

Opportunities & Challenges Background Assessment

Comprehensive Plan Update Wise County, Virginia

December 8, 2014

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1 Opportunities & Challenges

1.1 Planning and Participation Process

This Opportunities and Challenges Analysis provides an overview of the outcomes of the participation process that forms the core of the Plan’s vision statement and policy framework. Based on the real knowledge, perception, and experience of residents, businesses, service providers, and decision-makers, the opportunities and challenges identified in this analysis will guide development of the Plan update.

The Wise County Comprehensive Plan update is intended to define a long-term vision for the future and guide public and private actions to help achieve that vision. The vision is shaped by local community values, ideals and hopes about the best management and use of the community’s resources. To that end, Wise County has taken steps encouraging stakeholders provide real input into the planning process.

Identification of key challenges and opportunities is a critical first step in the planning process, and is the precursor to establishing an attainable vision. With an understanding of the County’s strengths and weaknesses and an idea of stakeholder’s preferences for the future, a unified community vision can be then be established. The next step in the planning process will be developing goals and policies to support the vision, and prioritizing strategies to achieve the vision.

Understanding the many purposes of the Comprehensive Plan update helps explain the process and its desired outcomes.

- **Establish a Future Vision for Wise County**

The Comprehensive Plan update will define a vision and provide guidance for the County to achieve its preferred future. As a County-wide Plan, there is a huge opportunity to consider the “big picture” for the County that is inclusive of all its communities, recognizing the interrelated aspects of community health and development and focusing on cooperation rather than competition.

- **Protect the Environment and Related Economic Development**

The Comprehensive Plan update will help ensure that benefits present generations enjoy do not diminish the needs and aspirations of future generations. While the ecological benefits of environmental protection are obviously important, it becomes even more critical given the broad support for environmentally-based economic development opportunities in Wise County. Environmental protection is crucial to promoting continued tourism-focused development based on trails, kayaking and outdoor recreation. Access to outdoor recreation activities rooted in a healthy environment is also important to increasing the quality of life for existing and future residents, as well as supporting youth retention and health of the workforce.

- **Promote Economic Development and Employment Opportunities**

The Comprehensive Plan update will promote new economic development and employment opportunities through a unified strategy that recognizes the need to diversify the County’s economic base, especially due to the impacts of declining employment in the coal industry. The economic development strategy will recognize the intertwined aspects of promoting and recruiting new businesses. It will address needs ranging from workforce development (including education and mental health support), to quality of life (services and amenities for working

families, including access to child care and health care). Supporting increased and more diverse employment opportunities is one important aspect of stemming youth out-migration.

- **Guide Property Owner and Developer Decisions**
The Comprehensive Plan update will provide a level of certainty to those investing in the County's future. It establishes a blueprint so that residents and developers have reasonable assurance of plans for land use and service provision. Those assurances, along with the County's planned commitment to service provision, investment, and maintenance, encourages private decision-makers to also invest in and maintain their properties.
- **Objectively Anticipate Future Needs**
The Comprehensive Plan update establishes a factual basis for coordinated decisions affecting Wise County's future. The Plan will be a foundation for data-driven decision-making, based on an objective analysis of County needs and aspirations.
- **Guide the Wise Use of Land and Resources**
The Comprehensive Plan update will establish sound planning principles and recommendations to guide the wise use of the County's land and natural resources in both newly developing areas and established communities.
- **Effectively Coordinate the Location of Public Facilities and Service Provision**
The Comprehensive Plan update can help ensure that funding and location decisions for public facilities are based on sound planning and financing principles. It can also support and strengthen new and existing partnerships and plans for coordinated services provision, helping to eliminate inefficiencies and promote increased levels of services across the County.
- **Promote Cost-Effective Use of Tax Dollars and Community Investment**
An up-to-date Comprehensive Plan will allow the County to identify critical future needs, prioritize them, and establish a cost effective means to achieve them. Participants in the process have identified numerous positive changes in the County, many of which are related to community investments, including energy, education, recreation and transportation enhancements. Identifying, prioritizing and coordinating future projects such as these will help the County continue to enhance the local quality of life.
- **Encourage Citizen Participation and Support for Wise County's Future**
The Comprehensive Plan update will not only include citizens and stakeholders in the creation of the Plan, but will also encourage continuing support and participation through the on-going implementation of the Plan.
- **Meet Commonwealth Law Requirements**
Finally, Wise County is required to, and will, update its Comprehensive Plan to comply with State laws concerning Comprehensive Plans, land use, transportation matters and related issues. This update process will ensure that the County continues to comply with State law.

1.2 Survey Summary

Members of the public, decision-makers and Advisory Committee members were asked to complete a survey asking them about current conditions, positive and concerning changes in the County. One of the most remarkable aspects of the survey responses is how similar all the responses are. It is especially remarkable given that the surveys were in an "open-ended" format where participants wrote in their

answers, rather than a multiple-choice type format where participants are required to choose from a closed set of possible answers.

While there is some diversity in the answers, the overall impression is that the participants in the process are overwhelmingly “on the same page” in their perception of the County’s greatest opportunities and challenges. It seems as though the critical challenge of the Plan update won’t necessarily be to build consensus on what the County’s priorities should be, rather, it might be to build support for a unified plan of how to achieve/implement those priorities.

It is important for the Planning Team to note that there is support for each major town (Pound, Big Stone Gap, Wise, St. Paul, Coeburn, Appalachia, and the City of Norton) in Wise County should be a part of contributing to the overall consolidated Update for Wise County. Opening constructive communications among various economic development groups and other interests will be critical to ensuring a successful process.

One participant made a statement that could perhaps be used to frame the process moving forward, which is that “Many of our citizens are feeling helpless and losing home. A beacon of hope is needed.” The need for cooperation and economic development is an utmost priority in this planning process. It is also important that the Plan be used and implemented once it is developed.

1.2.1 Three Most Important Positive Changes

There was wide consensus on the most positive changes in Wise County.

Improvements to Education

Education-related improvements were one of the most frequently mentioned positive changes, encompassing several related items. The Wise County Public School system consolidation of six high schools into three, the construction of two new state of the art institutions and the renovation of a third building was a big improvement. Continuing infrastructure and training developments and the ability of high school students to dual enroll and receive credit at Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) through the Virginia Community College system was also mentioned, as was the ongoing development of the University of Virginia College at Wise with the completion of the convocation center and expansion of the educational curricula.

Infrastructure Investments and Improvements

Infrastructure improvements were mentioned as important positive changes in nearly every survey submitted. Specifically, including:

- Expansion of the County water system (including the expansion of the Town of Big Stone Gap and Town of Wise water treatment and storage facilities);
- Development of the Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center (VCHEC);
- Bringing the Appalachia America Energy Research Center to Wise County;
- Road improvements, including the 460 connector, and US 23/58 (Powell Valley – Coeburn); and
- Expansion of 4G broadband service.

Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Improvements

Another positive change that was noted by many participants was the growth of tourism efforts, including outdoor recreational opportunities, especially the Spearhead trails in St. Paul and the Big Stone Gap Greenbelt trails. Other positive changes noted include:

- Growth of Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC)
- Litter control
- Convenience centers
- GIS – NASA grants
- Law enforcement central dispatch being combined
- Paperless offices
- Filming (BSG movie)

1.2.2 Three Most Concerning Changes

Lack of Economic Development and Employment Opportunities

Economic development concerns overwhelmingly topped the list of concerns for survey participants. In fact, almost every concerning change listed by responders is intimately connected to the lack of employment opportunities in the County. Stakeholders are very concerned about the decline in coal mining and the lack of diversification of the County's economic base. Economic development has been stagnant and many people mentioned the loss of the severance tax as a problem. The loss of small industry and businesses is a noted concern.

Health of Workforce and Impacts of Drug/Alcohol Dependence

The health and quality of the local workforce is a huge concern in the County. Drug and substance abuse/dependence, mental health, and access to health care for workers are all oft-cited problems.

Loss of Youth and Population through Out Migration

Respondents mentioned the loss of population, in particular young people, as a big concern. One respondent mentioned the lack of businesses to support a college atmosphere, which, along with a lack of economic opportunities, may impact youth out migration.

Need for Adequate Services (Medical, Transportation, Retail)

The loss of medical services and the community hospital is a large concern, as is the need for other basic services for residents, including public transportation and retail. In particular, the need for medical care access and support for community health was most frequently cited.

Need for Cooperation and Coordination Among Communities

Also frequently noted throughout the survey responses was that the community is divided and polarized. There is a notion that each locality within the County is competing with another, when instead there is a need to work together. The discord and lack of unity and cooperation with the City of Norton and Wise County was mentioned in particular.

Additional Concerning Changes:

- The school consolidation discussions since 1995 and its recent resolution with the three high schools – the County dropped the ball and misused funding for the greater good.
- The continued lack of drive to build bridges with MECC and UVA-Wise and incorporate both more into our County and respective towns.
- Over dependency on borrowings – insufficient cash resources and budget constraints.
- Lack of awareness amongst targeted business and industry.
- Internal and external problems/challenges within the county that affect performance productivity, efficiency, harmony and overall effectiveness.
- Lack of vision and leadership.

1.2.3 Three Most Important Issues Facing Wise County

Responses related to the three most important issues facing Wise County truly reflected the desire to build on the County's most positive changes while addressing the most concerning changes. The top responses reflected the following needs:

- Need to address substance abuse problems and mental health issues across the County.
- Need for diverse economic development that provides living wage employment opportunities, including for semi- and higher-skilled workers, and to move past the mindset of dependency on coal. Related to this, a need to stop the loss of talent/brain drain.
- Need to improve the attitudes and mindsets of people.
- Need for effective and accountable leadership in public positions, making decisions with buy-in ownership of common, long range planning and interests not driven by political correctness or self-serving interests.
- Need for more opportunities for youth, including recreation and after-school programs. Must educate children and young adults about the greater world outside Wise County and the opportunities available and within reach for Wise County.
- Need to increase revenues to address infrastructure needs, investments and finances.
- Coordinated and cohesive approach to meet the challenges and opportunities the new economy presents.
- Local commitment to develop solutions that will work locally.
- Transform the economy to sustain innovation, small entrepreneurs, and information access that are not dependent on traditional methods; sustain growth in the workforce by encouraging the local colleges and educational systems to build networks that inspire the youth of the region to raise motivation levels.

1.2.4 Vision 2025/ 2035

A long-term vision, rooted in community values, will be the foundation of the Wise County planning process. The vision statement helps citizens and decision-makers remember the ends to which the Plan aspires. Responses from participants regarding their vision for the years 2025 and 2035 will help define the County's vision statement. The following summary reflects the prevailing ideas for Wise County's future.

Prosperous Families Enjoy a High Quality of Life

Young families and retirees alike find Wise County a good place to live. They are healthy, educated and employed, living in safe communities with access to services and amenities, including medical care, retail, outdoor recreations facilities and other necessary infrastructure. Communities are walkable/bikeable.

Center for Recreation and Tourism

Wise County is a recreational trails haven known as the "playground of the south." Development of High Knob and Jefferson National Forrest and recreation-based development, such as resorts/ cabins and other small businesses, support a thriving tourism industry.

Progressive Growth and Leadership

Progressive County leadership focuses on the "big picture," taking action to promote growth and diverse economic development. Towns throughout the County cooperate, achieving infrastructure improvements that support new businesses and job creation.

Center for Education

The Mountain Empire Community College and University of Virginia College at Wise continue to grow and expand, supported by a vibrant "college town" atmosphere provided by businesses, recreation, and future job opportunities. Young people choose to stay in Wise County due to these opportunities and high quality of life.

Unity and Progress

"The pulling together of all the different stakeholders and players in the new economy who are aware of the local challenges and opportunities, who can identify key objectives for achieving the mission, to instill a "pride in ownership" of Wise County, and formulate strategies that will achieve and maintain a competitive position which will lead to the continued diversification of the economy that will be locally led and market driven in the global economy. "

Thriving Community

"A thriving rural county in the mountains, a perfect place to raise your family and visit. A safe haven for children to grow up in, an excellent and diverse school system offering opportunities, a thriving economy driven by the health profession, secondary and higher education, strong and active local governments, and technology."

"A thriving rural community with diversified industries to include technology, research and development, and tourism."

A Place for Family and Employment

"Factories, business, and jobs for all skill levels so that when our children finish college they want to come back and raise their children here and those without college degrees can have a comfortable living here as well"

“A much more diversified economy that can provide steady employment at all skilled and education levels.”

Coordinated and Improved

“I would like to see a county where much of the devastation of surface mining is reclaimed by DMLR with fees that have been set aside over the years. I would like to see a County with one municipal government where the six towns and the City of Norton bring together infrastructure assets of water and wastewater treatment and solid waste collection and management. An abundance of employment brought about by an all new economic base and cleaner County. UVA-Wise and MECC having a much larger enrollment. A strong hospital and banking network.”

1.3 The Most Important Issues for Tomorrow’s Leaders

Tomorrow’s Leaders Survey – Youth and Young Adults

Having the opportunity to incorporate the views of the community’s youth and young adults typically yields a confirmation of issues the ‘adults’ identify (there were far more issues in common than in contrast), but it also presents a unique perspective from the next generation of leaders, taxpayers, business and home owners and families (one can reasonably assume that the same comments today are many of the same from the prior generation of youth). The message the County delivers by reaching out to youth and young adults is one of inclusiveness – your views matter, our efforts are about and for you.

Themes

Some interesting themes were identified during the three all-day sessions with the high school government classes:

- *Community Pride.* These are a bright group of high school students, with an awareness of larger issues. From their comments, being aware of what other places offer and what is missing in their community should in no way be interpreted as an overall lack of pride or respect for their community. Other comments referenced a desire for a broader and more diverse community base (more people from other places, a diverse, balanced economy). Wanting to see improvement indicates the desire to make things better for themselves and those that follow them. Most indicated a desire to stay or return to Wise County. This is their home.
- *The Role for Local Government.* This is not an unusual dilemma for students or adults, uncertain of the grasp and reach of local control, which includes balancing action with the ability to pay and desire to tax. The questions that arise from this uncertainty show creativity and thinking outside the box (why can’t we...). Some of the examples raised include: finding alternative uses for empty storefronts, encouraging home-based businesses and promoting local businesses.
- *More vs Less Law Enforcement.* The drug problem was the number one issue negatively impacting students (followed closely by lack of jobs). A significant number of students indicated they would like to see a gentler approach to criminal justice, with what could be described as being more community policing oriented. However, more students indicated, when this issue was identified, a desire for more effective policing that addresses some of the community’s critical problems – primarily drugs.
- *Coal vs No Coal.* Most of the students commented on the lack of rewarding, good paying jobs. These high school seniors are aware of the economy they’re entering. As among the adults, there were a significant number of comments by students on both sides of this issue. Some more oriented on environmental protection and the development of alternate energy sources,

but most expressing support of the coal industry and the benefit that has been conveyed on the community from coal. Transitioning, but not abandoning, the coal based economy.

What the County Has Going for It

There were numerous positive attributes identified by the students – the scenery and environmental features, schools and college are highly valued, the culture of the community (people are friendly, hospitable, humble, honest). The County is a cherished ‘home’ of family and friends. A common point was dismay that there are problems interfering with their preference to stay. Law enforcement also was rated highly, generally, for their fairness and drug enforcement.

Most Critical Problems Facing the County

The most critical problems facing County youth are: drugs (impacts from drug abuse and drug-related crime), lack of good-paying jobs and poor economic conditions from the cumulative impact of coal industry losses and limited opportunities for recreation and entertainment for youth.

Most Critical Needs

The greatest needs youth identified include having a wide range of good-paying jobs (health care, technology, outdoor-oriented businesses, coal and post-coal economy jobs), providing a wide range of recreation (skating, pools, recreation center, shooting sports related, hiking and motorized trails), entertainment (arcade, theaters, restaurants, shopping) and dealing with the drug problem.

What the County Can Build On

There also were some important insights by the youth – about solving problems and having hometown pride. There was consensus that the community is good at resolving issues and solving problems (for example, unsolicited, students spoke of the positives of the school consolidation of the community working together). They’re watching, listening and learning some valuable positive lessons. There also were suggestions to publicize County success stories (people that have succeeded) and stories of local history and culture to instill more community pride.

1.4 Potential Goals, Policies and Strategies

The following list of actions and ideas is based on stakeholder meetings and survey results from the public participation process. These actions and ideas may be developed into goals, policies, and strategies to support and achieve the vision. This list is not to be considered a complete list of possible implementation measures, nor will every idea necessarily be included in the final Plan. It should be viewed as a starting point as “brainstormed” through the initial public participation process.

1.4.1 Governance and Fiscal Responsibility

- Support intergovernmental cooperation.
- Support regional cooperation
- Rotate committee assignments.
- Spend within limits.
- Work with Towns to prepare edges for development.
- Increase interaction among boards (BoS, IDA, PC).

- Coordinate meetings among Town/County managers, as well as those for Planning Commissions and elected leadership (Possible leadership summit).
- Consolidate one public access channel for all government uses.
- Hold joint BoS/Town or BoS/City Legislative meetings.
- Implement term limits to encourage new leadership.
- Spend VDECA money more wisely.
- IDA should fund businesses, not just bricks and mortar.
- Rely less on coal severance tax to fund budget.

1.4.2 Facilities and Services

- Consolidate services providers (i.e. fire and rescue)
- Improve/expand university and community college.
- Upgrade water and sewer to accommodate new industry. Consider a countywide water/sewer system.
- Support development of State and Federal offices in Wise County.
- Support affordable, safe day care.
- Provide facilities for orphaned children.
- Develop letters of agreement with Towns formalizing service provision.
- Ensure better equity/distribution of resources, facilities and services. Explore opportunities for revenue sharing.
- Coordinate and fund Capital Improvement Plans.
- Consider redevelopment strategies or uses for the empty high school.
- Connect Town water supplies.
- Plan for major regional recreation center that meets the needs of the “total family,” including youth and seniors. The Rec center should include multi-purpose space for volunteers, people in need and community service sentences (youth).
- Promote self-sufficiency related to grant monies for service provision.
- Prioritize steps/findings from Sewer Study.
- Develop an Emergency Response Plan.
- Provide fire hydrants.
- Improve signage.

