



# Smyth County Comprehensive Plan

Smyth County, Virginia



## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

*Plan Smyth* is **YOUR** plan.

We are very appreciative of the extensive community influence on this plan.

If you filled out one of the community surveys, or stopped by the Community Development booth at a 2021 community event, your ideas are part of this document.

Thanks to all who participated in the focus groups, and reviewed drafts to make this the VISION for Smyth future:

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*PlanSmyth 2044* was prepared in coordination with Smyth County Staff and Hill Studio of Roanoke, VA

**Date Adopted** \_\_\_\_\_

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# I. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Purpose and Use of the Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan provides direction and guidance for the development of Smyth County over the next 10 to 20 years. This plan is required by the Commonwealth of Virginia in order to ensure each locality creates a long-range plan to aid in guiding the development of public and private lands in their jurisdictions, as well as planning for public facilities, infrastructure, and future land use. This Comprehensive Plan will establish a framework for ensuring that land within Smyth County will be used properly in order to best support the goals, vision, and direction of both the community and government officials.

Beyond a plan to guide future development, the comprehensive plan serves as a resource to inform decision-making for both public and private projects such as utilities, new schools, roads, parking, community unity resources like libraries or community centers, housing developments, or shopping outlets. Just as important is the Comprehensive Plan's role as a resource to inform and make readily accessible the County's current condition and future direction.

This plan should be reviewed and revised every five years to ensure the current reality and future goals have remained consistent and development remains geared to meet the goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.

## 1.2 Overview of Smyth County

Sporting Virginia's highest peaks, "coolest" small towns, and extraordinary historical and outdoor resources, Smyth County's location provides both ample scenic natural beauty and strategic opportunity. Through its connection to other portions of the state, surrounding states, and its location on I-81 and proximity to I-77, Smyth County is primed to benefit from interstate commerce. Covered in large part by federal and state lands - Jefferson National Forest, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Hungry Mother State Park, and Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area – as well as hosting one of the longest portions of the Appalachian Trail within a single County, Smyth County offers those seeking to escape to the Great Outdoors ample opportunities. From hiking to fishing, from boating to zip lining, and from birding to experiencing breathtaking vistas, Smyth County has a wealth of outdoor resources.

Even before the creation of Smyth County in 1832, the Smyth County area was home to a robust agricultural and mining industry that supplied southwest Virginia and the country as a whole with valuable crops, cattle, and minerals like salt. Stoked by the arrival of the railroad, Smyth County grew into a regional center for trade, industry, and culture. The County has also faced hard times, but due to the resilient nature of those who call Smyth County home, the County has weathered economic turmoil to become a vibrant place for industries to locate and expand.



## 1.3 Vision and Goals for the Future

The vision and goals in this Comprehensive Plan are representative of a combined effort of the citizens, County and municipal officials, stakeholders, and community leaders to set forth a path for the next 10 to 20 years in Smyth County.

### Vision for PlanSmyth 2044

*In 2044, Smyth County will be recognized as a peaceful, friendly, healthy, and scenic community with a vibrant and diverse economy that fully utilizes its agricultural, industrial, small business, and retail assets. Scenic rural beauty and productive farm land can be found surrounding established towns, communities, and transportation corridors in order to provide ample opportunity for agritourism. Social and community services, public infrastructure, and affordable and diverse housing options will be readily available to support current and future residents of the County, both in rural and urban portions of the County. Smyth County will host high-quality schools with state-of-the-art facilities, instruction, and technology, pathways for employment, strong partnerships with local higher education institutions, and opportunities to build a robust well-educated workforce. Smyth County will become a hub for recreation through strong partnerships with Federal and State agencies, local communities, outdoor organizations, and private businesses to promote, improve, and expand recreational offerings, support services, as well as capitalize on the County's ample natural beauty. All of this has been achieved through thoughtful planning and a fundamental understanding that the citizens of Smyth County cherish their laid-back, tightly knit lifestyles, natural surroundings, and desire to sustain their community and quality of life for their children, families, future residents, and generations to come.*

### Goals for PlanSmyth 2044

#### Economy

**Agriculture** – Nurture and strengthen the agricultural industry in Smyth County through bolstering community and cultural ties to agriculture, preserving traditional family farms, investing in new agricultural ventures, enhancing business opportunities, and investing in agritourism Countywide.

**Industry** – Take proactive steps to create an environment that is conducive to the development of high-quality, diversified industries that will offer locals gainful employment, competitive wages, investment into the community, increased tax revenues, and improved overall quality of life for the residents of Smyth County.

**Business Centers & Corridors** – Invest in the revitalization of downtown areas to enhance current and future development opportunities, foster the development of small businesses and the County's entrepreneurial spirit, limit development to appropriate areas within and adjacent to the County's towns and along transportation corridors, and foster the revitalization and improvement of gateways that connect rural and developed areas.

**Tourism** – Support and expand opportunities that will contribute positively to the local and regional economy, capitalize and complement the County's unique natural assets, and craft a robust hospitality industry to support a growing sector of the County's economy.

## People & Quality of Life

**Housing** – Encourage the development of high-quality residential developments that offer a variety of housing types, prices, and sizes in areas of the County that have access to public utilities like water, sewer, and electricity.

**Education** – Continue to invest and support improvements to the County’s public schools through investments in technology, partnerships, brick and mortar, and early childhood education to provide the County’s children with a first-rate, well-rounded education that will prepare them for high-quality jobs moving forward.

**Recreation (Community Facilities)** – Invest in public recreational facilities and programming to meet the current and future needs of County citizens, enhance existing facilities, and improve the quality of life for all residents.

**Community Facilities & Services** – Ensure that community facilities are provided with ample resources and support to provide social, educational, and physical well-being programs to current and future residents of the County.

## The Natural Environment & Outdoor Recreation

**Natural Resources** – Manage, conserve, and protect the natural, wildlife, and scenic resources of Smyth County for current and future generations.

**Outdoor Recreation** – Capitalize on the unique environmental amenities that Smyth County has to offer in order to expand outdoor recreational opportunities to residents and visitors.

## Historic & Cultural Resources

**Historic & Cultural Sites** – Increase public awareness and promote the preservation of historic and culturally significant properties on the National and State Historic Registers and the addition of other important cultural and historic properties if deemed appropriate.

## Public Utilities & Infrastructure

**Transportation** – Plan for and provide a safe, efficient transportation network that integrates multimodal components where appropriate to accommodate developmental growth and future land use.

**Public Infrastructure** – Plan for and expand public utilities to areas that are not currently served, with attention paid to areas of projected growth in the County while utilizing appropriate environmental protections to minimize impacts to waterways, farm lands, and conservation areas.

**Public Safety** – Continue to support County and municipal emergency services to ensure timely and high-quality service to all residents of the County. Invest in professional and volunteer departments to ensure a steady stream of highly qualified firefighters, paramedics, and law enforcement officers to support emergency service operations.

## Land Use & Development

**Orderly Growth** – Implement the Comprehensive Plan through partnerships and creative land management tools authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the citizens of Smyth County.

**Orderly Land Use Protections** – Implement the updated Land Use Plan to manage future land use, including industrial, residential, and commercial development, to ensure an orderly and appropriate use of the County’s lands.

## 1.4 Direction for the Future: Opportunities & Action Points

To achieve the future plans encapsulated in the PlanSmyth 2044 Comprehensive Plan, there are several initiatives suggested to help the County develop to meet the needs of current and future residents. The following are overviews of the initiatives that will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 4:

### Economic Development

Fostering the growth of existing and emerging industries and small businesses in Smyth County will be essential in ensuring future economic prosperity not only for the County but the region in general. Steps such as the expansion of public utilities, the development of business parks and sites, emphasis placed on redevelopment opportunities, identifying, and pursuing midscale to upper midscale brand hotels/lodging and investments into the County’s downtown and rural areas will go a long way in creating an environment that is beneficial to the establishment of new industry, commercial, retail, and small businesses. Site development will play a pivotal role in fostering economic growth throughout the County. By providing either improved or additional sites for development in the County’s inventory, it will enhance the overall quality of life for residents but also create opportunities for job creation, entrepreneurship, and increased property values. Additionally, investing in site development can help bridge the urban-rural economic divide by providing rural communities with the necessary resources to compete in today’s global marketplace. Overall, prioritizing site development in Smyth County is essential for unlocking the full potential of each community and ensuring sustainable growth for years to come. Ensuring a balanced tax base in the County will guarantee County assets are adequately funded and able to provide community services that maintain a quality of life for residents of Smyth County.

This plan’s recommendations provide thoughtful development concepts to enhance both existing economic centers and rural villages (such as the ***Sugar Grove “Trail Town” Micro-Mixed-Use Concept***). These concepts offer a vision for future economic development in the County that can be guided by County leaders and implemented through private partnerships.

### Investing in Small Businesses

Building upon the foundations of the SmythStrong Program will be essential in facilitating the development of a robust business class in Smyth County moving forward. The first step in plotting this course is to continue to invest in local start-ups through grant programs, knowledge sharing, mentorships, and the creation of a revolving fund that extends loans to those who may not qualify for traditional services. Through these efforts, the initial barrier to entry – logistics, funding, and know-how – can be drastically



reduced. A second step in crafting an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Smyth County is the creation of a ***Business Incubator Space as well as a Makerspace*** to support small businesses in their early stages. These spaces not only could function as a launch pad for new small businesses, providing storefronts, meeting spaces, and tools, but they could function as a community resource for all businesses or those looking to break into the retail or commerce market. A concept of this space (***Incubator Space in Marion/Chilhowie/Saltville***) will be included to provide a vision for Smyth County's future entrepreneurial hub.

### Recreation Opportunities

The Outdoor Recreation Industry is a vital sector in Smyth County's economy and represents a major pull factor to the County itself and the region as a whole. Naturally, this is an area that should be capitalized on, celebrated, and valued moving forward. Invaluable resources like Hungry Mother State Park, the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, the Jefferson National Forest, the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and the Appalachian Trail all represent large opportunities for partnerships and expansion of recreational opportunities outside of the County's towns and villages. Government officials should capitalize on and foster partnerships to strengthen walking, hiking, cycling, and mountain biking trails, as well as boating, fishing, birding, nature watching, and other recreational opportunities.

Additional efforts need to be made to ensure ease of access, parity, and availability of recreational opportunities within the County's towns and villages. In order to facilitate these efforts moving forward, it is likely a Countywide Parks and Recreation Department will be needed to create parity, equitably distribute funding, and ensure all residents of the County have access to parks, trails, greenways, playgrounds, and sports facilities. With the County's ample natural beauty, there are many opportunities to expand residents' and visitors' ability to interact with the Great Outdoors. An example of one potential opportunity (***The Hungry Mother Greenway***) will be included to highlight how an underutilized resource could be easily and strategically utilized to create a unique recreational opportunity.

### Community Cohesion

Throughout the public engagement process, the impression that Smyth County is a tight-knit community that is a great place to live, work, and retire was emphasized over and over again. Yet, it was also shared that the County lacks community cohesion. Moreover, residents have lost some of the pride they once felt for the place they call home. This may be due to reduced face-to-face interactions from the COVID-19 pandemic or other issues, but the development of strong community connections, pride in where one lives, and investment in creating a place that is not only good for oneself but all those who live in the County are steps that need to be taken to build strong community cohesion in Smyth County.

The first step is creating a sense of pride in the County's history, industries, people, and cultures. This could be accomplished through greater emphasis on traditionally significant industries like manufacturing or agriculture, the creation of new festivals to celebrate what makes the County unique, or telling the County's story in unique, innovative, and engaging ways. A second method that could be utilized is the creation of new or redeveloped spaces for members of the community to gather, host events, provide community services, and foster a sense of local community. These spaces would likely center around existing community centers but build upon what is already available to better meet the unique needs of those living nearby. Concepts of 21st-century community gathering places that combine several

community-building strategies will be included in this plan in order to spark community building efforts. These plans, in combination with efforts on the part of County and municipal governments, local businesses, organizations, churches, community groups, and others, are hoped to be a jumping off point for improving community cohesion throughout Smyth County.

### **Housing Development**

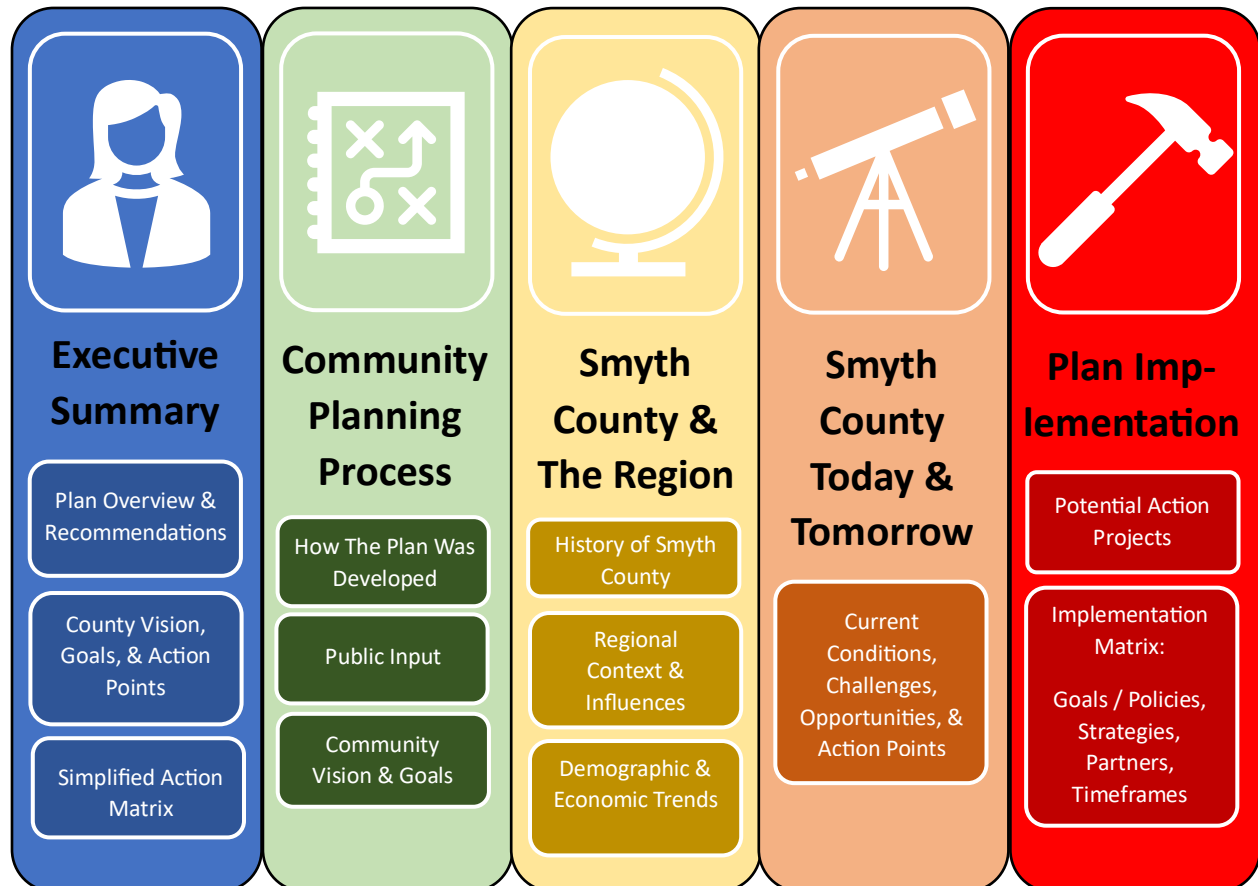
Housing, especially for median-income individuals, families, young professionals, and seniors, has become an issue for those currently living in or looking to relocate to Smyth County. Efforts to ensure diversity in housing type, cost, and size will be vital in addressing current housing shortfalls and preparing for the next generation of Smyth County workers. In doing so, local industries, businesses, colleges, and organizations will have an easier time attracting talent and expanding their operations. In addition to the need for expanded housing opportunities, it is important to balance residential development with the maintenance of the County's rural character. To this end, residential development should be concentrated in areas of the County that are more densely populated and served by public utilities like water, sewer, electricity, and broadband; community services like libraries, emergency services, and schools; and near transportation corridors like highways and public transit. The towns in the County (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville) offer opportunities for new development as well as redevelopment within their boundaries, with smaller villages (Sugar Grove, Adwolfe, and Atkins) presenting opportunities for residential redevelopment in the future.

### **Land Use & Development**

Smyth County must be prepared to meet the needs and challenges the County will face over the course of the next 20 years. In order to effectively do this, Smyth County will need to balance residential, industrial, and commercial development with protecting farm land and natural assets. Smyth County currently has a robust zoning ordinance that guides development across the County; however, this document has not been amended since 2016. It is likely this Zoning Ordinance, as well as the current Land Use Map (updated in 2013), need to be updated in order to better represent the trajectory of the County in the next 20 years. A more detailed explanation of future land use will be addressed in Ch 4.

## 1.5 Organization of PlanSmyth 2044

The following graphic provides an overview of the steps, processes, and organization of the PlanSmyth 2044 Comprehensive Plan:

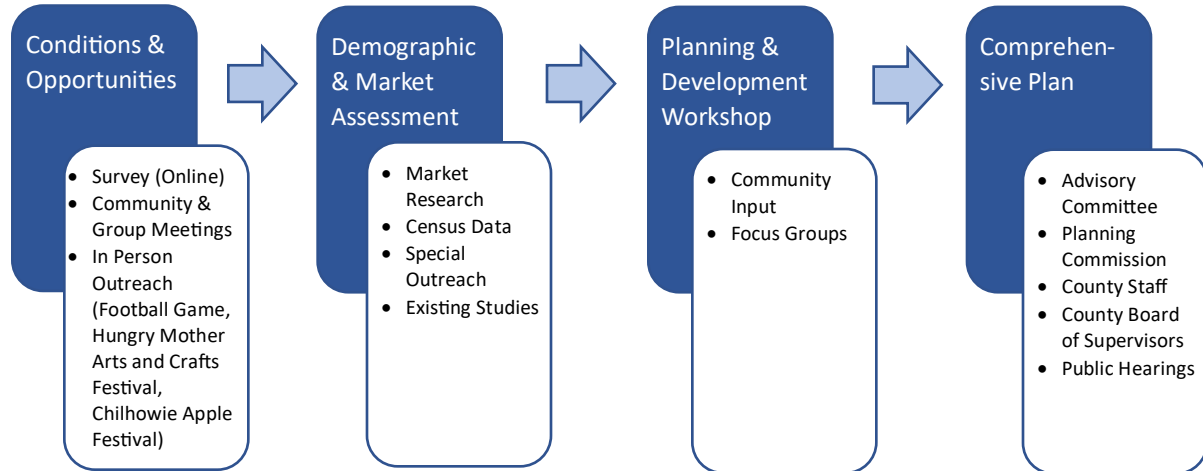




## II. Planning Process

### 2.1 Development of the Plan

PlanSmyth 2044 was developed over two years using community meetings, stakeholder meetings, in-person and online public engagement, a target educational campaign toward the County’s youths, and an online survey. The following flow chart summarizes the public engagement efforts undertaken as part of each work task:



During the study period, the project team worked with key officials in the local government, such as the County Planning Commission and other County department heads, to understand the existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities for the County. Occasional meetings with the Planning Commission provided opportunities to share project progress, significant demographic data, and to discuss the project’s vision, goals, and potential opportunities for the County’s future. In addition to cooperation with County officials, an online survey was conducted in order to allow citizens to voice their opinions, concerns, and insights into the current condition of the County and how best to improve quality of life moving forward.



***Hill Studio & Smyth County Booth at the Northwood vs. Marion High School Rivalry Football Game Staffed by Hill Studio and County Employees***

## 2.2 Citizen Survey

As an important part of information gathering, an online survey was conducted. This survey was comprised of 26 questions and polled respondents on a series of topics ranging from simple demographic information to views of community services to what citizens want to see from future development efforts. 253 citizens responded to the online survey. These responses have directly informed the vision, goals, and future direction discussed in the remainder of the plan. Naturally, an online survey advertised on the County’s website may not reach all citizens of the County. In order to remedy this, efforts were taken to expand access to the survey. This took the form of a booth at a local high school rivalry football game (Northwood High vs. Marion Senior High), The Hungry Mother Arts and Crafts Festival, and the Chilhowie Apple Festival in order to engage with a wide representation of the County’s population, and a series of educational presentations on comprehensive planning in the County’s three high school’s government classes to improve the representation of younger residents in the survey.

The graphics and comments shown below share some of the most common responses to the survey.



### ***Phrases Describing Smyth County***

Respondents to the survey painted Smyth County using phrases like “peaceful,” “small,” “rural,” “beautiful,” and “friendly.” This invokes images of a quaint, idyllic, rural community that is tight-knit and maintains the small-town feel that much of southwest Virginia is known for. These phrases are important in guiding future development by highlighting aspects of Smyth that residents hope to see maintained in the future.

### ***Biggest Strengths and Weaknesses of Smyth County***



**Biggest Strengths**

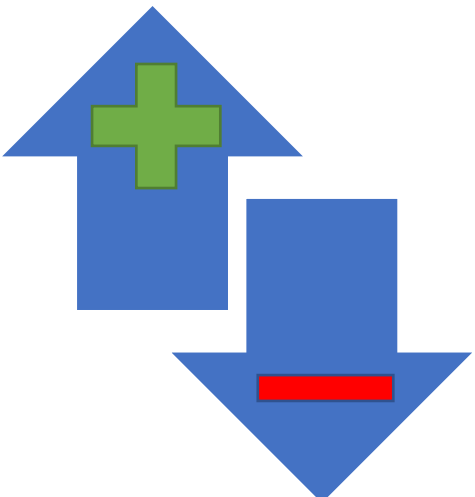


**Biggest Weaknesses**

Among survey respondents, clear patterns began to emerge in regard to what were seen as major strengths and weaknesses of the County. Strengths included phrases such as “community,” “people,” and “location,” pointing to aspects that are beneficial and make Smyth a good place to work and live. On the other hand, weaknesses include lack of “jobs,” “businesses,” and “restaurants” - all three phrases hint at the sentiments among residents to improve the County’s economic situation.

***What is your Vision for the Future (10 to 20 Years)***

Visions for the future of Smyth County were mixed, with many holding a positive outlook on the future, but just as many reported a feeling of apathy when looking to the future. The following are condensed sentiments from respondents:



- "A county that is adaptive to the times"
- "A county that is growing and more developed than it currently is"
- "Renovated older buildings in downtown areas"
- "Increased outdoor recreation opportunities"
- "More factories, businesses, and jobs"
- "Low cost of living and natural beauty will continue to attract visitors"
- "Expanded shopping, restaurant, and entertainment opportunities"
- "Increased interconnectivity to other parts of the state"
- "Younger People Want to Leave"
- Population and Economic Decline
- Drug Issues

***Primary Findings from the Survey***

<p><b>Primary Survey Findings</b></p>	<p><b><i>Challenges</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retaining and Attracting Young People and Families</li> <li>Economic Development and Job Creation</li> <li>Improving Quality of Education and School Facilities</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Opportunities</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investments in Small Business and Start-ups</li> <li>Expanded Tourism Opportunities</li> <li>Investments in Public Facilities</li> <li>Expanded Access to Outdoor Recreation (trails, parks, green spaces)</li> <li>Develop Economic Development Zones</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Vision for Smyth County</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affordable, easily accessible, and diverse housing options</li> <li>Improved Economic Health</li> <li>Increased commercial and entertainment amenities</li> <li>Expanded outdoor recreation opportunities</li> </ul>
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## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

relevant themes that influenced planning recommendations and strategies discussed in this plan. In general, these themes included:

- Enhancing public services and infrastructure, especially utilities
- Encouraging additional commercial activities in existing commercial districts
- Encouraging agriculture as an economic driver throughout the County
- Guiding residential and multi-use development
- Improving transportation networks and gateways between rural and developed areas
- Exploring complementary uses to existing on-the-ground conditions
- Increasing tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Encourage managed growth, particularly in populated areas (Marion, Chilhowie, Saltville, and Atkins)

## III. Smyth County & The Region

### 3.1 Brief History of Smyth County

Smyth County was officially formed on February 23, 1832, by the Virginia General Assembly using portions of Washington and Wythe County. Named after General Alexander Smyth, a general in the War of 1812, Virginia Senator and House of Delegate, and member of the US House of Representatives, Smyth County has a deep history that is intertwined with westward expansion during the colonial and antebellum period of US history. At the County's founding, the Town of Marion was created, named after General Francis Marion. The new town became the County seat. Two years later, the Smyth County courthouse was completed. Ever since, the town of Marion has grown. Tied closely to the agricultural and railroad industry, Marion became a major hub in the region following the completion of the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad in 1849. This expansion was halted during the Civil War, with much of the area's industrial and agricultural output being disrupted. Due to the destruction of railroad lines leading into this portion of the state, Smyth County was not reconnected to other portions of the state by rail until the completion of the Atlantic, Mississippi, & Ohio Railroad in 1881. Another important aspect of Smyth County's history is tied to the salt and plaster industry. In particular, the Town of Saltville owes its creation to the salt marshes in the area. These marshes not only preserved many important archeological artifacts dating back to the last ice age, but they also provided European settlers with the ability to access salt easily. In fact, Saltville was home to one of the Confederacy's main saltworks during the Civil War. Due to this valuable resource, Saltville was bombarded by Union forces in the First and Second Battles of Saltville in the latter half of 1864. Following the Civil War, Saltville rebuilt its saltworks and expanded its mineral industry to incorporate the creation of a chemical that was used in the creation of the rocket fuel that launched Apollo 11 in 1969.

Today, Smyth County continues to serve as an important stop along I-81, serving travelers and residents alike. Towns like Marion and Chilhowie have developed over the years to cater to the many tourists and travelers that come to and through the County every year.

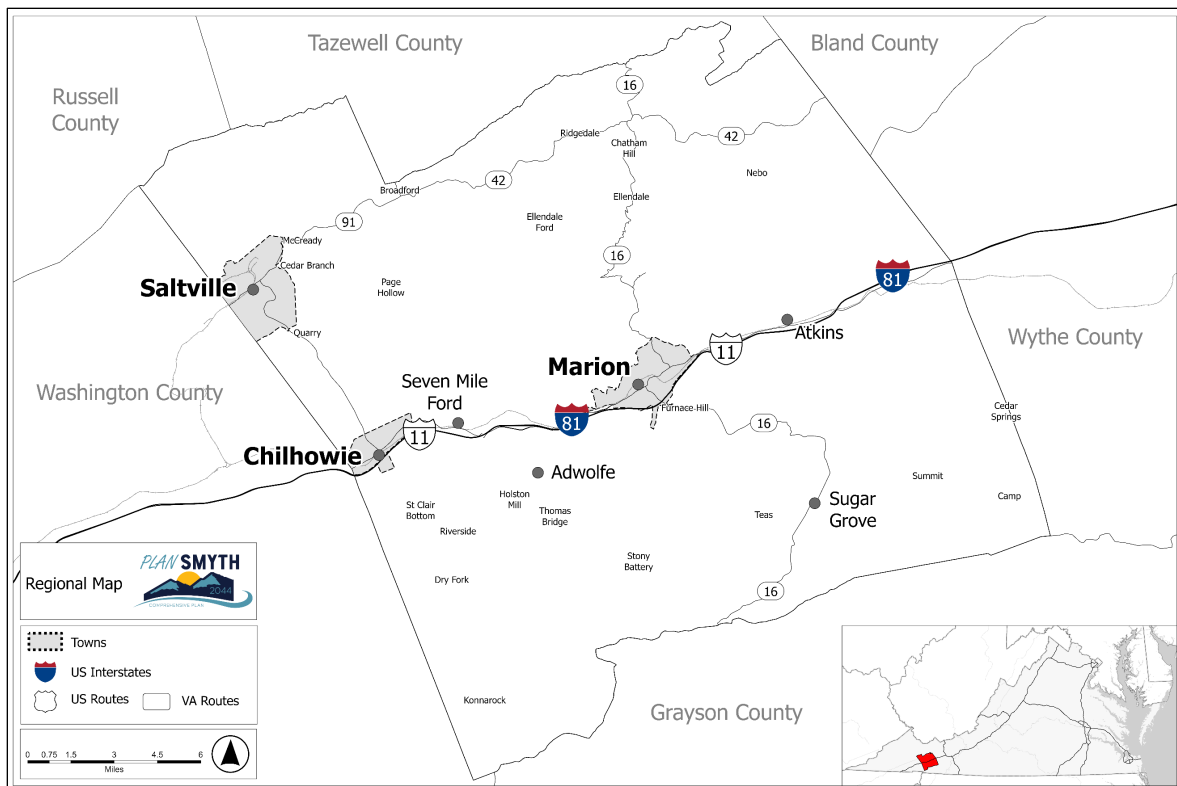


*Haystacks in Field Near Marion – May 1941 (Left), Saltville Early 1900's (Right) (Source: Library of Congress)*

## 3.2 Smyth County & the Regional Context

A map of Smyth County shown below provides context on the relationship that Smyth County has with the counties that surround it, the rest of southwest Virginia, and the state of Virginia as a whole. Located along I-81, Smyth County is situated around a major arterial that links substantial portions of western Virginia with Tennessee to the south and West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York to the north. A short distance from other major arterial routes, in particular I-77, Smyth County is located in close proximity to a major transit junction in the mid-Atlantic region. In addition to Smyth County's strategic transportation location, the County is also home to ample natural beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities. With substantial portions of the County located within the Jefferson National Forest, visitors and residents have easy access to breathtaking mountain views, cliffs, gorges, and other outdoor vistas. Within the County, major rivers include the northern, middle, and southern forks of the Holston River. These three rivers flow from points in Smyth and Wythe Counties westward towards Knoxville, TN, where the Holston meets the Tennessee River, which then flows into the Ohio River and then into the Mississippi River.

Smyth County is largely agrarian, with large portions of the County being used for agricultural land uses. Other areas of the County are either protected by the National Forest Service or Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (Jefferson National Forest and Hungry Mother State Park), used for residential purposes, or are incorporated as part of towns or census-designated places. Similar land uses can be seen in the surrounding counties of Wythe, Grayson, Washington, Russell, Tazewell, and Bland Counties, with sizable portions falling into conservation areas, agricultural, or low-density residential uses. One significant distinction from the surrounding counties is that so much of the agricultural land in Smyth has been placed in land use taxation, which acts as an agent of preservation.







## Smyth County Landscapes

Interstate 81 Near Atkins (Top-Left), Appalachian Trail near Atkins (Top-Center), Middle Fork of the Holston River in Marion (Top-Right), Hungry Mother State Park campsites (Center-Left), Downtown Marion (Center-Center), Mountains near Saltville (Center-Left), Cows in a field near Konnarock (Bottom-Left), Single-family homes near Marion (Bottom-Center), Mountain Empire Airport near Groseclose (Bottom-Right).

### 3.3 Influencing Regional Plans & Entities

#### MOUNT ROGERS PLANNING DISTRICT

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

##### ***2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy***

- This adopted plan sets forth an inventory of economic development partners and a coordinated strategy for furthering regional economic development. The strategy included an industry cluster analysis for the region that identified growing “star” clusters in manufacturing, transportation equipment manufacturing, agribusiness, food processing, apparel and textiles, chemicals and chemical-based products, advanced materials, and advanced metal manufacturing. The plan includes goals for Tourism, Agribusiness, Manufacturing, and Community Enhancement. Projects for Smyth County include the development of a new drinking water source for the eastern portion of Smyth County near Atkins, the expansion of public water lines into the Atkins area, the creation of a new drinking water source in the western portion of the County near Rural Retreat, and the rehabilitation of the Walker Mountain Overlook on Route 16 near Marion.

##### ***2019 Mount Rogers Hazard Mitigation Plan***

- This regional plan, required by FEMA, addresses natural hazards (e.g., dams, karst, winds, drought, flooding, etc.) and recommends mitigation measures. For Smyth County, the primary natural hazards identified include flooding, landslides, earthquakes, severe winter weather/ice, wildfires, drought, tornado/hurricanes, windstorms, hazardous material spills, and thunderstorms/lightning (ranked from most likely to least likely).

##### ***2011-2035 Mount Rogers Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan***

- This regional plan for transportation provides a list of desired future transportation projects by locality. For Smyth County, the plan provides recommendations for 73 transportation projects that include improvements to interstate, primary, and secondary roads.

##### ***2021 Mount Rogers Virginia Telecommunication Initiative***

- The Mount Rogers Planning District continues to coordinate projects for expanding telecommunication fiber infrastructure to unserved areas in the region. The state-wide initiative is managed by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and combines federal, state, local, and private investment to expand broadband fiber to areas throughout the region.

***The Crooked Road, Virginia Music Heritage Trail, and 'Round the Mountain' Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network***

- Smyth County is part of this regional economic development initiative for Southwest Virginia (2005) that celebrates and promotes the rich heritage of music and artisan crafts. These two non-profit entities contribute significantly to regional tourism.

**REGIONAL ENTITIES & AUTHORITIES**

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

***Mount Rogers Regional Partnership***

- This entity is a regional economic development organization responsible for prospect development, project management, and outreach marketing of industrial sites in the I-81 and I-77 Corridors for its member localities (Wythe, Carroll, Bland, Grayson, Smyth, and the City of Galax). Targeted industrial sectors include plastics and advanced materials, automotive and transportation equipment, food and beverage processing, and information technology. The entity is financed by its member localities and private sector contributions.

***Smyth County Chamber of Commerce***

- This County-wide chamber of commerce works within Smyth County to further economic development, entrepreneurial training, and economic vitality in and outside of the County's business districts (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville).

***New River / Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board***

- This board addresses employment training needs in the region. It receives funding from the Workforce Investment Act (U.S. Department of Labor) and helps with data collection and important career training paths to ensure a skilled workforce for targeted industry sectors.

***Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing***

- This entity furthers advanced manufacturing in the region through training and testing at the Southwest Virginia Center of Excellence located at Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator campus in Abingdon. This training and testing facility was funded by the Virginia Tobacco Commission and offers three programs in welding, machining, and industrial machinery mechanics.

***Smyth County Public Library System***

- The Smyth County Public Library System has three (3) branches that are found in the County's three towns – Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville. Governed by a seven-member Board of Trustees, the Smyth County Library System offers the public reference resources, internet access, copy/scanning/faxing services, and places for public meetings. This system is funded by multiple sources including the County, each of the three towns, state funding and miscellaneous grants. A Friends of the Library group also supports the system in a variety of projects and programs.

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### ***Smyth Wythe Airport Commission***

- This authority manages the Mountain Empire Regional Airport for Smyth and Wythe County. The Mountain Empire Regional Airport is found in Smyth County, roughly five miles east of Atkins.

### ***Mount Rogers Cigarette Tax Board***

- This entity is a regional state board for enforcing and collecting cigarette taxes within the region. The localities include Wythe, Bland, Pulaski, and Smyth Counties, as well as the Towns of Chilhowie, Dublin, Marion, Rural Retreat, Saltville, and Wytheville

### ***Smyth County Community Foundation***

- This foundation was originally created to support the Smyth County Community Hospital (SCCH) and improve the health of Smyth County's residents. In 2021, Ballad Health purchased the Foundation's remaining interest in SCCH. Faced with this change, the Foundation decided to adopt a two-entity model. Smyth County Charitable Fund continues the tradition of grant-making for non-profits in health, wellness and education. Smyth County Community Foundation promotes philanthropy across the County by encouraging endowments for scholarships and grants. The Foundation also owns and operates two wellness centers in the County (Marion and Saltville) as well as the Holston Hills Country Club.

## **SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA CULTURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION/ FRIENDS OF SWVA**

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

## **JEFFERSON NATIONAL FOREST**

The Jefferson National Forest is part of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests which were combined in 1995 and are now managed as one unit of over 1.6 million acres in Virginia. This National Forest lies in Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Much of the forest area consists of wilderness and outdoor recreation areas. Parts of Jefferson National Forest lie within Smyth County, as well as neighboring Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Pulaski, and Wythe counties. The Land and Resource Management Plan (2004) establishes future goals and land use (forest, timber, recreation, wilderness, etc.) based on land suitability. Due to large portions of Smyth County being included in the Jefferson National Forest, this plan has a large bearing on how much of the County's natural resources and outdoor recreation assets are managed and maintained.



## HUNGRY MOTHER STATE PARK

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation operates Hungry Mother State Park, located in central Smyth County, north of Marion. One of Virginia's original six state parks, Hungry Mother State Park has served southwest Virginia since 1936 and has continued to provide outdoor recreation and environmental education to visitors throughout its existence.

Hungry Mother is a state park that is centralized around Hungry Mother Lake, a 108-acre lake, and offers hiking, mountain biking, boating, fishing, swimming, and sunbathing opportunities. Hungry Mother's attendance has fallen slightly since a peak in 2006 but continues to remain steady, with roughly 230,000 visitors per year, bringing an estimated \$7.05 million dollars into the local economy. The 2015 Updated Master Plan calls for multiple renovations to the park's campgrounds, cabins, and utilities, as well as the addition of new facilities and staff.

### 3.4 Long-Range Planning in Surrounding Counties

#### WYTHE COUNTY

Located to the northeast, Wythe County (2020 Population 28,290, US Census Bureau) is home to numerous population centers. In particular, larger towns include Wytheville (8,265) and Rural Retreat (1,546) located along the I-81/I-77 corridor, and other smaller communities like Fort Chiswell and Max Meadows located in the eastern portion of the County and Ivanhoe, Austinville, and Barren Springs in the south. Substantial portions of Wythe County are agricultural and rural. Agriculture has historically been one of the largest industries in the County and continues to be an economic driver in the local economy. Additionally, conservation areas comprise another sizable land use category, with areas along the northern and southern border of the County being a part of the Jefferson National Forest and a large site located south of Wytheville (Big Survey Wildlife Management Area & Crystal Springs Recreation Area). Redevelopment efforts have been undertaken in both of Wythe County's towns, Wytheville and Rural Retreat. In both cases, efforts have been made to bolster small businesses, foster economic growth, and improve the quality of their downtown districts.

The **2040 Wythe County Plan** (currently in development) encourages future development in centralized villages and along I-81. In this way, development is concentrated, important agricultural and environmental resources are protected, and growth is implemented in an orderly manner. In addition, the comprehensive plan calls for the protection and growth of traditional economic drivers, such as agriculture, small business, retail, and the tourism industry, the revitalization of downtown areas, expansion of housing, recreation, and community/social service opportunities, as well as investments into multi-modal transportation, public utilities, internet and broadband service, and public safety facilities.

#### GRAYSON COUNTY

Located to the southeast, Grayson County is home to 15,333 residents (2020 US Census Bureau). With a population density of roughly 40 residents per square mile, Grayson County is a fairly rural and sparsely populated portion of the state. As a result, many of the County's population centers are small. The largest town in Grayson is its County seat, Independence, with a population of 1,011, with the other two towns, Fries and Troutdale, being home to 450 and 145 residents, respectively. In addition to the County's incorporated towns, there are three census-designated places across the County: Baywood, Hilltown, and

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Stevens Creek. US Route 58 is the primary thoroughfare in the County, connecting the independent City of Galax in the east to Washington County in the west, and VA Route 21, which runs north-to-south from Wythe County to Allegheny County (NC) in the south. Large portions of the County is zoned as Rural Farm District, which encompasses all land that is not districted otherwise or is included in a town's zoning. These lands are not necessarily farm land but rather are a catchall for rural residential, farming, and recreational uses. However, traditional agriculture, agritourism, and forest products are large drivers of the local economy.

The ***Grayson County Virginia 2018 Comprehensive Plan*** addresses what those living in the County see as the most pressing issues and opportunities for future growth. In particular, the plan focuses on improving the housing stock in the County, improving assisted living for senior residents, improving educational opportunities for all residents ("K-to-Gray"), investing in business training, green industry training, and vocational training, expanding public infrastructure to rural parts of the County, expand opportunities for local farmers, improve access to public transit and other alternative transportation methods (pedestrian and cycling paths), investing in public services (emergency services, utilities, trails, community assets) and community health (health care services and fitness activities), expanding tourism, and protecting the County's natural resources.

### WASHINGTON COUNTY

Located to the southwest, Washington County is home to 53,935 residents (2020 US Census Bureau). Home to numerous towns, including Abingdon, Damascus, Glade Springs, and Saltville, and census-designated areas Emory and Meadowview, Washington County is more heavily populated than many counties in the region. The majority of this County's population is centered around the County's major thoroughfare, I-81. Moving from east to west, I-81 intersects many of the County's main population centers; these include Glade Spring, Abingdon, Emory, and Meadowview. Additional important roadways across the County are VA-91 (Saltville to Damascus), US-58 (Damascus to Bristol), US-19 (Russell County to Abingdon), VA-80 (Russell County to Meadowview), and US-11 (parallel to I-81). The largest land use in the County is agriculture, followed by residential. Agriculture, much like the surrounding counties, is a large economic driver and, therefore, constitutes a sizable portion of the County. Residential areas are spread throughout the County and are largely located adjacent to towns or roadways. Important protected and recreational areas in Grayson County are Hidden Valley Lake and Channels State Forest, located in the northern portion of the County; the Mount Rogers National Recreational Area, located in the southeastern corner of the County; and the South Holston Lake, located south of Abingdon near the border with Tennessee.

The ***Washington County Comprehensive Plan*** (adopted in 2015) has set out a series of development goals and corresponding strategies for six categories: Housing, Economic Development, Natural and Cultural Resources, Community Facilities, Transportation, and Land Use. The first category (housing) focuses on improving the quality of housing stock in the County, enforcing current building codes, increasing the energy efficiency of current and new housing, improving access to housing, improving the diversity of housing options, and encouraging higher-density development where appropriate. Economic Development goals include recruiting new businesses to the County, fostering local start-ups and entrepreneurialism, retaining and expanding commercial and industrial businesses throughout the County, expanding infrastructure to support future business development, promoting the agricultural industry, promoting tourism opportunities, and coordinating both internally and regionally to foster

business vitality. Natural and Cultural Resource goals include the conservation of natural resources and open spaces, the establishment of conservation easements across the County, encouragement of conscientious construction and development practices to minimize environmental impacts, expanding access to trail and recreational opportunities, and preserving and promoting the County's unique historical and cultural sites. Community Facilities goals include capital improvements, improvements to fresh and wastewater utilities, growth of electrical, natural gas, telephone, and broadband internet utilities, improvement to the County's emergency management system and emergency services, increasing recreational opportunities, improvements to physical infrastructure schools, and the County's healthcare system. Transportation goals include greater long-range planning and integration into regional transportation planning initiatives, investments in alternative street design, public transit, and expanding pedestrian and bicycle networks. Lastly, Land Use goals include ensuring future development aligns with the comprehensive plan, preserving agricultural lands, minimizing sprawl, and a revision to the County's zoning and subdivision ordinance.

### RUSSELL COUNTY

Located to the northwest, Russell County is home to 25,781 residents (2020 US Census Bureau). Like many of the counties in the region, Russell is a fairly rural County with historically important economic activities, coal mining, and agriculture, still holding a key role today. Although small in population, Russell is home to numerous towns and villages. Towns include Cleveland, Honaker, Lebanon, and St. Paul, and Census Designated Places include Castlewood, Dante, and Raven. Among these towns and villages, the largest population center and the County seat is Lebanon with 3,159 residents. The major thoroughfare of Russell County is US-19 (East-to-West) and US-58 (North-to-South), which connect many of the County's population centers to one another. Additional secondary arterials include VA-80, VA-82, and VA-71. Substantial portions of the County have a slope of upwards of 20%; not only does this make activities like agriculture more complicated, but it also limits areas in which development, both commercial and residential, can occur. As a result, much of the County has been left untouched. The future land use map from Russell County's 2010 comprehensive plan echoes this, with roughly 90% of the County being zoned for agriculture, conservation/recreation, or natural resources, and the remaining 10% zoned for residential or special opportunities (both concentrated around the County's population centers). Like the surrounding counties, agriculture remains a sizable chunk of the County's economy, as well as the mining industry that employs many locals.

Certified in 2010 and adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in 2012, ***the Comprehensive Development Plan for Russell County, Virginia*** (2010) outlines the vision for future development in Russell County. In this comprehensive plan's recommendations, the County outlines six areas for improvement throughout the County, which include: Population, Land Use, Commercial, Industrial, Residential, and Transportation. Population recommendations focus on concentrating growth in areas of the County where development is already underway, towns along US-19, and the redevelopment of Honaker and Cleveland, two towns that are located away from US-19. Land Use recommendations include the establishment of an opportunity zone near Hansonville (intersection of US-58 and US-19) and Rosedale (intersection of US-19 and VA-80), the expansion of utilities to newly developed areas of the County, the clearing of "junk yards" and derelict residences, the improvement of privately owned roads throughout the County, the adoption of a County-wide zoning ordinance, and greater cooperation with the NGO's to increase conservation easements throughout the County. Commercial recommendations include improvement and investments into the County's freshwater resources, the establishment of tourist attractions (multi-use trails, a state

park), support for downtown revitalization efforts for the County's three towns, investments in the County's telecommunication and broadband internet networks, the creation of a wellness center for County residents, and cooperation with outside agencies to determine the feasibility of opportunity and redevelopment areas. Industrial recommendations include steps to grow the local economy, like the establishment of business districts, expansion of supporting utilities, courting of energy-related manufacturing, and improvements to roadways and County connectivity. Residential recommendations primarily focus on improving the County's current housing stock, ensuring community services (Fire, EMS, Road, Water, and Sewer) are accessible to all parts of the County, efforts to ensure housing is affordable and accessible, and conducting a housing study. Lastly, Transportation recommendations include improvements to VA-91 and VA-80, plans to prioritize the paving of unpaved roads, and the creation of a study to analyze the paving of subdivision streets across the County.

### TAZEWELL COUNTY

Located to the north of Smyth County, Tazewell County is home to 40,429 residents (2020 US Census Bureau). One of the more populated areas of southwest Virginia, Tazewell County is home to numerous towns and villages. The largest of these towns is Richlands, with a population of 5,261, followed by Bluefield, with a population of 5,096; Tazewell (the County seat), with 4,486; Cedar Bluff, with 1,069, and Pocahontas, with 269. Census Designated Places in Tazewell include Claypool Hill, Gratton, Raven, and Springville. The major thoroughfare of Tazewell County is US-460, which connects all major population centers of the County. The largest two land uses in Tazewell County are agriculture and forests. This is likely due to the mountainous nature of the County as well as development taking place largely along the US-460 corridor. That being said, most mixed-use, residential, and commercial land uses are concentrated around US-460 and the population centers along its route. Rural Residential is the only land use category that counters this trend, with this category following the secondary arterials that link many of the County's towns and villages.

Adopted in 2017, the ***Tazewell County 2017 Comprehensive Plan*** outlines future development across Tazewell County. Tazewell's Comprehensive Plan calls for a series of improvements that are organized by topic: Transportation, Community Facilities and Government, Infrastructure and Land Use, Education and Training, and Economy and Culture. Recommendations for improvements to Transportation in Tazewell include improvements to highly traffic secondary roads and connectors, a re-evaluation of the County's "Orphan Road" program, relief of congestion near Claypool Hill, and the development of a "Coal-field Expressway" which would improve US 460, US-19, and incorporate the future I-73 (yet to be constructed). Community Facilities and Government recommendations include the continued support of local and state service agencies, expansion of recreational opportunities and prioritization of conservation, improvement to emergency services, reduction of overcrowding in the regional jail, improvement of the County's library system, and improved response time and accessibility of emergency services. Infrastructure and Land Use recommendations include greater cooperation between town and County governments in regard to infrastructure, the development of a plan to expand public water and sewer access to all parts of Tazewell, provide more accessible solid waste convenience stations, develop a plan to extend the life of the County's landfill, expand the County's GIS capabilities, invest in alternative energy and alternative energy planning, and develop a plan to expand access to telecommunications (cell phone and broadband) to the entire County). Infrastructure and Land Use recommendations include the development and adoption of a County-wide zoning ordinance, the development of a stormwater management and floodplain protection program, the promotion of regional cooperation on land development and protection, and the plans to



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protect prime farm lands, timberland resources, and natural habitats. Education and Training recommendations include the promotion of nutritional and physical well-being programs, the development of a County-wide substance abuse prevention program, efforts to promote emotional wellness for all residents, continuing to implement career awareness and readiness programs, investment in programs to increase the number of high school graduates, improve overall education by improving schools and teachers, reducing dropout rates, improving childcare services, and develop a program to prepare new parents for raising their child. Lastly, Economy and Culture recommendations include developing a County financial strategy for future investments to expand and attract business into the County, support existing industries and businesses in the County, and invest, promote, and develop tourism opportunities across Tazewell.

### BLAND COUNTY

Located to the northeast, Bland County holds the smallest land border with Smyth County and is home to 6,270 residents (2020 US Census Bureau). This makes Bland County the fourth smallest County by population in Virginia. Due to this small population, most of the County is sparsely populated with no population center to speak of. In fact, Bland County is one of the only counties in the United States that has no incorporated communities. That being said, the largest census-designated place in Bland County is the village of Bland, with a population of 383 (2020 US Census). The primary thoroughfare in Bland County is I-77. This major highway bisects the County from south to north, linking residents to Wytheville in the south and towns like Princeton and Bluefield, West Virginia in the north. In addition to I-77, US Route 52 and VA 42 are secondary roads that connect the villages to one another. Like much of the region, Bland County is a rural County with the primary land uses being Agriculture and Conservation. This is due to large swaths of the County being included in the Jefferson National Forest, as well as the mountainous topography that forces agricultural activities to include much of the flat land in the County's valleys. These land types constitute 95% of land use in the County according to the most recent comprehensive plan, with the remaining 5% being comprised of commercial, industrial, residential, and public uses primarily concentrated around I-77.

Adopted in 2018, the ***Bland County Comprehensive Plan (2018)*** plots a course for the future of Bland County for the next ten years. Bland's comprehensive plan outlines a series of goals and objectives for the County focused on improving quality of life, economic vitality, and overall well-being. These include goals for Transportation, Land Use and Development, Environmental Quality and Sustainability, Economic Development, Agriculture and Rural Character, Housing, and Community. The first of these, Transportation, sets the goal of creating a "sustainable transportation system that links highways, transit systems, greenways, sidewalks, and bike trails to provide multimodal transportation options." This goal focuses future development towards greater coordination of land use and transportation planning, integrating multimodal (pedestrian and cyclist) transportation networks into the County's transit plans, improving safety for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists, improving connectivity among trails, greenways, and traditional transportation routes, increased cooperation between regional organizations, ensuring adequate funding for future projects, and better integrating the public in the planning process. Land Use and Development sets the goal to "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 Bland County's limited land capacity; and coordinate land uses with infrastructure needs." The previous Comprehensive Plan, although addressing the current issues, did not set forth methods of addressing these issues. Therefore, this section will not speak to

methods. The next area, Environmental Quality and Sustainability, set forth the goal to “preserve, enhance, and protect Bland County’s environmental resources to maintain a high quality of life for residents and sustainable development in the future.” Objectives for achieving this goal include the efficient and sustainable use of water resources through watershed and groundwater protections as well as stormwater management and other methods, the protection of natural areas, plant and animal life, soils, and tree canopy through strategic partnerships, sustainable tourism practices, the encouragement of redevelopment over new development, as well as green building practices and smart development, promoting cost-effective waste management practices, promoting the creation and enforcement of easily accessible environmental regulations, and promote environmental awareness among the citizens of Bland County. Economic Development sets the goal to “attract new businesses and expand existing businesses to provide a broad range of employment opportunities and a high quality of life for residents of, and those employed in Bland County.” To meet this goal, Bland County has created objectives including the creation of business/industrial parks within the County, redevelopment of aging sites, increase the availability of public infrastructure, tax breaks for “future industrial” zoning, promote a business atmosphere to support small businesses, agriculture, and eco-tourism, and improve workforce readiness through improved educational offerings. Agriculture and Rural Character set the goal to “preserve, protect, and enhance the quality of Bland County’s agricultural areas and promote traditional rural lifestyles, farm land, agricultural enterprises, open space, recreation, and historic resources within the County.” Objectives to meet this goal include preserving the County’s agricultural lands, promoting agriculturally related businesses, preserving the County’s open spaces, promoting and increasing indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities, and preserving historical sites, resources, and areas. Housing set the goal to “enhance neighborhoods within Bland County through preservation, revitalization, and quality infill development. Create quality affordable housing and mixed-use development.” Objectives to meet this goal include creating more sustainable, affordable, and diverse communities, as well as integrating parks, greenspace, public gathering locations, and community centers into the comprehensive plan. Lastly, the community sets the goal of “improving health and wellbeing; access to improved and enhanced community services, facilities, and infrastructure for all; and expanded opportunities for social equity among diverse community groups.” Objectives for meeting this goal include promoting and protecting public health, developing age-friendly communities (specifically for families with children and senior citizens), providing parks, recreational facilities, open spaces, and greenways, continuing to improve the County’s educational assets, and maintaining overall community safety.

### 3.5 Established Communities in Smyth County

Smyth County is home to three incorporated towns (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville), four census designated places (Adwolfe, Atkins, Seven Mile Ford, and Sugar Grove), as well as a handful of unincorporated communities like Groseclose and Rich Valley, which have developed across the County as population centers with accompanying community services, businesses, housing, and utilities.

#### TOWN OF MARION

Marion serves as the County seat for Smyth County and hosts many governmental offices for Smyth County and the town. Standing as the largest population center, Marion is both the governmental, cultural, and economic center of the County. Established in concurrence with the creation of Smyth County in February of 1832, Marion was named after Revolutionary War General Francis “Swamp Fox” Marion.

Historically, Marion served as a stop along the way to the Wilderness Road, which led American settlers through Southwest Virginia, over the Cumberland Gap, and into eastern Kentucky. Today, Marion remains an important stop for travelers along I-81. Funneling travelers along the valleys of western Virginia, I-81 very much follows the path of the former Wilderness Road, later US Route 11, and likewise has, and will continue to, contribute to the economy of Marion and Smyth County as a whole.

Although I-81 stands as an important arterial to other portions of the state, after its construction in the 1960's Marion saw a decline. However, substantial portions of downtown Marion have been preserved as part of the Marion Historic District, which was established in 1992. Since then, efforts have been made to improve downtown Marion, including the designation of Marion as a Main Street Community by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Town of Marion has outlined a series of 11 “General Goals” in its *2018 Town of Marion Comprehensive Plan*. These 11 goals are:

- *Encourage the orderly conversion of vacant land to urban use.*
- *Guide new development into a pattern that will complement, rather than conflict with, existing uses.*
- *Encourage an orderly land use pattern by adopting and enforcing effective land use controls.*
- *Provide proper and efficient road system connectivity between different land uses.*
- *Encourage adequate and affordable housing for all socio-economic groups.*



*Photo of Downtown Marion, Virginia*

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- *Provide community facilities that are efficient, effective, and strategically located.*
- *Designate areas for and create a viable environment for commercial development.*
- *Encourage targeted industrial development.*
- *Utilize federal and state programs to the maximum extent possible in the achievement of the town's goals.*
- *Provide for the enhancement of the cultural life of Marion.*
- *Encourage the preservation of historic sites.*

### TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

The Town of Chilhowie, a Cherokee word meaning “valley of many deer,” has gone through many iterations since its initial creation as a stagecoach town. Initially, Chilhowie was known as Town House, referring to the two-story log tavern that stood at the site along the Wilderness Road, and later altered to Greever’s Switch, referring to a type of railroad switch that was near the town, following the completion of the railroad. Not until the town was officially incorporated in 1913 did Chilhowie become the official title of the town.



*Photo of Downtown Chilhowie, Virginia*

Chilhowie has been known primarily as a manufacturing and agricultural village throughout its history, providing pottery, brick, lumber, textiles, fertilizer, farm equipment, and furniture to surrounding markets. Historically, cattle farming was a large aspect of the local economy, as was fruit production; both remain important pillars of the local economy. In fact, the tradition of apple farming is celebrated each year in September with an Apple Festival.

Chilhowie is home to numerous historical buildings that harken to the town’s past. Unfortunately, many of the pre-20<sup>th</sup> century buildings were lost to a large fire in 1909 that destroyed the town’s downtown district. Currently, much of downtown Chilhowie is incorporated in the Downtown Chilhowie Historic District, which was established in 2000.

Chilhowie has outlined a series of goals for the town in its 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The plan establishes 15 objectives that fall into five categories that strive to improve the town’s economic and cultural viability, all the while preserving its cultural heritage:

- **Land Use Development:** Provide an orderly, quality, balanced, and harmonious living environment.
- **Economic Development:** Continuously improve the economic wellbeing of Chilhowie and the surrounding area.

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

- **Housing**: Improve the quality, quantity, and availability of housing for all socio-economic segments.
- **Transportation**: Maintain and improve an efficient and safe transportation network
- **Environmental**: To improve and preserve the physical and social environment of the Town and surrounding area.

### TOWN OF SALTVILLE

Incorporated as a town in 1896, Saltville has held an important location not only regionally but nationally. Located near the site of a pre-historic salt marsh, Saltville's economy and history have always been tied to its namesake, salt. Beginning in the 1780s, salt began to be commercially mined in the area, with Saltville serving as a major supplier of salt to the Confederacy during the Civil War. In fact, Saltville's salt works were destroyed in the latter half of 1864 during the First and Second Battles of Saltville. Following the war, Saltville reconstructed its saltworks and continues to this day to produce salt and other mineral products for companies across the nation and the world.



*Photo of Downtown Saltville, Virginia*

Due to Saltville's location near a pre-historic salt marsh, the town has become a hotbed for archaeological study. With fossils dating back to the Ice Age, this unique location provides the town not only with a look to the past but also the opportunity to build for the future.

The Saltville Historic District, established in 2002, incorporates many of the cultural and historic resources of the town. Covering 187 acres, this district includes many commercial, religious, governmental, and cultural buildings and sites in and around Saltville, such as Wells Field (Salt Marsh), Saltville Post Office, Town Hall, and other commercial buildings along West Main Street.

Since Saltville's founding, the town has grown and shifted to meet the demands of the day. With the population peaking in the 1930s, Saltville still retains the close-knit, small-town feel that residents have enjoyed throughout the town's history. Although small, Saltville has plans to improve amenities, quality of life, and opportunities for its residents. In the town's comprehensive plan, created in 2019, Saltville outlines six goals for the town's future:

- **Housing and Land Use**: Provide a quality and balanced living environment to include and encourage a variety of housing options for current and future citizens of the Town of Saltville
- **Economic Development**: Foster a sustainable and thriving economic ecosystem within the Town of Saltville



## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

- **Community Development**: Improve the quality of living in the Town of Saltville
- **Transportation**: Support an efficient and safe transportation network in the Town of Saltville
- **Services**: Enhance services provided by the Town of Saltville
- **Infrastructure**: Provide and support an efficient infrastructure system within the Town of Saltville

### ADWOLFE

Adwolfe is a “census-designated place” and identifiable community located south of I-81 and is comprised of areas surrounding Adwolfe Road, Thomas Bridge Road, and Riverside Road. Home to 1,658 people and serving as a crossroads in the more rural portions of the County, Adwolfe is home to a volunteer fire department, a church, a Dollar General, a convenience store, and two gas stations. Although located in close proximity to I-81, Adwolfe currently remains rural with few amenities currently; however, Adwolfe is positioned for additional residential, small business, and commercial growth in the future.



