local agriculture and forestry resources. (See 6-4)



- 5-11 Support efforts, where feasible, to encourage the development of advanced communication infrastructure; broadband, wireless internet, and cell coverage/towers. *(See 8-1)*
- 5-12 Work with agencies and educational institutions to develop job skill training programs to meet identified gaps in the local workforce. *(See 4-13)*





## Agriculture and Forestry

See Chapter 6

**Goal: Preserve, protect, and enhance the quality of Grayson County’s agricultural areas and promote rural lifestyles, farmland, agricultural and forestry enterprises, open space, recreation, and historic resources within the county.**

### Summary

As the largest segment of Grayson County’s industry, agriculture and forestry pursuits involve a large portion of the county’s residents. Most of the County’s agricultural products are consumed outside of the county and represent a major stream for external dollars to flow back into the county. The rising trends of agritourism, value-added products, and local foods initiatives are promoting agriculture and local products to new audiences, expanding the demand for local products, and increasing value in local communities. There are numerous opportunities for expanded education and training to local entrepreneurs, farmers, and foresters that will also support increased economic impact within the county.

### Strategies

- 6-1 Create a committee of stakeholders and volunteers to analyze the causes of different types of agricultural damages, recommend policies/strategies to encourage farming, agriculture land retention, and strategies to improve ag/economics.
- 6-2 Educate residents about opportunities to protect prime farmland and encourage the farming of this land in future land-use decisions.
- 6-3 Support local food initiatives and consider collaborating with local farmers and regional agricultural organizations to create a regional food hub that will transport and market local agricultural products.
- 6-4 Support initiatives that create employment through value-added/processing of local agriculture and forestry resources. *(See 5-10)*
- 6-5 Expand efforts of agritourism initiatives. *(See 10-11)*
- 6-6 Consider workforce development program to meet the local farm/forestry labor needs and plan accordingly.
- 6-7 Evaluate the need for web-based clearinghouse of ag/forestry assets and networks to promote this economy. (producers, value-added products, active farms, local food infrastructure & transportation options for food products)
- 6-8 Encourage tourism visitation by supporting the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Matthews Farm Museum, the 1908 Courthouse, New River Trail State Park, Grayson Highlands State Park, and/or other natural & cultural history museums as tourism development. *(See 10-10)*
- 6-9 Develop internship/mentorship program for youth to gain experience/build resumes. Combine with leadership training. *(See 4-9)*



## Transportation

See Chapter 7

**Goal: Support a sustainable transportation system that links highways, transit, greenways, sidewalks and bike trails to provide multimodal transportation options.**

### Summary

Grayson County's primary method of transportation is the road system, of which a large portion is supported by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). VDOT maintains, supports, and develops state roads and road infrastructure within the county. The SMART SCALE transportation program has shown how imperative it is for the County to work closely with VDOT to develop the most economical and common-sense solutions to solve transportation issues. The County's collaboration with District Three Governmental Cooperative and its Mountain Lynx public transit are instrumental in providing public transportation options to residents and have the potential to be expanded within the county. In addition to roads and public transit, the rise in outdoor recreation and tourism in recent years has created numerous opportunities for the County to improve bicycling and pedestrian transportation.

### Strategies

- 7-1 Continue to work with Virginia Department of Transportation to develop, design, and implement transportation projects, including, but not limited to, SMART SCALE, Highway Safety, Bike Pedestrian Safety, and Transportation Alternatives projects.
- 7-2 Continue efforts to support the Twin County Airport (TCA).
- 7-3 Develop School System Capital Improvement Plan to prioritize transportation and facility improvement projects.
- 7-4 Partner with Towns to expand bicycling and pedestrian transportation options.
- 7-5 Analyze the need for Park & Ride locations and support public transit/ridesharing infrastructure when cost effective.
- 7-6 Consider policy that reduces strip development and multiple entrances to the state highways for safety concerns.
- 7-7 Proceed with Phase III of the Independence Pedestrian and Bike Trail. (See 8-4)
- 7-8 Use GIS to understand guardrail needs for reoccurring safety concerns.
- 7-9 Amend administrative process for rezones to include site plans and review/interaction with VDOT for rezone applications. (See 11-9)
- 7-10 Continue supporting District Three and Mountain Lynx and encourage citizen participation through marketing efforts.



## Public Services, Facilities, and Utilities

*See Chapter 8*

**Goal: Expand access to improved and enhanced community services, facilities, and infrastructure for all; and expanded opportunities for social equity among diverse community groups.**

### Summary

High quality public services, facilities, and utilities are imperative to the sustained quality of life in Grayson County. The County's efforts to expand services and infrastructure to support a greater percentage of the county are often hampered by terrain and inaccessibility of some areas of the county, so advances in technology stand to have a great impact upon the availability of these services in the future. The County understands the challenges of meeting the needs of different age groups, including creating age-friendly communities and services for children and seniors.

### Strategies

- 8-1 Support and encourage the development of advanced communication infrastructure; broadband, wireless internet, and cell coverage/towers. *(See 5-11)*
- 8-2 Support volunteer emergency services to ensure that all residents can receive timely emergency assistance.
- 8-3 Continue working with the Senior Advocacy Committee to assess the unmet needs of the elderly and develop strategies to mitigate concerns and meet future needs. *(See 9-4)*
- 8-4 Proceed with Phase III of the Independence Pedestrian and Bike Trail. *(See 7-7)*
- 8-5 Conduct education and outreach to floodplain property owners. *(See 11-15)*
- 8-6 Create a multidisciplinary committee to research techniques/programs that prevent the cycle of poverty. The study should include how poverty relates to lack of employment, education, lifestyle choices, substance abuse, personal responsibility/work ethic and social services.
- 8-7 Reduce long term cost to the county by improving efficiency of facilities, services, and work flows.
- 8-8 Consider the extension of water and sewer lines to communities with gaps in service or when environmental health threats necessitate action
- 8-9 Evaluate county water infrastructure throughout the county and develop a maintenance schedule to ensure that services remain viable.
- 8-10 Support efforts to reduce crime and substance abuse in Grayson County.
- 8-11 Encourage countywide efforts to reduce waste and increase recycling.
- 8-12 Support strategies to prolong the life of the regional landfill by increasing recycling/reuse of materials for ALL partners in the Solid Waste Authority.
- 8-13 Evaluate local incineration of trash and/or transfer station as an option to reduce trips to the landfill.



