

BLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Adopted Date: _____

Bland County Board of Supervisors

Randy Johnson, Chairman

Certified Date: _____

Bland County Planning Commission

Jerry Mercer, Chairman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document, updated by the Bland County Planning Commission for the Bland County Board of Supervisors and citizens, revises the Comprehensive Plan adopted on May 22, 2018. The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission conducted research, data collection, design, technical writing, and assembly. Funded by Bland County, this document aims to ensure the territory's long-term prosperity.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Revisions

Bland County, in tandem with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, has updated its Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the Code of Virginia. In 2024, the county submitted a need to update the Comprehensive Plan, last adopted in 2018, and provide guidance regarding future growth and development. This update emphasizes current demographic, housing, economic, transportation, and land-use data while strengthening the document's clarity, organization, and usability. The Comprehensive Plan serves as the County's primary long-range policy document, guiding decisions related to land use, housing, transportation, economic development, infrastructure, and community services over the next 20 to 30 years.

The update was developed through the review of demographic, economic, housing, transportation, and land-use data, along with coordination among County staff, the Planning Commission, and regional partners. Updated data from the 2020 U.S. Census, the American Community Survey, and state and regional agencies were incorporated to ensure the plan reflects current conditions and emerging trends.

Major Changes to the Comprehensive Plan

Updated Demographic and Economic Data

Data from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census and 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) were utilized. Population trends, age distribution, household composition, and migration patterns have been updated. Employment and wage statistics were updated to better reflect current economic conditions. Tables were updated, and visual graphics, including charts and graphs, were added for improved readability and analysis.

Reorganized and Consolidated Chapters

The "Communities" and "Agriculture & Rural Character" chapters were consolidated into the "Population" and "Land Use" chapters, respectively ("Population" chapter was renamed to "Population & Community"). Chapter introductions and conclusions were strengthened to improve continuity.

Land Use and Growth Management

Guidance is clarified on directing growth toward areas with existing or planned infrastructure. A summary of existing zoning districts was added to better connect policy implementations. Stronger emphasis is placed on rural preservation and protection priorities, land use policies, and infrastructure capacity.



Housing

The relationship between workforce needs, demographic trends, and housing availability was added. Data from recent housing analyses were used to provide context on the current housing market in Bland County and to guide policy direction. Emphasis is placed on expanding housing options to accommodate economic growth while respecting the county's rural character. The relationship between housing supply and demand, economic development, and efficient growth is further emphasized.

Transportation

Transportation priorities and projects were updated in accordance with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)'s Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP). Updated information and maps regarding air travel and rail has been added.

Economic Development

A sub-section on recent trends in economic growth and the expansion of employers within Bland County and its adjacent localities was added. This update also illustrates how economic development, housing demand, and infrastructure play an integral role. Commuting patterns were elaborated. Goals related to existing businesses and targeted growth opportunities were added.

Implementation Improvements

Implementation goals, objectives, strategies, and recommended actions were reformatted into a matrix to improve clarity and functionality, and additional components were added, including

the following additional information: (i) priority, (ii) estimated cost, (iii) time frame, and (iv) responsible parties.



INTRODUCTION

“With its long-range perspective, the comprehensive plan provides the opportunity for a game plan that both addresses short-term issues and lays the groundwork to respond and adapt to change over the long term.”

- David C. Rouse, FAICP

Introduction

A comprehensive plan is sometimes called the “general plan” in other states because it provides a broad framework for a community’s future. It addresses many aspects of the locality at a high level, while more detailed local and regional plans focus on specific issues, policies, and implementation strategies. Since 1980, every locality in the Commonwealth of Virginia has been required to develop and adopt a comprehensive plan to govern its physical development. It is the role of the planning commission to review and make recommendations to the governing body related to the plan, which should be considered impermanent due to a continuous need for adaptation to modern conditions. Comprehensive plans are typically structured to project the trends, vision, and goals for the community out 10-20 years.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the purpose, minimum content, and development process of comprehensive plan are defined by state code. As a Dillon’s Rule state, Virginia localities and municipalities are limited and may only wield the powers (i) expressly granted to them, (ii) powers necessarily or fairly implied, or (iii) powers crucial to their existence. The Code of Virginia Title 15.2. Counties, Cities, and Towns, sets out many of

the specific authorities and powers granted – not affected by a locality’s charter. [Chapter 22: Planning, Subdivision of Land, and Zoning of Title 15.2 of the Code of Virginia](#) provides generally the minimum requirements of the comprehensive plan, official map, capital improvements program, ordinance regulating subdivision and development of land, and authority related to zoning. These plans and ordinances are not the same, though clearly interrelated.

Scope, Purpose, and Contents

The comprehensive plan is general in nature, supporting more specific policies and regulations. According to the [Code of VA § 15.2-2223.A](#), the plan “shall designate the general of approximate location, character, and extent of each feature, including any road improvement and any transportation improvement, shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use...” – all transportation-related.

As part of the plan, localities shall include (i) a transportation plan that includes infrastructure needs and recommendations, (ii) a



transportation map with cost estimates for transportation improvements, (iii) long range recommendations for general development, (iv) designate measures for areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing, and (v) consider strategies to provide broadband infrastructure. Virginia also encourages that the plan considers strategies to address resilience, defined as “the capability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant multi-hazard threats with minimum damage to social well-being, health, the economy, and the environment.”

Though not required or encouraged by act of the general assembly, the plan may also incorporate many other elements, some of which are legally required in states other than Virginia. The plan should reference its relationship to other plans and should remain internally consistent and aligned with the land use regulations of the locality.

Legal Basis for the Plan

Though the comprehensive plan is considered advisory, it still serves as a guide for the physical development of the territory within the locality’s jurisdiction. The locality is therefore legally accountable to the plan. According to [Code of Virginia § 15.2-2232](#), the comprehensive plan “...shall control the general and approximate location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan.” Thus, while the comprehensive plan itself does not directly regulate land use, the plan does have status as a fundamental instrument of land use control once it is adopted by the local governing body. In addition, § [15.2-2232](#) provides

that “unless a feature is already shown on the adopted master plan, no street or connection to an existing street, park or other public area, public building or public structure, public utility facility or public service corporation [insert exemptions]... whether publicly or privately owned, shall be constructed, established or authorized until its location has been approved by the local planning commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan, or part thereof.” Developments within the territory of a local government shall be assessed through the lens of the 2232 Review process, but the comprehensive plan does not have the legal status of a zoning or subdivision ordinance. Rather, the plan establishes a legal basis for enacting or amending regulations, policies, and procedures authorized by statute.

A. Whenever a local planning commission recommends a comprehensive plan or part thereof for the locality and such plan has been approved and adopted by the governing body, it shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan. Thereafter, unless a feature is already shown on the adopted master plan or part thereof or is deemed so under subsection D, no street or connection to an existing street, park or other public area, public building or public structure, public utility facility or public service corporation facility other than a railroad facility or an underground natural gas or underground electric distribution facility of a public utility as defined in subdivision (b) of § [56-265.1](#) within its certificated service territory, whether publicly or privately owned, shall be



constructed, established or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has been submitted to and approved by the commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof. In connection with any such determination, the commission may, and at the direction of the governing body shall, hold a public hearing, after notice as required by § [15.2-2204](#). Following the adoption of the Statewide Transportation Plan by the Commonwealth Transportation Board pursuant to § [33.2-353](#) and written notification to the affected local governments, each local government through which one or more of the designated corridors of statewide significance traverses, shall, at a minimum, note such corridor or corridors on the transportation plan map included in its comprehensive plan for information purposes at the next regular update of the transportation plan map. Prior to the next regular update of the transportation plan map, the local government shall acknowledge the existence of corridors of statewide significance within its boundaries.

B. The commission shall communicate its findings to the governing body, indicating its approval or disapproval with written clarification. The governing body may overrule the action of the commission by a vote of a majority of its membership. Failure of the commission to act within 60 days of a submission, unless the time is extended by the governing body, shall be deemed approval. The owner or owners or their agents may appeal the decision of the

commission to the governing body within 10 days after the decision of the commission. The appeal shall be by written petition to the governing body setting forth the reasons for the appeal. The appeal shall be heard and determined within 60 days from its filing. A majority vote of the governing body shall overrule the commission.

C. Widening, narrowing, extension, enlargement, vacation or change of use of streets or public areas shall likewise be submitted for approval, but paving, repair, reconstruction, improvement, drainage or similar work and normal service extensions of public utilities or public service corporations shall not require approval unless such work involves a change in location or extent of a street or public area.

D. Any public area, facility, park or use as set forth in subsection A which is identified within, but not the entire subject of, a submission under either § [15.2-2258](#) for subdivision or subdivision A 8 of § [15.2-2286](#) for development or both may be deemed a feature already shown on the adopted master plan, and, therefore, excepted from the requirement for submittal to and approval by the commission or the governing body, provided that the governing body has by ordinance or resolution defined standards governing the construction, establishment or authorization of such public area, facility, park or use or has approved it through acceptance of a proffer made pursuant to § [15.2-2303](#).

E. Approval and funding of a public telecommunications facility on or before July 1, 2012, by the Virginia Public



Broadcasting Board pursuant to Article 12 (§ [2.2-2426](#) et seq.) of Chapter 24 of Title 2.2 or after July 1, 2012, by the Board of Education pursuant to § [22.1-20.1](#) shall be deemed to satisfy the requirements of this section and local zoning ordinances with respect to such facility with the exception of television and radio towers and structures not necessary to house electronic apparatus. The exemption provided for in this subsection shall not apply to facilities existing or approved by the Virginia Public Telecommunications Board prior to July 1, 1990. The Board of Education shall notify the governing body of the locality in advance of any meeting where approval of any such facility shall be acted upon.

F. On any application for a telecommunications facility, the commission's decision shall comply with the requirements of the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996. Failure of the commission to act on any such application for a telecommunications facility under subsection A submitted on or after July 1, 1998, within 90 days of such submission shall be deemed approval of the application by the commission unless the governing body has authorized an extension of time for consideration, or the applicant has agreed to an extension of time. The governing body may extend the time required for action by the local commission by no more than 60 additional days. If the commission has not acted on the application by the end of the extension, or by the end of such longer period as may be agreed to by the applicant, the application is deemed approved by the commission.

G. A proposed telecommunications tower or a facility constructed by an entity organized pursuant to Chapter 9.1 (§ [56-231.15](#) et seq.) of Title 56 shall be deemed to be substantially in accord with the comprehensive plan and commission approval shall not be required if the proposed telecommunications tower or facility is located in a zoning district that allows such telecommunications towers or facilities by right.

H. A solar facility subject to subsection A shall be deemed to be substantially in accord with the comprehensive plan if (i) such proposed solar facility is located in a zoning district that allows such solar facilities by right; (ii) such proposed solar facility is designed to serve the electricity or thermal needs of the property upon which such facility is located, or will be owned or operated by an eligible customer-generator or eligible agricultural customer-generator under § [56-594](#) or [56-594.01](#) or by a small agricultural generator under § [56-594.2](#); or (iii) the locality waives the requirement that solar facilities be reviewed for substantial accord with the comprehensive plan. All other solar facilities shall be reviewed for substantial accord with the comprehensive plan in accordance with this section. However, a locality may allow for a substantial accord review for such solar facilities to be advertised and approved concurrently in a public hearing process with a rezoning, special exception, or other approval process.



Relationship With Other Plans and Documents

The comprehensive plan is a policies statement, an overview of land use in the county, and the first step in the county's planning effort. This plan is further supported by additional, detailed plans formulated by the county, citizen groups, regional organizations, as well as state and federal government agencies. The comprehensive plan is not intended to serve as an exclusive guide for a locality's development. Nonetheless, it serves several distinct and essential functions.

The plan is the basis for land development regulations such as a zoning ordinance, where the plan may serve as a sounding board for examination of amendments to such land use regulations. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive frame of reference for the review and evaluation of conditional use permits, subdivision plats, site plans, and developmental proposals. It gives official recognition to areas of natural, historical, geological, or archeological significance with the purpose of ensuring their conservation and protection. The plan serves as a guide for efficient and coordinated improvements of public services. It identifies the assets of the county and outlines ways to preserve and leverage those assets.

The comprehensive plan can be implemented through zoning and subdivision ordinances, floodplain and stormwater management initiatives, capital improvement programs, and a range of additional policy measures. Other key plans that inform this county effort include the Mount Rogers Pre-disaster Hazard Mitigation Plan, Rural Long Range Transportation Plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, VDOT Six Year Improvement Plan, and similar documents. Other local and

regional plans may also be considered as they are developed, alongside state and federal plans and policies.

Continuity of the Plan

The comprehensive plan may be amended as necessary to ensure the comprehensive plan adapts to evolving circumstances and remains relevant. Over time, new initiatives may arise and shifts in governmental policy, or the emergence of more detailed planning efforts can necessitate updates. Amendments might be driven by the development of neighborhood plans, transportation improvement strategies, housing initiatives, parks and recreation proposals, strategic frameworks, small area plans, master plans, or other similar planning processes or developments. The plan should be flexible, open to modifications that reflect the changing needs and aspirations of the community, and supported by ongoing input from citizens, local officials, and partner organizations. By integrating such amendments thoughtfully, the comprehensive plan continues to serve as a dynamic and effective tool for guiding growth and preserving community assets. The plan may be monitored, maintained, and updated through various simple processes.

Annual Report

As part of the planning commission's annual report, the planning commission should conduct an annual review of the comprehensive plan in coordination with the annual budget,



Capital Improvements Plan (CIP),¹ as well as other financial, planning, and regulatory tools.

Five-Year Updates

The Code of Virginia requires that the comprehensive plan be reviewed at least every five years. Detailed procedures for the updates are recommended within this plan.

Amendments

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

Plan Implementation

The plan can be implemented through a variety of regulatory and financial tools. Generally, comprehensive plans are implemented primarily through the zoning ordinance, operating budget, and capital improvements plan.

Purpose

A comprehensive plan establishes a unified, long-term policy framework that guides Bland County's future development, land use, infrastructure, and housing over the next 20 to 30 years. This plan articulates the community's shared vision, core values, and strategic goals, providing a clear roadmap for decision-making by elected officials, Planning Commission staff, and stakeholders across the county. It serves as a dynamic reference point in evaluating land use proposals, infrastructure investments, housing initiatives, transportation improvements, economic growth opportunities, environmental and resource stewardship efforts, and quality of life enhancements.

Comprehensive in scope, the plan addresses every aspect of Bland County's physical, economic, and social landscape. It sets forth actionable goals, objectives, and strategies to support sustainable growth, enhance quality of life, and preserve the county's unique character while adapting to changing needs. By integrating all relevant factors, the comprehensive plan positions Bland County to proactively shape its future and fulfill the aspirations of its residents.²

Planning Process

The update process was conducted in accordance with the Code of Virginia, which requires localities to periodically review and revise their comprehensive plans to ensure continued relevance

¹ [Code of Virginia § 15.2-2239](#) states that local planning commissions are to prepare and submit annually capital improvement programs to governing body or official charged with preparation of budget.

² [Code of Virginia § 15.2-2223](#) states that local planning commissions shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction.



and consistency with changing conditions. This plan update was developed through a combination of data review, policy evaluation, and coordination with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission and local and regional partners. Existing demographic, housing, transportation, economic, and land use conditions were assessed using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, state and regional planning resources, and other available local datasets.

The Bland County Planning Commission plays a central role in the comprehensive planning process by reviewing draft plan materials, identifying key issues, and providing recommendations to the governing body. Public input and stakeholder feedback are also important components of comprehensive planning, ensuring that the plan reflects community values, local needs, and long-term goals. The county will continue to evaluate the plan on a recurring basis and make amendments as warranted.



... GOALS OVERVIEW ...

Introduction

The goals of the Bland County Comprehensive Plan were developed by the planning commission based on the major factors affecting the county, and in accordance with the requirements set forth in [Code of Virginia § 15.2-2223](#). The goals are outlined generally below and discussed more in-depth throughout, including specific objectives and strategies for accomplishing goals.

Agriculture and Rural Character

Goal: Preserve, protect, and enhance the quality of Bland County's agricultural areas by promoting traditional rural lifestyles, supporting regenerative agriculture, and preserving farmland, agricultural enterprises, open space, recreation, and historic resources within the county.

Land Use and Development

Goal: Facilitate land-use patterns that offer a variety of housing choices, 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.

Environmental Quality

Goal: Preserve, enhance, and protect Bland County's environmental resources to ensure a high quality of life for residents while supporting responsible future growth and development.

Economic Development

Goal: 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.

Housing

Goal: Enhance neighborhoods within Bland County through preservation, revitalization, and development. Promote the development of quality affordable housing and mixed-use development in higher population areas.

Community

Goal: Improve health and well-being; provide improved community services, facilities, and infrastructure that are accessible to all; and broaden opportunities for community groups.

Transportation

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

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The findings of the comprehensive plan are based on two considerations. First, the existing conditions are described and evaluated (in the following chapters). Next, the results of these evaluations are compared with the goals and objectives of the county, created as part of the strategic planning efforts included in this chapter. The comparison of future goals and past accomplishments then indicates the prioritized needs of the county. Timely implementation is crucial for achieving the community's vision, requiring coordinated efforts from the board of supervisors, planning commission, committees, staff, residents, and other partners.

The comprehensive plan serves as a policy guide; it does not directly regulate land use, but development and performance standards help realize its goals. The plan should be adaptable with periodic updates to reflect changing conditions. Once adopted, subdivision and zoning regulations must generally comply through the "2232 Review" process in accordance with Code of Virginia § [15.2-2232](#).

Key Tools

The plan identifies several tools available to the county as a municipality with authority granted by the state in accordance with the Dillon Rule. These tools may be employed to bring the goals, objectives and strategies of the plan to life for the benefit of current and future residents. These implementation tools are

interrelated and work together, providing continuity and breadth to the implementation program.

Development Regulations

Discussed in more detail in the following chapters, the plan may be implemented through legislative authorities of local governments – towns, counties, and cities of the Commonwealth. Since Virginia is a Dillon Rule state, local governments may only exercise powers (i) expressly granted by the state legislature, or (ii) powers necessarily or implied, or (iii) powers crucial to the existence of the local government. Towns in Virginia may regulate land and development through numerous mechanisms, most of which are attached to subdivision and zoning regulations.

Area Plan Process

An area plan is a specialized planning document that focuses on a specific part of a community, such as a neighborhood, district, or corridor, within a larger municipality or county. Its purpose is to assess local conditions, engage stakeholders, and develop tailored strategies to guide future growth, land use, and community development in a way that aligns with broader goals and visions.

Developing an area plan starts with assessing local conditions and gathering input from stakeholders to understand the community's needs. Planners analyze land use, infrastructure, and resources, then work with the community to set goals and objectives. Strategies and policies are formed to address



priorities like growth, preservation, or economic development. Eventually, a draft plan is shared for public feedback, revised as needed, and submitted for adoption. Once adopted, the plan guides future development and helps ensure growth aligns with the community's long-term vision.

Capital Improvements Plan

A capital improvements plan (CIP) represents a multi-year forecast for the locality's capital needs. The CIP not only identifies capital projects but also the financing required for the projects and their impact on the operating budget. Capital projects are separate from annual operating expenses due to their scale and financial burden, often requiring special financing, occurring at irregular intervals, and involving development of assets, such development extending several years.

Updates

Updating an implementation plan is a critical process in effective community planning, ensuring that the strategies, goals, and objectives established by a locality remain relevant and actionable over time. As circumstances evolve—whether due to demographic shifts, economic changes, emerging challenges, or opportunities—it is essential for a community's comprehensive plan and its implementation tools to adapt accordingly. Timely amendments help maintain alignment between the community's long-term vision and its day-to-day realities, providing a framework that supports feasible growth and responsive governance.

To keep the plan effective, periodic amendments are needed. Key reasons to amend a plan for implementation include (i) adapting

to changing local conditions, (ii) aligning with new data or policy, (iii) assessing progress, (iv) legal or regulatory requirements, (v) community feedback and engagement, and/or (vi) unforeseen circumstances and events. Regular updates help the community adapt to change, manage growth, and ensure the comprehensive plan stays relevant. The implementation matrix should also be revised through a thorough planning process to support success.

Implementation Matrix

The Implementation Matrix incorporated and defined below in depth displays the goals, objectives, and strategies of the community with specific action steps, responsible parties, timelines, and other properties deemed reasonable for implementation of the plan. If monitored, maintained, and amended periodically as part of the comprehensive plan, the Implementation Matrix may be the single most important mechanism for monitoring the progress of the locality in implementing its targeted goals toward achieving its stated vision.

Amendment

The planning commission of the community is required by the [Code of Virginia §15.2-2230](#) to review and/or update the comprehensive plan at least once every five years. Such a review, though not legally required to be reported to the local governing body or the Commonwealth, should be recorded in the minutes of the local planning commission and in the commission's annual report. If an amendment is deemed necessary, the commission may then request funding from the governing body to complete the comprehensive planning process, data collection, and other



related work. The [Virginia Public Procurement Act](#) allows for the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission to be contracted to complete such services without requiring a formal procurement process, thus lowering staff burden and cost. The process for amendment of the plan is specified in [Code of VA §15.2-2204](#), is relatively simple, and allows for crucial public feedback.



Implementation Matrix

The included goals, objectives, and strategies describe how Bland County will meet the challenge of managing future growth and community development. Each element contains related goals and objectives. Strategies are designed to achieve goals and objectives and are included in this chapter.

Goal: Description of the desired scenario for the community in the future. Goals are the broad, public purposes toward which policies and programs are directed. Goals are phrased to express the desired results of the Comprehensive Plan.

Objective: Statements of government intent against which individual actions and decisions are evaluated; these must be specific and attainable in some measurable fashion.

Strategy: Individual regulations, policies, and actions which, taken together, will enable the community to achieve Goals and Objectives. Strategies are the basis for implementation of the Plan by identifying and recommending specific courses of action. Strategies are included in this chapter.

Goals

A goal is the general direction toward which future actions are directed. Goals are general, long-term statements of purpose which provide a target toward which the development of the town can be directed. Goals are often not immediately measurable or achievable within a short timeframe. For this plan, the goals listed shall be concise and focused according to the chapters within the plan.

Objectives

Objectives in the plan serve as specific, measurable steps that translate broad goals into actionable targets. They articulate what the community intends to achieve in concrete terms and establish a clear direction for decision-making and performance evaluation. Each objective must be realistic, attainable, and framed in a manner that allows progress to be assessed over time.

Strategies

Strategies, in turn, are the practical actions, initiatives, ordinances, or programs undertaken to realize each objective. They provide a roadmap of recommended measures, ranging from policy changes and infrastructure investments to community engagement efforts, intended to move the town steadily toward its envisioned future. By clearly linking each strategy to relevant objectives and designating responsible parties, timelines, and required resources, the comprehensive plan ensures that vision is translated into effective, coordinated action.

Recommended Actions

The recommended actions in the comprehensive plan are specific steps aligning with the identified strategies developed through the planning process to achieve the county's vision and goals. These actions translate high-level goals and objectives into clear, practical measures that guide decision-making and investment. By outlining concrete objectives, responsible parties, generalized funding commitment estimates, and timelines, the recommended actions ensure that the plan's priorities move



from concept to implementation, fostering progress toward healthier, happier, more affordable, and attractive communities within the county.

Definitions

The sections below describe the terms and symbols used throughout the implementation matrix.

Terms and Symbols

Priority – A priority ranking of “**High**”, “**Medium**”, or “**Low**” is assigned to each strategy to help guide the allocation of funding and other resources. As the town’s needs or interests change and/or funding availability ebbs and flows, the priority of some strategies may also change.

Funding – An indication of the financial resources deemed necessary to implement each strategy, using the “\$” symbol to represent the relative cost of implementation.

\$	≤\$25,000
\$	\$25,000-\$100,000
\$	\$100,000-\$500,000
\$	>\$500,000

Timeline – An indication of the amount of time it may take to accomplish each strategic action.

Short-Term	1-2 Years
Intermediate	2-5 Years
Long-Term	5+ Years
Ongoing	Needs regular on-going efforts

Responsible Parties – An indication of responsible parties and/or key partners that may be necessary to accomplish each strategy; this is labelled with the agency or responsible party’s initials. Please see the key below:

BOS	Board of Supervisors
PC	Planning Commission
CS	County Staff
CG	Citizen Groups
DHCD	Dept. of Housing & Community Development
PS	Private Sector
PHD	Public Health Department
EDA	Economic Development Authority
BCSB	Bland County School Board
PDC	Planning District Commission
MRRP	Mount Rogers Regional Partnership
VDOT	Virginia Department of Transportation
DOF	Virginia Department of Forestry
DCR	Department of Conservation & Recreation
VCE	Virginia Cooperative Extension
VMR	Virginia Marine Resources
VTC	Virginia Tourism Corporation
VH	Virginia Housing
DEQ	Department of Environmental Quality
ACE	Army Corps of Engineers
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
ATC	Appalachian Trail Conservancy



POPULATION & COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Goal: Improve health and well-being; access to improved and enhanced community services, facilities, and infrastructure for all.