*Photo of the Adwolfe Community Center in Adwolfe, VA*

### ATKINS

Atkins is a “census-designated place” located in the eastern portion of Smyth County that is home to 1,121 people. Located along I-81, Atkins sits poised to take advantage of the ample vehicle traffic that traverses the area daily. Currently, Atkins is home to numerous businesses, an elementary school, a post office, a volunteer fire department and EMS, hotels, gas stations, a handful of churches, and multiple manufacturing facilities.



*Photo of the Atkins VFD in Atkins, VA*

## SEVEN MILE FORD

Seven Mile Ford is a “census-designated place” and identifiable community located in the western portion of the County that is home to 664 people. Located along VA-11 and adjacent to I-81, Seven Mile Ford sits poised to benefit from both local and interstate traffic to bolster its local economy. Currently, Seven Mile Ford is home to primarily single-family housing but located in close proximity to the County’s animal shelter, a campground, a Moose Lodge, a convenience store, and a handful of churches.



*Photo of I-81 Near Seven Mile Ford*

## SUGAR GROVE

Sugar Grove is a “census-designated place” and identifiable community located in the southeastern corner of Smyth County that is home to 610 people. Located at the intersection of VA-16 and the South Fork of the Holston River, Sugar Grove is a more centralized rural community. In comparison to other communities like Adwolve, Sugar Grove has concentrated its development into a small core. This is both beneficial in terms of development and also in terms of creating a community identity. Sugar Grove is currently home to a Post Office, Dollar General, a volunteer fire department, an elementary school, a handful of small businesses, a market, a gas station, and several churches. Although located some distance from many larger population centers in the County and major thoroughfares like I-81, Sugar Grove has the potential to serve as the go-to location for services in the southeastern portion of the County.



*Photo of a Barn Near Sugar Grove*



*Photo of Sugar Grove’s Post Office on Sugar Grove Highway*

## 3.6 Smyth County Demographic & Economic Trends

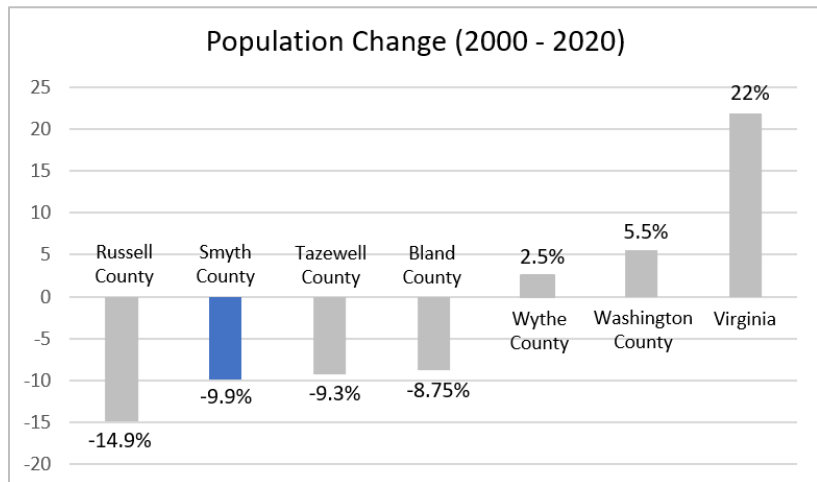
### DEMOGRAPHICS

A demographic profile of Smyth County examines key indicators of those who call the County home. These include population growth, race, ethnicity, age, educational attainment, and household income.

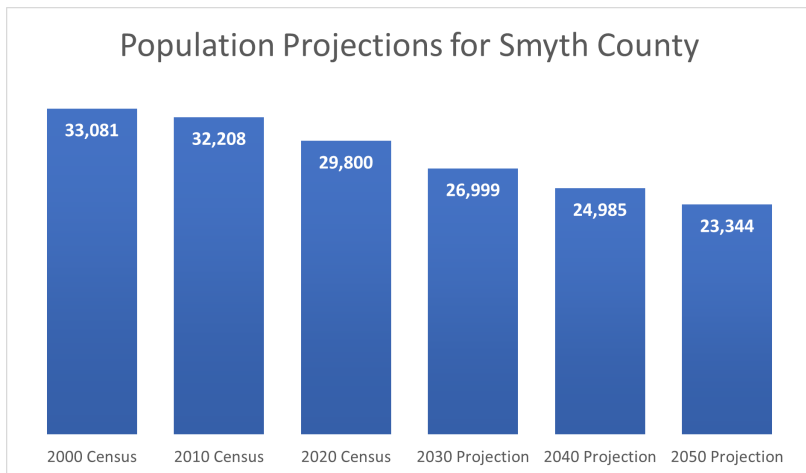
#### POPULATION

The 2022 population of Smyth County is around 28,290. The population in the County has slightly decreased by 2.6% from 2000 to 2010, with an additional decline of 7.5% from 2010 to 2020. This combined 10% slump mirrors a regional trend in population decline.

Over the past two decades, population growth in Smyth County has matched many of the surrounding counties with sizable declines. The only adjacent counties to Smyth that reported population growth between 2000 and 2020 were Wythe and Washington Counties, with 2.5% and 5.5% growth, respectively. However, in regard to the overall population growth seen across the state of Virginia, all counties within the region are well below the state's growth rate of 22%.



*Percentage Population Change from 2000 to 2020 in Smyth County, Surrounding Counties, and the State of Virginia*



*Population Projections for Smyth County (Projections Extrapolated from 2020 Census using annual growth rate projections from the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center)*

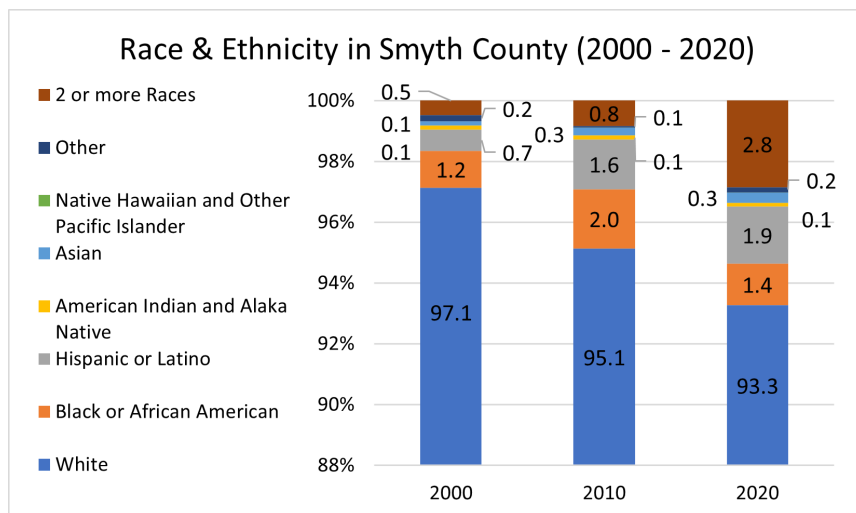
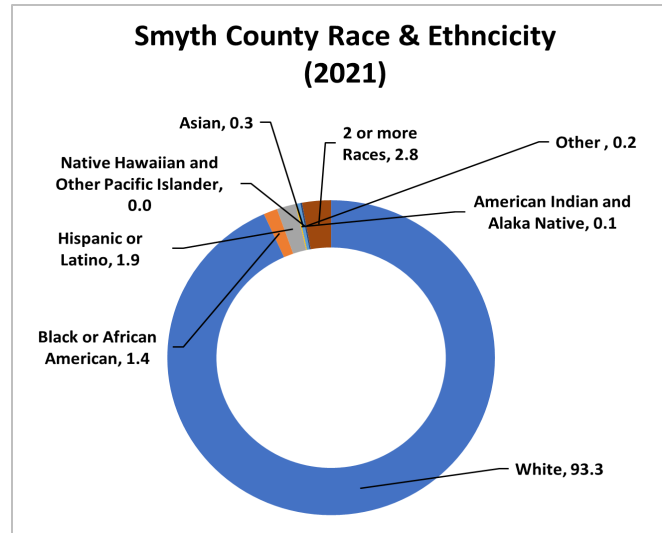
Over the course of the previous 20 years, the County's population has declined slightly from a high of 33,081 in 2000 to its current rate of roughly 29,800 individuals. However, without intervention, population decline is expected to accelerate over the next 30 years, with the population of Smyth County expecting to fall below 27,000 in 2030, below 25,000 by 2040, and near 23,000 in 2050. These figures are based on historical trends and projections provided by UVAs Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.



## RACE AND ETHNICITY

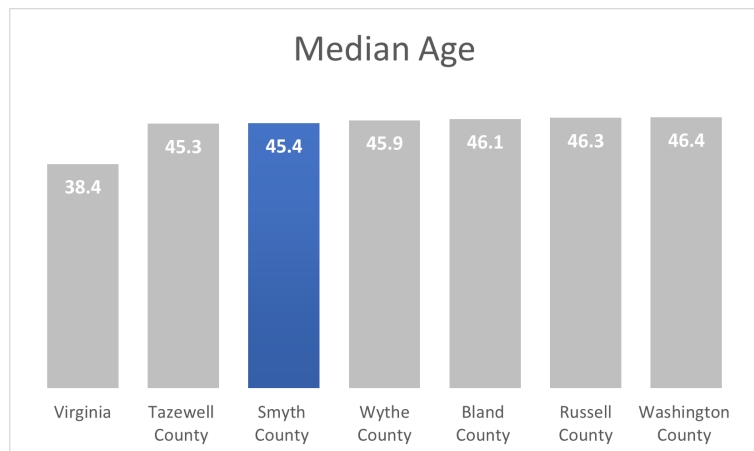
Smyth County is home to a mix of races and ethnicities; however, Smyth County is predominantly home to individuals who identify as white. It is estimated that in 2021, the population of the County is 93.3% White, 1.4% Black, 2.8% two or more races, 1.9% Hispanic or Latino, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.3% Asian, and 0.2% “other”. That being said, historically Smyth County has tended to be comprised of “white” individuals making upwards of with white upwards of 90% over the previous 20 years. Although the vast majority of citizens, there have been increases among those who identify as Hispanic or Latino and two or more races.

*Race and Ethnicity of Smyth County's Population, 2021 & Race in Smyth County 2000 to 2020 (Source: 2021 US Census Bureau Estimates, 2000 to 2020 US Census Bureau)*



## AGE

According to the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS), the median age in Smyth County is 45.4. This is in line with the surrounding counties, where the median age floats between 45.4 and 46.4 years of age. Compared with Virginia as a whole, Smyth County is considerably older compared to the state's median of 38.4 years. Within the County, 21.5% of the population are children and teens under the age of 20. This is the largest cohort of individuals in the County and has the potential to

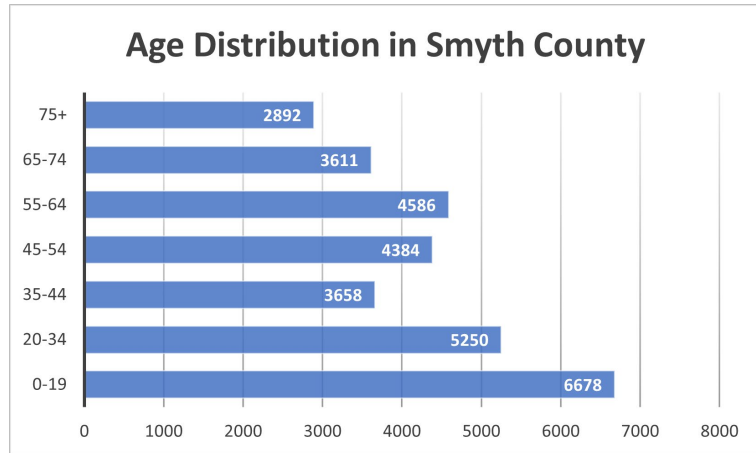


*Median Ages in Smyth County, Surrounding Counties, and Virginia (Source: US Census 2020 ACS)*

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

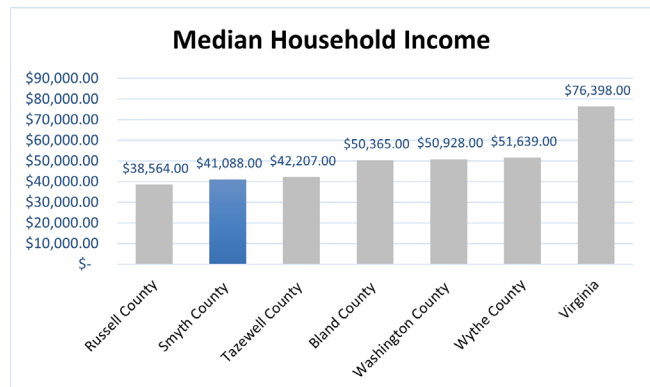
improve the local economy in the future. Roughly 21% of the County's population is 65 years old or over, with the remaining 42.4% falling between the ages of 20 and 64. The County's population will age over the next two decades, with growth concentrated in the population aged 65 years and older.

*Age Distributions in Smyth County, Surrounding Counties, and Virginia (Source: US Census 2020 ACS)*

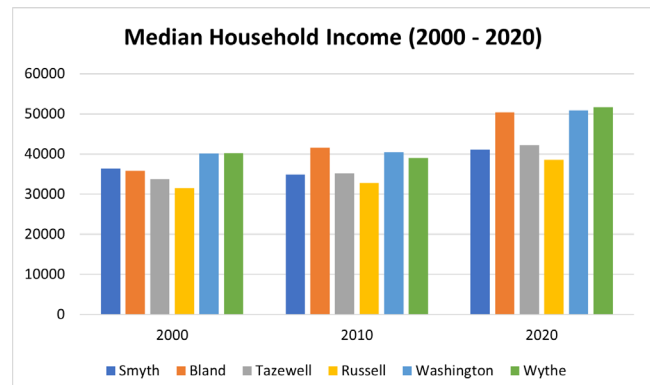
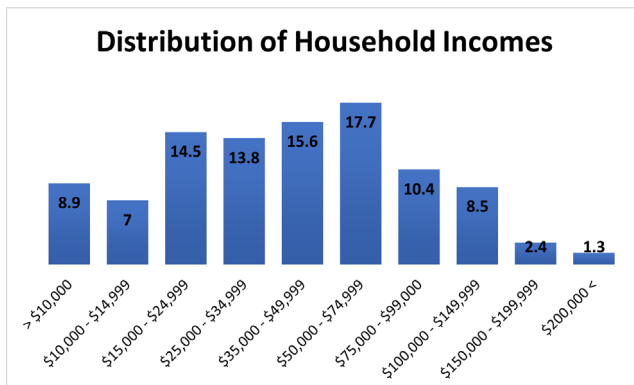


## INCOME

The median household income in Smyth County is \$41,088. Median household incomes in Smyth County are in line with the two counties to the north (Russell and Tazewell) but are considerably lower than those of counties to the east and west (Washington, Bland, and Wythe). That being said, incomes in Smyth County are significantly lower than the median household income in the state (\$76,398). Of those living in the County, roughly 19% (approximately one out of five) find themselves below the poverty line, and 8% of families (approximately one out of ten) in Smyth County live in poverty.



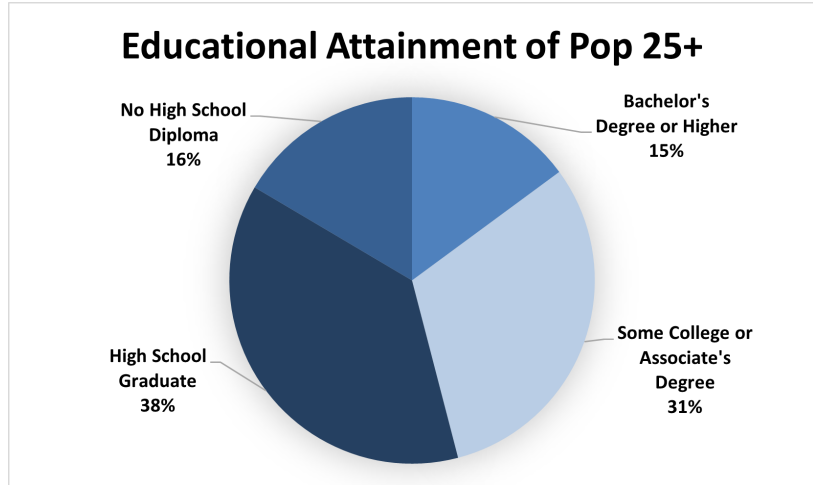
*Median Household Incomes in Smyth County, Surrounding Counties, and Virginia (Source: US Census 2020 ACS 5- Year Estimates)*



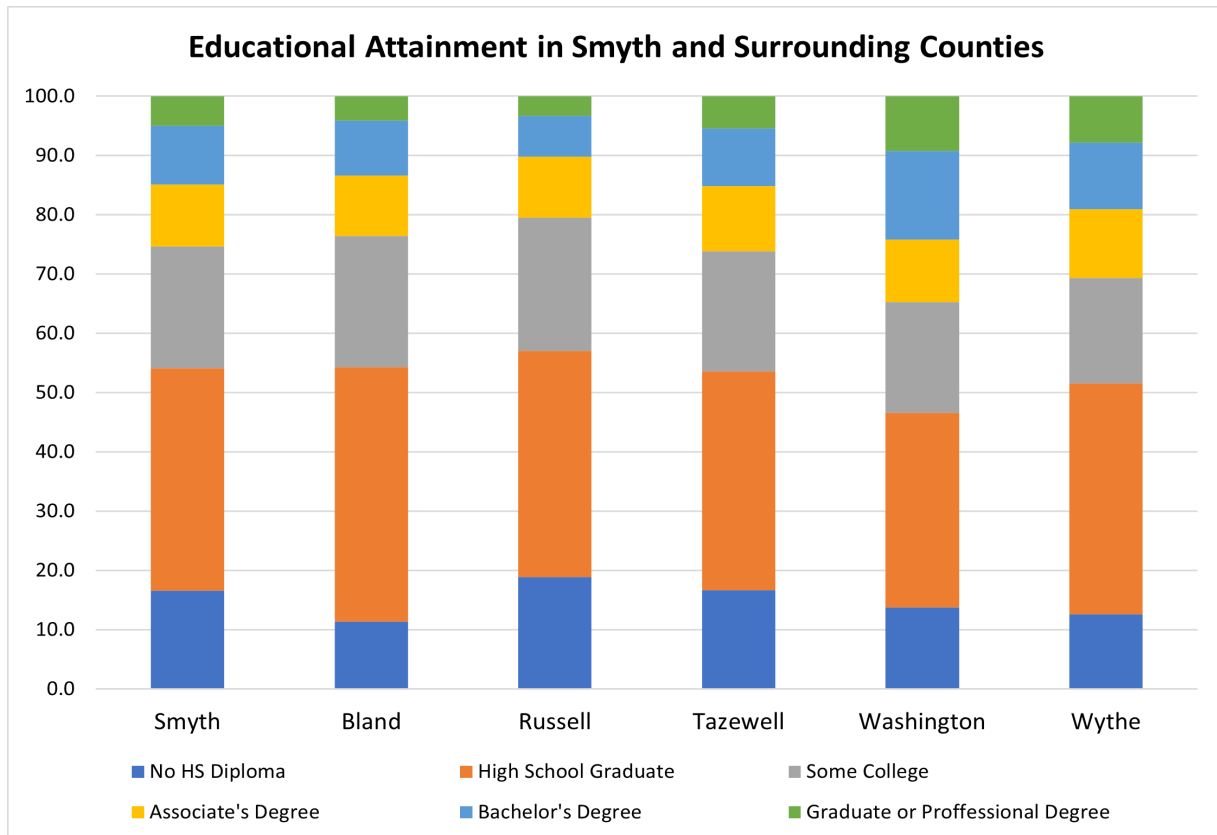
*Distribution of Household Incomes – Left & Median Household Income 2000 to 2020 - Right (Source: US Census 2020 ACS 5- Year Estimates, 2000 to 2020 US Census Bureau)*

## EDUCATION

Of the population aged 25 years or older in Smyth County, 83% have at least a high school diploma, 21% report having attended college but not receiving their degree, 10% report having an associate degree, and 15% report having a bachelor's degree or higher. Among residents younger than 25 (18-24), 14.9% have less than a high school diploma, 46% have at least a high school diploma, 34.3% have some college or an associate degree, and 4.8% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. These numbers are similar to surrounding counties and the state as a whole; however, Smyth does report higher rates of college attendance and graduation than surrounding counties.



*Educational Attainment of Population Age 25 Years or Older in Smyth County  
(Source: US Census 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)*



*Educational Attainment of Population Age 25 Years or Older in Smyth & Surrounding Counties (Source: US Census 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)*

## EMPLOYMENT

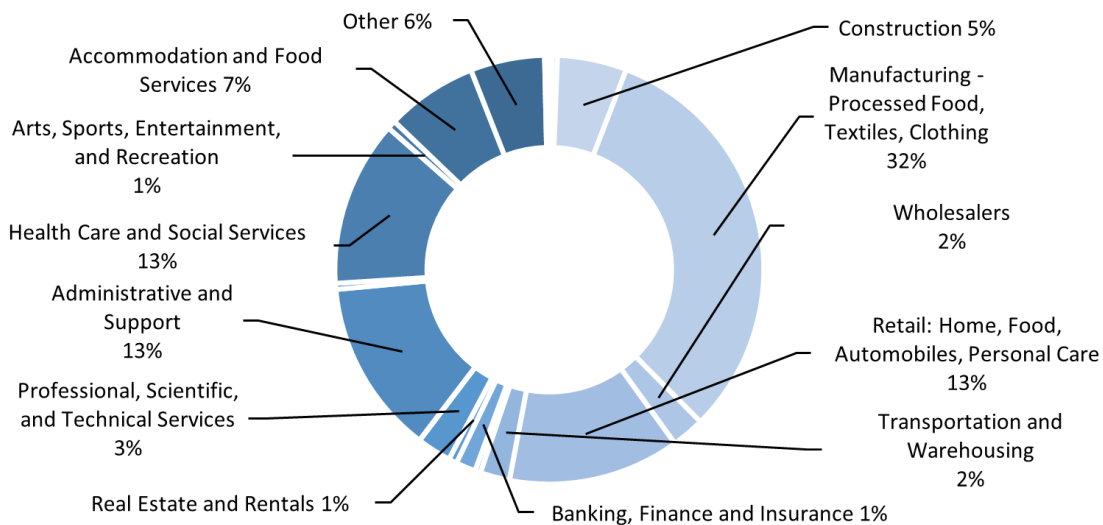
In 2022, approximately 11,465 people were employed in Smyth County. The largest non-farming industries by number of people employed in the County include Production (15% of jobs), Retail Trade (9%), Health Care and Social Assistance (9%) and Transportation (9%). As part of the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture (2017), Smyth County was home to 1,041 producers. Unfortunately, this data represents Smyth as it was six years ago – a new census is currently being conducted – but taken at face value, Agriculture employees are approximately 9% of all those employed in the County.

Major employers in the County include Smyth County School Board, General Dynamics, the Utility Trailer Manufacturing Company, the Southwest Virginia Mental Health Center, and Westlake Management Services.

### Top 10 Employers in Smyth County (2021)

1. Utility Trailer Manufacturing
2. Teleperformance USA
3. Smyth County School Board
4. Southwest Virginia Mental Health Center
5. General Dynamics Advanced Inc.
6. Westlake Management Services
7. Smyth County
8. Marion Correctional Treatment Center
9. Scholle Packaging Inc
10. Ballad Health

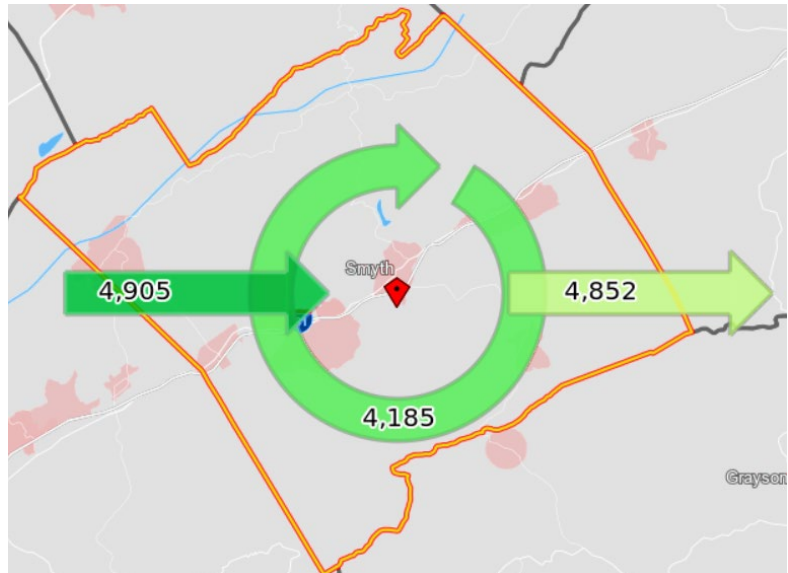
### Employment (Non-Agriculture) by Sectors in Smyth County (2022)



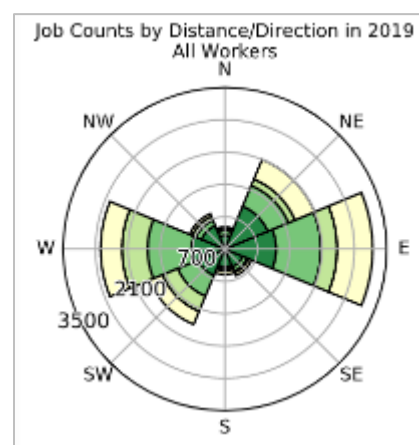
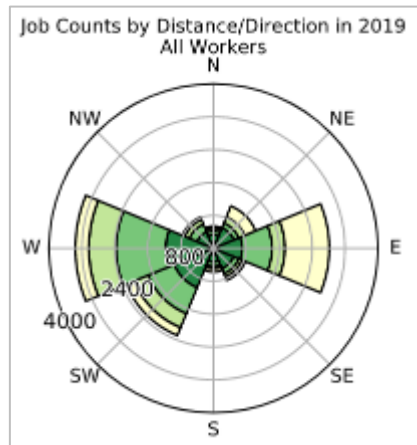
*Employment in Smyth County by Sector, 2022 (Source: Lightcast (Emsi))*

## COMMUTER PATTERNS

Smyth County serves as an employment center in the region but still has a slight net import of jobs, meaning that more people commute into the County for work than commute out. 4,185 workers live and work in Smyth County. 4,905 people commute into Smyth County to work each day, many commuting from Wythe County and Washington County. 4,852 Smyth County residents commute outside of the County each day, many commuting northeast to Wythe County or southwest to Washington County.



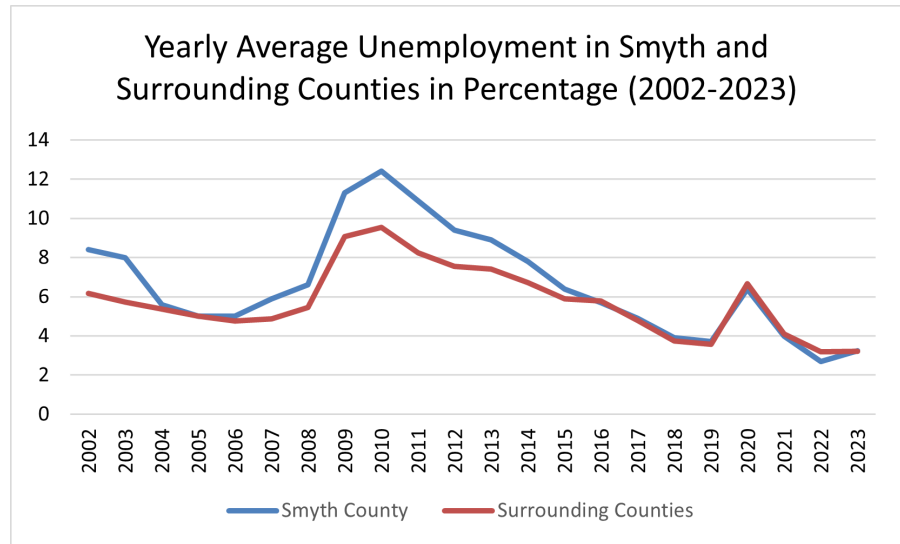
*Inflow and Outflow of Jobs in Smyth County (Source: 2019 US Census)*



*Job County by Distance/Direction Where Workers Live (Left) and Work (Right) (Source: US Census On The Map)*

## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

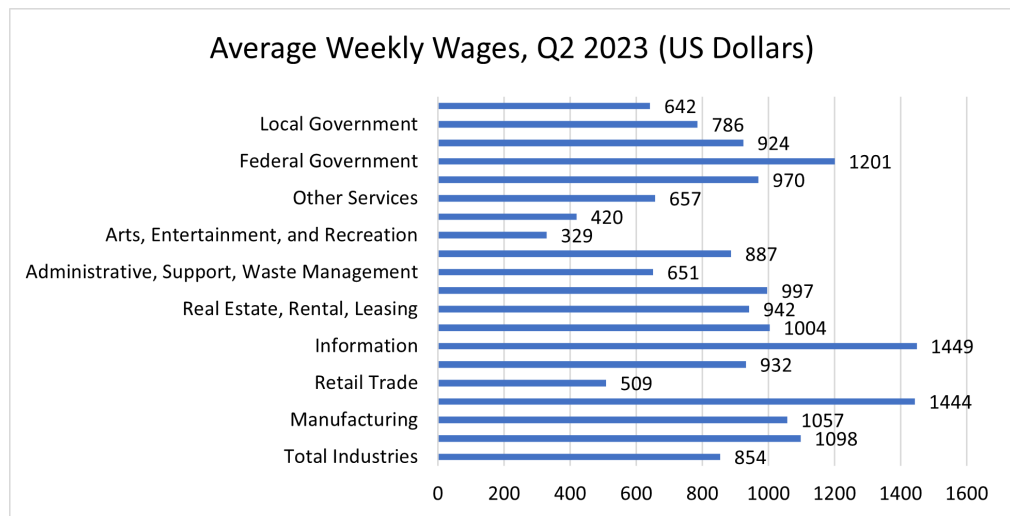
The unemployment rate in Smyth County was 3.6% in September of 2023, slightly higher than the state of Virginia, which reported a statewide unemployment rate of 3.0% in September. Like communities across the nation, unemployment in Smyth County was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the beginning of 2020, Smyth County's unemployment rate was at 4.9%. At the peak of unemployment in the Spring of 2020, unemployment in the County more than doubled to 10.8%. These rates tend to follow the trend across the region, with a peak in unemployment coming in the Spring of 2020 and falling off to pre-pandemic levels in the latter half of 2021 and early 2022.



*Unemployment Rates in Smyth County, Surrounding Counties, and Virginia (Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics)*

## WAGES

Average weekly wages across all industries in Smyth County were equal to \$642, with Virginia reporting nearly double at \$1371. According to the VEC, the largest industry by weekly wages in Smyth County was Information, which includes industries such as



*Average Weekly Wages in Smyth County (Source: Virginia Employment Commission)*

telecommunications, publishing, software development, and movie production. It should be noted that wage data was not available for several industries.

## **IV. Smyth County Today & Tomorrow: Planning Elements**

The planning elements discussed in Chapter 4 are grouped into five categories for organization purposes – People and Community Facilities, Economy, Public Infrastructure, Natural and Historic Resources, and Land Use and Development. Each of the categories discusses relevant topics and provides information on existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities for the future. Potential action projects are discussed for each category to help the County achieve the desired community vision and goals for 2044.

### **4.1 People & Community Facilities**

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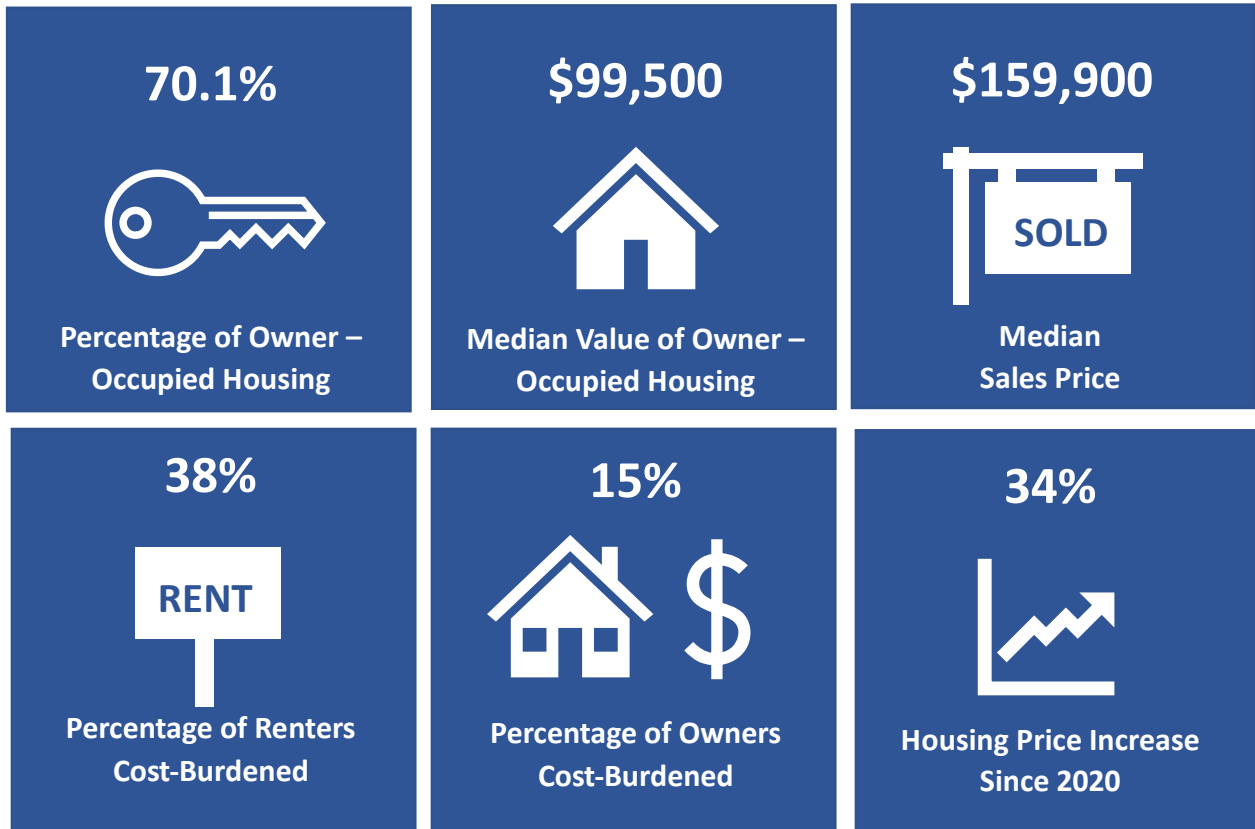
## 4.1.1: Housing



#### 4.1.1 HOUSING

##### HOUSING: EXISTING CONDITIONS

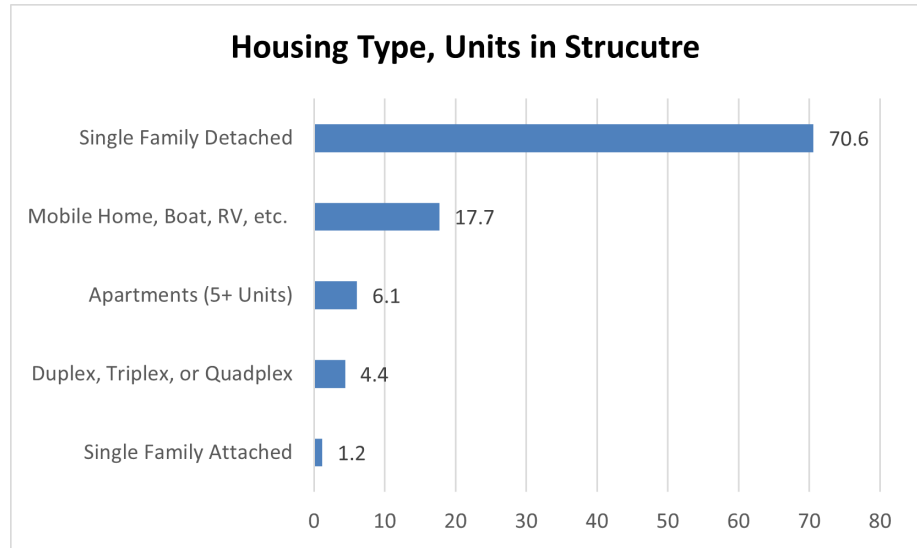
A summary of the housing characteristics for Smyth County (2020) is presented in the graphic below:





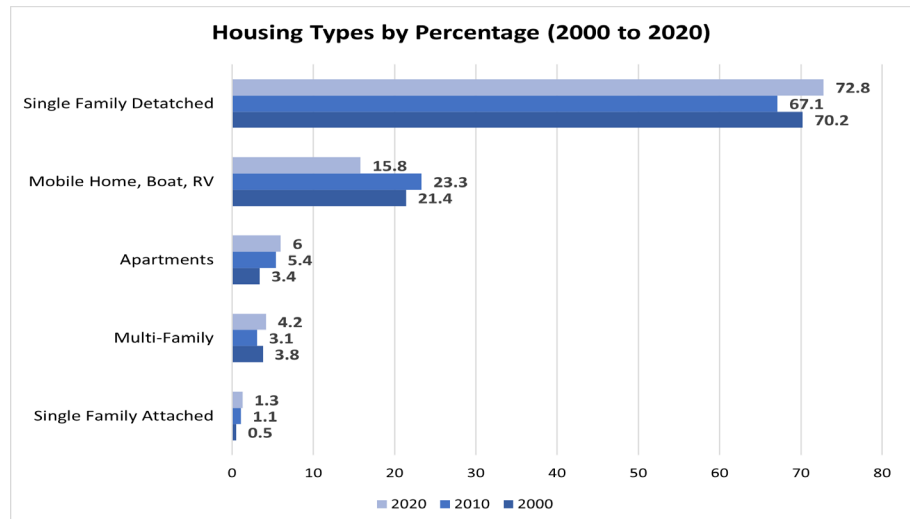
## Housing Type and Tenure

In 2020, Smyth County had a total of 12,694 housing units. The majority of occupied housing in the County is owner-occupied (70%), while 30% is currently renter-occupied, with a majority of these units found in the Town of Marion. Much of the housing stock consists of single-family detached homes (71%), followed by mobile homes (18%) and multi-family homes (10.5%).



*House Types in Smyth County, 2022 (Source: US Census Bureau)*

This trend can be seen historically as well, with the vast majority of citizens reporting they reside in single-family detached homes. According to the Census Bureau, over the previous 20 years, the percentage of households that reside in single-family detached homes has remained within about 5%, declining to 67% in 2010 and rising to ~73% in 2020.



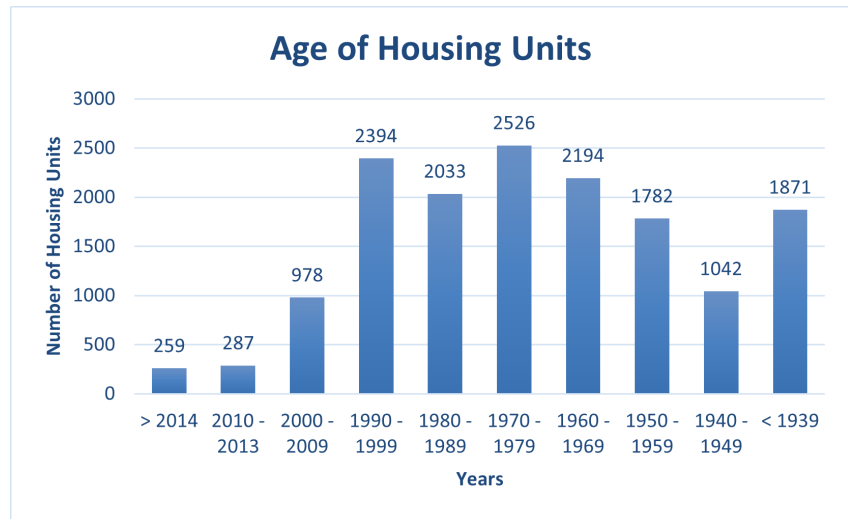
*House Types in Smyth County Between 2000 and 2020 (Source: US Census Bureau)*

This indicates a strong preference for this housing type in general, but it may also be indicative of housing stock in the County being overrepresented by single-family housing units. It is also important to note declines in the number of individuals that reside in mobile homes, down from 21.4% in 2000 to 15.8% in 2020, and the increase in those living in apartments, multi-family units, and single-family attached homes. This likely points to a preference shift within the County, away from mobile homes and towards higher-density living arrangements.

## Age of Housing

Housing stock in Smyth County is aging, with 54% of all housing being 50 years or older. This, paired with the fact that only 25% of all housing in the County has been constructed since 1990 and only 4% has been constructed since 2010, paints the picture of a County with either a lack of demand for new housing or a lack of an economic base to support the widespread construction of new housing. On the other hand, this simultaneously

highlights the quality of construction among the older homes in the County. Within sizable portions of the County's housing stock being constructed prior to WW2, the County offers ample opportunities to purchase or refurbish historic homes that possess character that cannot be replicated.

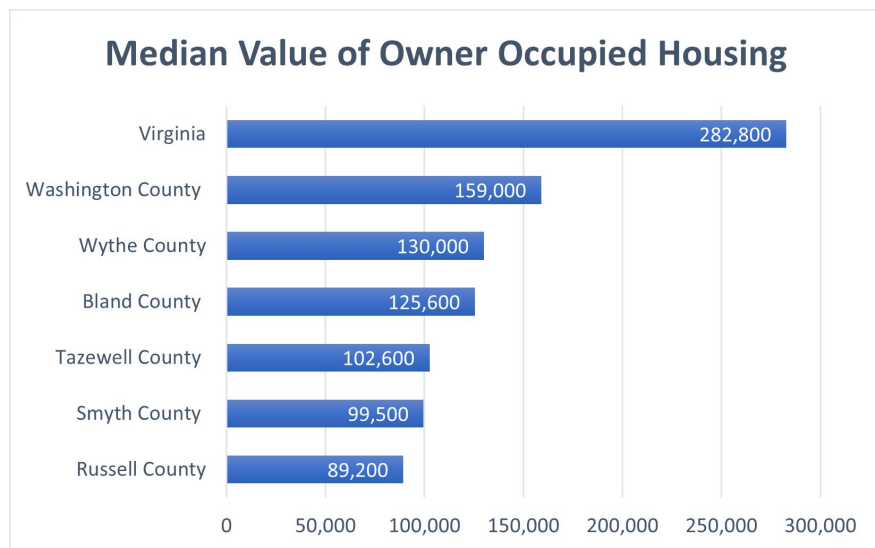


*Distribution of Housing Unit Ages in Smyth County (Source: US Census Bureau 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)*

## Housing Values

The median value of owner-occupied housing (the value at which the house was appraised) in Smyth County is \$99,500, which is comparable to counties to the north (Russell and Tazewell) but is considerably lower than counties to the east and west. Housing values and housing sales prices have increased steadily since 2012, with a recent increase in Southwest Virginia due to the COVID-19

Pandemic. This data highlights the fact that houses in Smyth County are valued lower than those in neighboring counties; however, this same data shows that home buyers have the ability to buy a comparable home in Smyth County for less than if they decided to purchase a home in a neighboring County.



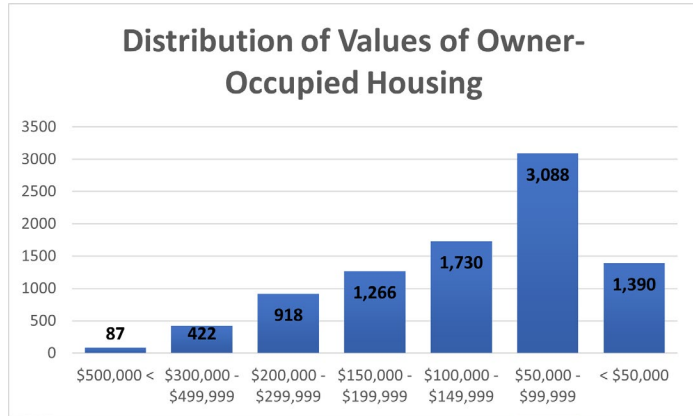
*Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing in Smyth and Surrounding Counties, and Virginia (Source: US Census 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)*

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

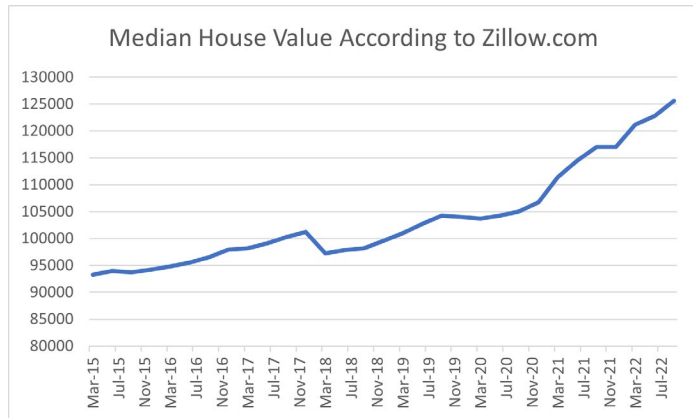
According to Virginia Realtors, the median sales price (the price at which a house is sold) in Smyth County at the beginning of 2022 was \$159,900. As housing values rise, housing affordability becomes a growing concern. In Smyth County, roughly 38% of renters and 15% of homeowners are cost-burdened, meaning these individuals spend more than 30% of their household's income on housing. This suggests a high need for affordable rentals.

Among homes in Smyth County, roughly 50% are valued at less than \$100,000, with only 16% being valued at more than \$200,000. The largest category of home values is between \$50,000 and \$99,000 at 34.7%.

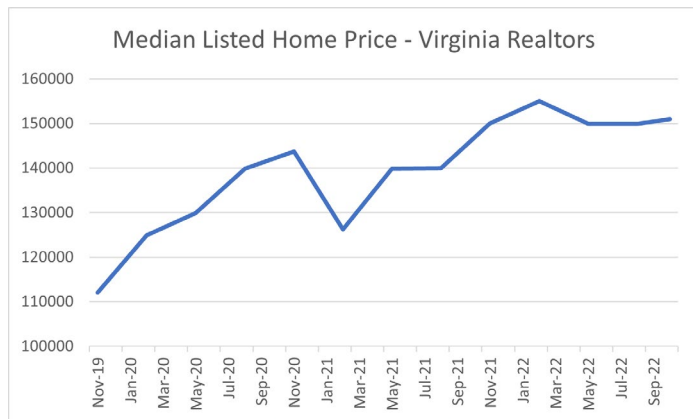
While housing values in Smyth County are lower than many of the surrounding counties, housing values have been rising consistently over the last ten years with an exceptionally sharp increase over the previous two years. This is largely due to the housing market rally following the economic downturn associated with Covid-19, with many sellers in Smyth County having benefited from increased housing values. On the other hand, this has impacted the buyers' market in Smyth County equally by increasing housing prices by nearly 22% in just two years. According to data provided by Virginia Realtors, median home listing prices have risen slowly over the last three years, with the median listing price coming in at \$112,000 in December of 2019 and rising to \$151,000 in October of 2022. In the same period, Zillow.com reports slightly more conservative numbers in regard to house value increases (Virginia Realtors, 34%, Zillow, 21%). These numbers likely need to be taken with a grain of salt due to the inflated housing market in which homes are selling for more than their asking price. However, this does show that housing prices are on the rise post-Covid.



**Distribution of Values of Owner-Occupied Housing in Smyth County (Source: US Census 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)**



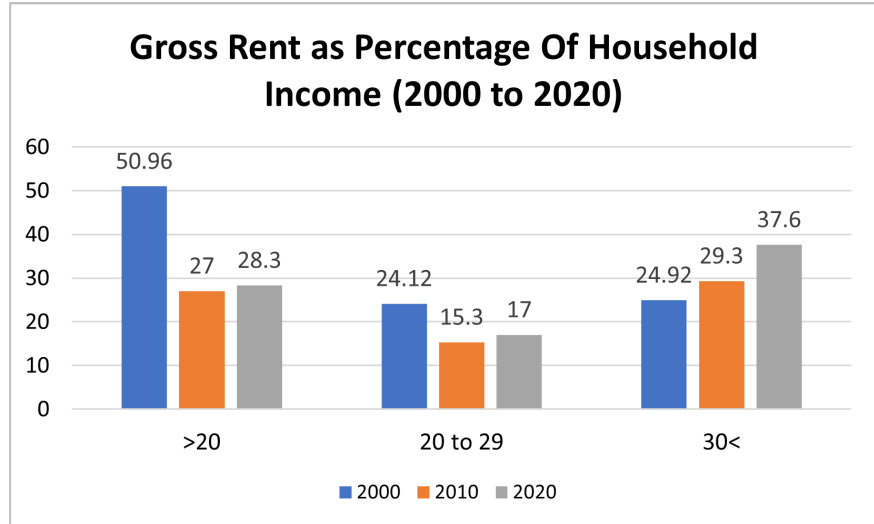
**Median Home Values in Smyth County (Source: Zillow.com)**



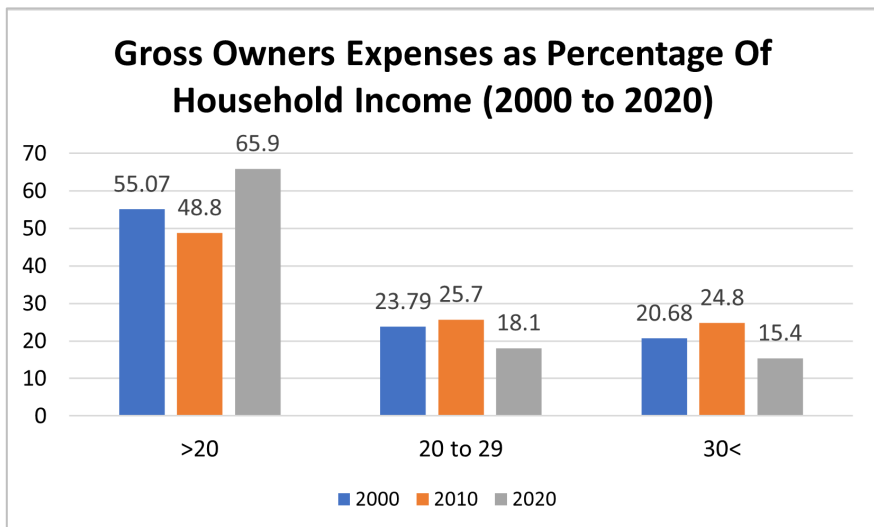
**Median Listed Home Price in Smyth County (Source: Virginia Realtors)**

## Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is another important factor in compiling a complete image of the current housing conditions across the County. Although the majority (seven out of ten) households own their home, there is a significant portion (three out of ten) that rent. Regarding housing affordability, a rent or mortgage is typically considered affordable if the amount paid is less than 30% of a household's total income. Any more than 30% and those individuals are considered "cost-burdened." In 2020, among those who rented their residence, roughly 38% were considered cost-burdened. Looking at historical data, the percentage of cost-burdened renters in the County is on the rise, with the number of cost-burdened renters increasing roughly 13% over the last 20 years. On the other hand, among those who own their home, the percentage of residents who are cost-burdened has decreased over the last 20 years, declining from 20.7% in 2000 to 15.4% in 2020.



*Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in Smyth County (Source: US Census 2000 to 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)*



*Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in Smyth County (Source: US Census 2000 to 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates)*

Taken together, this signals that renters in the County are likely being priced out of the market. This may be due to limited rental opportunities and corresponding rent hikes or the fact that household incomes are not keeping pace with housing costs, but nevertheless, this data illustrates the need for more affordable and abundant multifamily housing (apartments, townhouses, etc.). On the other hand, this data shows that the County's homeowners' economic situation has improved in the last 20 years, with sizable declines in homeowners being cost-burdened in the last two decades.



**Variety of Housing Types:**



*Examples of Manufactured Homes (Left) and Apartment Style Housing (Right) in western Smyth County*



*Examples of Single-Family Homes (Left) and Duplex Style Housing (Right) in eastern Smyth County*



*Example of Housing Over a Former Storefront in central Smyth County*



## HOUSING: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Smyth County faces many challenges when it comes to housing, both currently and potentially in the future. Based on survey results and conversations with community stakeholders, it is clear that the County's housing stock is aged and lacks diversity, with the majority of housing consisting of single-family homes. There is new home construction happening in Smyth County, but the extent is very limited and has decreased sharply over the previous 10 to 20 years. These issues are compounded by increasing housing and rental prices, stagnant wages, and a lack of rental opportunities. The result is an environment that may not be attractive to younger professionals, individuals being transferred into the County for work, and families looking to remain in the County or relocate. With the growth of neighboring communities such as Bristol and Wytheville, it is likely that the current demand for affordable and diverse housing will continue to grow. However, the housing challenges facing Smyth County can begin to be remedied through the creation of affordable, diverse housing that caters not only to younger individuals and families but to the County's older population that may be looking to downsize or move into a residence that is closer to town. The following are potential avenues for addressing housing moving forward:

***Diversify Housing Types and Costs*** – Moving forward, efforts should be made to ensure a variety of housing types and prices to meet the needs of those currently living and those looking to relocate to Smyth County. According to the community survey and focus groups, lack of housing choice and affordability has become a hindrance for people looking to remain in the County long term or relocate. Sizable portions of respondents to the community survey noted interest in expanding housing opportunities such as townhomes, condominiums, apartments, and housing targeted toward seniors. Not only could these types of housing improve a lack of housing, but they will also help diversify housing prices, which will help all socio-economic strata attain home ownership. Efforts should be made to increase housing in areas of the County that are compatible with the housing type in question. In particular, areas of Saltville, Chilhowie, Marion, and Atkins are potential centers for new development or redevelopment.

***Focus New Development & Redevelopment in Populated Areas*** – In order to maintain the small town feel and rural way of life that Smyth County is known for, it is important to reduce the sprawl of residential development into more rural portions of the County. In order to do so, residential development should be limited primarily to population centers along the 81 corridor (Marion, Chilhowie, Atkins) and Saltville. These areas also benefit from easy access to public utilities (roads, water, sewer, power), which will make development or redevelopment more compatible with infrastructure expansion.

***Increase Access to High Quality Rental Opportunities*** – With the creation of the Emory & Henry School of Health Science in 2014, the demand for rental properties in Smyth County has increased dramatically. As of 2023, there continues to be a demand for high-quality rental properties, much of which has not been capitalized upon. A lack of high-quality rental opportunities presents a challenge to students looking to relocate to the County, job seekers, those looking for short-term rentals before purchasing a home, or those who cannot afford a traditional single-family home. Therefore, it is important to bolster the County's supply to capitalize and retain those who are looking to rent. New development is a method for expanding rental opportunities through the creation of apartments, condominiums, or townhomes, but just as effective is the rehabilitation of existing homes, existing buildings, or storefronts to provide rental opportunities.

***Revitalization & Redevelopment*** – With an aging housing stock, it is likely that vintage and historic homes, those built before 1980, need updating. This presents the opportunity to upgrade the County’s existing older housing stock. Paired with the County’s low cost of living and high quality of life, the revitalization of the County’s older homes, particularly those in towns, has the potential to entice home buyers to relocate to the County. Redevelopment is another important tool in fostering a stronger housing market. Although likely geared towards rental properties, the redevelopment of existing homes, storefronts, and buildings presents the opportunity to increase the stock of high-quality housing.

***Develop Senior Housing*** – As the County continues to age, it is important to consider the needs of this important group. Paired with the increased desire for individuals to retire to communities with a slower pace of life, high quality of life, and low cost of living, Smyth County has the potential to recruit retirees, both locally and from outside of the County. Assisted Living Communities are one method for meeting this need and allow senior citizens to maintain their freedom and move from one type of accommodation to another as they age. Another method is the construction of housing that allows individuals to age in place. This reduces the need for new construction in the future, allows individuals to remain in their original homes, and improves accessibility within one’s home.

***Facilitate Affordable Single-Family Housing*** – As noted in the survey, single-family homes were the preferred housing type among those who responded. This demand presents a challenge, especially in the economic and housing climate in 2023. In 2020, the average household income for residents of Smyth County was roughly \$41,000; in 2022, the average cost for a single-family home in the County was roughly \$159,000. Taking closing costs into consideration, this constitutes a mortgage of roughly \$1,100, which causes the average citizen to be considered cost burdened if they were to purchase a home. This highlights the need for greater affordability when it comes to housing in general but also points to those outside of the County purchasing homes. According to focus group meetings, the optimal housing price for new single-family housing should fall between \$200,000 and \$300,000. Efforts should be taken to ensure that new single-family housing meets both the needs of current residents and those seeking to relocate to the County. The development of a detailed housing strategy moving forward, as well as engaging strategic partners (contractors, financial entities, town and County governments, and regional entities), has the potential to strengthen the local housing market and help home buyers achieve home ownership. Grow Smyth County is a recent program that seeks to address this gap through the use of 1% interest loans for builders to construct homes.

## What is a Planned Unit Development?

A planned unit development (PUD) is an intentionally designed community of houses and supportive amenities. These housing developments are not subject to standard zoning requirements but instead work with the local government to develop criteria that will determine common areas, private areas, and design guidelines. PUDs are often a result of a collaborative partnership between local governments and developers.

Housing types in a PUD may include single-family homes, condos, townhomes, etc. These developments may also include grocery stores, restaurants, office spaces, and more. PUDs also offer the opportunity to get relief from strict lot size minimums often found in rural communities.

Traditionally, residential structures and land are owned by the homeowner. Homeowners are required to belong to a homeowner's association (HOA). The HOA owns and maintains shared amenities such as parks, swimming pools, etc. Residents of a PUD can walk, bike, or drive a short distance to utilize these amenities which is an added benefit.

Examples of successful PUD ordinances include:

- City of Ellensburg, Washington
- Port of Dubuque, Iowa
- Habersham development in Beaufort



*Rowhome development in Wilsonville, Oregon*



*Housing development in Vickery, Georgia*



*Shared green space surrounded by residential units – Daybreak, Utah*





## 4.1.2: Education

## 4.1.2 EDUCATION

### EDUCATION: EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### Smyth County Public Schools

As with many local school districts, Smyth County Public Schools have invested in improving their educational offerings, learning environments, and teachers. For the 2020-2021 school years, the Virginia Department of Education reported that Smyth County Public Schools spent a total of \$11,263 per pupil, with the majority of these funds coming from local and state sources. Of the \$11,263, roughly 22% of costs were contributed locally, with 67% being contributed by the state government. The localities' contribution per pupil is far lower than the state average of 47%. Due to the County's declining population, no school in the County is over capacity, and demand for expansion is low; however, efforts have been made to improve facilities at all schools throughout the County.

As of 2023, Smyth County Public Schools were home to seven elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, and one career and technology center. All schools are located at separate campuses except for Chilhowie High and Middle School, which share a building. All schools in the County are fully accredited by the State of Virginia. With student to teacher ratios of 11.27:1 for K-7 and 10.58:1 for 8-12, teaching ratios are lower than the state average of 14:1 for K-7 and 15:1 for 8-12. In addition to traditional education, Smyth County offers advanced studies to students at the Southwest Virginia Governor's School (Pulaski – 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades), A. Linwood Holton Governors School (Online), as well as dual enrollment credits at Virginia Highlands Community College (Abingdon) and Wytheville Community College (Wytheville). Smyth County also offers students who wish to pursue a vocation the ability to receive training at the Smyth Career & Technology Center, with many students receiving certifications as well as a high school diploma at their graduation.