- 8-14 Support initiatives that expand the recycling program and the ability to collect revenue. Consider investing in a truck to haul products and a glass recycling/crushing process to capture revenue from this waste stream.
- 8-15 Achieve Certified Crime Prevention Community Status.
- 8-16 Expand the Recreation Department programs and facilities to include adult/senior programs and outdoor recreation.
- 8-17 Assist citizens seeking assistance with high cost projects such as home and septic system repair assistance through Community Action Agencies, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and other service providers. Promote foster parenting in the community. *(See 11-13)*
- 8-18 Continue improving the government website to facilitate the exchange of information in an accurate and efficient way.
- 8-19 Support educational programs about responsible animal ownership.
- 8-20 Explore successful models/programs that break the cycle of poverty and replicate these programs.
- 8-21 Support and expand activities of the Day Report Program to prevent repeat offenders and assist them with transitioning back into the community.
- 8-22 Utilize crime statistic data and GIS to identify, prescribe and treat areas of acute criminal activity.
- 8-23 Expand DARE program into the higher grades in conjunction with School Resource Officer program.
- 8-24 Build social capital by encouraging the formation and growth of civic clubs that address community needs. Topics may include scholarships, affordable housing, and other social issues.
- 8-25 Study how lighting choices impact the night sky and encourage citizens and businesses to utilize proper lighting choices, as to have minimal impact on the night sky and consider policy to protect dark skies as a local asset.
- 8-26 Consider resolution for “Clean Grayson Month” to promote civic and public actions to clean up the county.
- 8-27 Support the Independence Community Initiative for development of McKnight Park as part of tourism development. *(See 10-3)*
- 8-28 Encourage community members to participate in and/or support volunteer and emergency services in their communities.
- 8-29 Support communication and resource-sharing between agencies throughout the county, including the closer working relationships between EMS providers and sharing of marketing and web development resources for agencies without capacity
- 8-30 Explore possibilities for redevelopment of buildings such as the Mount Rogers School.
- 8-31 Encourage increased presence of law enforcement in the Western Grayson County.



## Health and Wellness

See Chapter 9

**Goal: Improve health and wellness services and facilities within Grayson County and enhance resident access.**

### Summary

As it is the foundation of any successful community, maintaining a healthy population is a major concern for Grayson County. “Lifestyle illnesses,” or those related to negative lifestyle choices, seem to be the primary health concern for residents, and the county is working to expand community access to health care and fitness activities. As there has been overwhelming support for improved access to wellness activities, including construction of trails and creation of a wellness center, this need remains a key concern of the County. Proximity to affordable health and dental care is another major concern of the County as it is often difficult for residents to access needed services.

### Strategies

- 9-1 Support the development of a Community Fitness/Wellness Center to provide opportunity for exercise and physical fitness.
- 9-2 Create a task force to analyze the environmental health of the county. As it relates to septic tank issues/straight-piping, the lack of a full-time environmental health officer. Ensure that the programs offered by the Health Department align with the needs of the county. *(See 3-4)*
- 9-3 Survey other communities to gather input on strategies for attracting medical clinics and services.
- 9-4 Continue working with the Senior Advocacy Committee to assess the unmet needs of the elderly and develop strategies to mitigate concerns and meet future needs. *(See 8-3)*
- 9-5 Expand the Recreation Department programs and facilities to include adult/senior programs and outdoor recreation. *(See 8-16)*
- 9-6 Support private investment in medical services and clinics, and efforts to expand or create telemedicine and community clinics, where possible.



## Tourism

See Chapter 10

**Goal: Preserve, enhance, and protect Grayson County’s environmental resources to maintain high quality of life for residents and sustainable development for the future**

### Summary

Grayson County’s varied outdoor recreation assets, traditional music, historical assets, and agrarian landscape have made it a popular destination for tourists. As outdoor tourism has expanded, available resources have been devoted to help promote the County, but certain challenges have placed limitations on tourism’s ability to bring in additional funds, including the shortage of restaurants and tourism related businesses, limited staff time, and the lack of a fulltime visitor information center. The County is looking at numerous ways to help tourism become a viable economic option for the future. Partnerships with local and regional tourism initiatives are key for the expansion of the tourism economy in the County.

### Strategies

- 10-1 Partner with regional tourism initiatives such as The Crooked Road, Round the Mountain, and other organizations accountable for increasing tourism.
- 10-2 Actively promote cultural events such as festivals, markets, music and other communal activities that are regional attractions to Grayson County, as well as marketing local products.
- 10-3 Support the Independence Community Initiative for development of McKnight Park as part of tourism development. *(See 8-27)*
- 10-4 Create a tourism brand for outdoor recreational assets on the western end of Grayson County to promote tourism and small business development.
- 10-5 Complete an inventory and a review of natural and cultural assets of the community.
- 10-6 Consider full-time visitor/tourism centers in both Eastern and Western Grayson County.
- 10-7 Consider collaboration between Grayson County and local historical societies/organizations to promote important historical/cultural resources of the county.
- 10-8 Consider creating a tourism business network to improve professionalism and networking of businesses associated with tourism.
- 10-9 Bridge the Tourism and Recreation Departments to ensure that visitors can access local recreational offerings.
- 10-10 Encourage tourism by supporting the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Matthews Farm Museum, the 1908 Courthouse, Grayson Highlands State Park, The New River, and/or other natural & cultural history museums as tourism development. *(See 6-8)*
- 10-11 Consider expanding efforts of agritourism initiatives. *(See 6-5)*
- 10-12 Create tourism zones within the County.
- 10-13 Capitalize upon local arts, music, and natural assets in Grayson County and surrounding communities.



10-14 Support the efforts of local theatre programs.



## Land Use

See Chapter 11

**Goal: Facilitate land use patterns that offer a variety of housing choices and convenient access to neighborhood shopping, schools, parks, and other services; protect property owners from incompatible land uses; make efficient use of Grayson County's limited land capacity; and coordinate land uses with infrastructure needs.**

### Summary

Grayson County's mountainous terrain, high acreage in forests, and pastoral landscape create the quality of life that is often cited as one of the reasons that residents love living in the County. Grayson County recognizes the need to protect natural assets while at the same time maintaining a healthy climate for businesses. The County's Land Use Ordinances and Codes guide the development of land and ensure that the local policy reflects state and federal mandates for soil and water protection and floodplain management.

