

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Grayson County, Virginia



CERTIFIED BY: Grayson County Planning Commission, November 1980
ADOPTED: April 1981

RECERTIFIED: January 27, 1998
ADOPTED: March 10, 1998

ADOPTED: January 13, 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This planning document was prepared by the Grayson County Planning Commission, the Grayson County Board of Supervisors, and the Citizens of Grayson County. The background research, writing, and assembly of the document were completed by staff of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission. The preparation of this document was financed by Grayson County and through grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Economic Development Administration, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Federal Highway Administration or the Virginia Department of Transportation. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

GRAYSON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Marla Phillips, Claude Rutherford, Robert Baker, Bobby Bartlett, Edgar Dean Edwards,
Lester Baldwin, Barbara McArthur, Dr. Palmer Fant, Bobby Taylor

GRAYSON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Ralph E. Tuggle, Douglas Carrico, Larry Bartlett, Joe Vaughan, and George Russell

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Don Young

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Mount Rogers Planning District Commission
Ronald R. Catron, Chairman

GRAYSON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Table of Contents

	Page
I. Introduction	
A. The Comprehensive Plan	1
B. Purpose	1
C. Relationship to Other Plans	2
D. Legal Status of Plan	3
E. Historical Overview	5
II. Physiographic Characteristics	
A. Geology	6
B. Relief	7
C. Climate	7
D. Hydrology	8
E. Soils	9
F. Vegetation	10
III. Population Characteristics and Trends	
A. Historic Trends	12
B. Racial Composition	13
C. Age/Sex Characteristics	14
D. Migration	17
E. Population Projections	18
F. Conclusions	20
IV. Economy	
A. Income	21
B. Employment	22
C. Agriculture	24
D. Manufacturing	28
E. Retail Trade	29
F. Wholesale Trade	30
G. Service Industry	31
H. Conclusions	32
V. Housing	
A. Existing Housing Conditions	34
B. Substandard Housing	39
C. Second Home Development	40
D. Housing Programs	42
E. Housing Needs	43
F. Conclusions	45

VI.	Community Facilities and Services	
	A. Facilities and Services Description	47
	B. Conclusions	58
VII.	Land Use and Development	
	A. Introduction	59
	B. Findings	59
	C. Existing Land Use	61
	D. Land Use Comparison Summary	61
	E. Constraints to Development	63
	F. Regulatory Controls	66
VIII.	Transportation	
	A. Introduction	68
	B. Transportation System	68
	C. Transportation Challenges	81
IX.	Government	
	A. Historical Background	82
	B. County Government Organization	83
	C. Town Governments	85
	D. County Government Finances	85
X.	Goals and Objectives	
	A. Vision 2025 Mount Rogers Region	91
	B. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats	92
XI.	Conclusions and Recommendations	
	A. Introduction	98
	B. Economy	98
	C. Housing	105
	D. Community Facilities and Services	106
	E. Land Use and Development	109
	F. Transportation	111

List of Tables

II-1	Elevation Characteristics	7
III-1	Population	12
III-2	Population Change	13
III-3	Selected Racial Data (1990)	13
III-4	Selected Racial Data (2000)	14
III-5	Population Distribution	17
III-6	Natural Increase: Births and Deaths	18
III-7	Net Migration	18
III-8	Population Projections	19
IV-1	Comparative Per Capita Personal Income	21
IV-2	Comparative Median Household Income	22
IV-3	Comparative Employment by Major Occupation Group	22
IV-4	Employment Characteristics	23
IV-5	Comparative Acreage in Farms	25
IV-6	Comparative Average Farm Size	25
IV-7	Comparative Manufacturing Sales, Payrolls, and Employees	29
IV-8	Annual Taxable Sales	30
IV-9	Comparative Retail Sales, Payrolls, and Employees	30
IV-10	Comparative Wholesale Sales, Payrolls, and Employees	31
IV-11	Service Sector Activity	32
V-1	Total Housing Units	34
V-2	Housing Composition	35
V-3	Comparative Values for Owner-Occupied Housing Units	36
V-4	Comparative Housing by Tenure	37
V-5	Comparative Median Gross Rent	37
V-6	Rental Costs as a Percentage of Household Income	38
V-7	Comparative Residential Plumbing	39
V-8	Housing Units	40
VII-1	Comparative Land Use	61
VIII-1	Annual Average Daily Traffic Counts	72
VIII-2	Roadway Design Standards	72
VIII-3	Public Transit Route Schedule	80
IX-1	Selected Revenues and Expenditures (Grayson County)	87
IX-2	Selected Revenues and Expenditures (Virginia)	87
IX-3	Scores on Fiscal Stress	89

List of Figures

II-1	Watershed Process Diagram.	8
VII-1	Rhododendron gap of the MRNRA.	59
VII-2	Fraser Firs on a Christmas tree farm.	60
VII-3	Burley tobacco crop in the field.	62
VII-4	Residential home, Elk Creek Community.	63
VII-5	Historic 1908 Courthouse in Independence.	63
VII-6	Banks of the New River.	65
VIII-1	Blue Ridge Parkway Route.	74
VIII-2	Map of Virginia Southern Highlands Scenic Byways.	75

List of Charts

III-1	Population Pyramid (1990)	15
III-2	Population Pyramid (2000)	16
IV-1	Employment Characteristics	24
IV-2	Average Farm Size	26
IX-1	Revenue Trends	86
IX-2	Spending Trends	88

List of Maps

The following maps may be referenced in the narrative, but are compiled in a separate, supplementary document:

<u>Map Number</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	Slope: 20 Percent or Greater
2	Population Distribution (1979)
3	Housing Distribution (1979)
4	Mobile Home Distribution (1979)
5	Traffic Flow (1981)
6	Traffic Count (1981)
7	Existing Land Use (1979)
8	Future Land Use (1981)
9	Recommended Highway Improvements (1981)

The following maps are included in the Comprehensive Plan:

<u>Map Number</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	Generalized Existing Land Use
2	Current Land Use with Housing Conditions
3	Future Land Use

CHAPTER I

Introduction

A. The Comprehensive Plan

The premise of the Comprehensive Plan is that it will be a guide for future decisions regarding the provision of public services. It will be a roadmap for changes in the use of land to the betterment of the health, safety, and welfare of Grayson County citizens.

The essential characteristics of the plan are that it is comprehensive, general, and long range. It is comprehensive in that the plan encompasses the entire county (outside the incorporated towns) and all of the natural, physical, and social elements that influence development. It is general in that the plan does not indicate specific locations nor contain detailed regulations. Long range means the plan looks beyond the foreground of pressing current issues to a desirable possible future in 20 years.

B. Purpose

Title 15.2 of the *Code of Virginia*, 1950, as amended, is devoted to regulations affecting counties, cities, and towns. Subsection 2223 states:

The local planning commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.

In the preparation of a comprehensive plan the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and trends of growth, and of the probable future requirements of its territory and inhabitants. The comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants.

Subsection 2223 goes on to state:

[The plan] with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, shall show the long-range recommendations for the general development of the parts of the county covered by the plan. It may include, but need not be limited to:

1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, business, industrial, agricultural, mineral

- resources, conservation, recreation, public service, flood plain and drainage, and other areas;
2. The designation of a system of transportation facilities such as streets, roads, highways, parkways, railways, bridges, viaducts, waterways, airports, ports, terminals, and other like facilities;
 3. The designation of a system of community service facilities such as parks, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;
 4. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;
 5. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable ground water protection measures;
 6. An official map, a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps, and agricultural and forestal district maps, where applicable; and
 7. The location of existing or proposed recycling centers.

The plan shall include: the designation of areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing, which is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.

C. Relationship to Other Plans

The Comprehensive Plan is a policies statement, an overview of land use in the county, and the first major step in the county's planning effort. This plan is supplemented by the following more detailed plans, which have been developed by the county, citizen groups, regional organizations, and state and federal governments.

- Grayson County Comprehensive Plan: The Grayson County Planning Commission has reviewed in detail the recommendations that were made in an amended version of the Comprehensive Plan that was readopted in 2003.
- Grayson County 604b Study: In 1998 a comprehensive water and sewer study was completed for Grayson County. The recommendations contained in that study have been reviewed by the Planning Commission and will be contained by reference.
- The Grayson County Historic Survey: An historical survey conducted by Gibson Worsham of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources was completed in the spring

of 2002. The Planning Commission has included the recommendations of that study in the appendix.

- Take Charge 2001: A committee of interested citizens volunteered their time to participate in a comprehensive strategic planning process designed to improve the quality of life for county residents. The Planning Commission has reviewed their recommendations and selected to include the majority of them in the Comprehensive Plan as goals, objectives, and strategies.
- Vision 2025: The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission conducted a strategic planning process during 2001 and 2002. The applicable goals, objectives, and strategies of that planning process have become a part of this plan.
- Regional Transportation Plan: The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission has prepared and approved a set of Regional Transportation priorities. The appropriate provisions of that plan have been included in the Grayson County Comprehensive Plan. Further references available are Grayson County's Economic Resource Group study on Page 91 of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is not an end in itself; it is a living document, a continuing study through which issues relating to the future of the county can be resolved by citizens and their elected representatives. The plan should be revised and supplemented as necessary. State law requires that it be reviewed at least every five years.

D. Legal Status of Plan

Legal status of the Comprehensive Plan is described under Subsection 2232 of Title 15.2 in the *Code of Virginia*, 1950, as amended. That part of the code reads as follows:

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 railroad facility, 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](#).

B. The commission shall communicate its findings to the governing body, indicating its approval or disapproval with written reasons therefore. 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 sixty 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 ten 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 sixty 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 involving a change in location or extent of a street or public area.

D. Any public area, facility 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 provision 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 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 by the Virginia Public Broadcasting Board pursuant to Article 12 (§ [2.2-2426](#) et seq.) of Chapter 24 of Title 2.2 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 Virginia Public Broadcasting Board 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 ninety 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 sixty 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.

E. Historical Overview

Grayson County was formed from Wythe County in 1793. The present boundaries of the county were formed in 1842, when Carroll County was split off from the larger Grayson County.

Grayson County was named for William Grayson, one of the first two United States Senators from Virginia. The county seat was established at Oldtown; however, the desire to have a more centrally located county seat resulted in the location of the county seat in Independence in 1850.

Boomtowns emerged in Grayson County toward the end of the 19th century. In 1884 the first factory in the county was started in the Mouth of Wilson community. When a railroad was completed into Grayson County in the late 1800's, towns developed as timber and textiles began to mark the local economy. These early settlements included the towns of Galax, Fries, Troutdale, and Whitetop.

During the early part of the 20th century, the growing of cash crops became profitable and a livestock association was formed. Soon after, burley tobacco was introduced and in the latter part of the century the growing of Fraser Firs as Christmas trees become an important part of the agricultural economy. The impact of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, the Grayson Highlands State Park, the New River Trail State Park, and the Heritage River Designation of the New River began to be realized.

CHAPTER II

Physiographic Characteristics

The physical constraints of land are perhaps the most basic factor which will determine the policies and recommendations of future land use development of any comprehensive plan. For example, while river valleys provide excellent land for farming, these can also be undesirable for intensive residential or commercial development due to the inherent risk of flooding. Additionally, where topographic slopes exceed 20 percent certain types of development are likely to create acute erosion, water runoff, and water quality issues.

A. Geology

Grayson County is located in the Southern Blue Ridge province of the Appalachian Mountain chain. The characteristics of this section of the Blue Ridge are its broad table-like area of 2400 to 3000 feet upland plateaus with numerous higher peaks rising above the upland to include Virginia's highest peak, Mount Rogers, which rises to a height of 5,729 feet. The summit is covered in high-altitude spruce-fir forest and is underlain by purple-gray dolomite that was erupted from volcanoes approximately 750 million years ago.

The predominant rock formations in the study area are comprised of igneous types of granite, granitic gneiss, charnockite, and layered gneiss. These Mesoproterozoic-era formations of granite, granitic gneiss, charnockite and layered gneiss date back to approximately 1.2 to 1.4 billion years ago, which means these were present before the existence of life on Earth. Less prevailing formations in the far eastern and western portions include the Neoproterozoic-era rock configurations formed 550 to 750 million years ago which are comprised of various metasedimentary rocks, metahyolite, and metabasalt; and along the New River Basin, the younger Paleozoic/Cambrian-type formed 500 to 550 million years ago, giving rise to the occurrence of dolomite, limestone, shale and sandstone patterns. The Fries Fault Line crosses the New River near the Town of Fries¹.

¹ *The Geology of Virginia, Blue Ridge Province*, College of William & Mary, C.M. Bailey, 1999.

B. Relief

Mountainous terrain is abundant in Grayson County. Over 60 percent of the land within the study area has an average slope exceeding 20 percent. Consequently, the availability of property that is suitable for intensive development is limited. Thin soils and steep topography also create additional difficulties that are associated with erosion, water quality, and sanitary sewage.