Objective 1: Promote and protect health. <i>Develop and establish guidelines, standards, and mechanisms that ensure that land use planning and design positively affect community health and wellbeing.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
1.1 – Planning and health awareness. Increase public awareness of the contribution that comprehensive planning can make to creating healthy communities.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
1.2 – Health related policies. Strengthening the community’s capacity to support and implement health related policies and programs.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, CS
1.3 – Health communication. Work with the public health department to increase communication and collaboration between health officials, health-care providers, and planners.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PHD
1.4 – Consider health in planning. Ensure that decisions on land use, transportation networks, and the built and natural environment promote healthy lifestyles and access to healthy food choices.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
Recommended Actions				
Input on health concerns. Solicit input from interested organizations and individuals to integrate health concerns into land use planning.				
Health impacts. Consider the health benefits and impacts of significant land development plans and projects, including the possibility of requiring health impact assessments for major projects.				
Health awareness. Raise awareness of health-related issues through creation of a development review checklist. This may include a mix of land uses, access to parks and recreation facilities, provision of and/or access to sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, and location relative to retail food stores and services.				
Affordable transportation. Ensure that affordable transportation services are available to and from health and other community facilities, especially for the elderly, special needs, minority, and low-income groups.				
Objective 2: Age-friendly communities. <i>Guide the development of age-friendly neighborhoods that cater to the needs of different age groups.</i>				
Strategies (Creating child-friendly communities)	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties



2.1 – Design for active children. Encourage developments designed to facilitate children walking, biking, and taking public transit to schools, retail areas, recreation centers, and other facilities.	High	\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
2.2 – Safe parks and playgrounds. Provide safe, accessible facilities and services that cater to children and youth, including parks, playgrounds, sports facilities, and recreation centers.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, CS, DCR, CG, PS
2.3 – Childcare facilities. Encourage the development of a range of childcare facilities; locate childcare facilities near schools when feasible.	High	\$	Short-term	BOS, CS, IDA
2.4 – Safe streets. Promote land use patterns and street connectivity that allow children to be more self-sufficient.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
Recommended Actions				
Safe routes to schools. Continue to participate in the Safe Routes to Schools program.				
Connectivity. Review neighborhood connectivity issues near existing schools, parks, and recreation facilities through the area plan process.				
Access for children. Consider access for children when making location-related decisions for new parks and schools.				
Strategies (Creating senior-friendly communities)	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
2.5 – Senior/special needs housing. Encourage the development of affordable housing for seniors and people with special needs, including accessory dwelling units or granny flats to allow residents to age in place; as well as independent living and assisted living facilities	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VH, DHCD, PS
2.6 – Senior service locations. Promote the co-location of adult daycare and on-site healthcare services with senior housing.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, VH, PS
2.7 – Senior services. Facilitate the provision of safe and accessible senior activities, facilities, and services.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, CS, CG, PS
2.8 – Community facilities. Encourage the establishment of multipurpose, multigenerational, age-friendly, community facilities.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, IDA, PS
Recommended Actions				
Aging in place. Investigate the creation of neighborhoods with lifecycle housing opportunities that allow seniors to age in place.				
Housing variety. Use the area plan process to promote a variety of housing types, including those that cater to seniors within the same neighborhood.				
Mobility barriers. Collaborate with community organizations to help remove barriers to mobility and access to public and private facilities and services.				



Expand transit. Work with District Three to expand the Mountain Lynx Transit system's services for seniors and persons with disabilities to provide more frequent service opportunities in the county.

Senior citizen needs. Analyze senior citizen needs for possible new or additional projects, programs, and activities for this growing segment of the community.

Objective 3: Parks, recreation facilities, and open space. *Provide parks and recreational facilities that meet the needs of residents at accessible locations throughout the county.*

Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
3.1 – Public Parks. Enhance and expand public parks within the county, particularly in lower-serviced areas identified in adopted plans or studies.	Medium	\$\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, CG
3.2 – Existing parks and facilities. Reinvest in existing parks and recreation facilities.	Medium	\$\$	Short-term	BOS, CS
3.3 – Routes to parks and recreation. Consider the availability of public transportation and pedestrian and bicycle routes to existing and planned parks and recreation facilities.	Medium	\$\$	On-going	BOS, PC, CS, VDOT
3.4 – Municipal cooperation. Increase cooperation between Bland County, surrounding counties, and other agencies in providing parks, open space, and recreational facilities.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
3.5 – Collaboration for parks and recreation. Increase collaboration with nonprofit, corporate, and private entities to provide or to allow access to parks, open space, and recreation facilities.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, PS
3.6 – Safe park environment. Use and promote park and facility design principles that discourage vandalism, deter crime, provide natural surveillance, and create a safe and comfortable environment.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
3.7 – Public farmers' markets. Facilitate the use of public parks, plazas, and other appropriate open space for public farmers' markets.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
3.8 – Safe access to parks. Promote safe access to parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities for children.	High	\$	Ongoing	PC, CS
Recommended Actions				
Parks plan. Develop and implement a recreation and greenways plan.				



Park development. Prioritize areas for new park development based on a lack of available parks and recreation facilities in identified areas, projected population growth/decline, recommendations made in area plans, and other feasibility measures.

Acquisition program. Develop a park/open space/land acquisition program and take action to acquire land, obtain easements, and develop facilities as opportunities arise.

Underutilized parks and recreation facilities. Address safety concerns, access, and other barriers to usage in existing underutilized parks and recreation facilities.

Funding new parks and recreation facilities. Identify funding mechanisms to develop parks and recreation facilities, particularly in the most underserved areas.

Objective 4: Greenways. *Create a network of greenways that provide recreation, open space, and alternative transportation links to shopping, employment, neighborhoods, and community facilities.*

Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
4.1 – Greenway system. Establish a connected greenway system throughout the county to provide connectivity between existing greenways, sidewalks, and bikeways, as well as neighborhoods, major destinations, and community facilities.	Medium	\$\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
4.2 – Greenway extensions. Support expansion/extensions and future parks and recreation facility connections.	Low	\$\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
4.3 – Greenway easements. Consider new tools for acquiring greenway easements.	Medium	\$\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
4.4 – Interagency cooperation. Strengthen intergovernmental and interagency cooperation in planning, funding, developing, and maintaining the greenway system.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
4.5 – Greenway connections. Connect greenway trails to existing and proposed sidewalks and bike paths to facilitate access to community facilities.	Medium	\$\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT

Recommended Actions

Greenway planning. Develop a recreation and greenways plan and implement its recommendations.

Greenway priorities. Build the priority trails identified in the developed recreation and greenways plan.

Greenway acquisition. Develop and fund a greenway easement acquisition program, including a description of greenway benefits to property owners.

Greenway design guidelines. Establish design guidelines that include safety in the design and management of greenway trails.

Greenway coordination. Continue to hold regular meetings with surrounding municipalities and counties on greenway coordination.



Greenway marketing. Develop a greenway marketing plan.				
Greenway maintenance. Establish a countywide “Adopt-A-Greenway” program.				
Objective 5: Educational facilities. <i>Ensure that Bland County’s schools are community assets that provide quality education to students.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
5.1 – Unused school property. Consider alternative uses for school property which is no longer needed for school facilities.	Medium	\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, BCSB
5.2 – Educational facilities. Evaluate long-term educational facility needs based on enrollment trends and existing studies.	High	\$\$\$\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, BCSB
Recommended Actions				
Use of school facilities. Consider programs for afterschool use of school facilities for playing fields, park spaces, and other activities.				
Joint use of parks and recreation. Ensure facilities continue employing joint use agreements between Bland County school system and public agencies that allow schools without adequate playgrounds and recreation facilities to use public parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces.				
Active transportation options. Design new facilities and reconfigure older facilities with safe sidewalks, bike paths, greenways, and transit stops to facilitate walking, biking, and taking public transit.				
Underutilized educational facilities. Forge partnerships between schools, higher education institutions, community organization, and local government departments by transforming underutilized school grounds, playing fields, and other educational facilities into safe, vibrant community spaces for community events, recreational activities, community gardens, and green/edible schoolyards.				
Objective 6: Neighborhoods. <i>Create safer, more livable neighborhoods that facilitate active and healthy living.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
6.1 – Emergency services. Ensure that all properties can be adequately served by fire, police, and emergency medical services.	Medium	\$\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, CS
6.2 – Blight removal. Facilitate the reuse or removal of vacant and abandoned land and buildings that contribute to the neighborhood blight.	High	\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, CS, DHCD
6.3 – Property maintenance. Encourage and support private landowners to maintain and upgrade their properties.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, CS
Recommended Actions				
Safe design. Consider safe design guidelines when assessing designs for new development or redevelopment projects.				
Blighted areas. Concentrate code enforcement and promotion of conservation and rehabilitation in areas in danger of becoming blighted.				



Safety standards. Consider creating standards to address safety concerns with respect to the location, design and maintenance of parks, recreation facilities, and greenways.

Law enforcement issues. Work with law enforcement to identify land use issues affecting safety and security that can be considered as part of the rezoning process.

Emergency services recruitment. Consider recruitment efforts to increase the number of emergency services personnel.



TRANSPORTATION

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

Objective 1: Land Use and Transportation Coordination. <i>Promote integrated development patterns and transportation networks that work together to support pedestrian- friendly communities and active modes of transportation. Land use and transportation decisions should be consistent and mutually reinforce each other.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
1.1 – Plan Integration - Work with Mount Rogers Planning District Commission and VDOT to promote Bland County’s transportation projects in coordination with regional and state transportation plans.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
1.2 – Land Use Supports Transportation - Invest in transportation projects that support economic development and land use goals.	Medium	\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
Recommended Actions				
Road Classifications - Use road classifications as a factor in zoning districts and land use conditions. Review and revise language to assure consistency between transportation function and land use.				
Objective 2: Integrated Transportation Network. <i>Develop a high quality, multimodal transportation network that provides transportation options that meet the short- and long-term transportation needs of residents and businesses in Bland County.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
2.1 – Road Network - Maintain a road network that will enhance our manufacturing and logistics-related strengths and contribute to further development of our economic base.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
2.2 – Multimodal Transportation - Promote and develop a multimodal transportation network that offers safe and attractive choices among modes including sidewalks, bike paths, greenways, public transportation in addition to roadways.	Medium	\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
Recommended Action				
Significant Road Projects - Work to fund and implement road projects of countywide significance.				
Objective 3: Street Design. <i>Design roads that are safe and efficient for motor vehicle drivers while accommodating pedestrians and bicyclists, and limiting negative environmental impacts.</i>				



Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
3.1 – Multimodal Projects - Ensure that new roadway projects and major reconstruction projects provide safe, convenient, and attractive accommodations for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
3.2 – Safety - Prioritize the safety and needs of pedestrians and bicyclists over the convenience of motorists for upcoming transportation projects.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
3.3 – Viable Roadway Design - Encourage viable roadway design and construction best practices to reduce stormwater runoff, maintain, and enhance vegetation, and minimize environmental impacts.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
3.4 – Roadway and Bridge Design - Design roadways and bridges to be community assets, serving to connect communities and to enhance the visual appearance of the built environment.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
Recommended Actions				
Safety - Consider the safety of all users, including bicyclists and pedestrians, when evaluating road and intersection improvement projects. Review VDOT safety data for locations with high vehicular crashes involving pedestrians and bicyclists to identify needed improvements.				
Road Diets - Consider road diets on roads with excessive widths and/or travel speeds. Use available right-of-way for landscaping and/or bicycle and pedestrian facilities or preserve right-of-way for other future use.				
Objective 4: Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation. <i>Create a safe and effective bikeway/sidewalk/greenway network that is an integral part of the transportation system, links together resources and destinations, provides an alternative to automobile travel, increases recreational opportunities, and advances healthy lifestyles and quality of life.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
4.1 – Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning - Consider use of bicycle and pedestrian transportation at every level of community planning, including development review, community development, recreation, and schools.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
4.2 – Locations for Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements - Enhance pedestrian and bicycle circulation, access, and safety near community facilities, including schools, library, parks, and recreation centers.	Medium	\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS
4.3 – Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Funding - Ensure adequate funding for construction and maintenance of bicycle facilities, sidewalks, and greenways as a critical component of the transportation system. Leverage state and federal grant	Medium	\$\$-\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS



funds, including VDOT's Transportation Alternatives program, to supplement local resources whenever possible.				
4.4 – Road, Bridge, and Intersection Improvements - Seek to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists in all road, bridge, and intersection improvement and construction projects. Continue to coordinate and implement pedestrian and bicycle accommodations with maintenance projects, such as striping bike lanes as part of resurfacing projects.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
4.5 – Underused Right-of-Way - Add bike lanes to roadways by converting underused right-of-way.	Low	\$\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, VDOT
4.6 – Child Safety - Support programs such as Safe Routes to Schools and provide new infrastructure to encourage children to walk and bicycle safely to and from school. Consider expanding such programs to connect to parks and other community facilities.	Medium	\$\$-\$\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, VDOT
4.7 – Appalachian Trail Accessibility and Improvement - Continue to work with partners such as VDOT and ATC to improve safety and accessibility of the trail.	Medium	\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, ATC, VDOT
Recommended Actions				
Integrate Bicycle/Pedestrian/Greenway Planning - Develop a comprehensive active transportation plan, the Recreation and Greenways Plan, and that integrates bicycle, pedestrian, and greenway components.				
Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans - Implement the Recreation and Greenways plan.				
Pedestrian Planning - Perform a gap analysis and a sidewalk construction priority list based on an objective ranking system. Fund sidewalk construction based on priority rankings and geographic differences.				
Bicycle/Pedestrian Rights-of-Way - Reserve, obtain and/or acquire right-of-way or easements for proposed bikeways, sidewalks, multiuse paths and greenways if facilities are not required to be constructed as part of the development approval process.				
Walkability/Bikeability Deficiencies - Undertake walkability and bikeability audits to identify deficiencies and target areas for infrastructure improvements.				
Appalachian Trail Crossing Improvements - Add pedestrian access improvements to increase safety and accessibility for those using the trail.				
Objective 5: Regional Transportation. <i>Create a strong multimodal regional transportation system that provides regional mobility, encourages economic development, promotes adequate growth patterns, and preserves the natural and built environments of the region.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties



5.1 – Regional Transportation Planning - Continue to work with regional planning partners and local transportation agencies to coordinate transportation planning, operations, and funding priorities for roads, transit, commuter rail, and other transportation modes.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
5.2 – Regional Planning - Work with regional organizations and other jurisdictions on collaborative land use and transportation planning efforts.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
5.3 – Roadway Improvements - Coordinate roadway improvement projects to support regional transit service.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT
5.4 – Regional Greenways and Bikeways - Work with regional partners to develop multijurisdictional greenways and bikeways.	Medium	\$\$\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT

Recommended Actions

Regional Transportation Projects - Help implement regional transportation planning projects.

Rural Technical Committee - Continue to provide representation on the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission's Rural Technical Committee to help assist with regional transportation planning efforts.

Objective 6: Transportation Funding. *Ensure adequate long-term funding for maintenance and construction of all modes of transportation facilities.*

Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
6.1 – Adequate Funding - Ensure adequate funding for construction and maintenance of all modes of transportation.	High	\$\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
6.2 – State and Federal Funds - Aggressively seek state and federal funds for local transportation projects. Leverage state and federal grant funds to supplement local resources whenever possible.	High	\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
6.3 – Funding Sources - Consider a wide range of standard and innovative funding sources for transportation funding, including bond issues, assessments and fees-in-lieu, taxes, toll roads, and public/private partnerships.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
6.4 – Transportation Investment - Ensure that transportation infrastructure investments are adequately distributed in the community.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC

Recommended Actions

Funding Strategies - Develop funding strategies for maintenance of existing and new construction of transportation facilities.

Development Impacts - Require developers to provide right-of-way, make improvements, construct facilities, or provide fees-in-lieu to help alleviate the traffic impacts of their projects.



Innovative Financing - Pursue local, state, and federal sources and innovative financing options to assist in funding transit infrastructure investments.

Objective 7: Transportation Planning Process

Strategy	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
7.1 – Collaborate - Ensure that transportation planning and decision-making is an open, collaborative process that includes citizens and local, state, and federal governments.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, VDOT

Recommended Action

Public Participation Policy - Follow the public participation policies adopted by the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Mount Rogers Rural Technical Committee to bring a broad cross-section of the public into transportation policy, planning, and investment decision-making processes.



LAND USE/ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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

Goal: Preserve, enhance, and protect Bland County's environmental resources to ensure a high quality of life for residents while supporting responsible future growth and development.

Objective 1: Water Quality and Conservation. <i>Use water resources efficiently and responsibly. Protect watersheds and streams by reducing pollution runoff, soil erosion, and flooding. Determine ways to provide high-quality drinking water to meet home, business, and recreational needs of the community.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
1.1 – Watershed Protection - Continue to promote the protection of watersheds and amend regulations as necessary.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DEQ
1.2 – Regional Watersheds - Promote regional cooperation for watershed issues.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, DEQ
1.3 – Natural Water Filtering - Encourage the protection and development of natural water filtering methods, such as riparian buffers.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, DEQ, DCR
1.4 – Stormwater Runoff - Encourage responsible design and construction best practices to reduce stormwater runoff. Strive to maintain and enhance vegetation and minimize environmental impacts, especially in areas with sinkholes (Karst topography).	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DEQ
1.5 – Stormwater Management Systems - Promote environmentally sensitive and aesthetically pleasing stormwater management systems.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DEQ, DCR
1.6 – Groundwater Protection - Protect groundwater from the adverse effects of development and natural resource extraction. Land development and use should be managed to reduce the likelihood of groundwater contamination.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DEQ
1.7 – Wastewater - Explore opportunities for wastewater recycling/reuse systems at wastewater treatment facilities to reduce the nitrogen and phosphorus load further and to reduce potable water consumption for nonessential purposes.	Medium	\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, DEQ
1.8 – Land Protection - Limit any land use that poses an undue risk to the quality and quantity of groundwater supply.	High	\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, DCR



1.9 – Natural Streams - Discourage, where feasible, further channelization and piping of streams.	Medium	\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC, DCR
Recommended Actions				
Water Quality Regulations - Continue to monitor water quality and conditions in current and future water supply watersheds. Study the effectiveness of current watershed regulations and recommend changes as needed for watershed protection.				
Watershed Management - Maintain open dialogue on watershed management with upstream and downstream localities.				
Stormwater Education - Educate land owners and businesses about the benefit of best management practices for stormwater protection.				
Update Stormwater Regulations - Update current stormwater regulations as needed to follow best practices for managing stormwater runoff.				
Erosion Control - Update erosion control ordinances and enforcement processes as necessary.				
Water Conservation Campaign - Promote a countywide water conservation campaign.				
Stream Crossings - Install bridge systems instead of culverts, where feasible, for stream crossings to help maintain the natural ecosystem associated with the stream.				
Objective 2: Land Preservation and Responsible Development. <i>Protect natural areas, as well as areas with rare plants and animals, high-quality soils, and/or tree canopy. Develop and redevelop land in the most productive method while protecting natural resources.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
2.1 – Environmental Partnerships – Work with state and federal government agencies to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas, especially those surrounding national forest.	Medium	\$	Long-term	BOS, CS, DCR, ACE
2.2 – Appalachian Trail and other Trails – Recognize and build upon the efforts of the Appalachian Trail maintaining clubs or other organizations to help utilize the Appalachian Trail and other clubs for the betterment of the county.	Medium	\$	Short-term	BOS, CS, CG, ATC
2.3 – Greyfields and Brownfields – Encourage redevelopment to preserve previously undisturbed land.	Low	\$	Long-term	BOS, PC, CS, PS
2.4 – Redevelopment and Infill – Encourage redevelopment of existing structures and infill in neighborhoods.	Low	\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, PS
2.5 – Responsible Development – Encourage responsible development practices including using green building technologies, retaining natural site features, and mixed-use development.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PS
Recommended Action				



Natural Landscapes – Explore options to protect scenic views and natural landscapes that are important to maintain the visual character of the county.				
Appalachian Trail – Work with Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers (PATH), Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC), the Outdoor Club of Virginia Tech (OCVT) and other organizations to maintain the Trail.				
Natural Resource Acquisition – Develop and maintain a list of properties that will help ensure long-term natural resource conservation.				
Green Infrastructure Plan – Consider developing a green infrastructure plan to analyze and protect the county’s ecosystems.				
Greyfield and Brownfield Incentives – Provide incentives to redevelop greyfield and brownfield sites.				
Natural Areas Integration – Study methods for integrating natural areas into the site design of development projects and ensure that these areas are protected during construction.				
Pervious Parking Surfaces – Consider whether to encourage using pervious parking surfaces in appropriate development situations.				
Green Building Techniques – Assess green building techniques and consider incentivizing their usage within the county.				
Karst Topography – Practice controlled development around areas with sinkholes and other Karst topography features.				
Trees Along Roadways and Infrastructure Lines – Coordinate with utility companies to preserve existing trees and plant new trees within the county to maintain healthy tree canopies while not impeding power or water infrastructure operations.				
Environmental Performance Standards – Consider investigating environmental performance standards for private and public development projects that address such issues as air emissions, pollutant discharges, erosion and sediment controls, and natural features.				
Objective 3: Waste Management. <i>Promote a cost-effective solid waste management program that protects the environment and citizens, promotes recycling, and reduces solid waste quantities, and successfully manages and reclaims landfill sites.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
3.1 – Recycling Committee/Plan for Recycling – Consider creation of a recycling committee for all districts or a plan for recycling.	Low	\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, CG
3.2 – Solid Waste Disposal Technology – Determine the need for newer solid waste disposal technologies that could reduce the volume of materials going into landfills.	Medium	\$\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
3.3 – Recycled and Recyclable Products - Promote the use of recycled or recyclable products among citizens and businesses.	Medium	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, PS
3.4 – Nuisance Ordinances - Consider creation of nuisance ordinances to combat trash and junk alongside major highways and byways. If such ordinances are enacted, then consider full-time enforcement officers for the ordinances.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS



3.5 – “Keep Bland Beautiful” Campaign – Consider a campaign to get citizens involved with roadside cleanup.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, PS, ATC
Recommended Actions				
Waste Reduction – Study processes for reducing the amount of waste going to landfills and implement chosen strategies.				
Environmental Education and Outreach - Establish a public program or collaborate with a nonprofit or private agency to educate the public on the environmental impacts of waste and the benefits of recycling.				
Unauthorized Landfill Sites – Identify unauthorized landfills and their sources and organize cleanup efforts.				
Objective 4: Environmental Regulation. <i>Encourage the creation and enforcement of cost-effective environmental regulations.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
4.1 – Environmental Input - Encourage local input in the development of environmental plans and regulations.	Medium	\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS
4.2 – Regulation Coordination - Coordinate the development of local regulations with the state and federal agencies.	Medium	\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, PDC
4.3 – Environmental Sources - Monitor the status of environmental resources.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
4.4 – Clear Regulations - Assess how local environmental protections and administration can be made clear, understandable, and effective.	Medium	\$-\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PS, DEQ
Recommended Actions				
Regulation Assistance - Work with businesses and individuals to assure their understanding of environmental regulations and maintain their compliance with those regulations.				
Effective Regulations – Assure that regulations are working as expected and revise ineffective or unclear regulations.				
Objective 5: Environmental Awareness. <i>Increase community understanding of Bland County’s natural systems and related environmental and resiliency issues.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
5.1 – Environmental Awareness – Increase public awareness of environmental issues.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
5.2 – Environmental Partnerships – Support organizations and/or programs that educate residents about environmental issues.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG



5.3 – Appalachian Trail Partnerships – Support organizations that provide outreach and help maintain the Trail.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, ATC
Recommended Actions				
Environmental Issues Outreach – Use public communications such as the media and social media to educate residents about environmental issues.				
Appalachian Trail Outreach – Use public communications to educate residents about the Trail, the importance of maintaining it and the impact it has upon the County.				



AGRICULTURAL & RURAL CHARACTER

Goal: Preserve, protect, and enhance the quality of Bland County's agricultural areas by promoting traditional rural lifestyles, supporting regenerative agriculture, and preserving farmland, agricultural enterprises, open space, recreation, and historic resources within the county.

