

WISE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

COUNTY OF WISE, VIRGINIA

Prepared for the Wise County Board of Supervisors
by the Wise County Planning Commission
with technical assistance provided by the
LENOWISCO Planning District Commission

Adopted October 8, 1998

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I - INTRODUCTION / SUMMARY

What is a Comprehensive Plan?	i-1
Why a Comprehensive Plan?	i-1
Who Does the Planning?	i-1
The Wise County Comprehensive Plan.....	i-1
Public Participation in the Planning Process	i-2
Executive Summary	i-3
Action Plans	i-6

PART II - INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER I - HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Location	I-1
Historical Perspective.....	I-1
Agriculture.....	I-1
Coal.....	I-2

CHAPTER II - NATURAL RESOURCES

Topographic Features	II-1
Geological Features	II-3
Climate and Weather	II-3
Hydrologic Features	II-4
Surface Water.....	II-4
Ground Water	II-6
Mineral Resources	II-7
Coal.....	II-7
Natural Gas.....	II-9
Iron Ore.....	II-9
Other Mineral Resources	II-10
Forest Resources	II-10

CHAPTER III - LAND USE SUITABILITY

Physical Considerations to Land Usage	III-1
Slopes.....	III-1
Soil Conditions.....	III-1
Flood Prone Areas	III-2
Mineral Land Under Development	III-3
Land Owned by Coal and Resource Companies and the U.S. Government.....	III-3
Land Subject to Potential Subsidence	III-4

CHAPTER IV - EXISTING LAND USE

Current Development Patterns.....	IV-1
Urban and Built-Up Land.....	IV-2
Agricultural Land.....	IV-4
Surface Mined Disturbed Land.....	IV-4
Forest Land.....	IV-5
Areas of Expansion	IV-5
Implications for Future Land Use	IV-6

CHAPTER V - POPULATION

Total Population Trends and Projections	V-1
Population Distribution and Density	V-2
Age Characteristics	V-2
Racial Composition of Population	V-4

CHAPTER VI - ECONOMY

Economic Base Analysis	VI-1
Basic Industries	VI-3
Mining	VI-3
Manufacturing	VI-3
Agriculture	VI-4
Supporting Sector Employment	VI-5
Government	VI-5
Wholesale/Retail Trade	VI-5
Other	VI-5
Employment Characteristics	VI-5
Commuting	VI-6
Labor Force Participation	VI-7
Unemployment	VI-8
Income	VI-9
Retail Sales	VI-10
Local Economic Development	VI-11
Discussion of Economic Issues	VI-12

CHAPTER VII - HOUSING

Housing Inventory	VII-1
Housing Stock	VII-1
Public Housing	VII-2
Housing Condition	VII-3
Housing Trends and Projections	VII-4
Construction	VII-4
Rehabilitation	VII-5
Deficiencies	VII-5
Problem Analysis	VII-6

CHAPTER VIII - PUBLIC UTILITY SYSTEMS

Water and Sewerage Planning Efforts	VIII-1
Existing Public Water Supply and Watersheds	VIII-1
Town of Appalachia	VIII-2
Town of Big Stone Gap	VIII-3
Town of Coeburn	VIII-4
City of Norton	VIII-4
Town of Pound	VIII-5
Town of St. Paul	VIII-6
Town of Wise	VIII-6
Wise County Public Service Authority	VIII-7
Existing Public Sewerage Systems	VIII-8
Towns of Appalachia and Big Stone Gap	VIII-8
C-N-W Regional Plant	VIII-8
Town of Pound	VIII-9
Town of St. Paul	VIII-9
Other Sewage Disposal Methods	VIII-9

Solid Waste VIII-10

CHAPTER IX - COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

General Function	IX-1
Educational Facilities.....	IX-1
Elementary, Middle and High Schools	IX-1
Vocational and Technical Schools	IX-3
Colleges.....	IX-3
Private Schools.....	IX-4
Health Facilities	IX-4
Hospitals	IX-4
Clinics, Physicians and Dentists.....	IX-4
Wise County Health Department.....	IX-4
Nursing and Rest Homes, Extended Health Care Facilities	IX-5
Public Safety and Administration	IX-5
Public Transportation	IX-5
Recreational and Cultural Facilities	IX-5
Historic Resources	IX-7
Archaeological Resources	IX-9