Segments of the study area where the average slope is less than 20 percent include Elk Creek, Baywood, Fox, Mouth of Wilson, Grant, and Flat Ridge. Lesser segments occur adjacent to major roadways and along the environmentally sensitive New River Basin.

The average elevation of Grayson County is among the highest in Virginia (Table II-1. Elevation Characteristics – Grayson County.) The lowest point in the county is approximately 2,120 feet and located at the New River along the Grayson/Carroll County line. The highest point, 5,729 feet, is located at the summit of Mount Rogers. The Town of Troutdale has the highest elevation of all of the incorporated towns in Virginia at approximately 3,400 feet.

**TABLE II-1
Elevation Characteristics¹
GRAYSON COUNTY**

Percent of Land Area	Elevation (feet)
0.7	5,000 and above
6.4	4,000 to 5,000
31.1	3,000 to 4,000
61.8	2,000 to 3,000
100%	

1. U.S. Geological Survey, Mt. Rogers Planning District Commission, 1978.

Generally, the highest elevations occur in the western sections of the County, with the lowest elevations occurring in the eastern sections. Elevations in the northern and central sections generally range between 3,000 and 4,000 feet, with lesser sections ranging between 4,000 and 5,000 feet.

C. Climate

Grayson County has a temperate climate with distinct seasonal variations. Frontal air masses affect the climate with rapid and frequent weather changes because of the low- and high-pressure systems that move with the fronts. The general prevailing winds are from the southwest.

The average annual precipitation is about 42 inches and snowfall averages approximately 20 inches. The average annual evaporation rate is 36 inches and the relative humidity is 68 percent. The January average daily high temperature is 46°F and the average daily low is about 24°F. In July, the average daily high temperature is 82°F and the average daily low is 64°F.

Intense showers may occur at any time, but these generally occur during the period from December to April. Thunderstorms are frequent and commonly occur from May to September. Snowstorms are usually confined to the months of November through March.

D. Hydrology

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

A watershed can be defined as:

A bounded hydrologic system within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that these become part of a community. – John Wesley Powell

The watershed process begins when precipitation occurs and water runs to the lowest point – usually into a stream, river, or lake. On its way to its lowest point, the water crosses over surfaces of forestland, suburban land, and urbanized areas or it may simply seep into the soil and travel through an

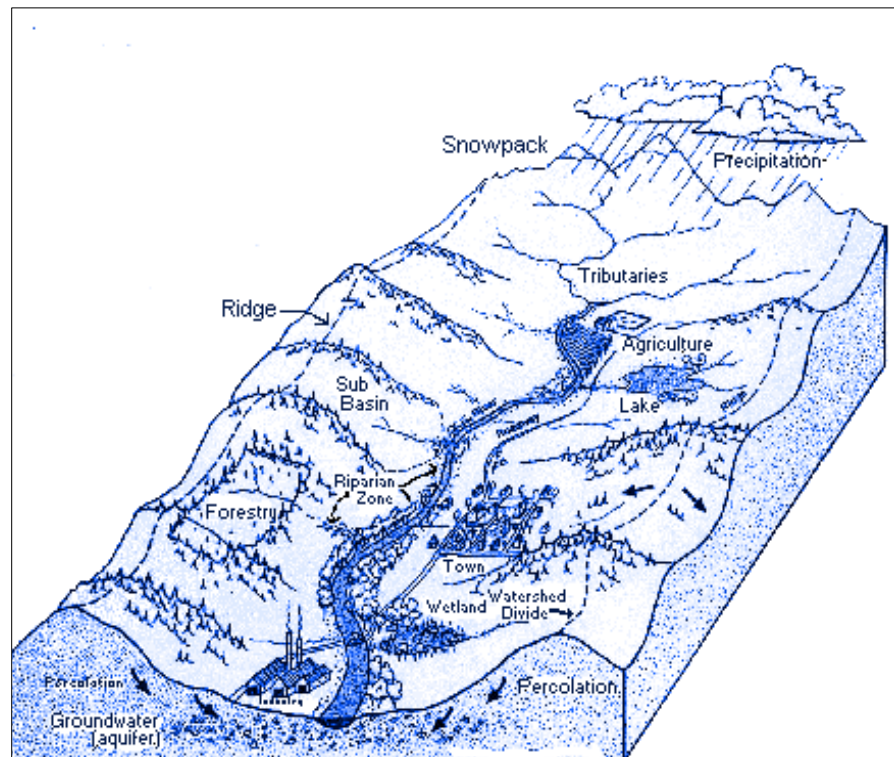


Figure II-1. Watershed Process Diagram.

aquifer (Figure II- I. Watershed Process Diagram.)

The New River has a median daily discharge of 1,623 cubic feet per second, and a minimum daily flow of 564 cubic feet per second near the City of Galax, which is approximately 6.5 miles upstream from the Town of Fries. A maximum-recorded discharge of 141,000 cubic feet per second occurred on Aug. 14, 1940².

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

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

Because flood damage is most common on farmland, property damage to residences is not common. One exception was the flood which occurred in November 1977. Dangers from flooding can be significantly reduced through effective land management practices aimed at sustaining vegetation and other naturally occurring ground covers. Careful management controls that comply with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regulations should be utilized and administered in flood-prone areas to discourage development.

E. Soils

The major factors that influence soil formation include the type of rock from which the soil is derived, degree of slope, the amount of weathering that has taken place, and the changes caused by plants and animals. Soils are formed by physical and biological forces, and consequently, certain soils have developed on the ridges, while entirely different soils occur in the valleys. Weathering is the geological term for the decomposition of rock material into soils. This process occurs more rapidly in limestone areas and less rapidly on the sandstone ridges; however, very little limestone exists in the county.

Soils derived from sandstone are thin and less fertile than the soils derived from limestone. During the soil formation process, organic matter has been retained in very sparse amounts. Most of the soils in Grayson County were formed under forest cover, where the

² USGS Provisional Stream Flow Data, Most Recent Value Nov. 1, 2002.

accumulated organic matter is significantly less than soils that develop with a grass cover. The various soils have pH levels ranging from slightly acidic to acidic in nature.

Almost all soils contain three layers – a surface layer, the subsoil, and the substratum. Usually the surface layer is less dense than the subsoil, with soil particles being smaller. Surface layers range from 6 to 10 inches thick; subsoil varies from 12 to 35 inches; and the substratum varies from a few to more than 30 inches.

The permeability of soils ranges from readily permeable (able to absorb water), when developed largely from gneisses and sandstones, to moderately and slowly permeable, when resulting from limestone, shale, and clay. Moderately permeable soils are most common. These soils are capable of taking in water rather rapidly when in good condition, but can also produce excessive runoff when exposed, compacted, or depleted of organic matter. Steep slopes and shallow stony soils prevail through the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, and these require a high degree of protective management to prevent erosion.

F. Vegetation

The Mount Rogers Planning District contains some last portions of the glacial-front forests in Virginia. This evergreen forest extended for hundreds of miles in front of a mass of glacial ice caps that existed approximately 10,000 to 20,000 years ago. Spruce and Fir occur naturally at elevations above 5,000 feet in North Carolina and Tennessee and on a few peaks above 4,500 feet in Southwest Virginia. Included in the spruce-fir forests are the Fraser Fir (also known as Balsam Pine) and Red Spruce. Immediately below the evergreen forest is the northern hardwood timber forest which is composed of beech, yellow birch, and sugar maple. This type of forest is unusual in Virginia and covers less than 2.5 percent of the entire 140,000-acre Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. In recent years, the commercial spruce/fir tree farmers are making extensive use of the ideal natural habitat of the County to produce live Christmas trees for a large and growing seasonal nationwide market.

Within the National Recreation Area, dogwood is spectacular and wildflowers abound in spring. By June, blossoms of rhododendron and laurel have reached their peak. Autumn color results in a recreation season during late October.

Improved management practices have dramatically improved the condition of recreation area forestlands; however, the present condition of the forest is directly related to early land-use

practices. Much of the forestland was cleared for farming or heavily cut for the timber market and then abandoned in the early 1900s. Later, fire and the chestnut blight epidemic completed the chain of events, which left thousands of acres of timber in a devastated condition, leaving undergrowth as growing stock. This has developed into fair stands of mixed oak and white pine.

CHAPTER III
Population Characteristics and Trends

A. Historic Trends

Once a community of more than 21,000 people, Grayson County’s population of the past two decades has shown little change, going from 16,579 in 1980 to 16,881 in 2000. Prior to that the county population had declined from 21,379 in 1950 to 15,439 in 1970. Much of the earlier population decline can be attributed to the creation of Galax as an independent city in 1953.

The City of Galax has grown slowly but steadily over the years, with the city population exceeding 6,800 in 2000. The same cannot be said of Grayson County, as shown in Table III-1. Generally, since 1980, the population trend for Grayson County has been one of little change or of decline.

Table III-1
Population
Grayson County, Galax, MRPDC, and Virginia
1950-2000

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Grayson County ¹	21,379	17,390	15,439	16,579	16,278	16,881
Galax ²	5,248	5,254	6,278	6,524	6,670	6,837
MRPDC ³	163,757	160,065	159,412	181,118	178,210	178,205
Virginia	3,318,680	3,966,949	4,651,448	5,346,797	6,189,197	7,078,515

1. The 2000 population figure is given as corrected by the U.S. Census Bureau as of July 6, 2001.

2. Galax became an independent city in 1953.

3. Source data came from the Virginia Statistical Abstract, 2000 edition (Table 16.6C); U.S. Census 2000 (Profile of General Demographic Characteristics); P.L. 94-171 Counts (1990) for Grayson County.

Table III-2 shows the average annual population growth for Grayson County versus larger regions, starting in 1950. Grayson County experienced moderate growth in the 1970 to 1980 period at an average of 0.7 percent per year, and then again in the 1990 to 2000 period at an average of 0.4 percent per year. Population trends both in Grayson County and in the Mount Rogers region lagged behind the steady statewide growth rate. From 1950 through 2000, statewide population grew on average by 1.6 percent per year, compared to 0.2 percent for the Mount Rogers region and -0.4 percent for Grayson County.

Table III-2
Population Change¹
Virginia, MRPDC, and Grayson County
By Decade
1950-2000

Decade	Virginia			MRPDC			Grayson County		
	Numeric Change	Percent Change	Average Annual Growth	Numeric Change	Percent Change	Average Annual Growth	Numeric Change	Percent Change	Average Annual Growth
1950-1960	648,269	19.5%	2.0%	-3,692	-2.3%	-0.2%	-3,989	-18.7%	-1.9%
1960-1970	684,499	17.3%	1.7%	-653	-0.4%	0.0%	-1,951	-11.2%	-1.1%
1970-1980	695,349	14.9%	1.5%	21,706	13.6%	1.4%	1,140	7.4%	0.7%
1980-1990	842,400	15.8%	1.6%	-2,908	-1.6%	-0.2%	-301	-1.8%	-0.2%
1990-2000	889,318	14.4%	1.4%	-5	0.0%	0.0%	603	3.7%	0.4%
1950-2000	3,759,835	113.3%	1.6%	14,448	8.8%	0.2%	-4,498	-21.0%	-0.4%

1. Analysis done by MRPDC based on the data found in Table III-1.

B. Racial Composition

Grayson County's population has always been predominately white, and that characteristic generally remained true in 2000. In 1990, 97 percent of the population reported itself as white; in the year 2000, the percentage had slipped to 91.7 percent, though direct comparisons are not strictly valid since under the 2000 Census, people could report themselves either as one race or as more than one race. Table III-3, below, gives a racial breakdown of the population for Grayson County and surrounding areas as reported in 1990.

Table III-3
Selected Racial Data¹
Virginia, MRPDC, Grayson County, and Galax
By Population and Percentage
1990

Locality or Region	Total Pop.	One Race							
		White	Percent	Black or African American	Percent	Asian	Percent	Hispanic or Latino	Percent
Virginia	6,187,358	4,791,739	77.4%	1,162,994	18.8%	156,036	2.5%	160,288	2.6%
MRPDC	178,205	172,973	97.1%	4,497	2.5%	351	0.2%	681	0.4%
Grayson County	16,278	15,729	96.6%	486	3.0%	14	0.1%	75	0.5%
Galax	6,670	6,219	93.2%	387	5.8%	15	0.2%	65	1.0%

1. Table DP1B. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics for Virginia (1990), from Summary Tape File 1A P1, P7, as reported by Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia.

Table III-4, in turn, gives the racial breakdown for the population as reported in 2000.

Table III-4
Selected Racial Data¹
Virginia, MRPDC, Grayson County, and Galax
By Population and Percentage
2000²

Locality or Region	Total Pop.	One Race							
		White	Percent	Black or African American	Percent	Asian	Percent	Hispanic or Latino	Percent
Virginia	7,078,515	5,120,110	72.3%	1,390,293	19.6%	261,025	3.7%	329,540	4.7%
MRPDC	190,020	181,880	95.7%	5,115	2.7%	464	0.2%	2,476	1.3%
Grayson County	17,917	16,429	91.7%	1,217	6.8%	12	0.1%	277	1.5%
Galax City	6,837	5,887	86.1%	428	6.3%	48	0.7%	757	11.1%

1. Table DPIB. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics for Virginia (U.S. Census 2000), as reported by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia.