Objective 1: Farmland/Agricultural Enterprises. <i>Preserve and protect the County's farmlands and agricultural enterprises.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
1.1 – Agricultural Land Conservation - Protect and conserve agricultural land in Bland County.	High	\$-\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, DOF
1.2 – Farm and Agricultural Development - Promote and support land use measures that support farm and agricultural development as part of Bland County's economy.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE
1.3 – Farm-Friendly Regulations - Maintain a farm friendly regulatory and community environment.	Medium	\$-\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE
1.4 – Agricultural Enterprises - Promote agricultural enterprises as a component of Bland County's economic development program.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE
1.5 – Agricultural Tourism - Encourage and promote Bland County's agricultural tourism provisions.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, VTC
1.6 – Community-Supported Agriculture - Support community-supported agricultural programs.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE
1.7 – Agricultural Education - Support agricultural education programs and events.	Medium	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE
1.8 – Agricultural-Related Businesses - Encourage farm and agricultural-related businesses to locate in the rural areas of the community, such as equipment/feed and seed establishments and other supply and service providers.	Low	\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS, CG
1.9 – Priority to Farming - Give agriculture priority over other uses on land suitable for farming.	Medium	\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, CG
1.10 – Conservation Easements - Support the placement of conservation easements restricting development on farmland.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DOF



1.11 – Farmers Markets - Promote and support the establishment of farmers markets and food cooperative facilities in commercially attractive locations to help create new markets for locally grown agricultural products.	Low	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE
Recommended Actions				
Agriculture in Rural Areas - Continue to encourage farming and agricultural activity in the county.				
Agriculture Viability - Initiate dialogue with farmers and agricultural property owners about how the community can enhance the viability of agriculture in the county and recommend possible changes.				
Agricultural Outreach - Enhance public outreach programs and activities to inform the public about the benefits of farmland and agricultural activity to the community.				
Connect Farmers – Work with Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to connect beginning farmers with experienced ones.				
Local Foods Movement – Promote the existence and expansion of the local foods movement.				
Farmers Markets - Encourage local producers to participate in Bland’s farmers’ market and farmers’ markets in neighboring communities.				
Agriculture Programs - Encourage the Appalachian Sustainable Development organization to promote its programs in Bland County.				
Objective 2: Open Space and Scenic Vistas. <i>Maintain open space and scenic vistas as part of the rural character of Bland County.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
2.1 – Open Space Preservation - Encourage the preservation of open spaces and passive land uses through public and private programs.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DCR
2.2 – Farmland Preservation Program – Continue to support farmland preservation programs and identify additional sources of funding.	Medium	\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DCR
Recommended Action				
Open Space Informational Materials – Distribute informational materials about open space and scenic vistas to introduce or reintroduce citizens, including school children, to the community’s resources.				
Tax Benefits Education - Educate property owners about available tax benefits for protecting rural open space and scenic vistas.				
Objective 3: Recreational Opportunities. <i>Provide for improved and additional recreational opportunities within Bland County.</i>				
Strategy	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
3.1 – Outdoor Recreation Areas – Support the establishment of additional outdoor recreation areas or opportunities in Bland County.	Medium	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DCR, DOF
Recommended Actions				



Maintain Recreational Facilities – Maintain existing recreational facilities and improve them as necessary.				
New Recreational Sites - Investigate the establishment of new recreational sites.				
Agricultural Tourism and Recreation - Provide additional recreational opportunities.				
Passive Outdoor Recreation – Expand opportunities for passive outdoor recreation, such as hiking and fishing.				
Objective 4: Historical Area Resources. <i>Preserve and protect Bland County's rural historic resources.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
4.1 – Rural Historic Resources - Preserve, protect, and promote significant rural historic resources in the community.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DCR
4.2 – Historic Farm Buildings - Encourage the reuse of historic farm buildings.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
4.3 – Financial Incentives - Support financial incentives that retain rural historic resources.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
Recommended Actions				
Education Programs - Initiate local education programs outlining and supporting the value of the county's historic rural character.				
Identify Historic Resources - Identify the rural historic resources, including historic farms, landscapes as well as prehistoric and historic archaeological sites.				
Rural Historic Preservation Programs - Sponsor programs and workshops that directly address the preservation of rural historic resources.				
National Register Nominations - Continue to support and assist property owners when requested in the nomination of eligible rural historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places.				
Rural Historic Easements and Covenants - Promote the placement of conservation easements and protective covenants on rural historic properties.				
Tax Credits - Encourage the use of federal and state income tax credits for the rehabilitation of the county's rural historic resources.				
Historic Farm Buildings - Assist property owners interested in the retention of historic farm buildings.				
Rural Historic Outreach – Consider developing public outreach programs that explain the importance of rural historic resources.				



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal: 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.

Objective 1: Farmland/Agricultural Enterprises. <i>Preserve and protect the county's farmlands and agricultural enterprises.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
1.1 – Planned Growth Districts - Consider plan for Planned Growth Districts, or development zones, for future business expansion along the Interstate 77 corridor.	Medium	\$\$\$	Short-term	BOS, PC, CS
1.2 – Protect future industrial land - Encourage protection of industrial opportunity areas from other types of development that would subdivide parcels.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
1.3 – Infrastructure for growing businesses - Continue to improve the transportation and utilities infrastructure to support the needs of industries.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
1.4 – Physical Improvements – Encourage property owners of existing structures and industrial-zoned land to rehabilitate their physical facilities to accommodate new business.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PS
1.5 – Organize for Business Development – Align efforts of business owners, property owners, and the community to strengthen business development efforts.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PS, CG
Recommended Actions				
Industrial Land Designation - Explore industrial plan protection mechanisms such as industrial zoning, tax credits, tax abatement or deferrals for industrial land protection.				
Industrial Land Protection - Protect planned industrial areas by following established land management plans.				
Industrial Zoning – Allow property to be zoned for future industrial use without tax penalties.				
Telecommunications Infrastructure - Develop broadband internet infrastructure to support needs of businesses and industry.				
Development-ready Sites - Create and market development ready sites.				
Economic Development Target Areas - Map Economic Development Target Areas and have available as a marketing tool.				
Transportation Plan Alignment - Align transportation plans with potential economic development opportunities.				
Objective 2: Business Atmosphere/Economic Expansion. <i>Promote a business atmosphere that is supportive of entrepreneurial endeavors and expansion.</i>				



Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
2.1 – Long-Term Economic Growth – Support and implement a coordinated long-term strategic plan that fosters adequate economic growth within the county.	Low	\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, PS, CG
2.2 – Public-Private Partnerships – Support public-private partnerships as a method to facilitate the growth of capital investment in combination with economic development activities.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC,EDA, CS, PS, CG
2.3 – Business Recruitment – Support the recruitment and retention efforts of both the Bland County Economic Development Authority and Mount Rogers Regional Partnership (MRRP).	Medium	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PS, CG, MRRP
2.4 – Small, Entrepreneurial, and Home-based Businesses – Support entrepreneurial businesses and other small start-up businesses, including home-based businesses.	Low	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
2.5 – Telecommunications Infrastructure – Support the development of county-wide broadband infrastructure.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DHCD
2.6 – Environmentally-sound Community – Support an environmentally-sound community with a high quality of life to attract quality, high-paying employers.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG
2.7 – Agricultural Economy – Support farming and agricultural tourism businesses.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DOF
2.8 – Tourism and Asset-Based Economic Development – Support tourism and development focused on the county’s historic resources, arts-related, and recreation-related activities such as the Appalachian Trail and National Forest.	Medium	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, VCE, DOF, VTC
Recommended Actions				
Regional Business Opportunities – Participate in regional planning and business recruitment opportunities.				
Telecommunications Infrastructure – Develop the Bland County Wireless network to provide wireless or hybrid internet networks throughout the county.				
Suitable Business Clusters – Target and market suitable and feasible business/industry clusters.				
Asset-based Economic Development – Embrace asset-based economic development centered on the County’s natural and cultural assets.				
Find Disadvantageous Codes and Regulations – Investigate existing county codes and regulations that may hurt small and home-based businesses or impede entrepreneurial business growth.				
Objective 3: Education. <i>Improve education on all levels for a trained workforce with varied skills.</i>				



Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
3.1 – Educated Workforce – Support institutions of higher learning within the region to provide a well-trained and highly-educated workforce.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
3.2 – K-12 Education – Promote community initiatives to maintain and improve the quality of Bland County’s schools.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
3.3 – Recruiting Companies – Capitalize on the presence of large companies and institutions of higher learning within the region to recruit prospective companies.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
3.4 – Wythe-Bland Foundation Scholarship Program – Continue to support and market the program, which offers tuition waivers for qualifying students.	High	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS
Recommended Actions				
Education Programs – Work with the business community, learning institutions, and workforce development board to assure that necessary education programs are available to students.				
Training for emerging job sectors – Work with the business community, learning institutions, and the workforce development board to assure students are receiving training for jobs in emerging sectors, particularly in the STEM curriculum (science, technology, engineering, and math).				
Volunteer Programs – Support school volunteer activities, including STEM-related programs.				
New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board (WDB) – Work with WDB to determine trends in employment and help meet the needs of the region’s employers.				



HOUSING

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

Objective 1: Livable and Mixed Communities. <i>Enhance existing communities emphasizing connectivity, walkability, a variety of land uses, and access to services.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
1.1 – Existing Infrastructure - Encourage development in areas with existing infrastructure before extending infrastructure farther.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DHCD, VDOT
1.2 – Pedestrian and Bike-Friendly – Promote communities to be pedestrian- and bike-friendly by developing interconnected street networks that include sidewalks and bike lanes.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DHCD, VH, VDOT
1.3 – Available Housing - Foster a market that is hospitable to available housing developments.	High	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DHCD, VH
1.4 – Rehabilitate and Retrofit - Continue revitalizing and rehabilitating existing developed areas to provide a variety of housing types and attract new investment.	Medium	\$\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, DHCD, VH
Recommended Actions				
Differing Housing Types - Encourage a variety of housing types by identifying sites for higher density residential uses in area plans.				
Available Housing - Ensure a variety of quality housing types for all income levels.				
Incentives for Redevelopment – Explore a range of incentives to make redevelopment faster and economically feasible.				
Increased Connectivity – Increase connectivity by linking roads to form a network that provides multiple routes for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers (see Chapter 4: Transportation for more information).				
Public-Private Partnerships - Support public-private partnerships that spur housing unit development.				
Objective 2: Integrated and Livable Communities. <i>Enhance livability features within communities and preserve natural and historical assets.</i>				
Strategies	Priority	Funding	Timeline	Parties
2.1 – Open Space, Parks, Greenways - Encourage the development of open spaces, parks and greenways that link existing and new neighborhoods.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, PS



2.2 – Community Gathering Places - Develop accessible community gathering places within the county that include spaces such as parks and farmers markets that encourage interaction and provide places for people to visit and relax.	Medium	\$\$\$	Intermediate	BOS, PC, CS, CG, PS
2.3 – Community Plans - Recognize local community plans and include them in countywide planning efforts.	Medium	\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG
2.4 – Main Street Character - In community centers establish continuous building street frontages and reduced setbacks to frame and enclose a Main Street character for pedestrians.	Medium	\$\$	Ongoing	BOS, PC, CS, CG, DHCD
Recommended Actions				
Historic and Natural Resources - Protect historic resources and the natural environment.				
Community Character - Preserve character of individual communities within the county.				
Rural Landscapes - Preserve natural features of the existing rural landscapes through conservation efforts.				



Vision Statement

...

« Our vision is to create a **clean** and **attractive** community for future generations. We aim to foster economic growth and offer an **affordable, inviting place to live** by **embracing a simple life**, supporting technological growth, and unique, family-oriented schools. »

...

POPULATION & COMMUNITY

Goal: Improve health and well-being; provide improved community services, facilities, and infrastructure.

Introduction

Bland County emerged from sections of Giles, Tazewell, and Wythe Counties as a response to local residents frustrated by remote county seats, arduous mountain journeys, and taxes that seemed to serve those outside their own region. Seeking greater autonomy, the community petitioned the Virginia General Assembly, which ultimately approved the creation of Bland County on March 30, 1861. The county was named after Richard Bland, a prominent colonial figure renowned for his advocacy of American independence from British rule.

The founding of Bland County was not just a matter of convenience; it represented a significant desire for self-governance and local control. Residents of the region faced unique challenges due to the mountainous terrain, which made travel to distant county seats both time-consuming and physically demanding. Additionally, the feeling that tax revenues were benefiting other regions rather than local communities fueled the push for separation. The successful petition to the Virginia General Assembly reflected a strong sense of community and determination among the people of Bland County.

Over the years, Bland County has maintained its commitment to community character and autonomy, preserving its historical roots while adapting to changing times. The county's establishment laid the foundation for a local government that

could better address the needs of its residents, fostering a sense of belonging and pride that continues to shape the region.

Historical Trends

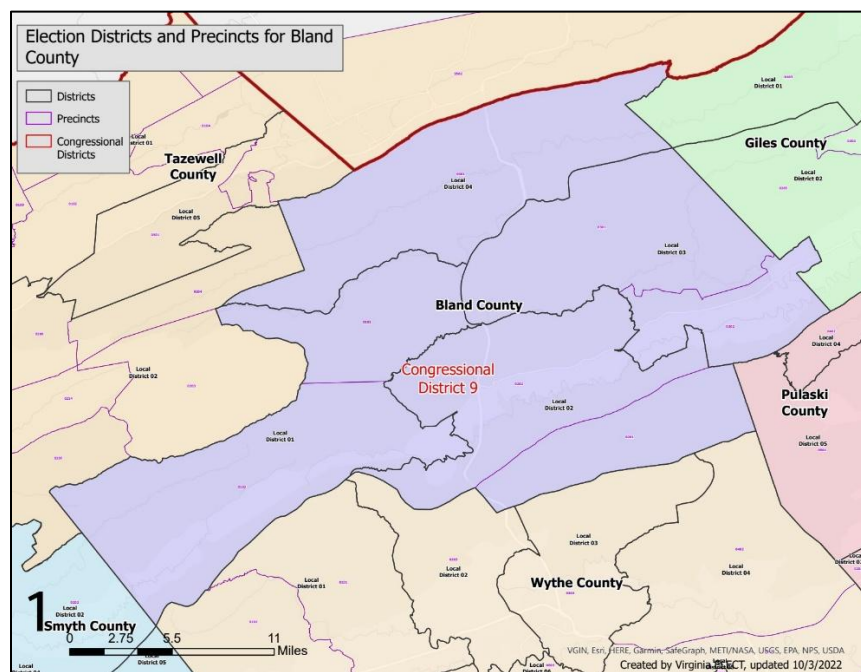
The population of Bland County has fluctuated over the past 70 years. The county witnessed a declining trend between 1950 and 1970; however, population began to increase from 1980 to 2000. The highest growth rate occurred between 1970 and 1980, with a 17.1% population increase. This rate of growth exceeded the Mount Rogers planning district (MRPD)'s rate of 13.6%. Between 1980 and 1990, the county once again gained in population by 2.6% compared to a decline from the planning district. The population reached 6,871 persons in 2000, a 5.5% increase from 1990, but once again declined by 1% to 6,824 by 2010. The population continued decreasing between 2010 and 2020 to 6,270. The population changes in Bland County, along with the planning district, between 1950 and 2023, are shown in **Table 1** and **Figure 2: Population Changes: Bland County and Mount Rogers Planning District (1950-2023)**.

The population of the Bland Correctional Center accounted for 9.3 percent of the total population of the county at 580 persons as of 2023. The population of Bland Correctional Center grew by 62.1% between 1980 and 2010. As of the 2020 Decennial Census, the county's population density was 17.5 persons per square mile without considering the population of Bland Correctional Center. Following the 2010 Census, Bland County was



redistricted to try to ensure that voting precincts have relatively equal populations. The population change for the decade from 2000-2010 was a result of small growth in three of the four districts and a large decline in the fourth. However, the remaining districts began declining by 2020, with the most significant being in District 1 (Sharon). For more information on the population changes in each district, see **Table 2**. For more information on the geographic boundaries of each district, see **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1: Bland County Election Districts



Source: Virginia Department of Elections



Table 1: Population Changes - 1950-2023

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Bland County	6,436	5,982	5,423	6,349	6,514	6,871	6,824	6,270	6,211
Mount Rogers Planning District	161,514	160,065	159,412	181,139	178,205	190,020	193,595	186,682	186,131

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates

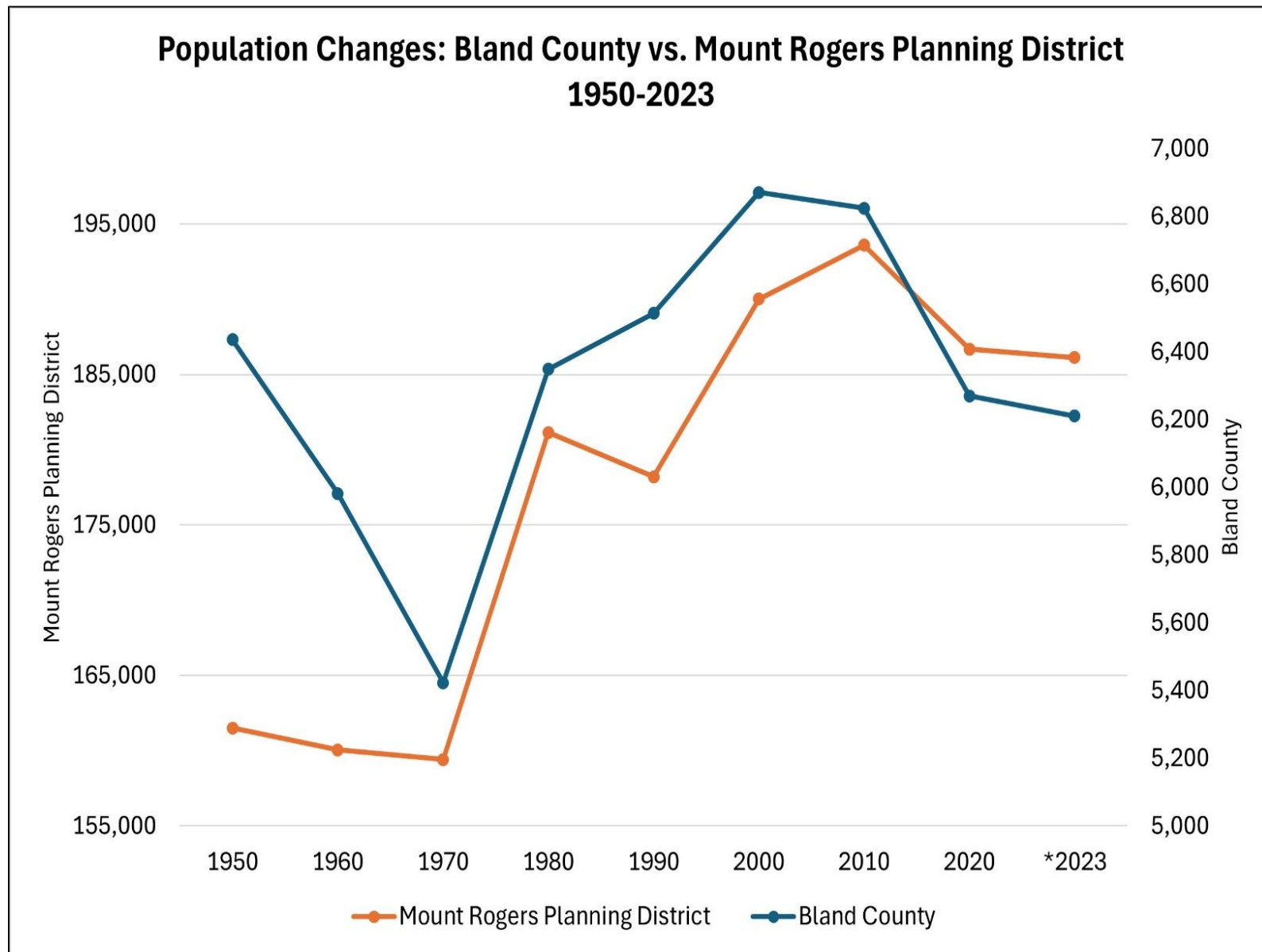
Table 2: Population Changes by District - 2000-2020

District	2000	2010	2020	2023	Percent Change (2000-2020)
District 1 - Sharon	1,699	1,774	1,568	1,608	-7.71%
District 2 - Seddon	1,698	1,754	1,677	1,597	-1.24%
District 3 - Mechanicsburg	1,715	1,727	1,625	1,978	-5.25%
District 4 – Rocky Gap	1,759	1,569	1,400	1,028	-20.41%
County Total	6,871	6,824	6,270	6,211	-8.75%

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



Figure 2: Population Changes: Bland County and Mount Rogers Planning District (1950-2023)



Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



Population Composition by Age, Race, and Gender

Age

The county’s population is aging, with the largest two age groups being “55 to 64” (16.4%) and “65 and older” (23.8%) as of the 2020 Decennial Census. The median age increased slightly each decade. As with most localities in the planning district, for many decades, out-migration of younger age groups has been a common trend. Many people in these age groups leave the county upon graduating high school, with the ultimate goal of attending college and/or pursuing opportunities outside the county. This is known as “brain drain³”, which presents additional stress to the aging population. The population composition of Bland County by age group between 2000 and 2020 is highlighted in **Table 5**, **Figure 3**, and **Figure 4**.

Race

Between 2000 and 2023, Bland County’s population has been predominantly white, as shown in **Table 3**. This is a consistent characteristic of every locality across the Mount Rogers Planning District and Southwest Virginia. The minority population represented only 6.3 percent of the total population in 2020 (396 persons). Most of the minority population is comprised of residents with two or more races, with 3.6 percent of the population composed of other minorities.

Table 3: Population by Race

Race	2000	2010	2020	2023
White alone	6,495	6,517	5,874	5,786
Black or African American alone	285	228	169	337
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	5	1	0	36
Asian alone	8	18	6	41
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	1	1	0	0
Some other race alone	32	10	7	11
Two or more races	45	49	214	90
Total:	6,871	6,824	6,270	6,211

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates

Gender

In 2020, Bland County had a population of 3,462 males (55.2 percent of the total population) and 2,808 females (44.8 percent of the total population). The median age of the male population was 46.8 compared to 51.3 for females. This data is influenced by the all-male population of Bland Correctional Center. Historic changes in population by gender between 2000 and 2023 are presented in **Table 4**.

³ According to [Merriam-Webster](#), brain drain refers to the “the departure of educated or professional people from one country, economic sector, or field for another usually for better pay or living conditions.”



Table 4: Population by Gender

	2000	2010	2020	2023
Male	3,747	3,765	3,462	3,561
Female	3,124	3,059	2,808	2,650

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey
2023 5-Year Estimates



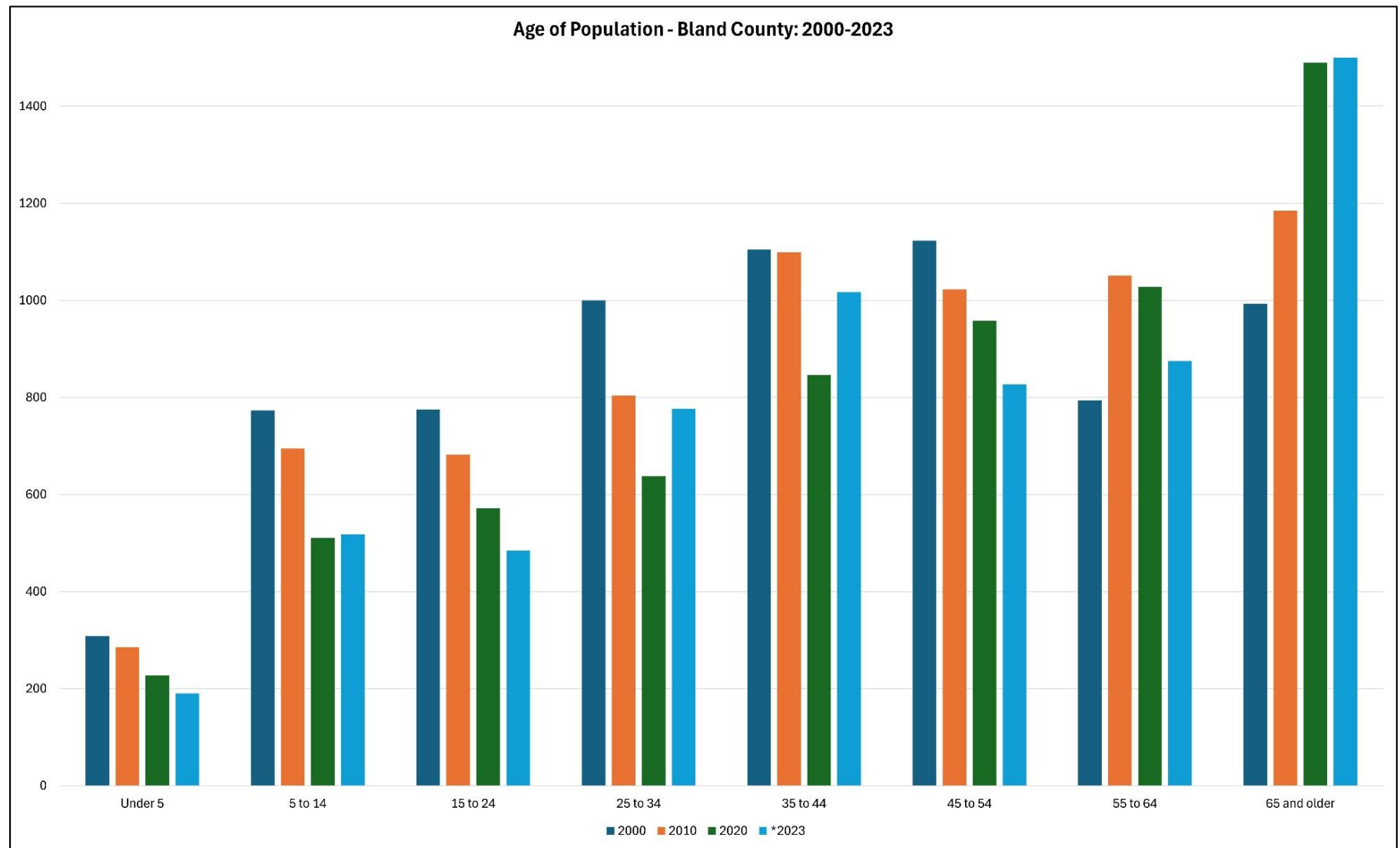
Table 5: Population by Age

Age Group	2000		2010		2020		2023		Percent Change 2000 - 2020
	Persons	Percent	Persons	Percent	Persons	Percent	Persons	Percent	
Under 5	308	4.5%	285	4.2%	227	3.6%	190	3.1%	-26.3%
5 to 14	773	11.2%	695	10.2%	511	8.1%	518	8.3%	-33.9%
15 to 24	775	11.3%	682	10.0%	572	9.1%	485	7.8%	-26.2%
25 to 34	1,000	14.6%	804	11.8%	638	10.2%	777	12.5%	-36.2%
35 to 44	1,105	16.0%	1,099	16.1%	846	13.5%	1,017	16.4%	-23.4%
45 to 54	1,123	16.3%	1,023	15.0%	958	15.3%	827	13.3%	-14.7%
55 to 64	794	11.6%	1,051	15.4%	1,028	16.4%	875	14.1%	29.5%
65 and older	993	14.5%	1,185	17.4%	1,490	23.8%	1,522	24.5%	50.1%
Total Population	6,871	100.0%	6,824	100.0%	6,270	100.0%	6,211	100%	-8.7%
Under 18 yrs	1,334	19.4%	1,220	16.4%	794	12.7%	879	14.1	-40.5%
Median Age	40.3		43.6		48.4		47.1		16.9%