1.4.3 Environmental Resources

- Find ways to use forest land held in reserve.

- Create a master trail plan.
- Protect environment while supporting economic development.
- Establish a plan to address possible water pollution problems with failing septic systems and dwelling units that discharge into waterways.
- Protect viewsheds
- Promote eco-tourism.
- Prevent further destruction/pollution from mining activities.
- Be better stewards of our natural environment and resources.
- Protect wildlife corridors.

1.4.4 Economic Development

1.4.4.1 Agriculture

- Support sustainable agriculture-based industries, including cannery (including to pasteurize), farmer's markets and farm stands.
- Support farms.
- Support small and diverse farms, such as bee keeping, apple orchards, vineyards, and switchgrass and hemp for surface mined areas.
- Support agri-tourism.

1.4.4.2 Tourism

- Support recreational trail development (hiking, biking, ATVs, horses).
- Develop High Knob and Jefferson National Forrest with trails and roads.
- Support development of resorts and cabins.
- Support development of regional tourism authority.
- Promote tourism development and create a marketing plan and related materials.
- Promote adventure tourism (biking, kayaking, etc).
- Explore allowing ATVs on Town streets.
- Coordinate with Heart of Appalachia Board for tourism.
- Interconnect Town trails.
- Develop campgrounds and RV parks.
- Provide hospitality training for employees at gas stations, restaurants, and hotels.
- Create new community centers with attractions that support tourism, such as multi-County trails - craftworks loop (crafts trail), and updated agricultural trail.

- Consider a tourism committee, but also make sure efforts go beyond a committee.
- Ease restrictions on establishments offering drinks by the glass.
- Consider tourist rail development.

1.4.4.3 Small Business Development

- Support small and micro businesses, including a place to sell local crafts.
- Workforce development and small business support – machine training, how to farm, high tech training.
- Reach out to existing businesses – survey of practices, needs.
- Help “make it easy” to open a business in the County.

1.4.4.4 Other

- Develop an energy research center.
- Use the existing rail system.
- Support diversified economic growth.
- Include and support college’s role in economic development.
- Build on Crooked Road.
- Coordinate economic development with State efforts.
- Support retirement development as an opportunity to diversify.
- Consider fish farming as a job generator.
- Develop Technology Park.
- Balance resource extraction and tourism/outdoor recreation activities.
- Increase local retail development.

1.4.5 Housing

- Support development of multi-family housing
- Designate more land for R2 development (don’t require a rezoning for duplex development)
- Address existing excess of single family homes.
- Require sewer connection for all new housing.
- Improve inspections of new and older housing.
- Increase accessible housing for college students, including higher quality rental housing.
- Encourage energy efficient improvements to older homes.
- Improve quality of low income housing.

1.4.6 Community Character and Health

- Support property maintenance
- Support improved aesthetics and appearance of property
- Improve litter control
- Support youth retention.
- Create opportunities to positive youth activities.
- Promote and conserve mountains and natural beauty.
- Protect “small town” feel and rural character.
- Develop gateways into Wise County and gateway signage.
- Study other similar places that are success stories, such as Asheville, for opportunities.
- Draw on past heritage to develop character, such as apple orchards and moonshine.
- Promote “college town” atmosphere.
- Develop recreation facilities such as ball fields.
- Provide trail heads for trail access.
- Provide senior-oriented programming and a community services registry/clearinghouse for senior services.
- Support for public library.
- Provide services for mental health and drug rehabilitation service.

1.4.7 Land Use

- Address challenges of providing sewer service.
- Encourage development and coordination.
- Support infill and reuse.
- Reduce the use of variances and address overly restrictive size/configuration standards.

1.4.8 Transportation

- Increase public transportation and bus service, especially for elderly.
- Complete “coalfield expressway.” / Do not complete coalfield expressway. *(Both views were represented on surveys and in comments – an ongoing discussion issue.)*
- Increase safety of roads, including repaving, traffic lights, and better maintenance.
- Build sidewalks, pedestrian connections and bikeways.

- Find ways to use and promote local airport usage.
- Build a connector road between UVA-Wise and airport.

2 Demographic Analysis

2.1 Overview

Changes in the total population and the characteristics of the population may have profound impacts on the economic, social and natural environment of the County. While Wise County as a whole is projected to lose population over the course of the planning period, projected demographic changes will increase demand for certain types of facilities and services. It is important to note that different age and income segments of the population have different needs, which shape demands for housing, services and infrastructure. For instance, an elderly population creates demand for communal housing types, medical services, passive recreational opportunities and public transportation. Families with young children, on the other hand, generate demands for different housing types, day care facilities, schools, athletic recreational opportunities and a mix of transportation options.

This report summarizes various demographic indicators relevant to the development of Wise County's Comprehensive Plan, including a projection of the community's likely population in 2030. This information in turn will allow the County to craft land development, economic, and housing policies that are responsive and reflective of the community's shifting demographics.

The current planning process for Wise County is driven by a number of concerns and challenges that can be seen through the demographic and economic trends that have played out in recent years. In fact, many of the current concerns of participants in the 2014 planning process are the same as concerns that were discussed and forecast in the 1998 Wise County Comprehensive Plan. For instance, the County's population continues to decline, while also becoming older. Youth out-migration exacerbates this trend, leaving the County with a smaller, older population that will require certain services, especially transportation and medical services, while not contributing as much in terms of economic growth.

Changes in the total population and the characteristics of the population may have profound impacts on the economic, social and natural environment of the County. Different segments of the population have different needs, which shape demands for housing, services and infrastructure.

Economically, concerns also remain the same, with the greatest challenge being the accelerating decline of employment in the coal industry. Jobs that have been lost in the mining sector are not being replaced by jobs with comparable pay, leaving Wise County with a growing unemployment rate. While the Virginia and the United States as a whole have experienced some recovery in terms of a lower unemployment rate in the past few years, Wise County's rate has increased. Unemployment, in addition to impacting local tax revenues, simultaneously increases need for local social services. Job training, poverty assistance, mental health and substance abuse services, are just some of the services needed by families and individuals that are unemployed.

Economic development, as well as provision of adequate and attainable housing opportunities, are both dependent on the availability of suitable development locations, which means provision of adequate infrastructure, facilities and services. As was noted in the 1998 Plan, the County has limited developable land due to various constraints, including steep slopes, poor soil conditions, flood prone areas, mineral land under development, land subject to subsidence from surface and underground mining, national

forest land and other public and private land unavailable for development. Future housing, commercial and industrial growth and development is largely dependent on the availability of public utilities.

Maintaining and expanding infrastructure to encourage economic development and attract younger residents will be a challenge for the County as it also balances the needs of an aging population and helps families transition from dependence on coal-related employment. It will be important to coordinate service provision and development efforts to be as efficient as possible, while relying on its strengths, such as the natural environment and educational institutions to drive positive growth.

2.2 Growth Highlights

- The Big Picture...
 - Projections are not set in stone, but reflect the desirability and feasibility of retaining and attracting residential and non-residential development.
 - The Plan is the County's (as a whole) best opportunity to effectuate an atmosphere that protects public and private investment decisions.
- Growth rates in the County have been elastic and variable, dependent in large part to the cycle of coal production and expanding role of the colleges.
- Projections show a long-term population decline in the County, through 2040, though the rate of decline will slow.
- Communities likely to experience continued population decreases include Appalachia, Pound and St. Paul.
- Communities likely to experience continued population increases include Big Stone Gap, Coeburn and Wise.
- Norton is expected to experience continued growth.
- One of the most interesting trends has been the transition, albeit slowly, from sprawl (rural) to a community-based (urbanized) development pattern. The potential for the Plan to build on this pattern is substantial.
 - In 2000, 34% of the population was in the towns and 66% was in the unincorporated areas.
 - By 2010, the pattern had shifted to a 35%-65% town-rural population ratio. Market and lifestyles were reflecting efficiencies and preferences.
- This pattern is projected to continue, with new development (and population) increasing more in the towns (.2% per year) and decreasing in the rural areas (.1% per year).
- There's a role for strong communities - those with available and adequate facilities and services, a mix of uses, a robust local economy, desirable amenities - that were good places to invest in homes and businesses.
 - By 2010, Big Stone Gap had over 38% of the population of the unincorporated area (an increasing share from 35% in 2000).

- Coeburn saw a modest 1% increase in share of population.
- Though the other towns had reduced shares of population, Pound (9.9% decrease in share) and Appalachia (9.7% decrease in share) hint the losses may be due to larger issues, which the Plan can and should address.

2.3 Historic Overview

2.3.1 Location

Wise County is located in the southwestern portion of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Irregular in outline, it is bounded on the southwest by Lee County, on the south by Scott County, on the east by Russell County and on the northeast by Dickenson County. Pine Mountain to the north and Black Mountain to the northwest form a natural boundary between Wise County and the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

2.3.2 Historical Perspective

The first documented settlement of what is now Wise County occurred in 1782 near present-day St. Paul by a man named John English. The delay in settlement stemmed from Indian raids, the lack of fertile soil suitable for agriculture, and poor access caused by the mountainous terrain. At the time Wise County was formed in 1856, the town of Wise, then called Gladeville, was the county's principal locality with a population of 250. In 1860, the county's total population was 4,308 persons, and the county continued to be sparsely populated until the turn of the century.

2.3.2.1 Agriculture

Most of the people living in what became Wise County in 1856 engaged in subsistence farming, like almost all of the population of the United States at that time. These farmers found Wise County's steep topography and thin soils to be limiting factors for agriculture, although some of the steep hillsides were plowed and cultivated with horses and mules. Many of the steepest hillsides were cleared and cultivated for only a few decades, however, before soil erosion and declining productivity resulted in their reforestation.

Between 1850 and 1860, tobacco production in southwestern Virginia increased by more than 2000 percent, but Wise County's tobacco production in 1860 was only 2,300 pounds. Tobacco never became as important a crop in the county as it did in neighboring Lee and Scott Counties. While small scale tobacco production eventually benefitted from a government-imposed quota system established in the 1930s, such systems were not established for any other locally grown crops. Corn was a much more important crop and was widely grown in the county, with 115,925 bushels produced in 1860.

The county's population expanded most rapidly after coal mining became a significant source of employment. Many areas of the county were more densely populated than they are today, with a much greater proportion of the food for this industrial workforce locally grown than is true today. It was a typical pattern for subsistence farmers to work as miners during the winter months. According to the 1940 Soil Survey of Wise County, about two-thirds of the farmers of Wise County also worked in the mines. The Survey also noted that the increase in population associated with the growth of mining caused some general farms to be converted to dairying and growing of fruits and vegetables for the local market.

Characterized by cool summers, no distinct dry season and rainfall usually well distributed throughout the growing season, Wise County's temperate climate favored cultivation of these fruits and vegetables. The county became well known as a producer of fine quality apples, and a number of commercial

orchards were established. From the 1940s through the 1960s, apples were an important local crop, with about 230,000 bushels harvested in 1949, 117,000 bushels in 1954 and 92,500 bushels in 1964. In 1965, a map prepared by the Wise County Fruit Growers Association showed 45 commercial orchards near the town of Wise. Most of these locally produced apples were sold in Virginia, Kentucky and West Virginia, although one local grower exported apples to Europe. By 1974, however, apple production had further declined to 35,400 bushels. The 1992 *Census of Agriculture* revealed five commercial orchards remaining in the county, with about 60 acres of producing trees.

2.3.2.2 Coal

The economic and population growth that took place in Wise County at the turn of the twentieth century set the tone for conditions existing in the county today. This growth resulted from the construction of railroads into the county, providing access to the abundant coal and iron deposits. Coal has been the lifeblood of the county since that time.

The first interest in Wise County iron ore and coal emerged in 1879. By 1882 two large tracts of land totaling 67,000 acres had been acquired by coal operators for development, leading to the purchase of nearly all the county's coal lands by developers. At this time, the county's population was approximately 7,775.

Lumbering operations began in Wise County about 1887. Other lumbering operations followed in 1895, after the construction of railroads into the county, but by 1915 practically all of the accessible marketable timber had been cut.

The pending arrival of railroads in the county gave rise to a "boom" in 1890. English and northern investors began pouring money into companies formed to develop the area's iron and coal resources. Prices soared as speculators bought and sold land; lot prices in the "new towns" rose from an average of \$30 to as much as \$1,000. The "boom" faded when the flow of English capital stopped.

Two railroads were completed into Wise County in 1890, another in 1891 and two others soon after. With the railroads came prosperity, as lumber, coal and iron could be shipped to eastern and southern markets. Development occurred rapidly, with mines opened, coke ovens and mining towns built, and schools and churches erected. The county's population grew from 9,345 persons in 1890 to 19,653 in 1900 and to 34,162 in 1910, a 266 percent increase in 20 years.

The first coal was shipped by railroad from Wise County in 1892. Because of high transportation costs, the market for coal was limited. But southern iron furnaces needed coke, and by 1910 there were 4,400 coke ovens in the county. Two iron furnaces were constructed in the county. One at Big Stone Gap went into production in 1892, but economic conditions caused its closing in 1916, signaling the end of iron ore mining in the county.¹

Coal production in Wise County reached a peak in 1926, with 6.5 million tons being mined and more than 6,500 men employed in the mines. By that time, the importance of lumbering had declined and the importance of iron ore had ceased, leaving coal as the basis of the county's economy.

Meanwhile, Wise County had become one of the state's wealthiest and most populous counties. In 1925 the county ranked seventh in the state in income tax, twelfth in assessed value of all real estate and eighteenth in assessed value of all taxable property. The county's 1920 population of 46,500 made it the eighth most populous county in Virginia and seventh in density of population per square mile.

¹ Norman H. Scott, *Iron Mining in Wise County*, 1993.

During this period, Wise County schools were among the best in the state. In the mid-'20s, the county led the state in average teachers' salaries. Moreover, only the counties of Arlington, Henrico, Norfolk, Pittsylvania and Roanoke surpassed Wise County in total disbursements for county schools and total value of school property. The county also had one of the highest tax rates in the state.²

By 1933, however, the county's fortunes were beginning to turn. Coal production had dropped to 2.8 million tons, marking the first of a series of "booms and busts" within the county's economy. In 1937, nearly one third of the county's coal production was used as railroad fuel, but this market was eliminated when the nation's railroads were dieselized following World War II. The home heating market also disappeared when coal was replaced by cheaper and more convenient fuels such as oil and electricity. Cheap imported oil cut into the industrial and electrical utilities market.

A United Mine Workers mechanization agreement was reached with the major coal operators in 1950. Prior to the agreement, in 1949, about 3.5 million tons of coal were mined in Wise County. By 1955 production had increased to six million tons, but this increase in production was accompanied by a decrease in jobs, with mining employment falling from 4,700 persons in 1949 to 3,200 in 1955.

Strip mining, first practiced in Wise County in the mid-1940s, became a major facet of the county's economy in the mid-'60s. Productivity-per-worker increased while mining employment fell. Production of coal by all mining methods had increased to 9.3 million tons in 1969, with only 1,823 production workers employed that year.

The productivity increases of the 1950s and '60s allowed Wise County's coal industry to survive, but the local economy suffered. Unemployment increased, money needed for public services was not available and people left the county to seek employment elsewhere.

In the 1960s national attention was focused on the plight of the Appalachian region. Efforts were begun to diversify the economy, provide jobs, improve the entire spectrum of public services, improve the quality and quantity of housing and reverse the flow of people leaving the region. A temporary end of the economic and population decline for Wise County and the surrounding region accompanied the energy crisis and the Arab oil embargo of the early 1970s. During the mid-'70s, another boom period occurred, with significant concurrent activity in the service industries. Fast food chains and discount merchandise outlets moved into the area to take advantage of the renewed vigor of the coal industry.

The euphoria of the 1970s dwindled during the decade of the 1980s. While various factors have been cited regarding that downturn in the region's coal-based economy, the 1980s saw a "second generation" of mechanization in the coal industry, resulting in higher productivity but decreased employment. Although it was not possible to use longwall miners in all mining applications, the use of these machines allowed production to remain on the increase, while manpower needs were reduced.

The number of mining employees decreased by nearly 1,300 persons from 1980 to 1990, and the county's population declined by more than 5,000 persons. In 1985, unemployment in the county rose to 15 percent, while coal production reached an all time high. While coal employment continues to decline, coal production appears to have stabilized, at least temporarily. Production is expected to begin a steady decline in the near future, however, as the more accessible reserves are depleted.

² Ralph Emerson Kennedy, *An Economic and Social Survey of Wise County*, 1928.

2.3.3 Recent Changes

Of utmost concern and great impact, hundreds of jobs in mining have been lost in Wise County over the past two years. This has caused great hardship for family throughout the County, who are struggling to get by after severance pay and insurance run out. Mines, such as the Cumberland River Coal's Pine Branch Number One in Wise County are being closed to a combination of stricter regulations for coal-fired plants, rising mining costs and cheaper alternative energy sources, including natural gas. In July 2013, Arch Coal, parent company of Cumberland River Coal Co., announced plans to idle its mine in Appalachia and lay off 213 workers, following a similar move by A&G Coal Co., once one of the region's biggest employers.

The loss of coal jobs has likely hastened out-migration population loss from the County. While the County enjoyed relatively low unemployment rates from 2003-2008, the unemployment rate spiked to an average of 8.8% in 2013. In August 2014 the rate was up to 9.1% in the County, as contrasted to 5.7% for Virginia and 6.3% nationwide. There is no rebound forecast for coal development in the region, but a continuing decline.

Despite growing unemployment, some positive economic development has occurred in recent years. One of the most noted positive changes in Wise County was the development of the Dominion Virginia Power's Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center (VCHEC), which began commercial operation in July 2012. The power station, just west of St. Paul, uses waste coal, also called "gob," which mining operations discarded in the early to mid-1900s. Prior to regulations on how to handle gob, the material simply piled up, often along streambeds, where it became a major source of water pollution.