2. 1990 and 2000 data are not comparable because in 2000, for the first time, individuals could report one or more race; in 1990 individuals could report only one race. The selected 2000 data shown here excludes the data on individuals reporting more than one race.

In the 1990 to 2000 period, Grayson County experienced some increase in its black and Hispanic populations, though percentages remain low. A few people reporting themselves as Asian also appear in Census data, though the percentages for Asians are extremely low.

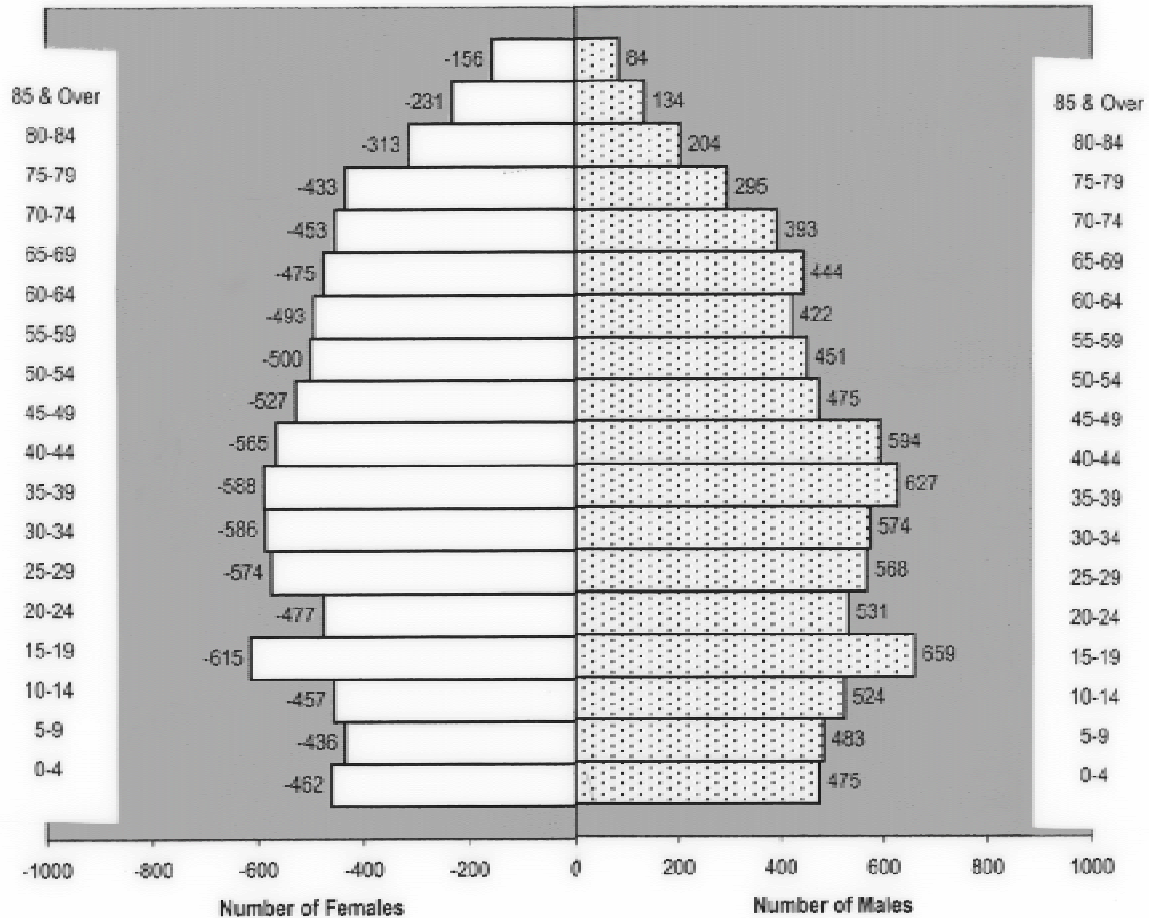
The table above shows that the population of the City of Galax is more racially diverse than Grayson County. Particularly notable is the city's Hispanic population, which made up approximately 11 percent of the total population in 2000. For the county, by contrast, the Hispanic population only amounted to 1.5 percent of the total.

C. Age/Sex Characteristics

One method for analyzing population changes over time is to evaluate age and sex characteristics. When presented in a format known as "population pyramids," the data can reveal important trends. The charts offered here show age/sex characteristics as they existed in Grayson County in 1990 and 2000. Numbers of males and females are shown in age groups spanning five years each, going from birth to the age of 85 and over. The data for females appear on the left side of the charts, while the data for males (shaded, for clarity) appear on the right side of the charts.

Generally, pyramids that are broad at the base indicate a growing population. This is because the number of females about to move into the reproductive years (15 to 44) will be greater than the number of females currently appearing in the category. For the future that means there will be more females available to have babies, and, generally speaking, the population will

**Chart III-1
Population Pyramid¹
Grayson County
1990**

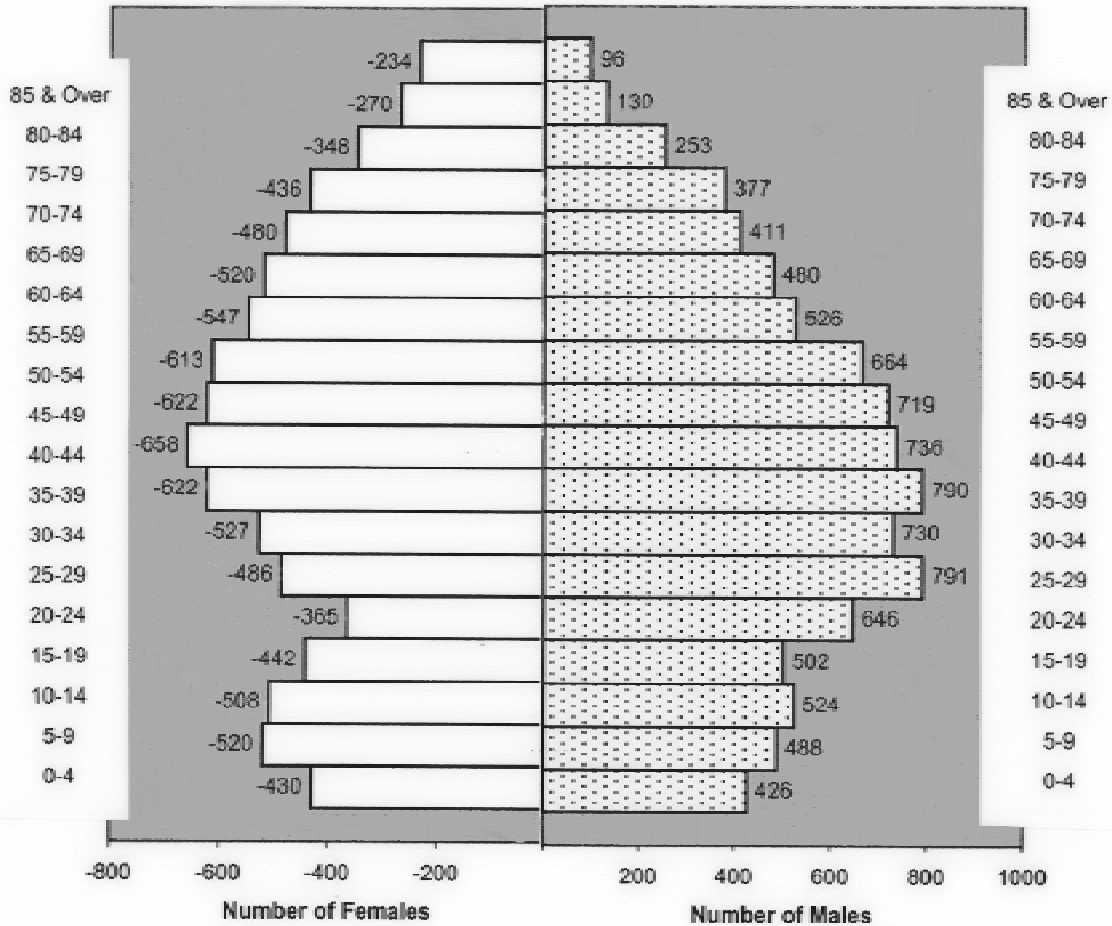


1. Population numbers for females are in negative format for purposes of display. Data sources include: U.S. Census Bureau Summary Tape File 1 (1990 Census) and sex by age 1990 Census data as reported by the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia

grow. As shown in the previous Comprehensive Plan, Grayson County had a broad-based pyramid in 1950. In the following two decades, however, the pyramid base narrowed as the population declined. The effect could be explained because in 1953, Galax became an independent city and thereby gained population formerly listed for Grayson County. Please study the population trend data from earlier in this chapter to see this in greater detail.

As shown in the population pyramids for Grayson County for 1990 and 2000, the population continues to appear narrow at the base in the early years of life. This indicates there are relatively few males and females about to enter the reproductive years and the population is not growing.

**Chart III-2
Population Pyramid¹
Grayson County
2000**



1. Population numbers for females are in negative format for purposes of display. The 2000 data for Grayson County contains inaccuracies in the adult population counts due to an error of approximately 1,000 people. The corrected 2000 Census count for total population in Grayson County is 16,881 (announced July 6, 2001); corresponding corrected age/sex data was not available. Data sources include: U.S. Census Bureau Table P12, Sex by Age (2000 Census) and sex by age Census data as reported by the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia

Young people as a proportion of the county population have been in decline. The percentage of young people in the 0 to 19 age group went from 29.8 percent in 1980 to an

estimated 21.4 percent in 2000.³ While young people have been declining as a proportion of the county population, increases can be seen for the adult age groups of 20 to 59 and 60 and over. This indicates Grayson County has been experiencing a “graying” of the population, with a greater proportion of people in the older age groups. For those aged 60 and over, the proportion went from 19.9 percent in 1980 to an estimated 22.5 percent in 2000. Details appear in Table III-5.

**Table III-5
Population Distribution
Grayson County
1980-2000**

Age Group	1980		1990		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number ¹	Percent
0-19	4,933	29.8%	4,111	25.3%	3,840	21.5%
20-59	8,348	50.4%	8,552	52.5%	10,042	56.0%
60 and over	3,298	19.8%	3,615	22.2%	4,035	22.5%
Total:	16,579	100%	16,278	100%	17,917	100%

1. The 2000 population was roughly 1,000 too high, due to a U.S. Census reporting error.

As seen in the previous Comprehensive Plan, Grayson County’s population in the past two decades has continued to become older. Data reported for median age reflects the same trend. For Grayson County, the median age level climbed from 38 in 1990 to 40.5 in 2000. For the Mount Rogers region, median age in 2000 stood at 40.25; the statewide median age stood at 35.7 in the same year.

D. Migration

Population migration is defined as the movement of people from one area to another. In-migration refers to people moving in on a permanent basis, while out-migration reflects a loss of people from a given area or locality. Migration is not the same as the in- and out-commuting by workers as they travel from their homes to their place of employment each day.

Net migration is defined as the difference between in-migration and out-migration. Net migration can be a valuable tool in making decisions about growth in a given area.

³ This is an estimate only since the 2000 population data is 1,000 people too many due to a reporting error by the U.S. Census Bureau. Though the overall population count for the county was adjusted in July 2001, corresponding data broken out by age groups was not available.

Table III-6
Natural Increase: Births and Deaths¹
Grayson County
1980-1999

	1980-1989	1990-1999
Natural Increase (Total) ²	62	-253
Resident Births	1,793	1,881
Resident Deaths	1,731	2,134
Average Annual Natural Increase	6	-23

1. Virginia Center for Health Statistics annual reports (Table 1); Virginia Statistical Abstract (Table 22.5 and 22.13).

2. Natural increase equals resident births minus resident deaths.

Net migration is calculated by determining natural increase (resident births versus resident deaths) and then applying those numbers to Census data on total population. The first step, looking at natural increase in the past two decades, appears in Table III-6, at left. For the 1990 to 2000 period resident deaths exceeded resident

births. In the prior decade resident births barely exceeded resident deaths.

The next step in determining net migration is to apply some simple additions and subtractions using Census data for the total population. This is shown in Table III-7, below.

For the period 1980 to 1989, Grayson County lost 363 people due to net out-migration. Had there been no moving out, the natural increase of 62 over the decade would have resulted in a population total 16,641.

For the 1990 to 2000 period, something different was happening. Resident deaths were greater than resident births by 253 for the 11-year period. Based on natural increase alone, the population would have declined by 253, resulting in a population of 16,025. But the 2000 Census showed the population had increased to 16,881; that means Grayson County gained 856 people who had moved in on a permanent basis.