### Strategies

- 11-1 Review existing zoning districts and consider new zoning districts to achieve community land use goals.
- 11-2 Continue Zoning Ordinance reviews and consider amendments for ease of use and to achieve land use goals, as necessary.
- 11-3 Continue to support web-based GIS for citizens' use.
- 11-4 Review and amend land use ordinances to ensure that they are aligned with each other and meet state and federal criteria. Align the ordinances with land use goals.
- 11-5 Improve county tax parcel boundaries and records to accurately reflect the county.
- 11-6 Bolster the county Geographic Information System (GIS) to improve land-use planning and county efficiency.
- 11-7 Host community meetings to gauge citizen input on land use and zoning restrictions.
- 11-8 Sponsor a suitability analysis for land-use types and develop a future land use map based on the recommendations of the suitability analysis.
- 11-9 Amend administrative process for rezones to include site plans and review/interaction with VDOT for rezone applications.
- 11-10 Collaborate with land use agencies who provide technical assistance such as the New River Soil & Water Conservation District, VDOF, USDA NRCS, USDA FSA, and other similar organizations.
- 11-11 Collect data on ridgetop development and analyze data to determine if future threats exist.
- 11-12 Consider amendments to the subdivision ordinance to require surveys and/or land division data in digital AutoCAD dxf files.
- 11-13 Assist citizens seeking assistance with high cost projects such as home and septic system repair assistance through Community Action Agencies, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and other service providers. (See 8-17)





- 11-14 Study how lighting choices impact the night sky and encourage citizens and businesses to utilize proper lighting choices, as to have minimal impact on the night sky. *(See 8-25)*
- 11-15 Conduct education and outreach to floodplain property owners. *(See 8-5)*





## Chapter Fourteen: Addendums

Approval of addendums, which are supported by the Grayson County Planning Commission, any future revisions made to approved addendums shall come before the Planning Commission for reapproval to ensure cohesiveness to the Grayson County Comprehensive Plan.



## Grayson County Senior Advocacy Committee 5-Year Plan



Grayson County  
Senior Advocacy Committee AARP & World  
Health Organization Age-Friendly Community  
Network  
5-Year Plan  
2018-2023



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

In July of 2016 a small group of citizens presented a summary of findings of the Governor's Conference on Aging held in Richmond, Virginia in May of 2016 to the Grayson County Board of Supervisors. We are facing the fact that 1 in 3 Americans are 50 or older, and the fact that our Millennial Generation (current age 11 - 35: the coming workforce) are disappearing. This fact is exacerbated in Grayson County because of 2 factors: the lack of jobs for our youth, and the shrinking current childbearing and working population. And so, Grayson citizens offered to assist the County in inventorying the current services available in the County to senior citizens, and assessing the availability of critical senior services.

In response to this offer of assistance, the Board of Supervisors, with the assistance of the County Administrator and staff and participation of the volunteers, created and passed a resolution which formally created the Grayson County Senior Advocacy Committee (GCSAC), outlined the requirements for service on the committee, the purpose, mission statement, goals, and the roles and responsibilities of the committee members. The committee consists of three to five Grayson County citizens, one Grayson County Supervisor, and one Planning Commission member. <sup>1</sup> The committee meets once per month; meeting times and place are published, and the public is invited.

The GCSAC acts as a "think tank." Soon after their appointment the GCSAC applied to the World Health Organization (WHO) and AARP's Age-Friendly Community Network and received Certification for Grayson County. The Committee recognized that the AFCN offered a great deal of structure and resources that would help to focus the work of the committee while eliminating the need to reinvent the wheel! Since receiving that Certification, the GCSAC began using the AARP guidelines, focusing on their 8 Dominions<sup>2</sup> to assess the County's status as an Age-Friendly Community Network member, and to recommend strategies to the Board of Supervisors for the County to achieve its stated purpose, goals, and mission as a member of this Network. The general purpose and hoped-for outcome of this work is improved quality of life for Grayson County citizens of all ages, and improved access to services - both publicly and privately provided - as those services become necessary.

The following is a 5-Year Plan for achieving the purpose, goals and mission of the Committee. The GCSAC chose to create a 5-Year Plan, rather than the AARP suggested 3-Year Plan, so it will be in sync with the County's Comprehensive 5-Year Plan schedule.



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## **COUNTY PROFILE**

Grayson County, Virginia covers an area of 446 square mountainous miles in the heart of Appalachia with a population of 15,107. Only 720 individuals identified themselves as belonging to a race other than white. Our median age is 47.6. The County seat is in the town of Independence, where most services are located. Our main industry is agriculture, involving livestock, timber, and non-timber forest products such as wildcrafted herbs. Our median household income is just under \$30,000. There is a strong, emotional attachment to the land; many families have lived in this county for over 200 years. With vast undeveloped areas of timbered land and elevations ranging from 2,500 to 5,729 feet on Mt. Rogers, Grayson boasts of an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna. Hunting, fishing, hiking and other outdoor recreation opportunities abound. Old time and bluegrass music are common pastimes and a point of pride for the culture.

We do have a variety of populations in Grayson County's citizenry with different points of view: the "native" residents (people who were born and raised within the County), the retirees who discovered the beauty and charms of Grayson and have migrated here, the folks who grew up here and left the area to pursue careers elsewhere and then came back, and the latest influx - young and mid-life folks wanting to farm and develop homesteads using the latest non-traditional approaches such as: permaculture, organic, biodynamic techniques along with intense rotational grazing. This trend is being encouraged by our forward-thinking County Extension services, Grayson LandCare organization, and our Vet to Farms program.

To illustrate the contrast in service needs, our native population is amazingly self-sufficient and has much lower expectations regarding the availability of services. Example: The County has one grocery store; this is not an issue with the natives but is a huge disappointment to retirees settling here. In our survey of services, we identified the following missing services that one might expect to find in any community: There is no hospital in the county, no physicians in the western end of the county, only one nursing home and no assisted living or co-housing options, and there are no senior living communities, no PACE Center, no department stores. Shopping outside of the County seat of Independence is limited to gas-and-go convenience stores, yard sales, and auctions. We also are somewhat proud of the fact that we have no McDonalds.

The population is spread over the 446 square miles, much of which is isolated due to the lack of infrastructure and topography. There are only two main paved roads, and there is no interstate access. A large number of county roads are graveled. Much of the population resides in the myriad small communities that dot the landscape. Each community has its own personality, identity, strengths, and weaknesses. These small communities lend an atmosphere of charming village life to the County.

The County provides a mild climate and has an abundance of extraordinary outdoor activity venues. The New River is the oldest river in North America, running south to north. The river supports fishing, tubing, canoeing and kayaking, as well as adjoining camp and RV sites. Cold mountain streams support trout fishing. Grayson Highlands State Park and the Mt. Rogers Recreation Area provide miles of trails for hiking - including the legendary Appalachian Trail - and horseback riding. The New River Trail, part of the Rails to Trails program, provides an easy, relatively flat elevation trail for hikers, bikers, and horseback riders alike, as it follows along the New River. Clean air, clean water, and a low crime rate enhance the nature-filled, easy lifestyle here. The Blue Ridge Birders and Blue Ridge Discovery Center guide locals and visitors in amazing outdoor





discoveries.