The VCHEC also is designed to be able to burn up to 20 percent biomass, which is waste wood from timbering operations. The station began burning biomass in October of 2013 and is working toward burning up to 5 percent biomass by the summer of 2015. The station operates under one of the strictest air emissions permits in the nation for a plant of its kind, which requires that 10 percent of the electricity be generated by biomass by 2017 if it is economically viable to do so.³

Some other non-mining economic development activity also occurred in the County, including three new ventures that located in Wise County in 2012 – Lonesome Pine Components Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of thermo foil 3D laminated wood products, which located a manufacturing facility in the Wise County industrial building; NanoQuantics, Inc., a company with two technology focuses that located its operations in the Appalachia America Energy Research Center; and Carbonite Corporation of Virginia, which rehabilitated a former coal load-out facility in Wise County using a newly developed and patented clean coal technology.⁴ Another positive example of recent economic development includes Micronic Technologies, a water treatment technologies company's headquarters and research and development operations, which announced plans to relocate from Sterling, VA to Wise County in May 2014, with intentions to form a partnership with the University of Virginia at Wise.⁵

Partnerships with local educational institutions have benefitted the County and its students throughout the past decade. For instance, in 2002, through the unique Wise Digital Earth Virtual Environment and Learning Outreach Project (DEVELOP) academic program, Wise County college and university students

³ <http://www.virginiabusiness.com/news/article/wise-county-power-plant-recycles-1.1-million-tons-of-waste-coal>
<http://www.timesnews.net/article/9076166/coal-waste-piles-across-sw-virginia-feeding-wise-power-plant>

⁴ http://www.tricitie.com/news/article_6b321512-25a1-59af-a96a-4fd16ef8317c.html?mode=jqm

⁵ <http://www.timesnews.net/article/9077222/water-treatment-tech-company-announces-relocation-to-wise-county>

gathered data from various local, state, and federal sources; built tabular data; and created Wise County maps for the County's WebGIS system, benefiting the County's planning and development services while giving valuable experience to local students.⁶

Public school consolidation was a big issue over the past several years, and has been a big change in the County. With the beginning of the school year 2011-2012 the three small high schools (Pound, Appalachia, and St. Paul) were closed. The three larger high schools were renamed and now house all the high school students. These schools are Central High School (formerly JJ Kelly High School), Union High School (formerly Powell Valley High School), and Eastside High School (formerly Coeburn High School). Two new high schools were built for Union and Central and completed in 2014, and Eastside High School was renovated and expanded.⁷

The School District reports many achievements, but also cites limiting conditions that it faces as challenges that are directly related to the County's current planning process, including declining enrollment, high poverty rates and economically disadvantaged students, an increase in non-traditional families, and an awareness that students may not be receiving health care services on a regular basis.⁸

Continuing infrastructure and training developments and the ability of high school students to dual enroll and receive credit at Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) through the Virginia Community College system was a recent development in the County, as was the ongoing development of the University of Virginia College at Wise with the completion of the convocation center and expansion of the educational curricula.

The region is known for its scenic beauty, outdoor recreation, traditional American music and cultural heritage crafts. Tourism-based development has increased in the County over the past decade, with the development of the Spearhead Trails as a centerpiece of those efforts. Currently ATV trails are available and over 500 miles of ATV and Equestrian trails are planned by the end of 2016.⁹

2.4 Population Trends and Projections

Estimating population size into the future is an inexact science based on historic trends and various sets of available data. The aim of these projections is to establish a reasonable baseline that Wise County can use to inform its land use policies during the planning period. The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) is tasked at the State level for projecting Virginia's and its Cities and Counties future population.

Factors affecting future population in a community include changing economic conditions, rate of natural increase, and the rate of in- and out-migration. Projections are based on information available at the moment; the estimates cannot account for unforeseen circumstances, such as additional industrial closings or changes in the national or international economy.

2.4.1 Population

As is shown in **Table 1**, the population of Wise County/Norton reached a high of 56,336 in 1950, declined by 14 percent to 48,592 in 1960, and dropped again, by 17 percent, to 40,119 in 1970, the county's lowest population level in nearly 60 years.

⁶ <http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/spring02articles/wisecounty.html>

⁷ Wise County Public Schools Division Profile, December 2013.

<http://www.wise.k12.va.us/Instruction/Documents/WiseCountySchools-ProfileDecember2013.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <http://spearheadtrails.com/default.aspx>

The 1970s saw the county's population increase to 48,620 persons. By 1990, however, this trend had reversed, with the population dropping to 43,820. The county's population combined with Norton city continued to remain steady over the next two decades, growing to a population of 45,410 in 2010.

Table 1: Historic Population, Wise County and Norton City

	Wise County	Norton *	Combined
1890	9,345	-	9,345
1900	19,653	-	19,653
1910	34,162	-	34,162
1920	46,500	-	46,500
1930	51,167	-	51,167
1940	52,458	-	52,458
1950	56,336	-	56,336
1960	43,579	5,013	48,592
1970	35,947	4,172	40,119
1980	43,863	4,757	48,620
1990	39,573	4,247	43,820
2000	40,123	3,904	44,027
2010	41,452	3,958	45,410

*Norton City was not chartered until 1954

Source: U.S. Census

Table 2 consolidates recent historical population counts and population projections. Growth Highlights, above, summarizes this exhibit.

Appalachia, Pound, St. Paul and the unincorporated County all experienced population loss from 2000 to 2010, while Wise stayed steady. Big Stone Gap and Coeburn experienced moderate growth. The 2010 Census identifies a Riverview CDP, which is a new designation, adjacent to and included in the Coeburn numbers. Given its proximity to Coeburn, it is reasonable to expect that population growth in that area was similar. Norton also experienced slow growth. Overall, the County increased by a total of 3.3% over the decade, with Norton city increasing by 1.4%.

The US Census estimated population is for Wise County, Big Stone Gap and Norton city. Census estimates are only available for Counties and towns with greater than 5,000 residents. It is estimated that Big Stone Gap and the County as a whole lost population from 2000 to 2013, with the County losing 2.1%. Norton city gained 1.5%, which is approximately the same rate of growth as the prior decade.

Based on growth trends from 2000 to 2010, with estimates from 2010 to 2013, it appears that the smaller towns and more rural areas in the County are losing population, while the larger towns of Big Stone Gap, Coeburn and Norton city are making gains. St. Paul figures only include portion of town within Wise County. Total St. Paul town population was 1,000 in 2000, and 970 in 2010. Norton is not included in Wise County total

Table 2: Population Estimates and Projections, 2000-2040

	2000			2010			2000-2010			2013		2020			2030			2040		
	Population	Percent of Total County	Percent of Unincorporated County	Population	Percent of Total County	Percent of Unincorporated County	Average Annual Pop Change	Urbanization Rate	Change Percent of Unincorporated County	Population	Average Annual Change	Population	Percent of Total County	Average Annual Change, 2010-2020	Population	Percent of Total County	Average Annual Change, 2020-2030	Population	Percent of Total County	Average Annual Change, 2030-2040
Incorporated County																				
Appalachia	1,839	4.6%	13.3%	1,754	4.2%	12.0%	-0.5%	-9.7%				1,727			1,700			1,673		
Big Stone Gap	4,856	12.1%	35.1%	5,614	13.5%	38.4%	1.5%	9.4%		5,548	-0.4%	5,903	14.5%	0.5%	6,191	15.3%	0.5%	6,480	16.2%	0.5%
Coeburn	1,996	5.0%	14.4%	2,139	5.2%	14.6%	0.7%	1.4%				2,189			2,240			2,293		
Pound	1,089	2.7%	7.9%	1,037	2.5%	7.1%	-0.5%	-9.9%				1,020			1,004			988		
St. Paul (partial)	784	2.0%	5.7%	772	1.9%	5.3%	-0.2%	-6.8%				768			764			760		
Wise	3,255	8.1%	23.6%	3,286	7.9%	22.5%	0.1%	-4.5%				3,296			3,307			3,317		
Total	13,819	34.4%		14,602	35.2%		0.6%	0.2%				14,715	36.0%	0.1%	14,872	36.8%	0.1%	15,067	37.7%	0.1%
Unincorporated County	26,304	65.6%		26,850	64.8%		0.2%	-0.1%				26,138	64.0%	-0.3%	25,519	63.2%	-0.2%	24,975	62.5%	-0.2%
County Total	40,123			41,452			0.3%			40,589	-0.7%	40,841		-0.1%	40,357		-0.1%	39,976		-0.1%
Decennial Change	1.4%			3.3%								-1.5%			-1.2%			-0.9%		
City of Norton	3,904			3,958			0.1%			4,017	0.5%	4,201	0.6%		4,468	0.6%		4,722	0.6%	

Table 3 also displays estimated population for the County, Big Stone Gap and Norton city through 2040. Projections are only available for Counties and towns with greater than 5,000 residents. The projections for Big Stone Gap are based on a consistent annual rate of increase of .5%. Norton City is expected to experience a similar .6% annual rate of growth, while the County as a whole is expected to lose population at a rate of .1% per year through 2040. Note that the population projections were prepared in November 2012, which was prior to many of the mining-related layoffs of 2013-2014. It is important to note that the estimates for 2013 do not match the projected growth trend, and instead show a higher negative growth rate for Big Stone Gap and the County as a whole. While the population might recover as the County's economic condition stabilizes, the loss in recent years will likely have an impact on the County's total population for some time to come.

The projected population continues the trend of the more urbanized towns and city continuing to grow, while the smaller towns and rural areas continue to slowly lose population, mirroring the trend from 2000 to 2010. Based on Census projections, Wise County will lose 1,476 people from 2010-2040, and Big Stone Gap will gain 866. That is an essential net loss of 2,342 for other parts of the County. It is likely that slower growth will continue in Coeburn and the Riverview CDP, also mirroring trends from 2000 to 2010.

Table 3: Population, Estimates and Projections, 2010-2040

	Population		Estimate	Population Projections		
	2000	2010	2013	2020	2030	2040
Appalachia town	1,839	1,754				
Big Stone Gap town	4,856	5,614	5,548	5,903	6,191	6,480
Coeburn town	1,996	2,139				
Pound town	1,089	1,037				
Riverview CDP	-	782				
St. Paul town (part)*	784	772				
Wise town	3,255	3,286				
Unincorporated County	26,304	26,068				
Wise County Total	40,123	41,452	40,589	40,841	40,357	39,976
Norton city**	3,904	3,958	4,017	4,201	4,468	4,722

*St. Paul figures only include portion of town within Wise County. Total St. Paul town population was 1,000 in 2000, and 970 in 2010.

**Not included in Wise County Total

Source: Population from U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010 Census.

Source: Population Projections Published on November 13, 2012 by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Demographics & Workforce Group, www.coopercenter.org/demographics/

Source: 2013 Estimates from U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts.

2.4.2 Age Characteristics

The age characteristics of a population can be used as a rough indicator of the levels and types of services desired and needed in an area. Each of the three age groups considered here — 19 and younger, 20-64 and 65 and over — has certain needs and desires that are quite different from those of the other age groups.

Table 4 shows the 2010 composition of Wise County's population by age group and gender, as well as its median age, while **Table 5** on the following page reveals the rate of change in each age group by decade from 1970-2010 in comparison with state and national figures.

It is significant to note, especially in comparison with state figures, the marked increase in the county's "65 and over" population, the continuing increase in the portion of the population in the "20-64" age group and the corresponding decline in the relative number of persons "19 and younger." These combined changes point to increased goods and services needs in both the "20-64" and "65 and over" groups. **Table 6** shows that between 2000 and 2010, the combined County and Norton city lost 5.1% of the youth population, while gaining 6.5% of the working-aged population and 4.2% of the older adult population.

Over the next few decades trends indicate that the retirement age population will continue to increase. This could potentially create a fiscal burden on local government by spreading available services to a greater population while losing a portion of tax revenues.

2.4.3 Dependency

Table 7 provides youth dependency and aged dependency ratios. These ratios reflect the number of people in the working age population for every young person and older person who are not in their prime wage earning years. In general terms, these ratios indicate whether there is a significant imbalance between the workforce and those dependent on the workforce for goods and services. This factor, when combined with other economic indicators, can provide insight regarding the vitality of the local economy. In terms of the youth dependency ratio, Wise County has 2.56 working aged person for each youth, somewhat higher than the State (2.37). The aged dependency ratio shows a wider variation. Consistent with its relatively high percentage of residents in older age cohorts, Wise County has 4.36 workers for each person of retirement age, lower than the ratios for Virginia (5.06). Over the next few decades, with more people reaching retirement age, Wise County will likely feel added pressure vis-à-vis the aged dependency ratio. A decrease in either ratio will create addition burden on the local government fiscally by spreading available services to a greater population while losing the most economically active age group and related loss of tax revenues.

Table 4: Gender and Age, Wise County, 2010

SEX AND AGE	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total population	21,431	51.7%	20,021	48.3%	41,452	100.0%
Youth (19 years and younger)	5,186	12.5%	4,811	11.6%	9,997	24.1%
Worker Bees (Ages 20-65)	13,711	33.1%	11,879	28.7%	25,590	61.7%
Seniors (Ages 65 and older)	2534	6.1%	3331	8.0%	5865	14.1%
Median age (years)	37.1		41		39	

Source: U.S. Census

Table 5: Population by Age Comparison, Wise County, Norton and Virginia, 1970-2010

	Total Population	Percentage of Total Population		
		19 and Under	20-64	65 and Over
1970				
Virginia	4,764,000	38.0%	54.2%	7.9%
Wise County	35,947	39.5%	50.1%	10.4%
Norton City	4,172	36.0%	52.4%	11.6%
Wise Co./Norton	40,119	39.1%	50.3%	10.6%
1980				
Virginia	5,347,000	24.8%	65.8%	9.4%
Wise County	43,863	34.4%	55.2%	10.4%
Norton City	4,757	32.9%	54.4%	12.7%
Wise Co./Norton	48,620	34.3%	55.1%	10.6%
1990				
Virginia	6,187,000	27.6%	61.7%	10.7%
Wise County	39,573	30.1%	56.8%	13.1%
Norton City	4,247	29.5%	56.4%	14.1%
Wise Co./Norton	43,820	30.0%	56.8%	13.2%
2000				
Virginia	7,078,515	27.4%	61.4%	11.2%
Wise County	40,123	26.4%	59.6%	13.9%
Norton City	3,904	24.4%	60.4%	15.3%
Wise Co./Norton	44,027	26.3%	59.7%	14.0%
2010				
Virginia	8,001,024	26.0%	61.7%	12.2%
Wise County	41,452	24.1%	61.7%	14.1%
Norton City	3,958	24.9%	60.4%	14.7%
Wise Co./Norton	45,410	24.2%	61.6%	14.7%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 6: Change by Age Group, 2000-2010

	Change, 2000 to 2010
Wise County	
19 and Under	-5.8%
20-64	6.9%
65 and Over	5.0%
Total Population	3.3%
Norton City	
19 and Under	3.7%
20-64	1.5%
65 and Over	-2.7%
Total Population	1.4%
Wise Co. / Norton	
19 and Under	-5.0%
20-64	6.5%
65 and Over	4.2%
Total Population	3.1%

Source: Derived from U.S. Census

Table 7: Age Dependency, 2010

Age Group	Virginia		Wise County		Norton city		Wise Cty/Norton	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Youth (0 - 19)	2,083,685	26%	9,997	24%	986	25%	10,983	24%
Working (20 - 64)	4,940,402	62%	25,590	62%	2392	60%	27,982	62%
Aged (65+)	976,937	12%	5,865	14%	580	15%	6,445	14%
Total	8,001,024	100%	41,452	100%	3,958	100%	45,410	100%
Youth Dependency	2.37		2.56		2.43		2.55	
Aged Dependency	5.06		4.36		4.12		4.34	

Source: Derived from U.S. Census

Table 8 shows population projections by age and gender for the County through 2040. Keeping with current trends, it is projected that the total percent of younger and working aged residents will slowly decrease while the percent of retirement aged residents will increase to 20.9% by 2040, an increase of 6.8% over the 2010 level.

Table 8: Population Projections by Age and Gender, Wise County, 2010-2040

	Female	Male	Total	Percent of Total
2010				
19 and Under	4,811	5,186	9,997	24.1%
20-64	11,879	13,711	25,590	61.7%
65 and Over	3331	2534	5865	14.1%
2020				
19 and Under	4,546	4,903	9,449	23.1%
20-64	11,191	12,864	24,055	58.9%
65 and Over	4,116	3,221	7,337	18.0%
2030				
19 and Under	4,388	4,731	9,119	22.6%
20-64	10,737	12,306	23,043	57.1%
65 and Over	4,634	3,558	8,192	20.3%
2040				
19 and Under	4,240	4,575	8,815	22.0%
20-64	10,644	12,162	22,806	57.0%
65 and Over	4,775	3,582	8,357	20.9%

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

2.4.4 Families and Households

Table 9 shows the general family and household characteristics for Wise County, for both 2000 and 2010. Other than a slight drop in families and households with children under the age of 18, and an increase in the number of householders living alone, the characteristics of families and households in Wise County remained fairly constant over the course of the decade. In 2010, there were 15,968 total households in Wise County. Family households comprised 68.2%, with 26.7% of those with children under 18 years. Non-family households comprised 31.8%, with 31.4% of those with children under 18 years.