CHAPTER X - TRANSPORTATION

Highways	X-1
Rail.....	X-1
Air	X-1
Public Transportation	X-2

PART III - THE PLAN

CHAPTER XI - LAND USE ELEMENT

Introduction.....	XI-1
Land Use Classifications.....	XI-1
Citizen Comment on Future Land Use.....	XI-3
Future Land Use by Type.....	XI-4
Residential	XI-4
Commercial.....	XI-6
Industrial	XI-6
Watersheds	XI-8
Other Protection Areas	XI-9
Historic Resources	XI-9
Archaeological Resources.....	XI-10
Action Plan	XI-11

CHAPTER XII - ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT

Present and Future Needs	XII-1
Mineral and Forest Resources	XII-1
Watershed Preservation.....	XII-2
Action Plan	XII-3

CHAPTER XIII - ECONOMY ELEMENT

Present and Future Needs	XIII-1
Citizen Comment on Economic Development	XIII-4
Action Plan	XIII-6

CHAPTER XIV - HOUSING ELEMENT	
Present and Future Needs	XIV-1
Obstacles to Solving Local Needs	XIV-2
Conclusion.....	XIV-3
Action Plan	XIV-5
CHAPTER XV - PUBLIC UTILITIES ELEMENT	
Present and Future Needs	XV-1
Water Service	XV-1
Sewerage Service.....	XV-1
Industrial/Commercial Utility Needs	XV-2
Action Plan	XV-3
CHAPTER XVI - COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES ELEMENT	
Present and Future Needs	XVI-1
Action Plan	XVI-3
CHAPTER XVII - TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT	
Future Transportation Facilities	XVII-1
Primary Highways	XVII-1
Secondary Highways	XVII-2
Coal Haul Roads	XVII-2
Urban Systems	XVII-2
Lonesome Pine Airport.....	XVII-3
Other Transportation Concerns.....	XVII-3
Action Plan	XVII-4

PART IV - PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER XVIII - PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	
Plan Adoption	XVIII-1
Codes and Ordinances	XVIII-2
Planning Commission Staff.....	XVIII-3
Intergovernmental Cooperation	XVIII-4
Coordination of Plan with Decisions on Local Public Facilities	XVIII-4
Public Understanding and Support	XVIII-5

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1	Elevation at Selected Points with Wise County..... II-2
2	Coal Production (in Millions of Tons)..... II-8
3	Forest Acreage II-11
4	Existing Land Use, 1975..... IV-3
5	Population Trends and Projections V-1
6	Population, Projections and Percentage by Age Group..... V-3
7	Rate of Population Change by Age Group V-4
8	Non-White Population as a Percentage of Total Population V-4
9	Economic Base Analysis VI-2
10	Work Residence Information, 1980 and 1990..... VI-6
11	Percent of Civilian Labor Force Unemployed..... VI-8
12	Unemployment Rates, 1983-1994..... VI-8
13	Per Capita Personal Income - 1979 and 1989 VI-9
14	Median Family Income..... VI-10
15	Taxable Sales 1982, 1987 and 1992..... VI-11
16	Housing Stock..... VII-1
17	Substandard Housing Stock - 1990..... VII-3
18	Wise County Watersheds..... VIII-2
19	Fall Membership in Public Schools, 1987-1993..... IX-3

LIST OF PLATES

<u>Plate</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Following Chapter #</u>
1	Location Map I	
2	Physiographic Divisions..... II	
3	Mineral Resources..... II	
4	Suitability of Soils for Septic Tank Drainfields III	
5	Flood Prone Areas..... III	
6	General Land Use..... IV	
7	Existing Land Use / Land Cover IV	
8	Existing and Future Water Service Areas VIII	
9	Existing and Future Sewer Service Areas VIII	
10	Future Land Use XI	

APPENDICES

<u>#</u>	<u>Subject</u>
A	Compilation of Community Survey Results

PART I

INTRODUCTION / SUMMARY

Part I contains general background information about the comprehensive planning process and a summary of the components of the Wise County Comprehensive Plan.