Music is played in most homes. It is taught on porches in the evenings throughout the County. Every small community has their own fiddler's convention, but the granddaddy of them all is the annual Galax Fiddler's Convention, which has been in continuous operation for more than eighty years. The annual Grayson County Fiddler's Convention is held at a ballpark in Elk Creek. Music lovers from all over the world come to enjoy a week of Old-Time music second to none.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAN**

Given the scope of designing an AARP Age-Friendly Community Network Plan for an entire county, especially such a poor and rural county as described in the County Profile, one might think the task overwhelming and unattainable. We are choosing to view our challenges as opportunities for economic development! The top concerns of senior citizens here (as identified through surveys of our seniors) and throughout the U.S. are transportation, access to healthcare, and affordable housing. Providing transportation seems a particularly daunting task when viewed from the County-wide perspective.

The over-arching strategy for our action plan is to review our County community-by-community, in a "village" approach. We chose to divide the County into our existing four voting districts which, by design, contain roughly equal population numbers. These districts are reviewed every 10 years and boundary lines adjusted to maintain parity among them. The districts are: Wilson, Elk Creek, Providence, and Oldtown Districts. Assessing communities by voting district accomplishes two things: 1) We divide the county into more manageable parcels. 2) The general population is more likely to actually read the Action Plan section that relates to their district and therefore will be more likely to engage in the process! We then assess the communities within each of these four districts for the basic services available and those missing and evaluated the livability of each community based on the AARP defined 8 domains. Following assessment, we then identify strategies to effectively "infill" each community with basic services and address identified livability issues. By taking the village approach, *we limit travel distances required to access basic services and enhance each of our communities' livability*, all the while building the County's tax base via the addition of new businesses. The GCSAC met with the leaders of each Community, shared our strategies, and received support of the basic idea from all of the Community Leaders, including identifying the priority of those communities. Attached are detailed descriptions of each district.

The focus of our 5-Year Plan is to highlight strategies for meeting basic needs in transportation, access to health & community services, affordable housing, and the social issues dominant in an aging population. We also include recommendations for improvement in our infrastructure (broadband access and cell service) and identifying the most effective ways of disseminating information. We feel that our public outdoor spaces are accessible, inclusive, and plentiful. However, we have included strategies in our 5-Year Plan that will support and encourage greater use of public outdoor venues by senior citizens.

## **HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED AND WHO WAS INVOLVED IN ITS DEVELOPMENT**

The core idea of the Plan - a decentralized view of the County, or "village" approach - was developed by the GCSAC in its monthly meetings in an effort to address the major transportation



issues facing elders. While transportation issues are huge everywhere, including major urban areas, they are exacerbated here by the mountainous nature of the topography and the isolation created by the combination of topography, the winter season, and the fragile nature of elders. In order to develop a manageable plan, the GCSAC began to explore the idea of developing a transportation strategy within each of the five main Communities within the County rather than a trans-county plan. District III Governmental Cooperative, the Area Agency on Aging which serves senior citizens in our Southwest Virginia District, already provides bus transportation weekly to area citizens, as well as volunteer drivers for seniors who need transportation out of state for medical needs. The bus service, however, is not adequate for local doctor's visits or basic shopping needs and errands, e.g. groceries, clothing, cleaning supplies, farm supplies, prescription pick-up, etc.

As the GCSAC looked more closely at these five discrete Communities within the County, we realized that each aspect of the 8 domains of an Age-Friendly Community became more easily addressed within each of these five Communities. A draft of the basic strategies was completed and reviewed by the GCSAC. The committee then determined that it was important to share these strategies with the leadership of each Community and gather feedback from them. Over a two-month period, each Community was visited, a list of the Community's priorities was made, and the basic plan shared with their leaders. Every community supported the Plan and contributed to the Plan.

The Plan was also shared with members of the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission and the Director of Planning and Community Development as well as the County Administrator and the Director of the local high school Career and Technical Education Center (CATE Center). The District III Director, Mike Guy, members of the Mt. Rogers Planning District Commission, the Director of Grayson County's Department of Social Services (DSS), and key members of DSS staff were also included.

The health care services component was such a big piece of this 5-Year Plan that a subcommittee was formed to research and develop recommendations for greater accessibility strategies for seniors. The sub-committee was comprised of local hospital CEO's, area physicians, hospital board chairs, and representatives of the District Department of Health. In addition, the GCSAC sought and received advice and assistance from Dr. Nancy Brossoie and Dr. Eunju Hwang of Virginia Tech's Department of Gerontology.

## **WHO WILL MANAGE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN**

By Resolution of the Board of Supervisors (BOS), the Grayson County Senior Advisory Committee can develop strategies and recommendations but is not authorized to implement those strategies and recommendations. Therefore, it will be the Board of Supervisors (BoS) who will take the actions necessary to implement the 5-Year Plan. The GCSAC is confident that the BoS will follow through with the implementation of the Plan if at all possible, as the BoS has already taken steps to incorporate the AARP Age-Friendly Network priorities into the County's Comprehensive 5-Year Plan. The BoS has also indicated that the AARP AFN 5-Year Plan, upon their approval, will be appended to the County's Comprehensive 5-Year Plan. The GCSAC will continue to act as a resource to the Board of Supervisors and will support the BoS in their efforts to implement the Plan as directed by the BoS. The GCSAC will also continue to act as an interface between County



Government and its citizens.

## **THE ACTION PLAN**

This Action Plan is primarily organized by domains and then livability within each of the five designated Grayson County Communities.

### **DOMAIN # 1. OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS**

Grayson County has an abundance of outdoor spaces, venues for events, covered pavilions for shelter and accessible bathroom facilities. Outdoor activities and social events take place year ‘round. Most activities and events are accessible by car and bus. Senior citizens not only take part in every conceivable activity — they are usually the organizers of the events! The parades and festivals are too numerous to list. They include food, entertainment, craft sales, educational experiences, music, celebrations, and social engagement. There are so many outdoor events in the county that we have multiple events going on every weekend. It is impossible to attend all of them.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

Nearly perfect now, we can think of only a few strategies to improve livability in our outdoor venues. An example:

In Independence we identified 6 major strengths we would like to combine to leverage a better quality of life for our seniors. The major strengths for livability there are:

- a) the existence of a nursing home,
- b) a large park in the center of town and across the road from the nursing home which the Town and County are developing,
- c) a library located next to the park and across the road from the nursing home,
- d) a vibrant Farmer’s Market held on Fridays in that same park May thru October,
- e) the 1908 Courthouse which houses a museum and is home to a variety of musical and theater events and lectures, and finally,
- f) Independence boasts a paved, landscaped trail from the center of town leading to a recreation/park area.