Table 9: General Household Characteristics, Wise County, 2000 and 2010

HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE	2000		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total households	16,013	100	15,968	100
Family households (families) *	11,517	71.9	10,892	68.2
With own children under 18 years	4,963	31	4,260	26.7
Husband-wife family	8,992	56.2	8,036	50.3
With own children under 18 years	3,717	23.2	2,847	17.8
Male householder, no wife present			850	5.3
With own children under 18 years			390	2.4
Female householder, no husband present	1,918	12	2,006	12.6
With own children under 18 years	966	6	1,023	6.4
Nonfamily households*	4,496	28.1	5,076	31.8
Householder living alone	4,088	25.5	4,379	27.4
Male			1,917	12
65 years and over			523	3.3
Female			2,462	15.4
65 years and over			1,291	8.1
Total Householders living alone 65 years+	1,792	11.2	1,814	11.4
Households with individuals under 18 years	5,488	34.3	5,013	31.4
Households with individuals 65 years and over	4,160	26	4,369	27.4
Average household size	2.44		2.4	
Average family size*	2.91		2.9	

Source: U.S. Census, 2000 and 2010

* "Family households" consist of a householder and one or more other people related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. They do not include same-sex married couples even if the marriage was performed in a state issuing marriage certificates for same-sex couples. Same-sex couple households are included in the family households category if there is at least one additional person related to the householder by birth or adoption. Same-sex couple households with no relatives of the householder present are tabulated in nonfamily households. "Nonfamily households" consist of people living alone and households which do not have any members related to the householder.

2.4.5 Race and Ethnicity

Historically, the population of Wise County has been predominantly white. The results of the 2010 Census indicate that, while the county's population is still predominantly white (93%), the percentage of non-white population has increased slightly since 2000 (96.9%). **Table 10** lists selected race and ethnicity characteristics of Wise County for 2000 and 2010.

Table 10: Race & Ethnicity, Wise County, 2000 and 2010

RACE	2000		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total population	40,123	100	41,452	100
One Race	39,878	99.4	41,067	99.1
White	38,870	96.9	38,561	93
Black or African American	713	1.8	2,137	5.2
American Indian and Alaska Native	64	0.2	53	0.1
Asian	121	0.3	141	0.3
Asian Indian	41	0.1	30	0.1
Chinese	9	0	30	0.1
Filipino	35	0.1	28	0.1
Japanese	5	0	6	0
Korean	14	0	9	0
Vietnamese	8	0	7	0
Other Asian [1]	9	0	31	0.1
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	4	0	2	0
Native Hawaiian	1	0	0	0
Guamanian or Chamorro	1	0	0	0
Samoan	2	0	0	0
Other Pacific Islander [2]	0	0	2	0
Some Other Race	106	0.3	173	0.4
Two or More Races	245	0.6	385	0.9
HISPANIC OR LATINO				
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	292	0.7	471	1.1

[1] Other Asian alone, or two or more Asian categories.

[2] Other Pacific Islander alone, or two or more Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander categories.

3 Economic Conditions

3.1 Industry Analysis & Major Employers

As noted, Wise County's origins lay in coal and iron ore extraction and lumbering activities. Coal mining has continued to be the county's dominant basic economic activity. The 1998 Plan noted that such dependence on one basic industry makes an area's economy highly susceptible to changes in that industry, and that dependence has historically resulted in a series of coal related "booms and busts."

Emphasis is placed on the basic employment sector and the role that mining has played as the principal employer in that sector. "Basic employment" is defined as employment in those industries selling most of their goods and services outside of the area, depending upon national or regional demand rather than local demand. By contrast, "supporting employment" is defined as employment in industries that find their primary market in the local area. Local government, retail trade, utilities and banking services generally are supporting activities.

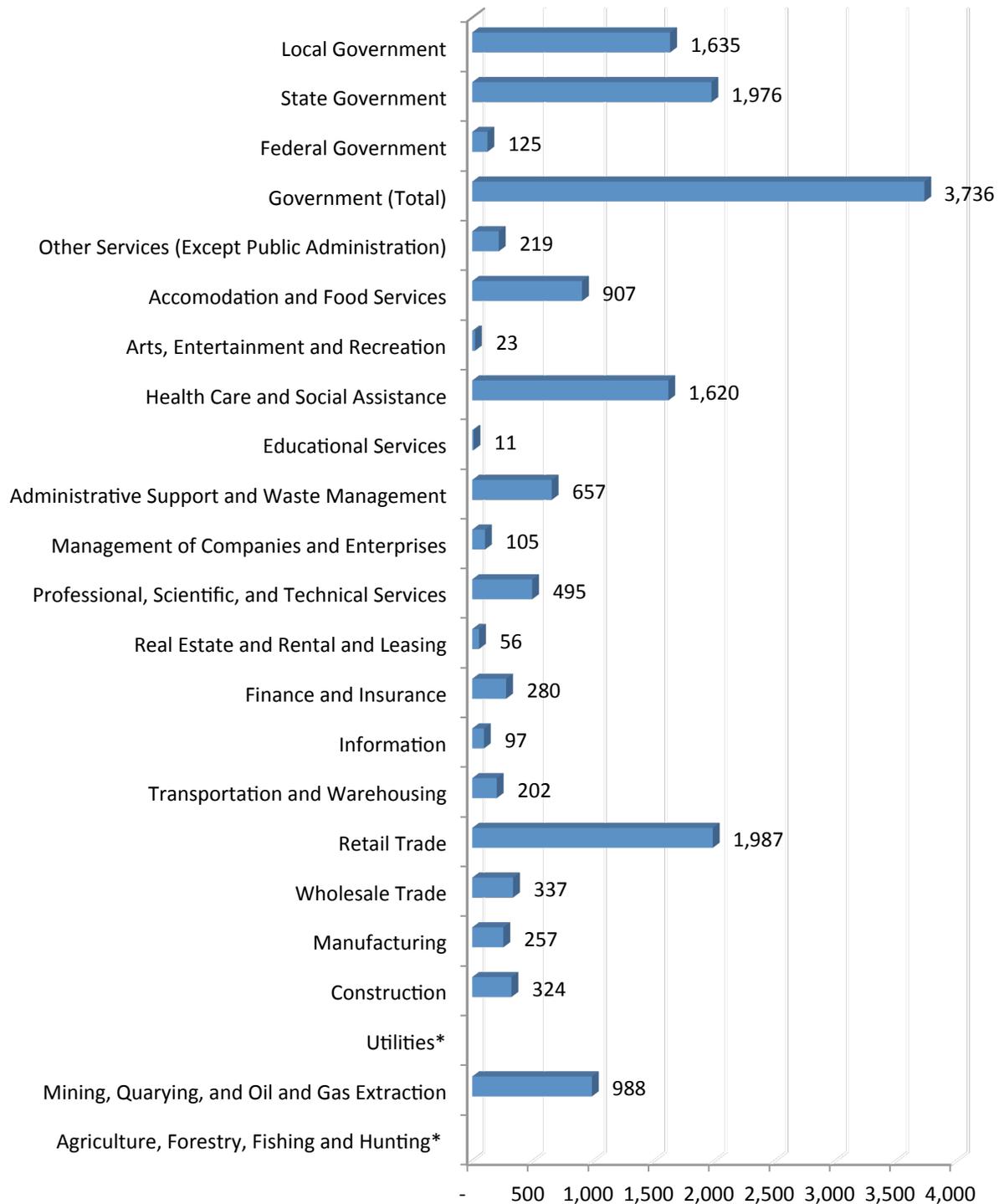
An economic base analysis considers these two sectors in looking at economic trends. The bellwether of a local economy, the basic sector "imports" purchasing power to the local area while "exporting" a product to outside markets. This purchasing power, in the form of wages and local taxes, provides the money necessary for the local supporting sector to produce the goods and services desired by the local population.

Figure 1 shows employment by industry in the first quarter of 2014 for Wise County. Government is the largest employer of any type, employing 3,736 people in the County. Health care and social assistance as well as retail are both larger industries in the County. Total employment in the County for the first quarter of 2014 was 12,458.

As is shown, only 988 people were employed in Mining, Quarrying and Oil and Gas Extraction in the County in the first quarter of 2014, which negatively impacts the County's base sector. In comparison, the U.S. Census reported that 1,987 people were employed in Mining, Quarrying and Oil and Gas Extraction as of March 2012, which indicates a loss of approximately 999 jobs in that sector over the course of 24 months in Wise County. Given that mines have continued to close throughout the second and third quarter of 2014, the number of Mining jobs lost is actually significantly higher than that. This is especially problematic because Mining Employment pays significantly more than other industries, with average weekly wages averaging \$1,361, as opposed to the total average in all industries of \$675, as shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 3 lists the fifty largest employers in Wise County.

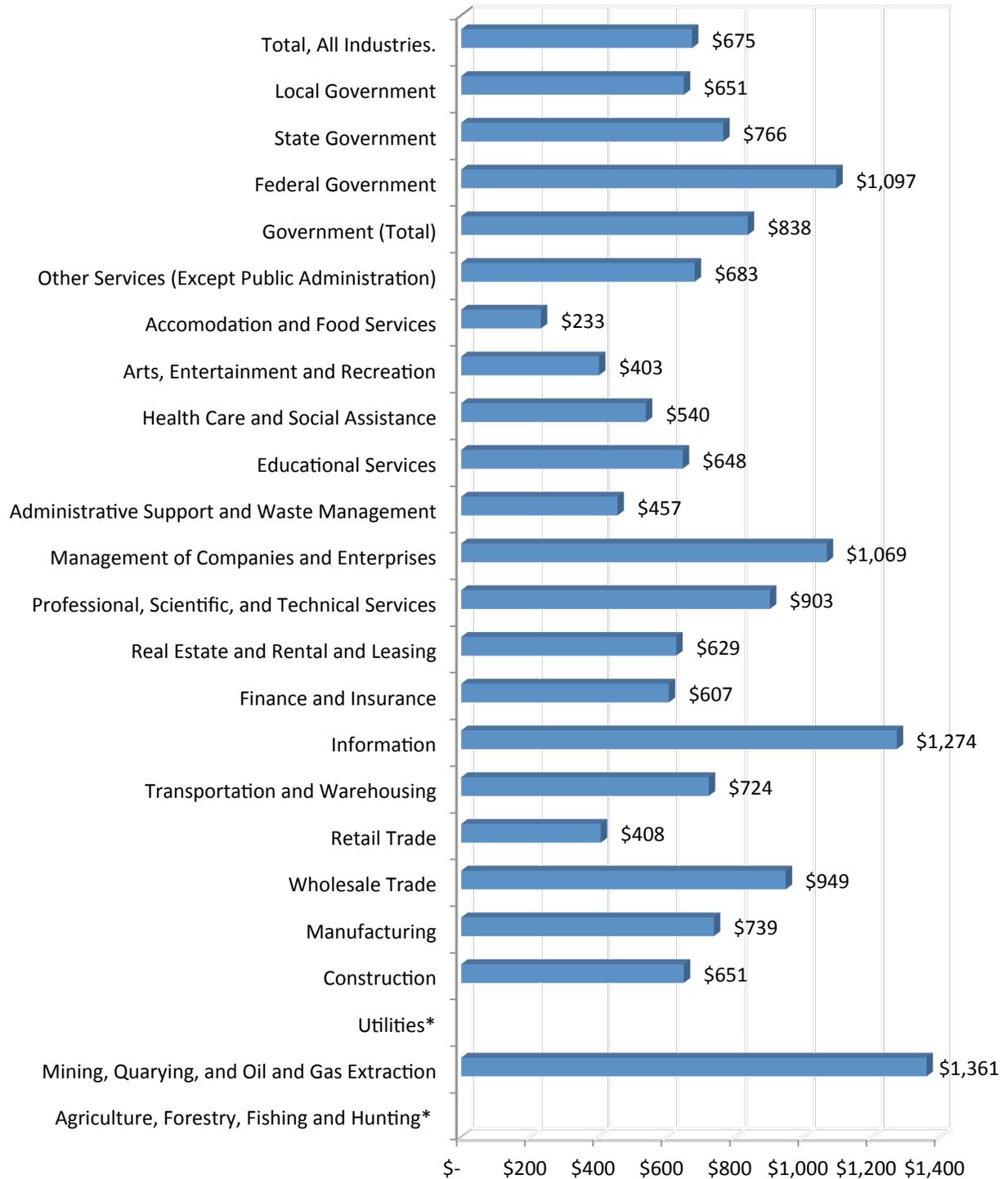
Figure 1: Wise County Employment by Industry, 1st Quarter 2014



Note: Asterisk (*) indicates non-disclosable data.

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 1st Quarter (January, February, March) 2014.

Figure 2: Wise County Average Weekly Wages by Industry, 1st Quarter 2014



Note: Asterisk (*) indicates non-disclosable data.

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 1st Quarter (January, February, March) 2014.

Figure 3: Wise County 50 Largest Employers, 2014

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Wise County School Board | 26. Payless Supermarket |
| 2. Red Onion Correctional Center | 27. Telemed |
| 3. Food City | 28. Crutchfield Corporation |
| 4. Wallens Ridge Correctional Center | 29. Wal Mart |
| 5. University of Virginia / Blue Ridge Hospital | 30. Riggs Oil Company Black Diamond |
| 6. Sykes Enterprises | 31. Roth LLC |
| 7. Mount Empire Community College | 32. VDOT |
| 8. Heritage Hall | 33. Wise County Social Services |
| 9. Bristol Regional Health System | 34. Red River Coal Company |
| 10. County of Wise | 35. Town of Big Stone Gap |
| 11. Mullican Flooring | 36. Hardee's |
| 12. Mount Empire Older Citizens | 37. Head Start |
| 13. Shore Stop Store | 38. Bates Contracting & Const Inc |
| 14. Mill Branch Coal Corporation | 39. Huddle House |
| 15. Lowes' Home Centers, Inc. | 40. Miner's Exchange Bank |
| 16. A & A Enterprises Inc | 41. Maxxim Shared Service LLC |
| 17. Frontier Health | 42. U.S. Department of Agriculture |
| 18. A & G Coal Corporation | 43. Caring Touch Home Health Inc |
| 19. Cumberland River Coal Company | 44. Renos Roadhouse |
| 20. Thompson and Litton, Inc. | 45. Kmart |
| 21. In Home Care | 46. Maxxim Rebuild Co LLC |
| 22. Dominion Virginia Power | 47. Rnse Enterprises Inc |
| 23. Virginia Department of Mines, Mineral & Energy | 48. Environmental Monitoring Inc |
| 24. Humphrey's Enterprises | 49. Paramount Coal Company Virginia |
| 25. Nine Mile Mining Inc | 50. Town of Wise |

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

3.2 Commuting Patterns

Table 11 reports commuting patterns for the County as of 2011, showing that 6,073 live and work in Wise County, while 12,366 people commute in to the County and 5,623 people commute out of the County. Norton city is the top destination for out-commuters, with 1,518 County residents working in Norton. Commuting patterns to neighboring coal-producing counties of Virginia and Kentucky represent a large portion of all commuting from the county, with just over 2,000 in-commuters travel to Wise County from both Lee and Dickenson County, Virginia.

From a historic perspective, in 1990, 77.4% of the county's resident workers worked within the county, down from 90.2% in 1980. This is a large contrast to conditions in 2011. Of the total 11,696 employed residents of Wise County, only 6,073, or 52% are employed within the County, with the remaining 48% commute out of the County. In-commuting to the county has also increased as of 2011, with the number of non-residents who chose Wise County as a place of employment rising from 3,725 in 1990 to 12,366 in 2011. The overall impact of increased in- and out-commuting points to an increased need for transportation services and infrastructure, as well as higher fuel costs for commuters to travel to and from their job. This can mean less disposable income for those employees as well as less time for home and recreation activities.

Table 11: Wise County Commuting Patterns, 2011

People who live and work in the area	6,073
In-Commuters	12,366
Out-Commuters	5,623
Net In-Commuters (In-Commuters minus Out-Commuters)	6,743

Top 10 Places Residents are Commuting To	
Area	Workers
Norton city, VA	1,518
Washington County, VA	474
Dickenson County, VA	448
Lee County, VA	413
Russell County, VA	326
Scott County, VA	321
Tazewell County, VA	260
Bristol city, VA	174
Sullivan County, TN	173
Buchanan County, VA	150

Top 10 Places Workers are Commuting From	
Area	Workers
Lee County, VA	2,189
Dickenson County, VA	2,078
Russell County, VA	1,265
Scott County, VA	723
Washington County, VA	618
Sullivan County, VA	548
Norton city, VA	479
Tazewell County, VA	309
Letcher County, KY	249
Buchanan County, VA	227

Source: U.S. Census Bureau,
OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2011.

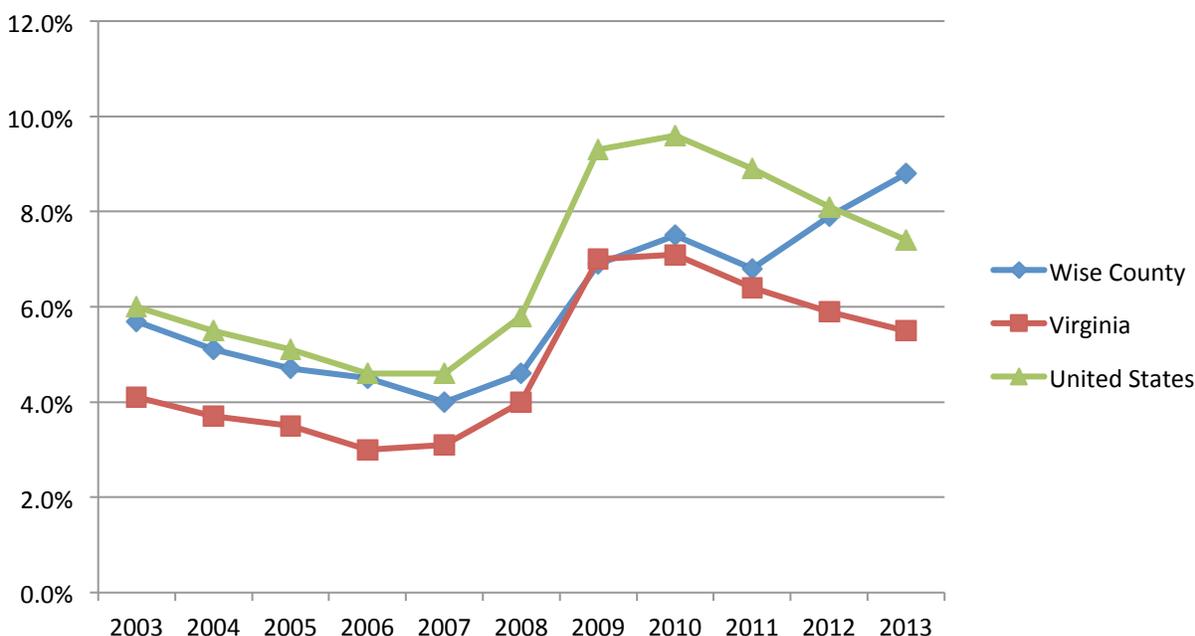
3.3 Unemployment

Table 12 and **Figure 4** show unemployment trends from 2003 to 2013 for Wise County, Virginia and the United States. While Virginia has enjoyed a lower than average unemployment rate for the past decade, Wise County had a higher rate, but was still relatively lower than the national rate across the time period. However, in mid 2011 the rate in Wise County began to spike due to discussed losses in the coal industry. In 2013 the unemployment rate in the County was 8.8%.