INTRODUCTION

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a series of recommendations which, if followed, will help a community guide growth within its boundaries. Specifically, it is an official document adopted by a locality's governing body to serve as a policy for decisions about future development within that locality.

Such a plan is general, comprehensive and long range -- comprehensive in examining all geographic sections and functional elements affecting future development, general in its main recommendations and long range in considering distant problems and possibilities affecting the locality's future.

Why a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is an important step in a locality's growth and development. Unguided growth can waste tax dollars and valuable land, overburden existing water supplies and detract from a locality's overall environmental character. Unplanned growth can also lead to land use conflicts. Through comprehensive planning, reasonable future population estimates can be derived and, in turn, determination made as to the most suitable areas for growth to occur, minimizing these conflicts. Likewise, comprehensive planning can help point out general areas requiring higher levels of utilities, services and community facilities, as well as indicate required improvements to the transportation system.

Who Does the Planning?

A planning body, usually called a Planning Board or Commission, prepares a locality's comprehensive plan. The Code of Virginia grants the Wise County Planning Commission the authority to undertake a planning program, including the preparation of a comprehensive plan. Because planning requires specialized technical skill and experience, the county government usually enlists the help of a professional planning staff to assist the Planning Commission with the task.

The Wise County Comprehensive Plan

The *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* is intended to serve as a broad policy guide to decisions about future development and redevelopment within the county. Its objective is to provide a framework and serve as a guide to be used by local

government, the private sector and the citizens of the county toward the attainment of the highest level of health, safety, convenience, prosperity and general welfare for all county residents.

The *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* can be viewed as an investment in Wise County's future. With conditions constantly changing, planning for the future requires the use of the most current data available. As can be surmised, the *Plan* should be updated and revised as these changing conditions warrant. The most current data available in many cases come from the decennial Census of Population, the last such occurring in 1990. Every effort has been made to include in this document the most current data possible.

Implementation, monitoring and maintenance will be essential to the success of this Plan. Upon adoption of the Plan by the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission should prepare an implementation plan. Annual measurable objectives should be established on a priority basis, with implementation responsibilities assigned. An annual date for reviewing accomplishments and setting major tasks for the coming year should be established. As conditions change and new problems or opportunities emerge, the Board of Supervisors may need to reconsider and alter the Plan.

Public Participation in the Planning Process

The first draft of this revision of the *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* was prepared by a subcommittee of the Wise County Planning Commission, composed of commissioners and citizen volunteers, with technical assistance from LENOWISCO Planning District Commission. This subcommittee adopted the following mission statement as it began its work in 1993:

The mission of this subcommittee is to develop a comprehensive plan, through public consensus, for the physical development of Wise County, that will ensure that the citizens of the county have the opportunity for a quality of life as good as, or better than, any other locality in the United States.

Throughout the process of preparing the first draft of the Plan, the subcommittee sought input from various agencies, departments and citizens. The subcommittee undertook a comprehensive citizen participation campaign in the spring of 1995

which included the following events and activities:

- A community leaders kick-off luncheon was held to inform public officials and community leaders that a comprehensive plan revision was under way and to solicit their input. Nearly 60 community leaders and public officials attended.
- Members of a speakers bureau spoke to eight community organizations, explaining the revision process, distributing a community survey and asking for input. Approximately 125 people attended these meetings.
- The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (CPS) met with three focus groups to solicit comments on housing, economic development and general quality of life issues. These groups included officials from the towns and City of Norton, Mountain Empire Older Citizens staff and students from Clinch Valley College.
- Three informal public meetings were conducted by the CPS, soliciting public comment on economic development, housing and general quality of life issues. A total of approximately 50 people attended these meetings.
- More than 4,500 community surveys were distributed through 12 major county employers, public meetings and the speakers bureau. The subcommittee received 460 responses to the survey. The results were compiled by the CPS and are included as Appendix A.