As a tool for guiding future development of school facilities and offerings, the **2022-2028 Smyth County Public Schools Comprehensive Plan** offers a road map for the next five years. This comprehensive plan sets a series of goals for the school district that falls into 1 of 5 categories: Instructional, Staff Development, Parental and Community Involvement, Safety and Citizenship, and Technology. The following are a few of the many goals the County has set for itself:

- **Instructional**
  - Address instructional gaps and deficiencies caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Implement "Science of Reading" research to support reading development.
  - Develop strategies for each school to improve SOL scores.
- **Staff Development**
  - Provide professional development to identify and address instructional gaps due to the COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Incorporate the 5 Cs into curriculum and instruction for virtual and in-person learning (Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Citizenship Skills)
  - Evaluate teacher shortage areas to strategize ways to recruit and retain highly qualified candidates.
- **Parent and Community Involvement**

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

- Continue to collaborate with local community agencies to provide needed services for at-risk students.
- Continue to gather parental and community input through advisory boards.
- Continue with partnerships to expand healthcare and mental support services.
- **Safety and Citizenship**
  - Continue to work with local law enforcement and other relevant agencies to update and revise (as needed) each school's Crisis, Emergency Management and Medical Emergency Response Plan
  - Use school safety audits to make school security improvements.
- **Technology**
  - Improve display, instructional hardware, and other technology in each classroom.
  - Provide students with network-capable devices and provide educational content that is technology related.
  - Ensure the safety of all personal information and hardware through periodical updates and replacement of outdated hardware.

Educational Facility	Relevant Information, 2022-2023
Atkins Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 187
Chilhowie Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 543
Chilhowie High School	Grades Served: 9-12 Enrollment: 393
Chilhowie Middle School	Grades Served: 6-8 Enrollment: 307
Marion Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 307
Marion Middle School	Grades Served: 6-8 Enrollment: 431
Marion Senior High School	Grades Served: 9-12 Enrollment: 639
Northwood High School	Grades Served: 9-12 Enrollment: 240
Northwood Middle	Grades Served: 6-8 Enrollment: 151
Oak Point Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 359
Rich Valley Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 130
Saltville Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 195
Smyth Career & Technology Center	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 250
Sugar Grove Elementary School	Grades Served: PK – 5 Enrollment: 101

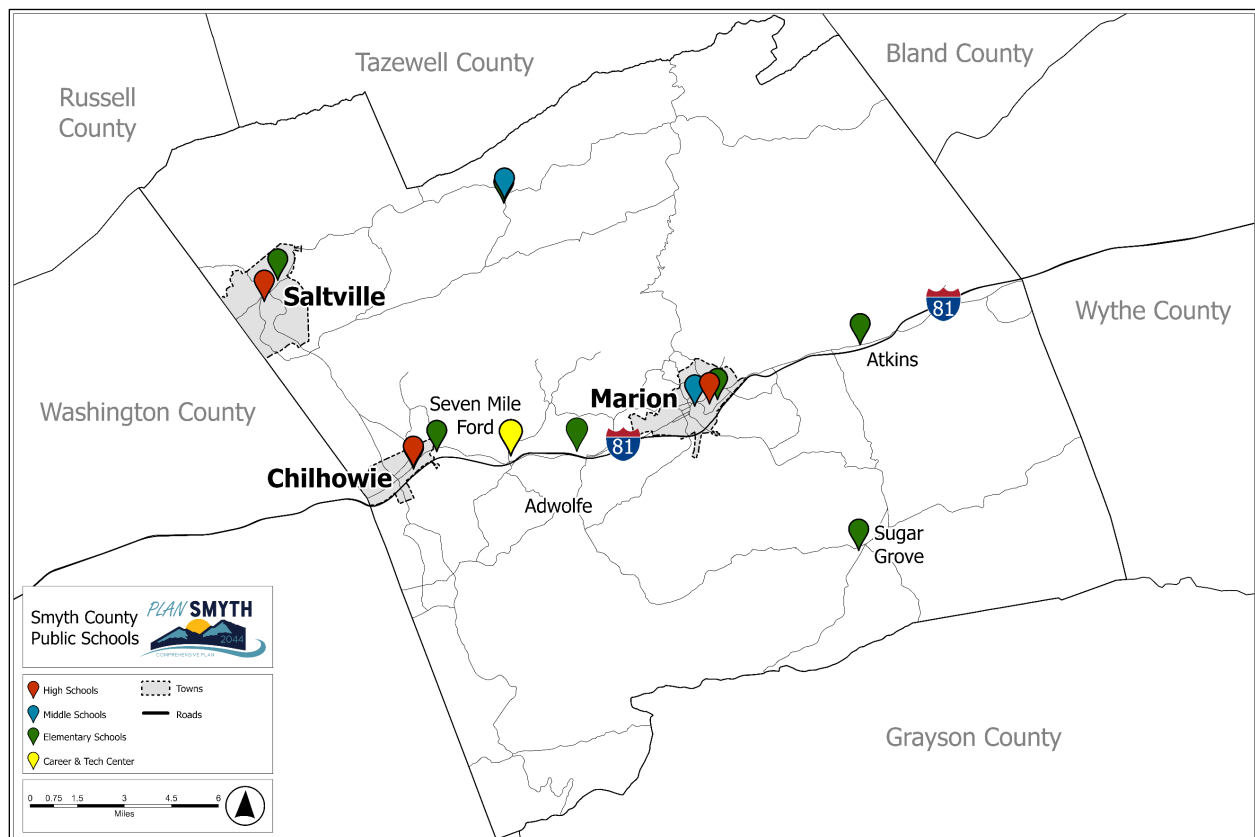


## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

According to the Virginia Department of Education, for the 2021-2022 school year, there were a total of 191 K-12 students who were homeschooled. The largest age group that is educated through homeschooling are children between kindergarten and 5<sup>th</sup> grade (39.2%).

In addition to traditional K-12 that capstones with a high school diploma, citizens of Smyth also have access to General Education Development (GED) classes and testing. The largest provider of vocational and GED training in the region is the Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program. This program provides GED and NEDP (National External Diploma Program) training to many counties in southwest Virginia, Smyth included. Similar services are provided directly through Smyth County's public schools at the Smyth Career and Technology Center and local community colleges, Wytheville Community College and Virginia Highlands Community College.

The following map depicts the location of public schools in Smyth County. Red pins represent the County's High Schools, blue pins represent Middle Schools, green pins represent Elementary Schools, and the single yellow pin represents the Smyth County Career and Technology Center.





### Higher Education

Although there are no main campuses of any 4-Year higher education institution located in Smyth County, there are satellite campuses of Emory and Henry College, and Wytheville Community College located in Marion. The E&H Health Science Campus offers graduate level education to those looking to pursue a career in the medical field; while WCC offers a broad range of classes at the Henderson School and technical focused courses at WCC-WEST, WCC's workforce education skills training center. Beyond these campuses, there are numerous institutions of higher education located in close proximity to Smyth County. In fact, Marion is located between two community colleges, Wytheville Community College, and Virginia Highlands Community College. The first of these two community colleges is located in Wytheville and offers two-year programs and technical certificates with a typical enrollment of 3,350 students per year. The second of these community colleges is located in Abingdon and offers similar programs; however, VHCC has a smaller student body with a typical enrollment of 2000 students per year. With regard to educational programs, both community colleges offer similar programs. Offerings are as follows:



*Emory & Henry College's School of Health Science Campus (2023)*

- **Wytheville Community College**

- WCC offers first and second year transfer program courses in arts and sciences that transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The transfer curriculums take advantage of the VCCS guaranteed transfer agreements and are offered in 16 program areas.
- Degrees and Certificates in Career and Technical programs include Administration of Justice, Administrative Support Technology, Business Management and Leadership, Clerical Studies, Construction Technology (Electrical Trades, HVAC, Plumbing, Carpentry, Welding, and Alternative Energy), Correction Science, Cybersecurity, Dental Hygiene, Advanced Manufacturing/Machine Technology, and Allied Health Occupations (Nursing RN/LPN, Physical Therapy, Veterinarian, Pharmacy Technician).
- In addition, WCC offers short-term workforce training courses with accompanying industry credentialing that can be completed in 15 weeks or less. These include GMAW/GTAW/SMAW welding, CDL Truck Driving, Lineman Power Line Worker, and Underground Power Programs. Workforce Programs targeted for the new Marion facility for Fall 2023 include Kubota Off-Road Diesel Repair, ASE Auto Service Technology, and AWS/NC3 Credentialed Welding. Incumbent and new hire customized training is offered for industry partners in Smyth County and can include welding qualification and training, front-line supervisor training, OSHA safety compliance, and more.

- **Virginia Highlands Community College**

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

- VHCC offers degrees in 6 areas of study, including **Information Technology** (cyber security, web, and application development, etc.), **Industrial Technology** (Engineering, Energy, Machining, Industrial Electricity, etc.), **Healthcare** (EMS, Nursing, Pre-Pharmacy, etc.), **Public Service** (Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Development, Education, etc.), **Agriculture & Natural Resources** (Horticulture Production), and **Business**.
- VHCC also offers short-term training courses in the following areas: certified billing and coding specialist, CDL, CPR, EPA 608, Excel, Certified Nursing Aid, OSHA Safety, Phlebotomy, Photovoltaic, Production Assistant, Remote Airman Pilot, ServSafe, Six Sigma, and Tradesmen Renewal.
- For qualified students from both community colleges, more than 30 state and private colleges across the commonwealth offer guaranteed admission. Local colleges included are Radford University, Virginia Tech, Emory & Henry College, Ferrum College, and Hollins University.

In addition to the local community colleges, there are other 4-year institutions of higher education within a short drive of Smyth County. These include Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Montgomery County – Blacksburg), Radford University (City of Radford), Emory & Henry College (Washington County), Bluefield University (Tazewell County – Bluefield), Bluefield State University (Mercer County, WV – Bluefield), Concord University (Mercer County, WV – Athens) and East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN.

### Smyth County Promise

The Smyth County Promise Program, beginning in 2023, serves as a powerful tool in providing higher education and career training opportunities to the County's students. Smyth Promise allows students from public, private, and home schools in the County to attend either Virginia Highlands or Wytheville Community Colleges in order to attain an associate degree, technical certificate, or credits that can be transferred on to a four-year institution. Funds from this program cover a student's first year of education with the second year being funded if the student maintains a 2.0 GPA. All in all, students are covered for 5 or 6 consecutive semesters after the student completes high school. In exchange for receiving this scholarship, recipients must complete 10 hours of community service per semester from agencies and organizations approved by Smyth County and the Smyth County Community Foundation.

### Special Education and Childcare Facilities

Across Smyth County, there are a total of 12 childcare facilities registered with the Virginia Department of Social Services. Among these 12, eight are licensed and four are not. Many of these facilities are associated with a church and are located within Smyth County's three towns (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville). Head Start, a federally funded preschool program, operates 3 Head Start facilities in Atkins, Chilhowie, and Saltville.

There is little in the way of special education programs within Smyth County beyond the services provided to these children through the public schools. Regionally, there is a school that caters to children with special needs in Wytheville that is operated by the Cooperative Centers for Exceptional Children.

### Environmental & Hands-On Learning Facilities

With its location in the heart of Appalachia, Smyth County offers a wealth of environmental and hands-on learning opportunities for the County and region's students. Among those on offer, Hungry Mother State

## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

Park (north of Marion) and the Blue Ridge Discovery Center (Konnarock) stand out as examples of where location, learning, and fun have been melded to create valuable learning opportunities. Hungry Mother State Park offers programming ranging from guided hikes, canoe trips, nature talks, and live interactions with native Virginia animals. With renovations to their center completed in 2021, Hungry Mother State Park is an asset that will continue to provide Smyth County's children, as well as adults, a better understanding of the plants and animals that call this part of Appalachia home and our role in protecting their habitats. Along with Hungry Mother, the Blue Ridge Discovery Center plays an important role in engaging children, parents, and researchers with the natural beauty and environment of Southwest Virginia. Located at the foot of Mount Rogers, the BRDS offers students the opportunity to get hands-on experience in learning about plants and animals, with the goal of creating an existing learning environment that sparks a love of the outdoors and drive to conserve what makes our region unique. Both resources are invaluable to local and regional school districts and should continue to be supported in order to ensure Smyth County students are able to safely learn about and experience the Great Outdoors all within Smyth County.

### ***Hungry Mother State Park's – Discovery Center***



***Native Plant & Animal  
Display (Top Left), The Park's  
Snapping Turtle (Top Right),  
Exterior of the Discovery  
Center (Bottom)***

### ***Blue Ridge Discovery Center***





### **The Henderson School**

A unique asset to Smyth County's educational offerings is the Henderson School. Located in the historic 1908 Schoolhouse in downtown Marion. The Henderson School, officially known as the Wayne C. Henderson School of Appalachian Arts, is a center where citizens can come, take classes, and expand their artistic and cultural horizons. Currently, the Henderson offers classes in watercolor, painting, quilting, woodworking, pottery, letter pressing, bookbinding, instrument construction, and instrument instruction. The Henderson is also home to numerous studio spaces, an 80-person event venue, as well as "The



*The East Strother Street Façade of The Henderson School*

Summit Center for Higher Education", a partnership with Wytheville Community College to offer classes and distance learning to the citizens of Smyth and Wythe Counties. Certainly, the Henderson School is a valuable asset to the County's artistic and cultural scene that must be supported and highlighted moving forward to promote Marion and Smyth County as a Mecca for experiencing and learning Appalachian culture and artistic tradition.

## **EDUCATION: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Education is a powerful tool in elevating the youth, middle aged, and elderly citizens of Smyth County into better, longer-lived, and more fulfilling lifestyles. Currently, educational opportunities in Smyth County are well rounded, well-funded, and strive to ensure all those who wish to learn are able to. Public schools lie at the heart of this effort, providing educational opportunities for children from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the opportunity to explore their interests and develop into well rounded individuals who are equipped for careers in the technical, industrial, medical, and service sectors and continuing education at local and regional colleges. Post-secondary education is also well provided with investments by Virginia Highlands and Wytheville Community College in bolstering career readiness and providing a jumping off point for further education at 4-year institutions, as well as the development of graduate-level educational opportunities by Emory and Henry College to address the local and regional need for medical professions. In summary, Smyth County provides a well-rounded and high-quality educational environment to benefit its citizens; however, there is a popular interest in making it even better. Efforts to improve all types of education and extend these opportunities to those who have lacked access in the past are certainly needed and should be addressed moving forward. The following are potential methods for addressing current educational challenges and capitalizing on educational opportunities:

***Continue to Invest in Smyth County's Public Schools*** – As the primary source of education for the County's youth, it is vital to ensure the County's public schools are well-funded, well-supplied, well-staffed, and are

## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

able to meet the shifting needs of their students over the next 10 to 20 years. With ever-quicken technological advances, investments in technological security, instructional technology, and personal devices (laptops, iPads, etc.) will be needed periodically to broaden educational opportunities. Through greater tax expenditures set aside for public education, the County's public schools will be able to better meet the needs of their students, improve salary and benefits for teachers, administrators, and support staff, and invest in brick and mortar to ensure the longevity of their buildings. Professional development for faculty and staff is essential in ensuring well trained employees who are better equipped to meet the educational needs of Smyth County's students, such as the desire for increased dual-enrollment courses and career / technical training classes. Partnerships with local four-year institutions and community colleges will be essential for training, certification, and continuing education.

***Advocate for Increased Funding*** – Members of the community, as well as local school board officials, should lobby for greater funding allocation to ensure equitable resources are provided to support instructional, technical, and physical improvements to the County's schools. Increased County, state, and federal funding presents a considerable opportunity to improve educational outcomes for all students in the County.

***Consider the Expansion of the Career and Technical Center*** – With the popularity and success of Smyth County's Career and Technical Center, efforts to expand their offering and/or physical footprint should likely be considered. This was noted as a primary opportunity to expand access to "good paying" jobs in the County as well as support the County's growing industrial sector.

***Continue to Develop Partnerships*** – Currently, Smyth County Public Schools have a robust relationship with both Virginia Highlands and Wytheville Community Colleges to support technical training and college pathways programs such as Dual-Enrollment. These partnerships should continue into the future in order to both strengthen enrollment at these institutions and provide career pathways for the County's students. Similar partnerships have been made with Emory and Henry to provide medical-based educational opportunities available to County students, and likewise, should be continued and strengthened.

***Assist in the Expansion of Current Educational Facilities*** – An issue presented in focus groups was the lack of available space for local community colleges to expand their offerings inside the County. Although facilities such as the Henderson School offer excellent space for artistic and cultural education programs, it lacks the facilities to support technical programs such as welding, automotive, or diesel mechanic classes, all of which were noted as being needed by local businesses. There are plans to renovate existing buildings within Marion to facilitate expanded programming (in the case of Wytheville Community College); however, it may be pertinent to take greater action moving forward on renovating unused buildings to meet this need.

***Support Stairstep Education Opportunities*** – The LAB school presents an important opportunity for Smyth County to increase the number of nurses, doctors, and mental health professionals beginning at the high school level. In conjunction with Virginia Highlands, Wytheville Community College, and Emory & Henry, the LAB school serves as a model initiative for "growing our own" and could be expanded to include other sectors such as business, technology, engineering, or advanced manufacturing.

***Conduct Full Childcare Study for Smyth County*** – A primary concern for Smyth County is the lack of early childhood intervention programs and education-based pre-schools. Although the County does offer pre-kindergarten for the County's residents, the number of seats is smaller than the number of children,

resulting in roughly 200 children per year having to fund educationally based childcare elsewhere. In some cases, this leads to children not receiving developmentally vital education and interactions that lead to cognitive, developmental, and linguistic delays. The result is a sizeable number of children who enter the public school system ill-prepared. This issue presents a clear present and future challenge to the County if left unaddressed. The first step in addressing this challenge is to determine the County's shortfalls and how they can be addressed. To determine the lack of educational readiness, availability of childcare options, and methods for addressing any potential shortfalls, a childcare study could provide County leaders with the information and resources to act. In 2022 a Childcare Market Analysis was conducted by the United Way of Southwest Virginia to detail the childcare market in Smyth County. This report certainly is a good step towards addressing current childcare shortfalls in the County, but the report lacks the actionable steps that a full childcare report would provide.

***Increase the Number of Educationally Based Childcare Opportunities*** – A significant challenge facing residents of Smyth County, especially working families and those of lower income, is the lack of affordable and accessible childcare. This issue is worsened by the lack of childcare in general in the County and more so if one is looking to enroll their child or children in an educationally based program. Therefore, efforts should be made to increase the number of educationally based childcare programs in the County. This not only has the potential to improve educational outcomes among the County's youngest residents but also increase the ability for working parents to reenter the workforce, which in turn will boost the County's overall economic output.

***Initiate the Creation of an Education Advisory Committee*** – The creation of greater, ongoing cooperation between the County and regional educational entities is an effort that should be strived for moving forward. Focus group members spoke of the need for such a body to guide educational policy, foster greater cooperation, and increase the level of opportunities provided to the students, teachers, and administrators of Smyth County. In an effort to not infringe on the authority of the County's school board, it was proposed that an advisory committee be formed to provide a well-rounded, regional view of the educational challenges facing the County and the region and how best to address these challenges. This advisory committee would consist of representatives from the local school board, local homeschooling co-ops, community colleges, 4-year institutions, cultural and environmental education centers (Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Hungry Mother State Park, Museum of the Middle Appalachians, Settlers Museum), and other career development (Job Corp), early childhood development, cognitive, and behavioral specialists that would help advise the County in educational matters.

***Continued Support of Smyth County Promise*** – Starting in 2023, Smyth County Promise seeks to lower the barrier to entry for local students to attain higher education. By funding both college and career/technical degrees, Smyth County Promise will bolster both blue and white collar jobs in Smyth County, reduce the cost burden that many are faced with when seeking higher education, and create a more knowledgeable, capable, and future ready populous. Continued support of this program is essential in ensuring all students in Smyth County have the opportunity to better themselves through education. Not only will this aid in the betterment of each student, but it will also better the County long term and ensure that local business, industry, government, and medical centers are well equipped to meet the needs of Smyth County moving forward.

***Consider the Creation of A Homeschool Co-op*** – With the increasing prevalence of homeschooling in Smyth County, it is important to provide parents, caregivers, and students equal access to the education



opportunities and resources afforded to students who attend Smyth County Public Schools. Currently, there are no formal homeschooling organizations that operate within Smyth County, although there have been in the past. This points to an already established network of resources and contacts, although likely dated, in the County that may be tapped into. With all this considered, to better meet the needs of this growing population of students, it may be necessary to solidify a County-wide homeschooling cooperative to support homeschooling efforts moving forward. Partnerships between local schools, higher education institutions, and other invested parties will be essential in forming this organization.

***Bolster & Support Adult Learning Opportunities*** – In addition to opportunities provided to younger students, providing opportunities for continuing education, re-training, and night-classes are essential for adults in and around Smyth County who may not be able to attend classes during typical work hours (9 AM to 5 PM). Efforts to meet this need are in the works by Wytheville Community College with the redevelopment of the former Ford Dealership in Marion to provide automotive related and welding classes. However, moving forward, steps should be taken to broaden educational offerings to adults in the County by both Wytheville and Virginia Highland Community Colleges. It was noted that Smyth County lacks a large space for either community college to offer sizable programming geared toward adults beyond specialty programs like those offered at the former Ford Dealership. Therefore, it is likely that a standalone facility will need to be developed by either a single community college or in collaboration between multiple educational partners (WCC, VHCC, Emory and Henry, Smyth County Public Schools, Radford University, and Virginia Tech).

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## 4.1.3: Recreation



### 4.1.3 RECREATION

#### RECREATION: EXISTING CONDITIONS

##### Public Parks & Recreational Facilities

Public Parks and Recreation Facilities are administered by the towns throughout Smyth County rather than the County at large. That being said, each town (Chilhowie, Marion, and Saltville) has their own public parks and recreation areas. These facilities are as follows:

- **Chilhowie**

- **Chilhowie Town Park and Recreation Center:** This park and recreation facility is located in central Chilhowie, south of Railroad Drive and north of I-81. The park is comprised of a baseball diamond, a basketball court, a playground, a picnic shelter, a bathroom, a stage, and a large grassy area.

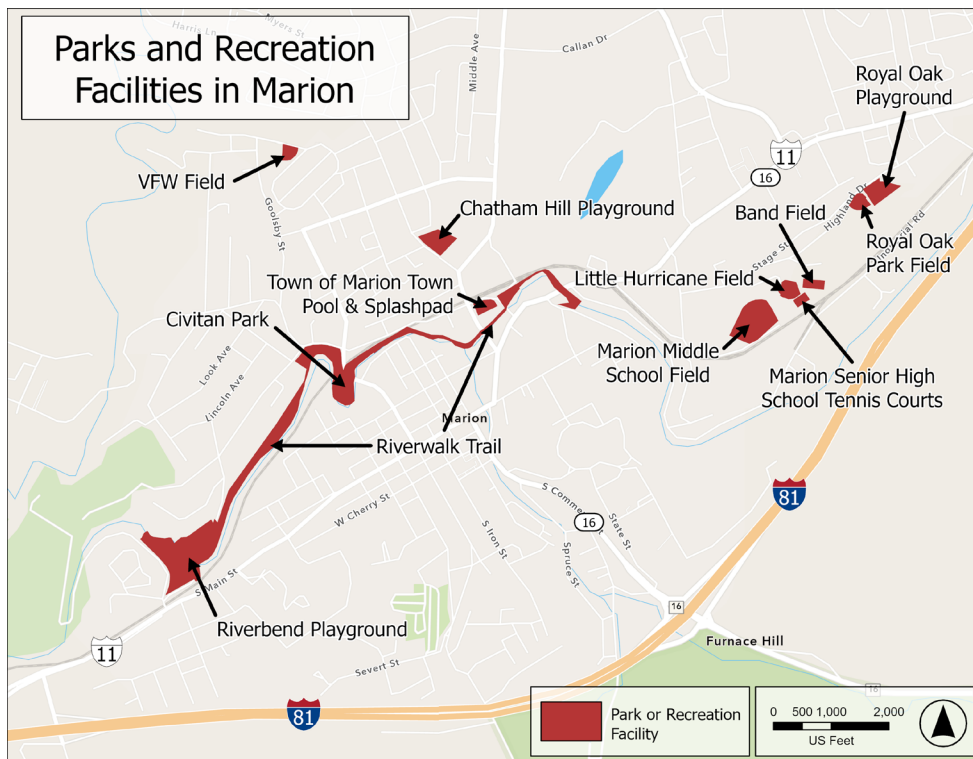


*All Parks and Recreational Facilities in Chilhowie, Virginia (2023)*

- **Marion**

- **Riverbend Playground:** Located along the Holston River in western Marion, this park offers residents a large playground, a basketball court, a futsal court, grills, four picnic pavilions, and grassy areas along the river to play and relax.
- **Chatham Hill Playground:** Located along Chatham Hill Road in north Marion, this park provides a playground, basketball court, pickleball courts, grills, and 3 picnic pavilions.
- **Royal Oak Playground:** Located along Highland Drive (Near Marion Elementary) in central Marion, this park offers a playground, a 9-hole disc golf course, 4 picnic pavilions, and the town's women's softball field.

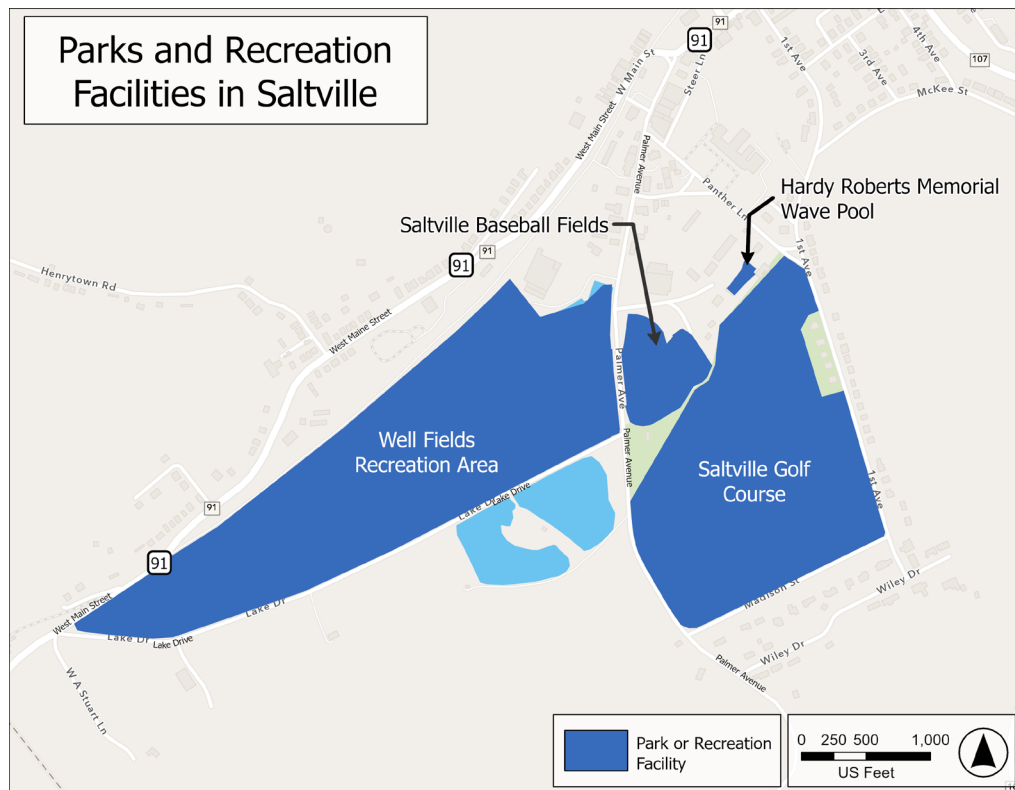
- **Steele Park Playground:** Located along Iron Street in southern Marion offers a playground, grills, and 2 picnic pavilions.
- **Civitan Park:** Located in central Marion, this park offers opportunities to fish along the Holston River as well as a large pavilion for meetings.
- **Riverwalk Trail:** This trail runs from Civitan Park (west) to Wilderness Road Garden Club Park (east) along the Middle Branch of the Holston River. This trail meanders through town and connects many points of interest throughout Marion. Parking lots are located at either end.
- **Royal Oak Park Field:** This facility is located adjacent to Royal Oak Playground and includes a softball field and pitching machines.
- **Little Hurricane Field:** This facility is located adjacent to Marion High School and is primarily used for youth t-ball, softball, and baseball, as well as adult league co-ed softball.
- **Band Field:** This field is used by the Marion High School Marching Band for drill practice, but during the off-season, this field is used for football and co-ed soccer programs run by the town's recreation department.
- **VFW Field:** This field baseball field, adjacent to Hockett Street in northern Marion, is used for t-ball and softball.
- **Marion Middle School Field:** Located behind Marion Middle School, this field is used for t-ball and co-ed soccer.
- **Marion Senior High School Tennis Courts:** Adjacent to Marion Senior High School, this facility hosts 4 lighted tennis courts that are open to the public.



**All Parks and Recreational Facilities in Marion, Virginia (2023)**

- **Saltville**

- ***Well Fields Recreation Area:*** This recreation area is located around the saltwater marshes that are central to Saltville, both physically and historically. This area is popular among birders, fishermen, and those who enjoy the outdoors.
- ***Hardy Roberts Memorial Wave Pool:*** This 150-foot-long and 60-foot-wide wave pool is the only public pool in Saltville and offers children and adults the opportunity to cool off in the warmer months.
- ***Saltville Golf Club:*** This public golf course is located south of Saltville and offers 9 holes.
- ***Saltville Ball Fields:*** located along Palmer Avenue, there are 3 fields that can be used for t-ball, baseball, and softball.



***All Parks and  
Recreational  
Facilities in  
Saltville,  
Virginia  
(2023)***

As outlined earlier, Smyth County does not have an overarching department that leads parks and recreation efforts in the County. The majority of established recreational facilities throughout the County are maintained and improved on the municipal level. In the case of Marion, parks and recreational facilities are maintained by the Town of Marion's Parks & Recreation Department, with facilities in Chilhowie and Saltville being maintained by the town government, with no particular department listed (Saltville).

## Outdoor Recreation Areas

Outside of municipal parks and recreational facilities, Smyth County has ample opportunities to connect with the great outdoors. The primary owners of these lands are the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, and US Forest Service\). Activities that visitors and residents may engage in include hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, fishing, camping,



boating, and swimming. Some of the outdoor offerings within Smyth County include, but are not limited to:

- ***Hungry Mother State Park:*** The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation operates Hungry Mother State Park located in central Smyth County, north of Marion. One of Virginia's original six state parks, Hungry Mother State Park has served southwest Virginia since 1936 and has continued to provide outdoor recreation and environmental education to visitors throughout its existence. Hungry Mother is a state park that is centralized around Hungry Mother Lake, a 108-acre lake, and offers hiking, mountain biking, boating, fishing, swimming, and sunbathing opportunities. Hungry Mother's attendance has fallen slightly since a peak in 2006 but continues to remain steady, with roughly 230,000 visitors per year bringing an estimated 7.05 million dollars into the local economy. The 2015 Updated Master Plan calls for multiple renovations to the park's campgrounds, cabins, and utilities, and the addition of new facilities and staff.
- ***George Washington and Jefferson National Forest:*** The Jefferson National Forest covers large portions of Smyth County, including the northern, southern, and much of the eastern borders. Facilities that are maintained by the national forest include the Settlers Museum of Southwest Virginia, the Pat Jennings Visitor Center, Raccoon Branch Campground, Hurricane Campground, the Grindstone Recreation Area, the Elk Garden Trailhead, and Fox Creek and Old Virginia Horse Campgrounds.



The majority of development recreation opportunities like trails and camping are located in the southwest corner of the County. RV camping, as well as primitive camping, is allowed at the Raccoon Branch and Hurricane Campgrounds, with primitive camping allowed at all other campgrounds listed above. In the case of Hurricane Campground, RV's over 30 feet are not allowed and there are no hook-ups for electric, sewer, or water and there is no onsite dumping station for waste. In the Case of Raccoon Branch Campground, RV parking is limited, with only 5 currently available, there are electric and water hookups, but no sewer; however there is a dumping station for waste on site. As of 2023, the US Forest Service is working to decommission and replace the wastewater system at Grindstone Campground on the Mount Rogers National

Recreation Area. The old wastewater system is no longer working and is too old to repair. This project will take several years to plan and complete and is necessary to protect the water quality of Big Laurel Creek, a native trout stream. Camping options will be limited over the next several years during the design, decommissioning, and construction process. As of 2023, the campground offered no running water. In addition to camping, visitors have the opportunity to hike, fish, bird, and hunt (when permitted). The majority of these opportunities are located within the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, an approximately 200,000 acres recreation area located across Smyth, Washington, Wythe, and Grayson Counties. The Appalachian Trail runs through the southeastern portion of Smyth County before snaking through the eastern portion of the County, passing east of Atkins, and moving into Wythe County.

- ***Clinch Mountain Wildlife***

***Management Area:*** The CMWMA is the second largest of Virginia's wildlife management areas and the most biologically diverse. Stretching across Smyth, Washington, Russell, and Tazewell counties, this management area encompasses 25,477 acres of the southwest Virginia countryside. There are opportunities for hunting, trapping (when permitted), primitive camping, trout fishing, warm water fishing, hiking, horseback riding, birding, boating, and rifle/handgun shooting within this area. The CMWMA is administered by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and requires access permits for visitors over the age of 17.



- ***South Fork of the Holston River:*** The Department of Wildlife Resources controls fishing along the south fork of the Holston River due to the river's popularity among trout fishermen. Within the upper portion of the river, fishermen are limited to single artificial hooks (between the Buller Fisher Cultural Station – near Adwolfe – and the upper boundary of the Jefferson National Forest – Near Atkins), a central portion directly around the Buller Fish Cultural Station in which catch-and-release is required as well as



the use of single-hook artificial lures, and a southern portion located near Thomas Bridge Road (south of Adwolfe) and the St. Clair Bottom area (west of Adwolfe) in which fishermen are required to have a trout license in addition to a state freshwater fishing license. The south fork of the Holston River is home to Rainbow and Brown Trout.

## RECREATION: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Recreation is one of many jewels in Smyth County's crown. Due to large swaths of the County being comprised of conservation areas such as Hungry Mother State Park, The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, and the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, residents and visitors to Smyth County have numerous opportunities to connect with the Great Outdoors. The same can be said for the County's larger towns; however, recreational resources are not as well distributed. In particular, the vast majority of recreational facilities are concentrated in Marion, with a serious lack of parity seen in Saltville or Chilhowie. The following are potential methods for improving recreational access moving forward:

***Establishment of a County-Wide Parks and Recreation Department*** – As noted above, recreational facilities across the County are at varying levels of parity, repair, and quality. This issue is compounded by the fact that the County's facilities are owned and maintained by various entities (schools, rec league, VFW), which poses challenges in attaining and distributing funding. This creates the issue of multiple localities attempting to provide similar amenities with varying levels of success. While nurturing the volunteer spirit that built and maintains these facilities, the creation of a County-wide entity provides Smyth County the opportunity to address some of these issues as well as expand the offerings. A centralized entity will have the ability to attain outside funding, distribute resources across the County, ensure timely maintenance, and expand facilities at a quicker rate. In addition, staffing of County-owned facilities can be managed at the County level rather than the municipal level, which will alleviate municipal funds to apply to other projects. In more rural portions of the County, a County-wide entity will be able to provide sports fields, playgrounds, trails, or other recreational facilities that would otherwise not be possible. Naturally, this will be a stair-step project that will not happen overnight; therefore, steps toward this goal should be made incrementally. A first step towards the establishment of a County-wide parks and recreation department may be the establishment of an advisory committee that oversees the creation, expansion, and maintenance of recreational facilities outside of the County's towns. This committee would include representatives from the town's recreational departments but allow these entities to remain independent. A second step would be to create a functional County-wide parks and rec department that would assume responsibility for the maintenance, staffing, and creation of facilities outside of the County's towns. A final step may be a merger of the town and County departments into a single department in which all facility operations are handled by this County-wide parks and recreation department. This final step is likely to take some time to accomplish and require buy-in both from County and town administration over the long term; however, the consolidation of effort to improve the County's recreational offerings is likely to be more impactful from a united front.

***Invest in Recreational Facilities Outside of Towns*** – A challenge faced by communities outside of the County's towns is the availability and quality of recreational facilities. This is due to the majority of recreational facilities being constructed and maintained by the towns in which they reside. As a result, there is a severe lack of recreational facilities outside of Smyth County's towns. Moving forward, investments should be made in creating or improving existing recreational facilities (baseball/softball fields, soccer pitches, playgrounds, greenways, pedestrian trails, cycling routes, tennis courts, etc.) available in rural communities across the County. In particular, efforts should be focused on communities in the County's north (Rich Valley, Nebo) and south (Konnarock, Sugar Grove).

***Leverage Partnerships to Expand Recreational Opportunities*** – Due to the presence of state and federal entities like Hungry Mother State Park, the Jefferson National Forest, the Mount Rogers National



Recreation Area, and the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, there are sizable opportunities to partner to expand access to recreational opportunities. This may take the form of marketing in which residents and tourists are made aware of the recreational opportunities in Smyth County, but it can also take the form of partnerships to create new or improve existing recreational opportunities or lobbying on behalf of state and federal partners to ensure local assets do not negatively impact local tourism or economy.

***Create Networks of Recreational Opportunities*** – An important opportunity for the County is the creation of recreational networks. Trails and greenways one component of this puzzle, but additional facilities also play a large part in connecting citizens to the outdoors. Multi-use facilities that pair recreational opportunities such as trails, soccer pitches, baseball diamonds, birdwatching, amphitheater, and pedestrian paths work in tandem to connect portions of the County to one another (transportation), cluster recreational opportunities to improve access, lowers costs, and create a draw for tourists, organizations, and citizens of Smyth County.

***Instill Disability-Friendly Design Into Recreational Facilities*** – Ensuring all residents of Smyth County are able to participate in recreational activities and access the same resources is important in reducing barriers for people with disabilities. In particular, it is important to ensure that those in wheelchairs or who have mobility issues are able to easily access areas such as parks, sports facilities, or walking trails. Efforts should be made to create pathways that are flat, easy to maneuver on, do not hinder wheelchair access (such as gravel), and have ample ramps and mobility aids.

## 4.1.4: Community Facilities & Services





#### 4.1.4 COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES

##### COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Community facilities and support services are important to the social and physical health and well-being of those who call Smyth County home. The following is a detailed description of the community facilities and services that are provided to the residents and visitors to the County.

##### LIBRARIES

The residents of Smyth County are provided library services through the Smyth County Public Library System. This system is comprised of three libraries located in Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville. These three libraries offer a variety of services such as material checkouts (books, DVDs, audiobooks, magazines), reference materials, Inter-Library Loans, free internet access, public computers, a Wi-Fi-hotspot and tablet lending program, online collections, and printing/copying/faxing for patrons.

The Smyth County Public Libraries are governed by a seven-member board that is comprised of one member from each of Smyth County's electoral districts. Each library is supported independently by respective "Friends of the Library" groups, which provide funding for materials, programming, and other services provided by each library.



*Saltville Library in Downtown Saltville, Virginia*

##### COMMUNITY CENTERS

Across the County, there are a handful of community centers that look to engage, educate, and provide services to their respective communities. Two of these centers are located in Marion, one is located in Saltville, and two other centers are located in the Riverside area south of Chilhowie and in the Konnarock area. The Marion and Saltville centers provide services to the County's youths and elderly and work to improve the County's overall health, while the other two provide areas for people to congregate and host events.



*Lifetime Wellness Center in Marion*

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- Marion Recreation Center – 328 East Chilhowie Street, Marion, VA
- Lifetime Wellness Center – 1 Health Way, Marion, VA
- Lifetime Wellness Center – 345 Palmer Avenue, Saltville, VA
- Konnarock Community Center – 6535 Whitetop Road, Troutdale, VA
- Riverside Community Center – 114 Red Stone Road, Chilhowie, VA



*Konnarock Community Center in Konnarock*

Although the publicly owned centers listed above provide community-based services to residents of the county in an official capacity, there are a number of other organizations that provide similar community services such as meeting spaces or sports facilities. In addition to the public facilities in Smyth County, there are a number of other private & non-profit-owned buildings that serve as community centers or places for people to gather. The following is a list collected from focus group members. This list is not exhaustive and may not include all community centers. Typically these centers are not staffed regularly and serve a primary purpose that is secondary to its role as a community center:

- Larger Churches (Chilhowie Christian Church, Chilhowie Church of God, Victory Tabernacle, etc.)
- Nebo Community Center (Nebo, VA)
- Ruritan Clubs
- Volunteer Fire Departments (Adwolfe, etc.)
- Rich Valley Fair (Saltville, VA)

### Additional Public Meeting Spaces



*Riverside Baptist Church in Riverside*

## HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Smyth County is part of the Mount Rogers Public Health District, which itself is administered by the Virginia Department of Health. Covering Bland, Carrol, Grayson, Smyth, Wythe, and Washington Counties, as well as the Cities of Bristol and Galax, the MRPHD covers a large region of southwest Virginia. The Health District is headquartered in Marion. Locally, the Smyth County Health Department operates offices in

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Marion that provide a variety of services to those living in the County. The department monitors public health risks, enforces public health standards, monitors environmental health standards for drinking water and restaurants, and coordinates vital records. In addition, services offered by the health department include immunizations, maternal and childcare services, screenings, family planning, and other important programs pertaining to community and environmental health.

In addition to the Virginia Department of Health, Virginia's Department of Social Services provides valuable services to the residents of Smyth County. Smyth County is located within the Western District for VDSS, with its central office located in Abingdon. Services are funded through VDSS and administered by the Smyth County Department of Social Services. Programs include TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), SNAP (Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicaid, Auxiliary Grants, Energy Assistance, Child Protective Services, Foster Care and Adoption Assistance, Adult Services and Adult Protective Services, Child Day Care Services, and Employment Services (VIEW).

Medical services in Smyth County are scarce outside of the County's major population centers, with the County's medical centers, doctors' offices, pharmacies, and specialists all located in Marion, Saltville, or Chilhowie. Some examples of medical facilities in the County include:

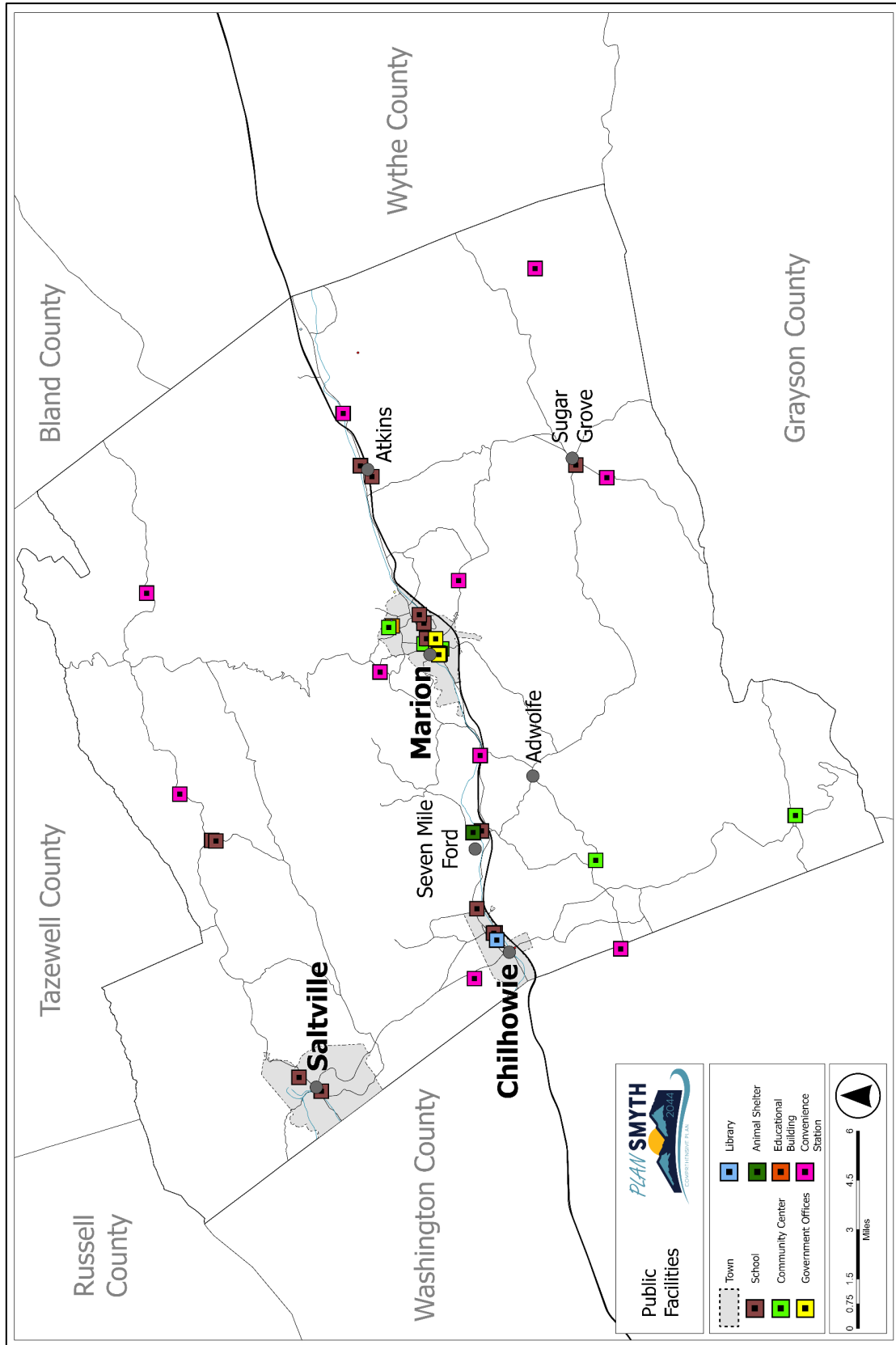
- ***Smyth County Community Hospital:*** Operated by Ballad Health, the Smyth County Community Hospital is the sole medical center in Smyth County providing services from Marion. Offering 44 acute care beds and 50 medical staff members, surgical services, women's services, emergency services, and cardio-pulmonary services, SCCH offers residents medical services without having to travel to larger towns or cities. Although small, SCCH offers services that are comparable to hospitals of its size. The nearest hospitals beyond SCCH are Johnston Memorial Hospital (116 beds), located in Abingdon, and the Wythe County Community Hospital (100 beds) in Wytheville.
- ***Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems:*** Serving Saltville since the late 1970's, Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems currently operates five medical centers in Saltville, Meadowview, Tazewell, and Bristol. The Saltville Community Health Center, one of two centers operated by the system in Saltville, offers adult and geriatric medicine, pediatric and adolescent care, behavioral health, a pharmacy, x-rays, minor surgeries, and emergency medical services.
- ***Southwest Virginia Regional Dental Center:*** Operated by Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems, the Southwest Virginia Regional Dental Center, located in Saltville, offers preventative dental services like cleanings, examinations, x-rays, fluoride treatments, fillings, root canals, crowns, and bridges, as well as tooth extractions, and emergency care for toothaches, other oral pain, and infections.
- ***Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute:*** The Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute is a mental health facility that has operated in Marion since 1887. Currently, the SWVMHI is a 179-bed state psychiatric institute that is operated by the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Services, serving both adults and geriatric individuals.
- ***Mel Leaman Free Clinic:*** Located in Marion, this free clinic offers impoverished residents of Smyth, Grayson, and Washington counties acute medical services, laboratory testing, eye examinations, vaccinations, dental services, behavioral health services, nutrition counseling, as well as helping patients with obtaining medication (medication assistance program). Recently, the Mel Leaman Free Clinic has partnered with Anthem Health Keepers Plus to offer a new mobile clinic to provide

medical services to locals who may not have access to transportation or live in very rural portions of the County.

- **Konnarock Family Health Center:** Located in Damascus, Virginia, the Konnarock Family Health Center offers residents of the more remote southwestern corner of Smyth County primary medical care, behavioral health services, and pharmacy services. This office is operated by Stone Mountain Health, a medical system that operates 13 additional medical centers across southwest Virginia. Although not located in Smyth County, this center offers primary care to many of the residents in Konnarock.
- **Adult Care Services:** The largest assisted living facility in the County is the Francis Marion Manor which is attached to the Smyth County Community Hospital and offers rehabilitation and nursing services to residents of Smyth County. Additional communities include the Valley Nursing Home (Marion & Chilhowie), and Gray Ridge Village (Marion), among others, with senior services being offered by Mount Rogers PACE (Marion) and Mount Rogers Community Services (Atkins).

Other community services agencies providing wellness and outreach care in Smyth County include:

- **The Appalachian Center for HOPE** is a planned center with the mission of addressing addiction and drug related issues in SWVA. This center will be located in a refurbished building on the Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute's campus and will focus on addiction recovery, reentry, and residential drug treatment programs.
- **The Mount Rogers Community Services** is a regional not-for-profit organization that serves Wythe, Bland, Carroll, Grayson, and Smyth Counties and the City of Galax. Guided by a fourteen-member board, the organization provides counseling services for mental health and substance abuse, as well as disability services. In Marion, the organization operates the Lisa H. Moore Counseling Center, Smyth Youth and Family Services, Smyth Crisis Care Center, and the Smyth County Industrial & Development Center and congregate group homes for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. In 2020, Mount Rogers Community Services received a \$4 million grant from the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to expand crisis care services and staffing to become a "certified community behavioral health clinic."
- **The District Three Governmental Cooperative** is a non-profit organization that provides both social, occupational, transportation, and caregiving services to the senior populations of Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe counties, as well as the Cities of Galax and Bristol. Services offered by District Three Governmental Cooperative include the Virginia Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, home-delivered meals, health screenings, flu shots, an ombudsman program that addresses concerns with nursing facilities, adult care residences, and in-home health services, legal aid services, and friendship cafes to name a few.
- Additional services to the community are offered through non-profits such as **local churches**, the **United Way, Helping Overcome Poverty's Existence (HOPE)**, **Goodwill**, and **Habitat for Humanity of Smyth County**.



**Map of Public Facilities in Smyth County (Brown – Schools, Lime Green – Community Centers, Yellow – Government Offices, Blue – Libraries, Dark Green – Animal Shelter, Orange – Educational Building (Support Offices), Fuchsia – Convenience Stations)Centers**



### Public Safety

Public safety is a foundational function of a local government and provides the citizens of a town, city, or County protection from natural and manmade hazards. In many cases, these services are taken for granted until an emergency arises, but a robust plan to address emergencies is vitally important in ensuring the physical safety of those who call Smyth County home. In doing so, the quality of life within the County is enhanced. The following section provides insight into the emergency services capacity of Smyth County (Fire, EMS, Police), an overview of regional planning efforts and recommendations for improving services, and a discussion of challenges & opportunities facing public safety and emergency response in Smyth County.

#### Existing Conditions

The central hub of Smyth County's emergency response is the Smyth County Emergency Communications Center. This center serves an important role as the County's Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), connecting residents and visitors to the emergency services system in times of need. This center is located in Marion at the Sheriff's office and is staffed around the clock to answer law enforcement, fire, EMS, and animal control calls. Equipped with an automated Computer Aided Dispatch system, a dispatch mapping system, and enhanced wired line 911, dispatchers are better able to address emergencies, locate callers, and quickly send services to the scene.

Within Smyth County, there are two categories that emergency services can fall into: **Public Safety**, including emergency management, fire, and EMS, and **Law Enforcement**, which includes the sheriff's office, police, and animal control. All Emergency Services in Smyth County operate in tandem to respond to calls throughout the County. Each element of the response system will be covered here briefly.

#### Public Safety:

Across Smyth County, there are total of ten Fire and EMS departments that provide lifesaving and firefighting services to their respective portions of the County. Many of these departments collaborate with departments and squads in close proximity as well as those outside of Smyth County to respond to calls. All Fire Departments work under an automatic aid agreement. This agreement gives additional apparatus and personnel from the closest neighboring companies to any working structure fire in the jurisdiction. Both Fire and EMS stations acquire their funding from a variety of sources, with some departments charging for services while others do not. Regardless, Fire and EMS Department funds are allocated for the County's general fund and are portioned out based on the size and needs of each department. The following is a list of active Fire and EMS Departments in the County:

- **Town of Marion Fire and EMS** (Station 1 / 2)
  - 1 – 231 West Main Street, Marion, VA
  - 2 – 230 South Park Street, Marion, VA
- **Town of Chilhowie Fire and EMS** (Station 3)
  - 3 – 315 East Lee Highway, Chilhowie, VA
- **Saltville Fire Department** (Station 4)
  - 4 – 312 Palmer Avenue, Saltville, VA
- **Sugar Grove Fire Department** (Station 5)

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- 5 – 178 Flat Ridge Road, Sugar Grove, VA
- ***Sugar Grove Lifesaving Crew*** (Station 5)
  - 5 – 178 Flat Ridge Road, Sugar Grove, VA
- ***Atkins Fire Department*** (Station 6)
  - 6 – 5758 Lee Highway, Atkins, VA
- ***Smyth County Fire / Rescue*** (Station 6)
  - 6 – 5758 Lee Highway, Atkins, VA
- ***Nebo Fire and Rescue*** (Station 7 / 8)
  - 7 – 2408 Old Wilderness Road, Ceres, VA
  - 8 – 6212 Bluegrass Trail, Saltville, VA
- ***Adwolfe Fire Department*** (Station 9)
  - 9 – 104 Thomas Bridge Road, Marion, VA
- ***Town of Saltville EMS*** (Station 10)
  - 10 – 126 Battleground Avenue, Saltville, VA

### ***Smyth County Fire – Rescue Academy***

In coordination with each Fire and EMS service, as well as regional and statewide partners, Smyth County has developed the Smyth County Fire – Rescue Academy to train and prepare local and regional fire and EMS professionals in firefighting, lifesaving, water rescue, hazard mitigation, and other emergency services operations. Located in Chilhowie, the center hopes to build upon the training and knowledge already present within the County’s emergency service personnel and allow others to learn and expand their lifesaving services. This center was completed in the latter half of 2022 and has been offering classes since its opening in early 2023.

### **Law Enforcement:**

In addition to Fire and EMS services, there are numerous law enforcement agencies that provide policing and animal control services across Smyth County. In terms of County-wide jurisdiction, the Smyth County Sheriff’s Office provides law enforcement services for all County residents, with individual towns providing law enforcement for residents within their local jurisdictions. Police departments include those in Marion, Saltville, and Chilhowie.

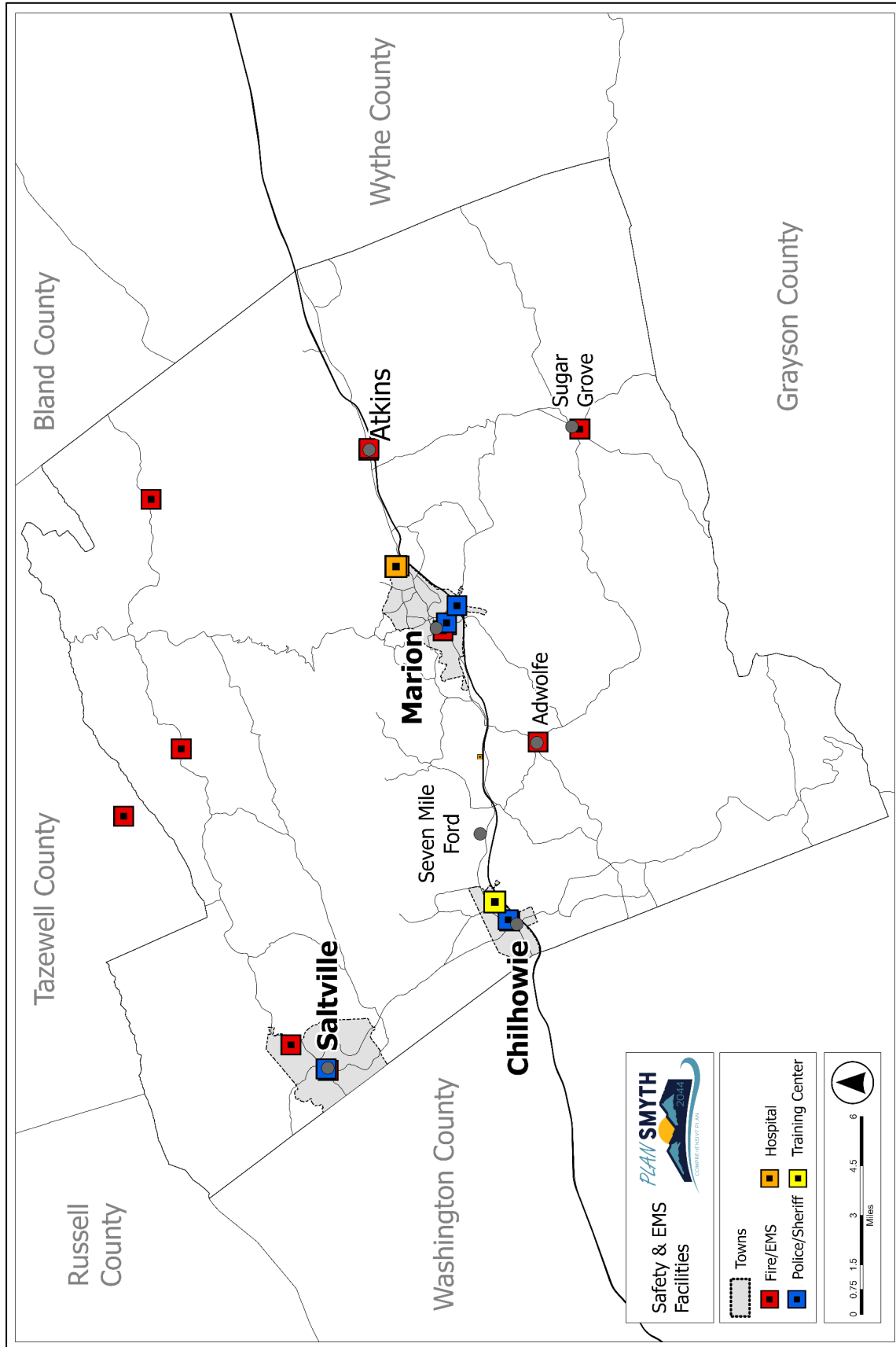
- ***Chilhowie Police Department*** – 325 East Lee Highway, Chilhowie, VA 4319
- ***Marion Police Department*** – 307 South Park Street, Marion, VA 24354
- ***Saltville Police Department*** – 217 Palmer Avenue, Saltville, VA 24370

The County Sheriff’s Office is located in Marion at 819 Matson Drive. Currently employing 59 full-time and 34 part-time officers, the Smyth County Sheriff’s Office has jurisdiction over 452 square miles of territory outside of the County’s towns. In conjunction with law enforcement duties within the County, the Sheriff’s office assists local departments when requested or required.

Animal Control is another important element of law enforcement in the County. Smyth County’s Animal Control provides emergency response throughout the County, enforces animal control laws, investigates acts of animal abuse, neglect, and cruelty, cares for injured animals, provides shelter services for abandoned or unwanted animals, and enforces proper vaccinations and licensing for pets. Their

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operations office and shelter is located in the Seven Mile Ford community at 287 Fox Valley Road, Marion, VA.