#### **Goal - Partner with the local nursing home to develop strategies that will encourage their seniors who are able, to safely enjoy the outdoors more often.**

1. In assessing actions that would encourage this outcome we identified the following needs:
  - a. Design colorful crosswalk and signage from the nursing home to the library/park area and embellish existing crosswalks at the center of town.
2. Create attractive information signage, rest stations, and colorful, painted directional icons on the paved trail, to encourage and inform users of the trail.
3. An example of an innovative approach to provide safe, outdoor experiences for seniors is a bicycle powered rickshaw type conveyance currently being used throughout Europe for that purpose, employing volunteer bicycle enthusiasts to provide the pedal power!

Throughout the County we recommend each event venue attempt to provide at least one easy-on golf cart type vehicle for transporting seniors at most large events. We also recommend a tent be provided for senior citizens and individuals with small children at most large outdoor venues to provide shelter from the elements, seating, hot and cold beverages, and possibly a fan.



## **DOMAIN #2 TRANSPORTATION**

Transportation for senior citizens is a huge issue throughout Virginia and the U.S. in general. The problem is exacerbated here by the mountainous terrain and the large area (446 square miles) this County covers. District III Senior Services has a new Lynx bus system that is available to transport all Grayson citizens to area businesses and physicians located in Independence and also outside the County in the town of Galax. Citizens in each area within the County are given access to the District III bus one day per week. In some areas access to bus service is granted three weeks out of four. District III Senior Services also provides volunteer drivers to senior citizens who qualify and who need transportation out of the area for their doctor's appointments. The American Cancer Society provides transportation for some individuals undergoing cancer treatment.

These services are very much appreciated, but they do not meet all the transportation needs of area elders. For instance, an appointment with a physician in Galax or Independence may require the individual to arrive prior to the timing of the bus service. Also, oftentimes individuals must wait over an hour to see their physician and they cannot meet the schedule of the returning bus. In addition, not all buses are equipped with lifts, and there are elders who cannot safely negotiate the steps in and out of the buses.

The greatest number of transports provided to our elders is provided via family members and neighbors. As tightly knit as our communities are, even those resources are being strained by the increasing needs of our elders and the rapid increase in our elder population. Family members and neighbors also must work and have other commitments that often prevent them from meeting their elder's transportation needs.

### **Recommended Strategies:**

1. Our first strategy is to encourage the infill of primary services within each of the 5 communities identified. Most, but not all, of our elders are concentrated in these village settings. If our elders have access to food, pharmacy, physician, and sundries in their local community, then transportation is not difficult to secure as time and mileages are drastically shortened, thus enhancing livability and the pleasantries of village life. We recommend the County develop a comprehensive list of venture capitalists and local "Angels" as well as a list of incentives that could be offered to encourage small business development.
2. Secondly, the county has recently acquired a nearly new 16 passenger bus, which can be used out of county and out of state. The bus is not for the exclusive use of seniors; however, we propose to partner with District III to develop a creative and effective scheduled use of that bus to facilitate our senior population's needs as we work toward bringing more services into each community.
3. We would encourage the County to investigate funding opportunities to develop a pilot "UBER" type service utilizing self-driving vehicles with trained attendants for our seniors. This pilot program could be developed by our Career and Technology Education (CATE) Center at the local high school. This would give students the opportunity to write a business plan, train in the delivery of safe transfers, and also automotive students could train in the maintenance of these high-tech vehicles. The pilot program would initially provide services to Independence residents only but could be expanded over time. We envision that autonomous vehicles are the wave of the very near future and rural areas are an ideal environment for their use.
4. We recommend collaboration with District III Senior Services to review their routes. We



further recommend the County explore the possible use of the District III Lynx system to transport senior citizens to large outdoor venues. We also recommend seeking additional funding to supplement the Lynx system to provide transportation for seniors to Grayson County events.

### **DOMAIN # 3 HOUSING**

Affordable housing is a major need in Grayson County. Most of our existing housing consists of old, uninsulated farm houses and manufactured housing. The old farm houses are impossible to reasonably and properly heat and cool. Maintenance needs are ongoing and costly. Many are multi-story and lack the amenities for senior living, or for raising a young family for that matter! Much of the manufactured housing is old and sub-standard. The existing housing that does not fall into either of these categories is mostly beyond the price range of our youth and elders.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

With the advent of new laws in the commonwealth regarding Accessory Dwelling Units, we recommend the development of a “small kit home” business by our Grayson High School CATE Center (Career and Technical Education Center) students and faculty and County resources. Those resources include, but are not limited to, the Crossroads Center, Wythe Community College, and Virginia Tech, local timber resources, “niche” market woodworkers and construction industry professionals and a County Building Inspector who is also a Class A builder himself.

- I) Our CATE Center has recently been umbrella'd into the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Certification of Carroll County Schools, so we are in a position to develop a STEM based program that would:
  - 1) Design a small (500-900 sq ft) kit house. This is a 1- or 2-bedroom house with prefabricated units of open walls that can be inspected on site. The homes would meet universal code, provide 3ft. doorways, zero elevation thresholds, and permit wheelchair access to all fixtures and wheelchair turn-around capability in every room. The home should be well insulated, and affordable to the median income here of \$30,000. Ideally cross-laminated timber walls technique would be utilized as we could use lesser quality wood in the construction and still provide a safe, affordable and well insulated home. If deemed inappropriate for use in these small homes, we recommend the cross-laminated timber wall technique be taught and perfected at the CATE Center as a separate skill/industry. There are a variety of other efficient building techniques that could be employed in the development of the kit homes.
  - 2) Pre-fabricate the kit home in the CATE Center woodworking shop. Utilize students in the pre-wiring and any pre-plumbing in the kit.
  - 3) Develop a marketing plan for the small homes locally at first. The homes could be used as ADU's on family member's property, on the property of the senior citizen for themselves and then rent their farmhouse for additional income or could be utilized by caregivers. These small homes could also be used to develop a community of affordable homes with services built into the community. Communities could be designed exclusively for seniors, or for a mixed age group.
  - 4) Develop a wider range marketing, business and distribution plan. Provide these homes throughout the state and beyond.
- II) Encourage area developers and builders to consider developing alternative housing opportunities within the county. Those alternatives to include: co-housing, assisted living, self-



contained village type community, rehabilitation of existing warehouses and downtown buildings to include street level retail service businesses, mid-level offices, and upper story residences. Elevators and parking plans are crucial to the success of proposed rehab projects. We also encourage the County to identify and invite developers from larger cities who are familiar with international building codes and have successfully completed the rehab of large commercial buildings.