Table 12: Unemployment Trends, 2003-2013

	Wise County	Virginia	United States
2003	5.7%	4.1%	6.0%
2004	5.1%	3.7%	5.5%
2005	4.7%	3.5%	5.1%
2006	4.5%	3.0%	4.6%
2007	4.0%	3.1%	4.6%
2008	4.6%	4.0%	5.8%
2009	6.9%	7.0%	9.3%
2010	7.5%	7.1%	9.6%
2011	6.8%	6.4%	8.9%
2012	7.9%	5.9%	8.1%
2013	8.8%	5.5%	7.4%

Figure 4: Unemployment Trends Comparison, 2003-2013



Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

3.4 Income and Poverty

Table 13 includes general employment status data for the County in 2012, showing that 48.2% of the County’s population is in the labor force. Note that the percent unemployed, 10.4% is higher than that shown in **Table 12**, for 2012, likely due to different sources, methods and margin of error.

As is shown in **Table 14**, median household income in 2012 was \$35,120, and mean household income was \$47,075. Per capita income was \$18,693. Just over 20% of the County received Food Stamps/SNAP benefits during the year.

Tables 15 and **16** show the age, gender, educational attainment, and employment status of those below the poverty level in Wise County in 2012. It is estimated that nearly a quarter, 24.1%, of the County’s population is below the poverty line, with 34.5 percent of children under 18 being in poverty, and 12.1% of those over 65. In addition to children being disproportionately affected by poverty, so are females, with 28.3% of females estimated to be living in poverty, compared to 19.9% of males. Those with less than a high school graduate are most likely to be in poverty, with a rate of 31.2%. It is estimated that 13.6% of those in the labor force are in poverty, with 10.5% of employed people being in poverty, and 41.5% being unemployed.

Table 13: Employment Status, Wise County, 2012

	Number	Percent
Population 16 years and over	33,875	
In labor force	16,319	48.20%
Civilian labor force	16,272	48.00%
Employed	14,580	43.00%
Unemployed	1,692	5.00%
Armed Forces	47	0.10%
Not in labor force	17,556	51.80%
Civilian labor force	16,272	16,272
Percent Unemployed	(X)	10.40%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

**Table 14: Household Income and Benefits, Wise County
(2012 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)**

	Number	Percent
Total households	15,673	
Less than \$10,000	1,992	12.70%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,551	9.90%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	2,336	14.90%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	1,926	12.30%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	2,201	14.00%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	2,554	16.30%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	1,489	9.50%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1,291	8.20%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	176	1.10%
\$200,000 or more	157	1.00%
Median household income (dollars)	35,120	(X)
Mean household income (dollars)	47,075	(X)
With earnings	9,914	63.30%
Mean earnings (dollars)	51,849	(X)
With Social Security	7,022	44.80%
Mean Social Security income (dollars)	16,390	(X)
With retirement income	3,203	20.40%
Mean retirement income (dollars)	15,059	(X)
With Supplemental Security Income	1,734	11.10%
Mean Supplemental Security Income (dollars)	6,942	(X)
With cash public assistance income	592	3.80%
Mean cash public assistance income (dollars)	2,149	(X)
With Food Stamp/SNAP benefits in the past 12 months	3,199	20.40%
Per capita income (dollars)	18,693	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Table 15: Estimated Poverty by Age and Gender, Wise County, 2012

	Total	Below poverty level	Percent below poverty level
	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
Population for whom poverty status is determined	38,478	9,274	24.10%
AGE			
Under 18 years	8,312	2,869	34.50%
Related children under 18 years	8,231	2,788	33.90%
18 to 64 years	24,445	5,715	23.40%
65 years and over	5,721	690	12.10%
SEX			
Male	19,267	3,842	19.90%
Female	19,211	5,432	28.30%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Table 16: Estimated Poverty by Educational Attainment, Wise County 2012

	Total	Below poverty level	Percent below poverty level
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
Less than high school graduate	7,147	2,233	31.20%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	8,611	1,621	18.80%
Some college, associate's degree	7,392	1,384	18.70%
Bachelor's degree or higher	3,608	111	3.10%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
Civilian labor force 16 years and over	16,025	2,178	13.60%
Employed	14,426	1,514	10.50%
Male	7,895	721	9.10%
Female	6,531	793	12.10%
Unemployed	1,599	664	41.50%
Male	1,047	407	38.90%
Female	552	257	46.60%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

3.5 Retail Sales

It was noted in the 1998 Plan that Wise County became more of a retail trade center during the 1990s, with retail sales in the county the highest in the region. **Table 17 and Figure 5** show trends in local option sales tax revenues from 2003-2013 in comparison with that of Virginia. The drop in revenues in 2011 coincides with the wave of mining layoffs.

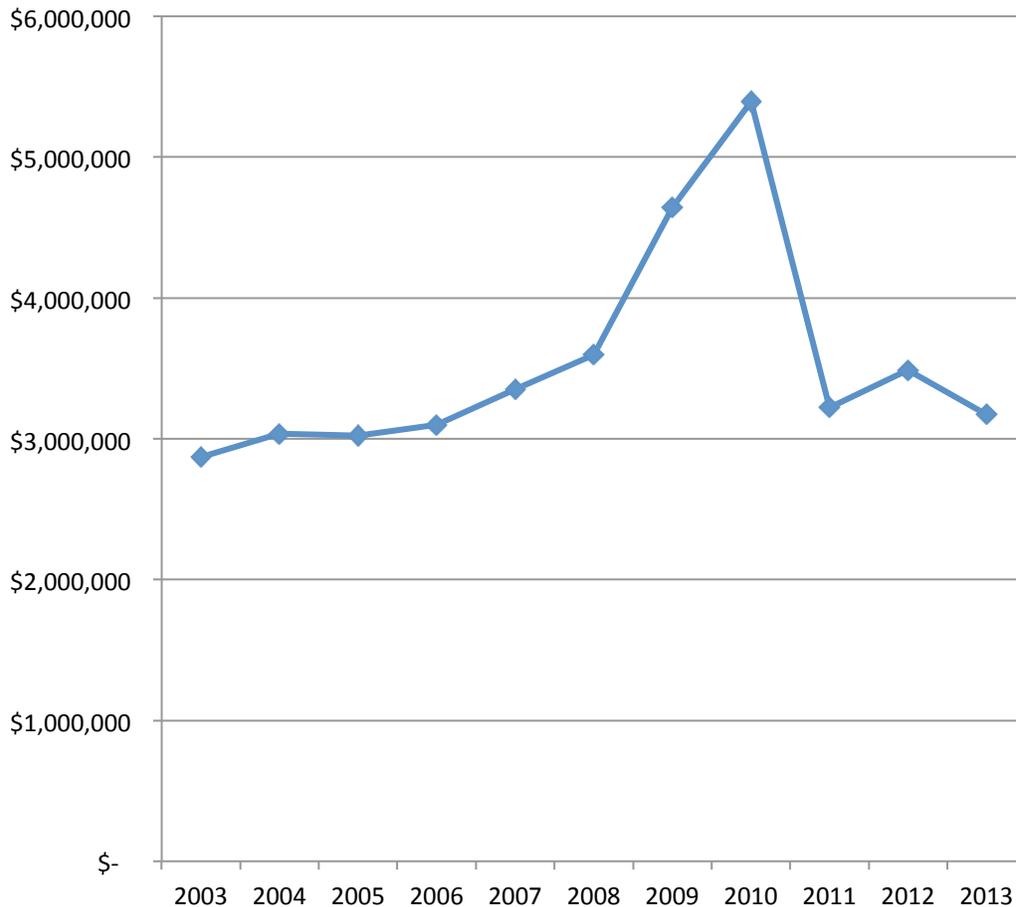
Table 17: Local Option Sales Tax Trends, 2003-2013

	Wise County	Virginia
2003	\$ 2,870,353	\$ 838,275,059
2004	\$ 3,036,660	\$ 914,499,686
2005	\$ 3,021,311	\$ 976,923,577
2006	\$ 3,100,940	\$ 1,028,544,074
2007	\$ 3,354,441	\$ 1,056,766,678
2008	\$ 3,594,616	\$ 1,032,815,078
2009	\$ 4,641,779	\$ 979,594,664
2010	\$ 5,397,208	\$ 992,820,512
2011	\$ 3,221,487	\$ 1,035,981,229
2012	\$ 3,486,847	\$ 1,080,662,042
2013	\$ 3,173,114	\$ 1,093,292,668

Note: This data is based on Virginia sales tax revenues deposited, rather than the actual taxable sales figures as reported on a dealer's return.

Source: Virginia Department of Taxation, Revenue Forecasting

Figure 5: Local Option Sales Tax Trends, Wise County, 2003-2013



3.6 Local Economic Development

There are a variety of local economic development tools in Wise County. The county has an industrial development authority and a full time economic development officer on the county staff. The county has developed two industrial parks, located in Esserville and Blackwood. In 1994, the county constructed its first shell building in the Esserville park, and the facility was sold shortly thereafter.

The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), a state legislative initiative funded by coal and oil road tax funds, has been operational in the state's seven coalfield counties since 1988. VCEDA offers financial assistance related to basic employment within its service area. Authority funds have been utilized in several projects in Wise County, including the Fournier furniture manufacturing plant near St. Paul, the AT&T Dual Party Relay Center in Norton and the extension of utilities to the Blackwood industrial park. The Authority also successfully marketed the Esserville shell building.

Following national and statewide trends, an increased emphasis on tourism represents a growing focus of economic development efforts in Wise County and southwestern Virginia. The county is a member of a regional tourism development authority that is exploring ways to promote tourism in the area.

Several issues emerge from the preceding data concerning Wise County's economic activity.

The first is the decrease in mine employment in the face of relatively stable coal production during the recent past. High wage jobs in the coal industry are not being replaced by comparable paying basic sector jobs, nor is there currently an expectation that they will be. While new jobs are being created in manufacturing, these wages remain well below those of the coal industry. Moreover, although the county has seen a tremendous increase in retail sales employment, these jobs cannot provide an economic base for Wise County.

Recognizing that industrial recruitment alone is not a realistic long-term solution to economic development problems, Wise County can and should examine other known "legs" of economic development, such as expanding existing businesses and creating new small- and medium-sized "home grown" businesses.

The county's wealth of natural and human resources translates to a range of development opportunities. Forming development strategies to take advantage of these resources will bolster the county's long-term economic health. With proper implementation, alternative approaches to economic development such as cottage industries, cooperatives, back-office development and incubator facilities, can play a major role in the long-term diversification of the county's economy.

Tourism, as yet a nascent source of employment in the county, has promise for providing one more component of the economic diversity mix being sought by county officials. Tourism exerts a strong economic impact across the entire commonwealth. Its scenic, historic and recreational attractions make Virginia one of the most popular travel destinations in the United States. Resultant travel related expenditures, tax revenues and travel industry payroll make tourism a major player in the state's overall economy.

Wise County's historic heritage and scenic beauty lure a wide variety of visitors. Yet its lack of easy access serves to hamper tourism development, borne out by the fact that the LENOWISCO district is consistently the least visited place in Virginia, ranking last among the state's planning districts in travel expenditures, tax receipts and travel-generated jobs and payroll. Yet, oddly, similar studies have revealed that southwestern Virginia has the highest percentage of return visitors of any area of the Commonwealth.

The challenge for Wise County will be to develop a strategy to tap into the tourism market existing in other parts of Virginia and nearby states. Yet the county must remain cognizant of the fact that the relatively low wages associated with the tourism industry will not make tourism the sole savior of the county's economy.

Finally, Wise County's two post-secondary institutions, the University of Virginia at Wise and

Mountain Empire Community College, are important assets for building a sound economic future for the county. These two schools already have an important direct economic impact. Both schools should also be viewed as key components of a long term economic development strategy for the county and the region. Any plans for Wise County's future development should include consideration of the impact that implementation of such plans will have on these two institutions. Enhancing the growth and prosperity of both schools can provide direct and indirect economic dividends to the county, as well as improving the overall quality of life.

4 Housing Conditions

Provision of adequate and attainable housing is a vital foundation for supporting sustainable community and economic development. Demographic factors such as an aging population and changing economic conditions play a role in the development of policies and actions related to housing needs and demand. Unique community characteristics and diverse development patterns in different parts of the County impact policy and implementation strategies.

Table 18 shows housing occupancy in the County. With a total of 17,940 units in 2010, the County had an 89% occupancy rate. The rental vacancy rate was 9.8%. Housing Tenure is shown in **Table 19**, which shows that 71.5% of housing units were owner-occupied in 2010, and 28.5% of units were renter-occupied. The average household size for owner-occupied units was 2.44 persons, just slightly higher than the average household size for renter-occupied units of 2.31.

As is shown in **Table 20**, two-thirds of the housing units in Wise County are single-unit detached, and a quarter of the housing units are mobile homes, with the remaining 8.3% as attached dwelling units.

The 1998 Plan noted a need for new housing in the County, as well as the trend towards an increasing number of mobile homes and manufactured housing to meet that need. Nearly 10% of the County's current housing was built from 2000 to 2010, with another 15% built during the 1990s. **Table 21** shows the year that housing was built in Wise County, with approximately a quarter of the County's housing stock being built since 1990.

As is discussed in the 1998 Plan, while mobile homes have fulfilled a critical need for new housing in the county, the longer term problem may be growing, since the estimated useful life of a mobile home is considerably less than that of a conventional home. Moreover, many of these mobile homes are placed in mobile home parks in the county. There is substantial support for the view that many people live in mobile home parks because they cannot find a plot of land to purchase. As such, however, these homes are taxed as personal property rather than real property, thus accounting for a smaller portion of local taxes than conventional housing. Yet, residents of these parks require the same public services as the rest of the county's residents.

There is a recognized need in the County for housing rehabilitation and maintenance assistance for low-income and elderly households. While there are several programs in the county directed at the rehabilitation of low income housing, there is a demand for more such services. Local housing authorities regularly apply for and administer Community Development Block Grants targeting specific communities with comprehensive housing rehabilitation. In addition, there are several non-profit organizations providing housing repairs on an individual basis to qualifying low-income residents.

Table 18: Housing Occupancy, Wise County, 2010

HOUSING OCCUPANCY	Number	Percent
Total housing units	17,940	100
Occupied housing units	15,968	89
Vacant housing units	1,972	11
For rent	497	2.8
Rented, not occupied	32	0.2
For sale only	208	1.2
Sold, not occupied	80	0.4
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	200	1.1
All other vacants	955	5.3
Homeowner vacancy rate (percent) ^[8]	1.8	
Rental vacancy rate (percent) ^[9]	9.8	

[8] The homeowner vacancy rate is the proportion of the homeowner inventory that is vacant "for sale." It is computed by dividing the total number of vacant units "for sale only" by the sum of owner-occupied units, vacant units that are "for sale only," and vacant units that have been sold but not yet occupied; and then multiplying by 100.

[9] The rental vacancy rate is the proportion of the rental inventory that is vacant "for rent." It is computed by dividing the total number of vacant units "for rent" by the sum of the renter-occupied units, vacant units that are "for rent," and vacant units that have been rented but not yet occupied; and then multiplying by 100.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Table 19: Housing Tenure, Wise County, 2010

HOUSING TENURE	Number	Percent
Occupied housing units	15,968	100
Owner-occupied housing units	11,422	71.5
Population in owner-occupied housing units	27,816	
Average household size of owner-occupied units	2.44	
Renter-occupied housing units	4,546	28.5
Population in renter-occupied housing units	10,505	
Average household size of renter-occupied units	2.31	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Table 20: Units in Structure, Wise County, 2012

UNITS IN STRUCTURE		
Total housing units	17,935	17,935
1-unit, detached	11,953	66.60%
1-unit, attached	178	1.00%
2 units	360	2.00%
3 or 4 units	282	1.60%
5 to 9 units	310	1.70%
10 to 19 units	125	0.70%
20 or more units	223	1.20%
Mobile home	4,501	25.10%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	3	0.00%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Table 21: Year Structure Built, Wise County, 2012

YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT		
Total housing units	17,935	17,935
Built 2010 or later	104	0.60%
Built 2000 to 2009	1,733	9.70%
Built 1990 to 1999	2,726	15.20%
Built 1980 to 1989	2,418	13.50%
Built 1970 to 1979	4,153	23.20%
Built 1960 to 1969	1,536	8.60%
Built 1950 to 1959	1,792	10.00%
Built 1940 to 1949	1,408	7.90%
Built 1939 or earlier	2,065	11.50%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

4.1 Affordable Housing

The availability of workforce housing has real impacts on the regional economy. The persons and families that need affordable workforce housing are, for the most part, 'working people'. This is a particular hardship for those who work in entry level jobs that are vital to sustaining a good economy and a good quality of life for everyone, and also includes essential workers (police, fire, health care, utilities, teachers and child care workers) retail, industrial, office and service industry workers, entry- and mid-level professionals and public sector (government and non-profit community organizations) employees. The relationship between commercial enterprises and workforce housing is key to employment supply and demand factors, focusing location of residence, business location and transportation and accessibility.

While the lack of employment opportunities and low incomes play a role in the housing problems within the county, another is that many people who work in the county choose to, or are forced to, live outside

the county. Part of the reason for this trend may be a lack of suitable housing. Housing policies should encourage a variety of suitable housing types for all income levels.