Table III-7
Net Migration
Grayson County
1980-1999

1980-1989	
1980 Population	16,579
1980-1990 Natural Increase ¹	62
1990 Total	16,641
1990 Population	<u>-16,278</u>
Net Out-Migration	363
Average Per Year	36.3
1990-1999	
1990 Population	16,278
1990-2000 Natural Increase ¹	<u>-253</u>
2000 Total	16,025
2000 Population ²	16,881
Net In-Migration	856
Average Per Year	77.8

1. See Table III-6 on Natural Increase.

2. As adjusted by the U.S. Census in July 2001.

E. Population Projections

Estimating population size years into the future is an inexact science based on historic trends and available information. Any projections should be viewed with caution, especially

those based on small population numbers, as is true for the communities that comprise the Mount Rogers Planning District.

Projections for Grayson County made in the 1970s and given for the year 2000 produced estimates ranging from 13,500 to 17,200, or a variation of 3,700 people (see the Grayson County Comprehensive Plan originally adopted in 1981). The variations stem from differences in the way the estimates are produced and the assumptions made. It is perhaps best to view population projections as educated guesses. As it turned out in reality, Grayson County’s population in 2000 was 16,881, leaning toward the high end rather than the low end of projections from more than 20 years before. Factors affecting local populations include changing economic conditions, rate of natural increase and migration trends. Projections are based on information available at the moment; the estimates cannot account for unforeseen circumstances that can greatly affect the future of a community.

Table III-8, shown below, shows population projections made by the Virginia

Table III-8
Population Projections¹
Mount Rogers Region and Virginia
Estimates
2000 and 2010

Locality or Region	2000 Estimate	2010 Estimate	Number Difference	Percent Difference
Bland County	7,201	7,805	604	8.4%
Carroll County	28,998	30,707	1709	5.9%
Grayson County	16,796	17,401	605	3.6%
Smyth County	33,799	34,302	503	1.5%
Washington County	51,193	53,601	2,408	4.7%
Wythe County	27,096	28,397	1,301	4.8%
City Bristol	17,508	16,796	-712	-4.1%
City Galax	6,796	6,999	203	3.0%
MRPDC	189,387	196,008	6,621	3.5%
Virginia	6,992,045	7,737,597	745,552	10.7%

1. Virginia Employment Commission, March 1999.

Employment Commission for Grayson County, several other localities, and the surrounding region and state. Grayson County’s population is estimated to grow by 3.6 percent between 2000 and 2010.

The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (University of Virginia) in the 1988 report, *Virginia’s Local*

Economies, cited NPA Data Services, Inc., a private Washington, D.C. firm specializing in population projections and related economic trends. For the 1996 to 2005 period, NPA estimated Grayson County’s average annual growth rate at zero percent, the lowest in the Mount Rogers

region. The Mount Rogers region was slightly ahead at 0.4 percent per year. For the same period the average annual growth rate for the state was one percent per year.

F. Conclusions

Moderate population growth will be a key factor in Grayson County's development over the coming years. This growth will be dependent on several factors – continued growth in the service sector and replacement of jobs lost in the manufacturing sector, retention of existing business and industry, and the in-migration of retirees.

Past projections of population growth in the county have been too optimistic. The original comprehensive plan, adopted in 1981, projected a population of 20,000 by the year 2000; the actual numbers fell short, with the population reaching only 16,881. But the 1981 analysis was correct in that the out-migration from earlier decades (1940 to 1970) had bottomed out and that the county could expect to experience some growth.

Where the future population will locate in the county will be determined to a large extent upon the implementation of the recommendations in this plan. The previous Comprehensive Plan suggested that the areas south and west of Galax and the areas near Independence would receive the majority of the growth projected in the county. The remaining growth would be dispersed throughout the county. That observation is still relevant today, and the recommendations contained in this plan will encourage that trend to continue.

CHAPTER IV Economy

This chapter examines changes in income, employment, and industries important to Grayson County, mainly over the past two decades. The story has been one of decline in nearly all areas. As pointed out in reports such as *Virginia's Local Economies*, Grayson County has in recent years experienced the lowest rate of employment growth in the Mount Rogers region. Rather than serving as an economic engine to draw people in, Grayson County exports much of its workforce to other communities, particularly Galax, located between Grayson and Carroll counties, Hillsville, Marion, Sparta, North Carolina, and Alleghany County and Ashe County, North Carolina.

A. Income

Grayson County incomes, along with other aspects of the local economy, are in a losing mode compared to the region and state, as shown in Table IV-1 and Table IV-2. While statewide incomes climbed steadily in the 1980s and 1990s, the opposite is true for Grayson County. In 1980, per capita personal incomes in Grayson County were 65.9 percent of the statewide average. By 2000, the ratio had slipped to 54.4 percent of the statewide average.

**Table IV-1
Comparative Per Capita Personal Income¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
1980- 2000**

Locality or Region	1980	Percent of State	1990	Percent of State	2000	Percent of State
Grayson County	\$6,710	65.9%	\$12,274	59.8%	\$16,941	54.4%
MRPDC	\$7,190	70.7%	\$13,830	67.4%	\$20,570	66.1%
Virginia	\$10,176		\$20,527		\$31,120	

1. Regional Accounts Data, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Median household incomes in Grayson County were also not keeping pace with the state. Again we see more evidence of decline, a characteristic also shared by the Mount Rogers Planning District as a whole during the same time period. Census data shows that by 1999, median household incomes in Grayson County had slid to 61 percent of the statewide average, down from 67 percent of the statewide average in 1979.

As will be seen in other sections of this chapter, the local area has sustained losses in jobs and shrinking of industries that formerly served as the backbone of the Grayson County economy. The losses have been particularly severe in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

Table IV-2
Comparative Median Household Income¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
1979, 1989, and 1999

Locality or Region	1979	Percent of State	1989	Percent of State	1999	Percent of State
Grayson County	\$11,732	67%	\$19,324	58%	\$28,676	61%
MRPDC (est.) ²	\$12,631	72%	\$21,002	63%	\$30,044	64%
Virginia	\$17,475		\$33,328		\$46,677	

1. U.S. Census 2000 (Profile of Selected Economic Statistics); U.S. Census Summary Tape File 3 (2000 and 1990); Virginia Statistical Abstract 1989 (Tables 12.9 and 12.13B).

2. As calculated by MRPDC.

B. Employment

Both state and federal data reflect significant job losses in Grayson County since at least 1977. For all industries counted by the Virginia Employment Commission, the job losses across-the-board have amounted to 2,333, or 48 percent, from 1977 through 2000. The highest rate of job losses occurred in the agricultural sector, followed by manufacturing. Further detail on these trends can be seen in Table IV-3, below.

Table IV-3
Comparative Employment by Major Occupation Group¹
Grayson County
1977, 1990, and 2000

Industry Sector	1977 Data ²	1st Qtr 1990	1st Qtr 2000	Net Change 1990-2000	Percent Change 1990-2000	Net Change 1977-2000	Percent Change 1977-2000
Total all industries	4,874	3,032	2,541	-491	-16%	-2,333	-48%
Agricultural	800	(D)	29	-	-	-771	-96%
Non-Agricultural	4,074	3,025	2,512	-513	-17%	-1,562	-38%
Manufacturing	2,177	1,798	851	-947	-53%	-1,326	-61%
Non-Manufacturing	1,297	671	1,009	338	50%	-288	-22%

1. Virginia Employment Commission, Covered Employment and Wages in Virginia.

2. Data taken from Table IV-4, Grayson County Comprehensive Plan originally adopted in April 1981.

(D) Not shown to avoid disclosure of confidential information, but the estimates for this item are included in the totals.

Federal data shows similar trends for total full-time and part-time employment in Grayson County. From 1980 through 2000, the largest number of job losses occurred in manufacturing, going from 2,512 jobs to 836 jobs, for a total loss of 1,676 jobs in that sector alone. Other losses occurred in mining and traditional agriculture, as shown in Table IV-4.

Table IV-4
Employment Characteristics¹
Grayson County
By Industry and By Five-Year Increments
1980 to 2000

Item	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	Net Change 1980-2000	Percent Change 1980-2000
Total FT and PT employment	5,781	5,816	5,468	5,534	4,817	-964	-16.7%
Employment by industry							
<u>Farm employment</u>	1,311	1,304	1,123	1,172	1,117	-194	-14.8%
<u>Nonfarm employment</u>	4,470	4,512	4,345	4,362	3,700	-770	-17.2%
Private employment	3,943	3,907	3,725	3,726	2,965	-978	-24.8%
	10	28	66	(D)	149	139	1390.0%
Ag. services, forestry, fishing, other ²	38	18	25	(D)	0	-38	
Mining	216	227	286	408	268	52	24.1%
Construction	2,512	2,306	1,762	1,388	836	-1,676	-66.7%
Manufacturing	64	78	97	79	64	0	
Transportation & public utilities	17	22	81	142	164	147	864.7%
Wholesale trade	385	406	453	506	430	45	11.7%
Retail trade	183	173	169	188	208	25	13.7%
Finance, insurance, & real estate	518	649	786	914	846	328	63.3%
Services	527	605	620	636	735	208	39.5%
Government & govt enterprises	38	36	39	38	50	12	
Federal, civilian	66	80	86	66	63	-3	
Military	423	489	495	532	622	199	47.0%
State and local	29	25	21	37	36	7	24.1%
State	394	464	474	495	586	192	48.7%
Local							

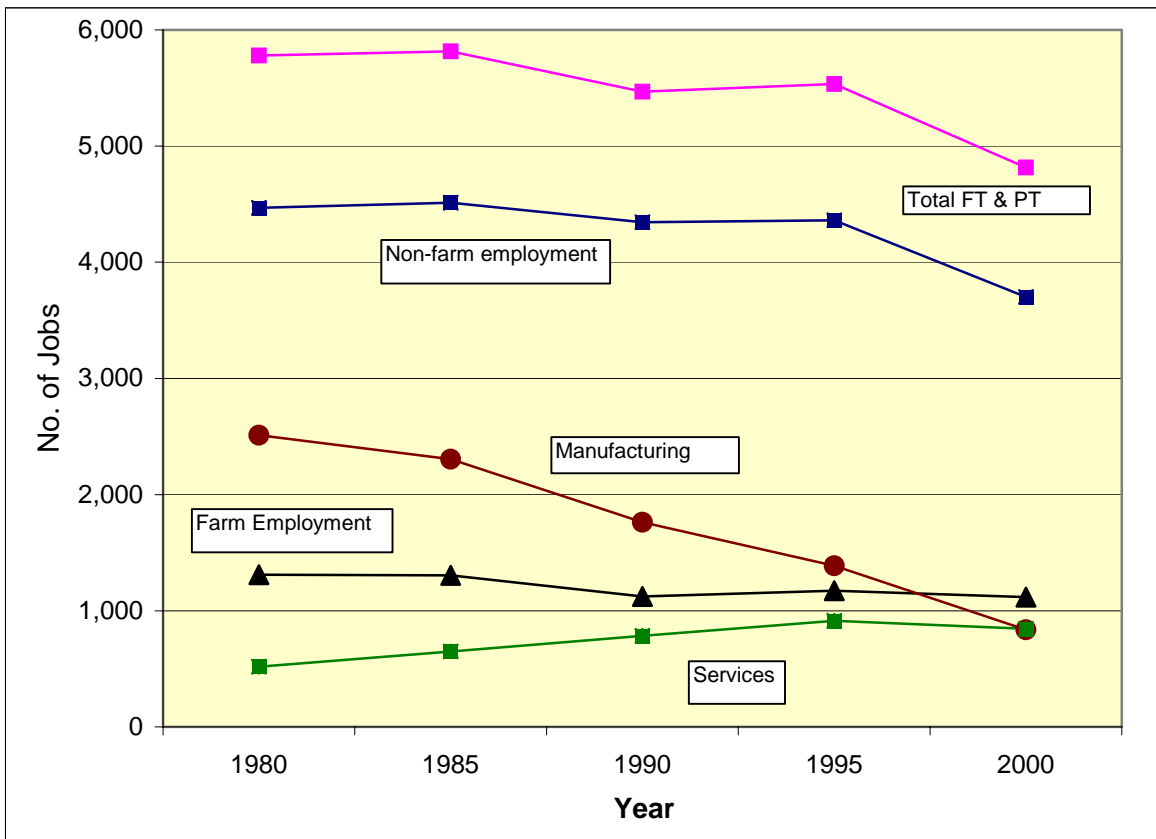
1. Table CA25, Total Full-Time and Part-Time Employment, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

2. "Other" means jobs held by U.S. residents employed by international organizations, foreign embassies and consulates in the United States.

(D) Not shown to avoid disclosure of confidential information, but the estimates for this item are included in the totals.

Sectors showing modest employment gains over the past two decades include agricultural services, construction, wholesale and retail trade, services, and state and local government. The number of jobs gained for any one sector are not significant, especially not when compared to the losses suffered over the years. A graphic depiction of employment trends in Grayson County can be seen below in Chart IV-1.

Chart IV-1
Employment Characteristics
Grayson County
By Industry and By Five-Year Increments
1980 to 2000



C. Agriculture

The U.S. Census of Agriculture over the years lends perspective for the farming community for Grayson County, the Mount Rogers region and the state as a whole. Land devoted to farming on the local level declined between 1982 and 1997, though at a lesser rate than that for the region and the state, as shown in Table IV-5, below. Between 1997 and 2002, Grayson County experienced a 5.4 percent increase in farm land.