- III) We recommend that the County support the GCSAC in coordinating area agencies that are already actively rehabilitating older homes and trailers in the County. This includes: District III, Rooftop, GCDSS, and the CATE Center. We recommend the GCSAC identify grant funding opportunities to enhance these entities' ability to serve the community's needs.

### **SOCIAL PARTICIPATION**

Most socialization in Grayson takes place in churches, at festivals and outdoor events, and at high school ball games. Music venues are plentiful year 'round. Many musical events are free. Many communities within Grayson still have community meeting buildings and Granges. Seniors commonly attend all of these venues, *at times they are the dominant age group!*

However, as we age, we lose some of our freedoms - the ability to drive, and safely walk on uneven terrain predominate. The reasons are many - loss of strength, visual impairments, hearing loss, and sometimes a gradual decline in overall health or an acute health crisis. As our seniors begin to face these losses, family, neighbors, and church families generally provide social interaction and transportation as needed. When family, neighbors, and church families are not adequate to meet the needs of the seniors, then the Department of Social Services and District III may be used to provide auxiliary care, transportation, and meals. All of these resources may still leave our elders alone and despondent much of the time.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

1. Pursue the development of an adult day care facility in the County. Partner with existing PACE Center(s) willing to provide a satellite day care in Grayson.
2. Support the development of an affordable Assisted Living Facility in Grayson.
3. Support the development of co-housing options for elders.
4. Develop support strategies for elders to participate in outdoor venues: cover, chairs, drinks, golf carts, bicycle rickshaws, etc.
5. Provide programming at proposed Wellness Center for senior activities, trips, specialized classes, etc.

### **RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

We are most fortunate in regard to respect and social inclusion of our elders here in Grayson County. The family and church centered culture here supports and respects and includes its elders. Our government officials, church leaders, and leaders of civic organizations are often predominantly over 50 years of age. Elders have a strong presence in this county.

Where we fail our elders is when their care needs exceed what can be given in the home and they are, of necessity, sent to a nursing home. These facilities have not evolved to meet the individualized needs of each patient. In short, they provide institutionalized care, not person-centered care. Everyone in these nursing homes must eat, sleep, bathe, and recreate when told to do so, irrespective of the individual's normal ADL patterns, interests, personality, and abilities. We



can do better!

**Recommendation:**

1. Provide programming to area nursing homes that promote the groundbreaking ideas of Dr. William H. Thomas, MD in his book, *What are Old People For?* His work exposes the ageism attitudes of our U.S. culture and points the way to a new model of care that benefits the senior receiving the care and the caregivers as well. We believe that exposing staff and administration to these innovative approaches to caregiving will stimulate conversation and possible changes in caregiving. These changes not only have a positive impact on our elders, but also have a meaningful impact on those delivering care!
2. Promote the inclusion of 3-bed nursing homes in each of the 5 Communities in Grayson County. Three-bed nursing homes are the “new wave” of care for those who require 24-7 skilled care. They are located in existing homes within a community. Nurses love them because they work 8 hour shifts and have only 3 patients. Patients love them because they have 1-3 care in a home, not an institutional environment. Families love them because the facilities are located in their communities, making it more convenient to visit their loved ones.

**CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

As previously stated, senior citizens are well represented in local government, political parties, non-profit boards, the VFW, Rotary, and a host of other civic organizations. Employment of senior citizens is common in our area. They operate our convenience stores, gas stations, small engine repair shops, and gift shops. Also, District III provides part-time employment for seniors who qualify. Youth are more likely to find barriers to employment here than senior citizens.

**COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION**

Most seniors in our community primarily get their information through church, radio, newspaper, TV, and phone calls with their friends and relatives. The “grapevine” seems to work very well for these senior citizens. Several area churches and Grayson County DSS have “street sheets” which are a one-page list of area resources that the GCSAC provided. The GCSAC recommended that the County modify its website to include links to basic services for senior citizens, including information on the use of 211.

There is a small group of active senior citizens who do use the internet regularly and carry smart phones and know how to use them. Those seniors are mostly retirees who have come back to the county or retirees who are new to the county.

Cell service in the county is spotty at best. Many areas of the county have no cell service or high-speed internet available.

We see the lack of cell service and broadband internet service to be a primary barrier to economic growth. As beautiful and inviting as this community is, retirees and business owners are not likely to locate here if they do not have access to reliable cell service and broadband internet service.

The main barrier to cell service is the mountainous terrain.

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a “relay” system for directing existing cell service tower signals to “pocket”



communities.

2. Make broadband service delivery in the County a *top priority*.
3. We recommend the County develop a series of 5-minute spots on WBRF, informing elders of various opportunities and resources in the community, including Grayson LandCare's new Free Market located just north of Independence, VA. The Free Market is just that - a store where everything is free! Besides free goods, the Free Market offers a bulletin board that lists services available. They also encourage social interaction and often offer craft lessons. Since its opening in late 2017, the community has wholly embraced the concept; both locals and "come here's" and people from all socio-economic levels are participating and co-mingling. Something rarely seen except at outdoor venues here!

## **COMMUNITY AND HEALTH SERVICES**

Health, as we know, is not simply the absence of disease, but is rather a continuum which is affected by many aspects of an individual's life. A safe environment, clean air and water and access to nature are an example of contributing factors to our health. Our diet is another factor; are we eating fresh fruits and veggies every day? Do we incorporate healthy fats in our diet? Do we have a basic understanding of nutrition? Do we exercise our bodies? Do we have a social life? Are we exercising our minds? Do we have a spiritual or religious life? All of these aspects of one's life contribute to a vibrant health continuum in an individual.

A basic contributor to our health outside of our lifestyle and environment is access to services. Here is our evaluation of existing services.

### **Health Services**

Our county is rated as a medically underserved area by the Federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Citizens must leave the county to access hospital services. Primary care in the county is only accessible for patients who have insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid, or who can pay cash. Limited services are available at the 3 primary care clinics in the county. None of the existing primary care clinics in the county are located in the western region, which is extremely remote. There are no gerontology specialists in the twin county region. There is one dentist in the county.

### **Recommendation(s):**

1. Form a task force to seek funding for the addition of a Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC) for the county. This type of clinic provides every citizen in the county with an array of health services. Having a FQHC also helps our area hospitals in two ways: 1) stops the use of the Emergency Rooms for primary care of indigent patients, and 2) provides potential new patient base via telemedicine. - Update: Mr. William Shepley, our County Administrator has made this a priority for Grayson County. He, with the assistance of a task force that he appoints, will apply for HRSA funding for a FQHC in the County.
2. Promote the inclusion of 3-Bed Nursing Homes in each zip code of the County.
3. Lobby for access to a gerontologist either on staff of the FQHC or at area hospitals. In addition, we recommend that area physicians, both hospitalists and those in private practice be provided with CME workshop opportunities educating them on the special healthcare needs of senior citizens.
4. Collaborate with the Mel Lehman Free Clinic to provide mobile dental care in the County.