4.1.1 Public Housing

The Wise County Redevelopment and Housing Authority serves the citizens of Wise County by providing and promoting the development of affordable rental housing and homeownership opportunities for low-to-moderate income households in a safe environment by revitalizing and maintaining neighborhoods, and continuing an active partnership with the County of Wise.

The following subsidized communities are owned or managed by Wise County Redevelopment and Housing Authority, totally 442 units.

Appalachian Towers

505 West Main St., Appalachia, VA
36 units (1 BR units)

Clinchview Apts

3311 Third Ave., St. Paul, VA
60 units (1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 BR units)

Commonwealth Apts

603 Commonwealth Ave NE, Wise, VA
26 units (1 & 2 BR units)

Inman Village Apts

189 Don Whitehead Dr, Appalachia, VA
88 units (1, 2 & 3 BR units)

John Vandiver Manor

117 Vandiver Drive, Coeburn, VA
21 units (1 BR units)

Litchfield Manor

107 Litchfield St. NW, Coeburn, VA
57 units (1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 BR units)

Monte Vista Apts

101 Monte Vista Lane, Big Stone Gap, VA
20 units (1, 2, & 3 BR units)

Old Mill Village Apts

11430 Old Mill Village Rd, Pound, VA
34 units (1, 2 & 3 BR units)

Ridgeview Apts

301 Walnut St., Appalachia, VA
20 units (1, 2, 3 & 4 BR units)

Sheffield Acres Apts

12124 Retford Rd, Coeburn, VA
56 units (1, 2 & 3 BR units)

Stonebriar Apts

Fourth & Broad St., St. Paul, VA
24 units (1 & 2 BR units)

In addition to these housing units, housing is provided for low-income families and individuals in privately owned housing through Section 8 rental subsidies. Wise County, Big Stone Gap and Norton all have their own programs.

4.1.2 Senior Housing

Retired people often have smaller household sizes, reduced incomes, and can suffer impaired abilities and mobility as they age. Without housing choices, long-time residents may be forced to leave the

community they have always lived in to find appropriate housing as they age. It is expected that senior housing will be a growing concern as baby boomers age.

Senior housing is generally based on market-rate rents, and provides a community for seniors to live in that provides for their increasing needs. Communities that are designed for those 55 years of age and older are increasingly committed to an “active lifestyle” for seniors and cater to the increased health and vitality of today’s seniors.

There are currently no assisted living facilities for elderly citizens who do not need nursing home or adult residence care, yet do not wish to remain in their homes and need support services.

5 Alternative Development Scenarios

Alternatives Analysis is intended to help compare alternative future land use development patterns. As the community updates its comprehensive plan, there are choices about community character, development intensity and the location of new growth. The consideration of alternative development scenarios will help the County select a future development pattern that is consistent with community values and resources and identify policies and strategies that best achieve community's goals. Identifying and comparing alternative development scenarios begins with an understanding of current conditions, challenges and opportunities. Consideration of alternative scenarios allows the community to:

- Establish a clear understanding of the existing conditions in the community.
- Identify realistic alternatives that propose growth trends and development patterns which reflect realistic possibilities for communities and the County.
- Compare the relative impacts of different growth strategies that evaluate impacts of different scenarios.
- Select a preferred scenario is a consensus-building process.

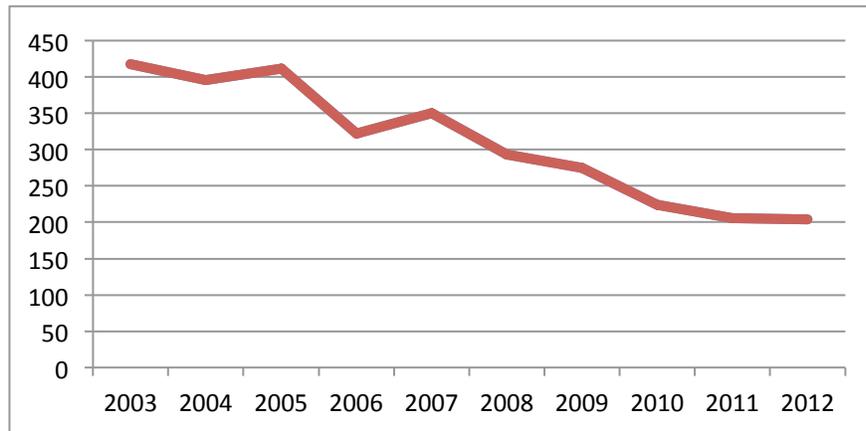
5.1 Recent Development Activity

Development activity, as evidenced by building permit activity, is occurring, shown in **Table 22**. Though it has been decreasing, as shown in **Figure 6**, the decline appears to have flattened.

Table 22: All Building Permit Activity

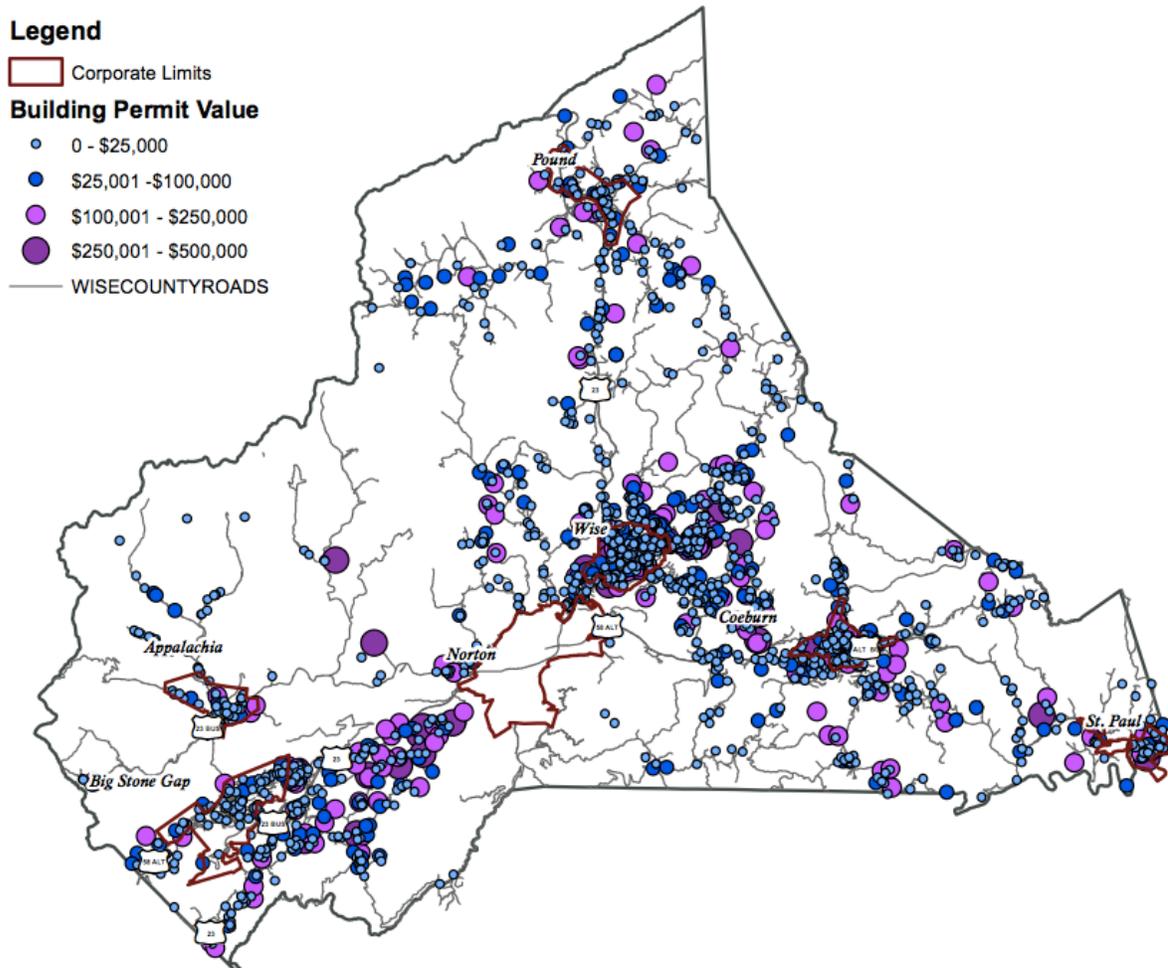
Year	New Residential	New Modular	DWMH	SWMH	Remodel / Addition Residential	Remodel / Additon Commercial	New Commercial	Non-Taxable	Total
2003	60	11	102	147	56	14	19	9	418
2004	56	7	100	151	47	10	12	13	396
2005	58	10	102	144	54	14	12	18	412
2006	57	9	88	90	39	14	5	20	322
2007	46	6	91	119	49	15	10	14	350
2008	49	3	80	81	39	10	21	10	293
2009	31	4	74	106	31	8	15	6	275
2010	18	2	56	82	31	7	11	17	224
2011	22	1	47	71	25	13	17	10	206
2012	14	2	43	76	39	8	9	13	204

Figure 6: Building Permit Activity, 2003-2012



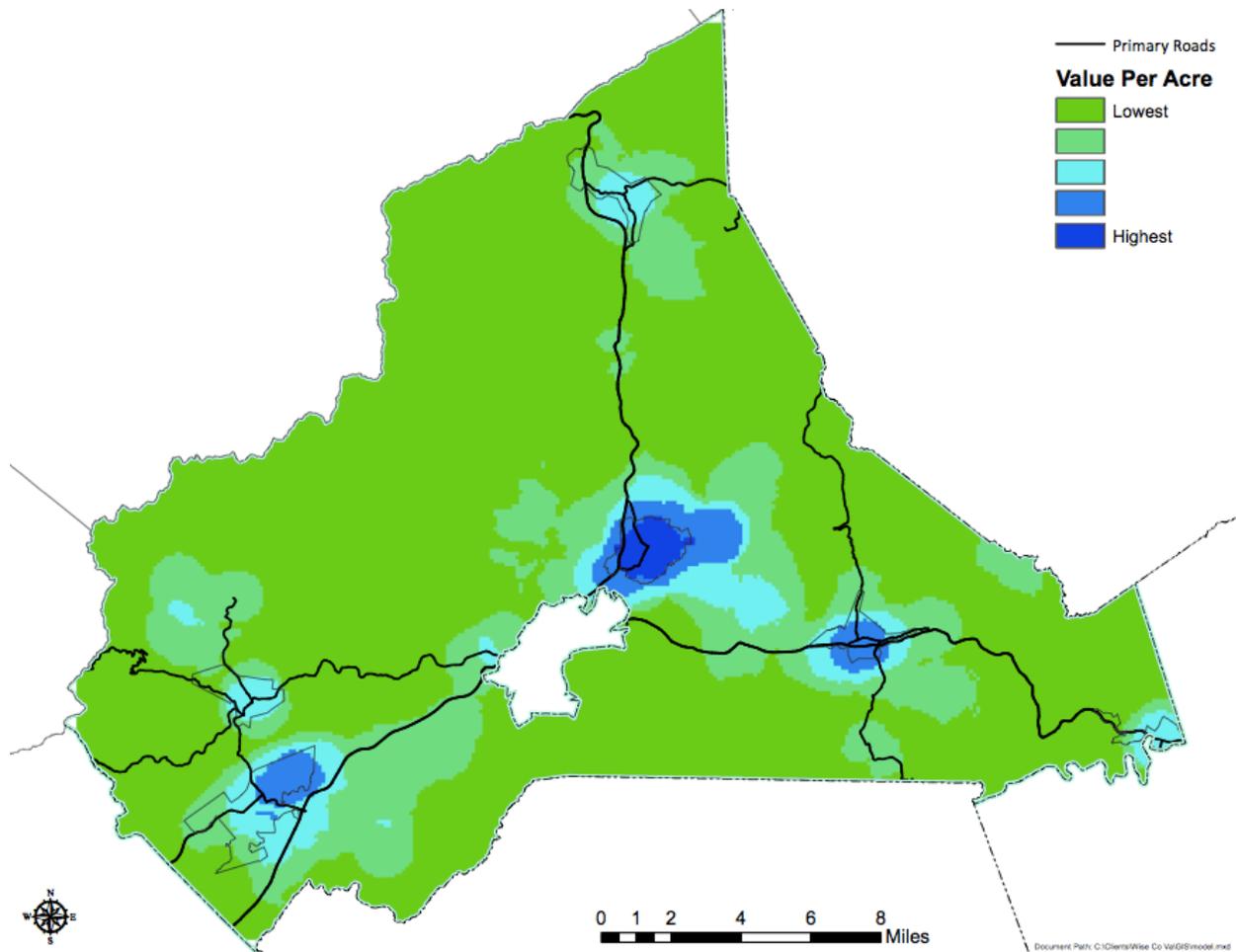
The geographic distribution of building permit activity is shown in **Map 1**.

Map 1: Building Permit Activity



Property Valuation. The total assessed value per acre, for land and improvements (buildings, structures, etc) shows the cumulative and relative investment intensity, historically, in the County, as shown in **Map 2**. This provides a market-based approach of where investment is occurring, and where investment value is being maintained.

Map 2: Total Assessed Value per Acre



5.2 In-Town Development Potential

Preliminary discussions with County stakeholders indicated a desire to encourage more development to be located in and near incorporated communities. **Table 23** identifies the amount of land within municipal boundaries (including the City of Norton). GIS data was analyzed to identify the built and unbuilt environment.

Table 23: Undeveloped Acreage, Incorporated Areas

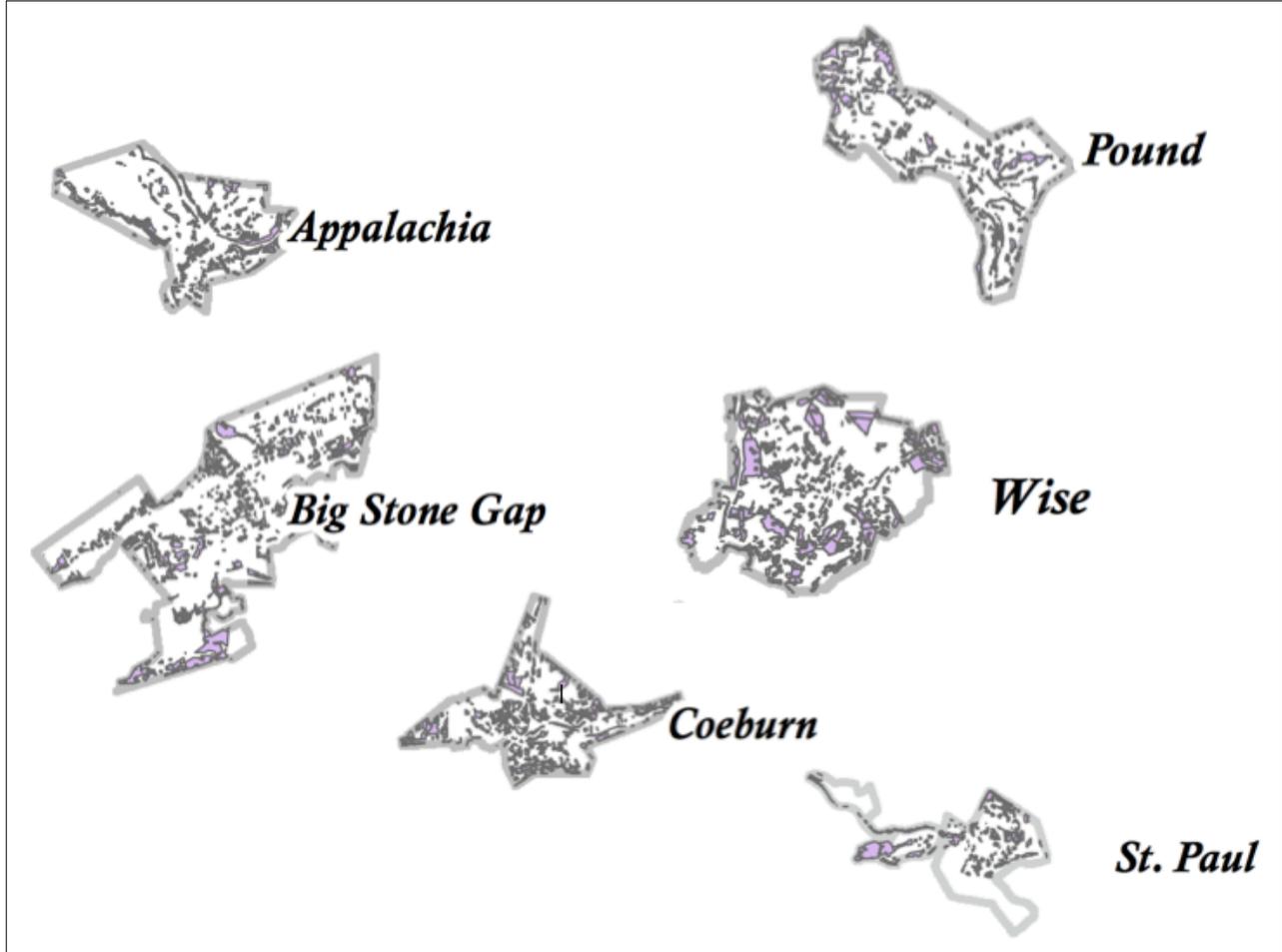
Community	Total Acres	Developed Acres	Undeveloped Acres
Appalachia	1,425.9	332.0	1,093.9
Big Stone Gap	3,196.3	853.0	2,343.3
Coeburn	1,250.7	464.4	786.4
Norton	4,810.7	2,442.6	2,368.1
Pound	1,661.1	510.9	1,150.3
St. Paul*	910.1	158.6	751.5
Wise	1,944.3	955.5	988.9

* Part of this undeveloped area is really developed but in Russell county.

However, as we remove from the category of undeveloped acreage those features which prohibit or eliminate development, due to right-of-way and roads, rivers and streams, railroads, floodway, parks and steep slope (slope in excess of 30%), **Table 24** identifies a more reasonable amount of development potential. Based on the demographic projections, there is available adequate land among the County’s communities to accommodate new growth and redevelopment opportunities. There is no *need* to promote or accommodate sprawl or leapfrog development patterns. The geography (location) of the potentially buildable undeveloped incorporated areas is shown in **Map 3**.