Table IV-5
Comparative Acreage in Farms¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Five-Year Increments
1982 to 2002

Locality	1982 Acres	1987 Acres	1992 Acres	1997 Acres	2002 Acres	Net Change 1982-2002 Acres	Percent Change 1982-2002
Grayson County	142,840	139,927	136,320	136,312	150,609	7,769	5.4%
MRPDC	852,517	806,434	772,654	773,066	840,300	-12,217	-1.4%
Virginia	9,436,900	8,676,336	8,297,011	8,228,226	8,624,829	-812,071	-8.6%

1. U.S. Census of Agriculture for 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, and 2002.

Regionally, from 1997 to 2002, the amount of available farm land increased by 8.7 percent, bringing the total acreage of farm land in the region to within 1.4 percent of the 1984 figure. During the same period, the total acreage in farms statewide also increased, but only by 4.8 percent.

For Grayson County losses in the farming sector have been occurring for decades, as documented in the previous comprehensive plan originally adopted in April 1981. At that time, land in Grayson County was reverting to open space and forestland rather than to increasing urbanization. This is distinct from the development pressures that have occurred in Northern Virginia and other parts of the Mount Rogers region. However, the development of the Christmas tree industry during the late 1990s and early 2000s has led to a significant increase in the total farm land available in Grayson County.

Table IV-6
Comparative Average Farm Size¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Five-Year Increments
1982 to 2002

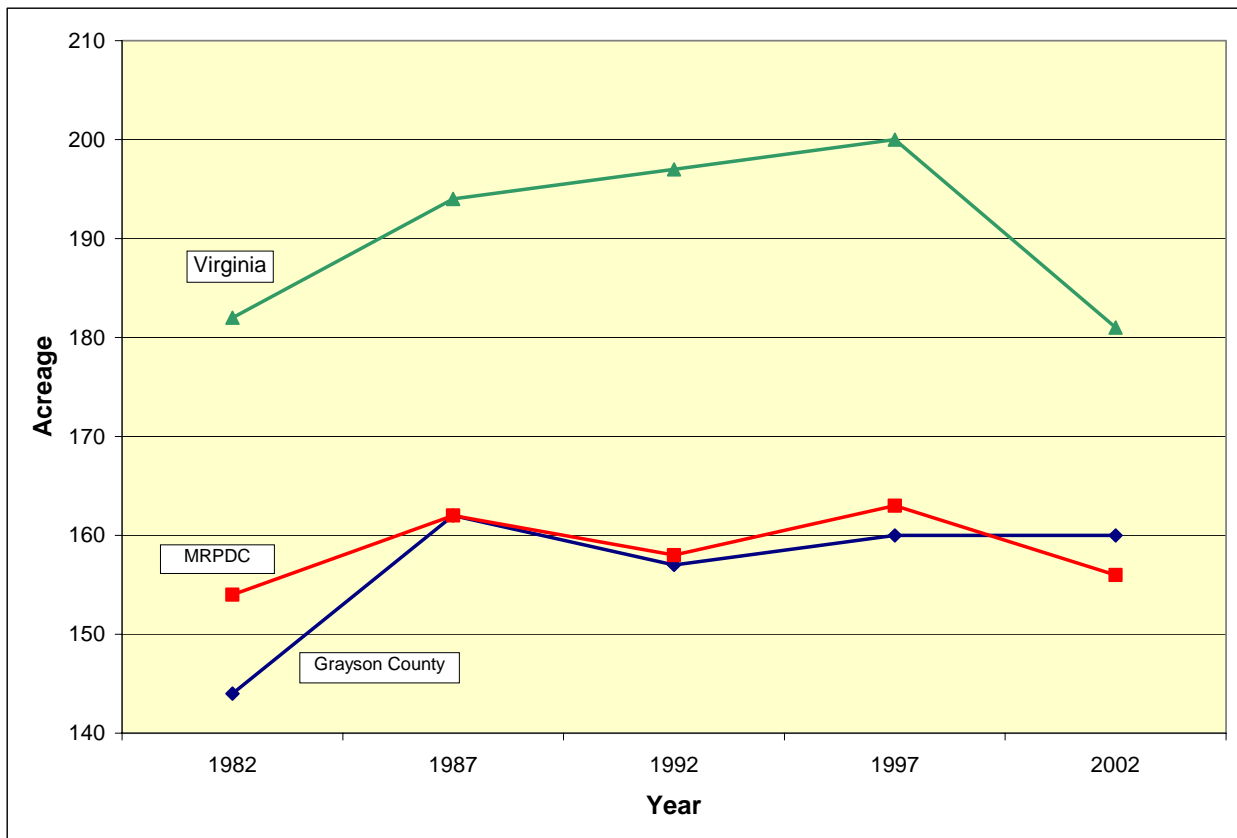
Locality	1982 Acres	1987 Acres	1992 Acres	1997 Acres	2002 Acres	Increase (Acres)	Percent Change
Grayson County	144	162	157	160	160	16	11.1%
MRPDC	154	162	158	163	156	2	1.3%
Virginia	182	194	197	200	181	-1	-0.5%

1. U.S. Census of Agriculture for 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997 and 2002.

For the 1987 to 1997 period, the average size of farms in Grayson County closely mirrored that for the Mount Rogers region as a whole, as shown in Table IV-6, above, and in the

chart on average farm size. Nevertheless, the 2002 figures indicate a shift toward larger farms in Grayson County as compared to the Mount Rogers region.

Chart IV-2
Average Farm Size
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
1982 to 2002



As discussed elsewhere in this document, Grayson's farming activity has been most affected by the conversion of mountain land to raise Fraser Firs for Christmas trees, now the leading source of farm income that generates an estimated \$10 million annually, based on the number of acres now devoted to Christmas tree production. In the past the livestock industry comprised as much as 93 percent of the value of farm products produced in Grayson County, based on data available from the U.S. Census of Agriculture from 1982 through 1997. The conversion of mountain land to Christmas tree production is likely to continue, given the relatively high income potential from Fraser Firs compared to the more traditional forms of

agriculture. An estimated 500 to 1,000 acres annually have been converted to Christmas tree production over the past 10 years, according to the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service.

Tied to the Christmas tree industry is the migrant farm labor force used to harvest the trees for market. Reliable data on the size of this labor force, especially on the county level, is largely non-existent.⁴ One estimate might be indicated through the U.S. Census Bureau, which in 2000 counted 277 residents of Hispanic or Latino origin in the county. Some discussion of the racial composition of county residents also appears in Chapter III.

For families of migrants who have settled in the region, federal initiatives such as the Migrant Education Program, established in 1965, have been established to improve the education of a population that moves frequently, faces social isolation, has cultural and language barriers, and experiences other problems that impede academic success. In the Grayson County school system,⁵ students identified with limited English skills ranged from three (in 1995 and 1998) to as many as 20 (in 1999). The City of Galax, with a much higher population of migrants, identified 132 such students in 2002.⁶ Statewide, the Migrant Education Program serves 3,500 migratory students.

The Virginia Justice Center (VJC) for Farm and Immigrant Workers, based in Charlottesville, provides legal aid services to migrant workers to resolve disputes involving wages and housing conditions. VJC estimates there are 50,000 migrant farm workers statewide who harvest Christmas trees, apples, peaches, and crabs.

Federal surveys have shown that migrant farm workers are often foreign born, young and male. Migrant laborers comprise 55 percent of short-term farm-task force, 64 percent of the harvest force and 45 percent of the peak season labor force nationwide. These workers generally get only limited employee benefits, are poorly educated, and often are only able to work about seven months a year, due to the instability of the work and an oversupply of laborers.⁷

⁴ Generalized demographic data is available through the National Agricultural Workers Survey by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Current Population Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Farm Labor Survey by the National Agricultural Statistics Service. This data is not broken out to the county level, due in part to the transitory nature of migrant laborers.

⁵ Grayson schools participate in the Southwest Virginia Regional Migrant Education Program, which provides services in 29 schools in 10 school districts in the region.

⁶ From the state education department Report of Limited English Proficient Students, as of Sept. 30, 2002.

⁷ From "What Federal Statistics Reveal about Migrant Farmworkers: A Summary for Education," through the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, at www.ael.org/eric. December 2002.

1. Forest Resources – Timberland has been important to the area since settlement. Today over fifty percent of the land remains timberland. While the timberland has changed due to insect, disease, fire, and timber harvesting, it continues to be important to the local economy. Timberland is one of Grayson County’s natural resources. Setting guidelines to maintain viable timberlands is essential to insuring a quality environment for Grayson County. Ecologically, timberlands help maintain good water quality. Timberland filters, traps sediments, and absorbs pollutants from overload, runoff, and subsurface flow. Timberlands act as natural buffers along the New River, smaller perennial intermittent streams by preventing excess nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorous, from entering and polluting our waterways. Tree roots help maintain clean ground water. Timberland provides essential ecosystems for a variety of plants and animals. It provides food, shelter, cover, nesting, and bedding areas for a wide variety of wildlife. Several rare or threatened species of plants can be found within the timberlands throughout the County. Timberland plays an economic role in the community, based on timber severance taxes paid from 1996 to 2001, which averaged 2.5 million per year to Grayson County landowners for timber sold. The 1995 publication, Virginia’s Forest Our Commonwealth describes how \$48.64 of economic value is generated from each dollar paid to a landowner for timber stumpage through such services as primary and secondary processing transportation, harvesting, construction, and marketing. Using this multiplier, the value of the timber harvested averaged \$121,600.00 in economical activity. These figures do not include values such as hunting, recreation, tourism, air quality, and aesthetic benefits, which are important to our economy. Socially, timberland provides a pleasant environment for Grayson County residents to live and work. It promotes public health and safety through the reduction of noise, air, water, and visual pollution. Timberland promotes and preserves the appearance, life styles, and traditions, which have existed in Grayson County for decades.

D. Manufacturing

Table IV-7 represents a picture of the manufacturing sector in Grayson County in 1997, as shown by data from the 1997 Economic Census.⁸ On the regional level, manufacturing in Grayson County accounted for 3.6 percent of sales and receipts and 4.5 percent of the region’s annual payroll. That is modest compared to most of the other counties and cities in the region.

⁸ The Economic Census is produced by the U.S. Census Bureau every five years.

For example, manufacturing is much more prominent in Smyth County, accounting for 20.5 percent of sales and receipts and 19.1 percent of the region's annual payroll.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Grayson County manufacturing has sustained significant losses over the past 20 years. Nearly 67 percent of manufacturing jobs have been lost in the county since 1980, and the future outlook is not good. Employment centers such as the City of Galax, traditionally strong for furniture making, appear on the brink of decline due to increased competitive pressure from overseas manufacturing.

Table IV-7
Comparative Manufacturing Sales, Payrolls, and Employees¹
Mount Rogers District
By County and City
1997

Locality	Estab.	Sales, receipts or shipments (\$1,000s)	Percent of Region	Annual payroll (\$1,000s)	Percent of Region	Paid employees
Bland County	7	\$85,499	2.5%	\$15,831	2.8%	656
Carroll County	35	\$286,323	8.5%	\$45,288	7.9%	2,430
Grayson County	18	\$123,380	3.6%	\$25,827	4.5%	1,085
Smyth County	53	\$692,628	20.5%	\$109,170	19.1%	4,913
Washington County	65	\$315,785	9.3%	\$53,226	9.3%	2,031
Wythe County	45	\$276,944	8.2%	\$51,638	9.0%	2,129
City of Bristol	41	\$1,222,944	36.1%	\$184,362	32.2%	6,954
City of Galax	24	\$380,240	11.2%	\$86,840	15.2%	4,460
MRPDC	288	\$3,383,743		\$572,182		24,658

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 1997 Economic Census (summary statistics).

E. Retail Trade

On a somewhat brighter note, retail trade in Grayson County has shown some growth, as indicated in Table IV-8, for annual taxable sales. Retail trade includes establishments that sell retail merchandise and offer related services. Retailing serves as the final step in the process of moving merchandise into the hands of the general public.

In Grayson County a large share of retail activity in 1997 occurred in the automotive industry, with eight businesses engaged in selling motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts and another eight businesses selling gasoline. These activities accounted for \$16 million in annual sales, or nearly half of the \$33 million worth of total retail activity, as shown by the 1997

Economic Census. The next most important retail activity in Grayson County was captured by food and beverage stores, accounting for just over \$10 million in annual sales in 1997.

Table IV-8
Annual Taxable Sales¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Thousands of Dollars
1996-2000

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Net Change 1996-2000	Percent Change 1996-2000
Grayson County	26,130	28,715	31,176	32,911	38,413	12,283	47.0%
MRPDC	1,227,290	1,281,323	1,331,467	1,403,551	1,491,189	263,899	21.5%
Virginia	53,923,260	57,047,801	60,113,811	64,068,575	68,661,581	14,738,321	27.3%

1. Virginia Dept. of Taxation data on annual taxable sales.

Table IV-9 shows retail activity in Grayson County as it compared to the Mount Rogers region as a whole. Grayson ranked just ahead of Bland but behind the other counties and cities for retail sales and employment. The data shown reflect activity in the retail sector in 1997.