Executive Summary

Introduction. This edition of the *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* discusses numerous features that together form the character of the county. These features are analyzed both independently and in relation to other features in an effort to identify existing and future resources, problems and needs. Recommendations are made with the goal of better utilizing the county's resources to meet present and future needs through the year 2020, while avoiding or minimizing conflicts and problems associated with growth and/or change.

The *Comprehensive Plan* has three major sections: Inventory and Analysis, "The Plan," and Plan implementation.

The inventory and analysis section consists of an assessment of existing conditions in the county, as well as an examination of past and projected trends.

The Plan consists of a brief description of current and future needs pertaining to land use, the environment, the economy, community facilities, housing, public utilities and transportation, and formal goals and policies which should guide the land use decision making of county officials. Action Plans at the end of each element describe existing conditions relating to that element, desired future conditions (or long-range goals), and strategies that, if followed, can move the county toward achievement of the desired future conditions.

The Plan's implementation section addresses the legal status of the Plan and makes recommendations for various policy and administrative functions related to the Plan's implementation.

Inventory and Analysis. The most important findings, from a land use perspective, resulting from assessment of the county's existing resources were:

- Wise County's population is not expected to grow significantly over the long term. Current projections point to a smaller, older population.
- 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. The lack of suitable land for residential development is particularly acute.
- Wise County's coal employment continues to decline while production remains at relatively high levels. Production levels are also expected to begin a decline as the most accessible reserves are depleted. The jobs lost in the mining sector are not being replaced by jobs with comparable pay. The county has abundant timber resources that, if properly managed and utilized, can provide future employment opportunities.
- Deficiencies exist in nearly all sectors of the county's housing market. From 80 to 90 percent of all new housing in the county is currently supplied by manufactured housing.
- Future housing, commercial and industrial growth and development is largely dependent on the availability of public utilities; extension of utilities to areas of the county best suited for such development is needed.

- Wise County's community facilities and services are generally good, with the exception of recreational facilities.

The Plan. A summary of the overall goals identified in the Plan include:

- Minimize land use conflicts and provide ample land for the county's future needs.
- Protect water resources and other critical environmental features.
- Foster economic diversity.
- Identify areas most appropriate for urban residential, commercial and industrial development, and develop utility extension plans to provide those areas with water and sewer service.
- Create conditions that will promote more housing construction and rehabilitation in the county for all income groups. Protect existing communities.
- Improve and increase recreational facilities in the county.
- Continue to make improvements to the transportation system, and look at ways to promote public transportation and other alternatives to private automobiles.

Plan Implementation. Zoning and subdivision ordinances are the major tools to accomplish the Plan's objectives. It is recommended that a county planner be hired in the near future to carry out the special needs of the Planning Commission, including, among other things: maintenance and expansion of the Comprehensive Plan; review and administration of housing, building, zoning and subdivision regulations and development proposals affecting provisions of the Comprehensive Plan; assistance in determining the appropriate methods of implementing proposed community improvement programs.

Finally, Wise County should develop a public awareness program to inform local citizens of local planning efforts and issues.

A compilation of the Action Plans for each element of the Plan follows.

ACTION PLAN - LAND USE

Existing Condition - There is a need for suitable land for future residential, commercial and industrial development in locations having adequate public services and not adversely affecting adjacent properties.

Desired Future Condition - A pattern of land use and development that reinforces and improves the quality of life for citizens, and assists in achieving the goals of the *Comprehensive Plan* in promoting economic diversity, protecting the environment and providing housing, public facilities, transportation and recreation.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Areas of the county that are most suitable for future residential development should be identified and provided with public utilities in advance of development to encourage dense development patterns that conform with modern subdivision standards.
- Encourage the concentration of industrial uses in areas served by adequate utilities, railroad and/or highway facilities where there will be minimum impact on residential uses.
- Encourage commercial development to cluster in well-defined locations along primary highways where water and sewer service is available.
- Enforce zoning regulations to protect property values and preserve the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods.