Map of Emergency Services Facilities in Smyth County (Blue – Police Stations & Sheriff's Offices, Red – Fire & EMS, Orange – Hospital, Yellow – Smyth County Fire & Rescue Academy)

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The facilities and services provided to the citizens of Smyth County are integral in ensuring the social and physical well-being of those who call the County home. Currently, community services are well received by those in the County and are considered a bright spot when it comes to their local government. However, it is clear that in order to better serve the community moving forward, Smyth County's community facilities and services must better meet the needs of current and future residents. Although well received generally, there are a handful of obstacles that should be addressed moving forward. Libraries, in particular, face the challenge of aging physical infrastructure. This results in higher maintenance costs to repair historic buildings that are nearing the end of their lifespan. This issue is not limited to community facilities but presents a sizable challenge to community services moving forward. Another hurdle that will need to be addressed is access to adequate medical services. A sentiment expressed both in survey responses and focus groups was that Smyth County's breadth of services is lacking, resulting in an inability to provide high-quality and accessible medical services. Although standard medical services are offered in the County, more complex procedures may not be available. This presents residents with the added challenge of traveling long distances if they require specialized medical services. In addition, rural portions of the County are largely without access to medical treatment unless they are able to travel to larger towns like Marion, Wytheville, or Abingdon. This issue has been compounded by the relocation of RAM (Rural Area Medical) service, which offers free medical services to low-income individuals in rural communities, to a new location at Emory and Henry College.

On the other hand, community services, particularly libraries and emergency services, are seen as invaluable to the community. Libraries currently serve a myriad of functions, serving as a community center, a learning environment, meeting spaces, a portal to the world wide web, and a resource for early childhood education and intervention programs. Emergency response is another bright spot in which Emergency Response Agencies are well positioned throughout the County to address the challenges of the future. The recent completion of the Smyth County Fire & EMS Training Center in Chilhowie offers future firefighters, paramedics, and police officers from inside the County and within the region the ability to learn, finetune their skills, and better serve their communities.

The following are proposals that may help Smyth County address the challenges facing its community services as well as build upon its success stories:

***Invest in Public Libraries*** – Currently, public libraries are providing a wealth of services to the community. Without modernizing these facilities, these services may be significantly challenged in the future. Investing in the physical infrastructure of the County's public libraries, either through the construction of new buildings or the revitalization/expansion of the buildings they are currently housed in, is needed to ensure they are able to continue providing services to their respective communities. In addition to physical infrastructure, efforts should be undertaken to ensure that public libraries are able to adequately meet the needs of the County. This includes educational programs, early intervention developmental programs, internet literacy programs, financial literacy, and other programs that can be hosted virtually or in person. Currently, library programing, organization, and interest level are strong. The libraries may be a logical institution to host community centers, as discussed below.



***Begin the Redevelopment of Local Community Centers*** – Community centers were noted as valuable spaces to hold public meetings, events, and polling stations during election season. Currently, many of these buildings are in poor condition, need improvements, or simply do not have the resources to provide the programming that their communities would like to see. Physically, these buildings should be considered for renovation to ensure they can continue to provide community space in the future. Efforts should also be made to enhance services being offered through these local community centers, specifically those in Konnarock and Riverside, to provide additional offerings such as youth and senior center services, public gyms, classes, and other programs catered to their community's needs.

***Consider the Construction of New Community Centers*** – As of 2023, there are five centers throughout the County, with three of the five being located in Marion. Of the three in Marion, one is a wellness center that is provided at cost, one is a typical community center, and the other is a senior center. These centers are meeting the needs of those in Marion, but the remainder of the County is not receiving the same level of service. Therefore, investigation into the feasibility of additional community centers should be explored. Efforts to consolidate services at the new community centers would be ideal, cost-effective, and provide easier access to a range of services. Due to the current placement of existing community centers, it is likely that new centers would be optimal in more rural portions of the County that currently lack a community center. Nebo, Rich Valley, Sugar Grove, Saltville, and similar communities should be considered prime candidates.

***Invest and Publicize Existing and New Community Events*** – Across meetings and survey responses it was noted that community pride and identity has declined over the previous 10 to 20 years. Due to this decline, residents have become far less connected to one another and largely lack the social cohesion that builds strong, connected communities. A proposed solution to this dilemma is placing greater emphasis on the County's unique quality through celebrations, festivals, and community gatherings. Many of these events have been hampered due to the Covid-19 pandemic in recent years, but a renewed investment in revamping and publicizing these events has the potential to spur community pride and connection. The first prong of this effort could take the form of increased funding, publicizing, and engagement with the County's current festivals. This includes the Chilhowie Apple Festival, the Hungry Mother Arts and Crafts Festival, the Rich Valley Fair, and Christmas/Independence Day/Labor Day Parades. The second prong could take the form of the creation of new festivals or celebrations geared to support specific industries, communities, products, or important events or people in Smyth County. For example, a Spring Flower Festival, Music Festivals, Special Event Parades, Cattle Festivals, or the creation of a centralized County Fair.

***Invest in Youth Programming*** – Noted both in the community survey and focus group meetings, youth programming needs to be expanded. Currently, the library serves as the main provider of youth programs in the County, with other programs such as FAA (Future Farmers of America), 4H, Scouting, and Extension's Tractor Club playing a role in engaging the County's young people. Sentiments coalesced around the notion that these programs are good and provide opportunities to engage young people, but they are not enough. The creation of youth centers may provide a solution to this issue by consolidating youth programming, giving working parents a place to send their children after school, and providing structure, mentorship, friendships, and educational programs to the County's children.

***Promote Early Childhood Intervention Programs*** – Pre-school preparedness among the County's youngest residents is poor. In fact, according to the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program, for the 2020-2021 school year, only 43% of the County's children were educationally, developmentally, and linguistically

prepared for kindergarten. Obstacles in a child's early development are detrimental to the child's continued educational, social, and developmental success. However, steps can be taken to ensure that those children who are not meeting their goals are provided with additional services. Early Intervention, or addressing developmental, learning, or social delays early in a child's life, is the best way to ensure children are as ready for school as possible. Currently, the County's libraries and elementary schools are taking on the responsibility of providing this type of programming; however, there is more that should be done across the board. Partnerships are a primary way of bridging this gap. In particular, efforts should be made to partner with Emory and Henry's Graduate School of Health Sciences (Marion), Radford University (Radford), Ballard Health or Carilion Clinic, and other local organizations to provide occupational, physical, and speech therapy as well provide developmental, educational, and training programs for children, parents, and community members.

***Continue to Support Emergency Services*** – Confidence in emergency services was noted as a bright spot both in the community survey and focus groups; therefore, it is important to continue to support the County's public safety and law enforcement agencies. This includes working to meet the objectives outlined the current and future updates of the ***Smyth County Emergency Operations Plan***: (1) centralize and unify emergency service processes and publish yearly data, (2) increase planning with Smyth County and unify all plans to reduce duplication, (3) update the County's aging communication equipment and critical communication techniques, (4) improve communication of emergency and non-emergency events in the County, and (5) improve emergency services infrastructure. The EOP is an evolving document and coordination between the Smyth County Emergency Management Office and County staff will be essential in ensuring current and future goals are met.

***Move Toward the Creation of Regional Emergency Services*** – Partnerships are crucial in expanding services to more rural portions of the County, increasing service capacity building, and promoting general collaboration between departments. The creation of regional emergency service operations not only allows departments to share resources, information, and knowledge, but it also aids in securing funding for projects that a single department, jurisdiction, or County may not have previously been awarded. With the expected growth in Smyth County and neighboring counties, it is important to plan for the future by creating strong regional partnerships now to ensure higher-quality emergency services moving forward. The establishment of the Smyth County Fire and Rescue Academy is a step towards this goal and has laid the groundwork for regional cooperation. Moving forward, similar projects should be prioritized to foster cross-County projects.

***Increase Community Health Services*** – Although health care providers are present in the County, survey respondents and focus group participants noted the lack of specialty services. It was also noted that due to Smyth County's placement between two major medical service providers (Ballad and Carilion), the area is likely resigned to having to travel to receive specialty care. Although there is little that can be done in this regard, there are steps that can be taken to ensure all residents of the County are afforded basic health care services like primary care doctors, dentists, optometrists, and pharmacies. In most cases, these services are well provided to those living in the County's towns, but more rural communities lack these services. Partnerships could be made to address these shortfalls, particularly with Emory and Henry's Graduate School of Health in Marion, Ballard, Carillion, Radford University, or local community colleges. In particular, these organizations could partner with local free clinics, the Virginia Department of Health, and County officials to offer a RAM-type service that offers free medical services to low-income individuals across the County.

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## 4.2.1: Agriculture



## 4.2 ECONOMY

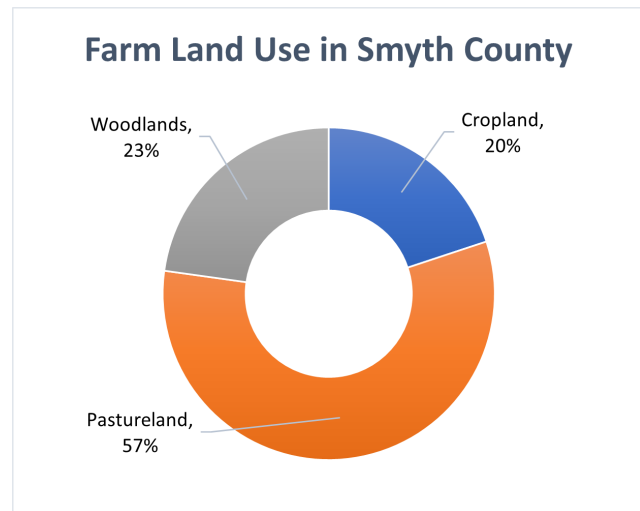
### 4.2.1 AGRICULTURE

#### AGRICULTURE: EXISTING CONDITIONS

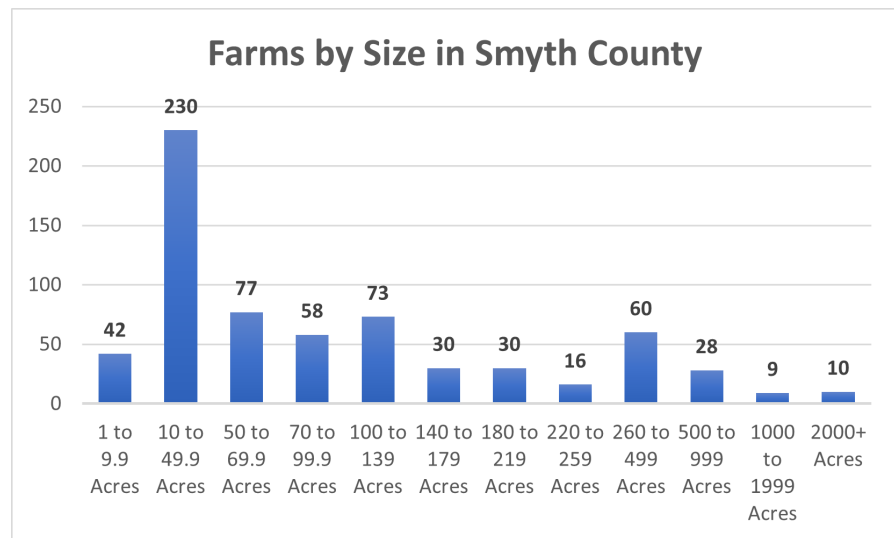
Historically, agriculture has been the primary economic driver in Smyth County. Although agriculture is not the primary economic sector in 2023, it remains an important cornerstone of the local economy. According to a 2017 study conducted by the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia, the agriculture industry directly added \$29 million dollars to Smyth County’s local economy and employed 1,010 individuals (directly and indirectly) in 2015.

##### Farms and Agricultural Land

Large swaths of Smyth County are comprised of agricultural lands. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture (USDA), Smyth County was home to 663 farms totaling approximately 130,000 acres. Among these lands, approximately 57% of farm land in Smyth County was pastureland, 20% was cropland, and 23% was woodlands. This makes clear that cattle farming is likely the largest agricultural sector in Smyth County. Among all farms in Smyth County, the average size is 186 acres, which is comparable to the average size of farms in the region. As with any County, there will be variation in the size of farms; in Smyth, the most common size farm is between 10 and 49.9 acres (230-34.7%). The second largest are farms between 50 and 69.9 acres (77-11.6%), with roughly 50% of all farms within Smyth County falling below 69.9 acres. Among the County’s farms, 96% are considered to be “Family Farms” by the USDA.



*Farm land Use in Smyth County (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)*



*Distribution of Farms by Size in Smyth County (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)*

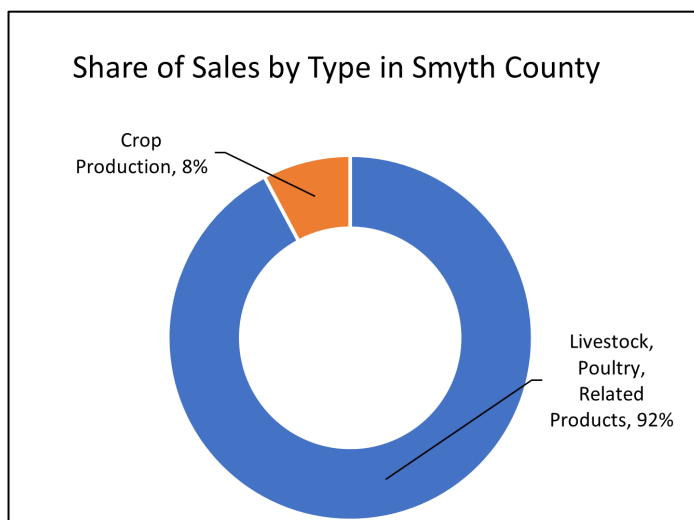


## Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold

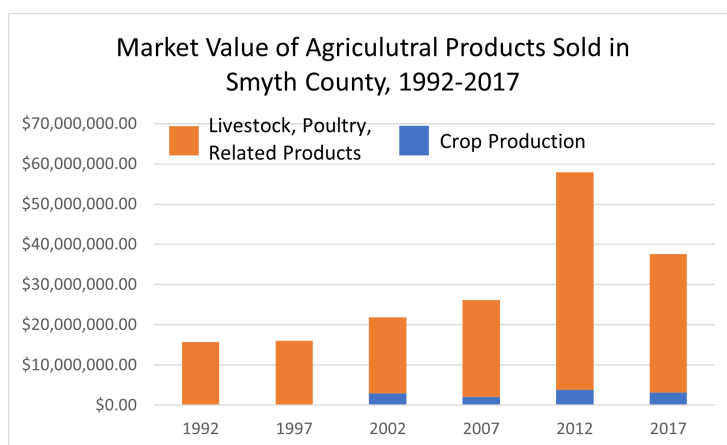
In 2017, the market value of crop production in Smyth County totaled 3.2 million dollars with livestock, poultry, and related products contributed an additional 34.4 million dollars. In combination, agricultural products produced in Smyth County sold for approximately 37.6 million dollars. Proportionally, crop production comprised 8% of agricultural market value, while livestock, poultry, and related products comprised the remaining 92%.

The market value of agricultural products in Smyth County has risen steadily over the course of the previous 20 years. The figure to the right shows the trend in both crop production (blue) and animal products (orange) sold. There was a sizable peak in market value created from livestock, poultry, and related products in 2012, with a combined 57.9 million dollars in agriculture products sold that year alone. In 2017 however, numbers returned to better align with the trend over the last 20 years, with the County reporting 37.5 million sold. This number is higher than counties to the north (Russell, Bland, and Tazewell) that report 23.2M, 8.8M, and 24.6M, respectively, and lower than Smyth's neighbors to the east and west (Wythe and Washington) with 65.5M and 69M, respectively.

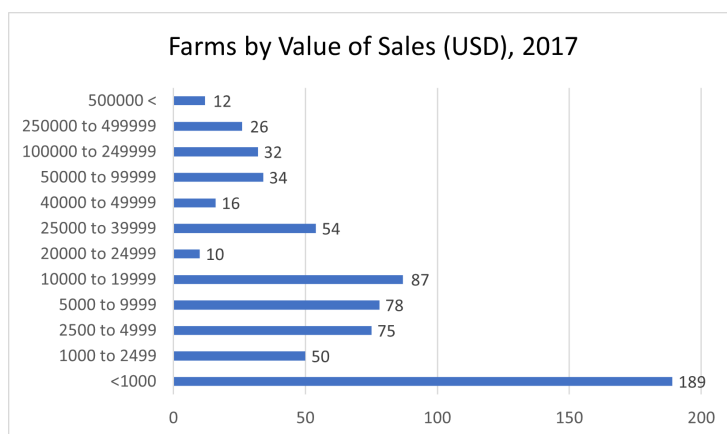
In addition to the value of products sold across the County, it is important to note the average value of products sold per farm. Across the County, this averaged out to \$56,653 per farm. The largest category among farms in Smyth County are those that had less than \$1,000 in sales, with 30% of all farms falling into this category.



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



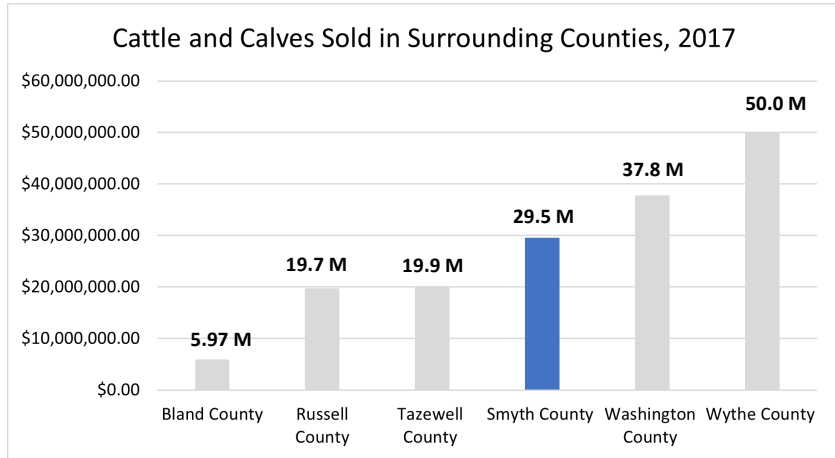
Market Value of Livestock, Poultry, & Related Products and Crops Sold in Smyth County, 1992 to 2017 (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)



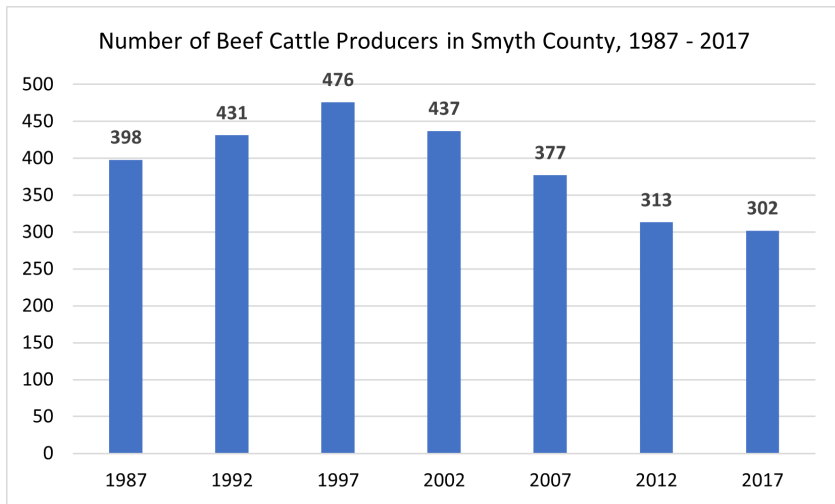
Smyth County Farms by Value of Sales (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

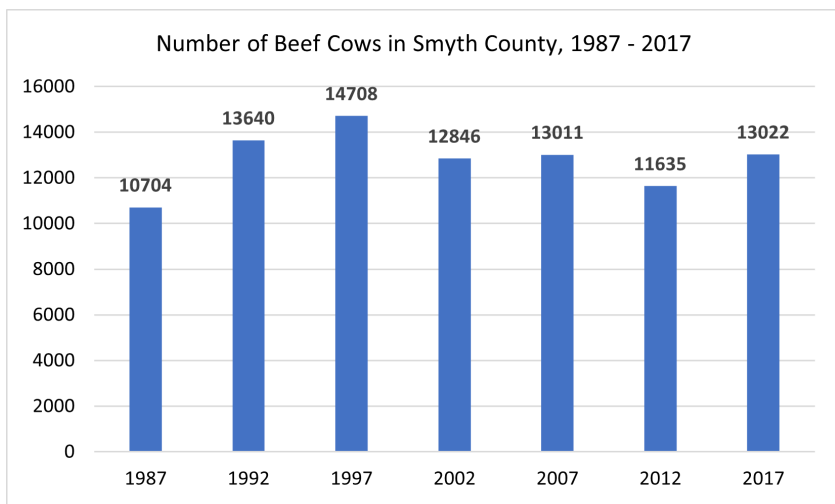
Among all of Smyth County's agricultural products, cattle and calves are the largest category by far. Representing a total of 29.5 million in sales, cattle and calves represent 78.6% of all agriculture related market value in 2017. In comparison to the surrounding counties, Smyth fares well but comes up short when compared to Washington and Wythe County, which report 37.8 million and 50 million, respectively. These numbers put Smyth County in 5<sup>th</sup> place in the state of Virginia for cattle and calves sold and 525<sup>th</sup> in comparison to the entire country. Beef cattle is the largest sub-category of this group, with 13,022 head of beef cattle reported in 2017. This represents 91% of all cattle in the County (excluding calves). Although impressive, historically, Smyth County has had a larger beef cattle industry, with upwards of 450 producers present in Smyth County in the late 1990's. Since the high point in 1997, cattle producers have shrunk to roughly 300. In regard to heads of beef cattle, patterns are more optimistic with the number of beef cows hovering within two thousand heads difference over the previous 20 to 30 years. This likely points to a consolidation of the beef cattle market in Smyth County since profits continue to rise and the number of heads has remained steady.



**Market Value of Cattle and Calves Sold in Smyth and surrounding counties (Source: USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture)**



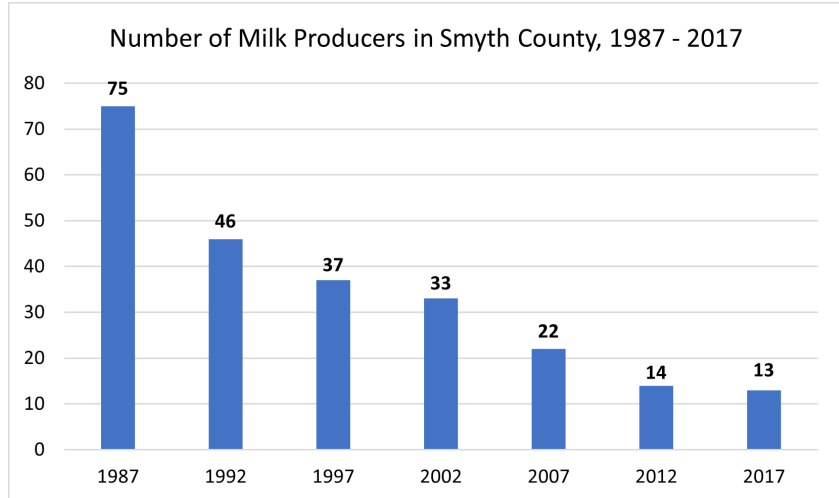
**Number of Beef Cattle Producers in Smyth County, 1987 to 2017 (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)**



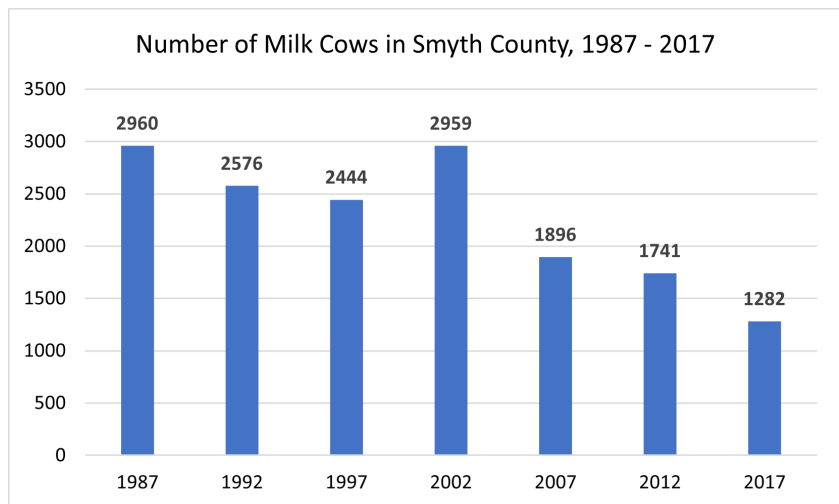
**Number of Beef Cows in Smyth County, 1987 to 2017 (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)**

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

The second largest category in Smyth County is “milk from cows” (dairy), which comprises 3.87 million dollars and 10.3% of all Ag-related market value. According to the 2017 Ag Census, there are 13 milk producers in Smyth County with a combined 1282 heads of milk cattle. This number has shrunk dramatically over the previous 20 to 30 years, with numbers in the late 1980s reaching 75 producers; now the County is left with 1/5 the milk producers. A similar trend can be seen among the number of milk cows. These likely hints that milk production, at least in Smyth County, is not as profitable as it once was, and therefore, farmers have turned to more lucrative livestock or crops. Although not nearly the dramatic drop that is seen among the number of milk producers, heads of milk cows have decreased sharply since a peak in 2002.



*Number of Milk Producers in Smyth County (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)*

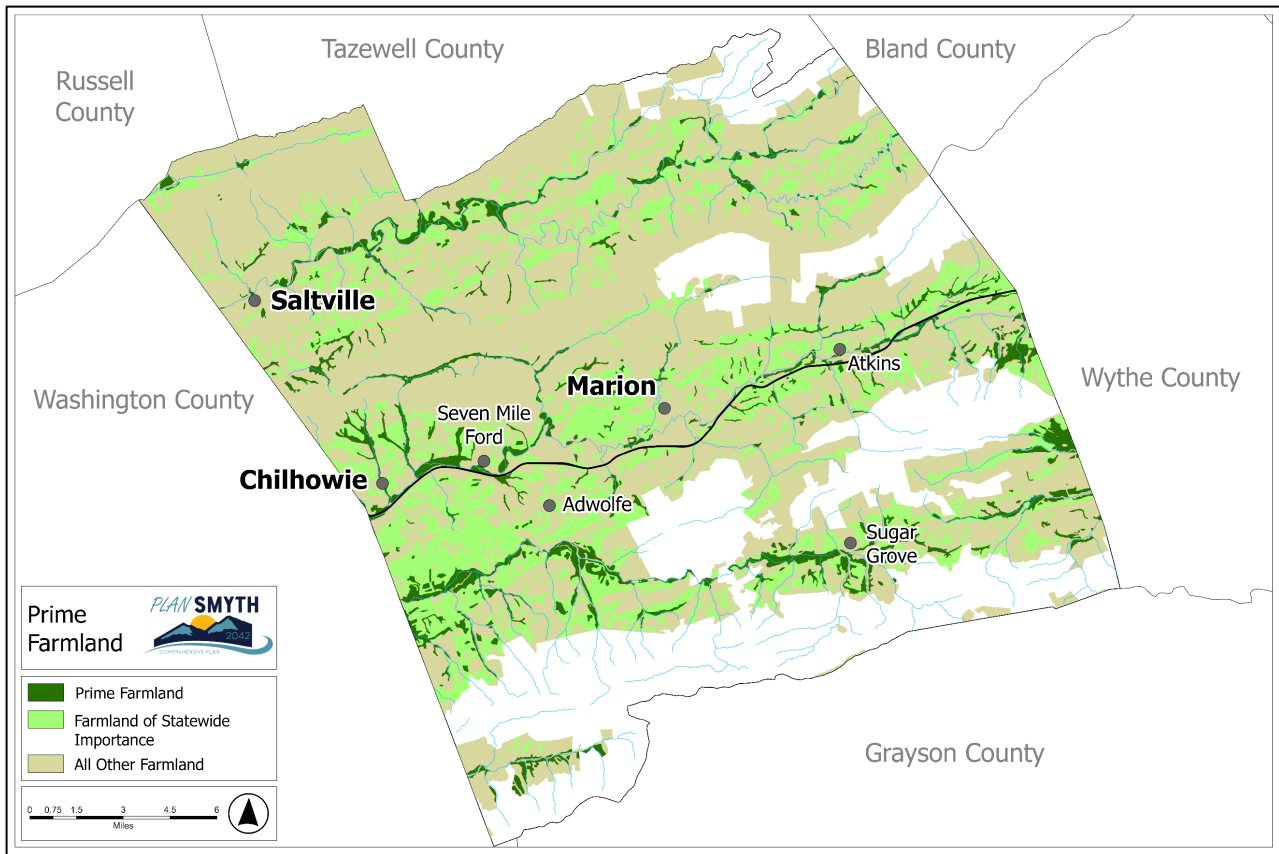


*Number of Milk Cows in Smyth County (Source: USDA Census of Agriculture)*



*Pastoral Scenes near Nebo (Left) and Rich Valley (Right)*

### Farm land Map



## AGRICULTURE: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The agricultural industry has been an important historical and contemporary economic driver for Smyth County. Not only is the agricultural sector important to the economic success of the County, but it also provides much of the cultural underpinnings that make Smyth County the place it is. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that farming remains a cornerstone of Smyth County, both culturally and economically. Naturally, there will be different objectives for the County’s agricultural industry dependent upon who you ask (small farmers vs. larger farmers), but the following were generally agreed upon:

**Invest in Smyth County Farmers**— It was noted by both small and large farmers that tax breaks, such as land use exemptions and equipment tax breaks, were instrumental in ensuring farms were able to remain profitable. In an effort to ensure the economic viability of both large and small-scale farming, these tax breaks should stay in place in order to reduce the financial burden placed upon the agricultural industry. Discussion on the future of Land Use Exemptions will likely need to be held in order to determine the best course of action in order to continue providing this tax break while allowing the County to collect adequate taxes to provide community services and public utilities. Financial support of large and small farmers is important, but just as important is the educational support of farmers. Partnerships with local community colleges, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Virginia Tech will be important in providing financial, horticultural, animal husbandry, and other agricultural training to support continuing education and business endeavors.

***Invest in Agricultural Education Programs*** – Retention of youth was an issue that presented itself in all focus groups, but particularly in the agricultural focused groups. In particular those in attendance noted that fewer young people are interested in farming or agricultural-related businesses. A proven way to attempt to remedy this issue is to integrate farming and agricultural education into school and extracurricular programming at an early age. Organizations such as FFA (Future Farmers of America), 4-H, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension are important partners in ensuring agriculture remains a central part of life in Smyth County. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure adequate funding for outreach and educational programs, support for County and municipal governments, and support for the community at large. Training, especially when it comes to school based agricultural programs, will be essential for educating the country's next generation of farmers. Therefore, partnerships should also be made with colleges such as Virginia Tech, Wytheville, and Virginia Highland Communities Colleges to ensure instructors and students are well-versed in new agricultural techniques, animal husbandry, agribusiness, and agricultural support services (equipment maintenance, nursery services, fertilizer/pesticide application).

***Foster Development of Ag Related Business*** – As noted in multiple focus groups, the need for agricultural related businesses, especially in rural communities, represents a deep concern held by many in attendance. Tractor and equipment repair was one of the largest concerns, but also feed and seed stores, farm equipment dealerships, general stores, and slaughterhouses were all businesses that were seen as essential. Moving forward, these types of businesses should be prioritized in rural communities that have the potential to host these types of businesses (have access to public utilities). Sugar Grove, in particular, is a community that has the potential for these types of businesses to locate there, along with the County's towns.

***Continue to Invest in Farmers Markets*** – farmers markets represent a point of interaction between the agricultural industry and the general public. For many, this is as close as they get to interacting with where their food comes from. Therefore, it is important, especially in regard to tourism, community building, and highlighting, to improve and expand the County's farmers markets. Currently, the County hosts two farmers markets in Chilhowie and Marion that offer a variety of goods on Saturday mornings. These farmers markets are well loved by those who attend, and efforts should be made to expand access both in terms of vendors and customer accessibility moving forward. The first step in doing so will be expanding existing farmers markets. Expanding already existing markets will not only allow more farmers, business, and craftspeople to sell their products; expansion will broaden the community building these farmers markets have done and make the farmers market "the place to be" on weekend mornings. Accessibility in terms of internet presence is another issue that was noted. Expanding both Chilhowie and Marion's farmers markets internet presence not only increases awareness of the markets but also increases the likelihood of tourist dollars being spent in the County, increases popularity, and fosters relationships with local farmers through storytelling, photographs, and videos.

***Continue to Invest in Agritourism*** – Agritourism represents a large pull factor to entice non-residents to visit the County and should continue to be pursued on the County level. Although there is apprehension on the part of some farmers in the County, agritourism, for those who wish to engage, is a prime opportunity to diversify a farm or business's income stream. Examples of agritourism include, but are not limited to, pumpkin patches, apple orchard tours, "pick-your-own" farm stands, road-side markets, breweries, wineries, distilleries, or creameries. When it comes to these types of businesses, it is important to ensure economic feasibility and the creation of partnerships to aid in the buildout of this potentially



## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

lucrative economic sector. SmythStrong and other business start-up programs are likely important tools for getting these types of business off the ground and should make efforts to foster agritourism businesses moving forward.

***Review Ordinances to Accommodate Agritourism*** – due to recent interest in expanding agritourism opportunities across the County, local officials should work towards reevaluating existing ordinances to accommodate Agritourism related uses or create a bespoke ordinance for Agritourism.

***Continue to Offer Land Use Taxation Program*** – the land use taxation program is instrumental in ensuring the continued economic feasibility of many of Smyth County’s farming operations. This type of tax break allows farmers to be taxed at a lower rate, given the land in which they own is preserved for farming. Much of the County is already afforded this tax break, with upwards of 90% of the County’s land being preserved for agriculturally related activities. That being said, this program not only ensures the protection of the County’s farm land, a precious resource, but lowers tax bills and increases profitability for both large and small farmers across the County.

***Celebrate Farming*** – Noted in the focus group was the lack of recognition and celebration of farming in Smyth County. With farming being a cornerstone of the County’s economy as well as its placement in the collective identity of Smyth County, it is clear this should be a priority. A few ways to celebrate farming could be the creation of agricultural centered festivals, a greater focus on agriculture and agritourism in County marketing, placing agriculture front and center in the County’s towns through increased visibility of farmers markets, or public artwork that celebrates farming and the cattle industry.

***Expand / Create a Smyth County Fair*** – Throughout the focus group participants, the importance of community events like festivals, fairs, and gatherings were stressed as tools for community building. Currently, Smyth County does not have a County-wide County fair, which could both celebrate the County’s agricultural heritage and bring all walks of life together. However, Smyth County does have a foundation that could be built upon - the Rich Valley Fair. Although far smaller than a typical County fair, the Rich Valley Fair presents an opportunity to build upon an event that already has a following, has infrastructure on site, and has the logistics in place to plan and execute a large event. Transitioning the Rich Valley Fair into a County-wide event presents a few challenges. One potential solution is to propose improvements to the current site that could allow the Rich Valley Fair site to host multiple events throughout the year.



## 4.2.2: Business Centers & Corridors



## **4.2.2 BUSINESS CENTERS AND CORRIDORS**

Smyth County benefits greatly from its location along I-81 and the establishment of major business districts around the County's major towns - Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville. Among these three towns, Marion is home to the majority of economic pull factors and therefore currently drives much of the commercial success of the County. However, areas such as Atkins hope to improve offerings to both Smyth County residents and visitors in the coming years. Together, these centers drive sustainable economic activity and foster economic growth and development within their boundaries and across the County.

### **BUSINESS CENTERS AND CORRIDORS: EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The primary business center within Smyth County is the town center of Marion. Being the largest town with the largest population and, therefore, the most economic activity, Marion is the focal point of commerce in the County. In addition to Marion, Saltville and Chilhowie stand as commercial crossroads for the County and intercept sizable commercial revenue from residents and visitors traveling along I-81 and VA-107. Beyond central commercial districts, development has cropped up around I-81 and its exits. These exits provide automotive related amenities (fast food, truck stops, gas stations, lodging, etc.), but they have yet to be developed in a well-organized, welcoming, well-landscaped, and well-designed manner. This predicament primarily impacts areas along I-81 that are outside of Marion and Chilhowie, such as the Atkins area, which is quickly developing into an economic center in the eastern portion of the County.

In comparison to up-and-coming villages like Atkins, the towns of Marion and Chilhowie, in particular, have evolved over time rather than cropped up around an interstate transportation route. These towns began as small communities with integrated pedestrian access and a small, centralized business district. These factors have allowed these towns to maintain their quaint downtown feeling while adapting to the times. Within the last 20 years, both Marion and Chilhowie have taken steps to ensure the economic, cultural, and historical vitality of their Main Streets. Both projects have reduced urban blight, improved facades, renovated buildings, improved streetscapes, and encouraged small business investments in their respective downtown areas.



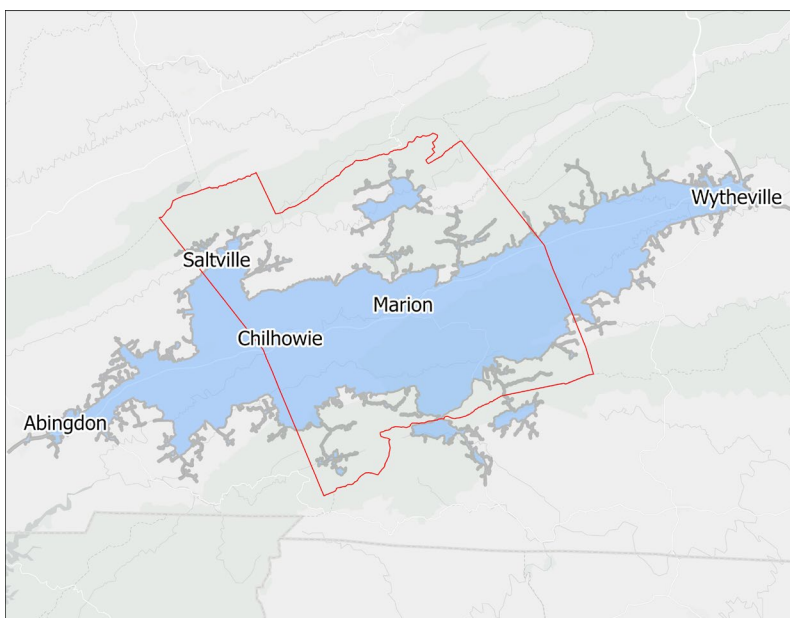
***Downtown Marion***



***Downtown Chilhowie***

## Retail Market Analysis

As part of the Comprehensive Plan, a retail market analysis was conducted in order to better understand the retail patterns – retail sales, consumer spending, retail leakage or surplus, and projected demand growth – for Smyth County. This type of analysis is important in understanding how consumers are currently spending their money as well as how that spending may shift in the future. By doing so, decision makers, businesses, and planners are able to understand where the local market may be headed. “Retail leakage” refers to the difference between the



**30-Minute Drivetime Area from the Center of Downtown Marion (Blue) and Smyth County Boundary (Red)**

amount of money residents are spending and the number of sales local retailers are making. If the number of sales is less than the amount residents are spending, this results in a leakage; however, if the number of sales is larger than the amount residents are spending, the result is a surplus. The first points to residents needing to travel to purchase goods, and the latter points to individuals outside of the area coming into the area to purchase goods. In this case, a retail leakage analysis was conducted for Smyth County itself for a 30-minute drivetime from downtown Marion.

The retail market analysis illustrates that consumer needs are not being met by retailers in Smyth County. As illustrated in the chart below, stores within Smyth County sold \$388 million in merchandise and services in 2022. During the same period, Smyth County residents spent approximately \$474 million. This indicates a retail market leakage of \$136 million to external markets.

However, within a 30-minute drivetime of downtown Marion, it is clear that the region is a commercial draw. Within the 30-minute drivetime area, stores sold an estimated \$1.183 billion in merchandise and services in 2022. During this same period, consumers living in the same area spent approximately \$954 million. This indicates a retail market surplus of \$229 million. This highlights the fact that this region has an economic pull.

	STORE SELL	CONSUMERS BUY	MARKET LEAKS OR GAINS
SMYTH COUNTY	\$338 M	\$474 M	-\$136 M
30-MINUTE DRIVETIME	\$1.183 B	\$954 M	\$229 M

**2022 Retail Sales, Expenditures, and Market Leakage for Smyth County (Source: Claritas and Envirionics Analytics)**

## Retail Leakage Opportunities

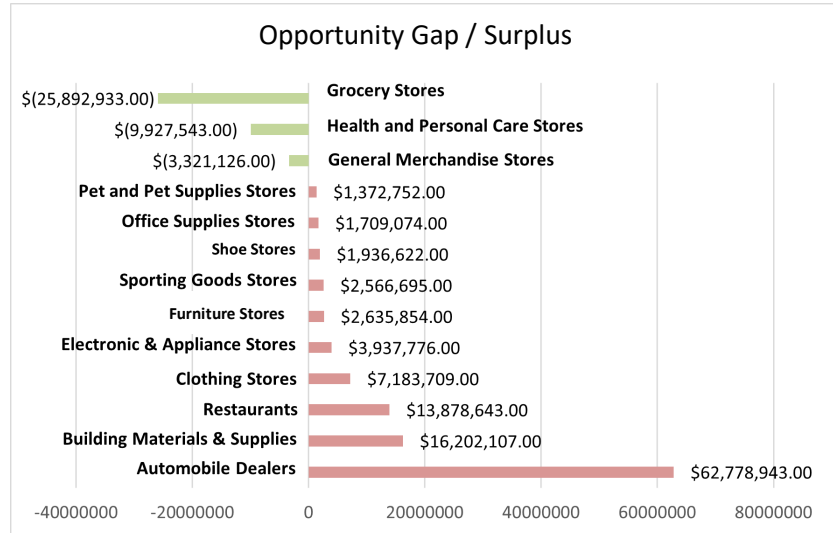
The figure to the right details areas of the local retail sectors and their level of saturation within Smyth County's local economy. Among different retail sectors, the largest opportunity for Smyth County is the addition of Automotive Dealers (\$62.8M leak), Building Materials and Supplies (\$16.2M leak), and Restaurants (\$13.9 M leak)

## Retail Demand

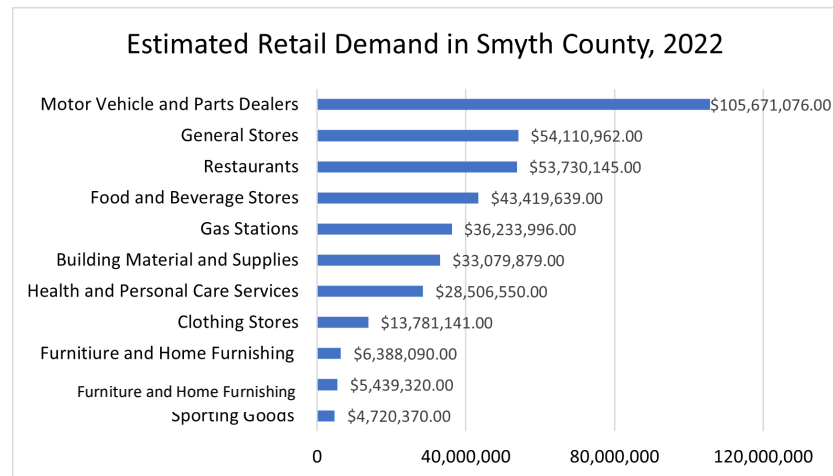
In an examination of retail demand, it is clear that residents want many of the retailers' outlines in the retail leakage analysis above. According to retail demand, the three largest demanded sectors are Automotive Dealers, General Stores (Department Stores), and Restaurants.

## Retail Sales

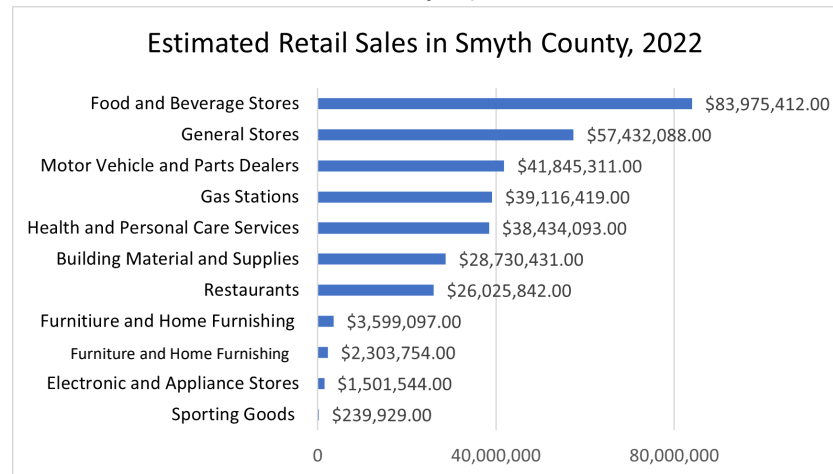
Retail sales make up the other half of the equation and represent the amount being sold in particular retail sectors in Smyth County. The top three sectors with the highest sales were Food and Beverage Stores (Grocery), General Stores (Department Store), and Automotive/Parts Dealers.



**Retail Leakage in Smyth County. Saturated (Green), Growth Opportunity (Red)**  
(Source: Claritas and Envirionics Analytics)



**Estimated Retail Demand in Smyth County (Source: Claritas and Envirionics Analytics)**



**Estimated Retail Sales in Smyth County (Source: Claritas and Envirionics Analytics)**



## BUSINESS CENTERS AND CORRIDORS: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Smyth County currently hosts multiple businesses inside and outside of its town centers; however, the majority of business growth seen in recent years has been within Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville. Main Street Programs are at the heart of downtown Marion’s business development and has an echoing effect on the resto of the communities within the County. However, not all retail needs are currently being met. This fact points to the need for expanded opportunities, investment in local businesses, and a reinvigoration of Smyth County’s entrepreneurial spirit. The following are a few methods for reaching these goals:

***Concentrate Business Development Along Transportation Corridors & Within Villages & Towns*** – In order to reduce the spread of commercial development into the County’s farm land, it is important to ensure that business development is contained to areas adjacent to major transportation thoroughfares and within towns. This includes areas in the I-81 corridor, along route 107, and route 16, as well as areas within Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville. By concentrating development in these areas, new businesses can have easy access to public utilities, transportation networks, and customers.

***Continue to Build Upon Current Business Development Programs*** – Currently, there are two programs that have been developed to help start-ups get off the ground through funding, logistics, and training. These include the Marion Entrepreneur Boot Camps created by the town of Marion and the Smyth County Small Business Boot Camp resources provided by the Smyth County Chamber of Commerce. Both have been instrumental in the creation of many small businesses in Smyth County and should be expanded to reduce the barrier to entry for those looking to start a small business. To spur small business development, it is likely that similar efforts to those taking place in Marion are needed in the County’s other towns, Chilhowie and Saltville. Through the establishment of start-up development programs in these towns, future entrepreneurs will be better able to address the retail and service needs of the County in the future.

***Build Upon the SmythStrong Program*** – The SmythStrong program was developed to help small businesses through grant money, financial assistance, and logistics through the COVID-19 Pandemic. The first phase of this program granted money to start-ups to foster entrepreneurialism in the County, with the first phase completed in 2023. Phase two, which launched in early 2023, extended grants to these same businesses to expand their services, hire new personnel, and bolster their businesses. This program represents an additional outlet for fostering entrepreneurial spirit in the County and should continue to offer grants to startups as funding allows.

***Develop a Revolving Grant Program*** – As noted in focus group meetings, the potential to develop a revolving fund of grant money for small businesses is a powerful tool for investing in the County’s economic future. Building upon the SmythStrong program, this revolving fund will afford funds to support start-ups and business expansion for years to come, regardless of government programs like ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act). Steps to establish this fund have already begun, and efforts to get this fund up and running as soon as possible will ensure the feasibility of programs like SmythStrong and others moving forward.

***Create an Incubator Space*** – The creation of an incubator space for start-ups not only allows easier access to the County’s entrepreneurial ecosystem but can also serve to provide new businesses with a storefront

to operate in their early months. This limits the barrier to entry for those looking to start a business in Smyth County and provides a wealth of benefits that can nurture a new generation of entrepreneurs.

***Foster Place-Based Business Development*** – It is important to capitalize on the County’s unique qualities that make it a great place to do business. In particular, capitalizing off Smyth County’s natural beauty is important in both promoting tourism in the area and building place-based businesses. Wineries, distilleries, breweries, tractor repair, agricultural equipment dealers, and recreational businesses (boat rentals, fishing stores, zip lines, hiking equipment) are examples of businesses that can capitalize on the needs of tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, farmers, and other residents. These businesses will likely be placed in areas where they are best able to meet the needs of their customers, which is likely to be rural areas of the County. However, these businesses should be limited to areas that are already provided with public utilities and ideally within the County’s rural villages. This way, sprawl into traditional farm land can be reduced and investments in the County’s smaller communities can be maximized. Communities such as Sugar Grove are prime examples of smaller communities that could capitalize on their proximity to prime farm land and recreational opportunities to reinvent themselves as a “trail town” that caters both to tourism and locals.

***Invest in the Creation of a Conference Center*** – Noted in focus group meetings, there is a lack of space to host large events (100+) within the County. This severely impacts all organizations in the County from hosting large events like a training session, informational meetings, conferences, or agricultural related events. Through the creation of a conference center, organizations will be able to host events in the County and not have to look elsewhere. This is likely to bring in outside tax dollars into the County and, if paired with a hotel, can serve to attract multi-day events like conferences or trade shows.

***Invest in Expanded Lodging Offerings*** – Although Smyth County is home to a handful of chain restaurants and national stores, there are few nationally recognized hotel chains. This likely limits spending in Smyth County and drastically reduces the likelihood that travelers along I-81 will stay overnight within the County. Efforts should be made moving forward to enticing chain hotels in particular, but other lodging offerings as well, through tools at the County and town’s disposal.

***Capitalize on Festivals and Events*** – Moving forward, festivals, community events, and scenic byways like Back of the Dragon should be publicized to a greater effect. Publicizing these events has the potential to increase local spending and bring outside tax monies into the County. This increase in tourism is also likely to spur increased demand for lodgings, restaurants, and shopping, which could serve to increase economic vitality in the County’s towns throughout the year.

***Develop New Festivals and Events*** – It was noted in multiple focus groups that there is a need to reinvigorate Smyth County’s community spirit. Festivals were noted as a prime way to bolster community identity, increase local and outside spending, and tell Smyth County’s story to the outside world. Paired with the County’s already well-known festivals, new festivals, and community events will begin to create a yearlong calendar that celebrates the County’s past, present, and future, all the while driving tourism dollars into the County.





## 4.2.3: Industry

## 4.2.3 INDUSTRY

### INDUSTRY: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Over the previous 20 years, Smyth County has had to adjust when it comes to the industrial and manufacturing industries that once were the cornerstones of the County. However, Smyth County has bolstered its efforts to attract new manufacturing, distribution, and warehousing as well as retain the industries that are already located in Smyth County. The entity leading the way for industrial development in the County is the Economic Development Authority of Smyth County. This organization is responsible for the development of publicly owned industrial parks, financing assistance for the attraction of new or the expansion of existing, industry, marketing, workforce development, and communication and outreach within Smyth County. The EDA is comprised of seven board members representing the seven electoral districts of the County that serve four-year terms.

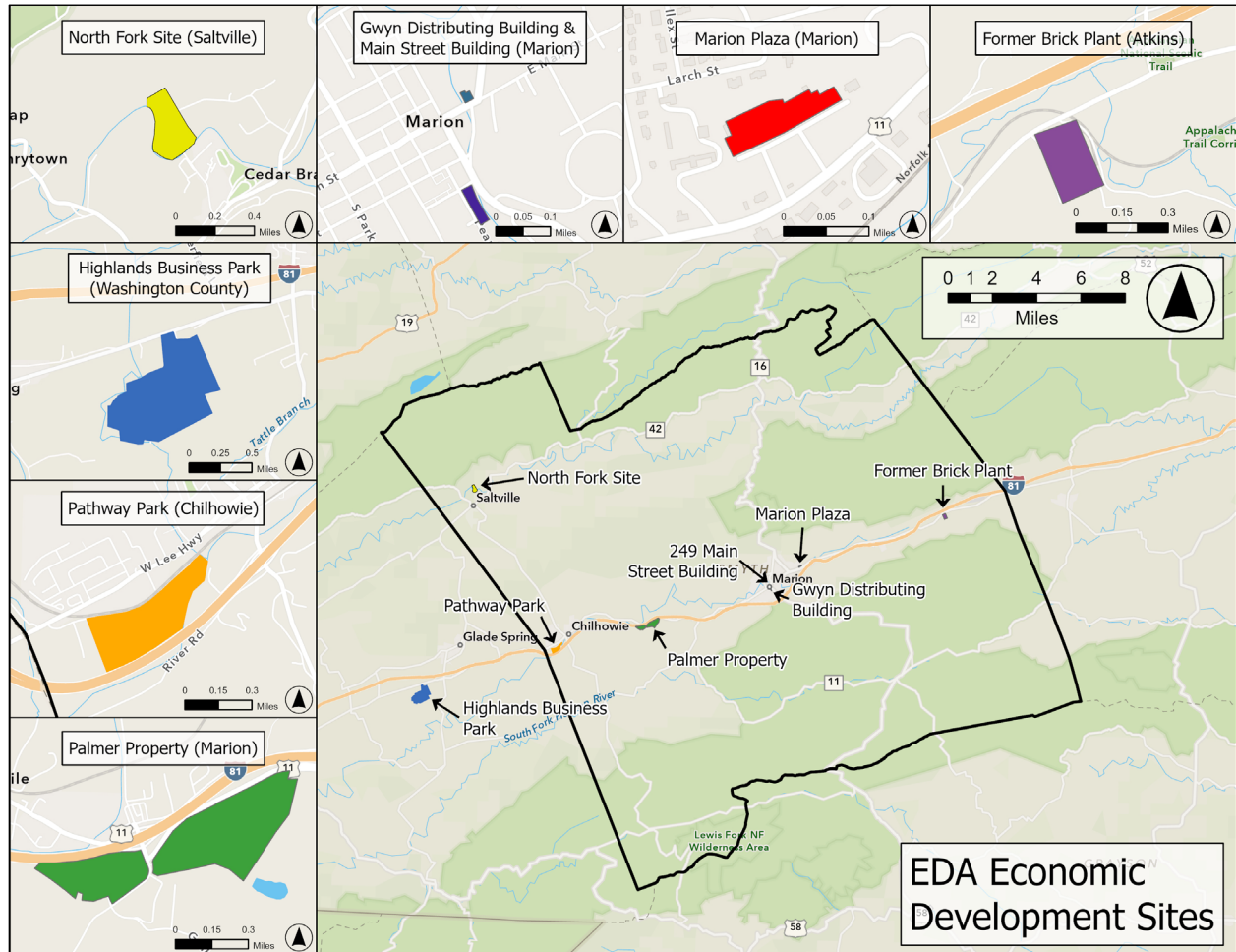
The EDA has contributed to the development of a series of sites across Smyth County. These sites include:

- **Palmer Property (Exit 39):** This property is located south of I-81 adjacent to Exit 39 near Seven Mile Ford. This undeveloped property consists of two parcels (43 and 89 acres) on either side of Chestnut Ridge Road that are zoned commercial. The site currently has public water and sewer lines.
- **Pathway Park:** This property is located between I-81 and Industrial Park Road in Chilhowie. Zoned as industrial, this 70-acre parcel is adjacent to an already in place Class A Railroad Line (Norfolk Southern), is located within an Enterprise Zone, has incentives in place for development, and has utilities already in place (broadband, electrical, natural gas, water line, sewer lines, and telecommunication lines)
- **North Fork Site:** Located at the site of a former mineral works, the North Fork Site offers 40 acres of industrially zoned space situated in Saltville with easy access to the Holston River and VA-107. This site is located within the town boundaries of Saltville and has easy access to utilities.
- **Former Brick Plant:** This former brick plant located in Atkins offers 303 acres of industrially zoned space. In addition to the acreage, this site currently hosts an 88,000 square foot warehouse and is within an Enterprise Zone, which offers incentives for redevelopment. This site is currently being used as a lumber yard.
- **Gwyn Distributing Building:** The former distribution center is located in downtown Marion. Originally constructed in 1949, this one acre and 32,100 square foot facility offers a prime opportunity to re-develop a historic building. Zoned as industrial and located within an Enterprise Zone, this parcel offers incentives for redevelopment as well as access to public water, sewer, and electricity.
- **Marion Plaza:** Marion Plaza is a shopping center located in eastern Marion that has space for economic development. Multiple storefronts have been vacant, and efforts are being made to fill them. Throughout the shopping center, there is 10,000 square feet of retail space. This area is zoned commercial and is within both an Enterprise Zone and a Technology Zone. Unlike the other properties listed by the EDA, storefronts in Marion Plaza are not for sale; rather, they are offered for lease.



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Large manufacturing companies located in Smyth County include Utility Trailer Manufacturing Inc. (Atkins), General Dynamics (Marion), Speyside Bourbon Cooperage (Atkins), Scholle IPN (Chilhowie), Woodgrain Millworks (Marion), Royal Building Products (Atkins), United Salt (Saltville), and American Wood Fibers (Marion), just to name a few.



*Location of Economic Development Sites Supported by Smyth County EDA, 2023*

## INDUSTRY: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Industrial manufacturing remains a large portion of Smyth County's economic base, with multiple large scale manufacturing firms creating products ranging from semi-truck trailers to liquid packaging materials to electronic components that support military hardware to a cooperage creating barrels for the world's finest whiskeys. Currently, the industrial backbone of Smyth County is strong, and efforts are being made to continue to diversify and expand industries that are already present in the County and increase efforts to entice new companies to relocate. Leading the way in this effort is the County's Economic Development Authority through the creation of development and redevelopment areas. Smyth County's industry will



## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

continue to provide those living in the County with a good living, opportunities to grow their careers, and undergird the economic vitality of Smyth County into the future. Although robust, there are additional efforts that could be undertaken to enhance manufacturing's standing in the County. The following are a few suggestions for consideration:

***Take Steps to Address Negative Perceptions of Manufacturing*** – A sentiment that was shared in business focus groups was that the general public, especially younger people, has a negative perception of manufacturing. These perceptions may or may not be strongly held, but efforts can be taken to either reduce or alter these perceptions. A preliminary step could be to assess public perceptions of manufacturing through a community survey. This would give EDA a better understanding of views that the public holds and plans that could be made to address them. Additional methods could be to introduce the public, specifically younger people, to the realities of manufacturing. This PR campaign could include visits to high schools, public meetings, or tours of facilities to highlight advanced manufacturing and the contributions it makes to the economic wellbeing of the County.

***Celebrate Manufacturing*** – A celebration of Smyth County's manufacturing was noted as important moving forward by focus group attendees. Not only will this highlight the role that manufacturing plays in the County, but it can illustrate the County's values and support its industry. The creation of festivals, parades, public art work, or community events that focus on celebrating Smyth County's historic, current, and future industries are prime examples of ways manufacturing could be celebrated moving forward.

***Partner With Local Schools to Supply Trained Workers*** – With an increased emphasis placed on advanced manufacturing, it is also important that the County can supply current and future manufacturers with a well-trained workforce. Smyth County Public School's main tool for ensuring this becomes a reality is the Smyth County Career and Technology Center. Efforts should be made to expand this resource for training the County's high schools in trades such as welding, machine, computer programming, and plumbing that work hand-in-hand to support the County's manufacturers. Similarly, efforts should be made by local manufacturers to create mentorship/training programs that prepare those at the Career and Technology Center to go directly into an advanced manufacturing job once they graduate from high school.