Table IV-9
Comparative Retail Sales, Payrolls, and Employees¹
Mount Rogers District and Virginia
By County and City
1997

Locality or Region	Establishments	Sales, receipts or shipments (\$1,000s)	Percent of Region	Annual Payroll (\$1,000s)	Percent of Region	Paid Employees
Bland County	18	\$19,812	1.2%	\$1,448	1.0%	145
Carroll County	114	\$162,556	9.7%	\$13,752	9.3%	957
Grayson County	38	\$33,413	2.0%	\$2,251	1.5%	176
Smyth County	170	\$232,065	13.9%	\$20,770	14.0%	1,560
Washington County	253	\$408,897	24.5%	\$40,835	27.6%	2,609
Wythe County	204	\$346,056	20.7%	\$27,166	18.4%	1,933
City of Bristol	155	\$331,695	19.9%	\$29,205	19.7%	2,266
City of Galax	71	\$134,604	8.1%	\$12,585	8.5%	906
MRPDC	1,023	\$1,669,098		\$148,012		10,552
Virginia	29,032	\$62,569,924		\$6,202,575		379,039

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 1997 Economic Census (summary statistics).

F. Wholesale Trade

Information on wholesale activity for Grayson County and the region is limited due to the small size of this economic sector. In some cases information has been withheld to avoid

identifying individual businesses. The same kinds of comparisons that were done for the manufacturing and retail sectors were not possible here.

Table IV-10
Comparative Wholesale Sales, Payrolls, and Employees¹
Mount Rogers District
By County and City
1997

Locality	Establishments	Sales, receipts or shipments (\$1,000s)	Percent of Region	Annual payroll (\$1,000s)	Percent of Region	Paid Employees
Bland County	6	(D)	(NC)	(D)	(NC)	(250-499)
Carroll County	25	\$42,912	(NC)	\$3,220	(NC)	164
Grayson County	3	\$927	(NC)	\$106	(NC)	5
Smyth County	25	\$65,653	(NC)	\$6,804	(NC)	237
Washington County	51	\$847,489	(NC)	\$29,280	(NC)	1125
Wythe County	21	\$72,988	(NC)	\$4,904	(NC)	184
City of Bristol	40	(D)	(NC)	(D)	(NC)	(500-999)
City of Galax	6	\$5,977	(NC)	\$1,013	(NC)	42
MRPDC	107	(NC)		(NC)		(NC)

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 1997 Economic Census (summary statistics).

(D) Not shown to avoid disclosure of confidential information.

(NC) Not calculated.

G. Service Industry

As documented earlier in Table IV-4 (on employment characteristics for the county) the service sector has been in a modest growth mode in Grayson County in the past two decades. Service employment went from 518 jobs in 1980 to 846 jobs in 2000, up 63.3 percent.

The service sector includes a range of activities encompassing professional and technical services, education, health care and social assistance, arts, entertainment, recreation, lodging, food services, and other similar activities. Table IV-11, shown below, offers a picture of this sector in Grayson County.

Table IV-11
Service Sector Activity¹
Grayson County
By Type of Service
1997

Services	Estab.	Sales, Receipts or Shipments (\$1,000s)	Annual payroll (\$1,000s)	Paid Employees
Real estate, rental, leasing	3	\$291	\$58	9
Professional, scientific & technical services	7	\$828	\$352	34
Admin., support, waste mgmt. & remediation services	6	\$2,848	\$1,552	166
Educational services	1	(D)	(D)	(1-19)
Health care and social assistance	10	\$3,156	\$1,602	71
Arts, entertainment & recreation	2	(D)	(D)	(1-19)
Accommodation & food services	14	\$1,840	\$555	65
Other services (except public admin.)	16	\$3,052	\$1,179	87
Total:	59			

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 1997 Economic Census (Summary Statistics for Grayson County).
(D) Not shown to avoid disclosure of confidential information.

H. Conclusions

Grayson County has taken an economic hit with the demise of the textile industry and has been working to replace jobs lost. Opportunities for the future will come from continued emphasis on tourism, infrastructure, and regional partnerships to rebuild the county's economic base.

The original Comprehensive Plan was very optimistic that furniture and apparel businesses would continue to find the county an attractive place to locate. The impact of the global marketplace has been devastating to the county and was unforeseen earlier. The jobs to replace those that have been lost have been slow in developing, and that trend will most likely continue.

But the county needs time to develop sites with adequate infrastructure in order to be prepared for the opportunities that develop. The Carroll-Grayson-Galax Regional Industrial Facilities Authority will allow Grayson County to invest in land outside of the county and derive revenues from the industries that locate therein.

In addition, sites need to be developed in the county for local entrepreneurs who have the skills to produce goods and services larger companies need but find it more profitable to outsource than maintain in-house as in the past.

The Fraser Fir and tourism industries should be nurtured in every sector of the county where an opportunity exists. Agriculture is once again a strong sector of the Grayson economy, but opportunities for product expansion are being ignored.

Opportunities for the future will come from the Virginia's aCorridor, Grayson County Economic Developer, with continued emphasis on tourism, infrastructure, and regional partnerships to rebuild the county's economic base.

CHAPTER V

Housing

This chapter examines the status of housing conditions in Grayson County, makes comparisons to regional and statewide data, and projects future housing needs for the county in light of developing trends and conditions. Topics to be covered include the physical state and value of housing, deficiencies such as age, lack of plumbing and overcrowding, housing costs, housing values, and related subjects. Much of the information to be presented here relies on data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1990 and 2000.

A. Existing Housing Conditions

Grayson County became host to 9,123 housing units as of 2000, up 21 percent since 1990. The rate of new housing development in Grayson County slightly outpaced the Mount Rogers region and the state, as shown in Table V-1.

The data also reveal a significant increase in the amount of vacant housing in Grayson County. The vacancies were up 76 percent, compared to a 45-percent increase for the region and only a 0.3-percent increase for the state. For the county much of the increase in vacant housing can be attributed to development of recreational housing (see section C for more details). Homes listed by the 2000 Census for seasonal, recreational or occasional use numbered 1,164 units, up 745 units since 1990. Recreational housing development in Grayson County provided at least some of the impetus for enactment of a local zoning ordinance in 1998. More discussion on this issue follows later in this chapter.

Table V-1
Total Housing Units¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Occupancy Status
1990 and 2000

Status	Grayson County		Percent Change	MRPDC		Percent Change	Virginia		Percent Change
	1990	2000		1990	2000		1990	2000	
Occupied	6,468	7,259	12%	69,085	78,701	14%	2,291,830	2,699,173	18%
Vacant	1,061	1,864	76%	7,450	10,789	45%	204,504	205,019	0.3%
TOTAL:	7,529	9,123	21%	76,535	89,490	17%	2,496,334	2,904,192	16%

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 1990 and 2000.

**Table V-2
Housing Composition¹
Grayson County
By Type of Housing Unit
1990 and 2000**

Housing Units	1990		2000	
	Grayson County	Percent of Total	Grayson County	Percent of Total
1-unit, detached	5,699	75.7%	6,538	71.6%
1-unit, attached	42	0.6%	44	0.5%
2 units	77	1.0%	80	0.9%
3 or 4 units	68	0.9%	81	0.9%
5-9 units	52	0.7%	84	0.9%
10-19 units	26	0.3%	18	0.2%
20-49 units	30	0.4%	38	0.4%
50 or more units	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Mobile home or trailer	1,383	18.4%	1,961	21.5%
Other ²	152	2.0%	279	3.1%
Total:	7,529	100%	9,123	100%

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 1990 and 2000.

As shown in Table V-2, approximately 20 percent of housing in Grayson County is composed of mobile homes or trailers. Most of the mobile home housing in the county is located outside of the three towns of Fries, Independence, and Troutdale.

The amount of mobile home housing has been increasing, going from 1,383 units in 1990 to 1,961 in 2000. Some 72 percent of all housing in Grayson County comes in the form of detached, single-family homes.

Table V-3 shows housing values based on data from the 1990 and 2000 censuses. In 1990 no owner-occupied housing in the county was valued at \$175,000 or above. By 2000 this had changed, with 62 homes in the county valued at or above the \$175,000 level. The information shown below is taken from sample data and not 100 percent data. The figures given (for housing counts) will not match up with data appearing in other tables in this chapter.

Table V-3
Comparative Values For Owner-Occupied Housing Units¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Value Range
1990 and 2000

Value	1990			2000		
	Grayson County	MRPDC	Virginia	Grayson County	MRPDC	Virginia
Less than \$15,000	214	2,177	20,639	82	675	8,034
\$15,000 to \$19,999	181	1,525	12,696	50	475	4,727
\$20,000 to \$24,999	190	1,919	16,453	85	788	8,249
\$25,000 to \$29,999	252	2,227	20,612	85	788	8,249
\$30,000 to \$34,999	274	2,733	28,805	189	1,487	11,605
\$35,000 to \$39,999	294	2,944	33,788	234	1,445	15,289
\$40,000 to \$49,999	491	5,580	80,038	319	3,652	37,545
\$50,000 to \$59,999	334	4,591	94,809	322	4,212	55,812
\$60,000 to \$74,999	306	4,942	164,226	595	6,475	129,210
\$75,000 to \$99,999	203	3,465	214,633	641	9,367	277,848
\$100,000 to \$124,999	42	965	114,156	270	4,165	197,618
\$125,000 to \$149,999	10	594	91,711	156	2,520	175,670
\$150,000 to \$174,999	17	256	73,883	132	1,440	133,343
\$175,000 to \$199,999	0	76	59,018	3	832	100,656
\$200,000 to \$249,999	0	145	73,874	43	595	127,984
\$250,000 to \$299,999	0	55	43,568	14	403	81,629
\$300,000 to \$399,999	0	46	37,098	0	367	75,399
\$400,000 to \$499,999	0	19	13,982	0	62	31,694
\$500,000 or more	0	13	14,445	2	115	32,054
TOTAL units sampled:	2,808	34,272	1,208,434	3,206	39,678	1,510,798
Median housing value:	\$40,000	\$45,563	\$90,400	\$65,800	\$72,938	\$125,400

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 1990 and 2000.

The long-term health of any community depends at least in part on the ability of residents to find comfortable, affordable housing that meets their needs. Patterns of homeownership in Grayson has changed little over the past decade, with 82 percent of housing occupied by owners, a rate slightly higher than for the Mount Rogers region as a whole. A smaller proportion of housing in the county is used by renters compared to the Mount Rogers region.

Table V-4
Comparative Housing by Tenure¹
Grayson County and MRPDC
By Occupancy Status
1990 and 2000

Tenure	1990				2000			
	Grayson County	Percent	MRPDC	Percent	Grayson County	Percent	MRPDC	Percent
Owner occupied	5,335	82%	52,736	76%	5,902	81%	60,189	76%
Renter occupied	1,133	18%	16,349	24%	1,357	19%	18,512	24%
Total:	6,468		69,085		7,259		78,701	

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 1990 and 2000.

As shown in Table V-5, rented housing in Grayson County is available at a lesser rate than in the region and the state. In 1999, the median gross rent came to \$318 in Grayson County compared to \$369 for the Mount Rogers region. Rental housing in the county and region significantly trailed the statewide median gross rent of \$650.

Table V-5
Comparative Median Gross Rent¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Specified Renter-Occupied Housing Units
1989 and 1999

	Grayson County			MRPDC (estimated)			Virginia		
	1989	1999	Percent Change	1989	1999	Percent Change	1989	1999	Percent Change
Median Gross Rent	241	318	32%	270	369	37%	495	650	31%

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 1990 and 2000.

The status of housing in a community can also be viewed based on what proportion of a person's income is used to pay for housing. Higher housing costs limit resources for other necessities, such as food, utilities, and medicine. This can become a severe problem for retired people living on fixed incomes and facing other economic pressures, such as high costs for medical care and prescription drugs. Similar issues can afflict younger age groups for people in low-pay jobs. The struggle simply to survive and meet basic needs can become overwhelming.

Table V-6
Rental Costs as Percent of Household Income¹
Grayson County, MRPDC, and Virginia
By Age Group
2000

	Grayson County	Percent of Those Computed	MRPDC	Percent of Those Computed	Virginia	Percent of Those Computed
15 to 64 years						
Less than 30%	533	74%	8,815	61%	451,535	65%
30% or more	188	26%	3,726	26%	242,000	35%
SUBTOTAL:	721		14,538		693,535	
Not computed: ²	258		2,011		51,027	
65 and over						
Less than 30%	73	54%	1,289	55%	41,213	48%
30% or more	61	46%	1,053	45%	43,768	52%
SUBTOTAL:	134		2,342		84,981	
Not computed: ²	110		812		13,890	
TOTAL:	1,223		17,706		843,433	

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 2000.