Table 24: Potentially Buildable Undeveloped Acreage, Incorporated Areas

Community	Buildable Acres
Appalachia	165.2
Coeburn	227.5
Big Stone Gap	374.0
Pound	219.7
St. Paul	124.1
Wise	423.1
TOTAL	1,533.6

Map 3: Potentially Buildable Undeveloped Incorporated Areas

5.3 Local Impacts from the Economy

The national economy, and national energy policies, have taken their toll on Wise County. **Table 25**, **Figure 7**, and **Map 4** paint a picture of a County struggling with larger issues. However, the Comprehensive Plan provides the County with the best-coordinated tool to address the issues raised using land use and fiscal policies to control what the local community can control.

In Perspective. According to Fannie Mae, the Single-Family Serious Delinquency rate declined slightly in August to 1.99% from 2.00% in July. It is part of a downward trend, down from 2.61% in August 2013; and well below the peak in February 2010 at 5.59%. This is the lowest level since October 2008.¹⁰

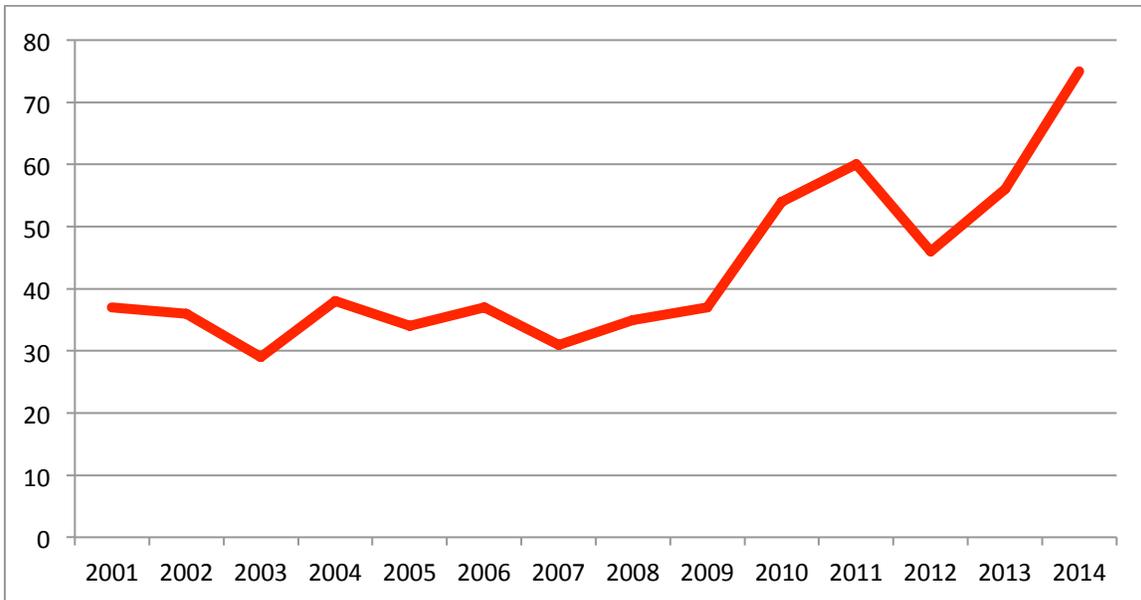
¹⁰ <http://www.fanniemae.com/portal/about-us/investor-relations/monthly-summary.html>

Table 25: Delinquencies and Foreclosures, Incorporated Areas

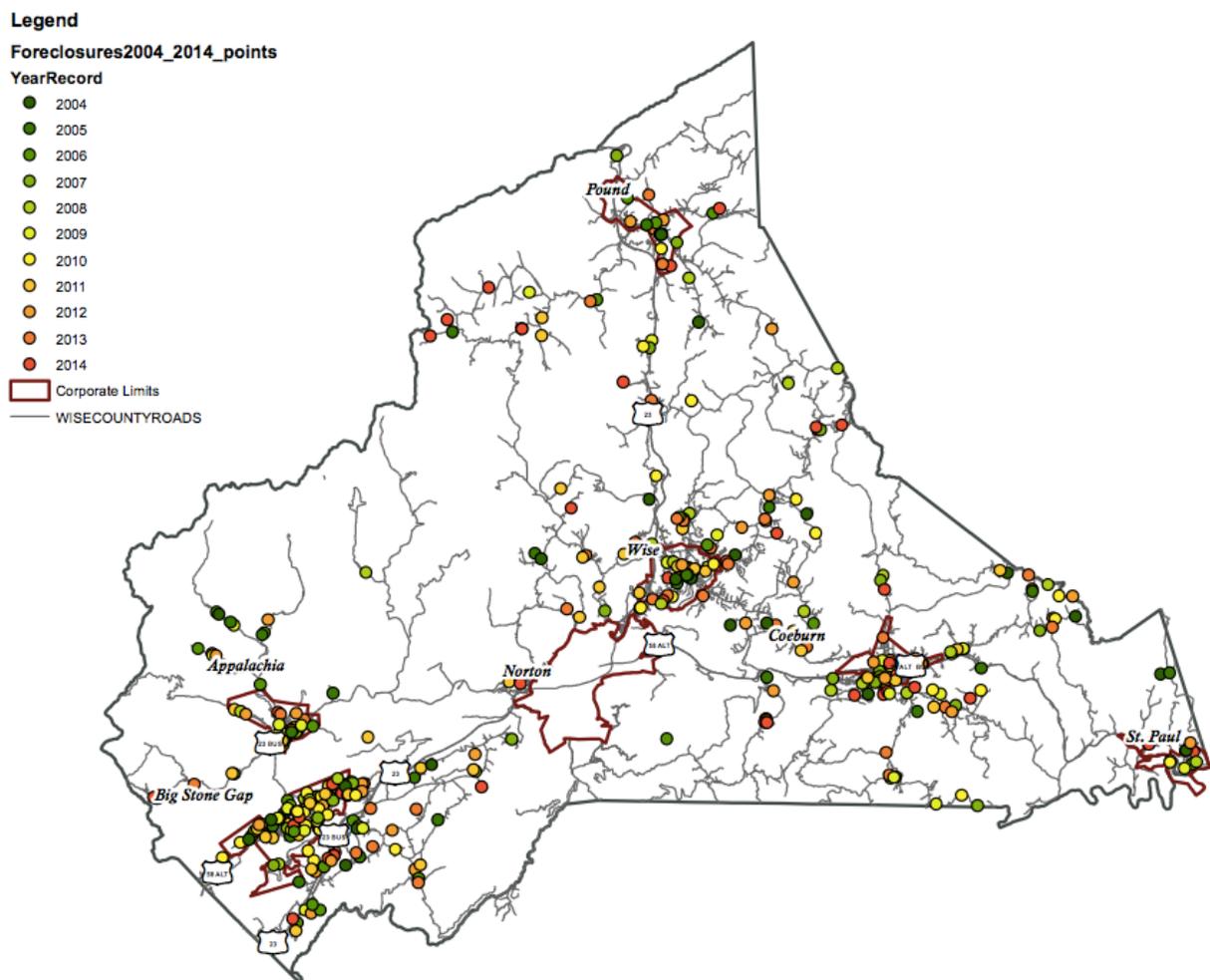
	Foreclosures*	Total Structures**	
Appalachia	38	1,101	3.45%
Big Stone Gap	120	3,984	3.01%
Coeburn	54	2,448	2.21%
Pound	20	1,228	1.63%
St Paul	10	833	1.20%
Wise	47	3,883	1.21%
Total	289	13,477	2.14%

* Delinquencies and foreclosures within 1-mile of community.
 ** Includes all apartments, businesses, etc.

Figure 7: Delinquency and Foreclosure Activity, 2001-2014



Map 4: Foreclosure Activity, 2004-2014



5.4 Broad Brush Perspective

Public facilities and services are essential to the orderly and rational development of undeveloped areas, especially at the ‘fringe’ of community boundaries. As development moves farther away from the center of the town or city, or as new development “leapfrogs” to less expensive, outlying rural land, the cost of providing public facilities and services increases. The Comprehensive Plan designates areas that are appropriate for development due to the availability of urban-type services (*i.e.*, public water, sewer and off-site wastewater treatment and paved roads). Development will be encouraged in areas where facilities exist and accommodated in areas where facilities can be provided in a cost-effective manner. Development in rural areas is minimized to reduce demands for road improvements and other public facilities and services. The framework for a rational growth strategy for the planning area is characterized by recognizing three types of development areas:

- **Rural Areas.** The Rural Area is the unincorporated County area and is planned to remain in long term agriculture, resource extraction or large lot residential development.

- **Developing Areas.** The Developing Area is the area within which adequate public facilities *should be available* within the life of the Plan and located adjacent to city and town municipal boundaries within the unincorporated area.
- **Developed Area.** The Developed Area is the area within municipal boundaries (though some adjacent areas may be included) where resources and services *are* available and maximized. It is mostly developed but has significant opportunities for infill development and redevelopment. Infill and redevelopment should efficiently use, maintain and expand existing infrastructure.

Within these areas, three alternative development scenarios were created by conceptualizing a range of development patterns and testing those with geo-coded data. Geographic Information System (GIS) computer software was used to develop models, helping us understand the relationship between the built and natural environments.

5.5 Land Suitability Model and Analysis

A land development suitability model was developed to provide decision makers and interested parties with a quantitative tool for assessing the environmental and infrastructural opportunities and limitations within the County. The model incorporates a weighting procedure that allows the user to increase or decrease the relative importance of a variety of economic and natural resource factors. Factors are based on geographic information system (GIS) datasets assembled from multiple sources including local, state, federal and other non-governmental sources. A development suitability map is only one of many tools that are used in the preparation of a land use plan. A final land use plan cannot be simply generated directly from a suitability map; although it is possible to generate a conceptual-level map showing where development should occur from a suitability map. Three broad factor categories were used:

- Identify land suitable for agricultural protection;
- Identify environmentally sensitive land;
- Identify lands proximal to infrastructure and investment.

The purpose of a land use suitability analysis is to provide a rational, systematic guide for identifying areas which are more suitable for development, and identifying areas which should be maintained for rural or agricultural uses, or protected as conservation areas. The suitability analysis is created using GIS data, which is data that is registered to a geographic coordinate system. The fact that the data sets are registered to a coordinate system makes it possible to add up the values of the input data sets, to create an overall score that indicates the degree of development suitability at every point on the map within the Wise County.

Various factors were weighted, as shown in the following table, by applying multipliers that reflect judgments regarding the relative importance of each factor. The source and content of these input data sets, and their relevance to land development suitability, is described in the following sections. Maps for each of the factors are shown following the table. After each factor is presented, alternative scenario composite maps were created to show the output based on the 19 factors shown in **Table 26**, indicating development suitability based on the following presumptions:

- **Low Suitability for Development (High Agricultural/Environmental Sensitivity).** In these areas, there is a presumption that land is not suitable for development. This does not preclude

development, but requires a showing by the applicant that sufficient conditions exist that, should development occur, on- and off-site mitigation attributable to the proposed development is required and addressed.

- **Moderate Suitability for Development (Moderate Agricultural/Environmental Sensitivity).** In these areas, there is no presumption regarding suitability (that land is suitable or not suitable for development).
- **High Suitability for Development (Low Agricultural/Environmental Sensitivity).** In these areas, there is a presumption that land is suitable for development. This does not guarantee that a proposed development is appropriate for any specific location.

5.6 Defining Alternatives

Alternatives analysis enables the community to evaluate several possible growth scenarios from various perspectives -- fiscal, environmental, quality of life, economic and legal -- by exploring advantages and disadvantages, by focusing on and comparing distinctions and by identifying implementation strategies and policy implications. These scenarios are not intended to advocate a preferred scenario, but are intended to reflect distinct possible growth patterns each with different views of the future Wise County. The analysis identifies three growth alternatives:

- Trends Alternative
- Smart/Targeted Growth Alternative
- Strong Communities Alternative

5.7 Common Assumptions

Each of the alternatives is described, below, but there are some common assumptions among the alternatives:

- The overall rate of growth is the same for each alternative to facilitate comparisons. Population remains constant among three alternatives, though there may be locational differences in population, density and intensity based on community (County and municipal) preferences.
- Due to declining population levels, there is available land to accommodate new development.
- Infrastructure is generally in place, with Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) infrastructure investment primarily being used to maintain and upgrade inventory.
- One of the focal considerations should be character areas – the types of uses, patterns, development standards and design guidelines appropriate for each community. Competition within the County to be minimized, and coordination (land use, economic development) encouraged.
- Existing development will remain in place. However, some exceptions may be made to permit redevelopment of specific areas.
- Future land uses will be defined and refined based on community character areas.
- Community Comprehensive Plans matter.

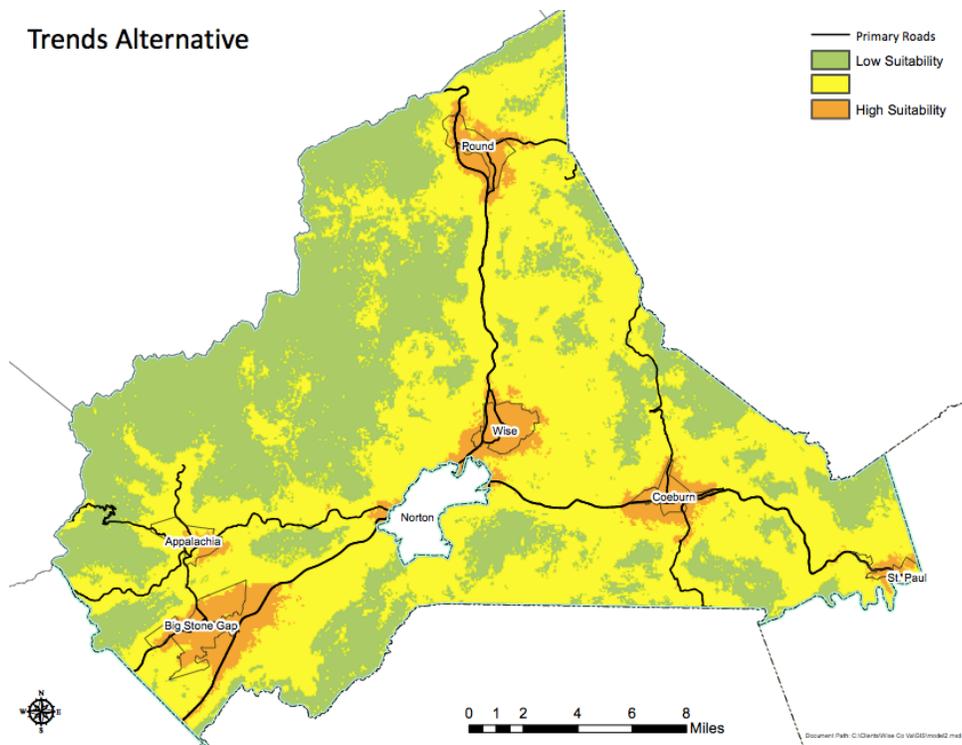
Table 26: Land Suitability Model Factors

Land Evaluation and Suitability Analysis Factors			Presumption of Non-Ag Development Suitability		
			Low Suitability	Moderate Suitability	High Suitability
Factor 1	Conservation Lands and Easements	Within 1/4 mile of boundary	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Outside 1/2 mile	
Factor 2	Wetlands	Within 1/8 mile of boundary	Between 1/8 and 1/4 mile	Outside 1/4 mile	
Factor 3	Distance to local road	Outside 1/2 mile	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Within 1/4 mile	
Factor 4	Distance to Primary Highway	Outside 1/2 mile	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Within 1/4 mile	
Factor 5	Existing availability of a public water	Outside 1/2 mile	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Within 1/4 mile	
Factor 6	Existing availability of community / public sewer (if required)	Outside 1/2 mile	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Within 1/4 mile	
Factor 7	Distance to municipal boundary	Outside 1/2 mile	Withing 1/2 mile	Within Boundary	
Factor 8	Distance to Schools	Greater than 2 miles	between 1 and 2 miles	less than 1 mile	
Factor 9	Distance to Fire Station	Greater than 2- miles	1-mile to 2- miles	Less than 1 mile	
Factor 10	Distance to Floodplains	within floodplain	within 500ft of floodplain	outside 500ft of floodplain	
Factor 11	Distance to Scenic Rivers	within 1/4 mile of river	between .25 and .5 miles	outside .5 miles	
Factor 12	Slope	Over 30% Slope	Between 15% and 30%	Below 15%	
Factor 13	Mining	Within 1/4 mile of boundary	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Outside 1/2 mile	
Factor 14	Trails	Within 1/8 mile of boundary	Between 1/8 and 1/4 mile	Outside 1/4 mile	
Factor 15	Natural Gas	Within 1/4 mile of boundary	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Outside 1/2 mile	
Factor 16	3-Phase	Outside 1/2 mile	Between 1/4 and 1/2 mile	Within 1/4 mile	
Factor 17	Ecological Cores Model	Outstanding	Very High, High	Moderate, General	
Factor 18	Composite Urban Vulnerability Model	1, 2, 3	4, 5	6, 7, 8	
Factor 19	Potential Charter Change	Unincorporated		Incorporated w/o Pound, Appalachia	