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



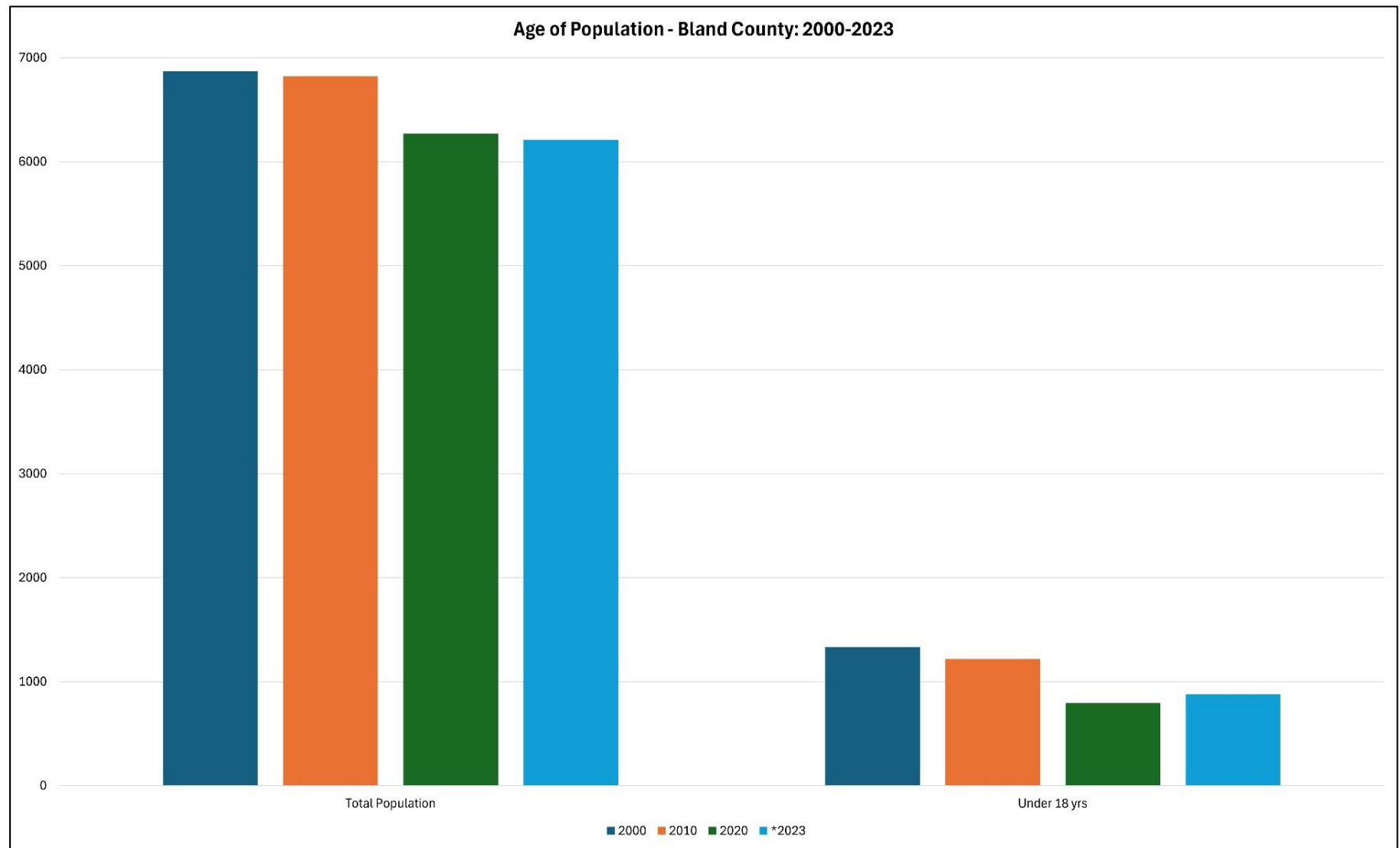
Figure 3: Age of Population



Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



Figure 4: Age of Total Population and Under 18 Years



Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



Population Growth Factors

There are several key factors that have an impact on population growth or decline, and there are a number of variables that are predictors of future population change. An analysis of the natural increase in population (births minus deaths) between 2008 and 2020 is shown in **Table 6**. This information was derived from Bland County vital statistics totals from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), with natural increase calculated as the number of births minus the number of deaths during each period. This measure helps distinguish population change resulting from natural increase from that resulting from net migration. As in much of the Mount Rogers Planning District, natural increase has not been a factor in Bland County's population growth. Net migration (movement in and out of the county) is comparable to that of most localities in the district, and as previously stated, this is particularly noticeable with younger age groups. According to the 2023 American Community Survey, 3.5% of the population moved to Bland County from elsewhere within the Commonwealth of Virginia, while 0.6% of the population moved to the County from out-of-state, thus equating to 4.1%. Based on the data in **Table 6**, it is evident that much of the County's recent population growth stems from in-migration, particularly of older age groups, and out-migration of younger age groups.

Table 6: Births minus Deaths - 2008-2020

Year	Live Births	Deaths	Natural Increase
2008	53	71	-18
2009	49	80	-31
2010	41	71	-30
2011	53	87	-34
2012	55	86	-31
2013	39	85	-46
2014	49	79	-30
2015	51	90	-39
2016	50	80	-30
2017	42	49	-7
2018	34	51	-17
2019	52	51	1
2020	42	71	-29

Source: Virginia Department of Health



Projecting population for a community the size of Bland County can be an almost impossible task because of its vulnerability to change based upon outside forces. For example, decision-making at the county level can have a profound effect. The construction of public water and sewer infrastructure, while not spurring automatic population growth, can have a pro-growth effect as the county looks to the future. These services alone are critical public health improvements and will provide opportunities for future residential and industrial expansion. With public sewer connections available to land parcels near Interstate 77, new industrial development is possible, which, in turn, will bring new families to the county. The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service predicts that Bland County's population will decrease from 6,270 to 5,019 persons from 2020 to 2050. To learn more about the population projections for both Bland County and the rest of the Mount Rogers Planning District, as well as the Commonwealth of Virginia, see **Table 7** and **Figure 5**.

Conclusions

The population of Bland County increased steadily between 1980 and 2000 but has since declined slowly. Currently, Bland County is experiencing a region-wide issue of out-migration of the younger population. Bland County's population is aging, with the median age of both males and females higher in 2020 than in 2010. The only two age groups with population growth were the "55 to 64" and "65 and older" groups. Despite new births driving county growth in the 1990s, the percentage of people under age 18 has declined since 1980, which is largely due to negative natural increase and smaller families.



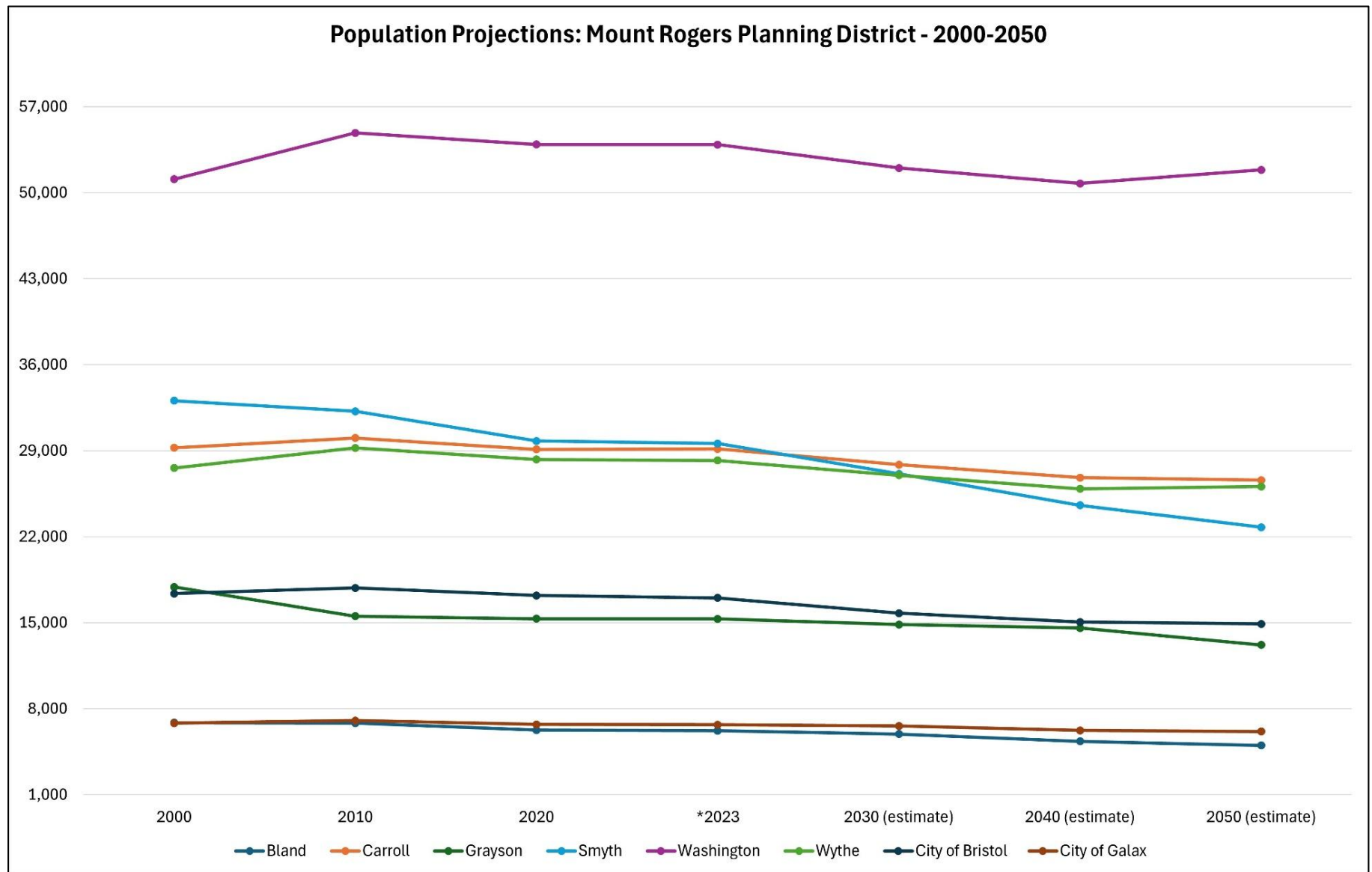
Table 7: Population Projections: Mount Rogers Planning District - 2000-2050

Locality	2000	2010	2020	2023	2030	2040	2050	Difference	Percent Difference 2000-2050
	Census ²	Census ³	Census ⁴	ACS 2023 ⁵	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	2020- 2050	
Bland	6,871	6,824	6,270	6,211	5,938	5,350	5,019	-1,852	-26.95%
Carroll	29,245	30,042	29,115	29,158	27,872	26,813	26,608	-2,637	-9.02%
Grayson	17,917	15,533	15,333	15,323	14,861	14,568	13,197	-4,720	-26.3%
Smyth	33,081	32,208	29,800	29,585	27,124	24,558	22,781	-10,300	-31.1%
Washington	51,103	54,876	53,935	53,913	52,020	50,753	51,859	756	0.0%
Wythe	27,599	29,235	28,290	28,219	27,009	25,898	26,087	-1,512	-0.1%
City of Bristol	17,367	17,835	17,219	17,024	15,778	15,065	14,902	-2,465	-14.2%
City of Galax	6,837	7,042	6,720	6,698	6,605	6,243	6,148	-689	-10.1%
Mount Rogers Planning District	190,020	193,595	186,682	186,131	177,207	169,248	166,601	-20,081	-12.3%
Virginia	7,078,515	7,892,900	8,631,393	8,657,499	9,060,433	9,628,974	10,343,481	3,264,966	46.1%

1. Weldon Cooper Center, 2025 2. 2000 Census 3. 2010 Census 4. 2020 Census 5. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



Figure 5: Population Projections: Mount Rogers Planning District



1. Weldon Cooper Center, 2025 2. 2000 Census 3. 2010 Census 4. 2020 Census 5. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates



Community

Due partially to its small population, Bland County is one of the only counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States without any incorporated municipalities throughout the entire county. In lieu of incorporated municipalities, there are 24 various unincorporated communities throughout the county. While other, lesser known, and more historical communities exist, Bland County's most easily recognizable communities include:

- Hollybrook
- Bastian
- Bland
- Rocky Gap
- Ceres
- Mechanicsburg

For more information about all 24 unincorporated communities within the county, see **Figure 6**.

Education

Education plays a vital role in the long-term stability of Bland County, with strong schools serving as a key factor in attracting and retaining families. Based on 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates, the educational attainment levels of the county's population are generally in line with much of the planning district and Southwest Virginia's rural areas. Significantly fewer individuals 25 and older hold a bachelor's or master's degree, but the majority hold a high school diploma. A portion of the population has pursued post-secondary education but has not conferred a degree. Additionally, a notable

percentage of residents have not completed high school at all; 12.1% of individuals 18 to 24 years old (38 persons) do not hold a high school diploma, and 8.9% of the population 25 years and older (444 persons) were without a high school diploma. This may present challenges in workforce and economic development. The comparatively lower levels of higher education attainment, particularly at the associate's and graduate degree levels, underscore the importance of vocational education and training, as educational attainment levels significantly influence employment opportunities and long-term economic resilience in the county. These trends suggest a continued need to align school facility planning, workforce development, and economic strategies with a smaller, aging population base.

Public Schools

Bland County is served by the Bland County Public School System, which provides K–12 education to residents. As with many rural communities in Southwest Virginia, school enrollment trends closely reflect overall population trends and shifts in age distribution. The two primary public schools in the county are Bland County Elementary School, located in the Bland community, and Bland County High School, located in the Rocky Gap community. According to the Virginia Department of Education, total enrollment for the 2024–2025 school year was 819 students, making Bland County one of the smallest school divisions in the Commonwealth. Comparable enrollment patterns are common among localities within the Mount Rogers Planning District. Enrollment by grade level is shown in **Table 8**.



Figure 6: Map of Bland County Communities

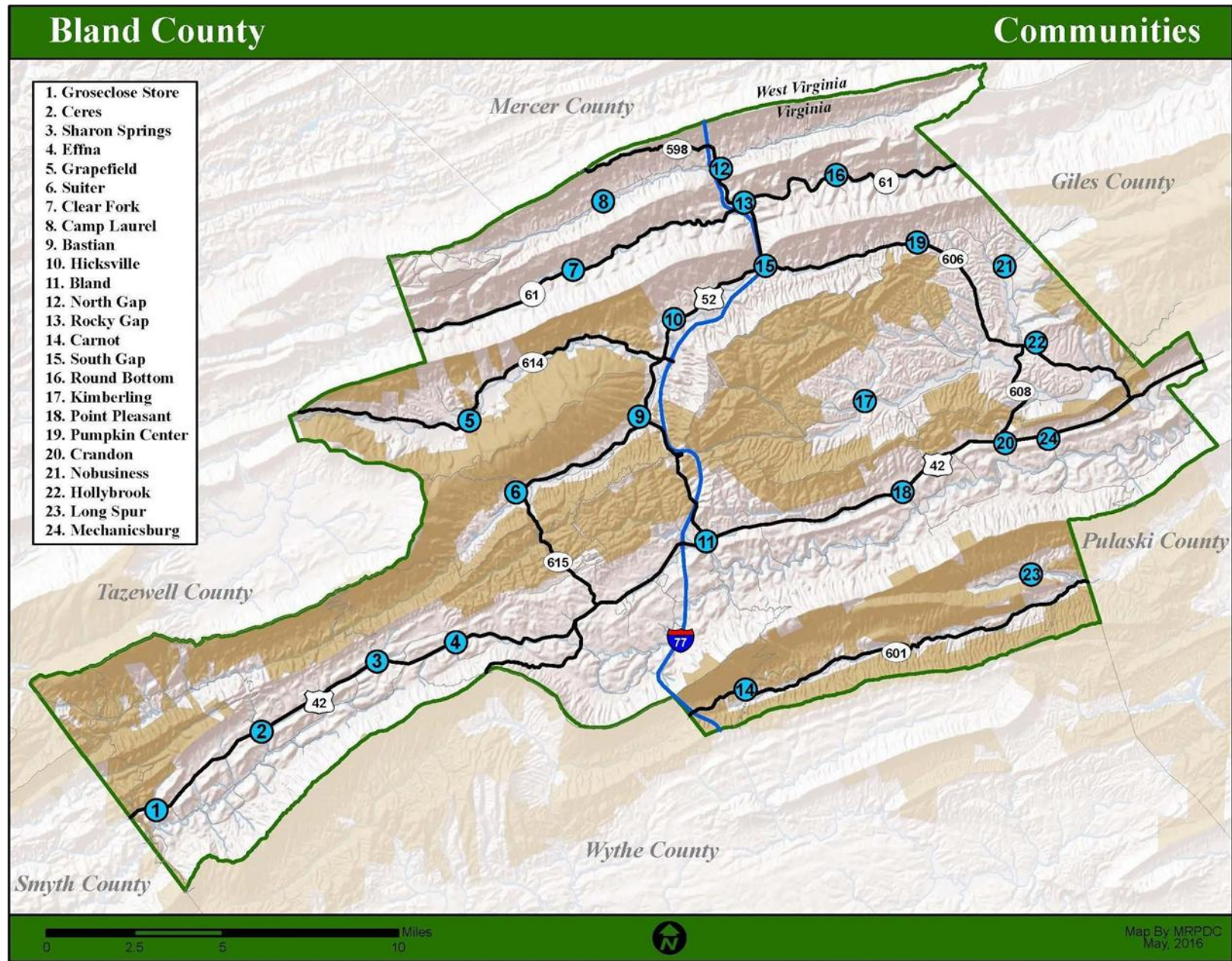


Table 8: Public School Enrollment

Grade	School Year		
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
	Students		
Pre-kindergarten	9	12	11
Kindergarten	57	35	47
Grade 1	43	60	36
Grade 2	59	44	60
Grade 3	55	53	45
Grade 4	50	52	50
Grade 5	49	53	52
Grade 6	49	48	52
Grade 7 ⁴	142	181	203
Grade 8	55	41	44
Grade 9	61	53	47
Grade 10	62	61	53
Grade 11	40	57	61
Grade 12	65	43	57
Total Enrollment	796	793	819

Source: Virginia Department of Education Fall Membership Data

The population trends shown in **Table 5** and **Table 8** indicate a continued decline in residents under the age of 18. The youth population directly affects school enrollment levels and long-term facility planning. As Bland County evaluates future demographic and development trends, officials should continue coordinating land use, housing, and infrastructure decisions with projected enrollment patterns to ensure that school facilities remain aligned with community needs. Planning efforts should focus on maintaining efficient, sustainable educational facilities while monitoring any potential future shifts in population growth.

Higher Education

Although there are no institutions of higher education in Bland County proper, residents have access to Wytheville Community College, the county's primary community college. The college offers general education, college transfer, career and technical education, workforce development, and cooperative education programs. The college also offers a dual enrollment program, allowing high school students to begin their college careers while earning credits toward their degrees. In 2007, the Wythe-Bland Foundation and Wytheville Community College created the [Wythe-Bland Foundation Scholarship](#), which covers five out of six semesters of full tuition and fees for students who graduate from high schools in Bland and Wythe Counties as a "last dollar" scholarship. Bland County is also located roughly 45 minutes from several 4-year institutions, including [Radford University](#), [Virginia Tech](#), and [Bluefield University](#).

⁴ For the 7th grade class roster, remote students are assigned to the Bland County school system up to a maximum of 150 fully-virtual students.



Library

The Bland County Public Library is in the Bland community, and it serves all the county's residents. The library is open to the public Monday through Friday, and it offers computers with internet access, public Wi-Fi, printing services, and books, magazines, learning resources, toys, and games that can be checked out. In addition, through a partnership with Virginia State Parks and the Library of Virginia, the library offers nature backpack kits, that can be checked out for two weeks. These backpacks include a parking pass, a butterfly net, binoculars, a compass, three pocket guides, and a journal.

Health Care

The [Bland County Medical Clinic](#) is an independent, non-profit, 501(c)(3) corporation that serves as the primary source of healthcare in the county. The clinic offers services such as minor surgeries and emergencies, immunizations, family medicine, behavioral health, chronic care, and in-house X-rays and labs. The clinic operates locations in the Bastian and Bland communities which are open Monday through Friday. Kissito Healthcare operates the [Bland Nursing & Rehab facility](#) in Bastian, which provides services primarily to seniors and individuals with various health care challenges; including physical, occupational, and speech therapy, IV therapy, comprehensive wound care, and dietary, nutritional, and medication management. The county does not have any full-service hospitals, and individuals who require critical or specialized care would need to travel to facilities in adjacent localities, such as [Wythe County Community Hospital](#) in Wytheville, [Carillion Tazewell Community Hospital](#) in Tazewell, [Carillion New River Valley Medical Center](#) in Christiansburg, and

[West Virginia University Medicine Princeton Community Hospital](#) in Princeton, West Virginia.

Emergency Services

Bland County receives fire protection services from the Bland County Volunteer Fire Department, the Hollybrook-Mechanicsburg Volunteer Fire Department, and the Rocky Gap Volunteer Fire Department. The Bland County Volunteer Rescue Squad delivers rescue and emergency medical services throughout the county. The Bland County Sheriff's Office is the primary source for law enforcement in the county, while the Area 26 office of Virginia State Police Division Four provides secondary law enforcement services in Bland County.



TRANSPORTATION

Goal: An adequate transportation system that links highways, transit systems, greenways, sidewalks, and bike trails to provide multimodal transportation options.

Introduction

Transportation planning plays an essential role in shaping communities, promoting economic development, and efficient growth patterns. The main transportation in the County is the road and highway system which includes all public roadways ranging from the Interstate 77 corridor to unpaved state secondary roads. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is responsible for all roadway maintenance and construction. VDOT's Bristol district is responsible for managing the County's roads, and Bland County works with VDOT representatives to coordinate and request maintenance and improvement projects. The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission hosts the Rural Technical Committee (RTC), which is responsible for most transportation planning, and for producing the rural Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (RLRTP).

Urban Development Areas (UDA)

Because of the primarily rural nature of Bland County, no Urban Development Areas (UDA) were identified in accordance with Code of Virginia [§ 15.2-2223.1](#). Urban development areas are considered areas suitable for higher density development and can be designated by localities to meet projected residential and commercial growth. The boundaries and size of these areas must be reviewed every five years. Code of Virginia [§ 15.2-2223](#) also states that transportation plans shall designate "a system of

transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations that include the designation of new and expanded transportation facilities and that support the planned development of the territory covered by the plan and shall include, as appropriate, roadways, bicycle accommodations, pedestrian accommodations, railways, bridges, waterways, airports, ports, freight corridors, and public transportation facilities."

The VTrans 2045 plan considers the Mountain West Corridor which consists of I-77 and U.S. Route 52, as a Corridor of Statewide Significance (CoSS) within Bland County, shown in **Figure 7**.

Roads

Interstate System

Interstate 77 plays a vital role in the transportation of people and goods. I-77 travels nearly 22 miles South/North from the Wythe County line to the West Virginia border in Mercer County. There are six exit/entrance ramps along I-77 in Bland County, which include:

- Exit 47
- Exit 52
- Exit 58
- Exit 62
- Exit 64
- Exit 66



As of 2024, the portion of I-77 through Bland County received an average of 16,000 annual vehicles per day.

Highways, Secondary, and Private Roads

VDOT classifies the roads within the county as the following:

- Primary (Rural primary or arterial highways, two-lane, multi-lane, and divided highways with controlled access points)
- Secondary (rural secondary road or collector road, two to four lanes and typically undivided)
- Private

A segment of U.S. Route 52 is considered a minor arterial road running through Bland County. The segment runs from Route 42 south in Bland proper to Route 42 north. The other minor arterial in Bland County is a segment of VA Route 42 that runs from Route 52 east in Bland proper to the east at the Giles County line. Bland County has twelve major collector roads, including:

- VA Route 42
- VA Route 61
- VA Route 98
- VA Route 52
- VA Route 606
- VA Route 614
- VA Route 666
- VA Route 601
- VA Route 608
- VA Route 615
- VA Route 717
- VA Route 1001

- VA Route 1002

To view all the various types of roads within the County, see **Figure 8**.

Scenic Roads/Byways

A scenic byway/road is a road recognized for one or more of six "intrinsic qualities": archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic. Scenic Roads / Byways are designated to preserve and protect the state's / county's scenic but often less-traveled roads and help to promote tourism and economic development. Bland County has three designated Scenic roads and three Virginia State Byways, which are shown in **Figure 9**.