***Partnership With Community Colleges to Provide Training and Retraining Programs Locally***– Currently, Wytheville and Virginia Highlands Community Colleges offer programs that train individuals in trades like carpentry, electrical work, machining, and plumbing, as well as programs in advanced manufacturing like engineering, machine technology, and mechatronics. All of these areas support advanced manufacturing in Smyth County, both directly and indirectly, but efforts should be made to add programming similar to those offered in Wytheville and Abingdon to residents locally. The creation of a partnership, either solely or in tandem between the community colleges, could serve to allow increased job training and retraining opportunities for those in the County looking to switch careers or move into the manufacturing sector. Similar coursework is already offered at the Crossroads Institute, operated by Wytheville Community College, in Galax. A similar initiative, WCC\_WEST, is a new program that will work to bolster advanced manufacturing training in the future as well.

***Capitalize on Industrial Park, Development, and Redevelopment Properties*** – The EDA in Smyth County holds several areas within the County that are prime for economic development, industrial development, and sites for businesses to relocate operations. These sites are currently being marketed as such and should continue to be sold as places to relocate or expand an existing industry. At sites where public

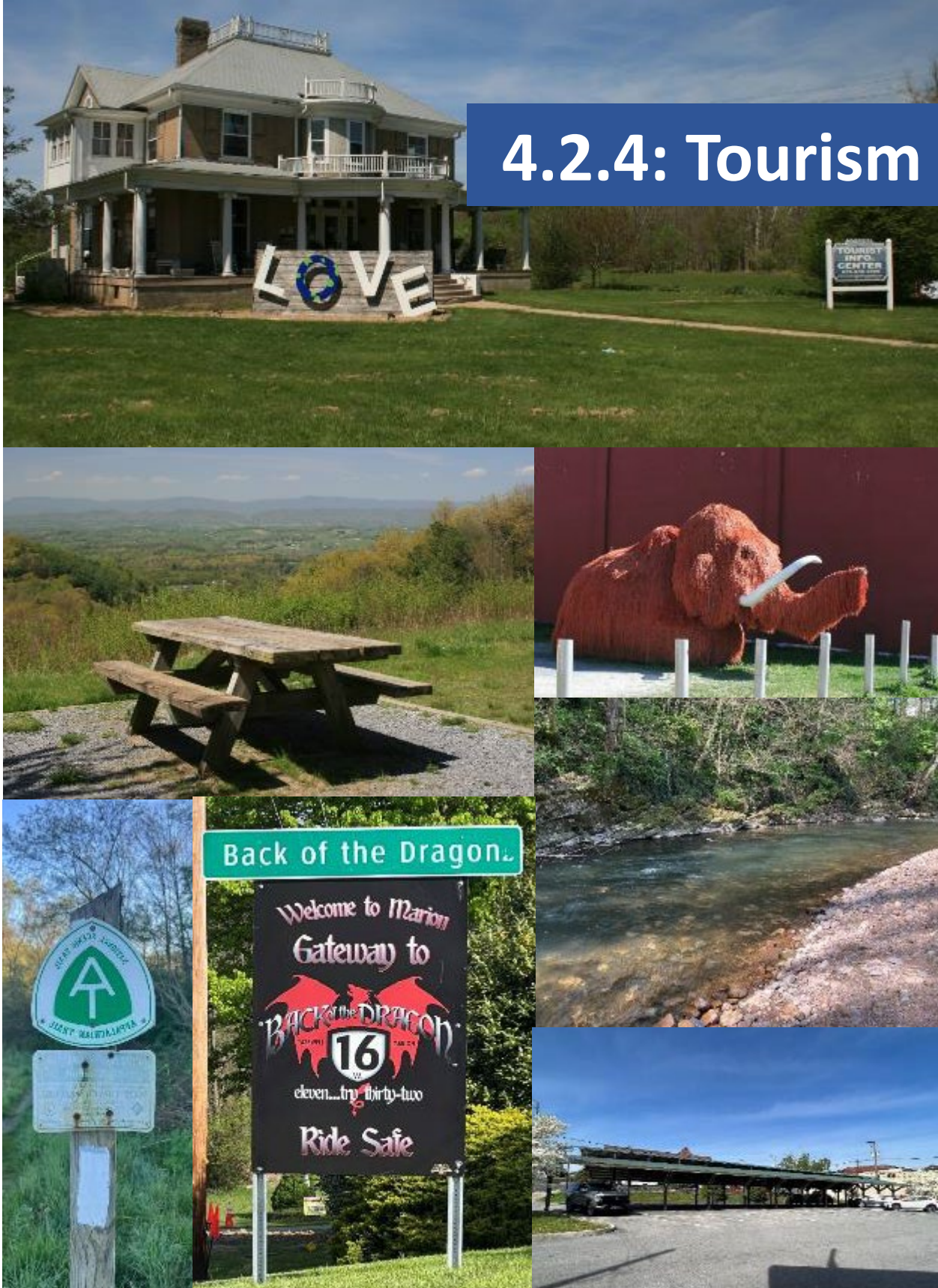
## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

utilities (water, sewer, electric) are not provided, efforts should be made to install these utilities in order to make new operations easier to establish.

***Establish a Regional Industry Authority*** – partnerships with the counties surrounding Smyth will be vital in jointly addressing industrial, manufacturing, support services, and workforce opportunities and shortfalls. Therefore, efforts should be made by Smyth County’s EDA as well as those in Wythe, Grayson, Washington, Russell, Tazewell, and Bland to pursue a joint authority that oversees regional industrial development. In this way, the region can better attract investments into the region, strengthen the local economy, and provide well-paying jobs to the citizens of the counties included.

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## 4.2.4: Tourism



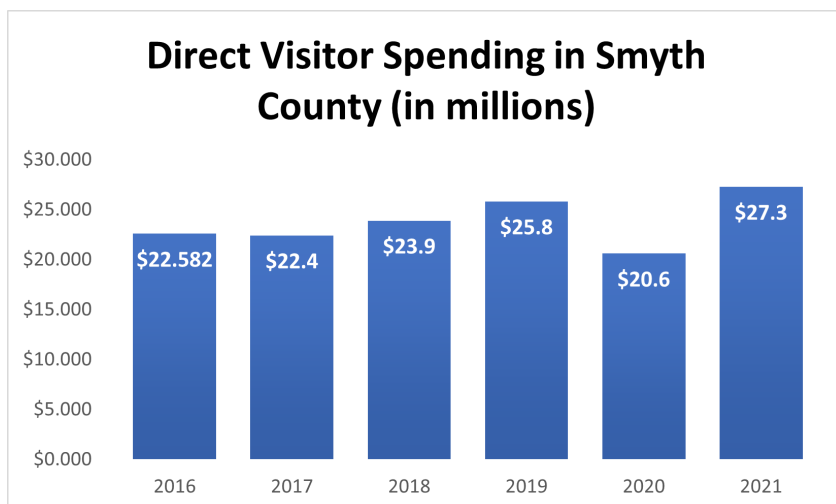
## 4.2.4 TOURISM

### TOURISM: EXISTING CONDITIONS

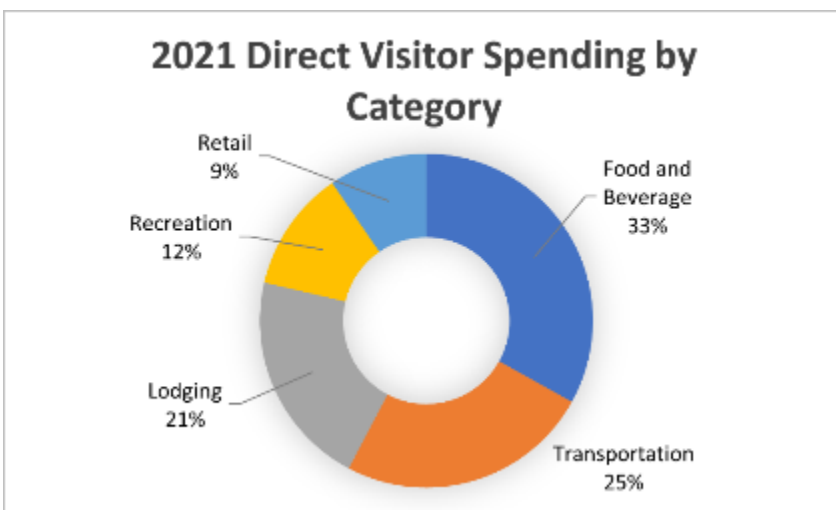
According to data provided by the Virginia Tourism Corporation in 2021, direct visitor spending in Smyth County has steadily increased from 2016 to 2021, with a small dip during 2020, which is likely associated with the Covid-19 Pandemic. Over the course of five years, direct spending from tourism rose from \$22.4 million to \$27.3 million, an increase of 21.9% and \$4.9 million dollars.

Among those who visited Smyth County in 2021, the largest portion of direct spending went toward food and beverage, with \$9 million dollars, or roughly a third of all tourism revenue, falling into this category. This was followed by transportation with \$6.7 million, lodging with \$5.7 million, recreation with \$3.2 million, and retail with \$2.6 million.

In 2021, travel-related expenditures supported 307 jobs across the County, brought in \$7.7 million in labor income, and contributed \$700,000 to state taxes and \$1.2 million to local taxes.



*Direct Visitor Spending in Smyth County Between 2016 and 2021 (Source: the Virginia Tourism Corporation)*



*2021 Direct Visitor Spending by Category (Source: the Virginia Tourism Corporation)*



Direct Visitor Spending 2016-2021, Smyth County (Millions)						
Year	Lodging	Food & Beverage	Retail	Recreation	Transportation	Total Spending
2016	5.4	7.2	2.1	2.0	5.9	22.6
2017	5.3	7.3	2.1	2.0	5.9	22.4
2018	5.5	7.8	2.2	2.2	6.3	23.9
2019	6.0	8.3	2.3	2.4	6.7	25.8
2020	4.5	7.0	2.0	2.0	5.2	20.6
2021	5.7	9.0	2.6	3.2	6.7	27.3

*Direct Visitor Spending 2016-2021 (Source: the Virginia Tourism Corporation)*

### Visitor Profiling & Nature of Demand Study For Smyth County

Completed in early 2023, the “*Visitor Profiling and Nature of Demand Study for Smyth County, Virginia*” by the Institute for Service Research answers many of the questions surrounding who is visiting the County, why they are visiting the County, and what is likely to persuade them to return. Based on this study, researchers derived 34 KMIs (key marketing insights) pertaining to Smyth County and its tourism industry based upon the collection of 406 surveys from visitors to Smyth County on more than one occasion over the last three years. Among the 34 KMIs, the following stood out as tools to guide future development:

1. “Smyth County has a distinct brand personality as perceived by visitors. The primary image component is natural beauty. The second image component is the friendliness of local residents.”
2. “For overall visitation, the primary pull factor possessed by Smyth County are the parks (particularly Hungry Mother State Park). The secondary pull factor is the bundle of area/regional museums.”
3. “Smyth County’s museums are of particular importance to visiting parties containing children 10 years old or younger”.
4. “When asked what should be added to Smyth County, the #1 request by visitors is restaurants, and #2 is lodging”.

These four key findings point to the opportunity for Smyth County to capitalize on their natural beauty, small town feel, and genuineness of their residents, parks, and natural areas, as well as cultural centers like museums. There appears to be a need for greater opportunities for families with younger children from this study, with particular interest in educational based opportunities like museums or environmental learning opportunities (HMSP, Blue Ridge Discovery Center). Reinforcing anecdotes and results from the community survey, restaurants and lodging were found to be an area that needs improvement in the eyes

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of visitors. Certainly, efforts should be made moving forward to capitalize on these opportunities as well as address the shortfalls currently present.

### Marion, Chilhowie, Saltville, and Smyth County Tourism

The following tourist attractions are located within Smyth County:

- ***Appalachian Spirit Gallery*** – Marion, VA
- ***Burke Print Shop at The Henderson*** – Marion, VA
- ***Song of the Mountains*** – Marion, VA
- ***The Ford Studio*** – Marion, VA
- ***The Lincoln Theatre*** – Marion, VA
- ***The Wayne C. Henderson School of Appalachian Arts*** – Marion, VA
- ***Blue Ridge Discovery Center*** – Troutdale, VA
- ***Chilhowie Famers Market*** – Chilhowie, VA
- ***Davis Valley Winery & Distillery*** – Rural Retreat, VA
- ***Grayson Highlands State Park*** – Mouth of Wilson, VA
- ***Hayes Valley Farms*** – Marion, VA
- ***Historic Salt Park*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Holston Hills Country Club*** – Marion, VA
- ***Hungry Mother State Park*** – Marion, VA
- ***Long Neck Lair Farm*** – Rural Retreat, VA
- ***Mount Rogers Headquarters & Visitor Center*** – Marion, VA
- ***Mount Rogers Scenic Byway*** – Marion, VA
- ***Mount Pleasant Preservation Society & Museum*** – Marion, VA
- ***Museum of the Middle Appalachians*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Park Place Drive-In*** – Marion, VA
- ***Rich Valley Fairground*** – Rich Valley
- ***Salt of the Earth Farms*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Saltville Civil War Overlook*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Saltville Civil War Sites*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Saltville Golf Club*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Saltville's Hardy Roberts Memorial Wave Pool*** – Saltville, VA
- ***Settlers Museum of SWVA*** – Atkins, VA
- ***Smyth County Museum*** – Marion, VA
- ***The Appalachian Trail*** – Smyth County Tazewell, VA
- ***The Channels Natural Area Preserve*** - Saltville, VA
- ***The Civil War Trail in Smyth County*** - Smyth County
- ***The Claw of the Dragon (Marion Loop)*** - Marion, VA
- ***The Octagon House*** - Marion, VA
- ***The Back of the Dragon*** – Marion, VA

***It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive of all tourist attractions in Smyth County.***

### Regional Tourism and Strategic Plan

The DRIVE 2.0 statewide tourism plan prepared by the Virginia Tourism Corporation includes strategic plans for each of Virginia's tourism regions, outlining strategies for tourism in the region for the 2020–2025 time frame. Smyth County is included in the Southwest Virginia Blue Ridge Highlands region which, includes the municipalities of Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Radford, Bristol, Pulaski, Abingdon, Wytheville, Galax, Marion, Damascus, as well as the counties of Washington, Montgomery, Carroll, Pulaski, Smyth, Wythe, Patrick, Floyd, Grayson, Giles, and Bland. Key highlights of the regional plan that relate to Smyth County include:

- The region's lures include its scenic beauty, outdoor recreation opportunities, access to state parks (Hungry Mother specifically for Smyth County), music and cultural heritage, quaint main streets (Marion & Saltville), and ease of connection to other parts of the state.

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- According to VTC, the main areas of focus for the SWVA Blue Ridge Highlands region are opportunities related to nature and outdoor recreation, the arts and music, the culinary arts (Agritourism, Dining, Libations), Town and City Centers, and Lodging.
- A secondary focus, according to VTC, should be given to History and Heritage, Meeting Spaces (Meetings and Conferences), Sports (College and Motorsports), and Events.

In addition, the VTC conducted research in collaboration with TravelTrakAmerica to determine the typical visitor to the region. They found that a typical visitor is married, traveling with 2.8 people, stays in the region for 2.4 nights, spends \$587 per trip, and has a mean age of 44.

The plan concluded with a series of recommendations to guide tourism planning in the region, which include:

- Connecting and collectively promoting outdoor experiences in the Blue Ridge Highlands. This should be done in order to help create a more cohesive regional identity around the region's recreational assets.
- Bundle and package experiences using the hub and spoke method to increase the overall appeal of individual attractions and offerings. In this way, visitors are able to easily access various activities, attractions, and amenities, all within a short distance of one another.

Localities	Direct Visitor Spending (Millions)					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bland	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.8	4.2	5.0
Bristol City	63.5	64.8	67.8	70.0	54.2	80.8
Carroll	37.9	41.4	43.5	42.0	33.6	46.8
Floyd	15.0	16.1	16.4	16.1	11.2	16.3
Galax City	14.5	14.7	15.5	15.7	11.6	15.6
Giles	25.5	26.8	28.4	29.6	21.4	31.8
Grayson	9.0	9.5	9.6	10.3	9.8	12.9
Montgomery	186.3	193.2	209.7	222.1	145.9	237.6
Patrick	19.7	20.6	22.2	21.5	17.3	22.2
Pulaski	65.1	66.2	70.3	74.1	56.4	77.6
Radford City	19.9	20.3	20.9	21.4	13.3	19.1

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Smyth	22.6	22.4	23.9	25.8	20.6	27.3
Washington	94.6	98.2	102.5	103.2	76.4	115.2
Wythe	103.6	108.3	112.3	114.7	86.5	129.9
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>681.2</b>	<b>706.7</b>	<b>747.5</b>	<b>771.6</b>	<b>562.1</b>	<b>838.2</b>

*Direct Visitor spending in Localities in Southwest Virginia – Blue Ridge Highlands Region, 2016-2021 (Source: the Virginia Tourism Corporation)*

## TOURISM: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism is a major driver of the local economy in Smyth County. With ample natural beauty, Smyth County is poised to take advantage of its local assets to improve the overall economic landscape; however, efforts to improve support facilities such as restaurants, hotels, and shopping will all need to be addressed for the County to take full opportunity of its placement as the featured destination of Southwest Virginia. The following are a few recommendations that could serve to improve the County's tourist sector:

***Invest in Tourist Opportunities that Improve Local Quality of Life*** – An important factor that was noted in focus group meetings was the need to develop tourist attractions that not only entice people to visit Smyth County but make living in the County more enjoyable. Most notably, increasing access to outdoor recreation opportunities through improved sidewalks, parking, and connectivity, as well as the addition of new or expanded cultural events, were noted as a way of improving quality of life. Although these are two examples, they highlight the physical, mental, and social benefits of investing in these types of amenities. Not only will they bring in outside revenue, but they can also help create better social cohesion and spur internal spending in secondary sectors like bike, kayak, equipment rentals, restaurants, or shopping.

***Create a “Digital Welcome Mat” for Smyth County*** – The need for a digital presence has never been more important. To drive tourism, there needs to be a collective push on behalf of the County, towns, and business leaders to ensure Smyth County has an aesthetically pleasing, up-to-date, and well-appointed “digital welcome mat.” Partnerships between the County's Economic Development and Tourism Department, Virginia Tourism Corporation, local Chambers of Commerce, and other business-related organizations should be fostered to ensure the rollout is coordinated, inclusive, and best highlights the County's unique tourist, lodging, food, shopping, cultural, and historical assets. This should include digital maps, “best kept secrets,” top 10 lists, and other informational resources that allow locals and visitors to better understand what is in Smyth County.

***Create Tourist Hubs*** – Creating tourist hubs can either be in a physical sense in which cultural, historical, shopping, restaurants, and natural assets work together as an experience or in a thematic sense in which assets are clustered by interest. This can be developed through physical signage in areas of the County that have similar tourist-related signage, branding, or aesthetics or through digital elements such as maps, collective branding. In addition to creating connections between assets, it is important to create a physical information center for each of these areas. Therefore, information centers should be established around

current assets that are well-staffed and conveniently located. Hungry Mother State Park, the Lincoln Theatre, Smyth County Visitor Center, and the Blue Ridge Discovery Center are prime examples of places where these centers could be established or developed further.

***Support the Creation of Tourism Support Services*** - With the development of new tourist offerings in the County, an equal amount of support should be given to secondary services. This includes businesses like hotels, restaurants, bars, rentals (car, bike, kayak), equipment outfitters, and local guides, just to name a few. The creation of robust support networks for already well-established tourist attractions, such as Hungry Mother State Park, will ensure that tourism dollars stay in Smyth County and are not lost to other counties.

***Create the Smyth County Tourism Department*** – Continue to invest in the Smyth County Tourism Association and strengthen its formal partnership with the Economic Development Department. Investments in the County’s economic development department and freestanding tourism association will be instrumental in guiding marketing, tourism, and general economic development moving forward. Currently, economic development and tourism are each staffed by a single employee. The County should consider increasing its investment in each entity, since a well-staffed department goes hand in hand with the need to grow the County’s economy. Moving forward, the two departments should continue to partner on economic development projects and grants and consider formalizing the partnership under the Smyth Strong umbrella. Investments in increasing capacity, funding, and manpower to this department are strongly recommended to guide continued economic growth over the next 10 to 20 years.

***Strengthen Partnerships with Federal and State Recreational Assets*** – With large portions of Smyth County falling under federal or state jurisdiction and many of those areas being home to popular recreational opportunities, it will be vital to create two-way communication between these entities and the County. Marketing and advocacy are pathways to strengthen these partnerships due to restrictions placed upon state and federal entities. Through expanded marketing efforts, unique recreational assets such as Hungry Mother State Park and the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area can be marketed to those inside and outside the County in a manner that Virginia State Parks and the National Forest Service may not be able to. Additionally, the County should engage in advocacy on behalf of these entities in order to increase funding, amenities, and opportunities within these lands.

***Market Smyth County as “The Basecamp of SWVA”*** – Marketing is a powerful tool in selling the County to tourists. Location is another important factor in how the County can market itself. With the abundance of natural assets, scenic beauty, and attractions within and close to Smyth County, in addition to the County’s proximity to I-81 and I-77, Smyth is strategically located in the heart of Southwest Virginia. This gives visitors the opportunity to see and experience multiple tourist attractions, cultural events, and outdoor recreational opportunities if only they stayed in Smyth County. Moving forward, Smyth County should begin to market itself not only as a place to stay in its own right but as a place you can come, shop, dine, stay, and use as a jumping-off point to explore other locations in SWVA. The creation of Smyth County as a “basecamp” for further exploration of SWVA takes advantage of the County’s placement and spurs the development of secondary services like restaurants, lodging, gas stations, electric charging stations, and shopping.



***Invest in Expanded Lodging Offerings*** – Investing in the creation of new short term lodging (hotels and motels) as well as short term vacation rentals and RV camping to capture tourism dollars and improve the ability for tourists to stay in the County.

In its research, the Smyth County Tourism Association has identified short term lodging as the greatest need for the tourism industry within the County. While all lodging options are welcome, the top priority is the construction of a new hotel located near one of the I-81 exits. This hotel should be a Midscale or Upper Midscale brand hotel, in order to serve business and leisure travelers as well as transient traffic from I-81.

Smyth County’s existing hotel stock is primarily Economy scale or independent, and therefore the County is missing the opportunity to capture the Midscale or Upper Midscale market segment. According to data from Virginia Tourism Corporation, demand for Economy scale brands shrank by 4.2% in 2023, while demand for Midscale remained steady, and demand for Upper Midscale brands grew by 2.4% in the same period.

In addition, the Tourism Association has identified a need for non-traditional short-term lodging that would specifically cater to the outdoor enthusiasts already visiting the area, including but not limited to tiny home rentals, yurts, privately owned campgrounds and RV parks, hiker hostels, and Eco-Resorts.



## 4.3.1: Public Utilities

## 4.3 PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

This section outlines public infrastructure and public service facilities across Smyth County. These include water and sewer lines, solid waste facilities, transportation networks, energy supplies, and broadband and telecommunication networks.

### 4.3.1 PUBLIC UTILITIES

#### PUBLIC UTILITIES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

##### Water

Smyth County provides water services primarily to the more developed portions of the County, those areas being Marion, Saltville, and Chilhowie. Fresh water is supplied from six different water systems throughout the County, including the Town of Marion, Smyth County, the Town of Chilhowie, the Thomas Bridge Water Corporation, the Town of Saltville, and the Rye Valley Water Authority. In combination, these six service providers purify and transport 4.7 million gallons per day, providing roughly 12,000 customers with fresh drinking water. Of this, Smyth County operates nearly 125 miles of waterlines, which provide nearly 400,000 gallons of water per day to roughly 2,500 customers. The following information was provided through a recent Smyth County Comprehensive Water System Study Report published in early 2023:

Water Infrastructure owned and operated by **Smyth County** include:

- **Watson Gap Water Subsystem:** This waterworks is situated around a natural artesian well and is permitted for 291,200 gallons per day. This well provides water for residents in and around the Saltville and Rich Valley (east of Saltville) areas. This site treats all water at the site with chlorine. This system operates in six pressure zones and provides fire protection to all customers within the system except those along Beaver Creek Road and Valley Road.
- **Walker Creek Subsystem:** Located in the west central and serves as a master meter connection between the Town of Saltville, the Town of Chilhowie, and an emergency connection to the Town of Marion and the Watson Gap Waterworks. This system is supplied through bulk water purchases from the Town of Chilhowie and Saltville and currently has a capacity of roughly 450,000 gallons. This system operates in six pressure zones with limited fire protection to the surrounding area.
- **Hutton Branch Subsystem:** Located in the eastern central portion of the County, this site consists of two drilled wells, a membrane filtration treatment plant, two atmospheric storage tanks, two booster pump stations, one well booster pump station, and two emergency connections to the Town of Marion waterworks. This system currently operates in one pressure zone and provides fire protection to the Hutton Branch area but not in Currin Valley. The current capacity is roughly 126,000 gallons.
- **Atkins Extension:** the Atkins extension is a consecutive waterworks that serves the Route 11 corridor from Atkins to the border with Wythe County. Water for this system is provided by the Town of Marion's "Atkins Tank," and due to the change in elevation, the further east you go the lower pressure gets; this is especially evident when the water level of the Atkins Tank is low. This results in limited fire protection throughout the line and no fire protection east of Exit 54.

- **East Hungry Mother Subsystem:** East Hungry Mother is a consecutive community waterworks that serves portions of Hungry Mother State Park. Water in this system is provided by the Town of Marion and is provided by the Town's Prater Lane tanks. Portions of the line provide fire protection, but not the entirety.
- **Saint Clairs Creek Subsystem:** Saint Clairs Creek is a consecutive waterworks located south of Chilhowie that consists of approximately 11,500 feet of 4-inch waterline, a booster pump station, and a water storage tank. Water for this system is provided by the Town of Chilhowie, with the site's storage tanks holding approximately 15,500 gallons of water. No fire protection is provided by this line.
- **South Fork Subsystem:** South Fork is a consecutive waterworks located south of Adwolfe, consisting of a water booster pump station, approximately 16,000 feet of 4-to-8-inch line, and one storage tank. Water for this system is provided by the Thomas Bridge Water Corporation, with the site's storage tanks holding approximately 86,000 gallons of water. Fire protection is provided along South Fork Road.
- **St. John's Crossing Subsystem:** St. John's Crossing is a consecutive waterworks that consists of approximately 9,000 feet of 2-to-8-inch line that serves the St. Johns Crossing subdivision and surrounding areas south of Chilhowie. Water for this system is provided by the Town of Chilhowie and provides limited fire protection with five hydrants located along the line.
- **Poore Valley Subsystem:** Poore Valley is a consecutive waterworks that consists of two master meter vaults as well as 6- and 8-inch waterlines that operate as part of the Town of Saltville's system. This system is located between the Saltville corporate limits and the Washington County line with Saltville operating that 8-inch waterline and the County operating the two master meters. The County bills those living between the two water meters. Water is provided by the Town of Saltville and this line does provide fire protection.

Water Infrastructure owned and operated by the ***Town of Chilhowie*** includes:

- **The Town of Chilhowie Water System:** This system serves all areas within Chilhowie's corporate limits, large swaths of the western portion of the County, and customers in the Mill Creek area of Washington County. Water is supplied through a 2.5 MGD membrane water treatment plant which is co-operated by the Washington County Service Authority. Water is collected from the town's springs and the WCSA's spring sources, treated, and distributed. Distribution mains include waterlines from two to 10 inches, with five pressure zones, seven main line PRVs, and five storage tanks which hold roughly 3.4 million gallons of water. Fire protection is provided throughout most of the system except for areas with smaller diameter water mains. This system services roughly 2,250 customers inside Chilhowie, across the western portion of the County, and within the Mill Creek community.

Water infrastructure owned and operated by the ***Town of Marion***:

- **The Town of Marion System:** This system serves all areas within the town's corporate limit and some areas just outside the town's limits. Water for the system is provided by a 3.0 MGD surface water treatment plant that pulls for the Middle Fork of the Holston River as well as four springs. The water treatment plant is in western Marion along Route 11 with the spring being located south of town. Marion's distribution system includes water lines from two to 16 inches, six pressure zones, four booster pumps, 10 storage tanks holding approximately 3.4 million gallons,

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

and fire protection within the town's limits. This system services roughly 3,600 customers inside and adjacent to Marion.

Water infrastructure owned and operated by the ***Rye Valley Water Authority***:

- **The Rye Valley Water Authority System:** This system primarily serves the community of Sugar Grove. Water is supplied by a 0.288 MGD membrane filtration plant that uses four springs as sources. This plant is located off route 16 north of Sugar Grove and began service in 2011. Distribution is provided by water lines ranging from two to eight inches with two pressure zones, one main line PRV, two storage tanks with approximately 545,000 gallons of capacity, and fire protection for areas within the system's single high-pressure zone. This system has no booster pump stations, with all flow being gravity assisted. This system services roughly 600 customers within the Rye Valley.

Water infrastructure owned and operated by the ***Town of Saltville***:

- **The Town of Saltville System:** This system serves all areas within the town of Saltville town as well as areas that are adjacent to town in Smyth and Washington counties. Water is provided by two drilled wells, the Cardwell Town Well and Well No. 10, with a total combined permitted capacity of approximately 830,000 gallons per day. Water supplied by these wells is chlorinated to ensure disinfection and safety. Distribution includes six booster pump stations, six mainline PRVs, 11 pressure zones, one hydro-pneumatic, and seven atmospheric storage tanks with a combined 913,000 gallons of storage. Fire protection is provided to most areas of the system, with limited to no protection for areas serviced by smaller-diameter waterlines. This system services roughly 1,000 customers within Saltville and in adjacent communities.

Water infrastructure owned and operated by the ***Thomas Bridge Water Corporation***:

- **Thomas Bridge Water Corporation System:** This system serves the communities of Adwolfe, Thomas Bridge, Stoney Battery, and adjacent areas both in Smyth and Washington counties. Water is provided to this system's waterworks through surface water extraction from the South Fork of the Holston River, with a backup supply provided by Taylor Spring. Distribution includes water lines from two to 12 inches, two mainline PRVs, four pressure zones, one booster pump station, three water storage tanks, and one WTP clear well tank that holds roughly 758,000 gallons of water. This plant was originally constructed in 1978, upgraded in 1997, and again upgraded in 2022 to improve water treatment, infrastructure, and conduct routine maintenance. This system currently services approximately 1,800 customers in western Smyth and eastern Washington counties.

### ***Transient Non-Community Water Systems:***

Transient Non-Community Water Systems are systems that serve at least 25 people that change throughout the year. Within Smyth County, these include systems at:

- Blue Ridge Discovery Center
- Brushy Mountain Admin Site
- High Country Horse Camp
- Hurricane Recreation Area



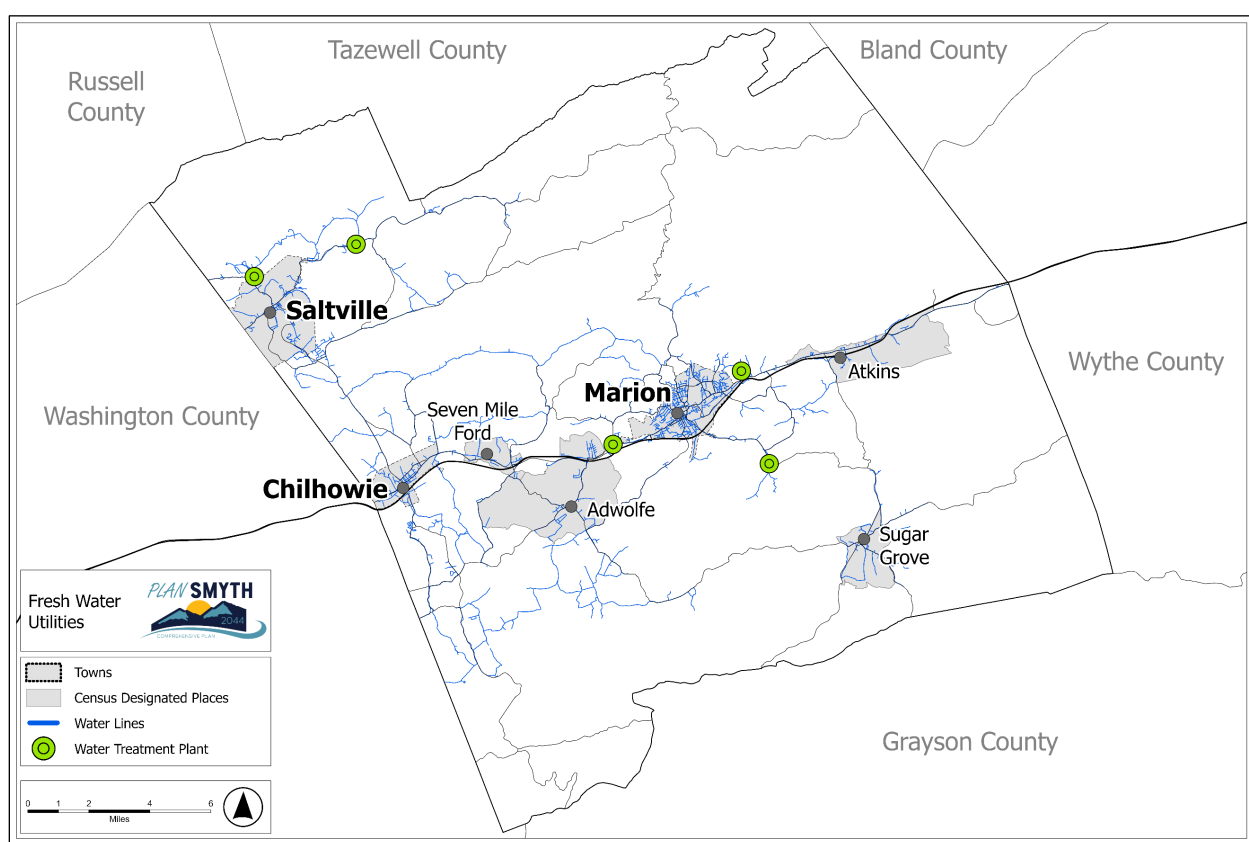
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- Konnarock Community Center
- Raccoon Branch

These systems provide water through groundwater wells and are all located in the Konnarock or Sugar Grove areas of the County. Recently, the well located at the Konnarock Community Center has been declared to be influenced by surface water and has been placed on a boil notice.

In order to supplement the County's water supply, the County purchases around 91 million gallons of water from non-County water sources yearly.

Areas that are not serviced by municipal or County water lines gain access to fresh water through home-wells with varying levels of purification. Areas in the southern portion of the County (east of Sugar Grover and areas within the National Forest) and the northeastern portions of the County (the Nebo and Rich Valley areas) are areas in which well water is primarily used.



## Wastewater

Sewer lines are provided primarily in populated areas of Smyth County. These include the area surrounding Saltville, Chilhowie, Marion, and communities adjacent to I-81. In addition to sewer lines, there are a series of wastewater treatment facilities that include:

- **Saltville Wastewater Treatment Plant:** This facility treats all wastewater in Saltville and areas that are connected to the town's sewer lines. This treatment facility is supported by six pump stations located throughout town and is located north of Saltville on Allison Gap Road.

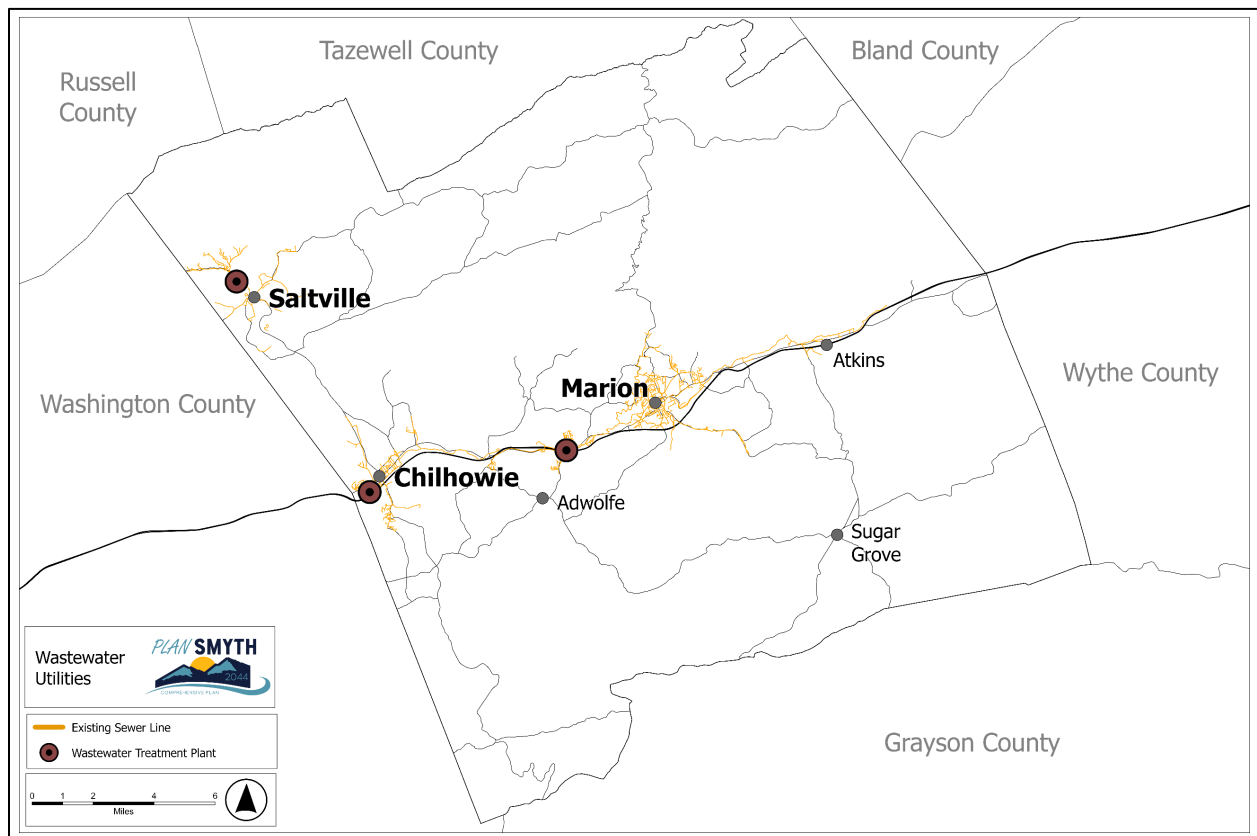
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- **Town of Chilhowie Wastewater Treatment Plant:** The town of Chilhowie operates an extended aerated wastewater treatment plant that services the town of Chilhowie and the Seven Mile Ford area. This plant has a capacity of 999,000 gallons per day and provides services to 1,250 customers.
- **Town of Marion Wastewater Treatment Plant:** This plant is located on the same site as the freshwater treatment plant located in western Marion.

### Solid Waste

Currently, Smyth operates solid waste transfer stations to accommodate non-hazardous solid waste. These stations are located in the western portion of the County and provide a location for solid waste to be temporarily stored until it can be relocated to out-of-County landfills for proper disposal. The County manages 11 convenience stations that allow residents to drop off household trash and recycling. These convenience stations are located at:

- Locust Cove - Bluegrass Trail, Rich Valley
- Dickey's Knob - Highway 16, Sugar Grove
- Fish Hatchery - Highway 16, Marion
- McCready's Gap - Poor Valley Rd, Saltville
- Old Quarry Road – Old Quarry Rd, Saltville
- Old Wilderness Rd – Ceres
- McMullin's Brown's Subdivision Road, Adwolfe
- Camp Road – Camp
- Wilkinson's Mill – Love's Mill Rd, Chilhowie
- Atkins – Lee Highway, Atkins
- Hungry Mother – Galliot Vista Drive, Marion



### Internet / Broadband / Telecommunications

Due to Smyth County being fairly rural, the distribution of internet, broadband, and other telecommunication networks have not been equitable in the past. Historically, interest service for much of Smyth County was provided through CenturyLink (now Lumen Technology/Brightspeed). CenturyLink provides the area with DSL (provided through copper telephone lines) as well as recent upgrades to fiber in some locations. Satellite internet is also an option for residents with providers like HughesNet, Viasat, and Starlink offering services; however, these services can be expensive and are spotty if the satellite does not have a clear line of sight (clouds, storms, etc.).

In terms of internet availability, Smyth County is now considered 100% served, according to the FCC National Broadband Map. This is largely due to a partnership between Smyth, Washington and Wythe Counties, the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and Point Broadband, all three localities were able to apply for funding through the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative to expand broadband access. Awarded in two phases, the first phase of expanding broadband access took place in 2020 with \$7,870,000 being awarded to bring connectivity to nearly 6,500 acres of Smyth, Washington, and Wythe counties. In total, this first phase connected over 1,000 homes that were underserved or totally unserved at that time. In 2021, the same partnership was made to expand access further with the goal of creating universal access in all three counties. In total, all three counties were awarded \$65,883,228 to fund the project along with Point Broadband leveraging \$33,052,600 to bring this phase's total budget to \$98,925,828. In total, phase two brought reliable broadband service to 27,450 homes and businesses and creating universal connectivity across all three localities.

Within the County, there are a handful of publicly available Wi-Fi hotspots according to DHCD. These include all public schools and the Konnarock Community Center in the southwestern corner of the County.

Cable and Satellite TV providers within Smyth County include DirectTV, Xfinity, and Brightspeed (CenturyLink). Traditional landlines are provided through Brightspeed, with wireless phone services being provided through traditional carriers like Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, and US Cellular.

### Alternative Energy

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

Like many communities across the Commonwealth, Smyth County must consider alternative, renewable energy sources that are environmentally cleaner and sustainable in order to meet the increasing energy needs of the future. The 2020 Virginia legislative changes allow for shared energy benefits, revenues, and cooperative agreements with providers. With these changes, there are many benefits (and challenges) that must be carefully evaluated by County officials in planning for this enhanced utility infrastructure. Managing the siting of facilities (from small to utility-scale) and balancing the costs, impacts, and benefits of various projects will be important in the long term.

Some general guidelines to consider in siting a solar facility include the following:

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

1. Minimize the impacts of connecting to the energy grid.
2. Minimize site grading, topographic changes, and loss of productive soils.
3. Encourage siting in previously developed areas as opposed to undeveloped areas.
4. Encourage facilities that offer direct benefits to local or on-site users (to the extent possible).
5. Avoid lands identified as prime farm land or those designated for environmental conservation.
6. Avoid lands having historic, cultural, or scenic significance.
7. Encourage colocation of agricultural uses (dual-use solar).
8. Provide sufficient setbacks from roads, residences, views, etc. and include effective landscaping buffers and maintenance provisions.
9. Preserve the ability of the land to be productively used or farmed in the future.
10. Ensure decommissioning plan with responsible parties and financial bonding.

Additional technical resource materials that can help guide decision-making can be found at <https://farmlandinfo.org/solar-siting/> and <https://swvasolar.org/swva-solar-playbook-online/>.

## PUBLIC UTILITIES: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, public utilities in Smyth County are reliable and dispersed throughout the denser populated portions of the County; however, services to more rural portions of the County are not yet available. Efforts are being taken to remedy this and ensure that all residents of the County are provided with public water and sewers, but since multiple systems service the residents of Smyth County, it is harder to maintain parity between the various systems. In order to better maintain, allocate funds, and create parity between current and future fresh and wastewater systems, it is likely that a County-wide authority needs to be created. In addition to fresh and wastewater systems, efforts should be made to expand Smyth County's ability to capitalize on the alternative and traditional energy markets. The following are a few suggestions for improving the County's public utilities:

***Continue to Expand Fresh and Wastewater Services*** – Water providers in the County, each to varying degrees, are expanding service to new customers. This will need to continue to meet future development across the County and connect rural communities with public water. Expansions and upgrades will likely need to focus on extending and improving service to communities north of Hungry Mother State Park, such as Nebo, Chatham Hill, and Ridgedale, and communities east of Sugar Grove, such as Summit, Cedar Spring, and Camp. Public sewers are another service that will need to expand in order to provide service to more rural portions of the County as well as areas where future urban development may occur. Currently, public sewer is available in the County's towns (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville) but will likely need to be expanded to areas of the County that are likely to see expanded residential, commercial, or industrial development in the next 20 to 30 years. Expansions likely are needed along route 107 between Chilhowie and Saltville, along route 11 between Chilhowie and Marion, points east of Marion, as well as the communities of Adwolfe and Sugar Grove.

***Move Towards the Creation of a County-Wide Water Authority*** - Due to the varying levels of service, updates, and repairs; it is important that moving forward, fresh and wastewater services be transitioned into a centralized authority that can ensure adequate maintenance, funding, quality of service, and infrastructural parity across the County. The creation of a centralized authority will ensure high quality service is maintained across the board, funding is easier to acquire, and expansion of water and sewer to rural portions of the County will be easier. A first step towards this goal would be the implementation of a

## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

County-wide SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system that would allow remote monitoring of the County's water infrastructure and serve as the foundation for greater cooperation in the future.

***Continue to Invest in Expanding Internet and Telecommunication Access*** – Currently, there are efforts underway to connect much of the County's population (~80%) to fiber optic high-speed internet. If possible, efforts should be continued to ensure 100% of the County is connected to fiber optic internet. In addition to internet access, telecommunications are an area that has the potential to be improved moving forward. Although the majority of customers are provided with reliable service within the County's towns, rural portions of the County have far spottier service. The role of 5G towers in the County has begun to address this disparity, but due to technical limitations of the technology, additional towers will be needed to adequately cover the County. Partnerships are already being created with traditional carriers and other companies; this should be continued to ensure reliable cell phone service throughout the County.

***Establish a Solar Energy Ordinance*** – With the presence of the Broadford Substation east of Saltville, large flat tracts of land, and generally good weather, it is likely that Smyth County will become a target for solar development in the future. Although there are no current plans to develop a solar array in Smyth County, it is important to be proactive to ensure the County's residents, natural resources, and economy are protected and ready for alternative energy when it comes.

***Establish a Wind Energy Ordinance*** – For the same reasons as solar energy, wind energy should be planned for. Although ridgetop wind farm development has been limited in the past due to the ridgetops in the County being owned by the US Forest Service, advancements in wind power technology will likely reduce the size of windmills which may reduce the need for ridgetop installations. Smaller scale windfarms may be possible in the future and should be planned to ensure the County is adequately prepared and protected.

***Establish a Regional Biomass Incinerator*** – Due to environmental concerns surrounding the landfill in Bristol, efforts to determine where to send the area's refuse has become top of mind. One solution that was raised in focus group meetings and already has support from surrounding counties is the creation of a regional biomass incinerator in the Chilhowie area. This incinerator would be located in Smyth County and provide refuse disposal for Smyth County and its neighboring counties. Not only would this incinerator create a solution for the County's refuse problem, but it would also create local jobs and has the potential to generate energy.

***Plan for Natural Gas Power Plants*** – With large amounts of natural gas being stored in the salt mines near Saltville and close proximity to the Broadford substation, steps to foster natural gas energy generation were brought up as a natural step to provide the region with electricity. Although there is no natural gas-related power being generated currently, it is likely this could emerge in the near future. If this is an industry that the County is interested in courting, steps could be taken to facilitate building (public utilities, site grading, etc.) and relocation (EDA incentives, etc.).

***Investigate the Creation of Energy Zoning*** – Due to a strong focus on expanding the County's energy sector in the future it is likely that efforts to cluster these industries will be important in preserving the County's rural nature. This is especially pertinent since large portions of energy development are likely to take place in the County's northern valley (Rich Valley), which is predominantly farm land. It is important to look to the future in this regard to ensure the zoning code maintains proper and orderly development.



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## 4.3.2: Transportation

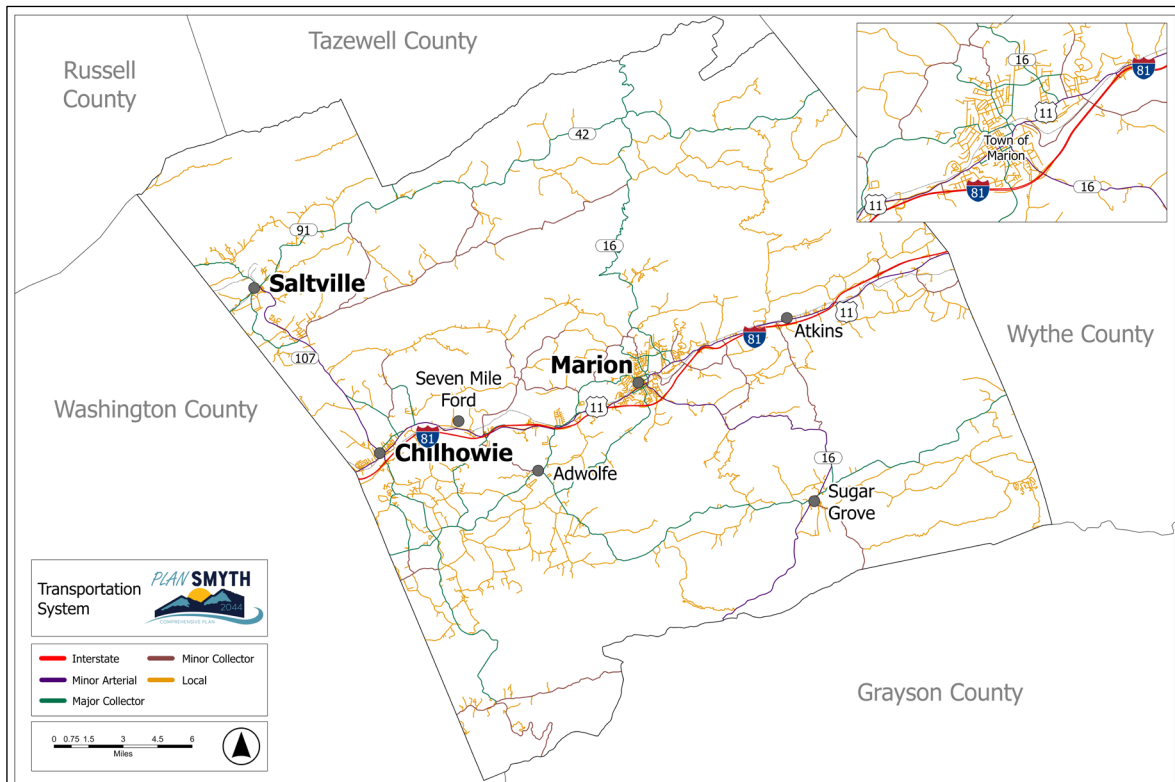
### 4.3.2 TRANSPORTATION

#### TRANSPORTATION: EXISTING CONDITIONS

##### Roads and Highways

Many of the public roads in Smyth County are administered and maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in one shape or form. The Town of Marion and Saltville maintain their own street networks with VDOT's Urban Maintenance Program. These roads are categorized by their usage and relationship to other roadways and population centers. These categories include interstate, arterial, connector, and local, ranging from highest use to lowest use. A map outlining these roadways can be found in this section.

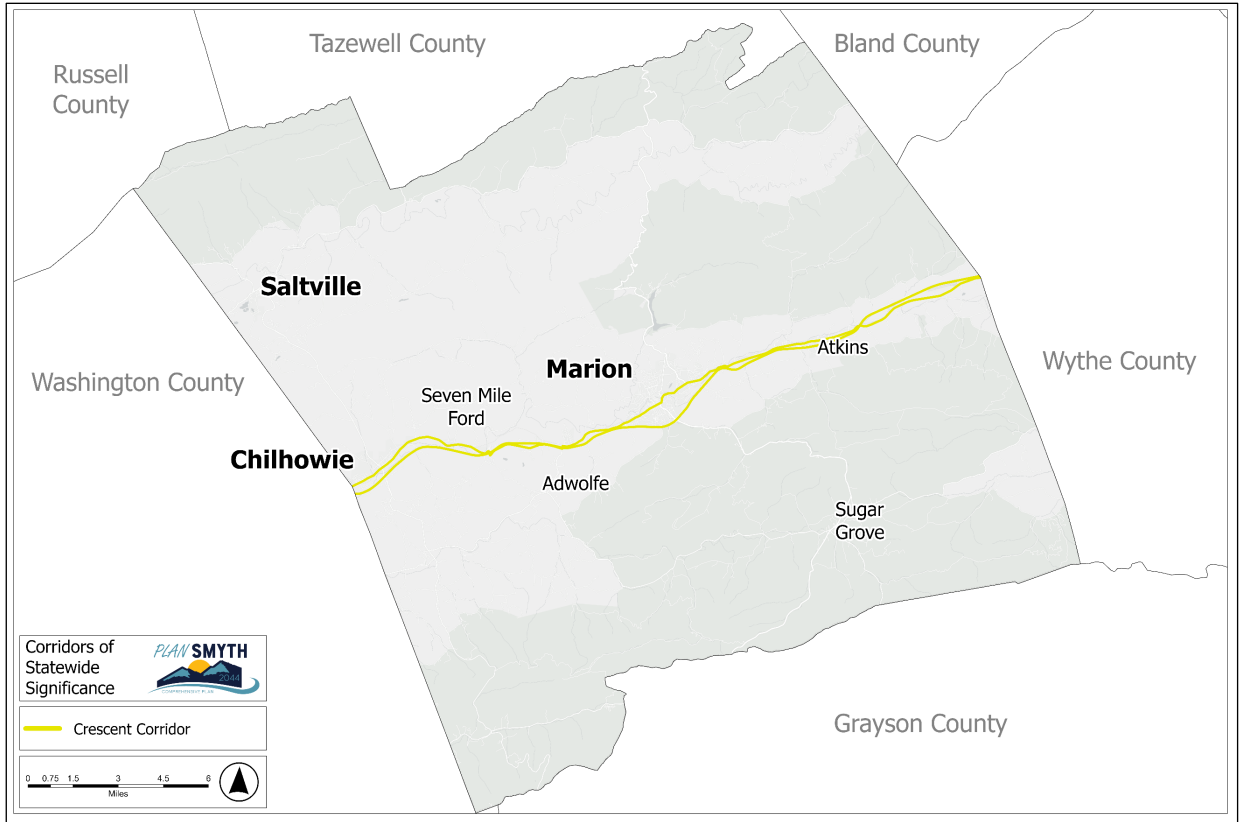
- **Interstates & Corridors of Statewide Significance:** primary interstates include I-81, which bisects Smyth County from east to west. I-81, along with US-11, creates a portion of the Crescent Corridor, a corridor of statewide significance that allows for multi-modal transit across the Commonwealth.
- **Arterials & Collectors:** There are no major arterial routes through the County, but minor arterial routes include US-11 (parallel to I-81), VA-16 (Marion to Sugar Grove), and VA-107 (Chilhowie to Saltville). Major collectors include VA-16 (Marion towards Tazewell Co.), US-11 (Sugar Grove to Adwolfe), VA-91 (Saltville to Tazewell Co.), and VA-42. Minor collectors include Valley Road and Nicks Creek Road.



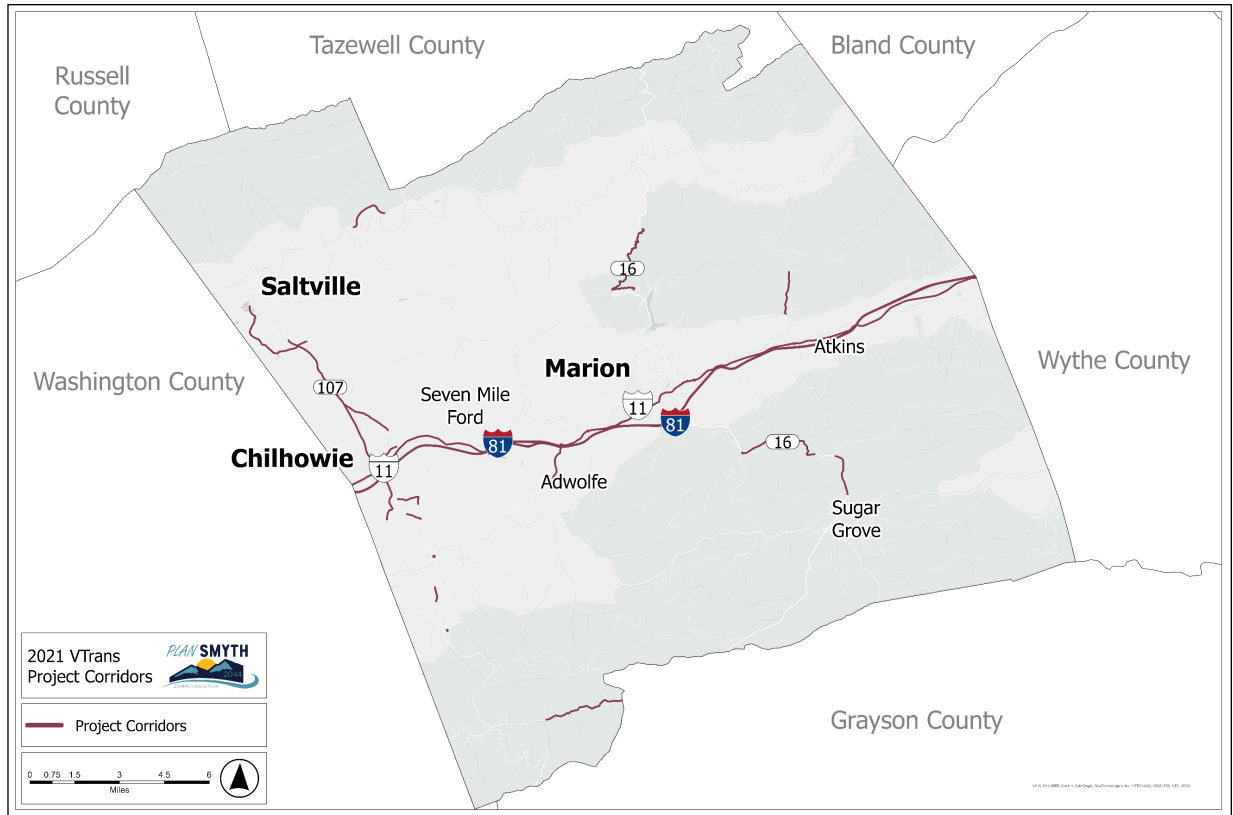
**Road Ways in Smyth County (Red: Interstate, Purple: Minor Arterial, Green: Major Collector, Brown: Minor Collector, Orange: Local )**



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**Corridors of Statewide Significance (Dark Yellow – Crescent Corridor – I-81 & US-11)**



**Map of VTrans Projects Outlined in their 2021 Report**

## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

Smyth County is located in the Bristol VDOT District. This district includes Bland, Buchanan, Dickenson, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe counties, as well as the Cities of Bristol and Norton.

### ***VTrans***

Communities throughout Virginia work with VDOT and regional planning agencies to develop short and long-term transportation plans for the future. In addition, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) and Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIPI) are responsible for the development and updating of the Commonwealth's statewide transportation plan. Officially known as *VTrans*, this plan identifies state-wide and local transportation goals, policies, needs, and priorities. In addition to *VTrans*, shorter term projects are identified and prioritized in VDOT's Six-Year Improvement Plan (not all projects listed in this report received funding). Some of these projects can be considered competitive as a SMART SCALE project, which ranks projects based on available funding and the project benefit to the locality (safety, congestion, economic benefit, etc.). An interactive map that showcases current and past VTrans project can be found here: [InteractVTrans MapExplorer | VTrans](#)

### ***VDOT Six-Year Improvement Plan Projects***

The following information provides an overview of existing transportation projects underway and additional details on others that have been identified but not funded.