5. Continue to pursue the building and development of a Wellness Center in Grayson County. A Wellness Center would not only provide a place for individuals of all ages to exercise, it would also provide an additional opportunity for socialization, building camaraderie and friendly competitions. It could easily become a social hub in the community.

### **Community Services:**

1. Our social services are adequate to meet the needs in Grayson. We recommend securing a new or interim Director of Social Services as a priority for the County.
2. Other rudimentary services are lacking: grocery stores, clothing stores, pharmacies, movie theaters, coffee shops, restaurants, etc. As mentioned in the Introduction to the Plan, our recommended strategy for providing these services is to assess each of five districts within the county regarding availability of basic services and identify those missing services most critical to the “friendliness” and viability of each unique community.

### **Recommendation:**

In order to begin to provide missing services, we propose that the County identify and cultivate a pharmacy in the region that is willing to deliver prescriptions to a designated pharmacy drop area within each community. This strategy is already successfully implemented in White Top with a pharmacy drop located in their Community Building. Each community’s needs will be different, but all communities need access to prescription drugs.

If we, as County policy, promote the inclusion of small service businesses within our communities, by whatever incentives the county deems necessary and proper, then we will not only be providing basic services, but we will begin an economic growth movement that supplies new jobs for citizens and new revenue base for the county. What kinds of incentives could be explored by the County? Traditionally municipalities have negotiated “deals” with large corporations involving lower utility rates and lower tax rates and assistance with infrastructure in return for the many jobs they supply. That is not a likely scenario for Grayson County. We can, however, develop a viable list of venture capitalists looking to invest in small business start-ups. We can also identify the business needs in our communities and actively seek those looking for small business opportunities. These actions cost no money...they require time and the knowledge base of where to begin. We recommend the formation of a task force to accomplish these three objectives.



## **APPENDICES & SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**



RESOLUTION of BOARD of SUPERVISORS CREATING  
the GRAYSON SENIOR ADVOCACY COMMITTEE  
GRAYSON COUNTY SENIOR ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

**PURPOSE:**

The Grayson County Board of Supervisors resolved to establish the Grayson County Seniors Advocacy Committee (GCSAC) for the purpose of assisting the Board with addressing the aging population's various needs within the community by:

- Identifying and inventorying services already available
- Identifying critical, missing services
- Developing strategies and approaches to filling the missing services gap
- Identifying strengths/talents/potential contributions of seniors
- Identifying economic development potential(s) created by the aging population
- Exploring creative 'aging-in-place' strategies that are cost effective and appropriate to our region Work in concert, with County Administration, Planning Commission, Economic Development Authority, Mount Rogers, District III, Department of Social Services, Extension, and any and all applicable state, regional and local agencies, etc., to make recommendations to the BOS for actions that lead to significantly improved quality of life
- Identifying and initiating meaningful dialogues with entities/agencies/organizations/ individuals that encourage their participation in building the economic & social health of the community.

**MISSION:**

The Grayson County Seniors Advocacy Committee will explore creative solutions to address the need for providing specialized services to the growing geriatric population in Grayson County, and will make recommendations to the County to further enhance the quality of life of its senior constituents that are consistent with values of self-determination and empowerment

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Grayson County Seniors Advocacy Committee shall be appointed by the Board of Supervisors for a two (2) year term and comprised of the following membership for a total of not less than five (5) no more than seven (7) members:

- Member of the Grayson County Board of Supervisors or designee
- Member of the Grayson County Planning Commission
- \*Three-to-five (3-5) citizens of Grayson County, of which one shall be a senior citizen, and the remainder shall have a passion for seniors and have applicable experience that will serve to advance the Committee's mission  
*(\*An Application Form must be completed and returned for consideration of appointment)*

The members of the GCSAC shall elect from its membership a Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary at its initial meeting and at the first meeting of each subsequent Calendar Year. With the exception of the initial meeting, the term of office shall be for the Calendar Year. The Committee shall generally employ the Consensus Process when conducting elections and through the course of meetings to conduct official business of the Committee.



**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The GCSAC shall serve solely as an advisory committee charged with assisting the Board of Supervisors with addressing the aging population's various needs within the community. The GCSAC may officially represent Grayson County on matters involving Seniors Advocacy.

The members of the GCSAC shall strive to advance the Committee's Mission and achieve the GCSAC's established Purpose. It shall appropriately report to the Board by way of meeting minutes or applicable project briefings submitted for inclusion in the monthly Board packets and may further brief the Board under the BOS Agenda section: Reports, Presentations or Requests.

**DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICTS****WILSON DISTRICT**

Wilson is the largest district in area in the county. The district begins a few miles West of Independence and occupies the entire Western end of the County, recently including Comers Rock community. It includes the active communities of White Top, Mount Rogers, Rugby, Troutdale, Flatridge, Mouth of Wilson, Bridle Creek, Grant, and Comers Rock. It is the most rugged and sparsely populated district in the County. Mt. Rogers Recreation Area is visited by tourists from all over the world — the legendary Appalachian Trail runs through it. Hiking, trout fishing, biking, camping, horseback riding, kayaking and birding are among the many outdoor activities enjoyed in this area. Cabins, campgrounds, and air BNB's abound in this area of the county. Each of the picturesque communities within the district host diverse festivals highlighting the unique culture here from Spring through Fall. Outfitters and guides are readily available.

Oak Hill Academy, a co-ed college preparatory Boarding School, founded in 1878, combines structure and self-reliance for students in grades 8-12 on its 240-acre campus in Mouth of Wilson. Oak Hill Academy has a 95% college acceptance for its graduating seniors.

Wilson District is home to Wayne Henderson, famous for his Henderson Guitars, his unique guitar picking style, and the annual Wayne C. Henderson Festival. His festival draws thousands of bluegrass fans each year.

Additional festivals include the following annual festivals: the Maple Festival featuring pure maple syrup and buckwheat cakes, the Molasses Festival featuring molasses, apple butter and their wild pony sale, the Ramp Festival. The district still includes Goodwill Granges. The Grant Goodwill Grange also boasts a community computer center.

Recommended Strategy: Encourage further development of the Tourist industry. Encourage infill of 3-Bed nursing homes, pharmacy drops, and expansion of existing small stores. The addition of a mobile HealthCare unit would be helpful in this area including dental care.