Figure 7: Corridors of Statewide Significance

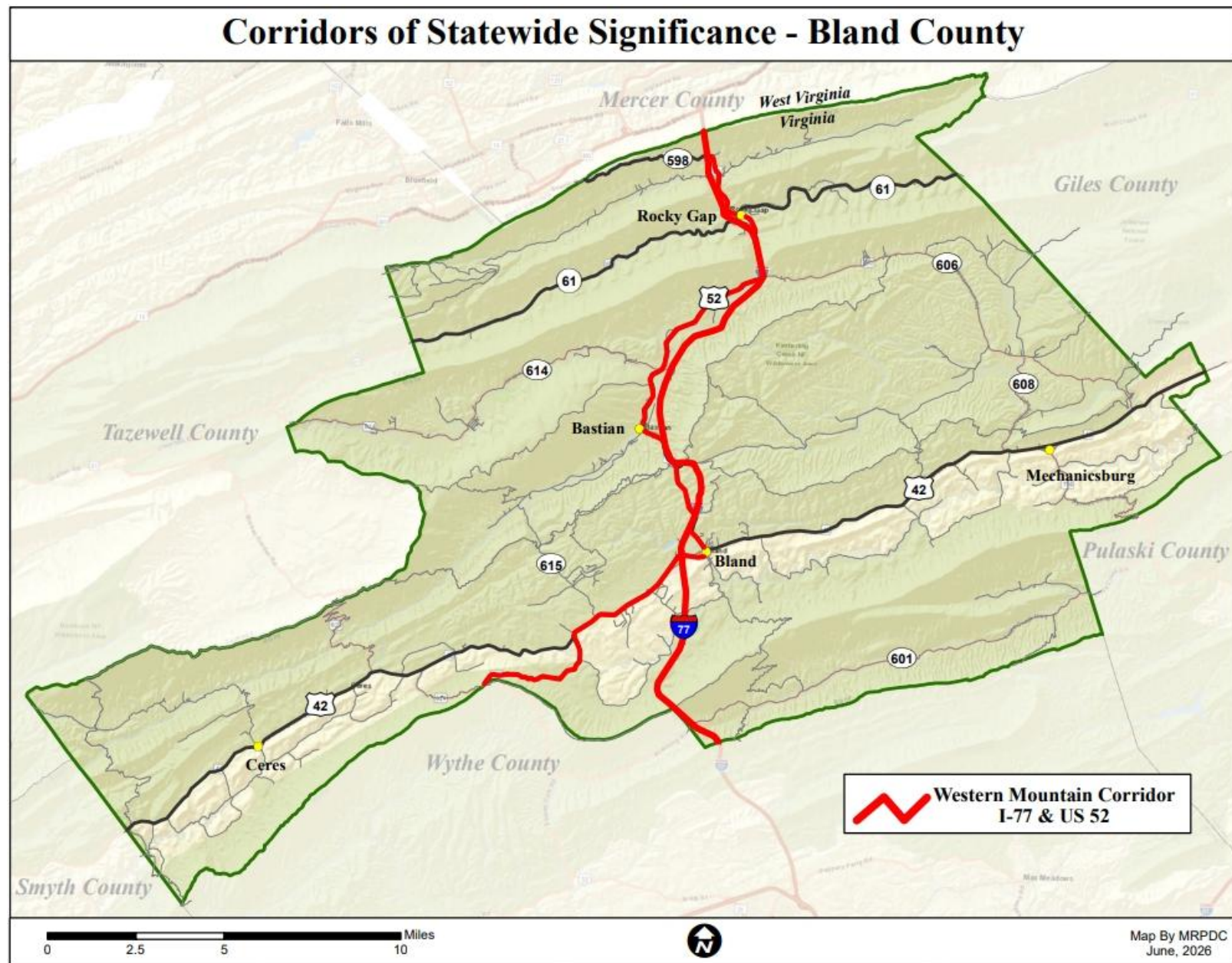


Figure 8: Road Classifications

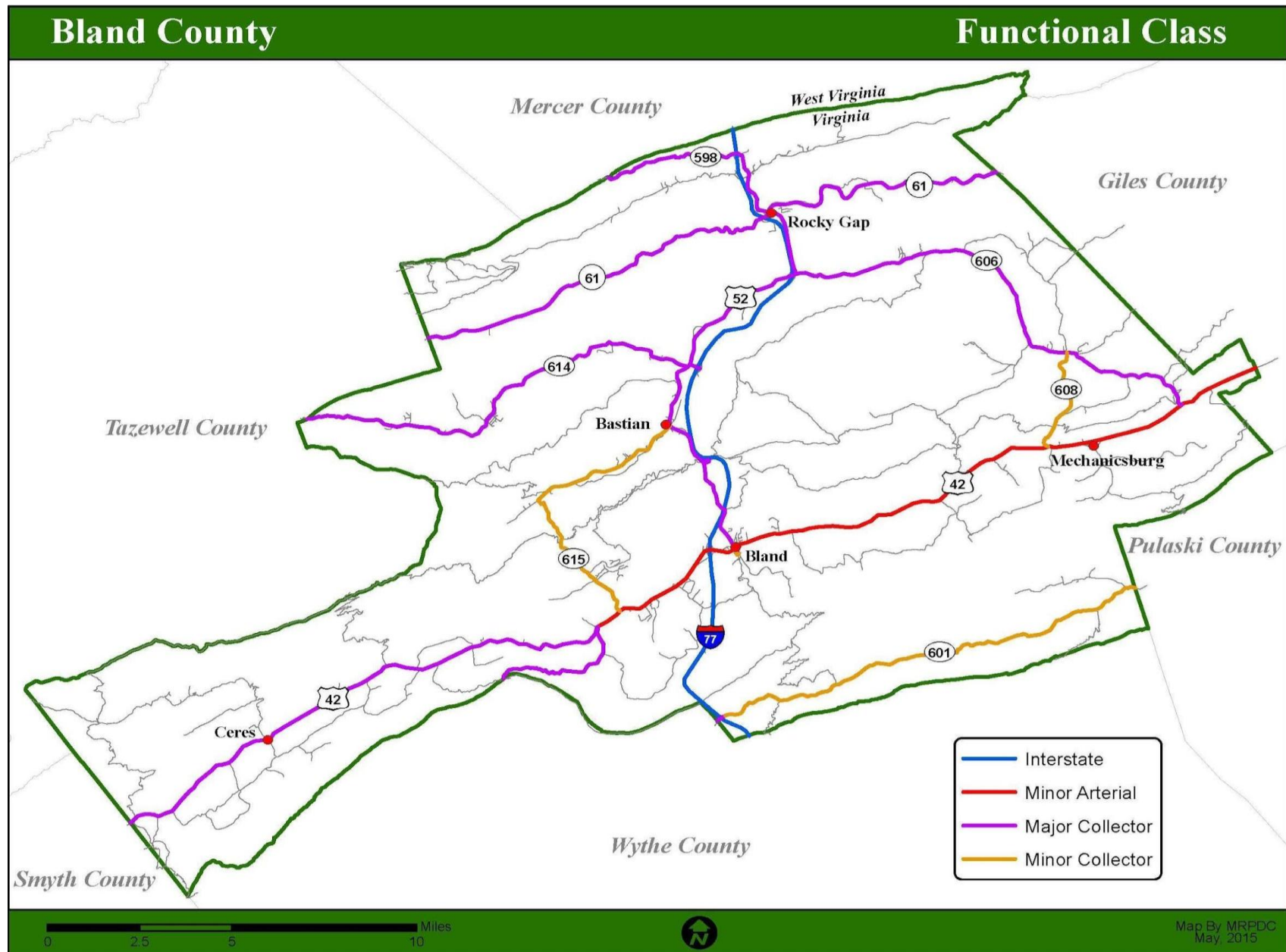
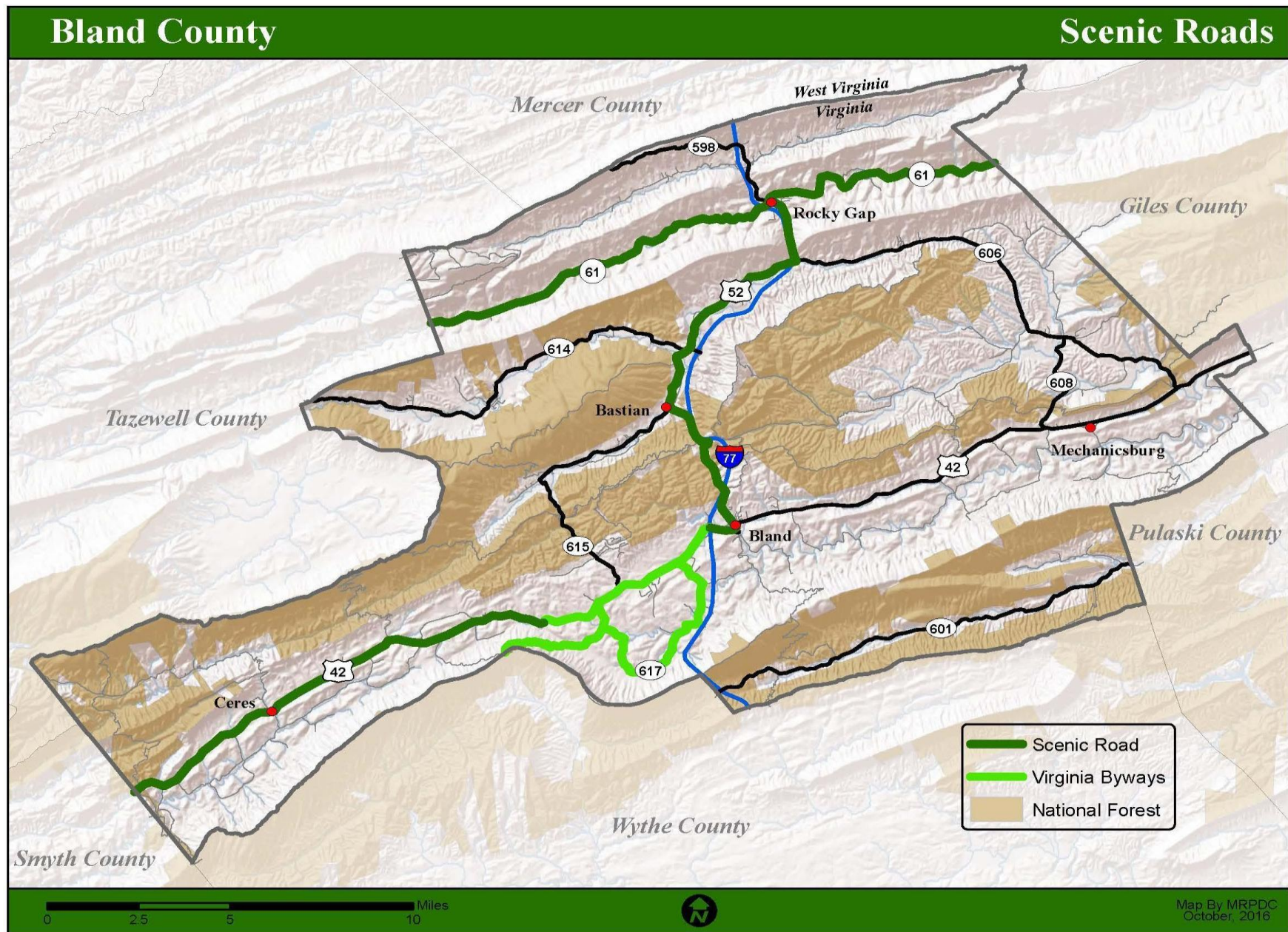


Figure 9: Scenic Roads and Byways



Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP), House Bill 2, House Bill 1887 - SMART SCALE Program

Transportation needs in rural communities such as Bland County typically exceed available funding resources. In Virginia, most state-funded transportation projects are managed by the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) through the Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP), which allocates funding for projects over a rolling six-year period pursuant to Code of Virginia [§33.2-214](#). Since 2016, major transportation projects have been evaluated and prioritized through VDOT's SMART SCALE process, which stands for System Management and Allocation of Resources for Transportation: Safety, Congestion, Accessibility, Land Use, Economic Development, and Environment. This process scores projects based on key factors, including: improvements to safety, congestion reduction, accessibility, land use, economic development, and the environment. The evaluation focuses on the extent to which a project addresses problems or needs relative to the requested funding for the project.

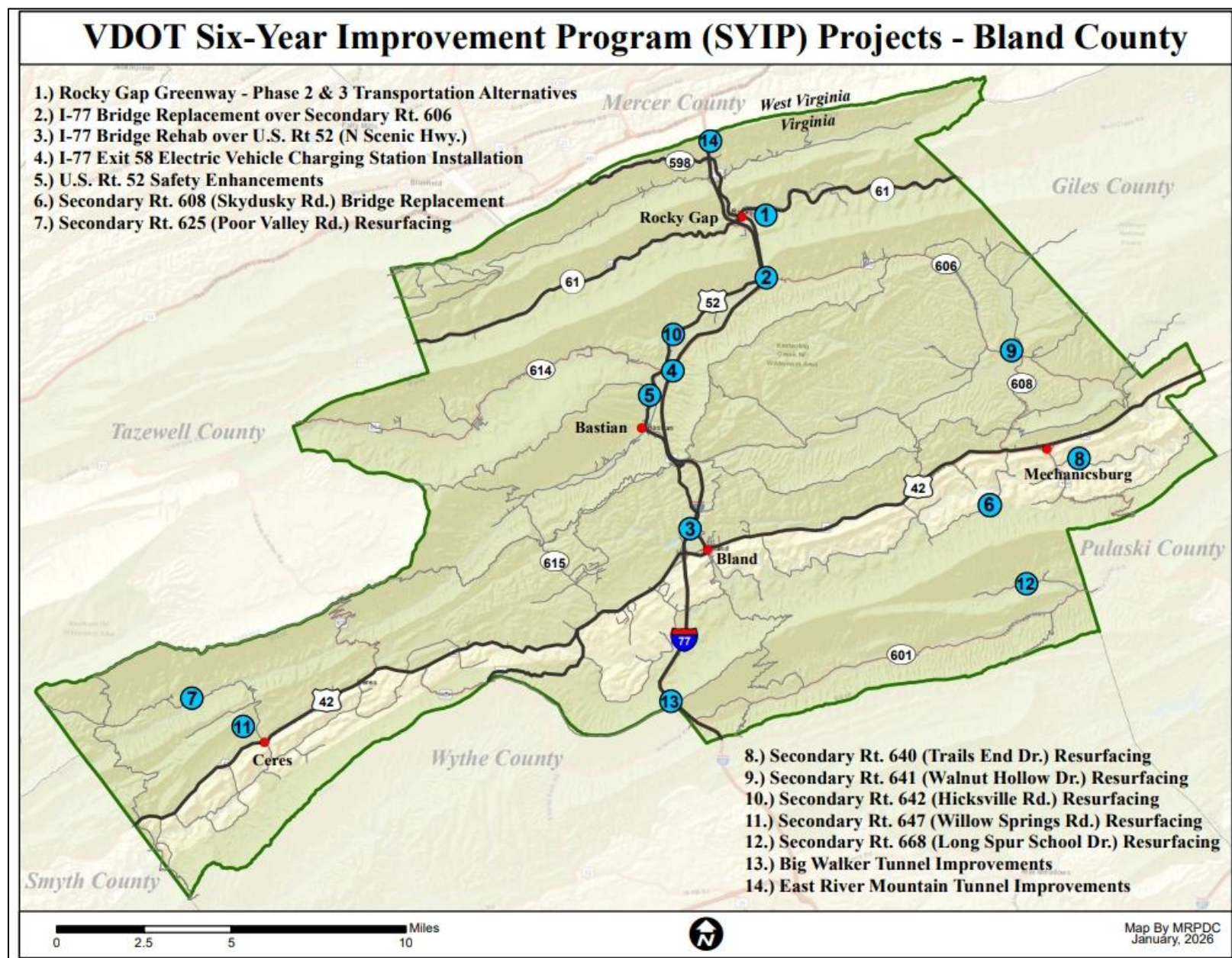
For Bland County, this process means that locally identified transportation priorities must compete statewide for limited funding. Projects must demonstrate measurable benefits under SMART SCALE evaluation criteria to receive state funding. The predominantly rural nature of the county presents significant safety and accessibility concerns, and Bland County must strategically align its transportation priorities with state scoring

criteria while continuing to support economic development, connectivity, and public safety.

The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission represents the regional agency that works with Bland County representatives to prioritize transportation projects. It is important that the county work with VDOT and the planning district commission to be aware of changes to the planning process. Not all transportation projects are subject to the scoring system of SMART SCALE. The statute excludes safety projects and asset management projects such as rehabilitating aging pavements and bridges. Certain funding sources are exempted, including Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, Highway Safety Improvement, Transportation Alternatives, Regional Surface Transportation and Revenue Sharing programs, and secondary/urban formula funds. Projects included in the SYIP have advanced through the Commonwealth's prioritization and funding process and represent the Commonwealth's near-term transportation investment commitments. SYIP projects reflect identified safety, maintenance, and mobility needs and provide insight into the types of improvements that are most competitive for state funding under current evaluation criteria. For more information regarding the projects either planned or in progress within Bland County through the SYIP, see **Figure 10** below.



Figure 10: VDOT Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) Projects



SMART SCALE Projects

Bland County's priority transportation project is to address [safety issues](#) along U.S. Route 52 in the Bastian area, at the intersection of Route 666 (Indian Village Trail) and Grapefield Road. This area off I-77 exit 58 has long been slated for commercial and industrial development, easily seen by the upcoming development at the exit, including the [Bland County Commerce Park](#), and the Love's Travel Stop. Improvements include the modification and addition of turn lanes, and new signage near the Wolf Creek Indian Village and pedestrian trail alerting motorists of pedestrians. As of 2024, the project is in its design phase and is estimated to cost between \$4.5-6.6 million. This remains the only ongoing SMART SCALE project in the county.



Rural Rustic Road Program

The Rural Rustic Road concept, first enacted by the 2002 Session of the General Assembly of Virginia, is a practical approach to paving Virginia's low volume unpaved roads. A pilot program, implemented in July 2002, demonstrated the success of this concept. It ensures that VDOT practices environmental and financial stewardship while providing basic paved access to more of Virginia's rural countryside. The 2003 Session of the General Assembly amended the legislation to provide that this method be considered as a first alternative for improving all unpaved roads in the future. The Rural Rustic Road Program, under Code of Virginia [§ 33.2-332](#) (previously 33.1-70.1), became effective July 1, 2003. The Virginia Department of Transportation's Local Assistance Division, working with the Rural Rustic Road Policy Committee, established the initial guidelines for this program.

The Rural Rustic Road concept is the paving of an existing unpaved road with a compacted or impervious surface, the reestablishment of existing associated ditches and shoulders, and usually the new hard-surfaced road is on the same horizontal and vertical alignment as the prior gravel pervious area. Furthermore, a focal point of the program is to leave trees, vegetation, side slopes, and open drainage abutting the roadway, undisturbed to the maximum extent possible.

Many of the County roads are paved; however, some of the less traveled roads and those with the fewest residents are unpaved yet maintained by VDOT. The County entertains requests for paving roads and reviews paving options on a case-by-case basis while working closely with VDOT to determine eligibility. For

more information on the county's road pavement conditions, see **Figure 11** below.

System Deficiencies, Potential for Safety Improvements (PSI), and the 2045 Rural Long Range Improvement Plan

VTrans is Virginia's statewide long-range multimodal policy plan that establishes the strategic vision, mid-term planning, long-term planning, and strategic actions for the Commonwealth's transportation systems. The update of VTrans2045 links the investment priorities to the goals, provides more detailed investment strategies to expand upon the investment priorities, and introduces a framework for performance-based planning. For more information on Bland County's specific VTrans priorities, see **Figure 12**.



Figure 11: Primary Road Pavement Conditions

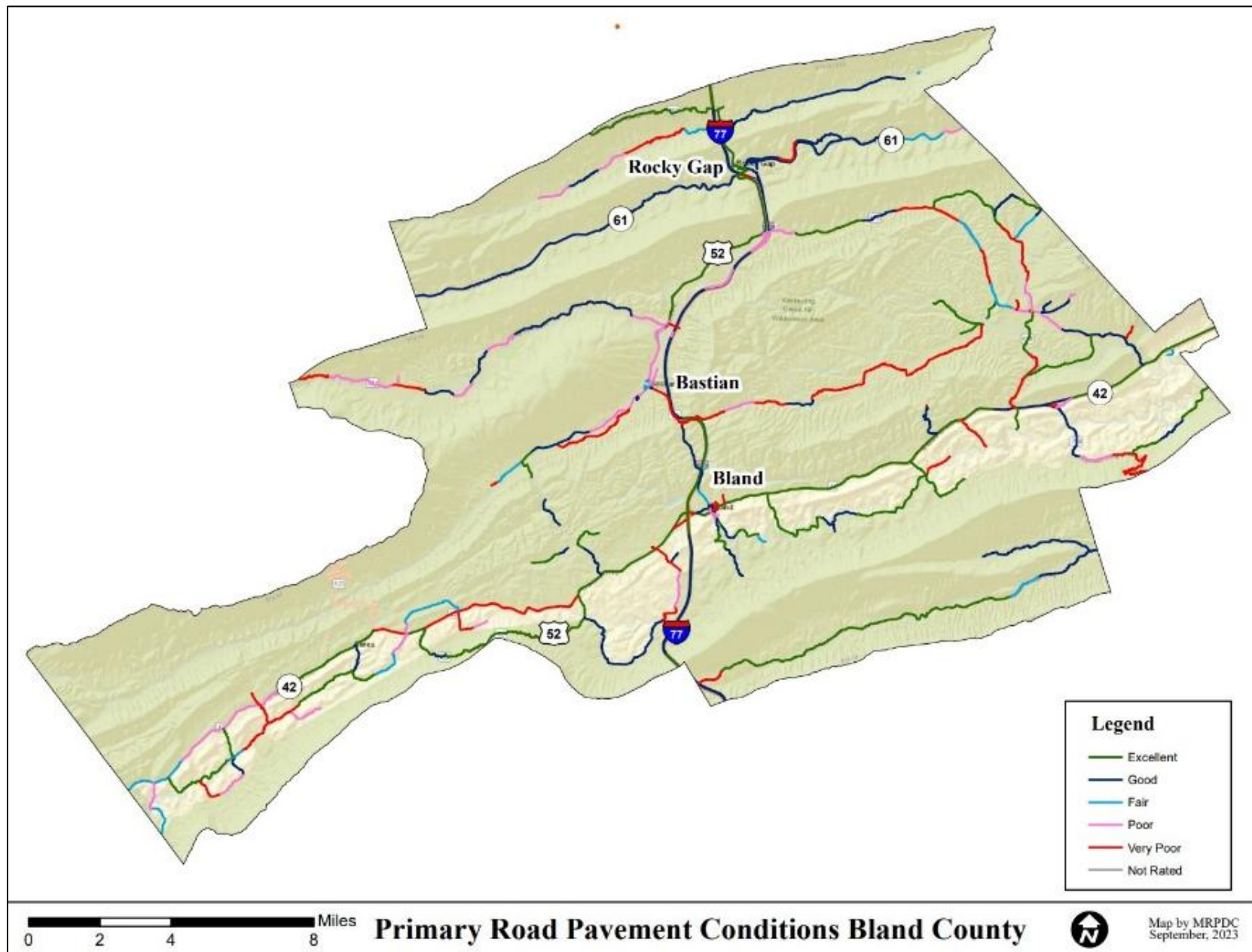
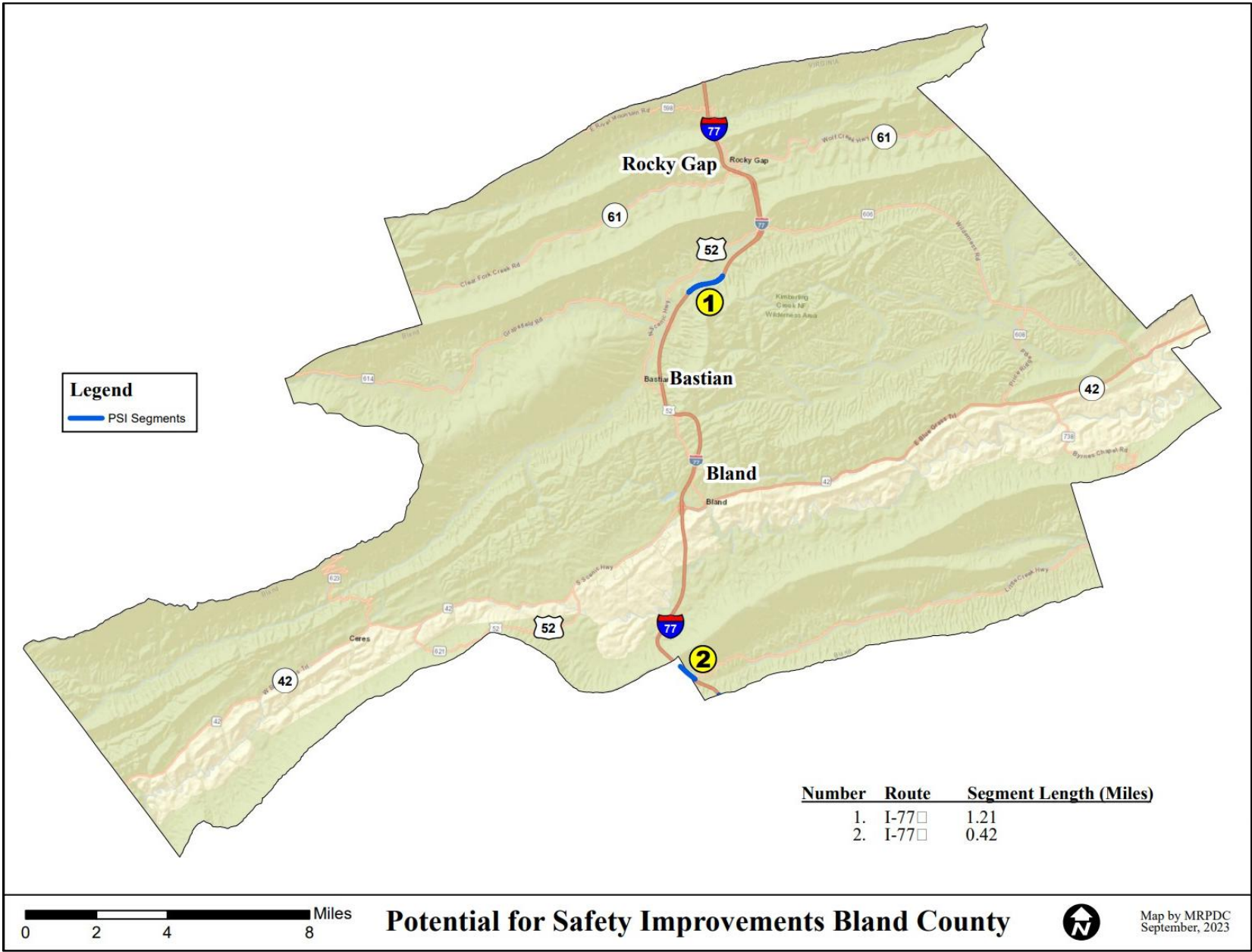


Figure 12: Potential for Safety Improvements in Bland County



Alternative Methods of Transportation

Mountain Lynx Transit

Mountain Lynx Transit, a Division of the District Three Governmental Cooperative, is the main public transit service offered in Bland County. The District Three Governmental Cooperative headquarters are based in Marion. Certain areas in Bland County are served by Mountain Lynx Transit buses on specified days of the week. On Mondays and Thursdays, the Bland, Route 42 East, Mechanicsburg, Hollybrook, Kimberling, and Bastian areas are served (Monday buses run to Bluefield, while Thursday buses run to Wytheville). On Tuesdays, the Route 42 West, Ceres, and Bland areas are served with service toward Wytheville.