As of 2023, the following are ongoing, recently completed or in the design phase projects by VDOT in Smyth County. A chart with project IDs, funding, and scope can be found on the next page:

- ***Interstate 81 Bridge Over Route 11 / Norfolk Southern Railroad/ Middle Fork Holston River (Completed)***: This project was completed in the summer of 2022 and replaced two bridges along I-81 that crossed the Middle Fork of the Holston River. These bridges had been in place for 50+ years and had reached the end of their lifespan. Due to the high traffic that crossed these bridges (29,000 vehicles per day), these bridges were prime targets for replacement. Their replacement had ensured safer movement of traffic through Smyth County.
- ***Interstate 81 Southwest Virginia Truck Climbing Lanes (In-Progress)***: A virtual public meeting was held regarding this project in April 2021. The purpose of this project is to improve traffic flow by adding truck climbing lanes in three locations on I-81 in southwest Virginia. These lanes are planned to be located at mile marker 32.4 near Glade Spring (Washington Co.), northbound of mile marker 39.5 near Seven Mile Ford (Smyth Co.), and southbound at mile marker 34 near Chilhowie (Smyth Co.). To date, climbing lanes have been completed near exit 47 with work ongoing near exit 39.
- ***Route 11 and 107 Intersection Improvements (Completed)***: The primary purpose of this project was to lessen congestion and enhance safety by improving the intersection of US 11 and VA 107 in Chilhowie. This project increased the turn radius for larger trucks, added a left turn lane from VA 107 north and southbound onto US 11, and a left turn into the Food City shopping center off VA 107. This project started in the fall of 2021 and ended in the summer of 2022.
- ***Route 11 / Railroad Drive Intersection Improvements (Completed)***: This project began in fall 2021 and was completed in the summer of 2022. The primary goal of this improvement was to enhance safety by adding a left and right turn lane onto VA 660 (Railroad Drive) from Route 11. This project is located between Marion and Seven Mile Ford on Route 11. This project provided a 200-foot-



## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

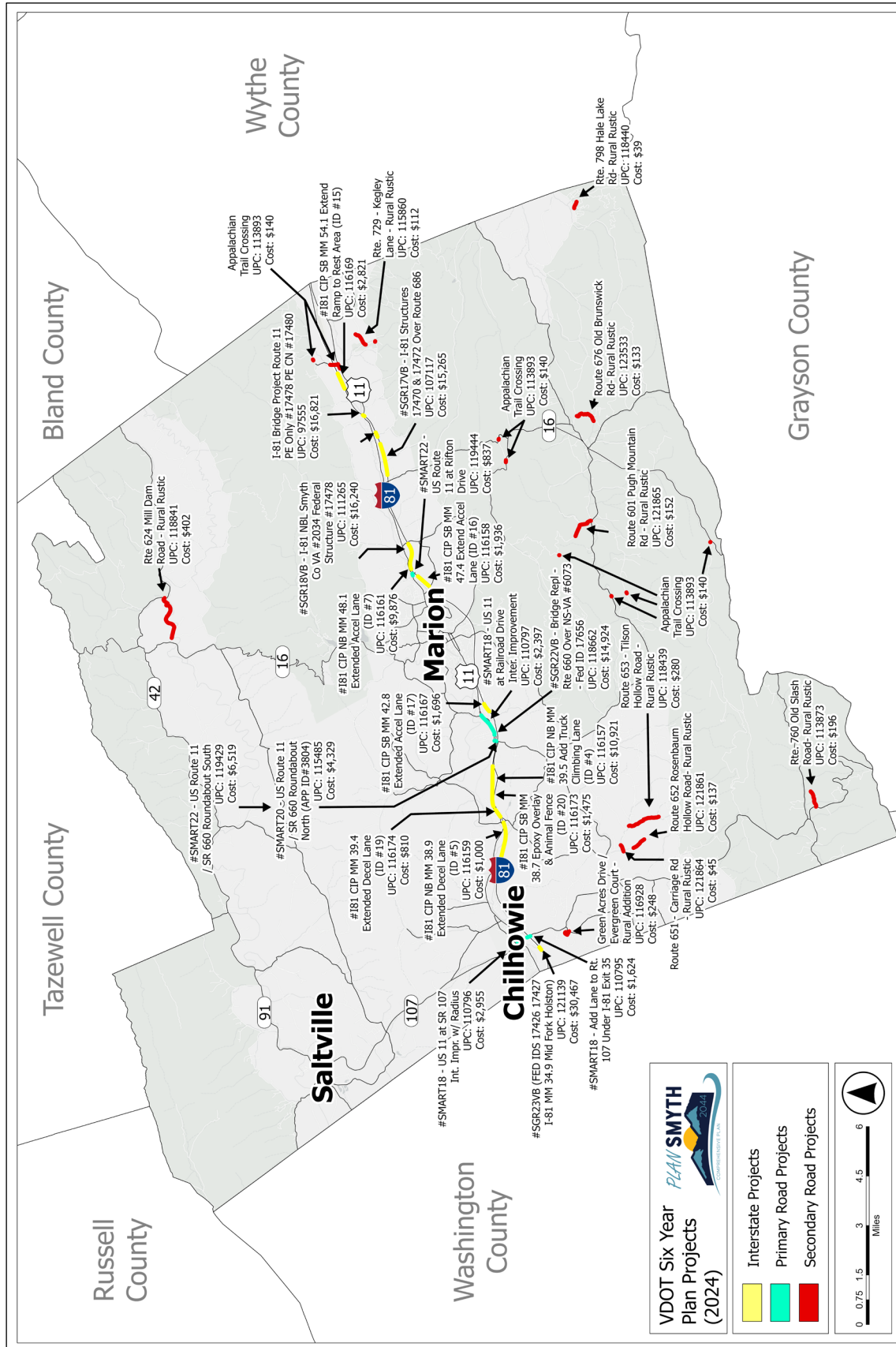
long turn lane in order to accommodate the large number of cars turning onto Railroad Drive due to this road being the only remaining entrance to a large neighborhood.

- Route 11 and Route 16 Intersection Improvements (In-Progress):** This project's primary goal is to improve the turning radius at the intersection of route 11 (East Main Street) and route 16 (N/S Commerce Street). Currently, the intersection is designed for typical passenger vehicle traffic. The new design will improve the streetscape to accommodate vehicles with a 40' wheelbase, as well as make improvements to pedestrian walkways in the intersections. In addition to improvements to the intersections, Pendleton Street, located to the east of the intersection, will become a one-way street. VDOT held an in-person public meeting on this project in August 2021, plans to award the project in late 2023 and have the project started in early 2024.
- Route 11 Roundabout at Route 660 (Railroad Drive) (In-Progress):** This project takes the Route 11/ Railroad Drive Intersection Improvement Plan (outlined above) and hopes to improve this busy intersection. The primary focus of this project is the creation of a roundabout at this intersection that will help improve traffic flow and cost less to maintain over time than a traditional intersection. VDOT held a virtual design public meeting regarding the project in May of 2021, and hope to award the project in late 2023, and have construction started by early spring 2024.

The map on the following page outlines all projects currently underway, in planning, or soon to be completed under the 2024 updated VDOT Six-Year Plan. The Six-Year Plan is a short-term plan that outlines planned spending for construction development or study over the next six years. This plan is updated yearly by the CTB as revenues are appropriated, priorities are updated, project schedules are revised. In addition to the map below, a table will be included that highlights the transportation projects included as part of the 2024 update. Unfunded projects are not included in the Six-Year-Plan and as a result will not be included in the table below. Include will be the project number, name, roadway types, as well as the estimated costs (in thousands of dollars) over the next five years.

Smyth County, Virginia – Six-Year Improvement Plan Projects						
UPC	Description	Road System	Estimate	FY24	FY25-29	Balance
			(Values in Thousands of Dollars)			
97555	I-81 BRIDGE PROJECT ROUTE 11 PE ONLY #17478 PE CN #17480	Interstate	\$16,821	\$0	\$0	(\$497)
107117	#SGR17VB - I-81 STRUCTURES 17470 & 17472 OVER RT 686	Interstate	\$15,265	\$0	\$0	\$0
111265	#SGR18VB - I-81 NBL SMYTH CO VA #2034 FEDERAL STRUCT #17478	Interstate	\$16,240	\$0	\$0	\$0
116157	#I-81CIP NB MM 39.5 ADD TRUCK CLIMBING LANE (ID #4)	Interstate	\$10,921	\$5,351	\$0	\$0
116158	#I-81CIP SB MM 47.4 EXTEND ACCEL LANE (ID #16)	Interstate	\$1,936	\$0	\$0	\$0
116159	#I-81CIP NB MM 38.9 EXTEND DECEL LANE (ID #5)	Interstate	\$1,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
116161	#I-81CIP NB MM 48.1 EXTEND ACCEL LANE (ID #7)	Interstate	\$9,876	\$0	\$0	\$0
116167	#I-81CIP SB MM 42.8 EXTEND ACCEL LANE (ID #17)	Interstate	\$1,696	\$0	\$0	\$0
116169	#I-81CIP SB MM 54.1 EXTEND RAMP TO REST AREA (ID #15)	Interstate	\$2,821	\$1,382	\$0	\$0
116173	#I-81CIP SB MM 38.7 EPOXY OVERLAY & ANIMAL FENCE (ID #20)	Interstate	\$1,475	\$0	\$0	\$0
116174	#I-81CIP MM 39.4 EXTEND DECEL LANE (ID #19)	Interstate	\$810	\$0	\$0	\$0
121139	#SGR23VB (FED IDS 17426 17427 I-81 MM 34.9 MID FORK HOLSTON	Interstate	\$30,467	\$0	\$27,467	\$0
110796	#SMART18 - US 11 AT SR 107 INT. IMPR. W/RADIUS	Primary	\$2,955	\$0	\$0	(\$87)

Smyth County, Virginia – Six-Year Improvement Plan Projects						
UPC	Description	Road System	Estimate	FY24	FY25-29	Balance
			(Values in Thousands of Dollars)			
110797	#SMART18 - US 11 AT RAILROAD DRIVE INTER. IMPROVEMENT	Primary	\$2,397	\$0	\$0	(\$110)
115485	#SMART20-US ROUTE 11 / SR 660 ROUNDABOUT NORTH (APP ID#3804)	Primary	\$4,329	\$463	\$1,672	\$0
119429	#SMART22 - US ROUTE 11 / SR 660 ROUNDABOUT SOUTH	Primary	\$6,519	\$1,809	\$2,962	\$0
119444	#SMART22 - US ROUTE 11 AT RIFTON DRIVE	Primary	\$837	\$632	\$0	\$0
110795	#SMART18 - ADD LANE TO RTE. 107 UNDER I-81 EXIT 35	Primary	\$1,624	\$0	\$0	(\$88)
121865	ROUTE 601 PUGH MOUNTAIN RD. - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$152	\$0	\$152	\$0
118841	RTE. 624 MILLDAM ROAD - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$402	\$0	\$402	\$0
121864	ROUTE 651 - CARRIAGE RD. - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$45	\$0	\$45	\$0
118662	#SGR22VB-BRIDGE REPL-RTE 660 OVER NS-VA #6073-FED ID 17656	Secondary	\$14,924	\$653	\$13,001	\$0
123533	ROUTE 676 - OLD BRUNSWICK RD - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$133	\$0	\$174	(\$41)
115860	RTE. 729 - KEGLEY LANE - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$112	\$0	\$0	\$0
113873	RTE. 760 - OLD SLASH ROAD - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$196	\$0	\$0	\$0
118440	RTE 798 HALE LAKE ROAD - RURAL RUSTIC	Secondary	\$39	\$0	\$39	\$0
99876	COUNTYWIDE RURAL ADDITIONS	Secondary	\$250	\$0	\$0	\$235
113893	APPALACHIAN TRAIL CROSSING	Secondary	\$140	\$0	\$0	\$0
116928	GREEN ACRES DRIVE/EVERGREEN COURT - RURAL ADDITION	Secondary	\$248	\$0	\$0	\$0



Map of VDOT Projects outlined in the 2024 VDOT Six-Year Plan Report (Yellow – Interstate Projects, Mint – Primary Road Projects, Red- Secondary Road Projects)

### ***VDOT Potential for Safety Improvements***

The following intersections and road segments have been identified by VDOT as one of the top 100 most deserving of safety improvements. Some of these intersections and segments are already included in the VDOT Six-Year Lane, but will be duplicated here to ensure accuracy, in addition these intersection and segments are not listed in any particular priority, rather they are listed from west to east. A catalog of all segments and intersections can be found at: [2018-2022 TOP POTENTIAL SAFETY IMPROVEMENT \(PSI\) SEGMENTS AND INTERSECTIONS \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

<b>VDOT Potential for Safety Improvements (2018-2022) – Roadway Segments</b>						
Route Name	Direction	Beginning	End	Length	Total Crashes	VDOT Rank
I-81	NB	34.30	35.24	0.94	36	45
SR - 107	NB	0.00	0.47	0.47	7	212
I-81	SB	39.83	41.73	1.90	36	109
I-81	SB	41.73	43.63	1.90	48	22
US-11	Both	42.58	43.30	0.72	16	93
US-11	Both	44.35	44.46	0.11	5	195
US-11	Both	45.25	45.43	0.18	12	66
US-11	Both	45.43	45.67	0.24	10	90
SR-16	Both	38.45	41.33	2.88	15	120
US-11	Both	46.26	46.67	0.41	12	98
I-81	NB	48.19	49.73	1.54	29	153
SR-16	Both	27.68	29.20	1.52	15	118
US-11	Both	49.21	49.85	0.64	6	180
US-11	Both	49.85	50.15	0.30	7	154
I-81	SB	51.88	52.74	0.86	17	175
I-81	NB	52.49	53.26	0.77	15	167

<b>VDOT Potential for Safety Improvements (2018-2022) – Intersections</b>			
Intersection	Locality	Total Crashes	VDOT Rank
SR-107 & Old Stage Road	Town of Chilhowie	6	106
SR-107 & Beattie Ave	Town of Chilhowie	4	128
SR-107 & North Bound Exit 35	Town of Chilhowie	10	145
Whitetop Rd & Grinstead Hill	Smyth County	4	133
Whitetop Rd, Loves Mill Rd, Old Airport Rd	Smyth County	11	54
Tattle Branch Rd & Cherokee Ln	Smyth County	4	144
Adwolfe Rd, Lee Hwy (US-11), Browns Subdivision Rd, and Railroad Drive	Smyth County	7	80
US-11 & Laurel Springs Rd	Smyth County	5	126
US-11, Chatham Hill Rd, E Lee St	Town of Marion	11	125
US-11 & State Park Blvd (SR-16)	Town of Marion	15	51
US-11, Wassona Cir, Johnston Rd	Smyth County	11	60
US-11 & Rifton Dr	Smyth County	15	42
US-11 & Nicks Creek Rd	Smyth County	5	118

### ***State of Good Repair Program***

The State of Good Repair (SGR) program is a VDOT program that provides funding for deteriorating bridges and pavement that is in poor condition or otherwise structurally deficient in some way. These pieces of infrastructure must be owned by the VDOT or the locality that is applying for repair funding. As part of VDOT's most recent report for fiscal year 2024 through fiscal year 2029, it was found that Smyth County has a total of 126 bridges that were eligible for the program. Some of the bridges that were found to be in the greatest need of repair are already in the process of being repaired through other statewide efforts such as the I-81 Improvement Project. In terms of pavement, the SGR program identified 15 segments of roadway that are eligible for repaving funds. These segments include portions of I-81 (north and southbound), US-11, SR-16, and SR-91. Complete lists of all SGR projects, along with their approximate location, length, and costs, can be found here: [State of Good Repair | Virginia Department of Transportation](#)

### ***Mount Rogers Planning District Commission – Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan***

In addition to these projects outlined by VDOT, regional and municipal planners have outlined additional opportunities to improve the transportation system in Smyth County. The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) outlines a total of 73 intersections, bridges, and sections of roads that need improvements in their existing rural long range transportation plan, adopted in June 2011. This long-term plan (20+ years) is adopted as a regional plan for more rural areas of the state. In this case, the following projects are recommended for completion before 2035. Although those mentioned here are located in Smyth County, the MRPDC also oversees planning for Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe Counties. For easier reading, these projects will be organized by intersection and segments designated as having operational (Op), Safety (S), Both (B), Geometric (G), or Other (O) deficiencies. Currently, in early 2024, this plan is being updated with a completion date set for mid-to-late 2024. This updated plan will better reflect the current transportation needs of the County, with some projects outlined in the 2011 plan likely being funded or no longer meeting the needs of VTrans. The updated plan includes transportation projects through 2045 in its scope. Once updated, this new plan can be found here: [Transportation – Mount Rogers Planning District Commission \(mrpdc.org\)](#)

#### ***Intersections***

- VA 107/VA 610 – **B**
- I-81 / Exit 47 – **Op**
- I-81 Bridges over Hutton Branch – **O**
- I-81 Bridges over VA 658 – **O**
- VA 670 Bridges over Holston River – **O**
- VA 617 over Hungry Mother Creek – **O**
- VA 619 Bridge over Holston River – **O**
- US 11/VA 16 (S Commerce St) – **Op**
- VA 16 / VA 691 – **S**
- US 11/VA 16 (Park Blvd) - **B**
- US 11/VA 16/Pendleton St. - **B**
- Chatham Hill Rd over Holston River - **O**
- Baughman Avenue Bridge over Holston River - **O**
- US 11 / VA 107 - **Op**
- I-81 / Exit 35 - **Op**
- US 11 Bridge over Norfolk Southern Railroad - **O**
- VA 91 (Main St) / VA 634/ First Avenue – **B**



***Segments***

- VA 16 from Grayson County Line to VA 689 – **O**
- VA 16 from VA 689 to VA 348 – **O**
- US 11 from ECL Chilhowie to 0.45 mi E VA 9858 – **O**
- US 11 from VA 645 W to VA 645 E – **O**
- US 11 from I-81 Connector to VA 690 – **O**
- VA 16 from VA 348 to 0.59 mi N of VA 349 – **O**
- I-81 from US 11 to SCL of Marion – **O**
- I-81 from NCL of Marion to Wythe Co Line – **O**
- VA 600 from VA 604 S to 1.46 mi N of VA 603 S – **S**
- VA 607 from VA 763 to VA 649 – **S**
- VA 774 from VA 637 to VA 609 N – **S**
- VA 610 from SCL of Saltville to 0.7 mi E of VA 696 – **S**
- VA 610 from VA 107 to VA 723 – **S**
- VA 723 from VA 610 to VA 633 – **S**
- VA 633 from VA 723 to VA 632 – **S**
- VA 633 from 0.16 mi N of VA 632 to VA 91 – **S**
- VA 613 from Washington Co Line to VA 634 – **S**
- VA 16 from VA 42 to Tazwell Co Line – **S**
- VA 660 from VA 718 to VA 657 E – **S**
- VA 657 from VA 650 to VA 660 E – **S**
- VA 650 from VA 657 to VA 702 – **S**
- VA 670 from VA 650 to VA 601 W – **S**
- VA 660 from VA 659 to US 11 – **S**
- VA 659 from VA 660 to Middle Fork Holston River – **S**
- VA 659 from Middle Fork Holston River to VA 665 – **S**
- VA 665 from VA 659 to VA 658 – **S**
- VA 658 from Hungry Mother Creek to VA 665S – **S**
- VA 658 from VA 665S to VA 655 N – **S**
- VA 601 from VA 676E to VA 16 – **S**
- VA 679 from VA 615N to US 11 – **S**
- VA 616 from VA 615N to WCL – **S**
  - VA 660 from VA 657E to US 11S – **S**
- VA 16 from SCL to .16 Mi S Marion – **O**
  - I-81 from SCL to NCL of Marion – **O**
  - US 11 Greenway Ave to College St. – **O**
  - S Poston St from US-11 to W Cherry St – **S**
  - Cherry St from S Poston St to VA 16 – **S**
  - Chatham Hill Rd Fowler St NCL Marion – **S**
  - W Chilhowie WCL Marion to N Church – **S**
  - E Chilhowie - N Church to Chatham Hill – **S**
  - S Church – SCL Marion to US 11 – **S**
  - VA 107 from NB Ramp I-81 to US 11 – **O**
  - I-81 from Wash. Co. L. to US 11 – **O**
  - US 11 from VA 1009 to ECL Chilhowie – **O**
  - VA 774 from US 11 to VA 637 – **S**
  - VA 91 - Palmer Ave to Alison Gap Rd – **O**
  - VA 107 – VA 91 to SCL of Saltville – **O**
  - VA 91 – VA 107 to NCL of Saltville – **S**
  - VA 91 – Wash. Co. Line to Palmer Ave – **S**
  - Buckeye St – VA 91 to .5 mi E of VA 91 – **S**
  - Palmer Ave – VA 91 .32 mi N of Lake Dr – **S**
  - Palmer Ave – Wiley Place SCL Saltville – **S**
  - VA 655 from VA 658N to VA 645 W – **S**

***Transportation Studies***

As with many locations across the Commonwealth, long-range and short-term transportation plans are needed to ensure easy mobility of people, goods, and services throughout Virginia. These are typically funded through state and Federal programs such as ProjectPipeline, STARS, and the Bristol District Intersection Safety Study. There are currently two (2) transportation studies underway in Smyth County. The following is a brief description of the scope of both studies:

- ***Route 11 (Main Street) / Route 16 (Park Boulevard) – Town of Marion - ProjectPipeline***
  - This study is being conducted through a partnership with the Town of Marion, the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and the Virginia Highway Board. This

project looks to identify recommendations for reconfiguring the intersection of Route 11 and Route 16 to improve safety, reduce congestion, and enhance multimodal accessibility. Once completed, the recommendation of this study will be developed into a funding application for Smart Scale Round 6 and other transportation funding programs. This project is currently in Phase 3 of development, which seeks to assess potential risks, develop and refine alternatives, and prepare a cost estimate and investment strategy. This project seeks to be completed by July 2024.

- ***I-81 Improvement Plan***

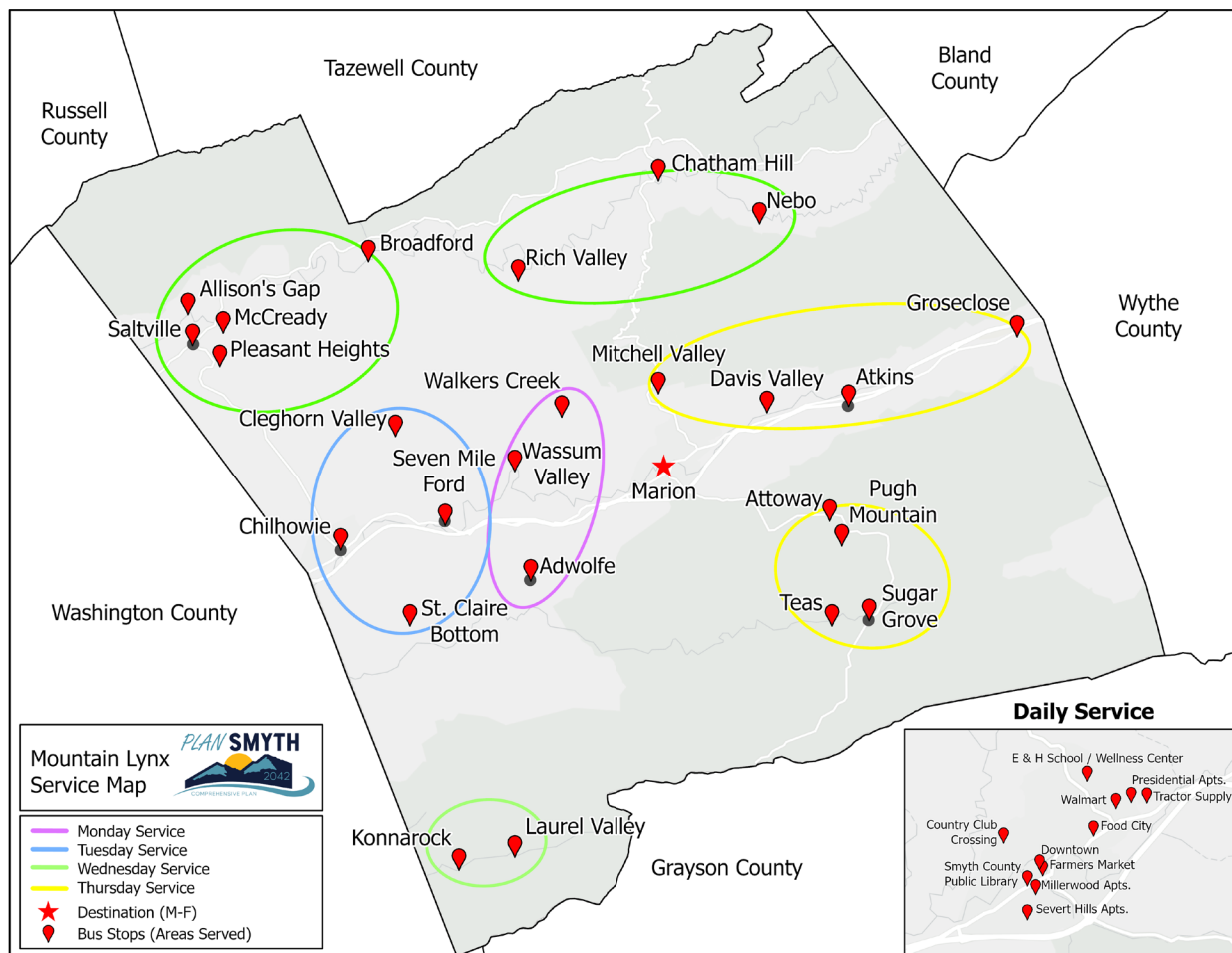
- This project seeks to improve the I-81 Corridor throughout Virginia to ensure safe, reliable, and efficient transit through one of the busiest transportation corridors on the eastern seaboard. As outlined in Chapter 743 of the 2018 Virginia Acts of the General Assembly, the CTB has been directed to develop a plan to improve this vital corridor through the implementation of \$2.2 billion over the next seven (7) to ten (10) years. This plan included the following elements in Smyth County:
  - Extended Deceleration Lanes NB (MM 38.9 to MM 39.1) - \$1.988 M
  - Extended Deceleration Lane NB (MM 45.5 to MM 45.6) - \$9.888 M
  - Extended Acceleration Lanes NB (MM 48.0 to MM 48.9) - \$5.569 M
  - Added Auxiliary Lane SB (MM 54.3 to MM 54.1) - \$5.520 M
  - Extended Acceleration Lane SB (MM 47.7 to MM 47.4) - \$4.266 M
  - Extended Acceleration Lane SB (MM 43.1 to MM 42.6) - \$3.654 M
  - Extended Deceleration Lane SB (MM 39.5 to MM 39.4) - \$0.965 M
  - Extended Acceleration Lane SB (MM 39.1 to MM 38.8) - \$2.179 M

## Public Transportation

Within Smyth County, the only method of public transportation system is the Mountain Lynx network operated by the District Three Governmental Cooperative, a non-profit that provides public services to portions of Southwest Virginia. The Mountain Lynx bus system services Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe Counties, as well as the City of Galax. Service is focused on population centers like Abingdon, Galax, Marion, and Wytheville, as well as rural portions of the aforementioned counties.



*Typical Mountain Lynx Transit Bus*



*Weekday and Daily Mountain Lynx Service Across Smyth County*

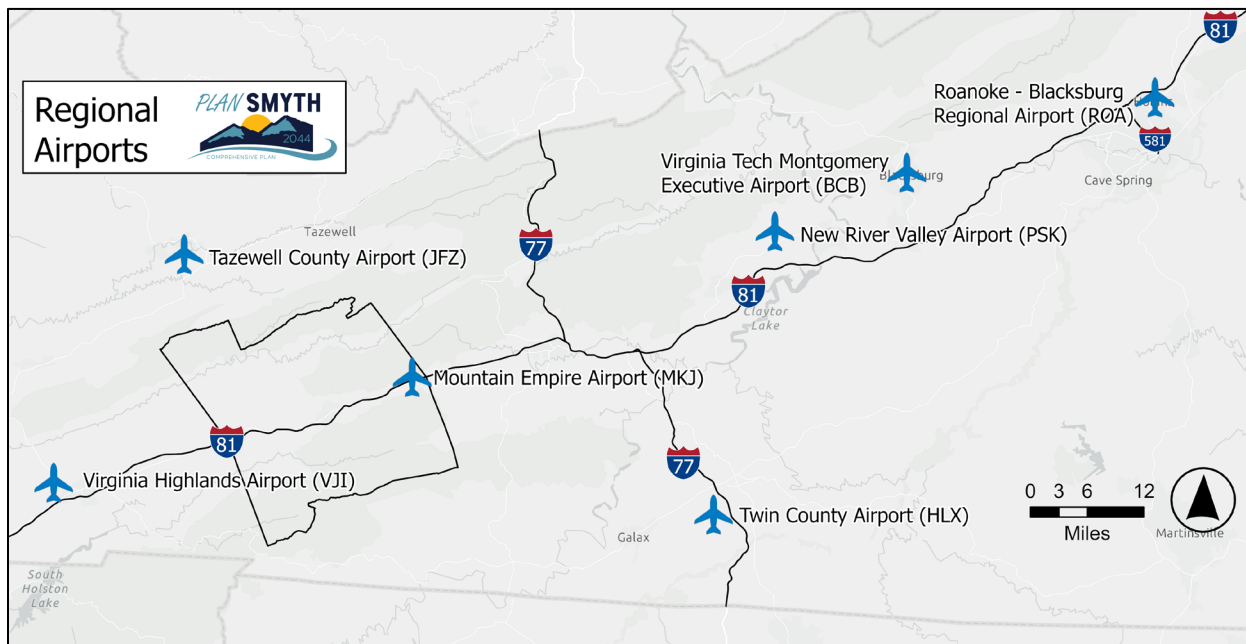
## Airports

There is one airport that serves Smyth County, that being the Mountain Empire Airport, located in the Groseclose area of the County along the border with Wythe County. MEA is located nine nautical miles from the center of Marion and is home to a single 5,252 x 75 feet runway and parallel taxiway. This airport does not have a tower (automated) and has a published localizer for GPS approaches. Although unmanned, MEA offers a terminal building with a waiting lounge, flight planning area, and conference room. This airport also offers full-service fuel for both 100LL and Jet-A. Operated by the Smyth Wythe Airport Commission, MEA has oversight from Smyth and Wythe County residents through a commission that meets once a month on-site. Additionally, there are a number of airports within the region that offer services to pilots ranging from small prop planes to commercial flights. Mapped in the image below, regional airports include:



**Mountain Empire Airport Terminal (Groseclose)**

- Virginia Highlands Airport (VJI) – Abingdon
- VT Montgomery Executive Airport (BCB) – Blacksburg
- Tazewell County Airport (JFZ) – Richlands, VA
- New River Valley Airport (PSK) - Dublin
- Twin County Airport (HLX) – Galax/Hillsville
- Roanoke Regional Airport (ROA) – Roanoke

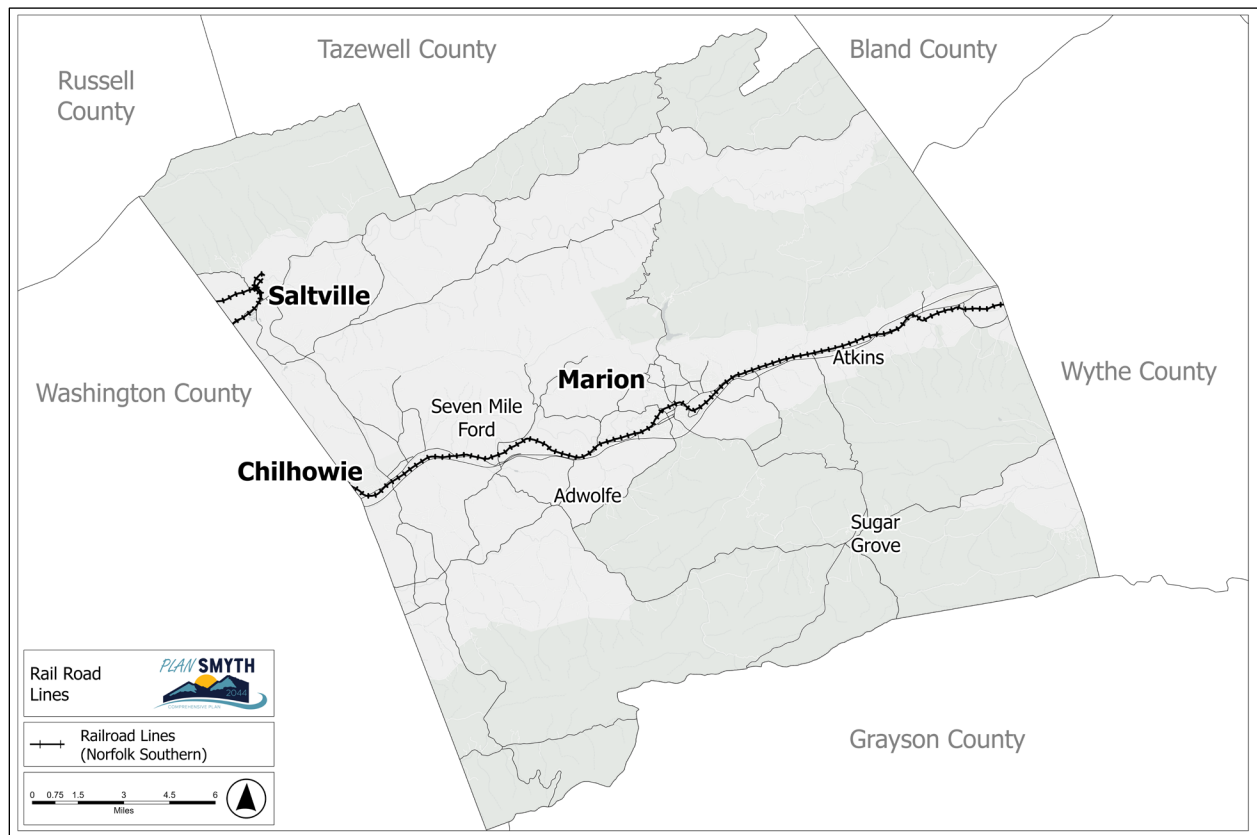


**Regional Airports in and around Smyth County. Black outline represents the borders of Smyth County (Source: Virginia Department of Aviation)**

### Commercial and Commuter Rail Services

Commercial (freight) rail service is provided in Smyth County by Norfolk Southern and transects the County parallel to I-81. Within Smyth County, Norfolk Southern operates rail stations at Groseclose, Atkins, Mt. Carmel, Marion, and Chilhowie. Norfolk Southern is a large freight operator along the eastern seaboard as well as many states in the eastern portions of the American heartland. Currently, Norfolk Southern operates in 25 states (Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine).

As of 2023, there is no commuter rail service that operates in Smyth County. The closest Amtrak station to Smyth County is located in Hinton, WV, which is 94 miles by car and 67.3 miles as the crow flies from downtown Marion with the second closest station located in Roanoke (105 miles by car). Since 2021, when then Governor Ralph Northam announced an expansion of Amtrak services to Christiansburg, VA, there has been hope that commuter service would be established in the greater SWVA region. Although a seemingly small step, the creation of a station in Christiansburg would move access to commuter rail from 94 miles to 70 miles by car, which would cut drive-time nearly in half. Steps have been taken to make the Christiansburg extension a reality, with recent talks of expanded service to Abingdon and Bristol.



*Location of Operating Rail Road Lines in Smyth County(Black Checked Line)*



## Cycling and Pedestrian Facilities

Cycling and pedestrian facilities in Smyth County are primarily located within downtown areas (Marion, Saltville, and Chilhowie) as well as designated parks and recreation areas such as Hungry Mother State Park.

- The ***Downtown areas of Marion and Chilhowie*** have undergone redevelopment to create a more inviting and pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. This has resulted in greater walkability in these areas.
- ***The Appalachian Trail*** snakes throughout the southern and eastern portions of Smyth County, offering both day and through hikers the ability to take in the beauty and rigor that Smyth County's topography has to offer.
- ***Hungry Mother State Park*** offers visitors nine trails with difficulty ranging from easy to difficult and lengths from an easy 0.2 miles (Ridge Trail) to a more strenuous 4.0 miles (Clyburn Ridge Trail).
- The County offers a number of greenways and trails within municipal parks, primarily in Marion. The most prominent of these is the ***Riverwalk Trail*** that follows the Holston River as it snakes through Marion.
- There are a number of hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding trails within the ***Jefferson National Forest and the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area***
- ***US Bicycle Route 76*** skirts through the southern portion of the County within the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. USBR 76 is a part of the TransAmerica Bicycle that stretches from Williamsburg, VA (Atlantic) to Florence, WA (Pacific).



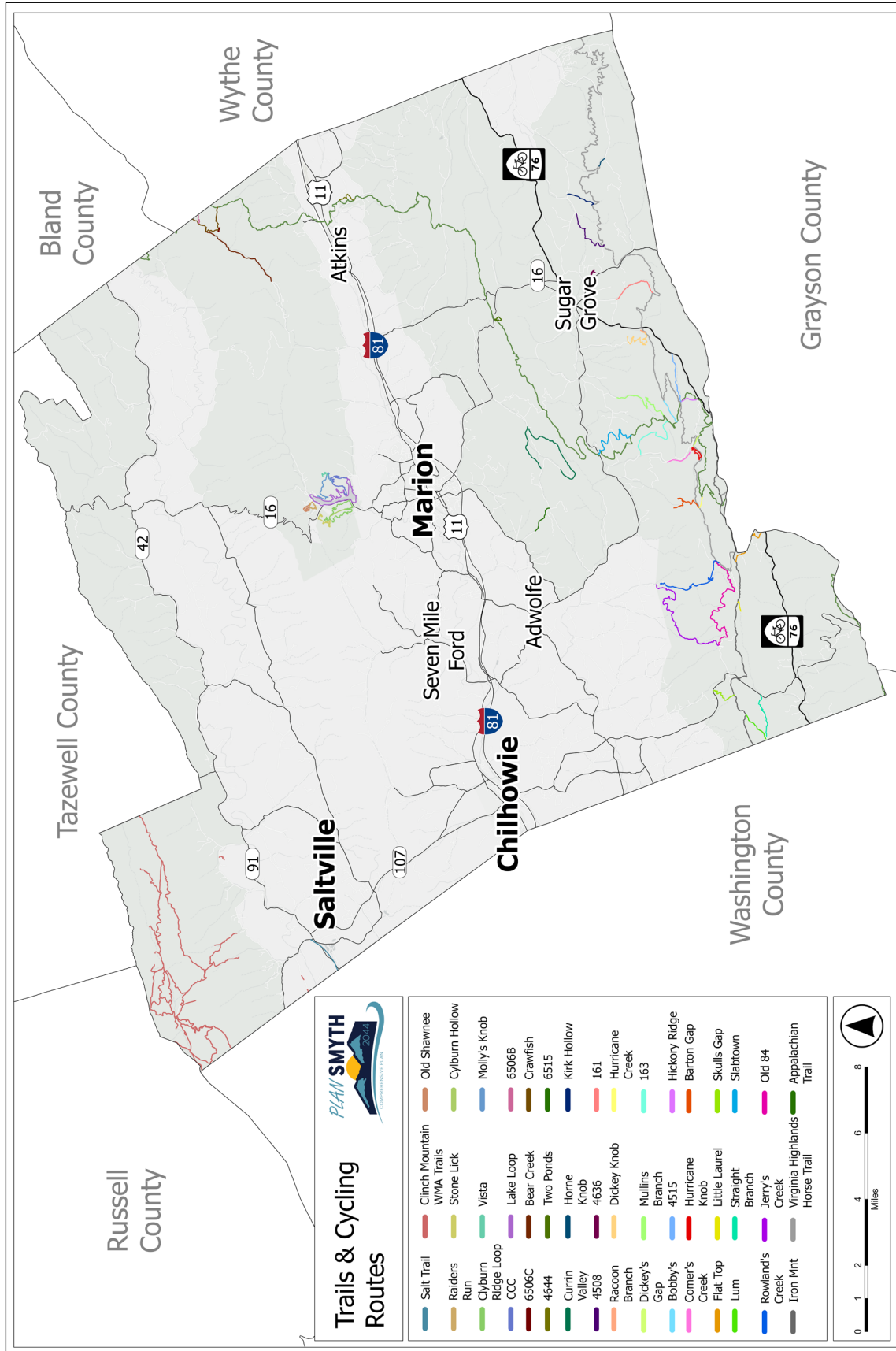
*Marion Riverwalk along the Holston River*



*Sign for the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area near Konnarock*

***VDOT's Transportation Alternative Projects***

VDOT's Transportation Alternative Project is a program focused on improving and expanding alternative transportation options across the Commonwealth and across the country is US Department of Transportation's Transportation Alternative (AT) Program. Since its inception in the late 1990's, this program has set aside a portion from the Surface Transportation Block Grant to fund smaller scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycling facilities, turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas; historic preservation and vegetation management; environmental mitigation; recreational trails; safe routes to schools; and vulnerable road user safety assessments. According to the Rail-to-Trails Conservancy's TrADE catalog, Smyth County has been awarded eight (8) projects since the program's beginning, with four (4) of these projects falling within the Town of Marion. No projects have been funded over the previous five (5) years, with the most recent project, the Back of the Dragon Scenic Overlook being funded in 2016. This project received \$736,000 in federal funds that were matched locally by \$184,000. In total this project received \$920,000 in funding and serves as stunning rest stop on Route 16 in central Smyth County.

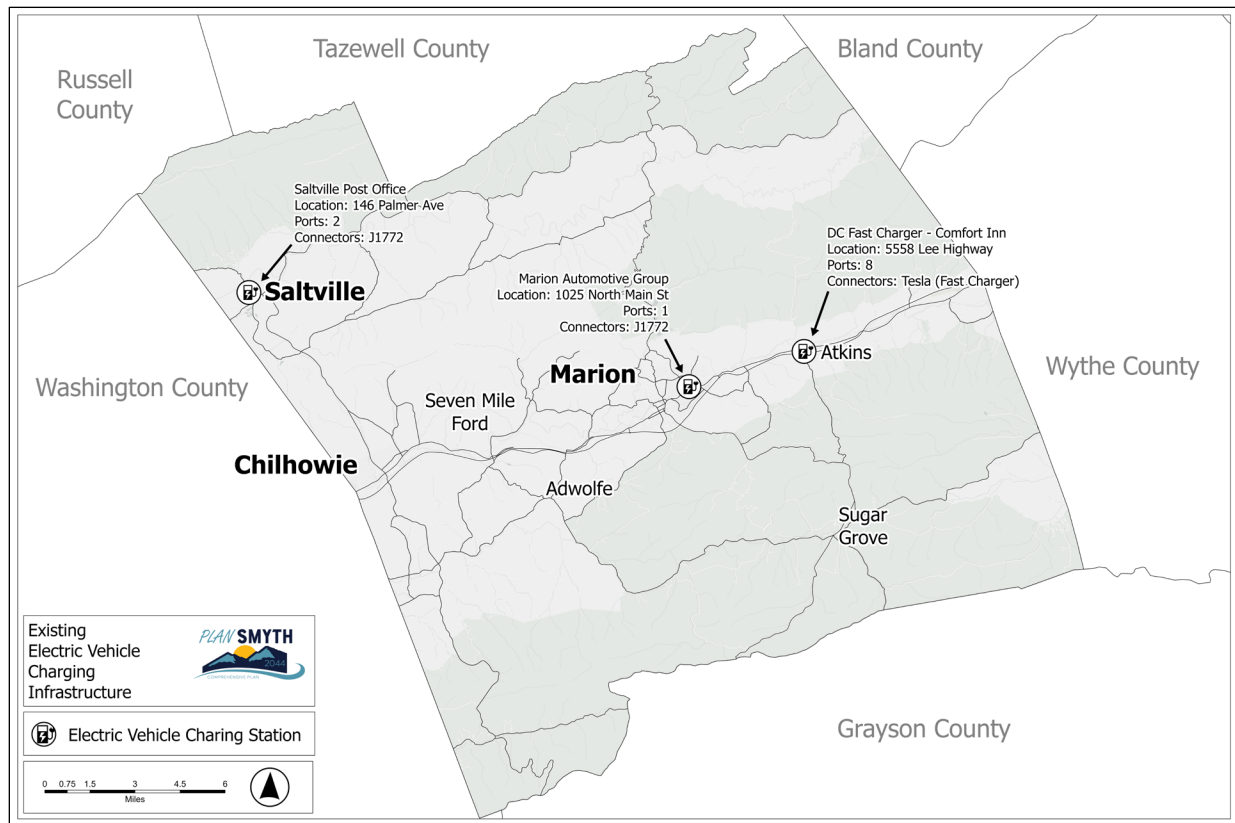


A

All Cycling and Trail Infrastructure in Smyth County (Mid-2023)

## Electric Vehicles & Charging Infrastructure

Although a few years ago, the idea of an electric car, truck, or eighteen-wheeler was unknown to most, electric vehicles have become commonplace with almost everyone familiar with electric vehicles (EVs). Although novel to some, the drive for the adoption of electric vehicles, has been driven in part by private companies, state and federal governments, non-profits, and shifts to create energy independence, has been ever increasing. In fact, many benefit from sizable tax credits and rebates when purchasing an EV or EV charging equipment. Currently, EV charging infrastructure is limited in Smyth County, with only eleven chargers spread across three locations in the County. Of these, one is limited to those who own Teslas, and one is located at a car dealership, and one is located at a Post Office. Naturally, as EVs become cheaper and more widely adopted, travelers are more and more likely to stop in locals that host EV charging stations. Smyth County's location along I-81 positions the County to draw travelers into the County's towns by pairing charging stations with shopping, lodging, eateries, and tourist attractions. In doing so, not only will visitors be able to charge their vehicles, but they will also be able to take in the sites, food, and culture that make Smyth County unique, all the while providing the County with outside tax dollars.



*Location of Existing Electric Vehicle Charging Stations in Smyth County*

In order to ensure the County is able to benefit from this energy transition, it is important to look ahead. With major car manufacturers, like Ford, shifting production to account for the adoption of EVs it is likely the need for a more robust EV charging network will be needed in the next 10 to 20 years. Implementing a County-wide EV network will be a long term process, but the creation of a small scale “fast charger” network centered around tourist attractions and downtown areas can be implemented in short work. This step in the right direction will provide locals and travelers alike with an amenity that is currently lacking



across the County. Enacted in 2021 by the US Department of Energy, the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Formula Program will be an important tool in implementation of EV charging infrastructure. This program focuses on establishing this type of infrastructure within one (1) mile of interstates where there is insufficient or non-existent charging infrastructure, categories that would include Smyth County. The following is an example of an existing EV charging station located in Atkins, as well as a map of existing EV charging stations.



*Tesla Super Charging Stations (8 Chargers) at Comfort Inn in Atkins off Exit 50*

## TRANSPORTATION: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, Smyth County benefits from a transportation network that is in good repair and functions well in most cases. Overall, it was noted in focus groups that Smyth County has a “good” transportation network that is “better than its neighbors.” This is beneficial for those living in Smyth County as well as tourists visiting the County and industries looking to relocate to the County. A well-maintained transportation network ensures that travel will be safe and efficient, with the unhindered transportation of goods. Although in good condition, Smyth County does have room for improvement in regard to its transportation network. The following are recommendations that serve to improve this important aspect of the County’s infrastructure:

***Increase Pedestrian and Cyclists Infrastructure*** – Cyclists and pedestrian infrastructure are two elements of mobility planning that should be focused on moving forward. Although much of downtown Marion and Chilhowie provide sidewalks there are no bespoke cycling lanes. With an increased emphasis being placed on alternative transportation, outdoor recreation, and improved connectivity, it is important to support efforts to increase the number of pedestrian-friendly complete streets, cycling lanes, and greater connectivity of already existing trails and sidewalks within the County’s towns. Similar efforts should be made in areas outside of Marion, Saltville, and Chilhowie that were deemed appropriate. Partnerships

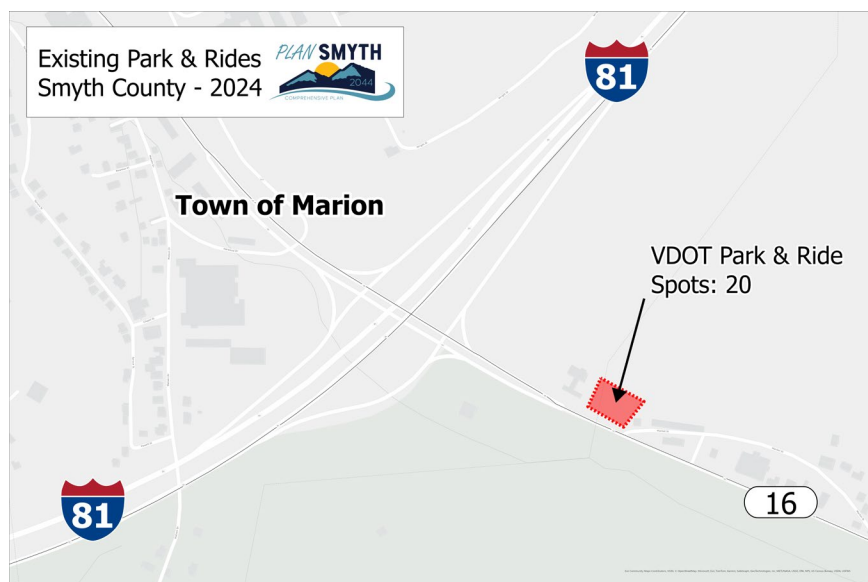


between VDOT, the County, towns, and the PDC will need to be strengthened to ensure new infrastructure can be built and maintained.

**Foster Public-Private Partnerships to Facilitate “Pull Off” Areas for Truckers** – The need for more places for tractor-trailers to stop in Smyth County was discussed repeatedly in focus groups and from anecdotal evidence. However, increasing the number of truck stops along I-81 largely falls into the realm of private enterprise. Therefore, moving forward, efforts should be made to entice the creation of a large truck stop in the County to capitalize on the need for overnight truck parking. Similarly, partnerships could be made with VDOT to increase capacity at the I-81 rest area near Atkins.

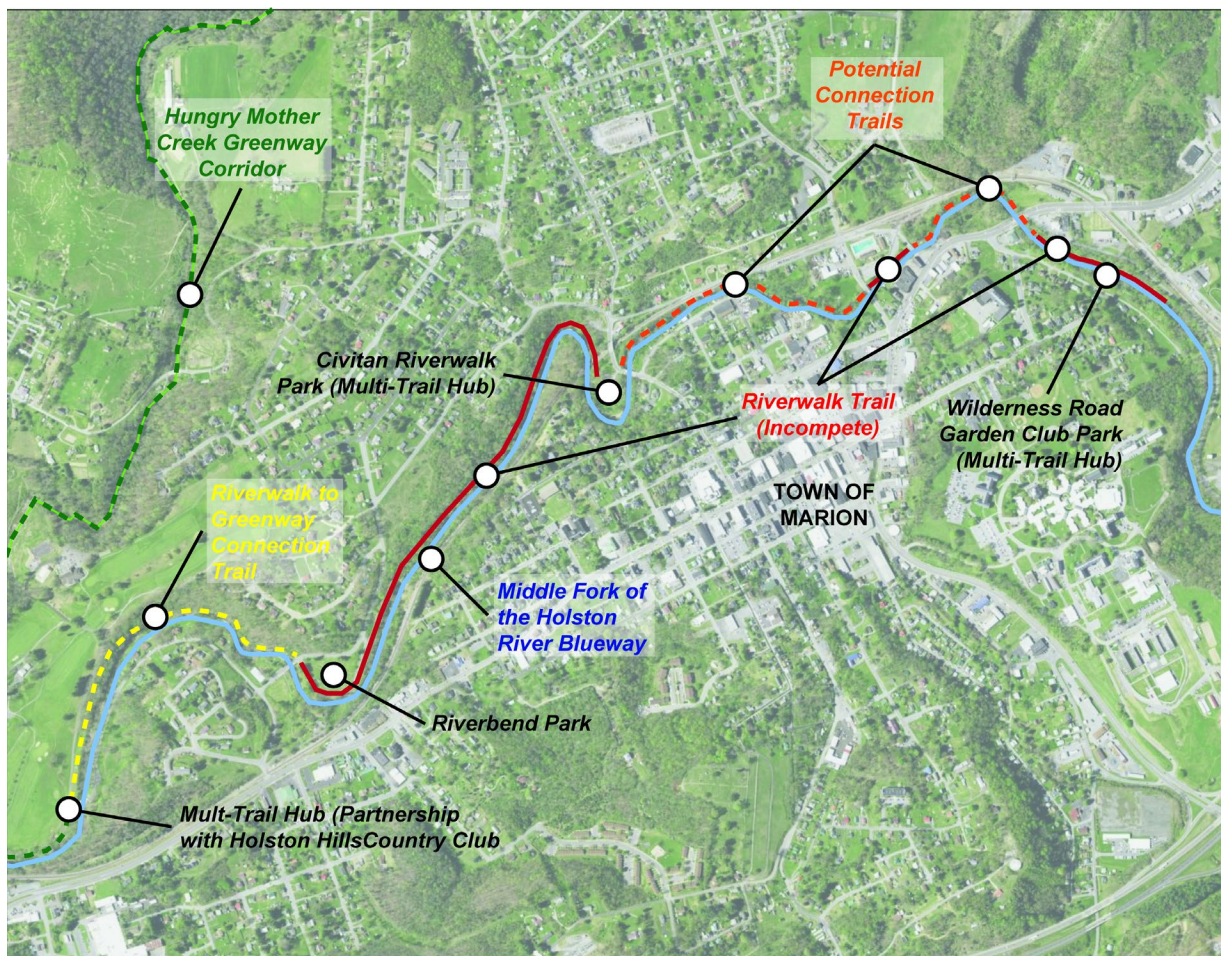
**Improve Public Awareness & Utilization of the Mountain Lynx System** – Mountain Lynx is a public transportation system that is currently being underutilized in Smyth County by many citizens and has the potential to reduce the need for personal transportation within the County’s towns, reduce traffic congestion, and lessen the County’s environmental footprint long term. Currently, the Mountain Lynx system is comprised of small buses (12 to 20 riders) that travel to specific portions of the County each day of the week with a single route serving Marion every day. In its current state, Mountain Lynx has been likened to a personal taxi service that largely caters to the elderly; this simply isn’t the case. Ridership for the system is diverse and sizable, with increased ridership during the summer. Moving forward, it would benefit both Mountain Lynx and the citizens of Smyth County to alter this perception and foster an image of the Mountain Lynx as public transit rather than a service for the elderly. Branding, accessibility, and general knowledge of the service is the first step in breaking this image. Creating a stronger digital presence, better accessible schedules (through an app ideally), and highly visible, eye-catching, and distinctive signage could all serve to improve Mountain Lynx’s public perception. A second step to improve Mountain Lynx’s perception is to improve routes and increase service. Although there are currently limitations (supply chain and labor) to increasing service, partnerships with local industry and colleges present the potential to bolster ridership and lead to the need to increase regular service to more portions of the County. If Smyth County hopes to entice younger individuals and families into the County, especially into towns, the presence of a reliable and easily accessible public transit system will set Smyth County apart from its neighbors and may open the door to other pedestrian-friendly development.

**Increase the Number of Park and Rides** – Currently, the County only hosts one park and ride, which is located south of Marion near the junction of Route 16 and I-81. With the growth of industry both in Smyth County and to the north and south, the desire for carpooling is likely to increase. Areas adjacent to I-81 and other major transportation corridors in Smyth County (107 and 16) are areas that would likely be candidates for a park-and-



ride. In conjunction with other public services, such as a Mountain Lynx stop, these parks and rides could serve as useful tools in decreasing congestion in towns and on I-81. Cooperation with VDOT to facilitate the instillation of these lots will be instrumental in increasing ride-sharing, public transit use, and decongestion on the interstate.

**Increase Recreational Connectivity Inside Marion** – Within the town of Marion, there are already trails with varying levels of completion and connectedness. These could serve as the foundation of a network to better connect the people of Marion to outdoor, social, community, and economic resources by foot, bicycle, or motorized scooter. The connection of the existing Creekwalk (that is currently disconnected in three places and located in central Marion) with a series of trails near the Walmart shopping center (eastern side of town) to the Holston Hills Country Club (western side of town) sets up the opportunity to connect large portions of town together through a pedestrian greenway. The creation of this greenway, in conjunction with a path that connects the Country Club to Hungry Mother State Park, has the potential to increase access to the recreational opportunities available at HMSP for those living in Marion. Partnerships between the town, County, private land owners, and state agencies like DCR and VDOT will be important in garnering local support, developing competitive grant applications, and addressing the current system gaps.



Existing (Solid Line) & Proposed / Recommended (Dashed Lines) Trails in Marion, Virginia



**Construction of The Rye Valley Rail Trail** – A long-term project that has the potential to increase recreational and alternative transportation opportunities for those living in the Rye Valley is the creation of a Rail Trail following the former Rye Valley Railroad Line. This project will serve to highlight the County's railroading history, create partnerships between federal and County entities, and increase outdoor recreation in the Rye Valley. Investigation into the feasibility of this project is likely needed initially to ensure buy-in from federal agencies, private landowners, and the County.

**Improve Access to Trails and Greenways** – An issue that was raised in multiple focus groups was the access issues surrounding some recreational trails within the County. Specifically, access to trails in more rural areas governed by the US Forest Service was noted, as well as parking, signage, and access roads in need of improvement. In large part, these improvements are in the hands of federal agencies like the US Forest Service, but partnerships between the County and USFS can and should be made to ensure access is available. FLAP grants are useful tools in improving access to these areas and therefore should be sought and utilized to improve access to recreational opportunities moving forward. Additionally, access to the Salt Trail – a 10.7-mile rail trail that connects Glade Springs (Washington County) to Saltville (Smyth County) has been noted to be lacking access elements which should also be improved moving forward.