5.8 Trends Alternative

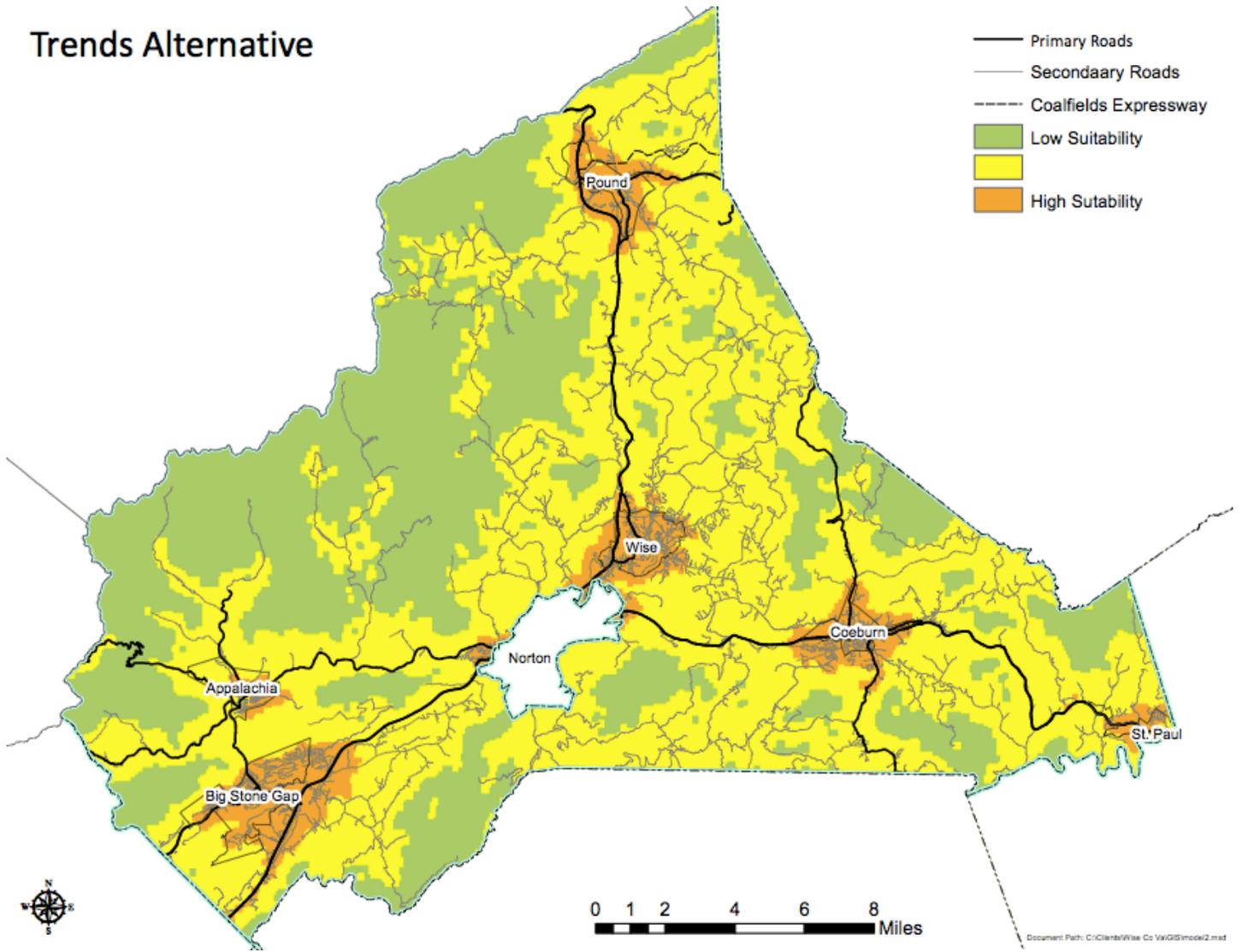
- ✓ Assumes that recent development patterns continue
- ✓ County and providers take a passive role, market-driven approach (response) to development
- ✓ No significant limitations on development in rural areas
- ✓ Development requirements based only on health, safety and the ability to serve
- ✓ Costs negotiable, on a case-by-case basis

Map 5: Trends Alternative Model Output Map



Map 6: Trends Alternative Concept Map

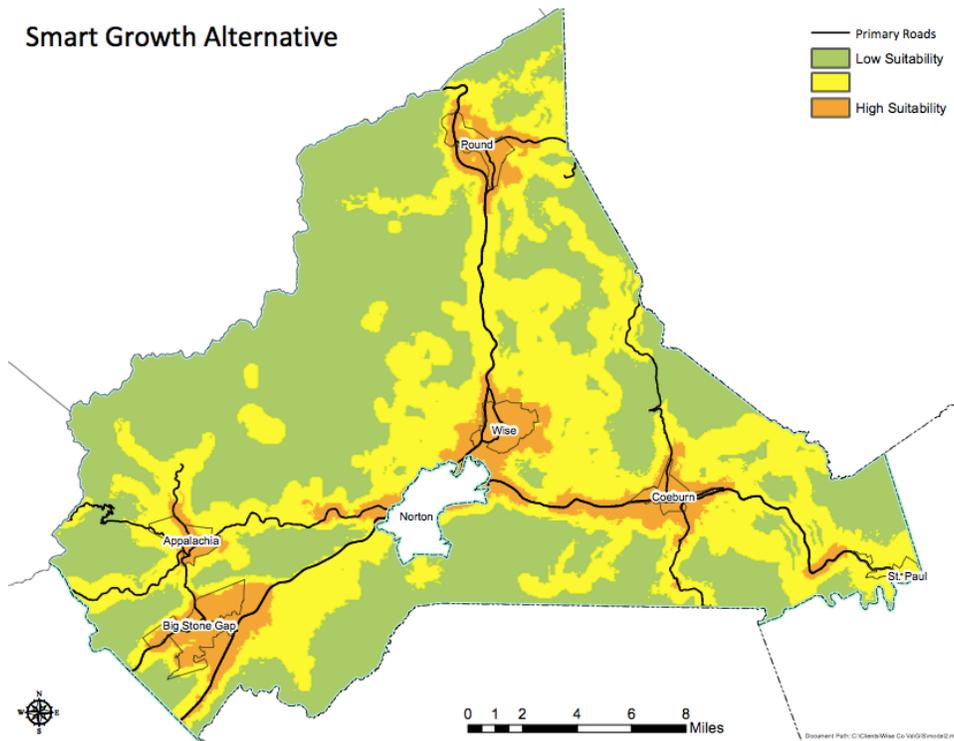
Trends Alternative



5.9 Smart/Targeted Growth Alternative

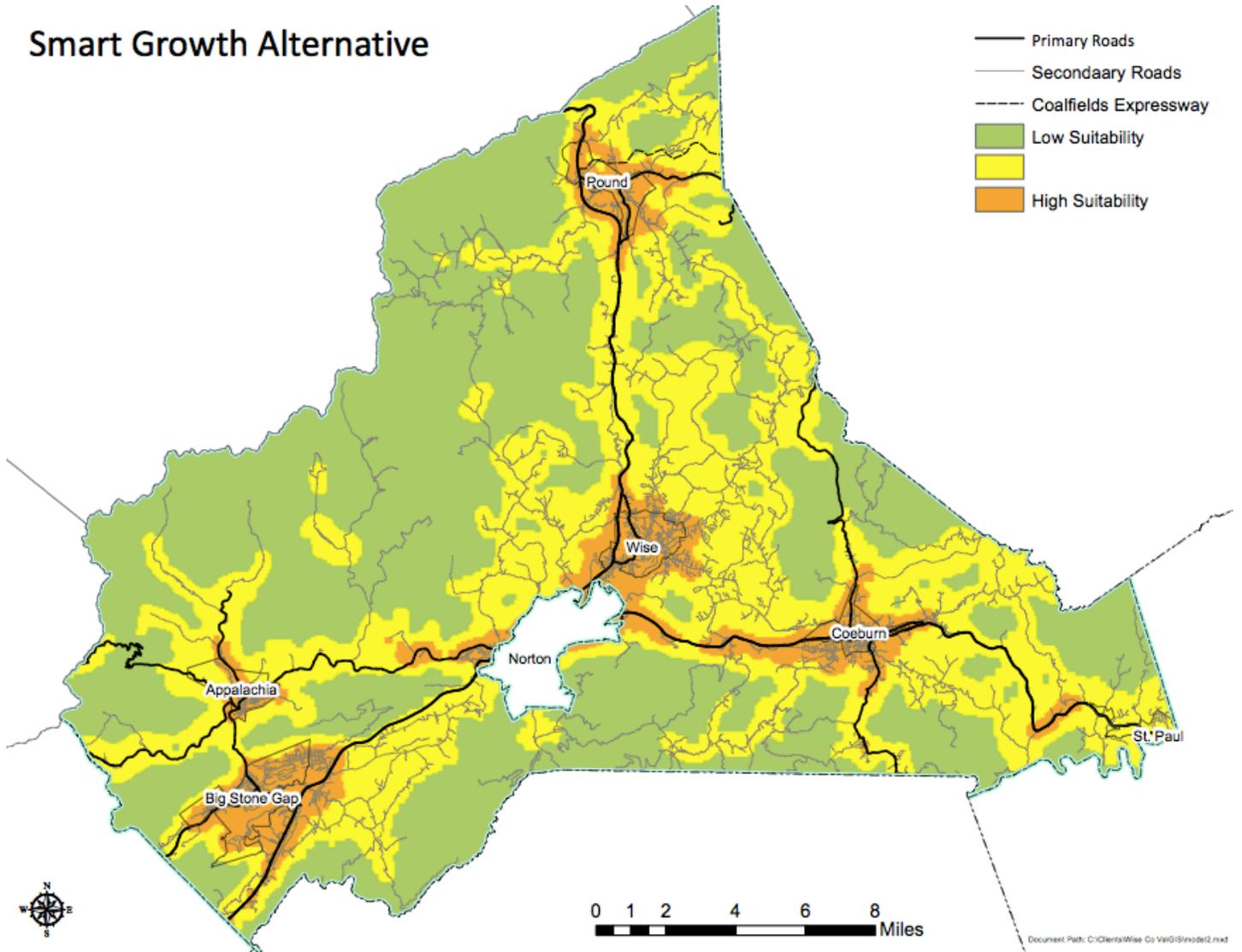
- ✓ Development is directed to City, towns and corridors
- ✓ Corridors play a larger role for commercial and industrial development
- ✓ Small lot and multi-family residential development directed to communities
- ✓ Corridors are important activity centers, but not as strip development
- ✓ County as key service provider in corridors, requiring provider coordination
- ✓ Gateways important to designate a sense of place, design matters
- ✓ Coordination with towns for development at fringes

Map 7: Smart/Targeted Growth Alternative Model Output Map



Map 8: Smart/Targeted Growth Alternative Concept Map

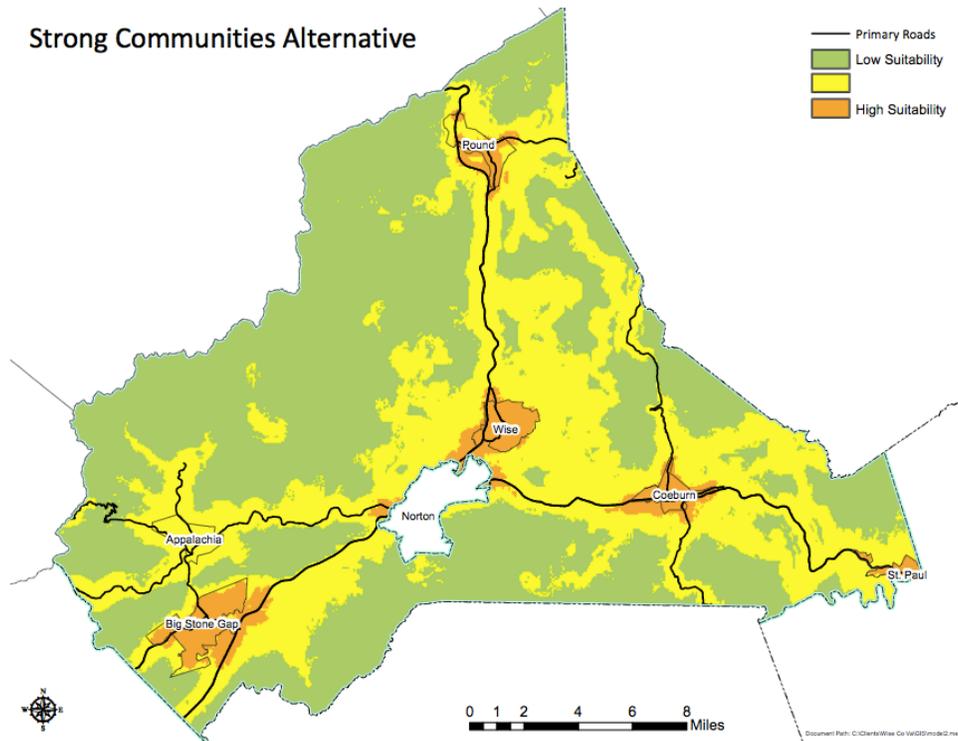
Smart Growth Alternative



5.10 Strong Communities Alternative

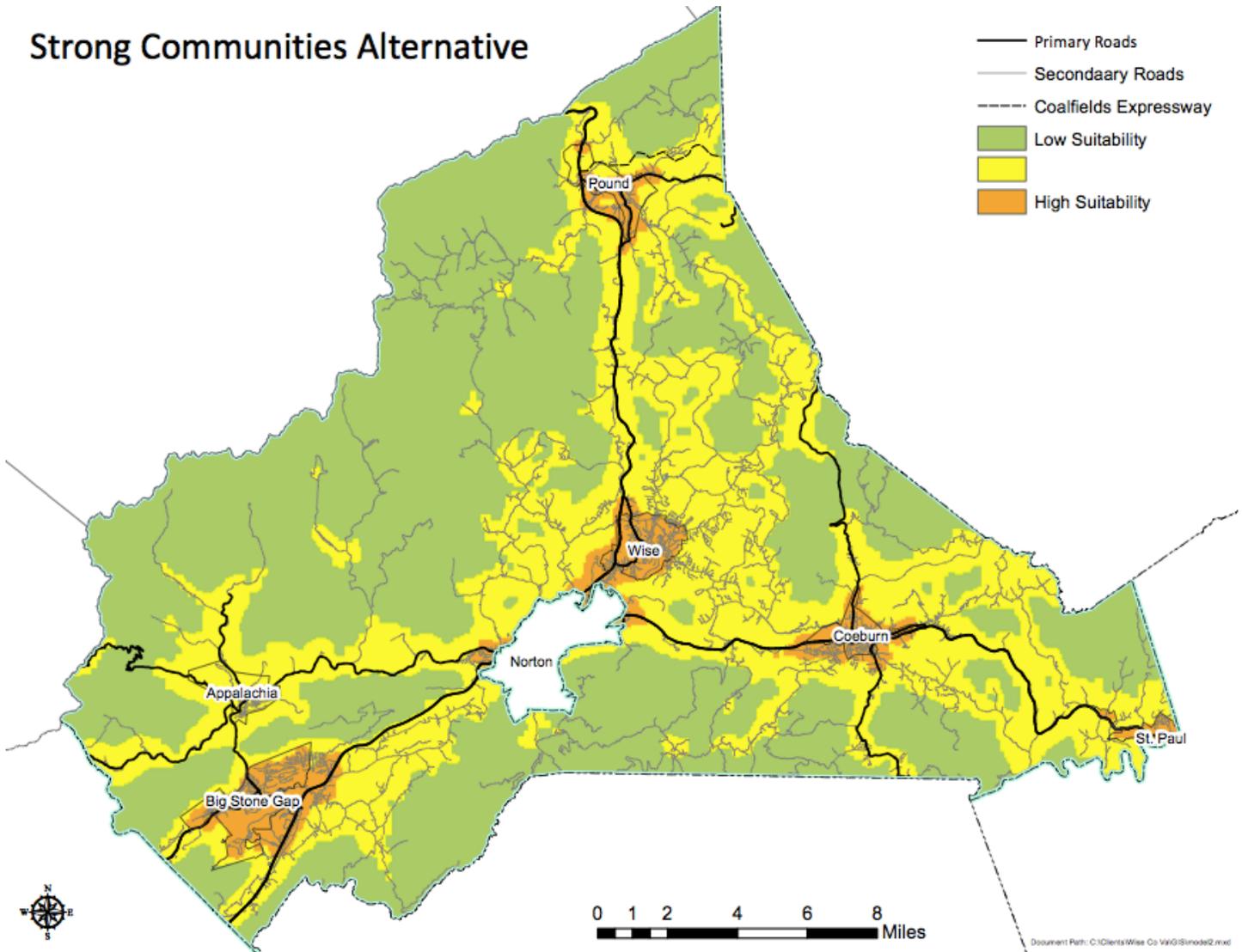
- ✓ Development is directed to City and towns with ability to provide facilities, services and amenities
- ✓ Prioritizes provider investment among communities - recognizes a ROI for public investment and CIP investment to be leveraged
- ✓ Communities not competing, but creating distinct ‘personalities’ to attract economic development and distinct future land use types
- ✓ Recognizes that not all communities may remain incorporated, but all communities will retain individual character

Map 9: Strong Communities Alternative Model Output Map



Map 10: Strong Communities Alternative Concept Map

Strong Communities Alternative



5.11 Preliminary Findings and Considerations

- **Trends** preserves the status quo. What you see now is what you get more of.
- **Trends** is *Let's Make a Deal* policy. It is based on a continuation of case-by-case negotiation, which typically favors the developer over the community (developers have considerable experience negotiating because nearly every deal is *a deal*, communities less so).
- **Trends** has the strongest property rights perspective. This is not intended to convey a loss of property rights for the other two alternatives, but that Trends places the higher emphasis on individual choice and less emphasis on community and provider cost and impact.
- **Smart/Targeted Growth** directs non-residential development, primarily, to corridors adjacent to and connecting communities, which has the potential to increase County service provider responsibilities. In contrast, **Strong Communities** directs most non-residential development to communities.
- **Smart/Targeted Growth** and **Strong Communities** require the greatest level of coordination and formal partnership between the County, municipalities and providers.
- **Strong Communities** inherently recognizes that not all municipalities may exist in 2040, should reversion be further considered and petitioned. However, **Strong Communities** protects and recognizes community character areas regardless of incorporation. Two findings related to this issue:
 - Pound and areas around the Town have benefitted from building permit activity and higher total value per acre than Appalachia.
 - Appalachia has the highest percentage of all structures in delinquency or foreclosure.