Rail

There are no freight or passenger rail lines that run directly through Bland County. Norfolk Southern operates freight rail lines north of the county in West Virginia and south of the county in Wythe County, including the Shenandoah Line. While rail infrastructure is not located within the county itself, nearby passenger rail access is available at the Roanoke Amtrak station, which opened in October 2017 and is served by the Northeast Regional with daily service to Central and Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and other major cities along the Northeast Corridor.

Additional regional passenger rail expansion efforts may further improve accessibility for Bland County residents. In 2024, the [Virginia Passenger Rail Authority \(VPRA\)](#) reached an agreement with Norfolk Southern to acquire its N-Line, and construction

began in 2025 on facilities that will allow passenger rail service to expand to Christiansburg, Virginia. While Bland County does not have direct rail access, these nearby freight and passenger rail facilities provide indirect connectivity that supports regional mobility and economic development.

Air Travel

Bland County does not have any airports within County limits; however, the County is within a short distance of several general aviation and commercial airports providing service to many major destinations.

General Aviation Airports

There are two (2) general aviation airports within the service area of the county.

Raleigh County Memorial Airport (BKW)

Located approximately 62 miles north of Bland County near Beckley, West Virginia, the airport is primarily catered toward general aviation and features two runways. The airport offers scheduled nonstop commercial flights to Charlotte, North Carolina provided by Contour Airlines as part of a subsidy through the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)'s [Essential Air Service \(EAS\) program](#). Air cargo services are also provided.

Virginia Highlands Airport (VJI)

Located 73 miles southwest of Bland County in Abingdon, this general aviation airport provides private, charter, and military flights. The airport also provides hangar rentals.



Regional Airports

There are two (2) regional airports within the service area of the county, shown in **Figure 13**.

Mercer County Airport (BLF)

Located approximately 23 miles north of Bland County near Bluefield, West Virginia, this general aviation airport provides private and charter flights, fueling, pilot services, and various business and medevac flights.

Mountain Empire Airport (MKJ)

Located 26 miles southwest of Bland County in unincorporated Smyth County, this airport features a 5,252 by 75 feet runway, which can accommodate a wide range of aircraft serving private and charter flights. The airport does not offer any commercial passenger flights.

Commercial Airports

There are three (3) commercial airports within the service area of the county.

Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport (ROA)

Located 87 miles east of Bland County in Roanoke, the airport offers nonstop service to many major cities. Service includes passenger flights, general aviation, airfreight carriers, corporate, air taxi, charter operators and the military.

Tri-Cities Airport (TRI)

Located 100 miles southwest of Bland County in Blountville, Tennessee, the commercial airport is a full-service airport serving the Tri-Cities region of Bristol, Johnson City, and Kingsport, along with other areas in Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina and

Kentucky. Non-stop flights are offered to international airports including Charlotte, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, St. Petersburg/Clearwater, Florida, Orlando (Sanford), Florida, and Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas. In recent years, the airport has expanded services by adding new destinations, including Washington Dulles and Orlando International Airport via [Breeze Airways](#), and Chicago-O'Hare via [United Airlines](#) and [American Airlines](#).

Piedmont Triad International Airport (GSO)

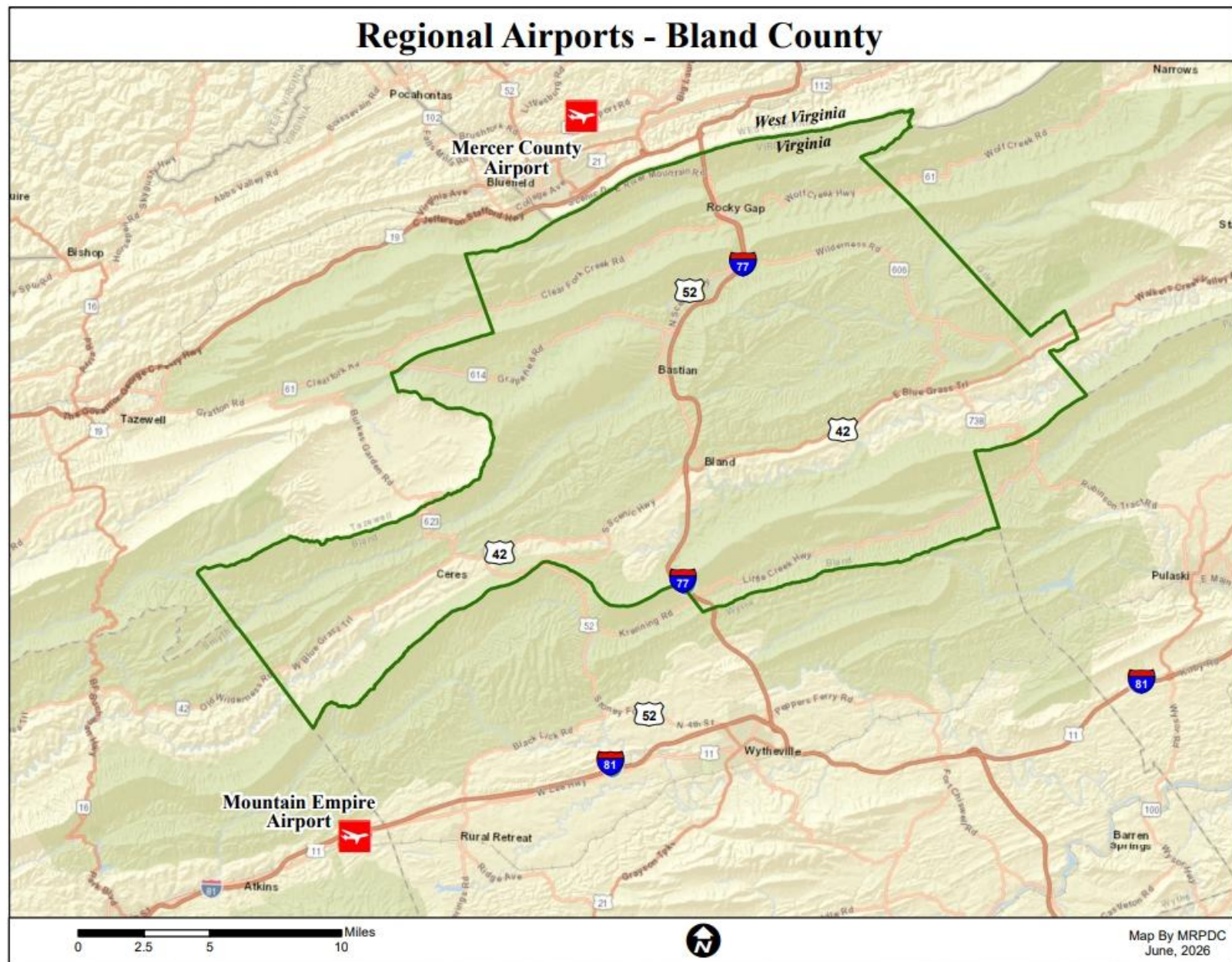
Located 121 miles southeast of Bland County near Greensboro, North Carolina, this commercial airport is centrally located to serve the Piedmont Triad region of Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point, along with surrounding areas in North Carolina and Virginia. The airport provides nonstop service to several key hubs along the East Coast as well as in the Midwest. The airport also serves as a hub for several cargo operators.

Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT)

Located 153 miles south of Bland County in Charlotte, North Carolina, it is the sixth busiest airport in the world, serving over 58 million passengers as of 2024. The airport is American Airlines' second largest hub, and nearly 200 nonstop flights provide service to national and international destinations.



Figure 13: Regional Airports



Pedestrian/Bicycling

Bland County offers many hiking trails throughout the Jefferson National Forest including 56 miles of the Appalachian Trail running the entire length of the county. Similarly, the county has made efforts to implement greenways. These are corridors of open space which follow natural assets while supporting environmental conservation.

The push for outdoor recreation activities in Southwest Virginia has helped the region capitalize on its natural assets. With Bland's numerous National Forests, several projects in the county are utilizing this resource. Thanks to the newly completed enhancement project in Rocky Gap, the community is now walkable, with safe access to schools, shopping, and other community facilities. Bland has sidewalks connecting to schools, shopping, the fairgrounds, and the library.

Appalachian Trail

In 2011, Bland County was designated an Appalachian Trail Community, which created a partnership between the County and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Two proposed projects in the County to provide pedestrian access to the Trail and increase safety are:

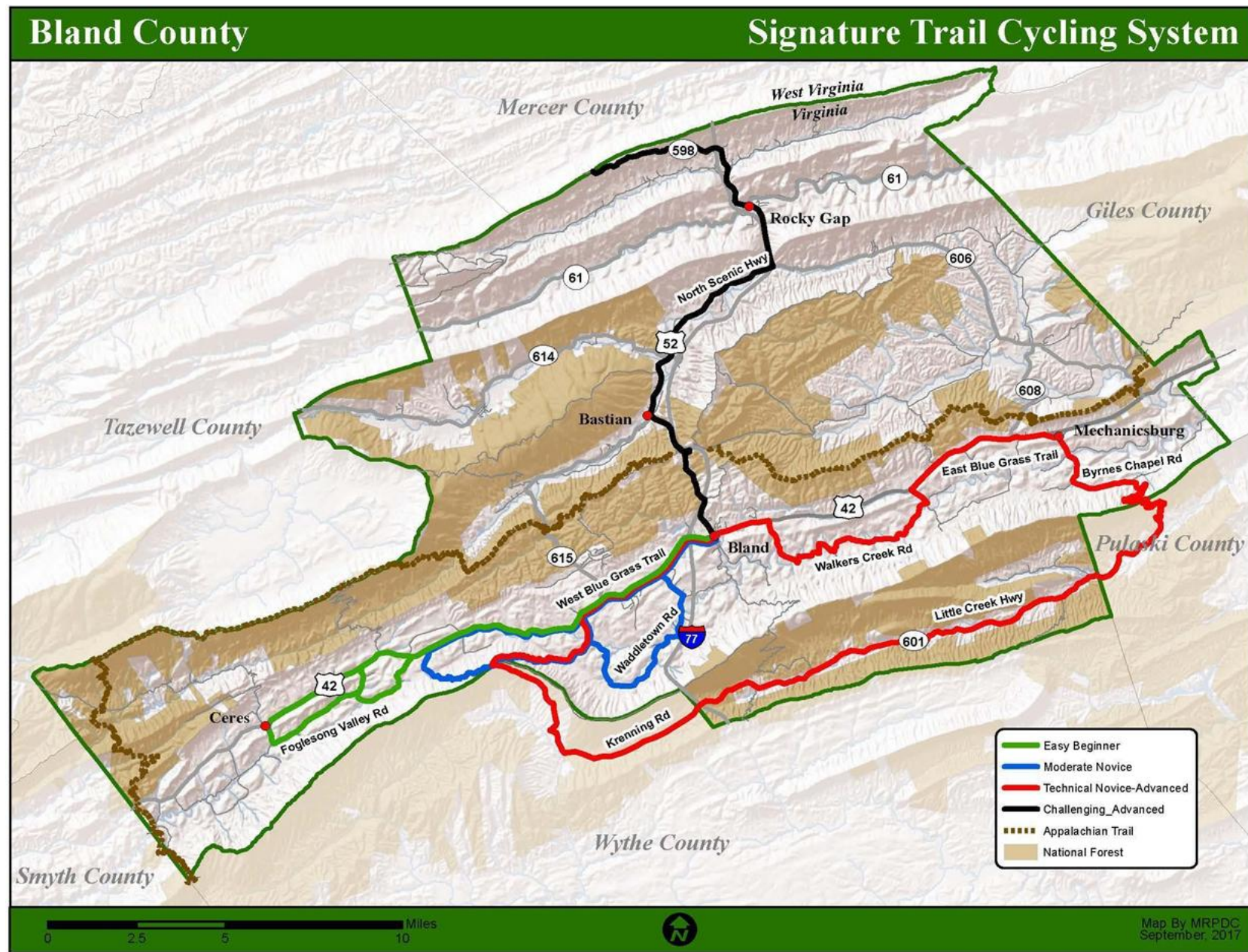
- Addition of path for access to and from the Appalachian Trail from **Route 42 to Route 671**
- Improvement for pedestrian access at S. Route 52 and Route 612 intersection for the Appalachian Trail

Bicycle Trails

In 2011, Bland County and the Economic Development Authority (EDA) developed the Frederico Morini Signature Bicycle Trail system. The trails will utilize State Primary and Secondary roads, and the trail network follows directional signs throughout the County. The Trail System will be the centerpiece of the county's tourism initiative and will play a large role in economic development. To view the county's Bicycle Trail network, see **Figure 14: Bland Cycling Trail System.**



Figure 14: Bland Cycling Trail System



LAND USE

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

Introduction

This chapter is intended to lay the foundation for zoning decisions, rezonings, and long-range planning by identifying appropriate growth areas, development constraints, and rural preservation priorities. Key considerations include existing land use patterns, environmental constraints such as slope, groundwater, watershed, and floodplain constraints, infrastructure, and community goals. The plan emphasizes the direction of growth to areas with existing or planned infrastructure while preserving the county's rural and agricultural land. Future land use decisions should be evaluated for consistency with these policies to ensure development respects surrounding uses, infrastructure capacity, and community character.

Current Land Use

The existing land use information for Bland County was collected and mapped by the staff of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC). Based on zoning information, approximately 95 percent of the land in Bland County was used

for agriculture and conservation/recreation in 2016. The remaining five percent was utilized for more intensive commercial, industrial, residential, and public/semi-public uses.⁵

Lands classified as Conservation/Recreation, including publicly owned forest lands and acreage managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Jefferson National Forest, represent a substantial portion of the County's total land area. These lands are generally not available for urban-scale residential, commercial, or industrial development due to ownership, environmental constraints, or long-term conservation objectives. As a result, development pressures within the County have historically occurred on privately owned agricultural and rural lands located outside of federally managed areas. Understanding this distribution of land ownership and land use is essential for evaluating future growth patterns and long-term land use planning.

Bland County's structures are scattered in a relatively random fashion along almost every road in the county. Several small communities are located along major roads and intersections. There is a tendency for these communities to grow toward one

⁵ The land use inventory reflected in this section is based on a parcel-level land use survey conducted in 2016 using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis and windshield survey. While the inventory has not been comprehensively updated since, it continues to provide an accurate representation of the county's overall development pattern given its rural character.



another, creating what are, in effect, linear communities. This trend can be seen along portions of Routes 42, 52, and 61.

Current Land Use Controls

Subdivision Ordinance

Bland County adopted its Subdivision Ordinance in 1991 to regulate the division of land and ensure that new development is served by adequate infrastructure and access. This ordinance provides standards for lot layout, road design, drainage, and utility coordination to promote orderly growth and protect public health, safety, and welfare.

As development patterns evolve, the County may periodically review and update the ordinance to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan's goals, objectives, and land use recommendations.

Manufactured Home Park Ordinance (MHP)

There is a Manufactured Home Park Ordinance in Bland County that contains the rules and regulations for constructing a manufactured home park in the county. This ordinance should be incorporated into the zoning ordinance at such time as the planning commission and the board of supervisors feel comfortable amending the zoning ordinance to add a Manufactured Home Park District to the official zoning map along with the accompanying regulations.

Zoning Ordinance

Bland County adopted a zoning ordinance in 1996 that appears to be serving the county's needs for the present. The planning

commission and the board of supervisors should continue to monitor development trends in the county and amend the ordinances as necessary to encourage development into those sections of the county that are provided with water and sewerage facilities.

Zoning Districts

Zoning districts are essential to Bland County's land use strategy and are established to create a cohesive and organized framework for future growth and development. By creating specific districts, the County seeks to promote compatible patterns of land use by designating appropriate areas for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and rural use. These regulations are vital for protecting public health, safety, and welfare by minimizing land use conflicts, managing development density, and ensuring that infrastructure and public services can adequately support new growth. The plan supports the community's long-term vision and policy direction, while zoning districts function as the principal regulatory mechanism for achieving these objectives. By translating the Plan's goals into enforceable standards, zoning ensures that Bland County's development remains consistent with its vision for a sustainable and well-balanced future.

Agricultural (AG)

This district is designated to allow for the preservation and protection of the county's existing rural character and agricultural base as well as accommodating low density non-farm dwellings and to make suitable and developable areas for both recreational home development and development along major roadways.



Commercial (C)

This district comprises a limited number of commercial businesses (retail, office, and service businesses).

Industrial (I)

This district allows for existing and planned light or heavy industrial operations.

Physical Development Constraints

Based on the existing land use data, along with a study of the previous land use maps, show that most of the intensive uses of land in Bland County are taking place around the existing communities, Bland, Bastian, Rocky Gap, Mechanicsburg, and Ceres. However, this trend is shifting toward a more linear form of development. This type can be seen along the Interstate 77 corridor and the major roads of the county.

Land development is naturally restricted naturally by certain physical features, such as slope, watershed and surface water conditions, groundwater conditions, and problems associated with floodplains.

Slope Constraints

Approximately 75 percent of the land in Bland County has a slope of 20 percent or greater. Slopes 20 percent or greater do not preclude development. However, the provision of services (water, sewage, other utilities) is more difficult and therefore more costly. The cost of constructing and maintaining roads is also higher. The use of septic tanks for sewage treatment is generally limited by steep slopes, and in some instances, public sewage treatment systems are not economically feasible.

Erosion and sediment control during and after construction is also an additional cost factor. Therefore, low densities (dwelling units per acre) and extreme care in platting are recommended when developing on slopes of 20 percent and greater.

A hidden cost to developing steep areas is the expense of improving existing roads to handle traffic generated by the development. Costs of reconstructing and improving can be extremely high, and the cost of improving access roads should be recognized as part of the cost of any additional development, especially when areas of changing relief are involved.

Watershed and Surface Water Constraints

The boundaries of the watersheds are an important restriction to the provision of sewage collection facilities, since gravity flow is a highly desirable feature for sewage lines. Once a watershed boundary is crossed, it becomes necessary to provide treatment in that watershed. Where watersheds pose a problem for the provision of sewage treatment facilities, lot sizes should be kept large enough so that septic disposal systems are not overloaded and central treatment is required.

The characteristics of the area and the amount of development in a watershed are also important for the stream flow. The most important are peak flow and low flow characteristics, total run off, and water quality. Such characteristics can be altered by the type of vegetation, the percentage of area made impervious by various types of development, by alterations of the stream channels, and by changes in the depth of the water table. In general, as development increases within a watershed, the peak flow of the streams is increased, the low flow decreases during



dry weather, total run-off is increased, and water quality may decline if numerous septic systems are in operation or there is increased soil erosion.

Groundwater Constraints

Areas with sinkholes (karst areas) and springs create special problems.⁶ Since little filtration of run-off from surface water or seepage from septic systems occurs, contamination of the water table can be a severe problem. In general, intensive development should be discouraged. However, when development occurs, it is recommended that low densities (larger lot sizes) be maintained. Sewage treatment should be handled by public treatment systems instead of private septic systems. Care should be taken not to build structures or roads over sinkholes or in areas with wide variations in soil depth.

Within the drainage area of the sinkhole, the effect of the development on run-off water must be considered. Sinkholes act as natural storm sewers and have limited capacities to handle run-off. Houses, roads, parking lots, schools, and industrial and commercial structures increase the run-off during rainy periods and may cause localized flooding. When development is allowed in these areas, care should be exercised to see that the capacity of the underground drainage is not exceeded and that the area at the bottom of the sink, where the water drains into the ground, is protected. If these precautions are not observed, flooding may result. If the flow of water is increased beyond the capacity of the

drain in a kitchen sink, or if the drain becomes plugged, the sink will start filling up.

As shown in **Figure 15** and **Figure 16**, there are several areas in Bland County where sink holes (karst areas) could pose problems, and development in these areas should be controlled. These areas are prevalent along Route 42.

⁶ According to Code of Ordinances Sec. 58-81, "Ground water shall mean any water beneath the land surface in the zone of saturation."



Figure 15: Slope Map

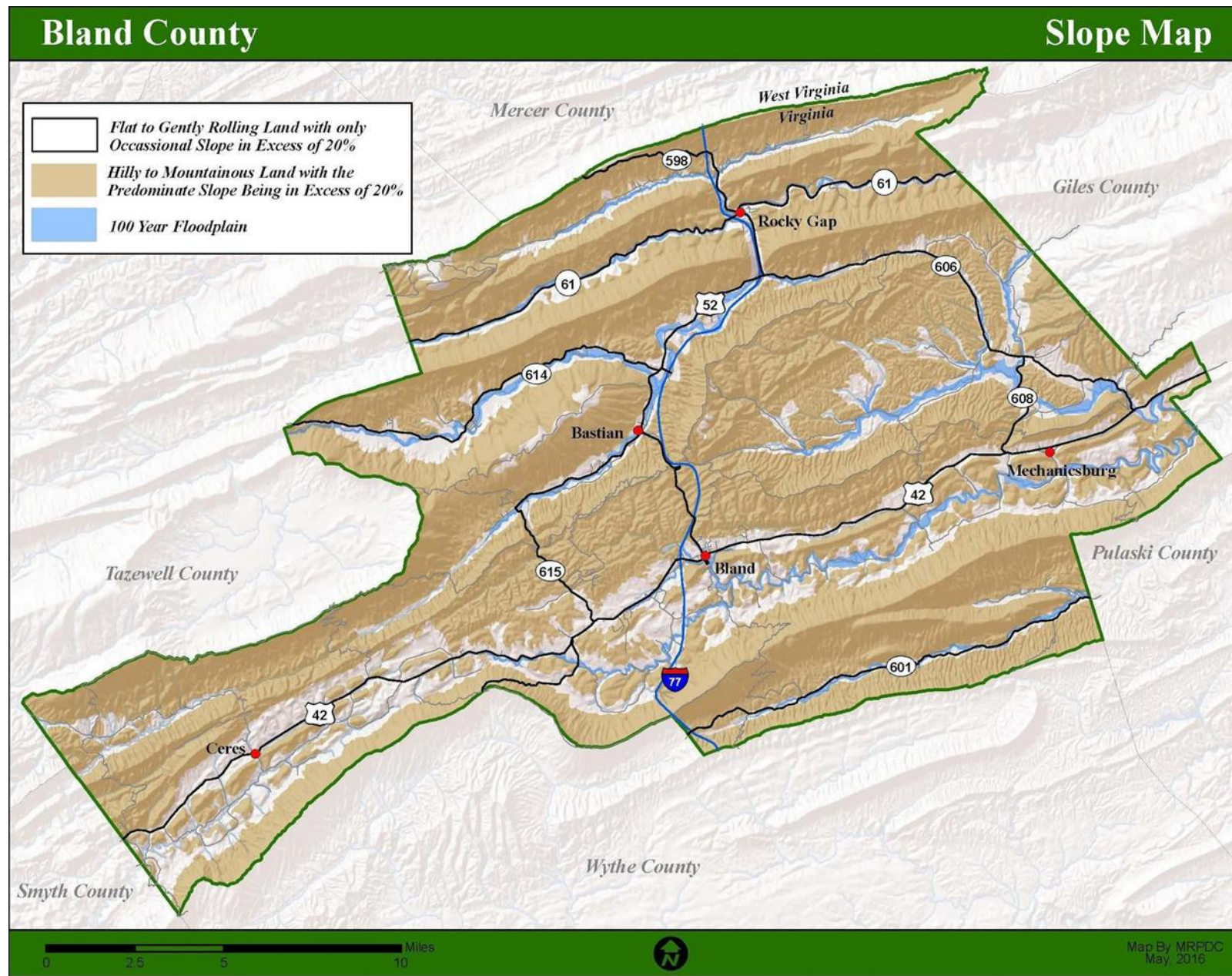
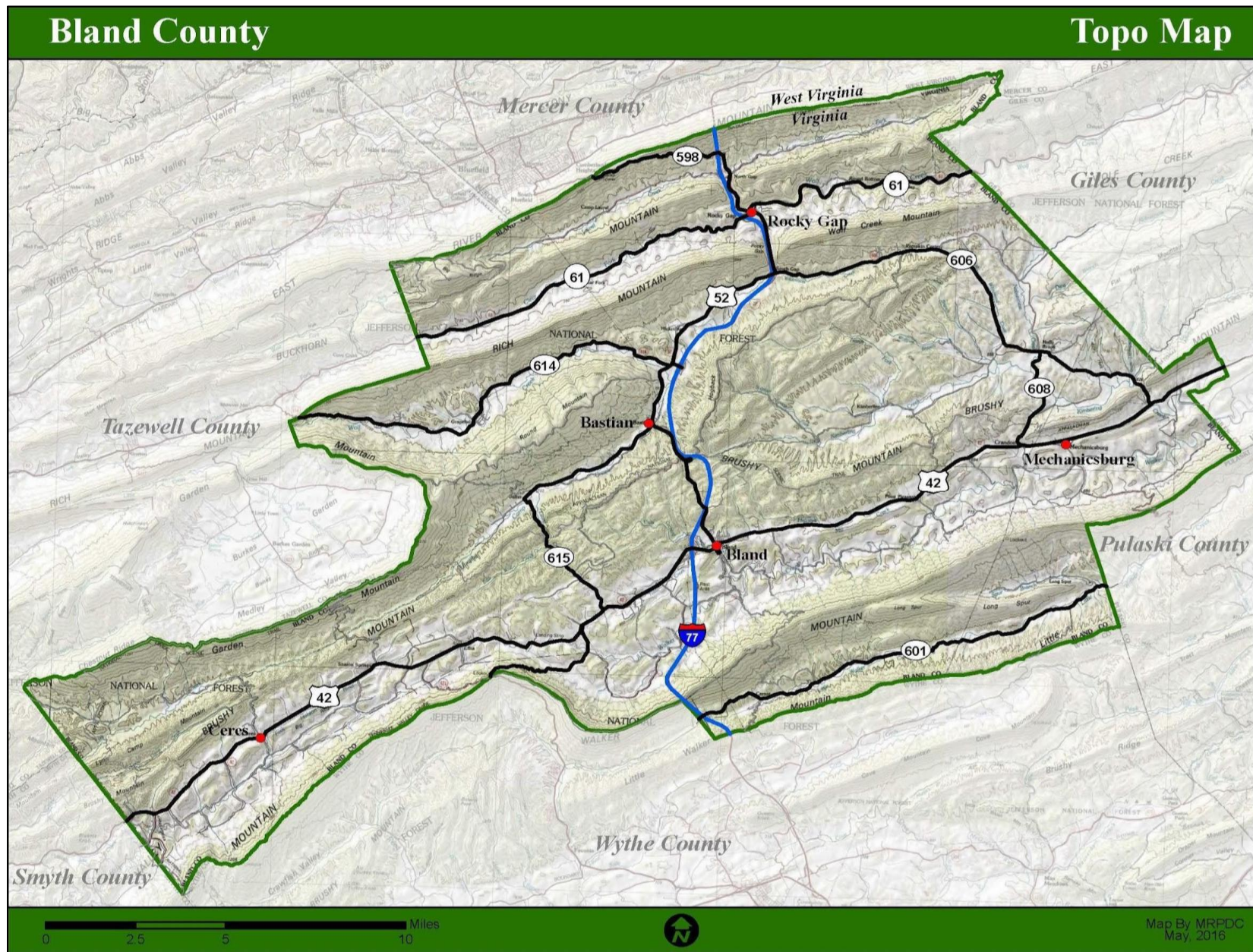


Figure 16: Topographic Map



Floodplain Constraints

Portions of the county are located within the 100-year floodplain as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These areas are generally concentrated along major watercourses and stream valleys. Development within designated flood hazard areas is regulated to reduce risk to life and property and to maintain Bland County's eligibility in the [National Flood Insurance Program \(NFIP\)](#).