**ELK CREEK DISTRICT**

Elk Creek community (population 1,097) is a high (elevation 2,621 ft), broad valley surrounded by mountain views from Big Ridge and Comer's Rock. There is a bank, post office, and two (2) fire and rescue squads. They also have a multi-function business that provides gas & diesel, a restaurant, game room, beauty salon, fresh produce and garden plants, and a convenience store.



A Farm Supply Store is available for purchase in the same area. The local elementary school building is closed and now owned by the local Fire & Rescue Dept. It is currently being used as a distribution point for the local food bank.

Outdoor spaces and buildings as a domain is one of the strengths of Grayson County. Opportunities for socialization, festival food, sales of handcrafts, music venues, exploration, hiking, biking, canoeing, and kayaking, fishing, and just plain fun abound year 'round in the county. There are two main outdoor events in Elk Creek. Both are well attended. The Elk Creek Dragway and the Elk Creek Fiddlers Convention. The Elk Creek Dragway holds events from March through April. It is privately own by local racers and fans and enjoys a wonderful reputation on the racing circuit. It is, of course, accessible for all ages. No alcohol is allowed on the premises.

The Elk Creek Fiddlers Convention just celebrated its 50th year in 2017. They hold the event on the 4th Friday and Saturday of June each year. It, too, is accessible to all ages. Both events bring participants from other states into the area and are well attended by locals.

In addition to these two events Comers Rock Camp and Picnic area and the Hussy Mountain Horse Camp, and the community Big Ridge picnic table are accessible by car for outdoor adventures. Both Big Ridge and Comer's Rock offer spectacular views of the Elk Creek valley. The Elk Creek Fire and Rescue on Highway 21 holds a bolt chicken fundraising event (chicken cooked outdoors over a pit) each year, a highly competitive Rook tournament, and an apple butter fund raiser each year. All neighbors are encouraged to participate in both the preparation and enjoyment of the spoils.

Recommended strategy: Support current efforts. Encourage development of current and new outdoor events. Encourage development of additional services at the local Marathon/Diner/ Store.

### **PROVIDENCE DISTRICT**

Located in the Northeastern tip of the County, Providence District includes the Town of Fries and the Communities of Brush Creek, Providence, Spring Valley, Liberty Hill, Fallville, and Carsonville. Fries was developed as a textile mill town by Col. Frances Henry Fries. The Town is situated on the side of a mountain overlooking the New River and a dam with picturesque falls; cliffs border the far side of the river. Bald eagles and osprey nest in the cliffs. Great white egrets and great blue heron populate the river. Running the length of Main Street on the town side of the river is a grassy, flat park. The New River Trail runs through the park; the trail is used by hikers, bikers, and horseback riders. A former Northern and Western Railroad bed, it is a relatively flat, easy trail which follows the New River for 39 miles and is widely used by locals and tourists alike. There is an accredited school and a recently renovated recreation center in the center of town. The recreation center includes a theater, basketball court, kitchen & dining room used for community gatherings, public library and pool.

Recommended strategy: Encourage further development of the tourist trade, inclusion of 3-bed nursing home, and a pharmacy drop.

### **OLDTOWN DISTRICT**

Oldtown District occupies the far southeastern section of Grayson County. The land is a mix of open, rolling pastures and timber. Both main roads in the county run through Oldtown District.



Highway 89 is the direct North/South route to and from North Carolina and the Blue Ridge Parkway and into the Town of Galax. Highway 58 is the East/West highway corridor transecting the district. This district covers the smallest area of the other districts but has the most dense population. The Town of Galax is incorporated within the boundaries of Grayson County's Old Town District. The active communities of Baywood and Fairview reside within Oldtown District. Fairview boasts an active Ruritan Club. The club is famous for hosting Bluegrass headliner concerts as fundraising events for the community. The Ruritan maintains a website and calendar for the community and hosts reunions, parties, and other gatherings in its building. Baywood Ruritan also sponsors Boy Scout Troop 281. The Baywood Community hosts a well-attended Festival annually. The event is sponsored by the Baywood Search & Rescue team. These volunteers not only provide emergency services but are known for their fund-raising events.

**Recommended Strategy:** This district enjoys close proximity to the Town of Galax and all the services available there, including schools, doctors, dentists, Twin County Regional Hospital, multiple groceries and retail shops, a wellness center and a community fitness center, a variety of gas stations and automotive service and parts stations, multiple pharmacies, a 3-bed nursing home and 2 large nursing homes, and the Chestnut Creek Center for the Arts. There are also a variety of restaurants and fast food options. We recommend the deepening of existing partnerships and the creation of new partnerships to extend these services beyond the town's limits.



GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	CONTINUUI
<b>OUTDOOR SPACES</b>	Encourage Event Planners to provide cover, seating & water for elders and people with young children	Begin now. Continue until it becomes the standard.	
	Encourage Event Planners to provide easy on/off golf cart or rickshaw bicycle type conveyance for elders & people with disabilities.	Begin now. Continue until it becomes the standard.	
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	Collaborate with District III AAA to explore possible updates to Lynx Routes	Begin now. Complete by 8/18.	
	Encourage area entrepreneurs to develop a local UBER type transportation service. Provide entrepreneurs with local financial “Angel” contacts & assistance from Crossroads to develop Business Plan.	Begin now. Identify task force lead Complete by 12/19.	
	Create educational program for Fire & Rescue teams re: transportation alternatives available.	Begin now. GCSAC to develop & present. Complete by 12/18	
<b>HOUSING</b>	Encourage the development of a variety of accessible housing options for all ages. e.g. co-housing, assisted living, small house communities with amenities, rehab downtown bldgs to provide businesses on ground floor and residences up, develop & advertise rehab program for existing homes, develop small modular house at GCHS Cate Center. Form consortium & seek funding for rehab of older homes/manufactured homes.	Begin now. Involve school board & GC Bldg. Inspector for CATE Center project. Possible developer’s luncheon sponsored by County for other housing projects. GCSAC forms consortium & seeks funding for rehab of older homes/manufactured homes.	
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	Develop task force to solve broadband delivery problems in the County	The task force has been developed by the County. A study is being done.	
	Upgrade information for Seniors on County Website	This has been completed. However, there is room for improvement!	
	Develop “Listening Stations” in area venues	Begin now. GCSAC to develop tables for Listening Stations at local events	
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	After area assessments, a task force determined the need for a FQHC in the County. Action required: Apply for HRSA Grants as they become available	Begin as monies become available. Grant writers being identified now.	



## **THE 8 DOMAINS**

1. Outdoor Spaces
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Communication and Information
5. Healthcare
6. Respect and Social Inclusion
7. Community and Health Services
8. Civic Participation and Employment