**Create Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure** – Currently, Smyth County has nine electric vehicle charging stations, with eight (8) located at a hotel in eastern Marion (not open to the general public but offers fast charging) and one located at Marion Automotive (open to the public but hours are limited, and charging is “trickle type charging”). Both cases present limitations for those within the County who wish to charge their EVs and those who are traveling along I-81 looking for public charging stations. This should be improved upon moving forward to both capitalize on greater EV presence in the United States and prepare for if or when EVs replace gas-powered vehicles. Currently, AEP (American Electric Power / Appalachian Power) and VDOT, through their Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment Plan, intend to



**Charging Stations & Improved Parking Lot Concept at the Corner of S. Commerce Street & E. Main Street in Marion**



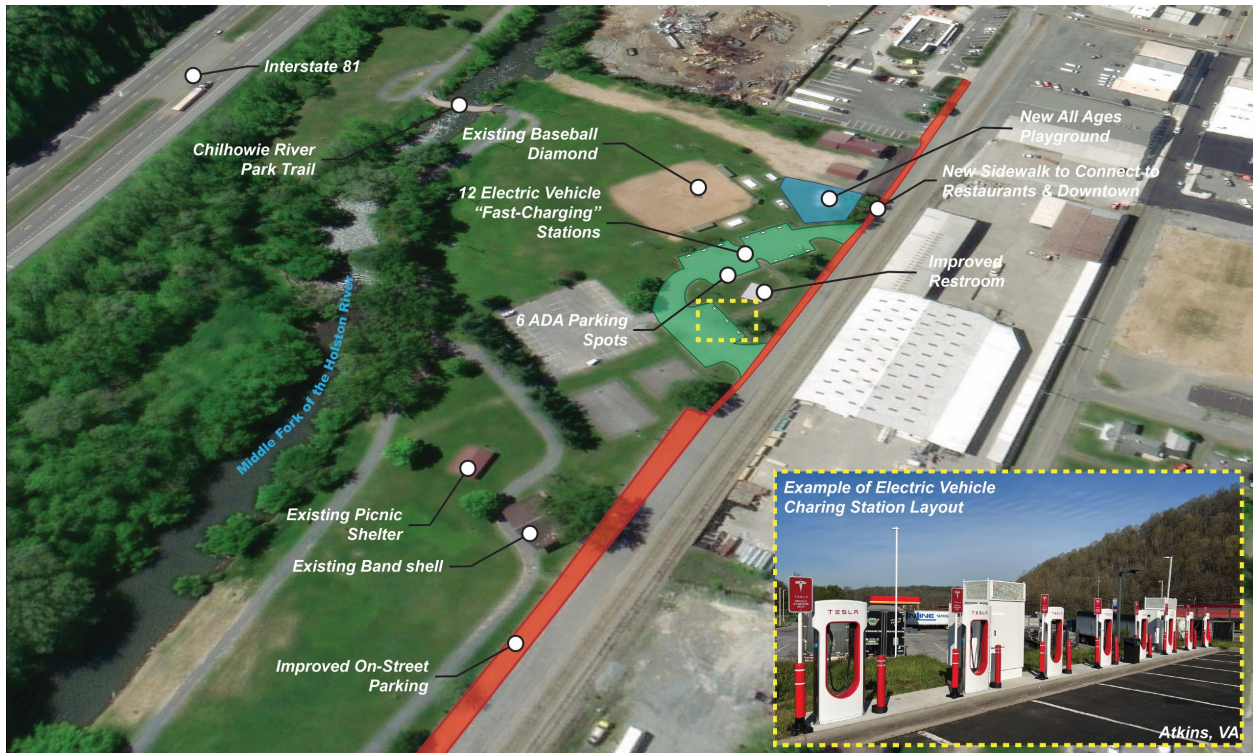
***Charging Stations & Improved Parking Lot Concept behind Storefront on E. Main Street in Marion***

facilitate the growth of EV charging, particularly in rural communities that lack charging infrastructure. This presents the opportunity for Smyth County to capitalize on tourist dollars that are currently driving through the County to charge elsewhere. The deployment of charging infrastructure in high-traffic areas that are close to shopping, restaurants, and other amenities will help boost outside spending, make the switch to EVs more convenient for locals, and place Smyth County ahead of the curve if deployed widely across the County. In the short term, this initiative should be limited to areas immediately adjacent to I-81, with a particular focus on high-traffic areas like Marion and Chilhowie.

The concepts above highlight an opportunity to add a much needed amenity to this downtown district through minimally invasive improvements. As this area of Marion has already been slated for redevelopment to improve downtown parking and walkability for visitors, merchants, and locals, this project will simply include the addition of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. These additions will install 15 fast-chargers in the heart of Marion with room for 15 EVs to charge at one time. This project will exponentially improve Marion's electric vehicle charging infrastructure and provide a draw into downtown Marion. An additional site that serves to benefit from electric vehicle chargers is the Town of Chilhowie. In particular, the Town of Chilhowie offers visitors a prime opportunity to benefit from the charging hub concept by combining restaurants, shopping, and outdoor recreation opportunities in close proximity. As a result, a prime location for a charging hub in Chilhowie is the Chilhowie Town Park. The following is a concept illustrating the addition of charging infrastructure and amenities to increase connectivity and overall enjoyment of the park.

In this concept, Chilhowie's town park largely remains the same, with all the elements that citizens already enjoy remaining in place. However, new additions such as an improved restroom facility, the addition of new sidewalks that connect the park to the rest of Chilhowie, improved on-street parking, and the addition of 12 electric vehicle chargers will improve residents' and visitors' ability to enjoy the park for many years

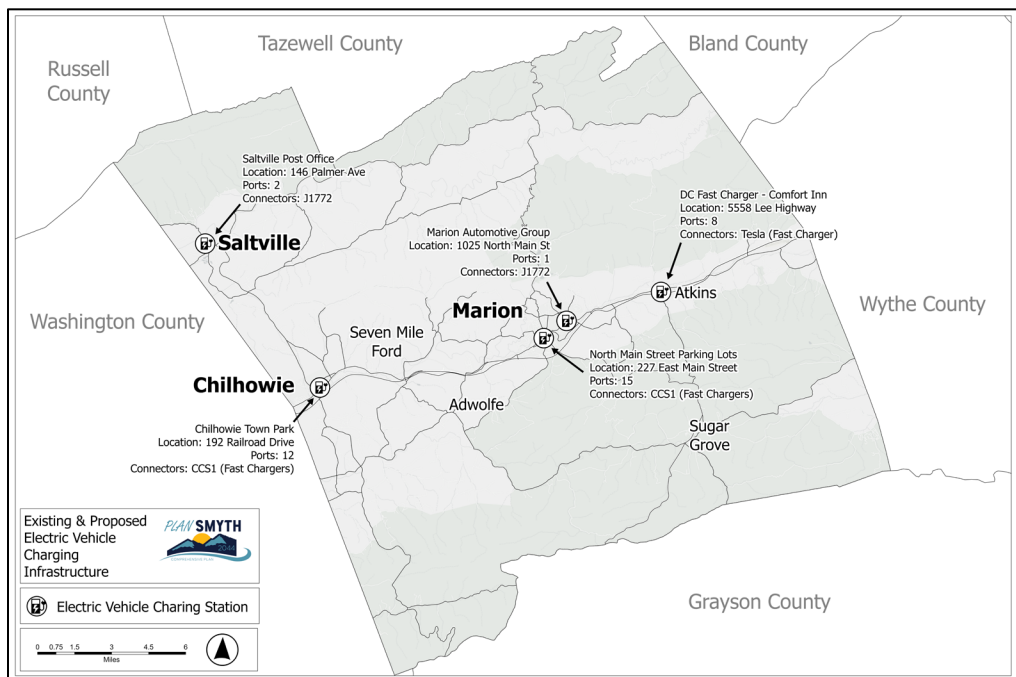




*Redeveloped Chilhowie Town Park in Chilhowie, Virginia*

to come. The installation of 12 charging stations in the already existing parking lot adjacent to railroads presents the opportunity for 12 electric vehicles to charge at the same time and provides Chilhowie its first set of publicly available charging stations.

As noted above, Smyth County's supply of "fast-chargers," chargers that offer EV owners the ability to park their car, explore, and return to a full or nearly full charger vehicle in as little as 30 minutes, is limited. However, the concepts covered above are all comprised of "fast-charger" DC based charging stations



*Existing & Potential EV Charging Infrastructure in Smyth County*



which provide the public the ability to quickly charge their vehicles. In total, the concepts include the installation of 27 charging stations that can charge up to 27 EVs at one time. This not only will provide the County with a significant amount of charging infrastructure, but it will comprise the largest concentration of publicly available charging infrastructure in Southwest Virginia. Naturally, all 27 chargers will not be installed initially. Likely, this charging infrastructure will be added gradually and based on future demand and usage. However, given the placement of the County, the current need for charging infrastructure, across the County but particularly in Southwest Virginia, and the ability to connect amenities like shopping, restaurants, and recreation to charging hubs, the County has the potential to become a routine stop for those with electric vehicles.

***Improve Town Gateways*** – First impressions largely determine how one perceives a town, city, or County. Gateways are a tool for shaping these first impressions, and there are significant opportunities to improve the gateways into the Towns. Marion is a prime example of a delightful town but has a less than stellar visual sequence along Route 16. With selective design, Route 16 can exhibit an inviting “front porch” for the town of Marion. Similarly, efforts to improve the aesthetic appeal of this gateway should be made to highlight the uniqueness of Marion and Smyth County as a whole. Similar efforts should be made in Chilhowie as well.

***Investigate the Creation of a County Gateway*** - Exit 54, located in the Groseclose area of Smyth County, was discussed as an area that is prime for the creation of a “County-wide-gateway” that integrates shopping, fuel centers, restaurants, park and rides, and lodging, and other amenities such as a visitor center, recreational center (“Hike the AT”), or automotive services. This exit’s location at the extreme east side of the County, the side at which most visitors enter, presents the opportunity to pull motorists off the highway, present what the County has to offer, and send them on their way to points of interest in the County. With the redevelopment of exit 54 referenced as an important economic development goal, the creation of a County gateway presents a catalyst to spur growth on the County’s eastern flank.

***Continue to Support Safety Improvements and Traffic Decongestion Throughout the County*** – with particular focus placed on the I-81 corridors, the County will continue to work with VDOT and other transportation partners to ensure the continual safety of the County’s roadways, as well as competitive grant applications for statewide funding programs like SMART SCALE. Potential efforts that may be sought out in the coming years are safety improvements to Back of the Dragon (Route 16) north of Marion as well as other roadways in the County that are partially narrow, hazardous, or pose a threat to motorists. It is likely a road network study needs to be conducted to determine portions of the County where streets, signage, and categorization need to be reevaluated or improved.

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## 4.4.1: Natural Resources

## 4.4 NATURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

### 4.4.1 NATURAL RESOURCES

#### NATURAL RESOURCES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

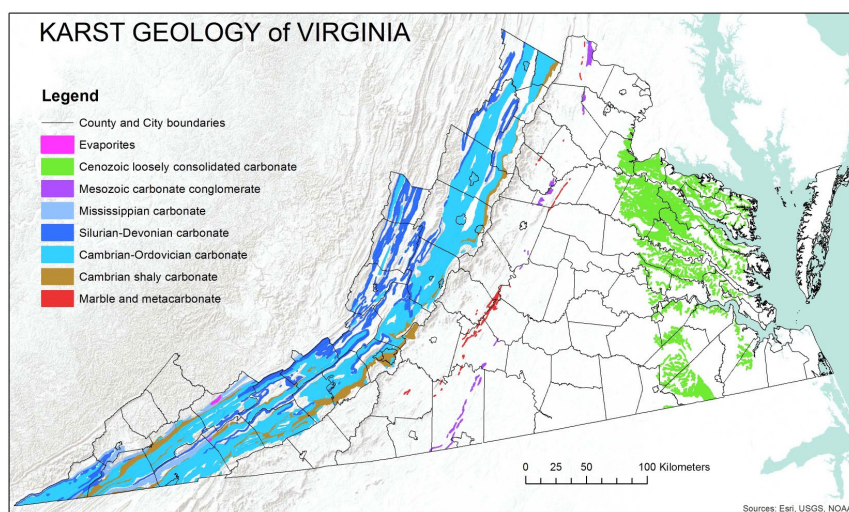
##### Natural Features

Smyth County lies within the Ridge and Valley Physiographic Province of Virginia and is adjacent to the Blue Ridge Physiographic Province to the south. These provinces are important in understanding Smyth County and the surrounding areas, distinct physical characteristics, and how many parts of Virginia's Appalachian region share similar geological, climatic, and biological characteristics.

Large portions of Smyth County are covered in deciduous hardwoods and evergreen forests. In fact, nearly 196,000 acres of the County (68%) are covered by forests. Among this number, approximately 159,000 acres fall under the Jefferson National Forest and Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, 3,334 acres falling under the jurisdiction of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (Hungry Mother State Park), with the remaining being scattered across the County. In addition to these areas, and within the protected lands of the Jefferson National Forest, is the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area (Operated by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources), which covers 25,477 acres of Smyth, Russell, Tazewell, and Washington Counties. This area is home to many protected species and is one of the most biodiverse areas of the County.

Ore and mineral mining have always been an important commodity to Smyth County's economy. Currently, there are eight mining operations active in Smyth County, according to the USGS. These mines are engaging in extracting crushed stone, clay, gypsum, and sand/gravel. In addition to active mining, the USGS notes there have been 127 producers in the County in the past. These mining operations extract iron, manganese, barium, cobalt, nickel, lead, zinc, calcium, and fluorine-fluorite. Although not listed by the USGS in their records, surface mining of salt has taken place in the Saltville area of Smyth County since before the first European settlements in the region.

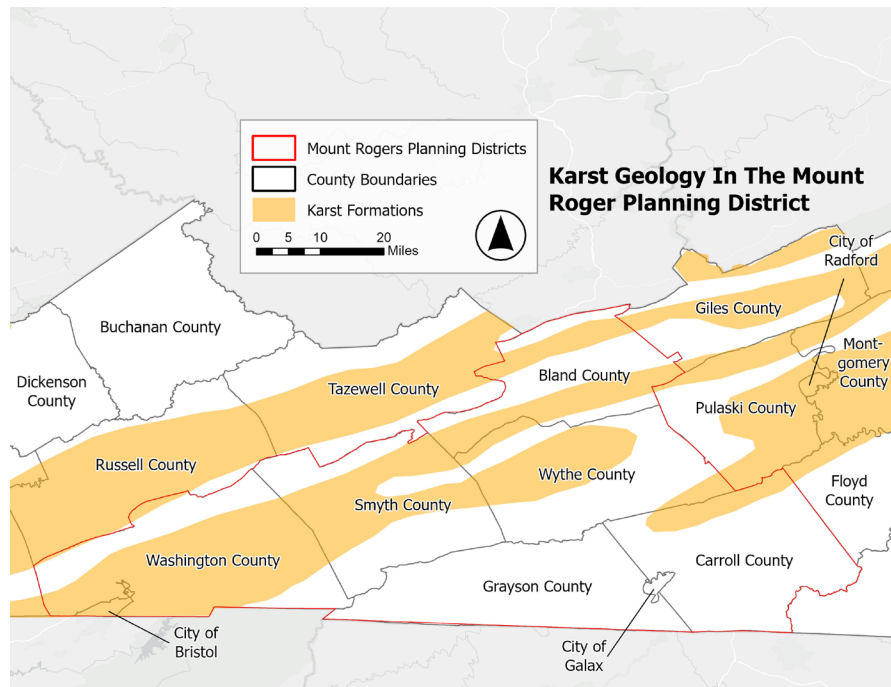
Karst topography, or land that is highly erodible and susceptible to sinkholes, caves, and aquifers (mainly comprised of limestone, dolomite, or gypsum), across the state of Virginia is primarily located in the mountainous regions in the western portion of the state. This type of geology can be troublesome for manmade structures, wells, and aquifer irrigated agriculture. Many of these underground water



*Karst Geology Across Virginia (Source: United States Geological Survey (USGS))*



sources are susceptible to overuse, causing the water table to lower beyond accessible levels and water quality degradation due to point source and non-point source pollution (agriculture). Sinkholes are also an issue when limestone/ dolomite/ gypsum deposits or the water table is close to the surface. Within Smyth County, karst topography can be found across much of the central portion of the County; these areas include the ground beneath Atkins, Marion, Chilhowie, Seven Mile Ford, and Adwolve.



*Karst Geology in the Mount Rogers Planning District (Source: Virginia Department of Energy)*

### Environmental Quality – Water and Air Quality

The primary water source for the residents of Smyth County are the three forks of the Holston River. The North Fork of the Holston River has its headwater in the western portion of Wythe County. This fork flows along the northern boundary of Smyth from the County line with Wythe County, through Saltville, and into Washington County in the west. The Middle Fork of the Holston River has its headwater in the eastern portion of Smyth County near the Wythe County line. This fork flows through Atkins, Marion, Seven Mile Ford, and Chilhowie before flowing into Washington County in the east. The South Fork of the Holston River also has its headwater in Smyth County, west of Sugar Grove. The South Fork flows through Sugar Grove and south of Adwolve before flowing into Washington County. Beyond Smyth County, the three forks of the Holston River flow into each other near Kingsport, Tennessee to form the Holston River, which then flows southwest before joining with the Tennessee River near Knoxville, Tennessee, which then flows into the Ohio River, the Mississippi River, and finally the Gulf of Mexico. All three of the forks are monitored for water quality since all three are used as sources of drinking water for the County's residents.

Presently, there are no air quality monitoring stations monitored by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (State) or the Environmental Protection Agency (Federal) within Smyth County. The closest Air Quality monitoring station is located in Rural Retreat and only monitors Ozone levels for the region.



### Soils and Prime Farm Land

Within Smyth County there are 39 series of soil. These soils include:

- Austinville • Botetourt • Calvin • Chiswell • Derroc • Fredrick • Groseclose
- Berks • Brushy • Carbo • Dekalb • Drypond • Greenlee • Ingledove
- Konnarock • Marbie • Poynor • Speedwell • Timberville • Westmoreland • Wyrick
- Laidig • Mauretown • Shelocta • Sylco • Tumbling • Wheeling
- Lily • Melvin • Shottower • Sylvatus • Udorthents • Wolfgap
- Liz • Newbern • Sindion • Tate • Welkert • Wumo

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

### Conservation Lands

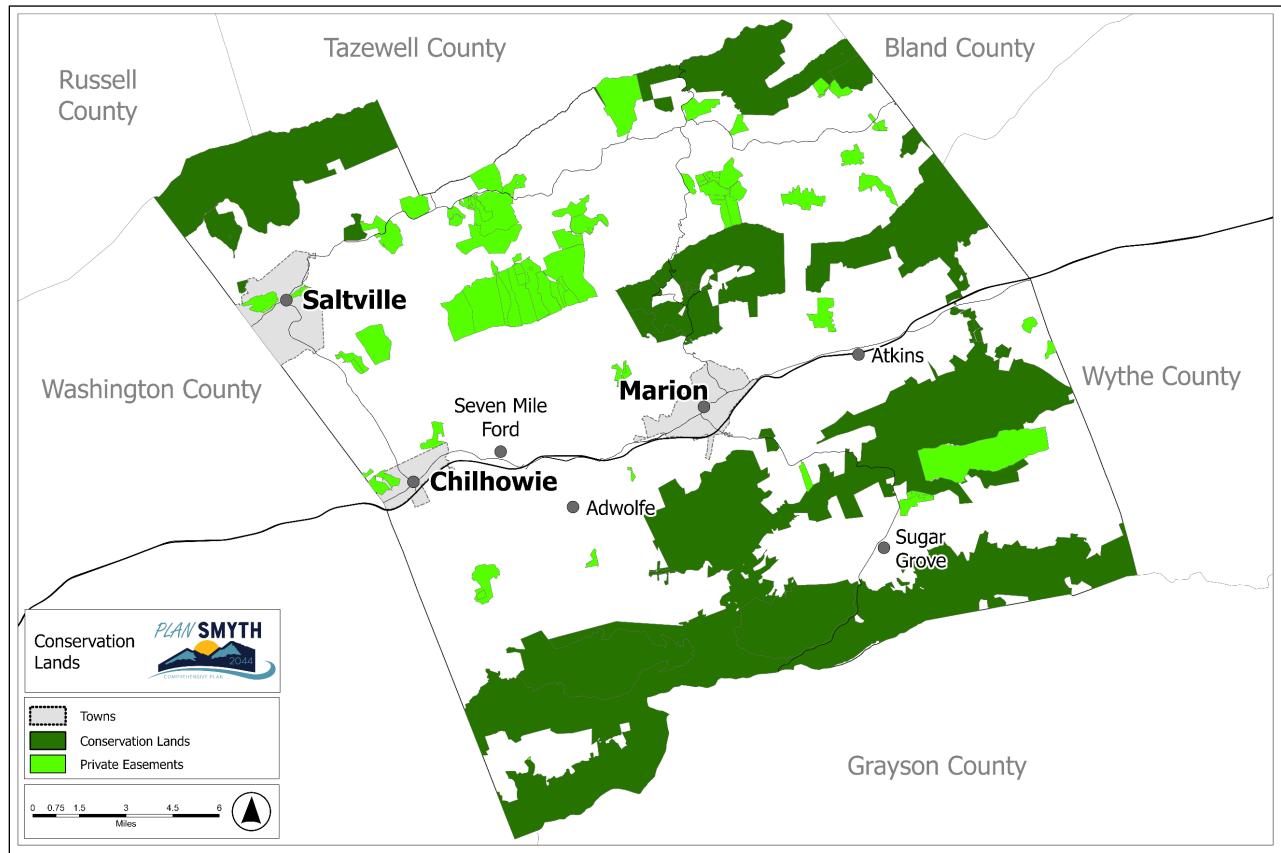
Smyth County is home to multiple protected natural areas located throughout the County. The largest of these is the Jefferson National Forest in the north and south portions of the County (including the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area), the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area in the north-western corner of the County, and Hungry Mother State Park located near the center of the County north of Marion. Conservation easements are another form of conservation lands that are not directly controlled by a state, local, or federal government but still set aside land for conservation. The majority of these easements are located in the northern portions of the County between Saltville and Marion, with sizable parcels located to the east and west of Sugar Grove as well. A map of these lands will be provided on the following page.

### Endangered Species

Within Smyth County and the Commonwealth of Virginia as a whole, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources is responsible for the management of endangered and threatened species. According to the Department of Wildlife Resources, across the state there are currently 138 species that are threatened or endangered. These include the 77 species that reside in Virginia that are listed in the Endangered Species Act (1978). Protected under both state and federal regulations include plants, fish, amphibians, mammals, reptiles, insects, and invertebrates.

The most recent report by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (then Department of Game and Inland Fisheries), 2015 Virginia Wildlife Action Plan, has set goals for targeting the preservation of threatened and endangered species across the state. Although, as of 2023, this action plan has not been updated, the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan clearly pinpoints species for conservation efforts. Within Smyth County itself, some of the roughly 30 to 40 “priority species” include the Blue Ridge Dusky Salamander, Eastern Hellbender, Swanson’s Warbler, Sharphead Darter, Tennessee Dace, and the Eastern Small-Footed Myotis, just to name a few.

### Conservation Lands Map



## NATURAL RESOURCES: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

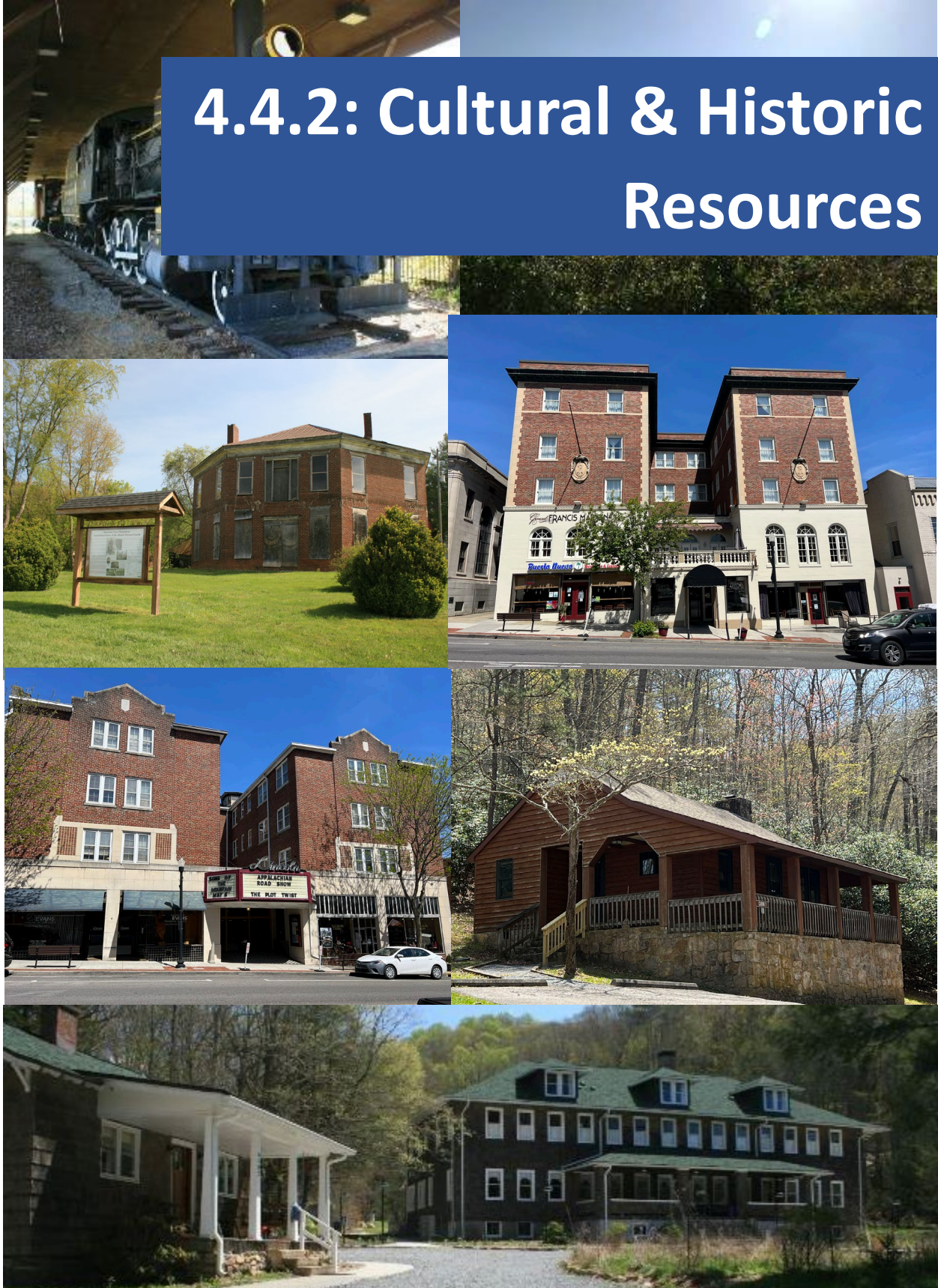
***Continue to Support the Preservation of the County's Natural Resources*** – Smyth County is, in large part, covered by lands that are federally or state protected for the use of preservation or conscientious recreation. County officials should continue to support the preservation of these lands to benefit the environmental health of the local and regional ecosystems, provide clean drinking water and air for its citizens, and sustain the stunning natural areas for its citizen and others to connect with nature, themselves, and one another. The continued growth of partnerships with the National Park Service, US Forest Service, Virginia State Parks, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources will be essential in protecting, providing, and proliferating environmental biodiversity and quality moving forward. Therefore, all efforts to facilitate partnerships, information sharing, and joint projects should be made.

***Support the Growth of Well-Appointed Conservation Easements*** – Conservation easements are an important tool in preserving fragile environmental elements, hindering urban and industrial development, and ensuring environmental quality for years to come. These easements should be used in this manner, but efforts to coordinate with County staff to limit future conflict should be made prior to filing paperwork to establish an easement.

***Investigate the Creation of Recreational Easements*** – Due to the large presence of conservation land, as well as recreational opportunities, it may be important to protect land that is currently utilized for recreational needs from future economic development. Areas of particular interest are near I-81, areas that contain existing recreational experiences like parks, trails, and greenways, and areas with high recreational potential (such as Konnarock or areas adjacent to the Appalachian Trail). Undeveloped land that has the potential to serve a recreational function in the future would also be targets of this type of easement, allowing recreational development on this land, as opposed to a conservation easement, which limits construction, impervious surfaces, roadways, and other amenities that would benefit a park for example.



## 4.4.2: Cultural & Historic Resources



## **4.4.2 CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES**

### **CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES: EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Smyth County holds an important place both in the region and state's history. As a result, the County boasts a wealth of cultural and historic resources. Smyth County was officially formed on February 23, 1832, from portions of Washington (west) and Wythe (east) counties. Named after General Alexander Smyth, a general of the War of 1812, Virginia Senator and House of Delegate, and member of the US House of Representatives, Smyth County has a deep history that is intertwined with westward expansion during the colonial and antebellum period of US history.

Although the land that became Smyth County was not inhabited by European settlers until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Native Americans called this land home for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Indigenous Native tribes to the County include the Cherokee, Yuchi, Moneton, and Tutelo Peoples. In the 1750s, Smyth County sat at the frontier of then-British America. Many Europeans were attracted to portions of Southwest Virginia for the fertile farming lands and distance from many of the established cities along the coast. In addition, many settlers traveled through the area and established farms in what would later become Smyth County due to both the Great Wagon Road (from Pennsylvania through the Shenandoah Valley) and the Wilderness Road (from Montgomery County towards Tennessee and Kentucky – Cumberland Gap).

Naturally, with the initial European settlement in the region being driven mainly by farmers, agriculture became a large driver of the local economy until the industrial revolution in the 1800's and particularly following the Civil War (post-1865). Even before industrialization, mining played a large role in the County's economy. Salt production led the way in this regard, with Saltville's saltworks playing a pivotal role both economically and historically (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Saltville) in the area; however, in addition to salt, the County has also had significant iron, zinc, magnesium, and gypsum mining industries in the past and currently. This industrious past (and present) is evident across the County, with numerous historic farms, grist mills, mines, and buildings.

#### **National and State Register of Historic Places Properties**

Smyth County currently has 22 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These properties include cemeteries, historic homes, churches, downtown districts, farm sites, former sanitariums, schools, theatres, a railway depot, a tavern, a former hospital, and a battlefield. Brief descriptions of each property will be included on the following pages, along with a map outlining their locations.



### **Aspenvale Cemetery**

Aspenvale Cemetery is a privately owned cemetery located north of Seven Mile Ford along the Middle Fork of the Holston River. The primary historic note about Aspenvale Cemetery is that the grave of Virginia-born war hero of the American Revolution, General William Campbell, is located inside the cemetery's rock walls. Campbell led his forces to victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain (SC) on October 7, 1780, and later joined General Marquis de Lafayette's forces in eastern Virginia prior to the siege of Yorktown. Campbell was killed by British forces on August 22, 1781 and laid to rest in Aspenvale Cemetery at a later date.



*Aspenvale Cemetery (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **A.C. Beatie House**

The AC Beatie House is located in Chilhowie and was constructed in 1891. This house was home to Alonzo Claibourne Beatie, a prominent local political leader and farmer. The home was built by a local carpenter, William Pendleton, and features Queen Anne detailing. The property also has a modern agricultural outbuilding and "the ruins of Town House," a regionally important home that was constructed in phases after 1770.



*A.C. Beatie House (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **H.L. Bonham House**

The HL Bonham House is located in Chilhowie and was constructed in 1911. This house was home to Hezekiah Love Bonham, a regionally prominent farmer and businessman who pioneered innovations in the cultivation, processing, and sale of apples in SWVA. The home is designed in the Colonial Revival style and was designed by C.B. Kerfott Jr. Bonham worked closely with Virginia Polytechnic Institute to improve the application of scientific principles for fertilization and orchard management and constructed the only cold storage facility for apple grading and packaging between Roanoke and Bristol.



*H.L. Bonham House (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **Chilhowie Methodist Episcopal Church**

The Chilhowie Methodist Episcopal Church, now Chilhowie United Methodist Church, was completed in 1894 and is an example of the Gothic Revival architectural style. Constructed of locally made golden-brown pressed brick and dark metal steeple, this church stands in stark contrast to the simple, wooden, country churches that are prominent across the region. There is no particular architect associated with the design of CMEC, but the design is believed to be influenced by E.J. Rutland, an English born superintendent of the local brick factory.

*Chilhowie Methodist Episcopal Church (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



### **Downtown Chilhowie Historic District**

The Downtown Chilhowie Historic District is a small commercial center located along I-81 in the western portion of Smyth County. Initial construction in the corridor was spurred on by the advent of the railroad in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century. This era of construction saw the establishment of industrial buildings, shops, and brick and weatherboard homes. Within this district, the commercial buildings date from 1900 to 1930 which directly corresponds to the town's initial growth period in which Chilhowie was transformed from a small train depot town to a small regional economic hub.



*Downtown Chilhowie Historic District (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **Fox Farm Site**

The Fox Farm Site, located along the Middle Fork of the Holston River, is home to a preserved Indian Village that was occupied between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The site represents information on the interaction and development of regional trade between Indian groups. The presence of various ceramic types and marine shell ornaments support the notion that trade between Indians living in SWVA traded with those living along the coasts (either directly or tangentially). The site also provides educational opportunities to learn about native structures, mortuary practices, and subsistence farming.



*Fox Farm Site (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



### **R.T. Greer and Co. Building**

This building, located in downtown Marion, was once home to the RT Greer and Co., the leading medicinal plant material supplier in the Appalachian region from the early 1900's to 1968. RT Greer and Co. was established in 1904 in Marion by Riley Thomas Greer, George W. Greer, and F.P. McGuire. This building was erected in 1916, and business was conducted on site until the company went out of business in 1968. The building then stood empty until 1993, when it was reopened, selling local crafts, herbs, and holding classes on herbal medicine. Since then, the building has been converted into apartments.



***R.T. Greer and Co. Building (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)***

### **Henderson Building – Southwestern State Hospital**

The Henderson Building, located in Marion, was the main building for the then Southwestern Lunatic Asylum and was constructed in 1887 as part of Virginia's effort to expand mental health care to all parts of the state. The domed centerpiece of the building was designed by McDonald Brother of Louisville, Kentucky, and was named after Dr. E.H. Henderson, a superintendent of the hospital from 1915 until his death in 1927. Between 1930 and 1931, the Henderson building saw a facade update in the Italian Renaissance-style. This building continues to house administrative offices for the Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute.



***Henderson Building (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)***

### **Hungry Mother State Park Historic District**

The Hungry Mother State Park Historic District is located within the boundaries of Hungry Mother State Park (2,215 acres) north of Marion. Hungry Mother State Park was constructed between 1933 and 1941 by 600 Civilian Conservation Corp members. Many of the buildings are prime examples of CCC style buildings, including cabins, shelters, and lodges.



***Hungry Mother State Park Historic District (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)***

### **Konnarock Training School**

The Konnarock Training School, located in the southwestern corner of the County, was established in 1924 by Lutheran missionaries as the Women's Missionary Society of the United Lutheran Church in America. The school served both as a private boarding school and a public day school with a focus on the cultural, spiritual, and social development of girls from underprivileged families in the region. Surviving remnants of the school complex include the school's main building, a rustic style classroom/dormitory designed by Richmond, VA, architects Henry Carl Messerschmidt in 1925. In addition to the main school



*Konnarock Training School (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

building, there is a bungalow style building on site that was built in 1936 and served as the school's infirmary. The school was closed in 1958 after the Lutheran's Board of American Missions concluded that the school's mission was completed. After the school's closing, the property was handed over to the Forest Service. Renovated in 2022, it serves as the home of the Blue Ridge Discovery Center.

### **Lincoln Theatre**

The Lincoln Theatre is located in downtown Marion and is a prime example of the 1920s movie-palace fad that gripped much of the County at that time. Built in 1929, the Lincoln Theatre's interior design takes cues from Mayan design, which is incredibly unique for both the time and the area of the County. These designs include 3D appliques and stencils of gods, animals, mythological creatures, and Mayan calligraphy along the walls and ceilings. In addition to these unique



*The Lincoln Theatre (Source: The Lincoln Theatre Foundation)*

design features, the theater also hosts six large murals that depict scenes of American and local history. This theater holds 750 seats and was built by Charles C Lincoln Sr., the wealthiest man in Marion at the time. The Lincoln Theater hosted both films and vaudeville acts until its closure in 1977. The theatre was purchased by the Lincoln Theatre Foundation in 1988 and has restored the theater to its former glory. Currently, the theatre hosts musical acts and cultural events.



### **The Hotel Lincoln (Francis Marion Hotel)**

The Hotel Lincoln was completed in 1927 and stands as one of SWVA's few continuously operating 20<sup>th</sup> century hotels. Funded by Charles C. Lincoln (same as the Lincoln Theater) and Dr. William M. Sclater, and designed by Roanoke based Eubank and Caldwell, the Hotel Lincoln took advantage of Marion's placement on US 11 by offering higher-end amenities to locals and travelers. The hotel included a drugstore, coffee shop, beauty salon, and barber shop. The building still stands along Route 11 and serves as a prime example of Georgian Revival architecture in downtown Marion. This hotel is currently called the Francis Marion Hotel.



*Francis Marion Hotel (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **The Marion Historic District**

The Marion Historic District was established in 2000 and includes residential, commercial, and institutional structures from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. All structures in the district are organized in a grid pattern that was laid out in 1832 and is organized around the Beaux-Arts-style courthouse at the center of town. The boundaries of the district were expanded in 2011 to include commercial and institutional properties adjacent to Main Street as well as residential buildings to the north and south.



*Marion Historic District (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **The Marion Male Academy**

The Marion Male Academy was the first effort in Smyth County to offer public education to its citizens. Established in 1873 by local academic D. C. Miller, MMA was established in response to the Underwood Constitution of 1869 that mandated free public school and the slow rollout of this mandate. Prior to the school's establishment, younger residents of Smyth County were educated at a private co-educational high school, which was closed when the school's founder left to become the president of Marion Female College (an all-female college that operated in Marion until 1967). The school was constructed in 1876 and operated until 1893, when Marion Public High School was opened, and D.C. Miller became the school's first superintendent. The school was auctioned off in 1901 and has served as a private residence since then.



*Marion Historic District (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



### **Marion Norfolk & Western Railway Depot**

Constructed in 1903, the Norfolk and Western Railway Company chose Marion as the site of a new passenger and freight station. NWRC chose J.C. Nesbit of Harrisburg, PA, to design and construct the depot. The design of the depot is like that of other NW depots of the time. Passenger service continued to this depot until 1971. In 1993, the depot was sold to a developer and converted into a commercial space.



*Marion Norfolk & Western Railway Depot (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **Old Stone Tavern**

The Old Stone Tavern was constructed in 1815 by Fredrick Cullop to accommodate travelers along the Wilderness Road (US 11) as they migrated through the Cumberland Gap in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This tavern was constructed using locally sourced limestone and stands as one of the oldest stone buildings in the County. Typical of early colonial taverns, the Old Stone Tavern is sheltered by a two-level gallery with scalloped eaves. This structure is located south of Atkins in the eastern portion of Smyth County.



*The Old Stone Tavern (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **Preston House**

The Preston House was built in 1842 by John Montgomery Preston on land inherited by his wife, Maria Thornton Carter Preston. This land had belonged to Carter Preston's grandfather, General William Campbell. Preston built this building initially as a grand tavern, placing the building on the site of a former log tavern. During the tavern's heyday, the establishment gained a dubious notoriety, a stigma that Preston hoped to avoid. The building uses both Federal and Greek Revival elements in its architectural design. The tavern served travelers along the Wilderness Road until 1864, when it became a residence for Preston's son; in the same year, the home was sacked by Union troops en route to Saltville and Abingdon.



*Preston House (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

### **Saltville Battlefields Historic District**

The Saltville Battlefield's Historic District contains the sites of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of Saltville, in which Union and Confederate forces contested the areas surrounding the Saltville saltworks. The district encompasses the remains of the extraction, processing, and transportation facilities associated with the Saltville saltworks, as well as an extensive system of field fortifications built in 1863 and 1864 to defend the saltworks. There are



*Saltville Battlefields Historic District (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

also three important structures associated with the battles that survive; these are the home of William A. Stuart (brother of Confederate general J.E.B. Stuart), which served as the headquarters for Union General George Stoneman during the battles of Saltville.

### **Saltville Historic District**

The Saltville Historic District includes most of the surviving historic commercial and residential buildings in and around Saltville. Mathieson-Alkali Works developed Saltville as a company town from 1892 to 1930. In 1931, the mineral company began to release land for construction of privately owned commercial buildings; these releases continued until 1950, with the majority of commercial buildings hailing from this era. Commercial and institutional buildings comprise much of Saltville's northern blocks, while residential structures comprise the southern blocks.



*Saltville Historic District (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



## Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044

### Scott-Walker House

The Scott-Walker House stands as the oldest stone farmhouse in the County and is a prime example of early vernacular architecture. Although no specific date is known for when the Scott-Walker House was built, it is estimated that this home was built between 1800 and 1815 for Charles Scott, a wealthy farmer and slave owner.

*Scott-Walker House (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



### Smyth County Community Hospital

The Smyth County Community Hospital was constructed between 1965 and 1967 in Marion and was the first hospital built by the community to provide medical services without racial discrimination. Although simple in its design, this hospital employed a state-of-the-art circular corridor plan when it was constructed, as well as an advanced communication system. Smyth County Community Hospital was built by Echols-Sparger & Associates and is one of the few internationally styled buildings in the County. The hospital closed its doors in 2006, but since then has been adapted into an educational setting for Emory & Henry College's School of Health Sciences.



*Smyth County Community Hospital (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

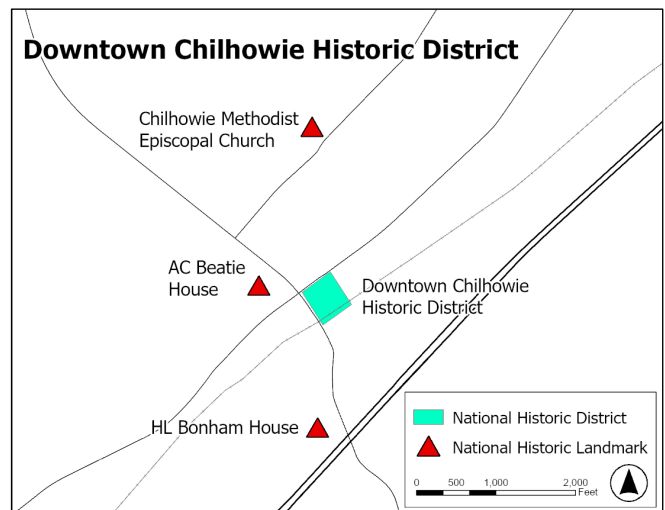
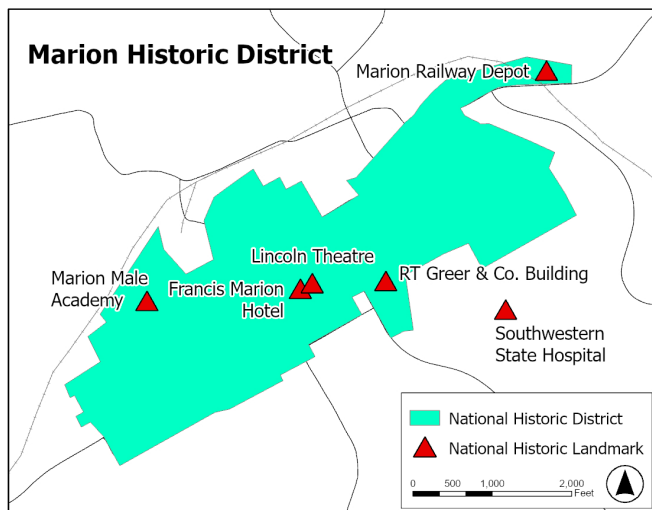
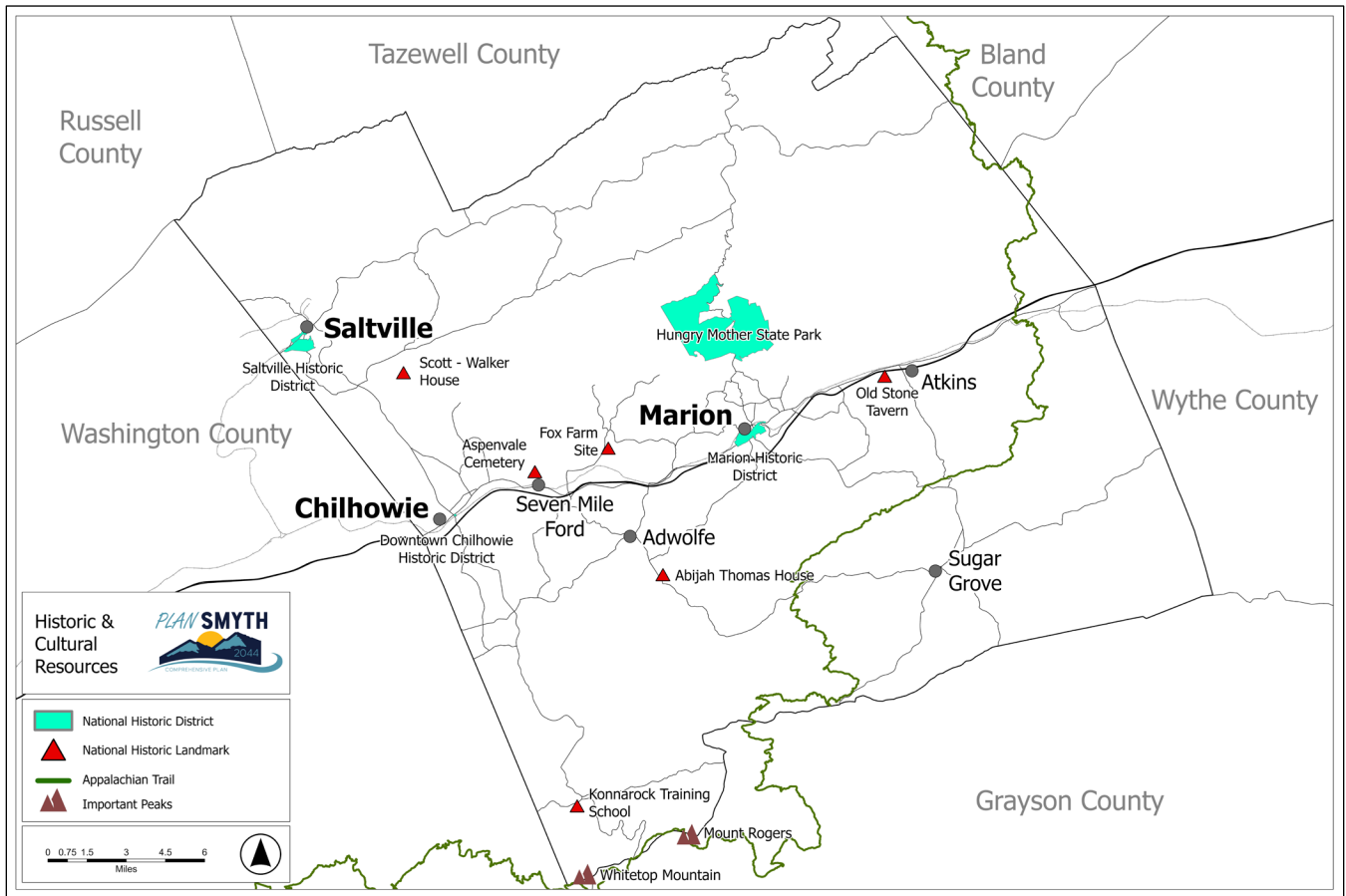
### Abijah Thomas House

Built in 1856-57 by Adijah Thomas, a landowner and developer of mines, mills, and foundries, this house stands as a the most sophisticated example of Orson Squire Fowler's octagonal architecture. Fowler argued that structures that were octagonal were a better use of space and adds 1/5<sup>th</sup> more interior space than a square shaped house of the same dimensions. This house is owned by the Octagon House Foundation, which is working to preserve and renovate the building.



*Abijah Thomas House (Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*

## Cultural and Historic Resources Maps





### Preservation Tools and Partners

The three towns of Smyth County (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville) contain their own respective National Register Historical Districts. These districts protect certain aspects of the historic resources if federal monies are involved. However, they do not guarantee the historical and cultural character of each of these town's downtown centers are preserved.

In addition to historical districts, there are numerous community organizations that promote awareness and preservation of the County's cultural and historic resources. These include:

- **The Smyth County Historical Society & Museum (Marion)**
  - Established in 1961, the Smyth County Historical Society and Museum was started by a small group of Smyth County residents with the goal of preserving the County's history before culturally and historically significant artifacts and information were lost to time. After moving multiple times due to an ever-growing collection, the Smyth County Museum is currently located in the former Parks-Belk department store, which itself was constructed in 1940/1941 on the site of the former Christ Episcopal Church which was constructed in 1871.
- **The Smyth County Genealogical Society (Marion)**
  - This organization began to assist residents of Smyth County in conducting family history research as well instructing residents on methods for preserving records, documents, and artifacts. Projects the society has engaged in include the preservation and digitization of family bibles and obituaries, transcriptions of the Smyth County School Census for 1885, 1910, and 1915, the minutes and records of the Mt. Oliver Free Will Baptist Church, photographs, and transcriptions of minutes from the Town of Marion's Town Council, and the digitization of local photography.
- **The Settlers Museum of Southwest Virginia (Atkins)**
  - This non-profit was established in 1987 to tell the story of the people who settled in the mountains of southwest Virginia. Attractions include a museum and replicas of an 1890's schoolhouse and farm.
- **The Museum of Middle Appalachians (Saltville)**
  - This museum, located in Saltville, is dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and research of the people, culture, and history of the Middle Appalachian region. This museum tells the story of the Middle Appalachians from pre-history to current times and works to increase awareness and research into issues facing those living in Appalachia.
- **Main Street Programs (Marion)**
  - The Main Street Program is a federally funded program that seeks to bolster business in small town downtowns and business districts. This program also works to improve the aesthetics of downtowns through façade, streetscape, and walkability improvements.

## CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

***Establish a Historical and Cultural Asset Advisory Committee*** – While not a high priority in the previous comprehensive plan, the protection of the County’s historical and cultural assets was held as something that must be proactively addressed in the new comprehensive plan by focus group members. Already in unofficial development, the creation of an advisory committee on the preservation of the County’s historical and cultural assets should be legitimized moving forward. This advisory committee, comprised of representatives of historical and cultural preservation organizations, tourism and economic development, town and County governments, and the general public, should be organized to advise the County Board of Supervisors on matters pertaining to the preservation of the County’s historical and cultural assets.

***Investigate, Catalog, Preserve Local Cultural and Historical Assets*** - It was noted that there is a lack of knowledge on the current condition and location of the entirety of the County’s historical and cultural assets; therefore, in order to better conserve, preserve, and remedy to County’s assets, it is recommended that the County, or Historical and Cultural Advisory Committee, perform an asset inventory, condition, and preservation study to determine the status of the County’s assets as well as guide recommendations for future restoration and preservation efforts.

***Focus Restoration Efforts on Downtown Buildings and Highly Visible Sites*** – In order to best allocate preservation and restoration funds, efforts should be focused on downtown areas in Marion, Saltville, and Chilhowie. Not only are these areas the most highly trafficked, but they are also home to the lion’s share of buildings that would benefit from restoration and redevelopment. Façade improvements, updated utilities, the removal of asbestos, and residential or commercial redevelopment are all important steps that will need to be done to ensure the County’s historic storefronts are restored, reused, and preserved for long term use. Partnerships with MainStreet Programs, the National Park Service, the local Chamber of Commerce’s, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and others serve to ensure long term support for redevelopment and preservation efforts.

***Benefit from Cultural and Historical Hubs*** – As part of the effort to create tourism hubs, local historical and cultural assets must subscribe to the County’s “digital welcome mat:” to ensure a cohesive, easy to understand, and accessible network for locals and tourists.

***Address Funding Issues*** – A major issue is funding inadequacies that are incurred from the day-to-day operation, restoration, curation, and manpower costs. These are issues that are facing many cultural and historic sites across the County; however, efforts can and should be made to ensure the viability of the County’s important assets. Collectivization of the sites is an option and allows all these sites to pool their resources to ensure they are all viable. This can be done through private enterprise, public entities, or through a joint partnership amongst the County’s cultural and historical assets. Governing of this co-op could be managed through a council, similar to the Historical and Cultural Advisory Committee, to ensure resources are adequately dispersed throughout the County. In addition to these actions, increased focus should be placed on grants, outside funding, and increasing tourist dollars (and potentially funded through meals and lodging taxes). All of these elements have the potential to improve the quality of sites

## **Smyth County Comprehensive Plan – PlanSmyth 2044**

throughout the County and boost marketing, visibility, and desirability to guests through added amenities or expanded attractions.





## 4.5: Land Use & Development



## 4.5 LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

Smyth County hosts a myriad of natural resources, historic and cultural properties, scenic landscapes, productive agricultural lands, unique recreational experiences, revitalizing towns, and a flourishing business sector. With all these assets, the County is primed for future growth, specifically in areas that are adjacent to I-81. However, a large driver of Smyth County’s future growth is directed by how development and land assets are managed over the next 10 to 20 years. Proactive, strategic planning and effective guidance for future land development and use will be integral in providing current and future residents of the County with a successful economic future.

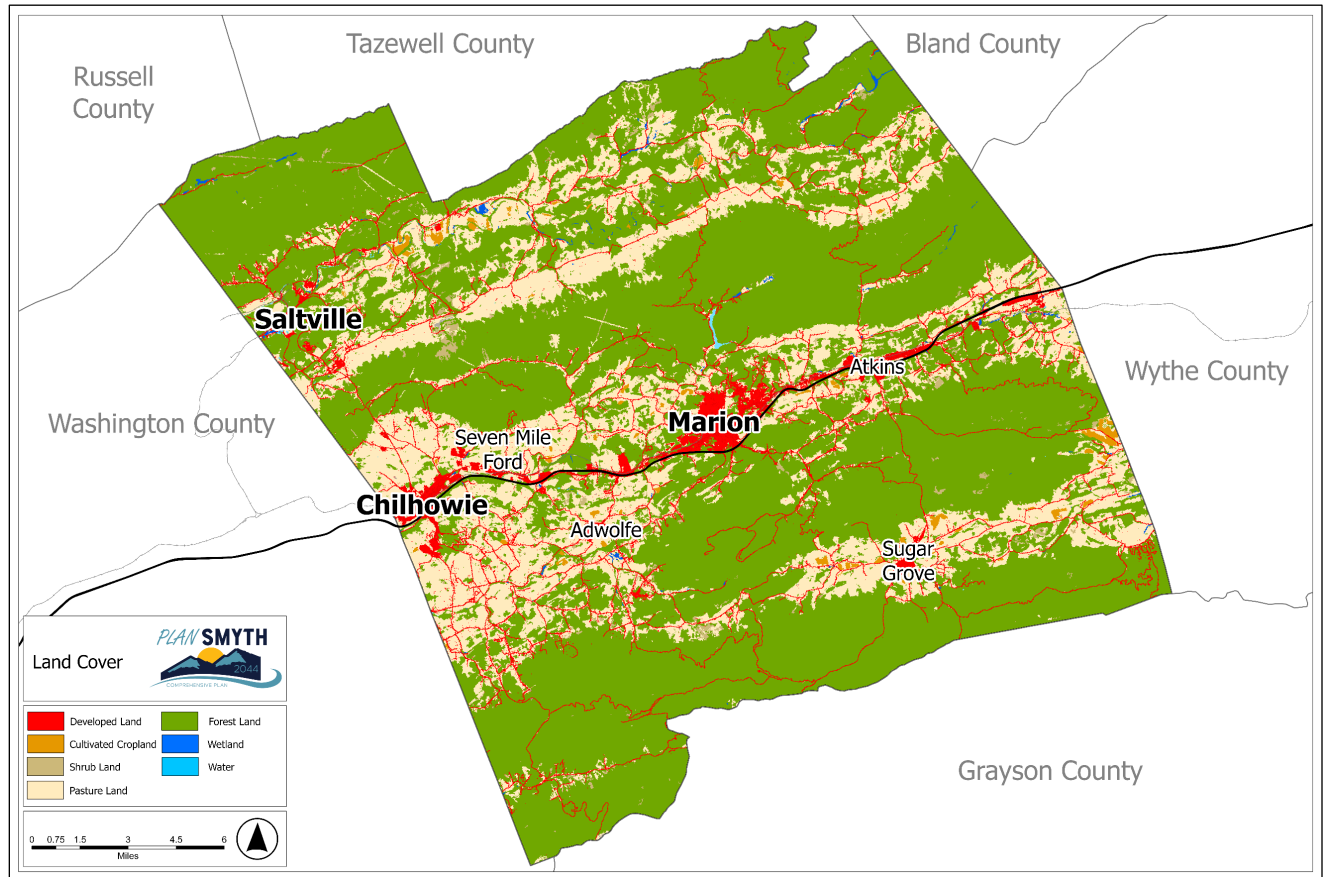
### Land Use and Development: Existing Conditions

#### Existing Land Use

Large portions of Smyth County are covered in forests, pastures, and developed areas. As with many portions of rural Virginia, much of the County remains rural with development sequestered to Marion, Saltville, Chilhowie, and areas adjacent to I-81. The table below outlines existing land use patterns across Smyth County as of 2019. A map illustrating these patterns can be found on the following page.

Land Cover Category	Areas (Acres)	Percent of County Area
Open Water	866	0.07%
Developed Lands	88,701	6.81%
Barren Lands	391	0.03%
Forests	889,667	68.27%
Shrub/Scrub	11,901	0.91%
Herbaceous/Hay/Pasture	301,232	23.12%
Cultivated Cropland	7,301	0.56%
Wetlands	2,990	0.23%
Source: USGS Land Cover Data (2019)		

### Existing Land Use Map



### Managing Land Development

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, land use and development are typically guided by the long-range comprehensive plan (sets the vision and goals and provides direction for managing lands within the jurisdiction) and adopted land development regulations (zoning and subdivision codes establish rules for how and where development occurs). Smyth County adopted its current Zoning Ordinance in October 2001 and went into effect January 1, 2002. This ordinance applies to all unincorporated areas in the County, with incorporated areas having their own ordinances. The Town of Marion’s most recent Zoning Ordinance was adopted in March of 2015, Chilhowie’s most recent Town Code was updated in 2021, and Saltville Zoning is outlined in its most recent Comprehensive Plan (2019).

Smyth County Zoning Ordinances	Overview of Regulation
Airport Safety Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopted 1991</li> <li>Prevents structures that obstruct airport airspace operations, applies to nearby properties and towers &gt; 50 feet.</li> <li>Mountain Empire Airport / Smyth-Wythe Airport Commission</li> </ul>

Smyth County Zoning Ordinance	Overview of Regulation
Floodplain Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopted 1997</li> <li>• Regulates uses, activities and development in flood prone areas (floodway, 100-year floodplain as established by FEMA)</li> <li>• Establishes standards for development in these areas</li> </ul>
Manufactured Home Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulates the development of manufactured home parks and placement of individual manufactured homes</li> <li>• Reviews suitability of land, environment, natural features, neighborhood, utilities, streets, lot size, and setback from public roads.</li> </ul>
Nuisance Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various ordinances to address nuisances, particularly unsafe, dangerous, or unsanitary public or private buildings, walls or structures, accumulations of litter or trash, and any dangerous or unhealthy substances which have escaped, spilled, been released, or allowed to accumulate.</li> </ul>
Stormwater Management and Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes requirements for control of soil erosion and runoff during land disturbing activities 10,000 sf or more.</li> <li>• Standards per the Code of Virginia</li> </ul>
Subdivision Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopted 1996</li> <li>• Establishes standards and procedures for new subdivisions.</li> <li>• Land divisions are exempt if they are (1) adjacent property with no building site, (2) family divisions, (3) One Acre Lots, (4) Two Acre Lots, (5) Five Acre Lots</li> </ul>

## LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Proper land use and development are essential in ensuring the County has orderly development that benefits the County's residents, industry, businesses, farmers, developers, and government officials. Luckily, Smyth County already has land use planning implemented throughout the County, but in order to better facilitate growth in the future, it is likely that new, more concise land use categories will need to be devised, and current land use categories will need to be reevaluated to represent usage that is most beneficial to the economic and social wellbeing of the County all the while preserving the unique qualities of the County such as farm land and environmental assets like forest, rivers, and greenspaces. The following are recommendations to address future land use and development in the County:

***Ensure that Current Land Use and Zoning Ordinances Match*** – From discussions in focus groups, it was noted that the current Zoning Ordinances for the County do not match the current land use map. This needs to be remedied moving forward in order to create cohesion between the two documents, reduce confusion for developers, and ensure that new development matches measures agreed upon in this comprehensive plan.