While floodplain areas represent a relatively small portion of the county's overall land area, they pose important constraints on future development. Structures built within flood-prone areas may require elevation, floodproofing, and adherence to additional construction standards. As a result, floodplain mapping should be considered when evaluating rezonings, subdivision proposals, and infrastructure extensions. Avoiding inappropriate development in flood-prone areas reduces long-term public costs associated with emergency response, infrastructure repair, and hazard mitigation.

Care should also be taken to prevent the flooding of existing developments on floodplains, which are extremely vulnerable to additional development or modification of the channel upstream.

Challenges with Development

Based on previous data on existing land use surveys, only a relatively small portion of the land is currently being used for intensive development. The rest is sparsely settled.

Development patterns in the Bland County are influenced by a combination of physical, environmental, and infrastructure-related factors. Steep slopes, shallow soils, and variable groundwater yield limit the suitability of certain areas for higher-density development. The county's rural character, history, and limited public water and sewer infrastructure constrain the intensity and location of future growth.

Because a significant portion of the county consists of federally managed forest land or environmentally sensitive terrain, developable land is concentrated in limited areas, meaning residents of the county have access to woodland and open spaces and some vestiges of an older, more rural America is retained. This distribution underscores the importance of coordinating land use decisions with infrastructure capacity, groundwater availability, and environmental protection. A thorough evaluation of these factors will be necessary to ensure that future growth occurs in a manner consistent with the County's rural character and long-term sustainability.

This trend is changing as increased development is beginning to spread out adjacent to highways leading out of existing communities. In effect, it is important to understand that any intensive development occurring in Bland County should be restricted to a relatively small area. This means there will be competition between equally desirable uses of land for the same



tracts. If new industrial sites are to be located in the county, land will have to be converted from agricultural or other low density uses. The amount of land retained for agricultural use will in turn be a limiting factor on residential, commercial, and industrial development. More prudent use of land resources is necessary in already established commercial, residential, and industrial centers.

Growth policies like this will require county planning commission members and county supervisors to make difficult decisions about future land use. It is expected that there will be problems with the specific steps to be followed to implement such a policy. However, the kinds of decisions and problems to be faced are those that can be addressed through community planning. The specific steps to be taken to make such a policy a reality will be presented in the discussion of the recommended goals, objectives, and strategies.

Planned Growth District (PG)

This district classification provides an area of transition between agricultural zones and the commercial and industrial zones. The district applies to properties within the urban growth areas not platted for intensive development due to the low short-term

prospects of the availability of community facilities and in consideration of existing land uses. Because portions of developable land are in what the county considers potential growth areas, as designated in the Comprehensive Plan or any other plan adopted by the county, and may not develop soon, the permitted uses in the PG district shall not lessen the potential for these areas to eventually develop as needed. To view each planned growth district, see Error! Reference source not found., **Figure 17, Figure 18, Figure 19, Figure 20, and Figure 21.**



Figure 17: I-77 Exit 47 PG District



Figure 18: I-77 Exit 52 PG District

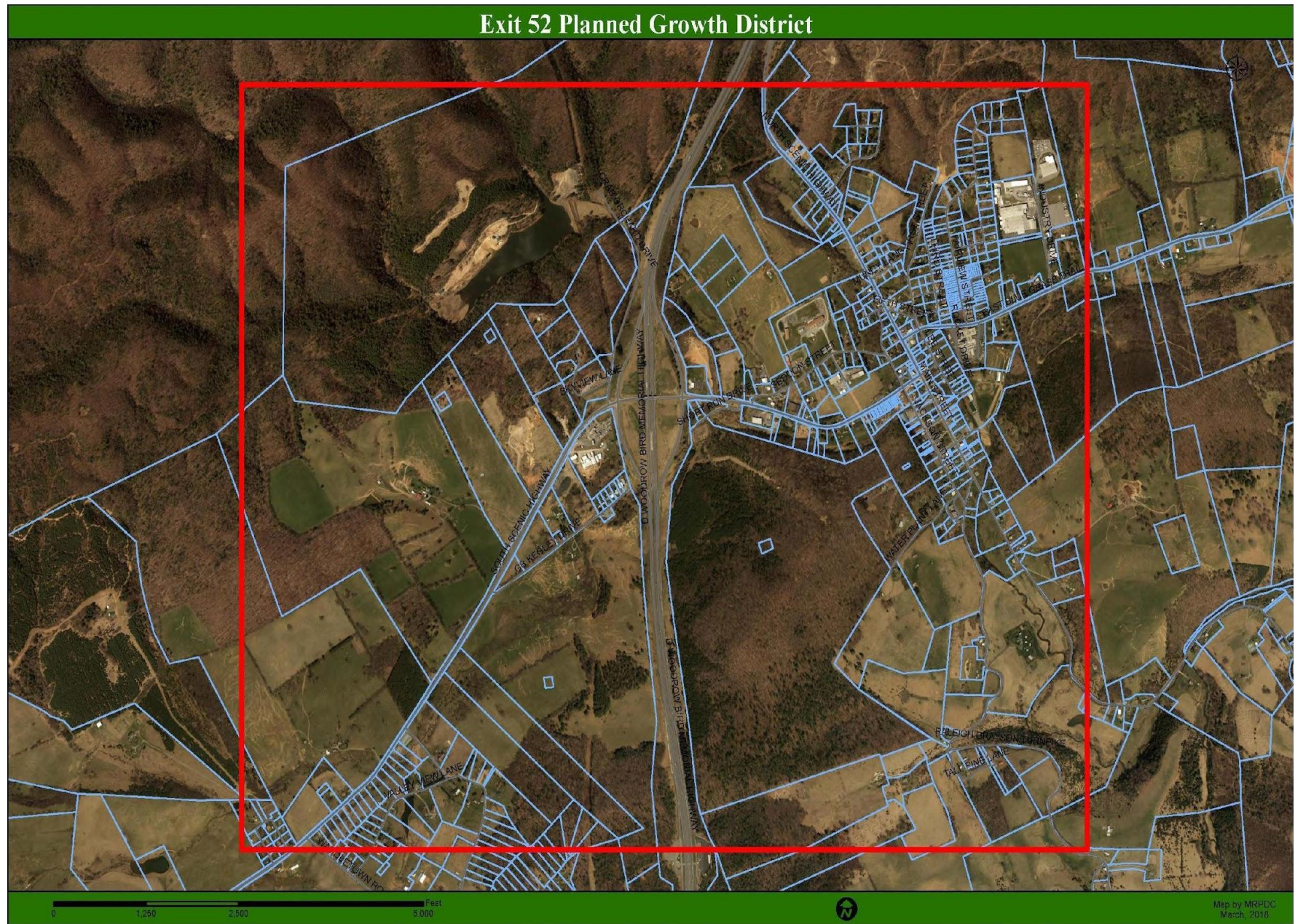


Figure 19: I-77 Exit 58 PG District



Figure 20: I-77 Exit 62 PG District



Figure 21: I-77 Exit 64 PG District



Figure 22: I-77 Exit 66 PG District



Environmental Quality

With approximately one-third of the county designated as National Forest, the natural character and scenic beauty of Bland County are among the most well-preserved in Southwest Virginia. Bland County's citizens protect its natural resources, and many residents note that the rural character is one of the reasons why they chose to locate or stay in the county. Much of the Bland County way of life is tied to the land, and it is one of the driving factors of entrepreneurial economic development in the county. As a designated [Appalachian Trail Community](#), Bland County has 56 miles of preserved trail that beckon adventurers and naturalists and provide economic development opportunities for the county. This well-known trail is only one of many natural assets in the county, but, in combination with the Jefferson National Forest, it often serves as a guiding force for environmental protection efforts.

Goals

To maintain, enhance, and protect Bland's environmental resources, overarching goals have been laid out to help determine the best ways to maintain resources and a high quality of life while not being detrimental to County industries, including:

- Providing clean, high-quality water to meet the domestic, economic, and recreational needs of the community.
- Protecting high-quality natural areas and sites with rare plants and animals.
- Protecting watersheds, wetlands, and streams to reduce pollution runoff, soil erosion, and flooding.

- Promoting environmentally sensitive development that respects natural areas and enhances the quality of our built environment.
- Creating a cost-effective solid waste management program that protects public health and the environment, promotes recycling, reduces the amount of solid waste, and successfully manages and reclaims landfill sites.
- Enforcing cost-effective environmental regulations.
- Increasing community understanding of and sensitivity to the area's natural systems and related environmental issues.

Agriculture & Rural Character

One of Bland's key assets is its agricultural lifestyle, and many Bland County residents still make their living through agriculture. There are various local, regional, and state agricultural efforts in which Bland County residents participate to advance local agriculture. The county's land use, housing, and economic development efforts all center on its natural and agricultural resources. Based on data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s [2022 Agriculture Census](#), agriculture, while predominantly family-owned farms, is one of the county's most significant economic drivers (see **Chapter 6: Economic Development** for more information).

The Bland County Office of the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) plays an important role in supporting the local agricultural



economy.⁷ The office conducts farm management meetings each fall, winter, and early spring to educate area farmers on emerging trends, production techniques, and market conditions. Educational programming also extends to youth through food preservation and nutrition workshops. In accordance with Code of Virginia [Title 15.2 Chapter 43](#), the county board of supervisors is to “conserve and protect and to encourage the development and improvement of the agricultural and forestal lands in the county, for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products.” To support long-term economic growth, the County should remain open to and encourage alternative agricultural processes and innovative applications. Agriculture should remain a central consideration in efforts to broaden the local economy.

Economic Development

Much of Bland County’s future economic development depends on maintaining the environmental quality of its landscape. Employment in agriculture has decreased significantly in recent years, while tourism has been a driving force in the county’s economy (see **Chapter 6: Economic Development**). The county’s rural character captures people, whether tourists, potential residents, or long-time citizens. Protecting Bland’s environmental assets is one step toward developing greater prosperity for the county and maintaining a high quality of life for future generations.

⁷ The Bland County Office of the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) conducted a [situation analysis and community survey](#) to identify and address community issues, particularly those related to agriculture.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal: 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.

Introduction

Bland County’s location along Interstate 77 is one of its key economic drivers. The southern county line is approximately 12 miles north of the interchange with I-77 and I-81, and with this superb interstate access, half of the United States’ population and major industrial centers can be reached from Bland County within a day. Its location has historically been one of Bland’s greatest assets, providing access to major population centers such as Bluefield, West Virginia; Roanoke, Virginia; Bristol, Virginia/Tennessee; and Charlotte, North Carolina, while maintaining its rural character and charm. Location becomes increasingly important as quality-of-life factors come to the forefront in economic development considerations.

Employment

Employment Trends

Economic indicators such as average weekly wages provide useful context for understanding regional employment conditions and household income trends. Bland County stands out within the Mount Rogers Planning District. The data in **Table 9** highlights various employment statistics derived from the Virginia Employment Commission, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Census Bureau. As of 2025, a total of 2,098 people

were employed. The county’s average weekly wage for all workers was \$1,113, higher than the planning district’s average of \$898.50. Variations between employment totals discussed in the text and those shown in the table may result from differences in reporting periods, data sources, or methodology. These distinctions are important when evaluating local economic structure and workforce trends.

Table 9: Employment Data

Unemployment Rate (2023)	Employment (September 2025)	Avg Weekly Wage Per Worker, Qtr. 1 2025	Avg Weekly Wage Percent of State	Avg Weekly Wage Per Worker, 2024	Avg Weekly Wage Per Worker, 2020
1.7%	2,098 employees	\$1,113	74.8%	\$1,292	\$901

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates 3. U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates 4. Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, Economic Trends 2004 5. Virginia Employment Commission, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages 6. Virginia Employment Commission, Virginia Community Profile - Bland County 7. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, County Employment and Wages in Virginia - Fourth Quarter 2024 8. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, County Employment and Wages in Virginia - First Quarter 2025

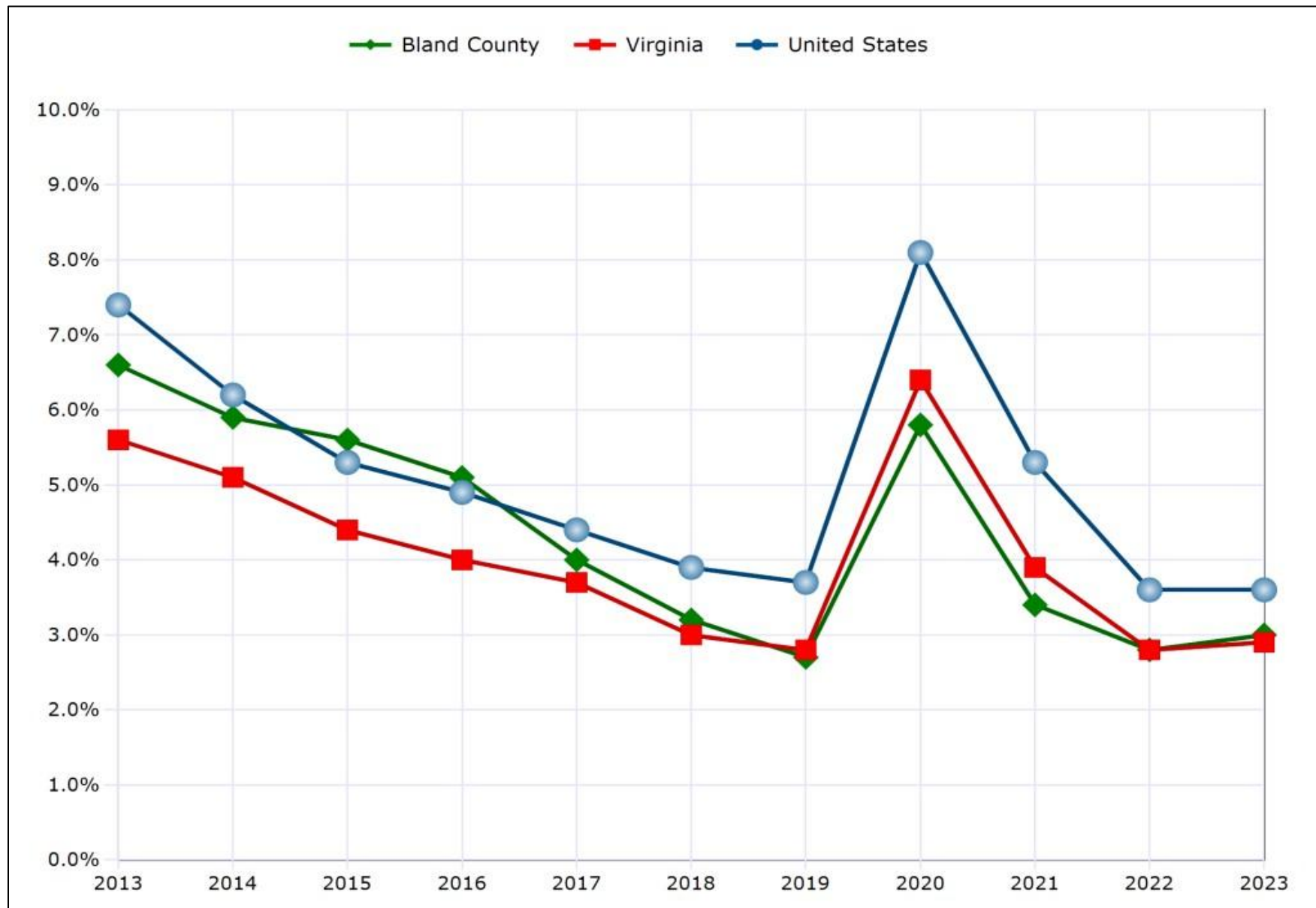


Unemployment Rate

Bland County has witnessed a decrease in unemployment, except for 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Between 2013 and 2022, Bland County's unemployment rate has, for the most part, seen lower unemployment rates in general compared to other localities in the planning district. **Figure 23** illustrates the unemployment rates between 2013 and 2023.



Figure 23: Bland County Unemployment Rate - 2013-2023



Source: Virginia Works (https://virginiaworks.gov/_docs/local-area-profiles/5104000021.pdf)



Employment by Industry

The employed labor force by industry groups in Bland County is broken down in **Table 10**. Although the overall civilian employed population declined slightly between 2018 and 2023, the largest decrease occurred in Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance (a loss of 186 persons), while the largest increase occurred in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining (a gain of 138 persons).

Table 10: Employment by Industry

Industry	Number	
	2018	2023
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	2555	2324
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	12	150
Construction	111	105
Manufacturing	451	566
Wholesale trade	133	48
Retail trade	310	149
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	214	147
Information	6	51
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	100	61
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	86	60
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	635	449
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	169	203
Other services, except public administration	156	195
Public administration	172	140

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2018-2023: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Income Levels

Between 2018 and 2023, the percentage of households which decreased the most during this period was those making between \$15,000 and \$24,999 (13.1% to 6.4%). In contrast, the group with the most significant increase was households earning between \$100,000 and \$149,999 (14.9% to 22.6%). The income distribution in 2018 and 2023 are shown in **Table 11**.

Table 11: Income Distribution - 2018 versus 2023

Household Income	Households		Percent	
	2018	2023	2018	2023
Less than \$10,000	147	112	5.8%	4.8%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	127	84	5.0%	3.6%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	145	81	13.1%	6.4%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	186	69	11.7%	9.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	118	121	13.4%	15.2%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	176	112	17.7%	21.3%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	89	73	14.5%	9.0%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	129	128	14.9%	22.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	121	156	2.2%	3.9%
\$200,000 or more	208	165	1.6%	3.2%
Total Households	2,523	2,345		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2018-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Poverty

Poverty in Bland County disproportionately affects older residents. Households headed by individuals aged 35 to 64 and those 60 years and over experience the highest rates of poverty, highlighting the need for targeted support for these vulnerable age groups, which can be seen in **Table 12**.

Table 12: Poverty Status

Age Group	Below Poverty Level	Total
Under 5 years	56	179
5 to 17 years	112	685
18 to 34 years	246	807
35 to 64 years	140	2,168
60 years and over	178	1,787
65 years and over	114	1,426
Gender	Below Poverty Level	Total
Male	329	2,657
Female	339	2,608

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates

Industries

Manufacturing

Manufacturing remains one of the most significant components of Bland County’s local economy. According to the 2023 American Community Survey, the sector employs over 566 individuals, making it the county’s largest provider of jobs. Manufacturing remains the highest paying industry within the county, with an average weekly wage of \$1,346 as of 2025 according to [Virginia Works](#). Hitachi Energy serves as the largest employer in the county, employing approximately 530 persons⁸. The Bland County Economic Development Authority (EDA) must remain diligent in staying abreast with the needs, successes, and issues within the environment of its current manufacturers, because it will be more productive and beneficial for the county to retain its current manufacturing base instead of having to attract new businesses to take their place.

Government

Government employment in Bland County is higher than other localities in comparison percentage wise because of the county’s low population and number of government-based job opportunities. Based on the 2023 ACS, there were estimated to be approximately 356 government workers. The Bland Correctional Center (state), Bland County School Board (local), and the County of Bland (local) are among the top government employers. The Bland Correctional Center is the second largest

⁸ This is a rough estimate based on the recent expansion of the facility (see **page 94**).



employer and its operations within the county have helped stabilize the industry base and increase average wages.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a declining industry within the county, with the 2022 USDA Agriculture Census reporting only 10% of the county's farms hired farm labor, a sharp decrease from 71 county residents (16 years and older) in 2010, 116 in 2000, 145 in 1990, and 278 in 1980. As agriculture has become increasingly more global and competitive, many producers have become part-time and now earn their main income in other industries.

However, despite these trends, the 2022 Agriculture Census reports that 79,310 acres of land were devoted to farms from which \$10.8 million in farm products were sold, up from 9.3 million in 2012, and \$8.6 million in 2007. Nationally, the number of farms is decreasing as farm size grows, and Bland County is no exception. The number of farms in Bland County decreased from 362 in 2012 to 324 in 2022, while the average acreage increased from 214 to 245 acres per farm. It is important to note that many farms in the county are family-owned and operated, which has significantly reduced the demand for employment in the industry. The county must remain supportive of its agricultural producers and help them determine ways to better market their products.

Tourism

Tourism has become a key component for Southwest Virginia's economy in recent years. Asset-based economic development, or development centered on historical, cultural, and natural assets has been noted as the new "creative economy" within the region. This type of development not only builds businesses and

livelihoods from resources already at hand, but also builds a sense of pride in the region and its heritage. The county's location also gives a competitive edge in tourism, as it provides visitors with easy access to the Appalachian Trail and other tourism assets such as the Wolf Creek Indian Village and Museum and the Big Walker Lookout.

Each September, the county hosts an annual fair which serves as a signature community event, supporting local economic vitality and fostering civic engagement. The fair features local vendors, locally sourced products, live music, rides, livestock exhibitions, and a horse show, contributing to the county's cultural identity and providing recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

Workforce

Bland County's ratio of in-commuters to out-commuters, in which 70% more people leave the county for work than come in (1,578 vs. 980 in 2024), may label it a bedroom community. I-77 provides the direct link between Bland and Wythe Counties, Virginia and Mercer County, West Virginia, and with it over 700 people leave Bland each workday to work in one of these two counties. This out-commuting pattern shows both an available workforce and need for localized employment. For more information on these commuting patterns, see **Table 13** and **Table 14**.



Table 13: Top 10 Places Residents are Commuting To

Area	Workers
Wythe County	430
Mercer County, WV	286
Smyth County	185
Pulaski County	173
Tazewell County	153
Washington County	108
Montgomery County	89
Carroll County	68
City of Galax	45
Giles County	41

Sources: Virginia Works, 2025, U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2014.

Table 14: Top 10 Places Workers are Commuting From

Area	Workers
Mercer County, WV	297
Wythe County	248
Tazewell County	156
Giles County	67
Pulaski County	66
Smyth County	44
Washington County	41
Henrico County	21
Carroll County	21
Montgomery County	19

Sources: Virginia Works, 2025, U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2014.

Future Economic Development

Like most of the Mount Rogers Planning District and Southwest Virginia, Bland County transitioned from primarily agricultural to manufacturing. Hitachi Energy is the largest private employer in the county, employing over half of the county's manufacturing sector. The company operates a facility in the community of Bland, which began operations in 1972 and was expanded in 2021 to increase production of medium-voltage transformers,



adding around 40 employees. In 2022, the Wilderness Mountain Water Company acquired the former site of 3300 Artesian, to upgrade it and add new equipment with the goal of increasing production and expanding jobs. These recent expansions, along with job opportunities in adjacent localities, suggest a likely increase and broadening of the population leading to increased demand for housing in the county which is considered a high priority.