"Not computed" includes households that did not report either rental costs or income.

Table V-6, shown above, gives an overview of income versus rental costs for people in the income-earning years and for those in the 65-and-over age group. In the younger group, 26 percent of renters spend too much⁹ on housing in Grayson County. For senior citizens who rent housing, 46 percent spend too much on housing in Grayson County. This data can be compared on a regional and statewide basis, as shown in Table V-6.

People who use 30 percent or more of their income for housing costs are considered cost-burdened by the state Department of Housing and Community Development and the Virginia Center for Housing Research, based at Virginia Tech. People who use more than 50 percent of their income for housing costs are considered severely cost-burdened. People who have the most trouble paying for housing include those living on limited, fixed incomes (elderly and disabled) and low-wage workers.¹⁰

Between 1989 and 1996, rent burdens (a measure of the relationship between housing costs and low-income renter incomes) went up in several parts of the state. Some of the greatest

⁹ People who statistically spend too much for housing are defined as those who use at least 30% of their incomes to pay for housing costs.

¹⁰ Further detail is available in the five-year strategic plan by the state Department of Housing and Community Development called the "Consolidated Plan of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 2003-2007." The plan covers housing needs for the state.

increases occurred in the rural regions, including Grayson County.¹¹ A subsequent study showed that rental costs eased somewhat between 1997 and 2001; the study also showed significant housing problems remained for renters.

These statistics point to the need to provide more affordable housing to help ease the economic burdens for some people, especially the elderly, disabled and low-wage working families. This is a problem experienced locally, regionally, and statewide.

B. Substandard Housing

The usefulness of housing in the community also depends on how well it is equipped to meet modern needs for sanitation and convenience. Housing becomes substandard if it was built prior to 1940, lacks complete plumbing, or is overcrowded (defined as more than one person per room).¹²

Table V-7, below, provides information on plumbing status for the county and region. The most recent data show an estimated five percent of housing units (or 430 homes) lack complete facilities, a rate slightly higher than that for the Mount Rogers region as a whole. In the previous Census, eight percent of housing in Grayson County lacked complete plumbing facilities.

**Table V-7
Comparative Residential Plumbing¹
Grayson County and MRPDC
By Plumbing Status
1990 and 2000**

Plumbing Status	1990				2000			
	Grayson County	Percent	MRPDC	Percent	Grayson County	Percent	MRPDC	Percent
Complete Plumbing Facilities	6,909	92%	73,204	96%	8,693	95%	86,860	97%
Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities	620	8%	3,023	4%	430	5%	2,630	3%
TOTAL:	7,529		76,227		9,123		89,490	

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 1990 and 2000.

¹¹ From the “Consolidated Plan of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 2003-2007,” DHCD, May 2003, pages II-13 through II-15.

¹² As defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Another measure of substandard housing relates to its age, based on the assumption that older housing is more likely to be wearing out and in need of major rehabilitation to meet modern needs. Fully 15 percent of Grayson County housing (or 1,365 units) was built in 1939 or earlier. Another eight percent of local housing (737 units) was built between 1940 and 1949, making those units now more than 50 years old. The most recent Census data on housing age in Grayson County is given in Table V-8, at right.

**Table V-8
Housing Units¹
Grayson County
By Year Constructed
2000**

Year Built	Number	Percent
Built 1999 to March 2000	202	2%
Built 1990 to 1998	1,622	18%
Built 1980 to 1989	1,545	17%
Built 1970 to 1979	1,709	19%
Built 1960 to 1969	1,108	12%
Built 1950 to 1959	835	9%
Built 1940 to 1949	737	8%
Built 1939 or earlier	1,365	15%
TOTAL:	9,123	

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Tape File 3, 2000.

Older housing in bad condition or in need of repairs most often affects those least able to make improvements, including the elderly on fixed incomes and low-wage working families. Though most housing appears in relatively good condition throughout Grayson County, there are pockets of deteriorated and substandard housing, as shown on the accompanying map on housing conditions. Data for the map are based on an extensive windshield survey carried out by staff of the MRPDC during the winter and spring of 2002-2003. In most cases the deterioration is most obvious in various mobile home parks scattered throughout the county.

C. Second Home Development

Development Trends

Second homes, or housing built for seasonal or recreational use, are tracked by the U.S. Census based on vacancies and sub-categories that include rental and seasonal housing. Some housing is simply listed as “vacant,” with no special use attached. In 1990 the Census presented this data based on uses of condominiums and “not condominiums.”¹³ For Grayson County there were no condominiums listed, so the only other choice came under the “not condominiums”

¹³ Taken from Table H006. Condominium Status by Vacancy Status, from the 1990 Summary Tape File 3, as presented on-line under the American FactFinder section of www.census.gov.

category. In this group, housing for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use amounted to 449 units. Another 467 units went into the “all other vacants” listing.

For the 2000 Census there is a category called “vacancy status.”¹⁴ In this listing, housing given over to seasonal, recreational or occasional use in Grayson County amounted to 1,164 units. A comparable number of 1,380 seasonal units are listed for neighboring Carroll County. The numbers are less for other counties in the Mount Rogers region (536 in Smyth County and 583 in Washington County).

Within its own boundaries, Grayson County’s seasonal housing count went from 449 to 1,164. This represents an increase of 715 units, or 159 percent, in a decade. The rising trend in development of second homes has raised concerns among the political leadership of Grayson County, due to issues over the long-term impacts of development in remote rural regions and market forces that are driving up the cost of land. Grayson County, with its rural character, beautiful mountain vistas, land devoted to farming and raising Christmas trees, and resources such as the New River, is attractive to buyers who have been shut out of the North Carolina market and now, according to local people, have been drawn to the low land prices and low taxes in Grayson County.

Land Sales and Subdivision Activity

In September 1999, a large landowner sold approximately 13,000 acres of rural land, a majority of which was located in Grayson County along the New River, at public auction. Per-acre prices for these tracts ranged from \$453 to \$10,300. The mountain land in Grayson County is also receiving development pressure, with recent purchasers of large tracts platting subdivisions for seasonal occupants. Like the tracts located on the New River, the prices for the mountain land varied. The most desirable of these tracts sold for approximately \$10,000 per acre.

Development Controls

While mountainside housing development will continue in Grayson County, there are options available to help control or limit undesirable development that harms the environment, overburdens the land or strains the county’s resources. Generally, these tools fall into one of two categories – those of a regulatory nature (such as subdivision and zoning controls) and those of a

¹⁴ Taken from Table H8. Vacancy Status, from 2000 Summary Tape File 3, as presented on-line under the American FactFinder section of www.census.gov.

voluntary nature (conservation easements, Open Space plans, agricultural, and forestal districts). Unlike some communities where sprawl (or string along development) has already destroyed much of the landscape, Grayson County remains very rural in nature and can take steps to prevent or reduce widespread harm to its landscape.

To be effective, land use controls and policies must be developed with care, balancing the rights of private property owners and developers against the interests of the public aiming to preserve the character of the community. The needs of all stakeholders and interest groups, as well as the special features of the landscape, should be taken into account in a comprehensive, thoughtful manner.¹⁵

D. Housing Programs

Programs exist in Grayson County to help eligible recipients with home purchase, emergency housing needs, weatherization, heating costs, and rehabilitation and development of low-income housing. This section identifies the available programs and provides the appropriate contact information. While programs and services help address some needs, there also are many unmet needs, which will be addressed in the housing needs section of this chapter. Available programs and services for Grayson County include the following:

- *Assisted Housing for the Elderly*: These include Grayson Manor Apartments in Independence, with 32 units (276-773-3500); and Riverview Apartments, 215 Hilltown Road in Fries, also with 32 units (276-744-3447).
- *District III Senior Services*: This agency provides services to people aged 55 and over in Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe counties, and the cities of Bristol and Galax. Services include a limited range of home repairs. The agency is based at 4453 Lee Highway outside of Marion. For more information call 276-783-8157.
- *Grayson County Department of Social Services*: This agency, based at 129 Davis Street in Independence, provides help with home energy costs to eligible recipients through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (276-773-2452).

¹⁵ See also the discussion in Chapter VII, Land Use and Development.

- *Grayson County Rental Assistance Office*: This county office, located in the Grayson County Courthouse in Independence, deals with Section 8 housing for low-income people. For more information call 276-236-8149, ext. 101.
- *Hostel of the Good Shepard*: This is a 20-bed emergency shelter for the homeless located at 405 West Center Street in Galax. Call 276-236-7573 for more information.
- *Housing Rehabilitation*: Rehabilitation services are available to eligible recipients through programs offered by People Inc., which serves a wide region including Grayson County. Call the rehabilitation specialist for more information at 276-619-2285.
- *Mountain Shelter, Inc.*: This nonprofit agency is based at 170 East Main Street in Wytheville. It develops low-income housing in Smyth, Wythe, Bland, Carroll, and Grayson counties, and the City of Galax. Call 276-228-6280 for more information.
- *Rooftop of Virginia Community Action Agency*: This nonprofit agency, serving Carroll County, Grayson County, and the City of Galax, stands at 205 North Main Street in Galax. Its services include a weatherization program to insulate homes and reduce high utility costs. Call 276-236-7131 for more information.

E. Housing Needs

Housing needs are studied by the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), and the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech. A study published in November 2001 examined housing needs for 21 market areas in the state.¹⁶ DHCD and VHDA held a series of nine forums statewide. For the Southern Blue Ridge Market Area¹⁷ the forum met in Abingdon.

¹⁶ From “Analysis of Housing Needs in the Commonwealth,” DHCD and VHDA, November 2001, section on Southern Blue Ridge Market Area.

¹⁷ Includes Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Franklin, Grayson, Patrick, Smyth, and Wythe counties, along with the City of Galax.

The top housing issues identified by forum participants and the needs analysis included the following:

- **The existing housing stock is in poor condition**, requires substantial rehabilitation, and falls short of federal standards for purchase.
- **There is a shortage of rental units**, especially decent, affordable rental units.
- **Affordable housing is in limited locations**, a problem experienced in sparsely populated rural areas.
- **Environmental constraints add to housing costs** due to lack of available, suitable land for development. There are problems created by steep slopes, and there are problems with flat land, which is often located in or near the flood plain.
- **Absence of public water and sewer service limits development options.**
- **Government policies add to housing costs and restrict new development** due to zoning restrictions that ban development of affordable housing, especially manufactured housing. Housing is not always a high priority for state and federal officials. There is a need to view housing in rural areas as economic development.
- **The Southern Blue Ridge is more reliant on manufactured housing units than most other market areas.** In 2000, 26 percent of total housing units in the region were manufactured housing units.
- **The area was the only rural market in which the rate of growth in renter households exceeded the increase in assisted rental units.** The rate of increase in assisted rental units was nearly half the statewide rate and well below the rate in most other rural markets. The Southern Blue Ridge also was the only rural area to have a large decline in the ratio of deep subsidy family units per 1,000 non-elderly households.
- **The gap between wages and housing costs is increasing.** Many working poor lack the job security they need to buy a home, and young people are leaving due to lack of job opportunities.
- **The area has experienced less economic growth than most other regions of Virginia.** Unemployment and low wage rates are barriers to finding affordable housing.

- **Increased collaborative efforts are needed**, especially for development of housing for special needs groups, including the elderly and the mentally ill. Payments are too low for Supplemental Security Income, and those with limited incomes cannot afford adequate housing.
- **More transitional services and support services are needed** for people in programs designed to help them break the cycle of dependence on drugs and alcohol.
- **There are few accessible housing choices**, especially for people with disabilities.
- **Program guidelines preclude some needs**. Rules for block grants address housing in neighborhoods but not in scattered locations. Other problems, such as deed restrictions required by the Indoor Plumbing-Rehabilitation program, also create barriers.
- **Access to financing is not always available**. Few resources are available to promote homeownership among low-income individuals and families.
- **Balanced and continuous funding is needed** from all levels of government. There is a perception of a bias toward urban areas versus rural funding assistance, entitlement versus non-entitlement communities, and metropolitan versus non-metropolitan areas.
- **Consumer awareness and assistance is inadequate** regarding how to buy a house and available programs for assistance.
- **Greater coordination of services is needed** among all the parties involved to make owning a home available to more people. The existing delivery system is fragmented. Multiple agencies and programs must be brought together to address housing needs.

F. Conclusions

Housing, including its cost, availability, and condition, is an issue that directly affects the local quality of life and the ability of a community to grow. For most communities, the ideal situation would be the availability of a range of housing and housing types to serve the multiple needs and incomes of the community. Those most in need of help with housing issues include people who live on limited fixed incomes (elderly and disabled) and low-wage working families. Availability of adequate housing is also a factor in economic development and the ability of a community to attract new industry.