***Ensure Future Land Use Complements Town Land Use*** – A challenge for the County is ensuring that all future land use is done in a manner that best reflects the needs of the County but does not negatively impact each town. For example, if an area within Chilhowie is slated for residential development, a large factory with rail access should not be placed directly next to it. Non-complementary land use has not been an issue in the past; therefore, efforts to ensure cohesiveness should be continued moving forward.

***Implement Segmented & Detailed Residential Land Use Categories*** – Under the current land use map, large portions of the County fall into the category of "Rural Residential." This represents lands that are generally outside of traditional transportation corridors, federal or state-protected lands, agricultural lands, or within town boundaries. In other words, this represents a "catchall" that encompasses much of the County's land that does not fall into any other category. With the hope of preserving the culturally and economically important land that resides in both the Rye and Rich Valleys, the ability to curb lower-density housing development from cropping up adjacent to non-complementary land uses, heavy industry, for example, is needed. Therefore, "Rural Residential" should be reconsidered and applied to areas that currently host low-density development, are connected to public utilities, or have plans to be connected to public utilities in the near future.

The "Urban Residential" category is sparsely used in the 2013 map but is likely to be important moving forward with increased demand for housing types that require higher-density development. Therefore, this land use category will likely need to be expanded to include areas in which future residential developments will likely be located. This includes areas with easy access to transportation networks, like I-81, Route 11, and Route 107, current public utilities, and within close proximity to the County towns.

***Consider the Addition of an Energy Land Use Category*** – With the placement of the Broadford Substation east of Saltville and the likelihood of expanded alternative and traditional power production in the County, it is likely. This land use category will provide portions of the County where power generation is allowed, limiting the sprawl of solar and wind farms and limits. Due to the need for road networks to support the transportation of fuel to the plants, these areas will largely be located adjacent to roadways, and in an



effort to reduce land use conflicts, these districts will be located away from population centers and residential areas.

## Future Land Use Categories

Discussed below are the Future Land Use Category recommendations for Smyth County in order to guide responsible, well planned, and future focused land use over the next 10 to 20 years. These categories are intended to provide guidance for smartly managing the County’s land, ensuring culturally and economically significant enterprises are preserved, all the while providing the groundwork for fostering a robust industrial base, increasing amenities, and increasing the quality of life for those living in Smyth County.

Future Land Use Categories, PlanSmyth 2044		
<b>Conservation</b>		
Description	Density/ Intensity	Development Character
<p>The Conservation land use category provides a designation for lands that fall within federal, state, local, or private conservation and management areas. Examples include portions of Hungry Mother State Park, the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Jefferson National Forest, Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and the series of Conservation Easements located throughout the County.</p> <p><b>Scenic Parkway Overlay</b> Scenic Parkway Overlay refers to Conservation areas that align with already established roadways that add cultural or scenic value to the County. In these corridors, signage, lighting, and development will be discouraged to ensure the scenic quality of these thoroughfares, with 300 foot setbacks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undeveloped</li> <li>• Limited Recreational Development</li> <li>• Conservation</li> <li>• Natural Areas</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural, Natural Landscapes</li> <li>• Passive Outdoor Recreation (hiking, mountain biking, cycling, birding, fishing, hunting. Etc.)</li> <li>• Forest Lands</li> <li>• Wildlife Management</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> </ul>

<b>Recreation</b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Development Character</b>
The Recreation land use category provides a designation for lands that will be used for generally recreational uses, such as hiking, mountain biking, birding, and other passive outdoor recreational uses. Areas in this category are not protected by federal or state entities and are in close proximity to existing recreational opportunities, scenic areas, or require preservation to ensure this land is not used for a competing activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Recreational Development</li> <li>• Conservation</li> <li>• Natural Areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural, Natural Landscapes</li> <li>• Passive Outdoor Recreation (hiking, mountain biking, cycling, birding, fishing, hunting. Etc.)</li> <li>• Forest Lands</li> <li>• Wildlife Management</li> <li>• Support facilities for general recreational uses</li> </ul>
<b>Agriculture</b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
This land use category provides preservation and protection of large farms that fall within portions of the County traditionally used for farming, greenhouses, crop and timber production, and pastureland. These areas include low-density residential uses that are typically one or more single-family homes that are associated with agriculture. These areas may be served by public water, broadband, and electricity but are unlikely to be served by public sewers or water. Water & sewer extensions are not a priority in these areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farms (Large Lots)</li> <li>• Minor Residential development and typically 6+ acre lots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural agricultural landscapes</li> <li>• Some public utilities are available, but not all, and public facilities may be some distance away</li> <li>• Residential development is associated with both larger and smaller farms and well as homesteads</li> <li>• Agribusiness Operations</li> </ul>
<b>Rural Residential (Low Density)</b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
Rural Residential represents areas of the County that are rural in nature. These areas are likely sparsely populated, with lots likely being larger than two acres. These areas are likely outside of major transportation corridors but have easy access to secondary roads. Public facilities are some distance away. Typical residential development in these areas includes single-family homes and manufactured homes. Smaller scale agriculture is allowed in these areas. Public water may be available, but unlikely, with public sewer being unavailable. Extension of these services are lower priority than in more densely populated areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2+ acre lots</li> <li>• Possible PUDs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some public utilities are available but not all</li> <li>• Located outside of the traditional “town” areas (Marion, Saltville, Chilhowie)</li> <li>• Typically not located near public facilities like grocery stores, banks, restaurants, libraries, or schools.</li> </ul>

<b><i>Village Residential (Medium Density)</i></b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
Village Residential represents areas of the County that are serviced by some public utilities and are located in close proximity to important roadways. These areas are likely populated with public facilities and community services being close by. Typical residential development in this area includes single-family homes (attached and detached), duplexes, apartments, townhomes, and manufactured homes. These areas likely have access to public water, but not public sewers. Likely areas for water & sewer expansion if not already available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small to Medium Lots</li> <li>• 10 to 15K sq ft lots</li> <li>• <b>Single-family:</b> 2-4 dwellings / acre</li> <li>• <b>Multi-Family:</b> 6-12 dwellings / acre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential neighborhoods or areas with easy access to the County's towns</li> <li>• Public Utilities &amp; Services</li> <li>• Connected roads and possible sidewalks</li> <li>• Multi-Family dwelling dependent upon access to public water and sewer.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Urban Residential</i></b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
Urban Residential represents areas of the County serviced by all public utilities, located adjacent to major roadways and one of the County's urban centers. These areas are highly populated, have easy access to public utilities, public service, community assets, public transit, and are within walking distance to typical amenities like grocery, shopping, restaurants, etc. Typical residential development in these areas includes single-family homes, duplexes, apartments, townhomes, condominiums, and mixed-use developments with residential offerings over commercial storefronts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller lots</li> <li>• High Density Developments</li> <li>• <b>Single-family:</b> 2-8 dwellings / acre</li> <li>• <b>Multi-Family:</b> 4-12 dwellings / acre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older, more densely packed neighborhoods</li> <li>• Apartment Buildings, Condos, Reuse of buildings for residential use</li> <li>• Easy Access, within walking distance, to public amenities, attractions, social services, shopping, and dining.</li> <li>• Connected roads, sidewalks, trails</li> </ul>

<b><i>Rural Village</i></b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
<p>Rural Village provides areas of the County for small business development in rural portions of the County. These areas are located at the crossroads of transportation thoroughfares, are likely served by public utilities like water, sewer, electricity, and broadband internet, and already have some development. These areas are good candidates for public utility expansion if a service is not already available. Typical land use includes small scale industrial use (sawmill, crop processing, etc.), agribusinesses, grocery stores, restaurants, shops, gas stations, convenience stores, and community services (Libraries, Fire/EMS, Police, Social Services).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Lots for Business Development</li> <li>• &lt;5000 sf buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Node development at crossroads</li> <li>• Managed, safe access</li> <li>• Managed signage, lighting, parking, benches</li> <li>• Cohesive feel that promotes walkability and a small-town atmosphere</li> </ul>
<b><i>Commercial / Industrial</i></b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
<p>This land use category provides for business and industrial development along major transportation corridors such as I-81 and US-11. Examples of typical commercial land use may include highway-oriented businesses like fast-food and fast-casual restaurants, gas stations, lodging, automotive repair shops and stores, and charging stations. Examples of industrial-oriented land use may include manufacturing facilities, warehouses, distribution facilities, industrial parks, corporate offices, business parks, or other industries. Industrial facilities may be buffered for other adjacent land use depending upon compatibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinated nodes of development along corridors rather than strip development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidated entrances</li> <li>• Screened operations areas, loading, employee parking, and storage lots</li> <li>• Business support services</li> <li>• Public utilities, roads, railway, public transit access</li> </ul>



<b>Energy (Alternative &amp; Traditional)</b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Density/ Intensity</b>	<b>Developmental Character</b>
<p>The Energy Land Use category provides areas of the County that are designated for the purpose of energy production. This includes both renewable and non-renewable sources such as solar, wind, bio-mass, and natural gas to produce electrical energy for the County and points elsewhere. This also includes areas for energy storage that is associated with alternative energy production.</p> <p><b><u>Energy Priority Areas</u></b>                      These areas prioritize the development of solar fields and activities associated with energy production. Centered around already established sub-stations, these priority areas are typically away from residential areas and have easy access to the power grid.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large areas that already host energy production or are adjacent to existing assets</li> <li>• Little to no adjacent residential or commercial development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy production infrastructure (plants, substations, solar fields, wind farms)</li> <li>• Node development at key crossroads on highways or major roads</li> <li>• Security Elements</li> </ul>

## Future Land Use Map

The future land use map developed for Smyth2044 is outlined and illustrated on the following pages. This map serves as a general reference to guide future land use development in Smyth County and ensure an orderly method for continued economic development. The following speaks to each Land Use Category and its prevalence across the County:

### Conservation

Conservation is one of the larger land use categories in Smyth County. This is due to the sizable presence of State (Hungry Mother State Park and Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area) and Federal (Jefferson National Forest and Mount Rogers National Recreation Area) conservation areas throughout the County. Scenic Parkway Overlays represent transportation corridors that traverse especially scenic or culturally valuable land in the County. In these areas, signage, lighting, and development are restricted to protect the scenic value of the landscape.

### Recreation

Recreation is another large land use category that works closely with Conservation. These areas have been set aside for development related to outdoor recreation. This type of development is minimally invasive and complements the natural character of the County's conservation lands. The Konnarock area of the County represents a large area where this category is utilized.

**Agriculture**

Agriculture is another large land use category that represents a historic and modern asset of importance to the environmental and economic health of the County. Due to this importance, efforts to ensure agricultural lands are protected from undue development and encroachment from non-compatible land use must be ensured moving forward. Lower density residential development is appropriate adjacent to agricultural lands throughout the County, energy production is another land use that is appropriate in areas of the County that are largely agricultural, especially energy production that is passive, such as solar or wind. However, incompatible land use, such as denser housing, industrial, and commercial should be directed closer to the County's population centers.

***Rural Residential (Low Density)***

Rural Residential represents areas of the County that are low in population density, where residential development may be sparse, and public utilities may or may not be available. These areas are likely served by utilities like electricity but are unlikely connected to public water or sewer and opt for wells or septic tanks to access fresh water and dispose of waste. These areas are generally away from the County's population centers.

***Village Residential, Medium Density***

Village Residential, Medium Density represents areas of the County that are likely connected to most public utilities such as electricity, water, and broadband but are not connected to public sewers. These areas are located near population centers. These areas may not be contiguous with the town boundaries but are likely within a short distance of public services like schools, fire, EMS, grocery stores, libraries, etc. These areas are generally located around established towns like Saltville, Chilhowie, and Marion as well as smaller villages.

***Urban Residential***

Urban Residential denotes areas of the County that are likely to see denser development in the coming years. This includes mixed-use developments that bring shopping and restaurants as well as apartments, condominium, and townhouse style residential offering to Smyth County. Urban Residential zones have ready access to public utilities, public services, public transit, shopping, restaurants, and other amenities provided in the County's largest population centers. These areas are located directly adjacent to the town boundaries of Saltville, Chilhowie, and Marion, as well as areas that are likely to see increased development in the near future.

***Rural Village***

Rural Villages represent areas of the County that are located within an already established community that have the potential to provide needed commercial, retail, and food related services to the County's more rural population. Typically, these areas will be located along a larger secondary road. These areas represent nodes for future development.

***Commercial / Industrial***

Commercial / Industrial represent areas of the County that should be preserved for both commercial and industrial uses moving forward. These areas are located adjacent to Smyth County's main transportation

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corridors, I-81, encompass population centers such as Marion and Chilhowie and include areas of particular economic interests such as business/industrial parks and exits.

### ***Energy***

Energy represents areas of the County that are either currently being used for energy generation or have the potential to be used for energy generation. These areas are typically located along a highway, at a terminus or gather place of electrical lines, and typically away from towns and residential developments. Notable examples include the Broadford Substation east of Saltville. Solar Priority Areas are located around already established electrical sub-stations and cover areas of the County that are not already used for denser residential, commercial, or industrial development.

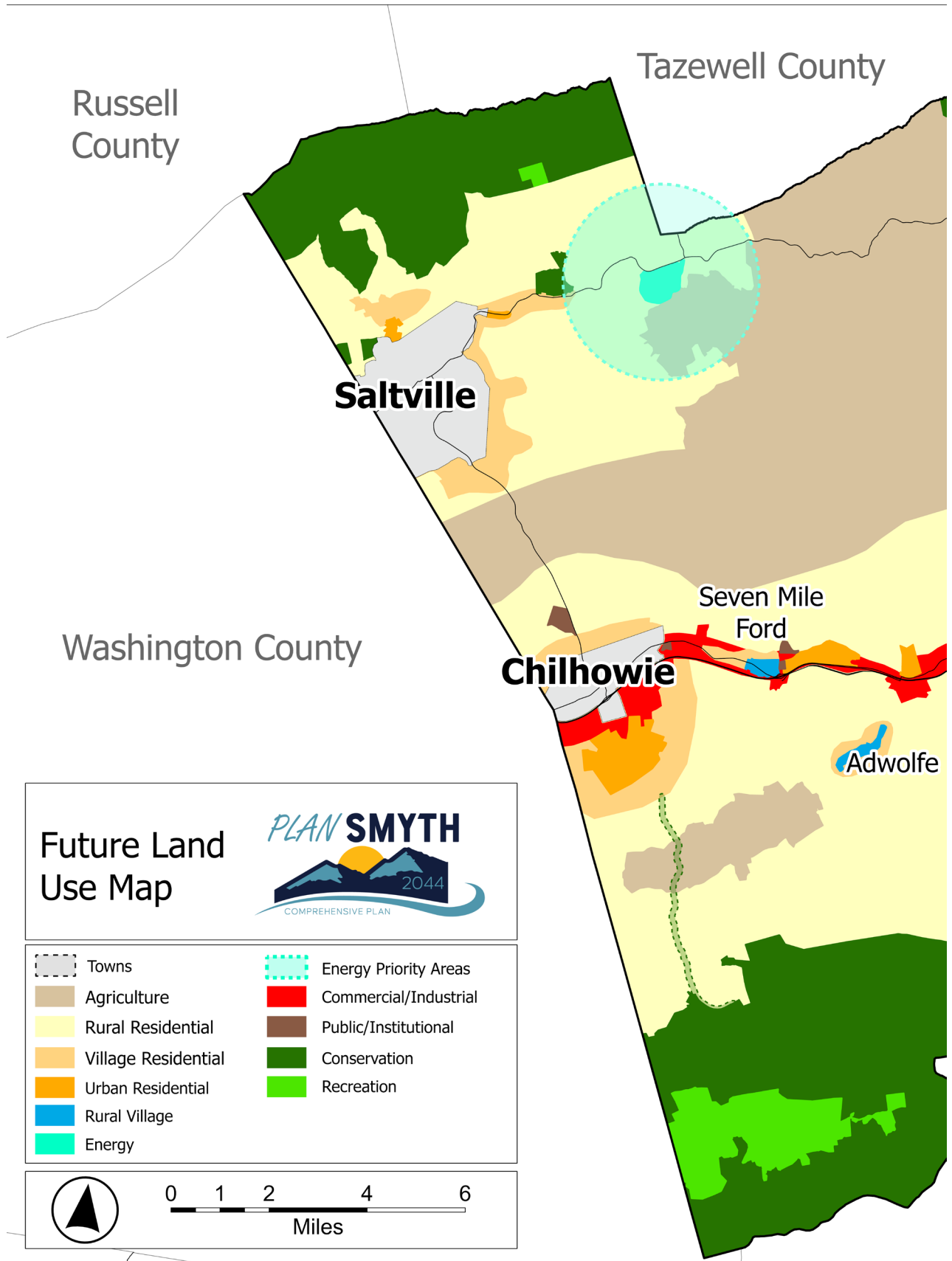
### ***Public / Institutional***

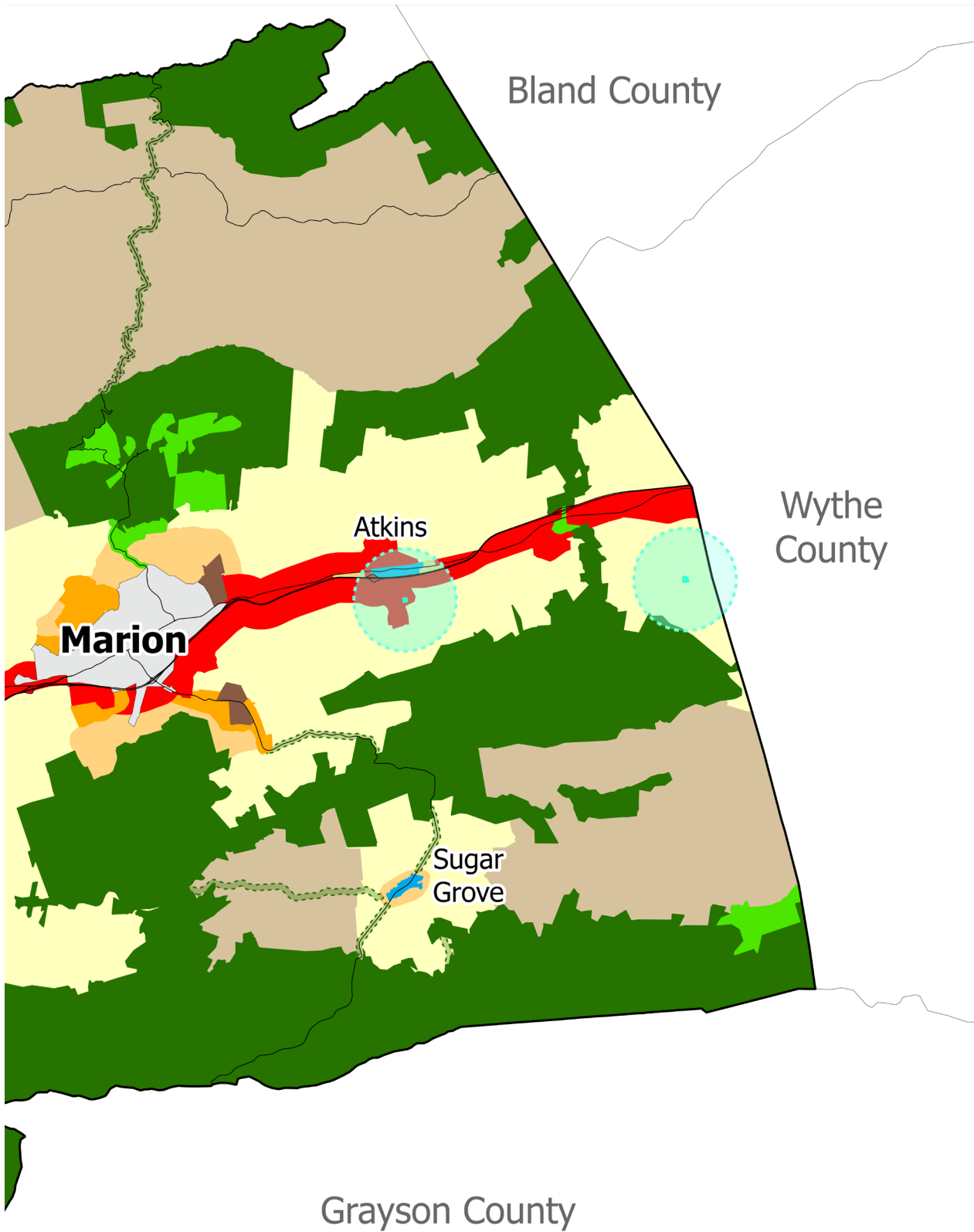
These areas are large parcels of publicly held land that either host a public facility, like a school, hospital, or park, or are slated for development to benefit the public.

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## **Maintaining Rural Character & Managing Development**

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

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

With continued growth, land use and zoning will need to be enforced to ensure orderly growth that does not impact the rural character of the County. Steps to ensure the preservation of the County's history, large farms, and natural areas will also go hand in hand with ensuring orderly growth.

## V. Implementing Smyth2044

The recruitment and full commitment of all partners will be instrumental in the success of the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter will provide an overview of the recommendations, strategies, and potential action projects to engage both public and private sector partners in the implementation of Smyth County's Comprehensive Plan. To ensure this, steps should be taken early in the process to enlist all parties to ensure they are on board and committed to the goals and objectives of this plan. Although County staff will play a leading role in the implementation of this plan, they cannot go it alone, and therefore will the support of developers, citizens, private investors, town officials, representatives of the Mount Rogers Planning District, and numerous representatives from State and Federal agencies to see the plan come to fruition.

### 5.1 Opportunity Action Projects

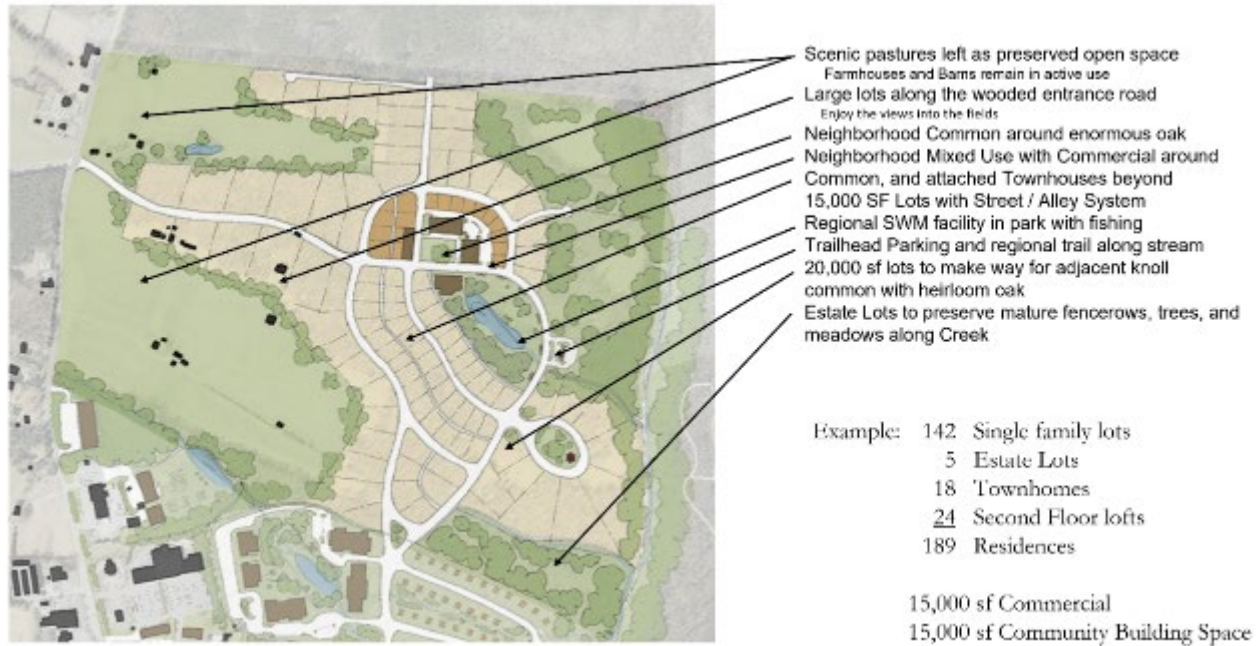
In developing Smyth2044 there were numerous ideas raised as potential projects to move Smyth County towards achieving the future vision and goals outlined in this report. These projects serve as jumping off points for future development across the County and serve to bring many interested parties to the table for a common goal. These "Opportunity Projects" were touched on briefly in the executive summary section of this report but will be elaborated upon in more detail here:

#### Housing – Potential Residential Development

The accessibility of housing for families, young professionals, and those looking to enter the local workforce, has become an issue. Both for those currently living in or looking to relocate to Smyth County. Efforts to ensure diversity in housing type, cost, and size will be vital in addressing current housing shortfalls and preparing for the next generation of Smyth County workers. In doing so, local industries, businesses, colleges, and organizations will have an easier time attracting talent and expanding their operations. In addition to the need for expanded housing opportunities, it is important to balance residential development with the maintenance of the County's rural character. To this end, residential development should be concentrated in areas of the County that are more densely populated and served by public utilities like water, sewer, electricity, and broadband, community services like libraries, emergency services, and schools, as well as near transportation corridors like highways and public transit. The towns in the County (Marion, Chilhowie, and Saltville) offer opportunities for new development as well as redevelopment within their boundaries, with smaller villages (Sugar Grove, Adwolfe, and Atkins) presenting opportunities for residential redevelopment in the future.

PUDs, or Planned Unit Developments, are a useful tool in creating denser housing and other amenities in areas of a County, city, or town that may typically host more sparse housing. These areas are not subject to the standard zoning code but rather are governed through criteria developed in coordination with local governments. The result is closer ties between local governments and private developers that create housing developments that may better reflect the current or future needs of a specific community. The following are examples of PUD's that have been proposed elsewhere and may serve as an example of what is possible in Smyth County.





*Example of a PUD showcasing single-family homes, townhomes, commercial development, and sizable greenspaces*



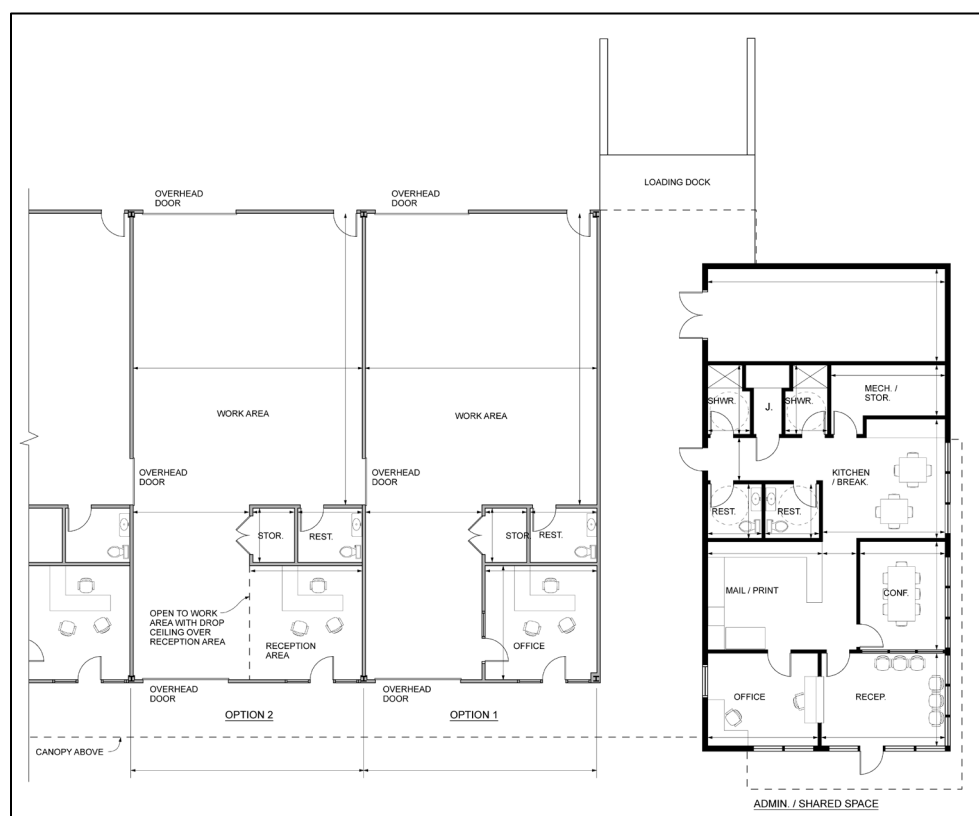
*Example of a Neighborhood Common featuring small businesses and a variety of housing options*

Several suggestions regarding housing opportunities that enhance the existing neighborhood fabric in established communities, establish similar connections in new communities, and expand housing offerings are included in **Appendix A**.

### Business Development – Incubator Space

Building upon the foundations of the SmythStrong Program is essential to facilitating the development of a robust business class in Smyth County moving forward. The first step in plotting this course is to continue to invest in local start-ups through grant programs, knowledge sharing, mentorships, and the creation of a revolving fund that extends loans to those who may not qualify for traditional services. Through these efforts, the initial barrier to entry – logistics, funding, and know-how – can be drastically reduced. A second step in crafting an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Smyth County is the creation of a Business Incubator Space as well as a Makerspace to support small businesses in their early stages. These spaces not only could function as a launch pad for new small businesses, providing storefronts, meeting spaces, and tools, but they could function as a community resource for all businesses or those looking to break into the retail or commerce market.

The concept to the right shows a potential floorplan for an incubator space in one of Smyth County's towns or villages. This floorplan utilizes an open concept with large open multi-use areas, space for offices, conference room, storage, and restrooms. As an example, this only shows one configuration,



***A typical business incubator has shared administrative space and implements very flexible workspaces to nurture start-ups.***

but the open concept allows a multi-purpose with flexible space for meetings, retail, and co-working, and administrative needs. Similar efforts have the potential to launch Smyth County's already robust entrepreneurial ecosystem to the next level by providing storefront and office space for SmythStrong and similar local programs. Potential sites that could benefit from this type of redevelopment include the property located at 249 East Main Street (Marion) or other buildings primed for redevelopment in

Saltville, Chilhowie, or the County’s other villages. Regardless, efforts should be made to ensure any new incubator space meets the needs of the community in which it serves in order to facilitate the next generation of businesses in Smyth County.

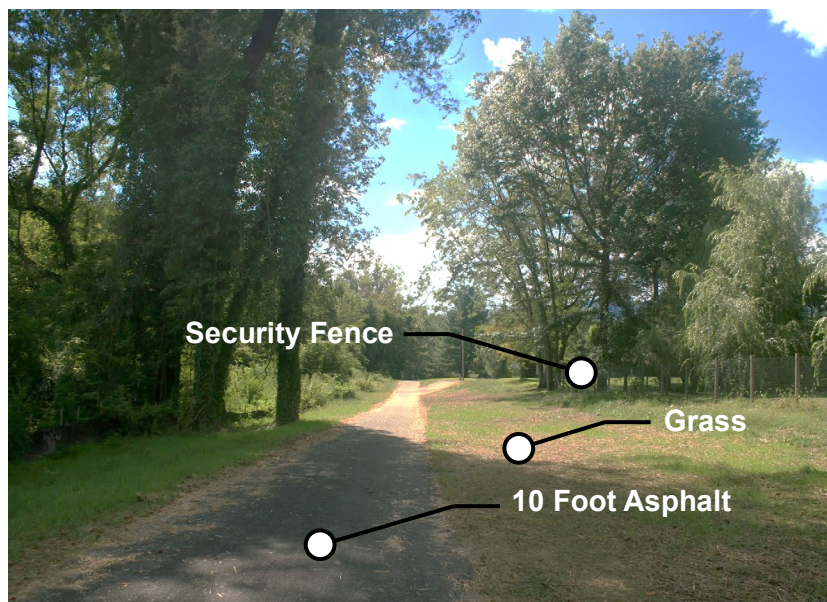
Recommendations regarding bolstering Smyth County’s business ecosystem are included in **Appendix A**.

### **Outdoor Recreation – Hungry Mother Creek Greenway**

The Outdoor Recreation Industry is a vital sector in Smyth County’s economy and represents a major pull factor to the County itself and the region. Naturally, this is an area that should be capitalized, celebrated, and valued moving forward. Invaluable resources like Hungry Mother State Park, the Mount Roger National Recreation Area, the Jefferson National Forest, the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and the Appalachian Trail all represent large opportunities for partnerships and expansion of recreational opportunities outside of the County’s towns and villages. Government officials should capitalize and foster partnerships to strengthen walking, hiking, cycling, and mountain biking trails, as well as boating, fishing, birding, nature watching, and other recreational opportunities.

Additional efforts need to be made to ensure ease of access, parity, and availability of recreational opportunities within the County’s towns and villages. In order to facilitate these efforts moving forward, it is likely a Countywide Parks and Recreation Department will be needed to create parity, equitably distribute funding, and ensure all residents of the County have access to parks, trails, greenways, playgrounds, and sports facilities. With the County’s ample natural beauty, there are many opportunities to expand residents’ and visitors’ ability to interact with the Great Outdoors. The **Hungry Mother Creek Greenway**, linking the town of Marion, the Holston Hills Country Club, and Hungry Mother State Park, represents currently underutilized resources that could be easily and strategically used to create a unique recreational opportunity for residents and visitors to Smyth County.

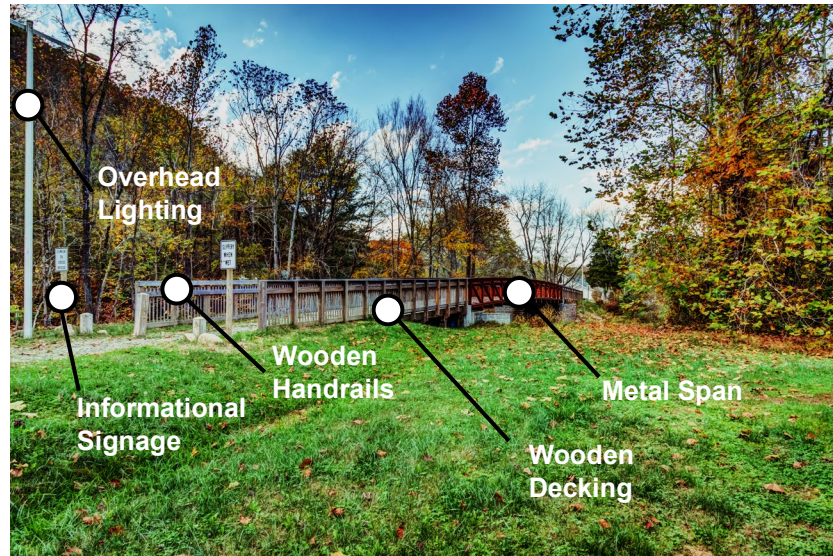
A project in its infancy, the **Hungry Mother Creek Greenway** has already garnered community support among those seeking to expand outdoor recreation opportunities in the County as well as some citizens along the proposed greenway’s length.



*Greenway Corridor (Greenbelt Trail - Big Stone Gap, Virginia)*



This greenway has the potential to create a walking and cycling route that will complete a major gap in Smyth County's current trail systems. Currently, Hungry Mother State Park, one trailhead, is home to roughly 18 miles of hiking, walking, and cycling trails, with the other trail head, the Town of Marion, being home to the Riverwalk Trail. The image to the right is an example of what a typical corridor

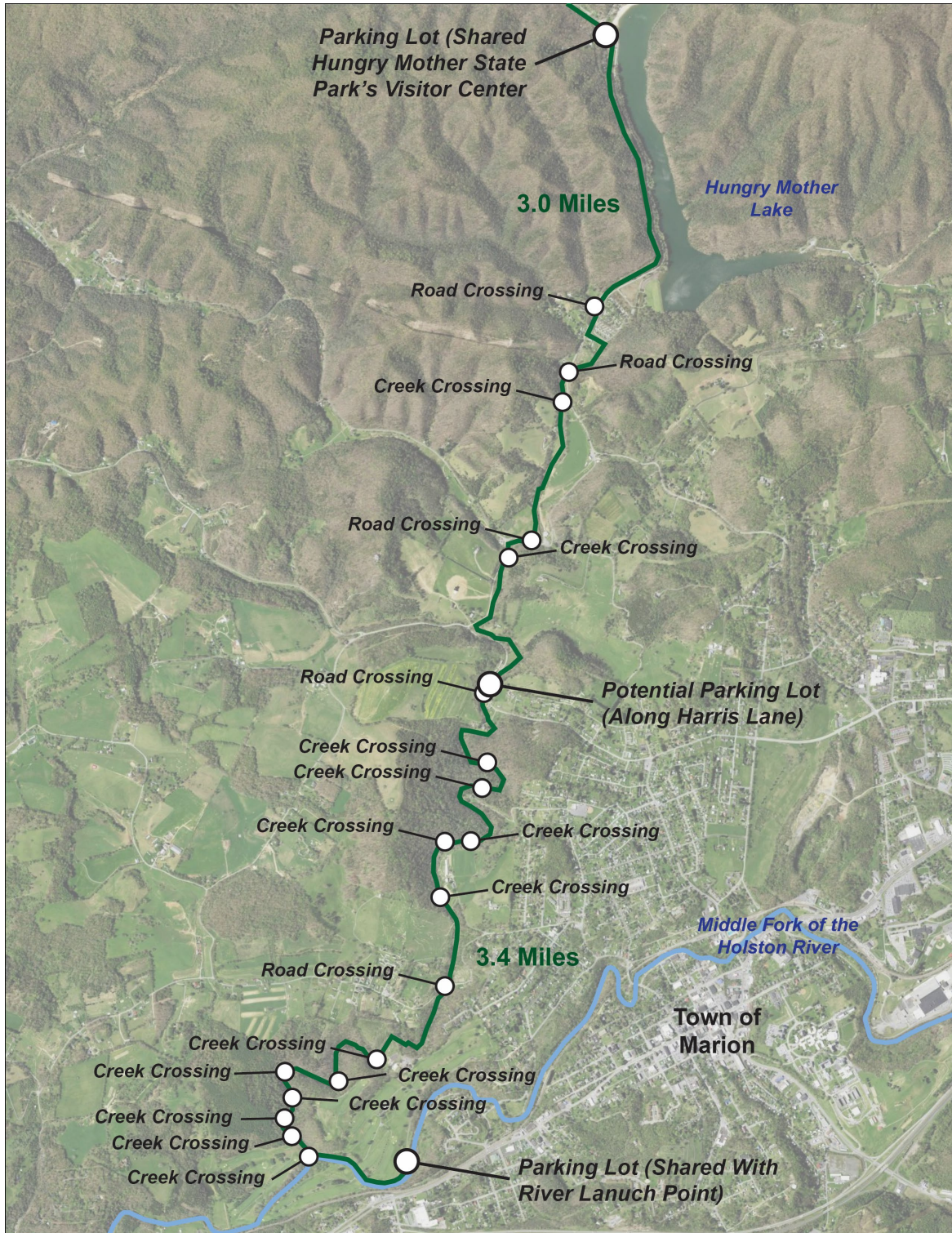


***Footbridge Example (Virginia Creeper Trail – Damascus, Virginia)***

along the greenway's length could look like. This example includes a 10-foot asphalt pathway, grass or trees on either side, with fencing or wooden railing to ensure users remain on the trail. Equally important with the Greenway's placement along Hungry Mother Creek will be the need for creek crossings (14 identified on this proposed route). The image to the right shows a footbridge that is currently being used along the Virginia Creeper Trail, which utilizes both metal and wooden construction to provide a safe and aesthetically pleasing method for crossing a creek or river. This example included wooden and metal handrails, a crushed stone pathway, clearly visible signage, and lighting. Naturally, this bridge serves as a starting point and final decisions on bridge types, materials, and additional amenities will be decided in the future in collaboration between the County, its citizens, and its partners if the Greenway moves forward.



The following is a map outlining a proposed trail corridor of the Hungry Mother Creek Greenway. Included are the potential access points along the trail (parking lots) as well as places where the trail will cross Hungry Mother Creek (referred to on the map as creek crossings) and places where the greenway will cross a roadway (referred to on the map as “road crossing”).



**Proposed Potential Corridor of the Hungry Mother Creek Greenway (Total 6.4 Miles in Length)**



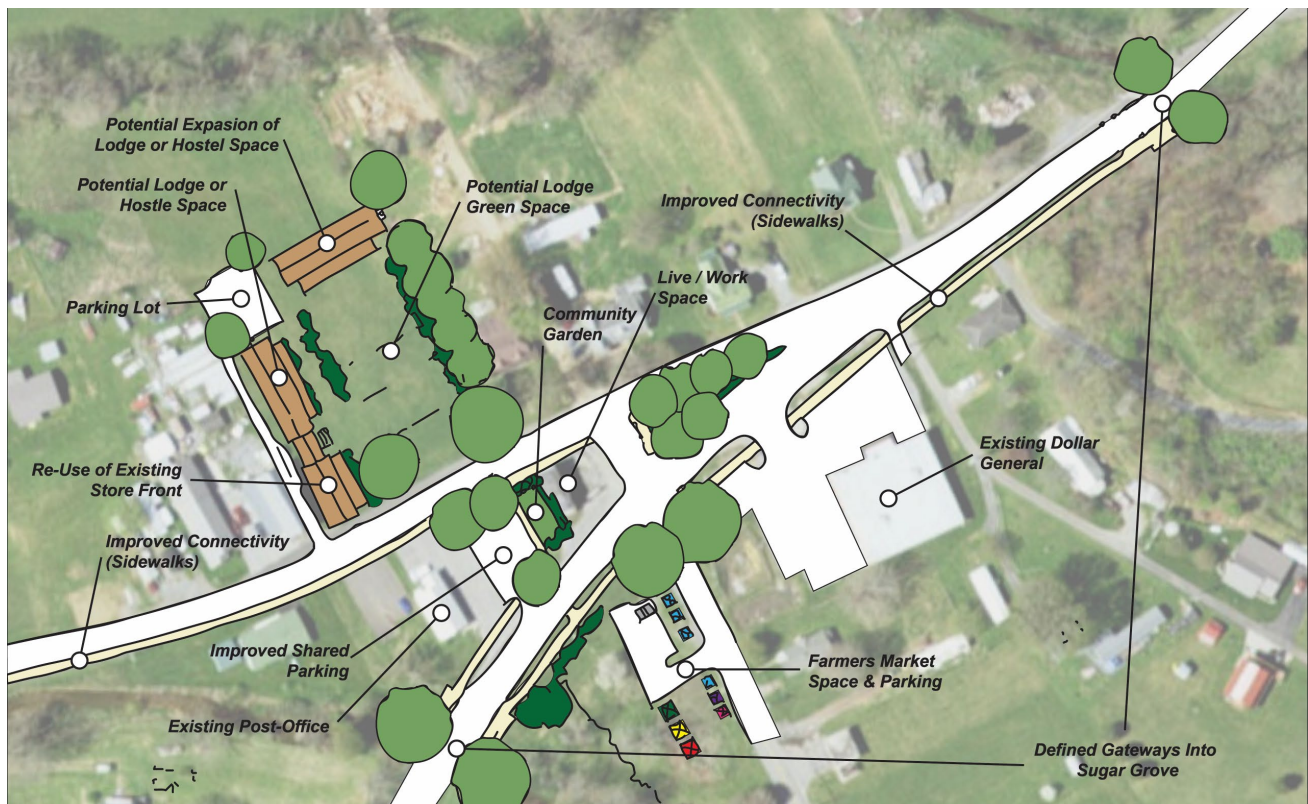
Recommendations regarding expanding and supporting Smyth County’s recreational sphere are included in **Appendix A**.

### Rural Economic Development – Sugar Grove “Trail Village” Micro-Mixed-Use Concept

Fostering the growth of existing and emerging industries and small businesses in Smyth County will be essential in ensuring future economic prosperity not only for the County but the region in general. Steps such as the expansion of public utilities, the development of business parks and sites, emphasis placed on redevelopment opportunities, as well as investments into the County’s downtown and rural areas will go a long way in creating an environment that is beneficial to established and new industry, commercial, retail, and small businesses. Ensuring a balanced tax base in the County will guarantee County assets are adequately funded and able to provide community services that maintain a quality of life for residents of Smyth County.

This plan’s recommendations provide thoughtful development concepts to enhance both existing economic centers and rural villages. These concepts offer a vision for future economic development in the County that can be guided by County leaders and implemented through private partnerships. **The Sugar Grove “Trail Town” Micro-Mixed-Use Concept** provides a vision of Sugar Grove that maintains its rural character, all the while capitalizing on its proximity to the Appalachian Trail, Mount Rogers, and Grayson Highland State Park. Through thoughtful commercial, retail, and infrastructure development, Sugar Grove can position itself as “The Gateway to Mount Rogers.”

Recommendations regarding expanding and supporting Smyth County’s rural communities are included in **Appendix A**.



Concept of the Sugar Grove “Trail Village” Micro-Mixed Use Village

### Community Cohesion – Festivals & Community Spaces

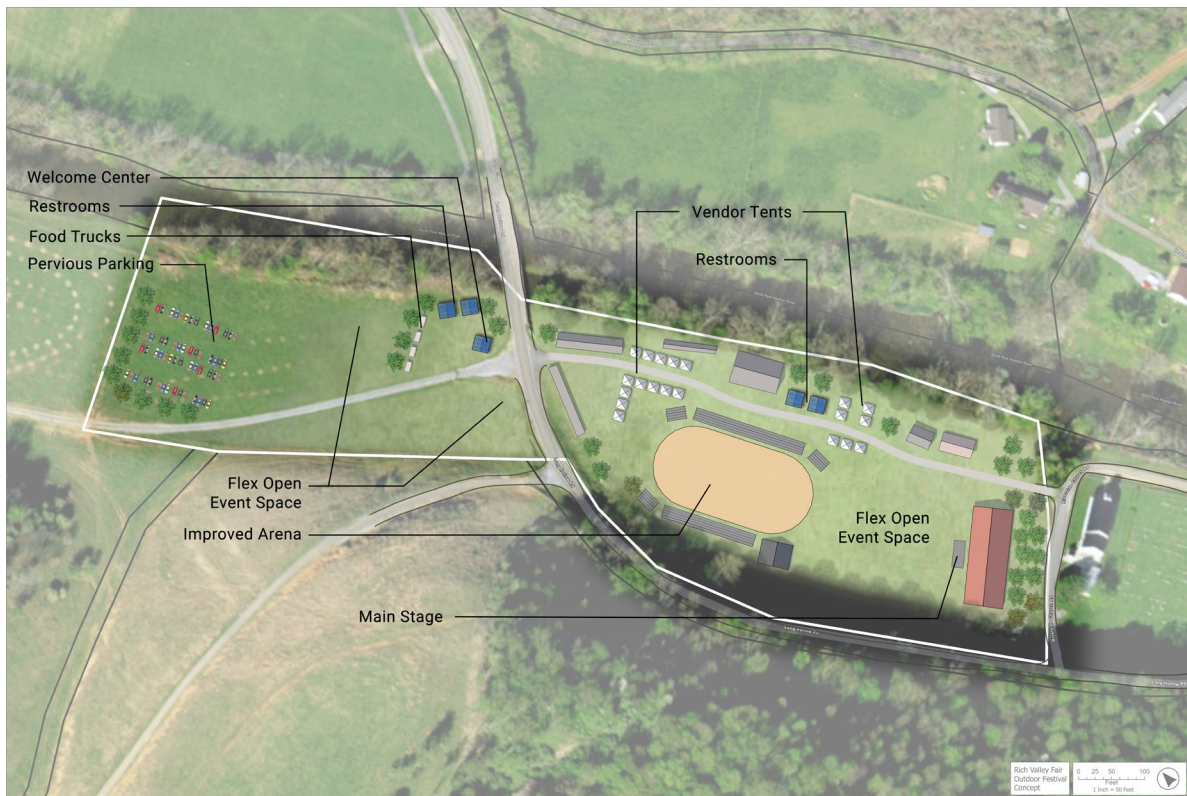
Throughout the public engagement process, the impression that Smyth County is a tight-knit community that is a great place to live, work, and retire was emphasized over and over again. Yet, it was also shared that the County lacks community cohesion. Moreover, residents have lost some of the pride they once felt for the place they call home. This may be due to reduced face-to-face interactions from the Covid-19 Pandemic or other issues, but the development of strong community connections, pride in where one lives, and investment in creating a place that is not only good for oneself but all those who live in the County are steps that need to be taken to build strong community cohesion in Smyth County.

The first step should be creating a sense of pride in the County's history, industries, people, and cultures. This could be accomplished through greater emphasis on traditionally significant industries like manufacturing or agriculture, the creation of **New Festivals** to celebrate what makes the County unique, or telling the County's story in unique, innovative, and engaging ways. A second method that could be utilized is the creation of new or redeveloped older spaces for members of the community to gather, host events, provide community services, and foster a sense of local community. These **New Community Spaces** would likely center around existing meeting spaces or community centers but build upon what is already available to better meet the unique needs of those living nearby. A concept of 21st-century community gathering places that combines several community-building strategies is included in this plan in order to spark efforts, in combination with efforts on the part of County and municipal governments, local businesses, organizations, churches, community groups, and other, to improve community cohesion throughout Smyth County.

***Rural Festival Concept – Rich Valley Fair***

The concept shown below utilizes a beloved and well-known site in the County that is already home to a well-attended event, The Rich Valley Fair. Currently, the Rich Valley Fair is regionally known for its annual Fair & Horse show, typically hosted in July or August. However, historically, the Rich Valley Fair was well known for hosting musical performances. Many of which showcased up-and-coming country and folk musicians passing through Rich Valley before moving on to Nashville to “make it big” in the music industry. This redevelopment concept hopes to draw in these acts once again by creating a permanent band stand to allow musicians to captivate the audiences of Smyth County and the surrounding area once again.

This concept showcases the inclusion of permanent or temporary restroom facilities on both sides of Long Hollow Road, a Welcome Center, space for Food Trucks, pervious parking space, improvement to the existing riding / show arena, as well as the preservation of ample open space to be used for whatever purpose is deemed necessary for the event in question. These spaces may be used for additional vendor space, parking, a site for a temporary stage, or other uses.



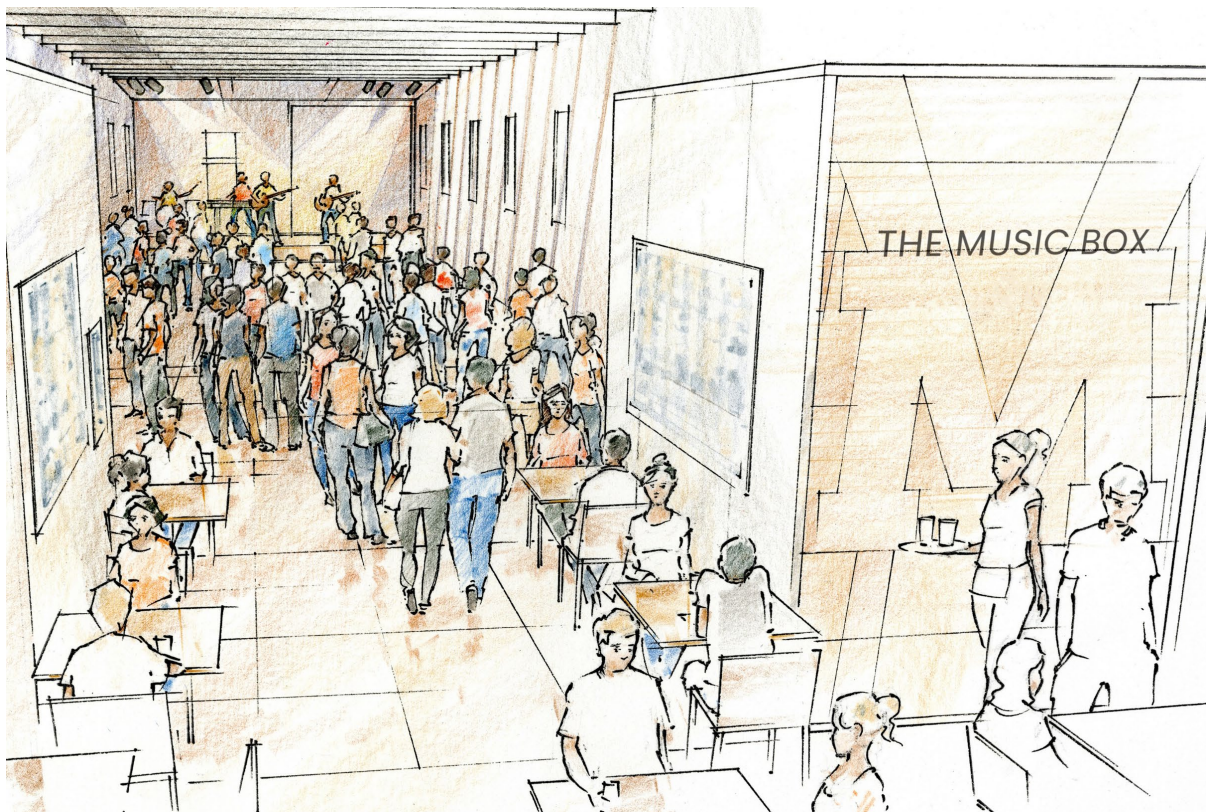
***Rural Festival Concept at the Rich Valley Fair***

Although this is one concept, attempt to capitalize on Smyth County rich music and cultural history should be made in earnest moving forward. Partnerships with local and regional musicians, music organizations, cultural organizations (such as Song of the Mountain), local municipalities should be fostered and pursued to showcase Smyth County “the place to be” for music, cultural, and other festivals in Southwest Virginia.



### ***Urban Community Gathering Space***

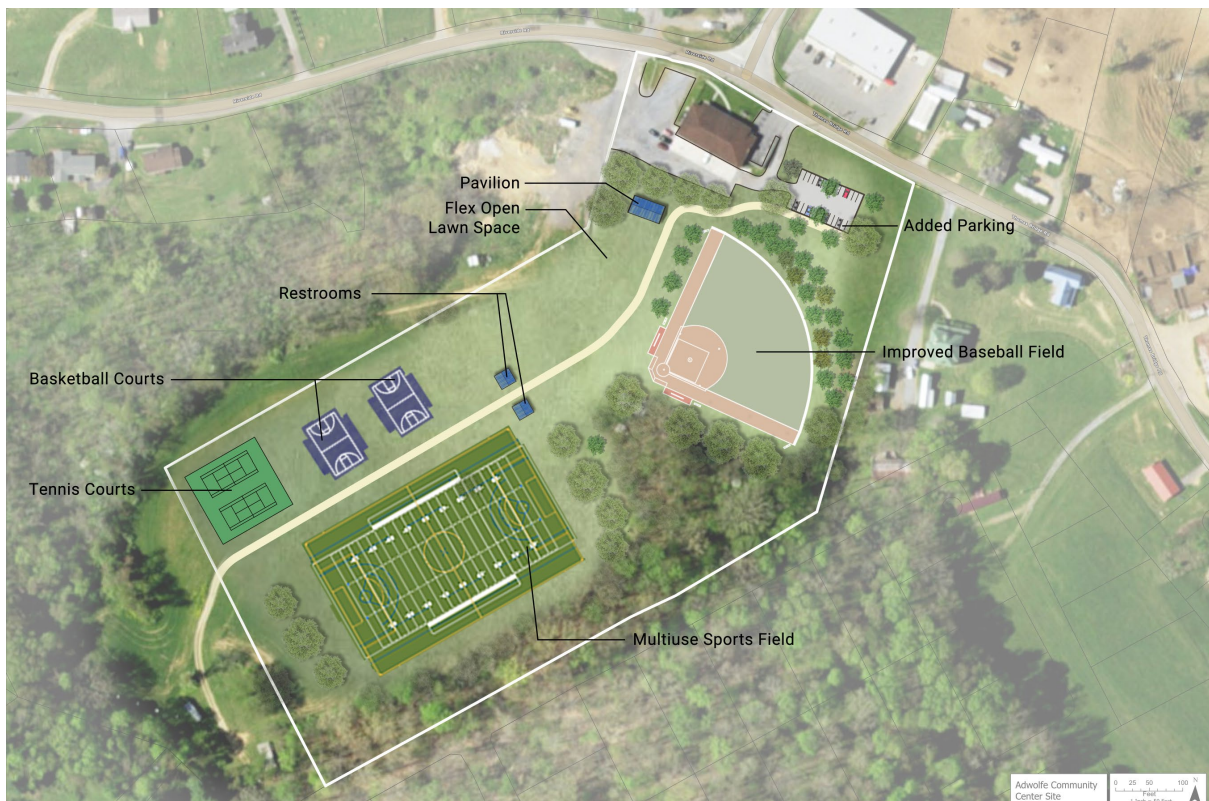
In addition to rural spaces for gathering and events, areas closer to villages and towns are prime locations for new festivals and community events spaces. As centers of commerce and hubs for the County already, these more urban areas provide the opportunity to pair events with shopping, lodging, and dining and provide an additional boost to the local economy by bringing in outside tax dollars. Utilizing underused properties, especially for purposes of creating events spaces, new restaurants, bars, or green spaces, will be instrumental in maintaining the character of Smyth County's towns and villages while offering new and exciting opportunities for locals and newcomers. Partnerships with local municipality, regional entities (like the Crooked Road, Friends of SWVA, etc..), and other music and cultural organizations to ensure the County is able to take full advantage of its unique history and craft just as unique places for people to come together, enjoy themselves, and create shared experiences that will last a lifetime.



***Interior concept of The Music Box, a mixed use space that offers indoor and outdoor space for dining, connecting , and enjoying live music.***

***Community Center Redevelopment Blueprint – Adwolfe Community Center***

One finding that has become evident through the work of this Comprehensive Plan is that although Smyth County is home to a handful of County owned community centers, much of the work that would typically be associated with these centers is handled by local churches, volunteer fire departments, and other organizations that are tied into the fabric of the community. As a result, many of these sites have become places where people come together to host meetings, parties, vote, or simply toss a football. Naturally, this begs the question of where do we see these centers in the future. Expanding services is something that was requested both from the community survey and in various focus groups; in particular, the addition of sports facilities and places where parents and their children can play was top of mind. In order to address this, a concept was devised to illustrate how an existing center, in this case, the Adwolfe Community Center in Adwolfe, could be improved upon to better meet the needs of the community. In this concept, the new site still retains the active VFD and meeting spaces but adds additional amenities. Parking is one, with the addition of a parking lot near Thomas Bridge Road, as well as updating to the existing baseball diamond and addition of tennis courts, basketball courts, and a multipurpose sports field (soccer or football). In addition to purely recreational additions, this concept proposes the addition of restroom facilities, a pavilion for meetings, luncheons, and get-together, as well as an open lawn that could be used for festivals, events, or additional parking. With the addition of these amenities, not only will recreational opportunities be improved for those living in and around Adwolfe, but it could also serve as a blueprint for improved community centers and spaces through the rural portions of Smyth County.



***Concept of a Redeveloped Adwolfe Community Center – Adwolfe, Virginia***

Recommendations for bolstering community cohesion and preserving Smyth County’s unique cultural, historical, industrial, and agricultural heritage are included in **Appendix A**.

### **5.1 Implementation Matrix**

An implementation matrix, see Appendix A, provides recommended actions, public policy, and efforts needed to fully implement the Smyth2044 Comprehensive Plan. This matrix is intended to be used as a guide and management tool to help monitor and implement the long-term goals of the County. The matrix is not a public directive; it is a tool for developing and updating annual work programs. Timeframes are suggested but are meant to be flexible depending upon priorities, available funding, and leadership from the public and private sectors.