The availability of quality, affordable, and workforce-based housing plays an integral role in business attraction, expansion, and employee recruitment and retention. Employers increasingly consider housing availability and infrastructure when making location decisions, particularly in rural communities like Bland County and across Southwest Virginia. Ensuring that Bland County can accommodate housing demand associated with Hitachi Energy, Wilderness Mountain Water Company, and any prospective employers will strengthen the county's economic resilience. Strategic housing planning promotes a stable workforce, enhances quality of life, and complements efforts to expand access to broadband, support small businesses, and advance asset-based development such as tourism. Coordinating housing and economic development strategies can help the county better align land use decisions with long-term economic goals while maintaining its rural character.

Goals

For Bland County to prosper and adapt, specific goals have been laid out to help the county progress into the future. Many of these goals are multi-disciplinary and apply over several objectives, even objectives outside of Bland's Economic Development goals.

Goals for Economic Development:

- Attract new businesses and expand existing businesses
- Support expansion of infrastructure, including water, sewer, and internet
- Support a broad range of employment options
- Encourage economic growth
- Support entrepreneurial innovation
- Support opportunities for higher educational attainment by the local workforce
- Identify and protect suitable large industrial park sites
- Rehabilitate older, derelict, and underutilized commercial properties
- Retain and improve quality of life factors
- Support tourism, historic, recreational, and arts-related attractions
- Support development of commercial property along the interstate corridor.

Bland County's economic development goals hinge on one very important factor: being broad and adaptable. Many Southwest Virginia communities have long been dependent on a single major industry whose slowdown devastated the local economy, with coal, tobacco, and furniture manufacturing being only a few examples. These tough transitions lay the need for a broader



economy and a resilient, well-trained workforce. As discussed, several communities are moving toward an asset-based tourism economy, and while it may be one component of Bland County's plan, tourism cannot be the backbone.

Three overarching objectives have been developed to help achieve Bland's goals:

1. the development and/or redevelopment of business sites,
2. promotion of an expanded economy, and
3. the continuing improvement of education on all levels.

Economic Position

Southwest Virginia's transitioning economy can be seen as a catalyst for needed change across many communities in the region. Bland County has long been one of the stronger, more resilient areas in the region, and with the proper guidance, it will continue as a regional leader. Bland County's residents need safe and healthy job opportunities that provide a living wage, and through the combined efforts of the citizens, the County, and its businesses, that is a realistic goal. The economic future of the county depends on a coordinated approach that supports existing businesses, attracts new investment, and strengthens workforce capacity. Strategic economic development efforts must consider not only business recruitment and infrastructure, but also the availability of housing, services, and quality of life that support employees and their families.

Housing Conditions

Housing availability, especially in rural areas like Bland County, is an important factor in economic development, and housing that

caters to workforce needs will support business expansion, reduce barriers to employment, and reinforce the county's long-term economic resilience. By coordinating economic development initiatives with land use planning, housing strategies, and infrastructure investments, the county and its citizens both have the capacity to meet the demands of industry in the future and to grow Bland's economy into one of the most vibrant within the region.



HOUSING

Goal: Enhance neighborhoods within Bland County through preservation, revitalization, and quality infill development. Foster an environment that promotes the development of quality housing and mixed-use development in higher population areas.

Introduction

Providing adequate and attainable housing is paramount for supporting sustainable community and economic development. Demographic factors, such as an aging population and a changing economy, can significantly influence the development of policies and actions related to housing needs and demand. Unique community characteristics and development patterns in different parts of the county shape Bland County policy and implementation strategies. Mixed housing types within the county can be challenging. Local housing issues often involve a broad range of considerations.

The vast majority of Bland County's population is situated along the I-77 corridor, which provides access to neighboring localities that have experienced job growth over the years. Bland County's location, along with its major transportation assets, allows for easy access to job opportunities in adjacent localities such as Wythe County to the south, Tazewell County to the west, Pulaski County to the southeast, Giles County to the east, Smyth County to the southwest, and Mercer County, West Virginia, to the north.

Bland County had a total of 3,200 housing units according to the 2020 Census, a slight decrease from 3,222 in 2010 and 3,161 in 2000. Of these, approximately 2,070 (65%) were owner occupied. In comparison, Virginia's home ownership rate was 70.5% according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

Most of the housing units in Bland County are single-family homes (73.2%). Multi-family units (apartments and duplexes) comprise only 6% of the housing stock and are not professionally managed. Manufactured housing comprises 24% of the housing units in the county. Most of the housing in Bland County consists of older homes (built primarily before 2000); approximately one-third of homes were built before 1970.

Based on data from the 2020 Decennial Census, the median value of an owner-occupied home in Bland is approximately \$157,100, which compares to the State median value of \$360,700. Many homeowners in the county pay less than 30% of their income for housing; however, about 20% of renters pay more than 30% of their income for housing. This may indicate that the county needs more affordable rental housing to meet residents' needs. **Table 15, Table 16, and Table 17** provide more information regarding this data.



Table 15: Housing Units

Tenure	Count	Percentage
Owner Occupied	2,070	65%
Renter Occupied	435	14%
Vacant	695	22%
Single Family	1,715	73.2%
Multi-Family	70	6%
Manufactured Home	562	24%
Total Units	3,200	

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates 3. Bland County Building Official

Table 16: Year Housing Units Built

Year Built	Number Built
2020-later	6
2010-2019	163
2000-2009	329
1980-1999	922
1960-1979	465
1940-1959	218
1939 and before	242

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates 3. Bland County Building Official

Table 17: Additional Housing Data

Category	Value
Average Household Size (Owner Occupied)	2.13
Median Value (Owner Occupied)	\$157,100
Median Gross Rent (Renter Occupied)	\$683
Median Mortgage Cost	\$853
Housing Owner Costs > 30% of income	23%
Rental Costs >30% of income	9%

Sources: 1. U.S. Census Bureau 2. American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates 3. Bland County Building Official

Housing Market

For-Sale Properties

The for-sale housing market in Bland County is largely composed of existing structures. Except for the Rolling Meadows subdivision in the Bland community, new construction has been stagnant over the past several decades. With the growing senior population, demand for patio homes has risen, with single-family attached homes with small yards located within larger developments or communities. These are generally smaller than most single-family homes.

Manufactured, mobile, and modular homes are also prevalent in Bland County. As of the 2020 Census, 24% of Bland County's households live in manufactured homes. It should be noted that townhomes in Bland County are limited, and the vast majority are renter-occupied, largely due to the county's rural nature, zoning



restrictions, and greater demand for larger single-family homes. However, Bland County’s townhomes being designated as rental properties makes them a desirable option for first-time renters and those with limited financial resources.

Most of the permits issued were for the construction of manufactured and modular homes, many of which were relocated to new lots, rather than stick-built homes, as well as for replacing older homes destroyed by fire and natural disasters. These permits were issued primarily along the I-77 corridor, with a small number being in the Ceres and Mechanicsburg communities. The number of residential building permits issued by Bland County between 2018 and 2022 is shown in **Table 18**.

Table 18: New Home Building Permits - 2018-2022

Year Built	Single-Family	Manufactured / Modular	Duplex / Townhome	Total
2018	5	21	0	26
2019	8	18	0	26
2020	7	15	0	22
2021	2	16	0	18
2022	10	15	0	25
Total	32	85	0	117
Percent	27.4%	72.6%	0%	100%

Source: Bland County

Rental Properties

There are no professionally managed rental properties in Bland County, and most rental properties currently standing are various townhomes, single-family homes, and mobile homes originally built for sale that have since been repurposed as apartments for rent. No income-restricted apartments are available in Bland County, and no public housing agencies operate within the county. There is a limited supply of affordable rental housing in the Town of Wytheville and Bluefield, West Virginia, respectively, though they are often fully occupied. However, many older units in-county are considered affordable for those who would qualify. Roughly 400 households within Bland County are renters.

Future Housing Demands

The presence and continued growth of the Hitachi Energy facility, along with the Wilderness Mountain Water Company’s water bottling facility, as well as several other employers in nearby localities, have led to the creation of dozens of new jobs in Bland County, Bland County’s future housing needs are influenced not only by population change but also by shifts in household composition, workforce demands, and economic development activity. Despite the modest and aging population, the county must consider the importance of providing adequate housing opportunities for current and future workers.

Bland County, along with the county’s Economic Development Authority (EDA), is actively pursuing avenues for encouraging and promoting development in the vicinity of South Scenic Highway (U.S. Route 52). These focused efforts to spur development of additional housing options to address demand associated with



the job growth, relieve pressure on the county's limited rental market, pave the way for commercial development, and ultimately end a multi-decade lull in new housing unit development. This Comprehensive Plan underscores the importance of expanding housing options to better align with current and projected needs, particularly for workforce households, seniors, and residents seeking a greater range of housing choices.

There are various parcels considered vacant and underutilized, many of which are suitable for the development of new residential properties. Expanding housing choices within the county can help attract and retain employees, reduce commuting longer distances, and support local economic stability. Providing a mix of housing types and locations will help ensure that Bland County remains competitive, supports local businesses, and accommodates people of different ages. Future housing strategies should balance growth while preserving the county's community character and infrastructure capacity.



Specialty Housing

With several vacant or underutilized properties with potential for residential development in the county, some may be suited for targeted population groups. These types of housing are designed to provide specialized, affordable, and supported living arrangements for those who would not otherwise qualify for traditional housing.

Workforce Housing

As previously discussed, the availability of housing is an important factor when an employer chooses to make a presence in the region. Employers tend to find employee recruitment and retention difficult because of the lack of affordable housing. This is especially important for essential workers (emergency personnel, school employees, healthcare, and utilities), retail, industrial, and service workers, and employees in the public sector. Factors such as where households live, where businesses are located, transportation, and accessibility are crucial when determining the need for workforce housing.

Senior and Retired Households

Senior housing is generally based on market-rate rents and provides a community for seniors to live in that provides for their increasing needs. In 2020, Bland County's active senior population (55 - 64 age group) had 1,024 people. Communities that are designed for those 55 years or older, commonly known as 55+ communities, along with assisted living communities, are generally focused on an "active lifestyle" for seniors and cater to the increased health and vitality of seniors.

Special Populations

Special populations are generally at a higher risk. These can include certain types of seniors, individuals with disabilities, minorities, single parents, the homeless, low-income families, and veterans. The county should promote and implement various initiatives targeted at these populations, such as transitional housing, emergency shelters, and developing homes and communities designed for these populations.

Housing Resources

There are many programs within Bland County designed to support eligible recipients in securing quality housing, emergency housing needs, and the rehabilitation of low-income housing.

Appalachian Independence Center

This independent, non-profit organization provides services geared toward individuals with disabilities in Washington, Smyth, Wythe, Bland, Grayson, and Carroll Counties, as well as the cities of Bristol and Galax. The organization offers services such as advocacy, peer support, independent skills training, housing assistance, and transition support.

Virginia Housing

Formerly the Virginia Housing Development Authority, this non-profit organization, created by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1972, provides resources for homebuyers, homeowners, renters, and business partners, including classes, videos, and grants, with the goal of attaining quality affordable housing. The organization also issues homebuyers and developers of quality rental housing with non-taxpayer-funded bond-based mortgages.



District Three Senior Services

A division of the District Three Government Cooperative, this agency provides a variety of services, including home repair and housekeeping services, home meal deliveries, nutrition assistance programs, and care assistance programs.

Bland Ministry Center

This non-profit Christian social ministry facilitates and participates in construction projects, especially in home repair, including maintenance, roofing, painting, and wheelchair ramp installations. The ministry also provides a food pantry, a clothes closet, and a dental clinic.

HousingForward Virginia

This organization provides communications, education, research, and facilitation related to housing policies in the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as conducting various housing assessments related to addressing housing needs.

Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

This agency provides resources such as tax credit programs, housing rehabilitation, affordable and special needs housing, and assistance and prevention for the homeless population.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's CDBG program is administered through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. This program offers housing rehabilitation in areas with over 50% low-to-moderate income residents. The program allows up to

\$1,250,000 in rehab or substantial construction to qualifying areas or scattered sites throughout a locality.

CDBG assistance is also available to support infrastructure development for the creation of single- and multi-family housing units targeted at low- and moderate-income individuals. Funding is applicable to infrastructure final design and construction, as well as for down payment assistance. The most significant applicable HUD programs are the interest credit program for individual homes, rent supplement loans, and low-income or public housing programs funded by HUD. Rental costs of low-income families may also be subsidized under Section 8 of the [Housing and Community Development Act of 1974](#). Eligibility for these programs is determined by income levels and family size.

Conclusion

Housing plays a critical role in supporting Bland County's long-term vitality, quality of life, and economic stability. While population growth is projected to remain low, changing demographics, workforce needs, and household preferences indicate a growing need for a broader range of housing options. Ensuring adequate housing is available for current and future residents is essential to maintaining a stable and resilient community. With the expansion of employers such as Hitachi Energy and Wilderness Mountain Water Company, housing availability remains an important factor in workforce recruitment and retention.

Providing a mix of housing opportunities while respecting the county's infrastructure capacity, topography, and rural character will help reduce commuting pressures, support local businesses,

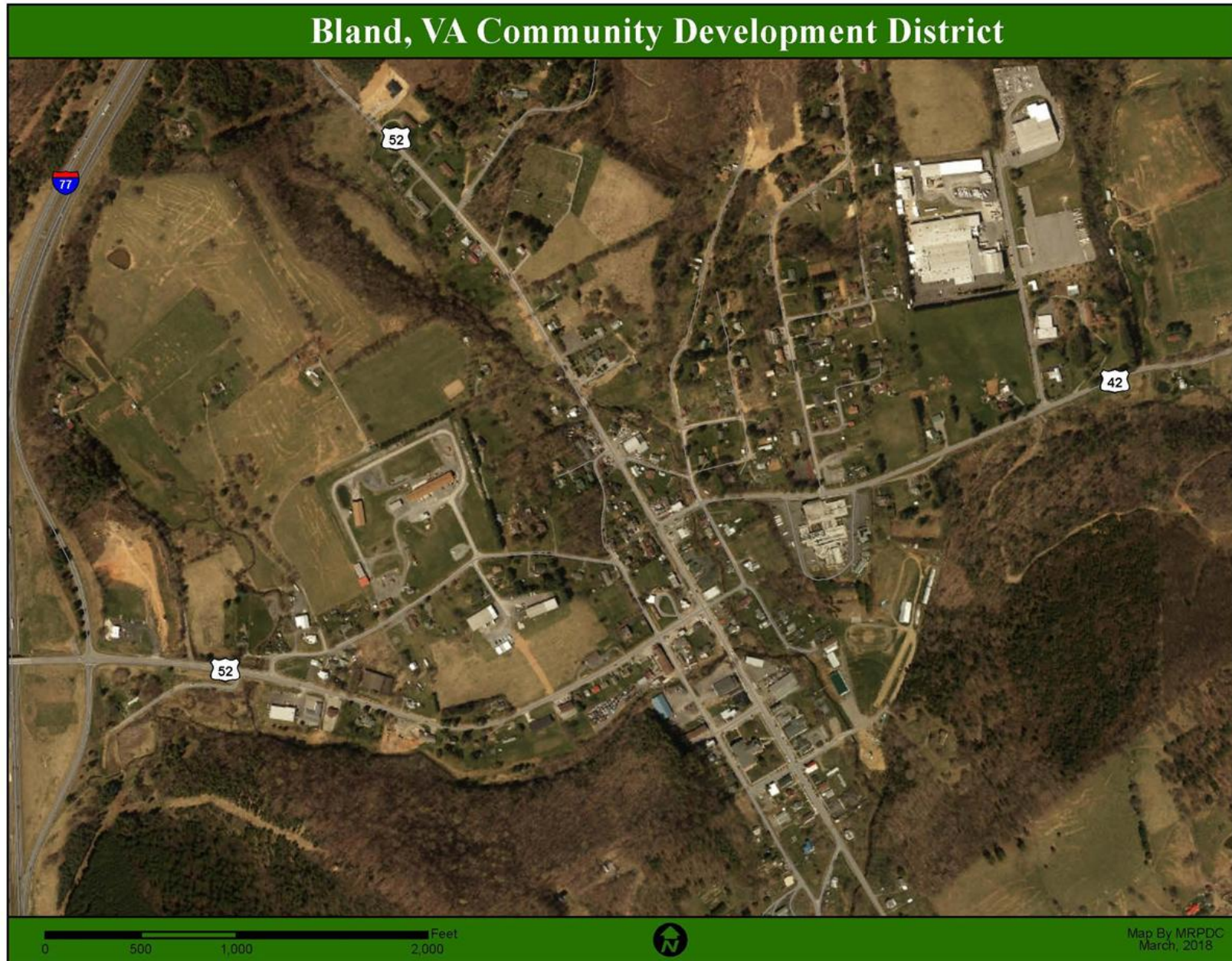


and allow residents to remain in Bland County at different life stages.



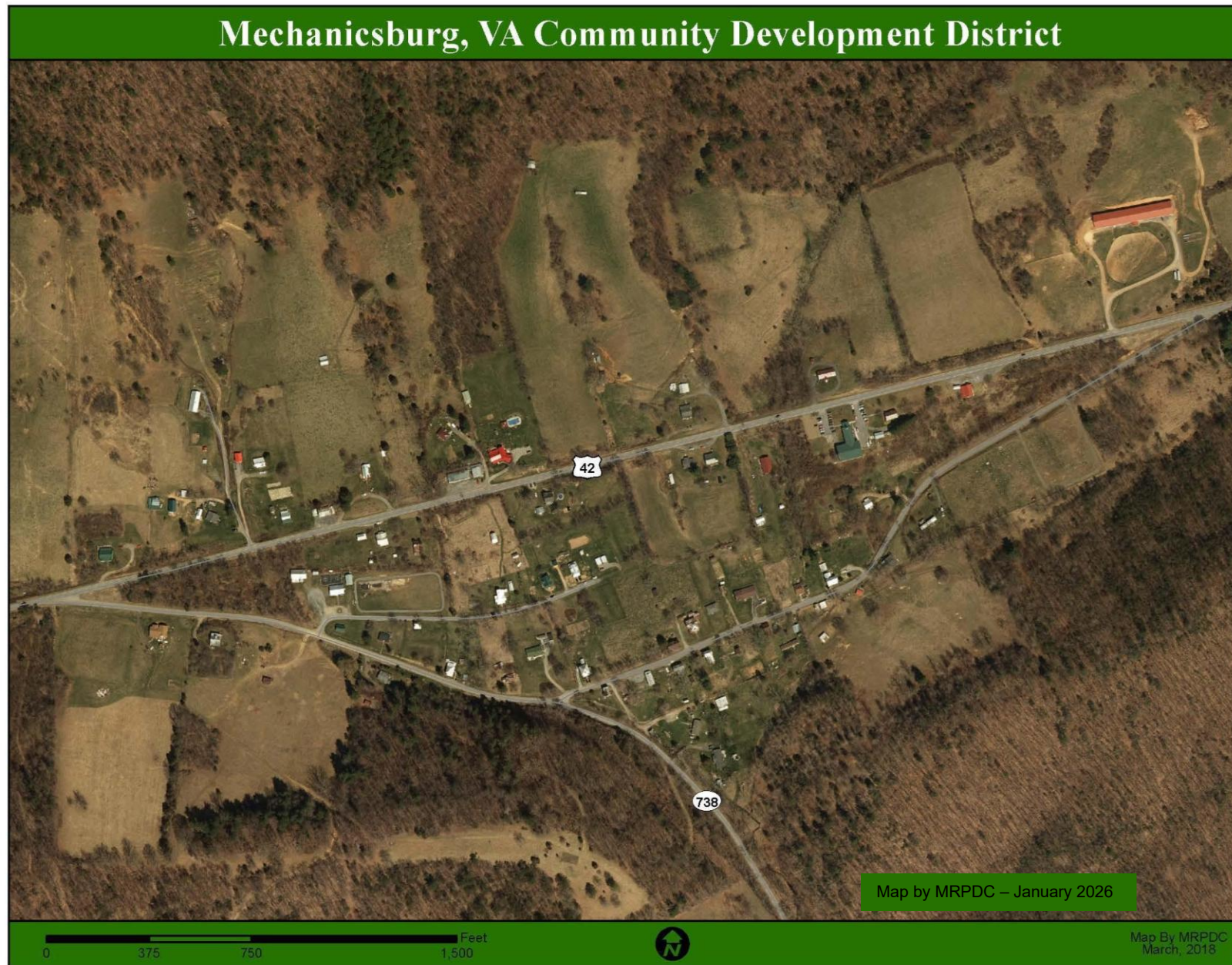
APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MAPS

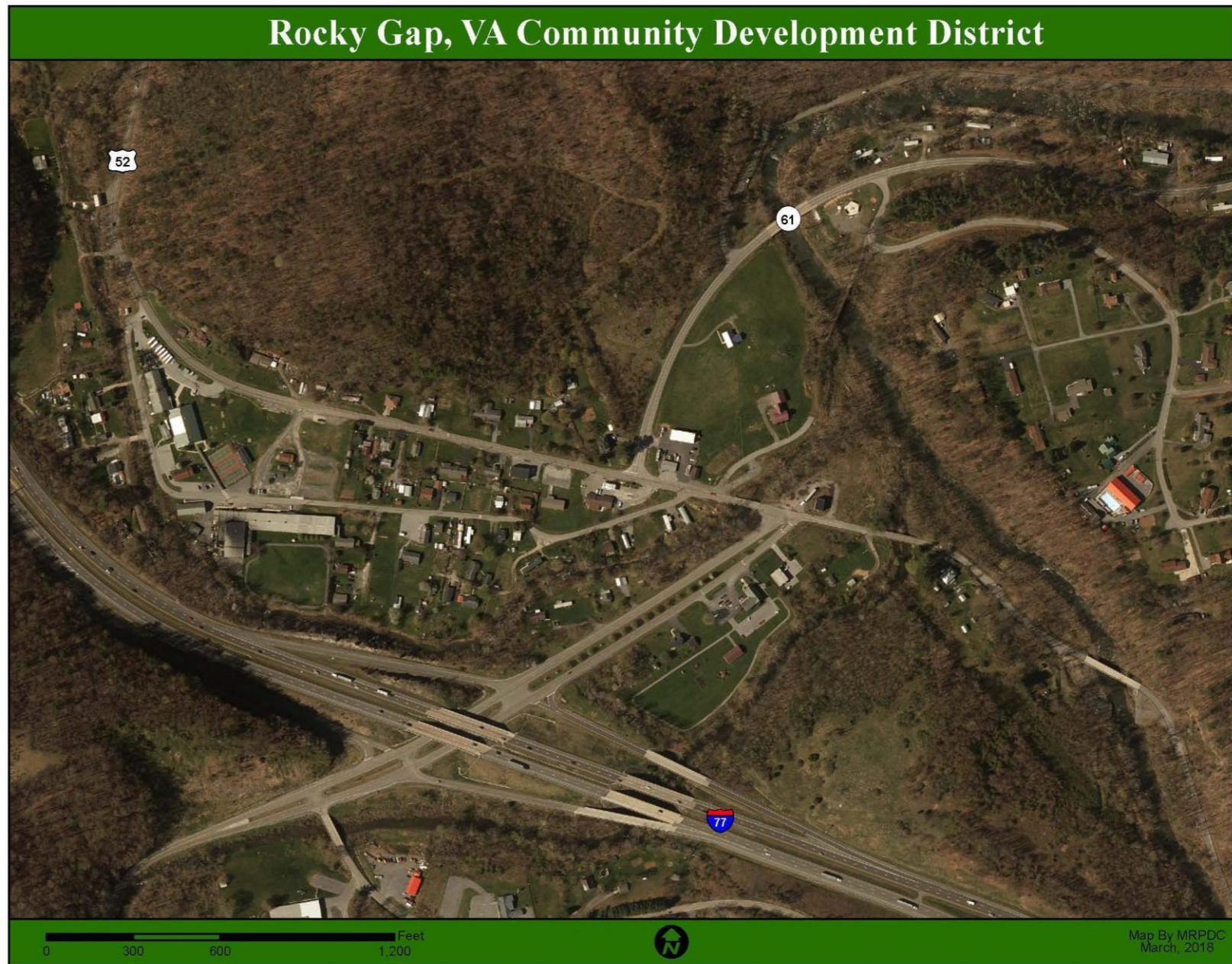












APPENDIX B: SWOT ANALYSIS



STRENGTHS:

*Scenic beauty
 *Location (interstate; halfway b/t Ohio & Myrtle Beach)
 *School teachers & scores
 Wythe-Bland Foundation
 Festival of Leaves
 Work ethic (community/general)
 Appalachian National Scenic Trail (52 mi)
 Artesian well (sustainable pure mtn water)
 Wolf Creek Indian Village
 Tunnels (6th and 7th longest)
 Eupepsia Wellness Resort (spa)
 Manufacturing base
 Fiber (deployment imminent)
 Future Farmers of America Museum
 Farmer's Market (all local produce)
 Bland Ministry Center
 Twin Depot Parkway (Rte 61)

OPPORTUNITIES:

*Bastian Industrial Park
 *The Crooked Road
 *Artesian well
 Walker's Creek (white water)
 Wilderness Areas (signage)
 Tourism marketing (profile, digital/social)
 Fairgrounds (underutilized)
 Off-road recreation enthusiasts
 Public-private partnerships
 Textile building (redevelopment)
 Broadband (deployment/expansion)

**WEAKNESSES:**

*Complete broadband and cellular coverage
 *Phone lines (aging/deficient)
 *Lack of affordable housing
 *Blight (cars, cats, housing, mud/erosion)
 *Lack of economic draw (short stops)
 Volunteer EMS (old equipment)
 Only four magisterial districts
 Declining and aging population
 No public sewer at Rocky Gap
 Available spaces at Bastian Industrial Park
 High quantity of state and federal land

THREATS:

*Low birth rates/decline in students
 *More urbanized surrounding counties
 School system combinations
 Drug traffic (West VA corridor)

¹ The (*) symbol denotes higher ranked items in each category.