Some of the main housing issues and concerns raised in this chapter include the following:

- While many homes are in good condition in Grayson County, a few still lack complete plumbing and a substantial number are now more than 50 years old.
- Affordable housing in Grayson County is a significant problem for renters, those who live on limited fixed incomes (elderly and disabled), and low-wage working families.
- Windshield surveys by MRPDC staff revealed most of the obviously deteriorated housing is found in scattered locations and/or manufactured home parks. Manufactured homes often are more likely to show their age compared to other forms of housing.
- Manufactured homes housing comprised 21 percent of all housing in Grayson County as of 2000. This is a problem commonly faced by rural communities in the Mount Rogers region. Manufactured homes often are the only housing option available to low-income families.
- Development of second homes is a significant issue. The quantity of second homes has more than doubled in the past decade. Recent land sale and subdivision activity indicate this trend is likely to continue for some time to come.
- There are limited services available to provide for housing rehabilitation, alternative housing for low-income and disabled people, and other housing-related issues.
- Barriers to housing development include government regulations, environmental constraints, weak buying power among low-income people, limited access to financing, and lack of infrastructure development (public water and sewer), among other things.
- The needs of special population groups – low-income elderly, the disabled and/or mentally ill, low-income working families, and people in transitional programs – are poorly addressed.

CHAPTER VI

Community Facilities and Services

A. Facilities and Services Description

Community facilities and public services play an important role in the vitality of the county. The benefits of effective community services and facilities are essential in attracting new businesses, residents, tourists, and industries while providing for the overall quality of life for the county's citizens.

The community facility section of the Comprehensive Plan will include a brief description of the following: education, libraries, health care, social services, recreation, public utilities, fire, emergency services, police, public water and wastewater treatment, and solid waste collection and disposal. The services described herein are provided by Grayson County, state and federal agencies, public and private non-profit organizations, and private for-profit enterprises.

Administration Building / Courthouse

The Grayson County Courthouse and administrative offices moved from the 1908 Historic Courthouse to its current location in 1981. This facility stands just behind the prominent old structure just off of Davis Street.

The facility houses the County Administrator, Treasurer, Assessor, County Extension, Voter Registrar, Commissioner of Revenue, Social Services, County Extension Services, and the Commonwealth's Attorney. The building is also home to Virginia's 27th Judicial Circuit court system, and the Circuit, General District and Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court facilities and offices related to their function are housed in the administration building.

Public Safety

Grayson County Sheriff's Office

The Sheriff's Office provides 24-hour, seven-day service in the county. Services are divided into patrol, investigation, community policing, court security, and dispatch. The Sheriff's Office services are also supplemented by State Police as is required. The office consists of 21 sworn officers and other support staff.

County dispatchers, via the Twin County E-911 System, which is located in the City of Galax, distribute calls for service. In calendar year 2002, the department received and dispatched

approximately 6,597¹⁸ calls for service. The Sheriff's Office is located at 122 Davis Street, immediately adjacent to the Historic 1908 Courthouse, in Independence.

New River Valley Regional Jail Authority

As a result of changes in state funding for the renovation of older correctional facilities in the early 1990s, it was determined to be financially advantageous to partner with the Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Pulaski, Radford, and Wythe local governments and create the New River Valley Regional Jail Authority. In 1999, after several years of planning and coordination, Grayson County began housing its inmate population at the *New River Valley Regional Jail* in Dublin.

The Regional Jail Authority borrowed \$39 million to fund the project, which included a \$14.5 million contribution from the Virginia Department of Corrections. Actual construction of the facility cost approximately \$25.4 million, with all remaining funds being used to pay related administrative costs.

The jail, which stands on 27.79 acres within the Dublin Industrial Park, has a capacity of 454 inmates and was designed in a manner to ease expansions when necessary. Approximately 150 people are currently employed from the region to manage and operate the jail.

Emergency Services

Fire and emergency rescue services are provided to the county's residents by 10 independent, all-volunteer organizations, which are strategically located across the county. Separate and dual-purpose station/squad houses are located in the following communities: Baywood, Elk Creek, Fries, Independence, Mount Rogers, Rugby, and Troutdale. Galax Fire and Rescue serves the Baywood and Fairview communities and also provides backup to the Town of Fries. During calendar year 2002, the fire departments responded to 237 calls for service, while emergency rescue providers responded to 1,466 calls¹⁹.

Water and Waste Water Systems

The Virginia Department of Health recognizes/identifies three different types of water systems and these are: *Community, non-community and transient non-community*. Community systems have at least 15 connections and are used by year-round residents or serve at least 25

¹⁸ Grayson County Sheriff's Office, April 2003.

¹⁹ "Report – 911 Calls For 2002," Twin County E-911 Regional Commission, January 2003.

persons. Community systems include, but are not limited to, the public and private systems that serve towns, communities, subdivisions, and trailer parks.

Non-community systems are those that are not community systems but operate at least 60 days out of a year. Examples of these systems are those that supply water to picnic areas and state parks. Transient non-community systems are those that serve at least 25 of the same people over six months of the year. These would include individual school and commercial systems.

Public Water and Waste Water Systems

Grayson County owns and operates the Fairview water system. Water service from this system was extended to the Oldtown community in March 1999. At present, there are no public waste water systems in the unincorporated sections of the County. The City of Galax supplies water for the Fairview system and the Oldtown extension through a bulk purchase agreement. In combination, the Fairview and Oldtown extension serve less than five percent of the residents living in unincorporated areas of the county.

The county does not provide public water and sewer services to the unincorporated portions of the county. However, the County does have an agreement with the Town of Independence to provide water (50,000 GPD) and sewer service to the Grayson County Industrial Park. Concentrated wastewater service is primarily limited to the residents of the Towns of Fries and Independence. An estimated 90 percent of the residents in Grayson rely on septic system disposal of wastewater²⁰.

In contrast, nearly 100 percent of the residents in the towns of Fries, Independence and Troutdale are served by public water systems. The remaining county and town residents who are not served by a water system rely on wells, springs, cisterns, or haul water to supply their needs.

Other Water and Waste Water Systems

The non-community and transient non-community types of small water and wastewater systems are a common necessity in Grayson County. Currently there are 23 small permitted water delivery systems and eight small permitted wastewater disposal systems in operation.

These small systems are directed by state code, which requires that all waterworks serving over 15 year-round residents, or 25 persons, and all wastewater treatment facilities be subject to the permit requirements of the Virginia Department of Health and/or the Virginia

²⁰ “Comprehensive Water and Sewer Study for Grayson County, Virginia” October 1998.

Department of Environmental Quality. These small systems operate to serve schools, state parks, subdivisions, trailer parks, camps, and commercial facilities across the county.

New River Regional Water Study

The preliminary engineering and design of a water system capable of serving the Town of Independence and Grayson County and the Town of Sparta and Alleghany County, North Carolina is underway. Regional Water Supply Incentive Funds (a no-interest loan program) available through the Mount Rogers Planning District are currently being used by the partnering jurisdictions to finance the initial feasibility study activities. These funds will also serve to leverage support of future federal and state grant and loan proposals.

Public Utilities

American Electric Power provides electric power service throughout the county. The service capacity of the system is 5,850 megawatts. To enhance future economic development opportunities and other related growth, redundancy to the electric power grid system is currently needed. *Sprint Telephone Company* provides telephone service throughout the county. Telephone service and existing facilities should support future growth. Several national service providers provide wireless communications to the county's residents. However, this service is not available in many remote sections of this study area. *Adelphia Cable Entertainment* supplies cable television service. Satellite television signals can be purchased from several national service providers.

Broadband Internet Service

In 2002, the Town of Independence began to explore the feasibility of constructing a fiber optic infrastructure in their community through grant assistance from federal and state sources and with local funds. It is hoped that when complete, the new network will create an Internet system capable of serving the Town's residential, industrial, and governmental customers. Extension of the system along the main highway corridors – Routes 58, 21, and 16, and eventually throughout the entire county – is planned as funding becomes available. Expansion of the system into the Town of Sparta and Alleghany County, North Carolina is also a possibility.

Broadband fiber optic networks are well known for the ability to broaden and improve a community's connectivity by improving its potential to generate economic development, to

foster improved healthcare through telemedicine, and to increase educational opportunities by easing the transfer of vital communication.²¹

Solid Waste Collection and Disposal

Carroll-Grayson-Galax Solid Waste Authority

Grayson County is a member of the *Carroll-Grayson-Galax Solid Waste Authority*, which operates a landfill that accepts non-hazardous refuse. Contractors transport all hazardous waste materials to permitted sites in South Carolina and West Virginia. Formerly located in Carroll County, the Authority's landfill is now situated within the readjusted corporate limits of Hillsville.

Grayson County provides residential refuse collection on a weekly basis to the entire county and the Town of Independence. This service is sustained through general funds appropriation. Upon collection, county employees transport all refuse to the landfill. Large household item pick-up is provided twice a year without charge. Fee-based commercial /industrial collection is available through the county and private contractors.

Grayson County Recycling Program

The county promotes environmental conservation and encourages its residents to bring household recyclables to collection points as often as possible. The collection points operate the first Saturday of each month at the Mount Rogers School, Osborne's Store, Hoffman's Store, Russell's Store, and Cox's Chapel the second Saturday of each month, collection points are open at the Carsonville Store, Fries Fire Department, Providence School, and Elk Creek School. In Independence, recycling collection points are open each Friday and Saturday, except on holidays.

Educational Facilities

Public Primary and Secondary Schools

The *Grayson County Pubic School System* provides most of the educational services and facilities for its residents. The system is in compliance with the Virginia Standards of Quality and Standards of Accreditation. Along with other school systems in the state, the county's

²¹ "Strategic Technology for Regional Competitiveness in the Network Economy," Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Volume 3, February 2003, full report available at www.ecorridors.vt.edu.

schools utilize the Standards of Learning to improve student achievement. The Grayson County school system offices are located at 412 East Main Street in Independence.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the system operated 11 schools for approximately 2,281 students. There are six elementary school facilities which are located in Baywood, Bridle Creek, Elk Creek, Fairview, Independence, and Providence. The county's two middle schools are located in Independence and Fries. One high school and one career/technical education program facility are located in Independence. A combined school located at Whitetop serves grades K-12.²²

The school system staff includes approximately 180 teachers, 23 instructional aides, six guidance counselors, six library/media specialists, seven district administrators, and 14 school administrators. The system's current student-teacher ratio is 12:5, well ahead of the state average of 13.8 students per teacher.²³

Private Schools

Oak Hill Academy, a nationally recognized private boarding school, is located in the Mouth of Wilson community. Established in 1878, the academy has a Southern Baptist religious affiliation. The campus and related support facilities are sited on 400 acres and provide co-education to students in grades 8-12. The school's dormitories can accommodate approximately 210 students.

Higher Education

There are no institutions for higher education or job training facilities available in Grayson County; however, excellent opportunities do exist regionally. These include the Crossroads Rural Entrepreneurial Institute, Wythe County Technology Center, Wytheville Community College, Wilkes Community College, Bluefield College, Concord College, Emory & Henry College, Radford University, Virginia Tech, and Old Dominion – Teletechnet. Surry Community College located in Dobson, N.C. and Wilkes Community College in Sparta, N.C. both have distance-learning capabilities for the attainment of advanced degrees.

The *Crossroads Rural Entrepreneurial Institute* located in Galax houses a mixed-use business incubator, a technology-enhanced education center, and a continuing education center for workforce skills. This innovative institute can provide a number of basic and customized

²² "September 30, 2002 Fall Membership," Virginia Dept. of Education, revised March 2003.

²³ "Grayson County, Virginia District Profiles," National Center for Education, April 2003.

training and educational programs designed to meet the demands of changing economic environments. The institute also provides comprehensive business assistance and consulting to local and regional entrepreneurs.

Wytheville Community College (WCC) offers college credit courses at Grayson County High School. The number and type of classes provided are based upon anticipated enrollment. WCC's dual credit program offers classes to high school students who want to acquire post-secondary college credits prior to graduating from high school.

The *Mount Rogers Adult Education Program*, a state-funded effort, provides Adult Basic Education and GED preparation classes at Grayson County High School for the county's residents. These services are available at no cost.

Libraries

The *Grayson County Library* is a main branch of the *Wythe-Grayson Regional Library System (WGRLS)* and is located in Independence, at 147 South Independence Avenue. The library is open Monday through Saturday. . Services and programs at the library include a summer reading program, preschool and toddler story times in the spring and fall, mobile outreach services service, Internet access, and introduction to computer and Internet workshops.

The library contains approximately 60,000 volumes and carries about 100 periodicals. Through the Mountain CAT consortium, the library also offers access to books in the City of Galax, Wythe and Carroll County libraries. Smaller branches of the regional library system are located in the Town of Fries and the Whitetop community. Each branch contains about 2,000 volumes and assorted audio-visual materials.

Recreation

Grayson County Recreation Park

The *Grayson County Recreation Park* is located on the northeast side of Independence, off Powerhouse Road. The park's accommodations include an Olympic-sized (25-meter) pool, two baseball/softball fields, two lighted tennis courts, picnic area with shelters, and a 1.2-mile fitness trail. An assortment of programs is available for youth and adult activities. The Recreation Department employs two full-time staff and approximately 25 seasonal staff to operate and manage its programs.