Specific Physical Development Actions Recommended

- Efforts at recruitment of heavy industry should be centered around the Blackwood Industrial Park to the extent possible, with the park being expanded as funds allow.
- Consideration should be given to developing one or more industrial parks for small light industrial uses. Such parks could accommodate the needs of new businesses or existing businesses that need room to expand.
- It is recommended that the county reconsider its plans to develop the surface mined land surrounding the Lonesome Pine Airport as a light industrial park, and instead consider developing a plan for recreational uses and certain low impact commercial uses that would benefit the county as a whole, encourage tourism, and complement surrounding residential development and Clinch Valley College. Examples of such uses are a public golf course, tennis courts, stables, horse trails, bike trails, fair grounds, office complexes, etc. Depending on the suitability of the surface mined land, some residential development may be possible.

ACTION PLAN - LAND USE (cont'd)

Existing Condition - Wise County has many historic resources, but at the present time there are few mechanisms in place to encourage the preservation of those resources.

Desired Future Condition - Wise County's historic resources are recognized and preserved through a variety of public and private initiatives.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should, in cooperation with the property owners in those communities, apply to have the Blackwood, Stonega and Derby historic districts listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.
- Wise County should develop a historic preservation overlay district as part of its zoning ordinance.
- Wise County should encourage, through a public awareness program, owners of those private historic properties identified in the survey as having a potential for listing, to apply to have the property listed on the state and national registers.
- Wise County should encourage, through all of its ordinances and county policies, the protection of historic resources.
- Wise County should develop a long-range historic preservation plan.

* * * * *

Existing Condition - Wise County's inventory of archaeological resources contains gaps in location and time; no archaeological properties in the county have been listed on state or national landmark registers; the county has no overall strategy for identifying and protecting such properties.

Desired Future Condition - Wise County has a complete inventory of archaeological resources and a plan for protecting those sites, including the use of volunteer stewardship.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should develop a Historic Preservation Plan that can be included as an element in future comprehensive plans.
- The county should support the expansion of the inventory of known archaeological sites, possibly working with local colleges and historical societies to achieve this goal.
- The county should encourage the use of volunteer stewardship to help protect sites, seeking information from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources on how to develop such a program.

ACTION PLAN - ENVIRONMENT

Existing Condition - The county's mineral resources are being developed while meeting government regulations to protect the safety of employees and the environment.

Desired Future Condition - To encourage continued mineral resources development through the proper use of methods that will be least destructive to the environment and through the conscientious enforcement of reclamation methods that will restore an environmental balance as soon as possible.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should continue to work with government agencies that regulate the development of mineral resources to assure continued enforcement of environmental protection and long-term beneficial reclamation.
- The county should continue to work with conservation groups and state and federal agencies to acquire and manage tracts of land that provide unique or special wildlife habitats or watershed protection.
- The county should designate unique scenic areas within the county where land and resource development should be reviewed to assure the area's unique qualities are maintained.

* * * * *

Existing Condition - Within all ownerships in the southern mountains of Virginia, the net annual growth of sawtimber exceeds harvest by 60 percent, as reported by the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station of the USDA Forest Service in 1992.

Desired Future Condition - The forest products industry utilizes the renewable wood resources within the county's forests on a sustainable basis and is a leader within the Commonwealth of Virginia in implementing best management practices to protect water quality and wildlife resources found within the forests.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should continue to work with the state and federal agencies that manage and oversee the development and protection of the county's forest resources to assure an increased implementation of the state best management practices.
- The county should continue to work with conservation groups and state and federal agencies to acquire and manage tracts of land that provide unique or special wildlife habitats or watershed protection.
- The county should continue to encourage landowners with forest lands to retain those lands in forest cover to assure a sustainable wood products industry.
- The county should continue to work with the industrial development agencies and

existing wood products businesses with the county to develop value-added wood products businesses.

- The county should encourage a greater utilization of wood products from both public and private lands.

ACTION PLAN - ENVIRONMENT (cont'd)

Existing Condition - At the present time, at least one of the county's town watersheds is vulnerable to land uses posing potential negative impact on those supplies; changing conditions could expose other of the town watersheds to similar threats.

Desired Future Condition - The preservation of all major water sources in Wise County, i.e., reservoirs and their watersheds, in the near as well as indefinite future.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- A series of Reservoir Watershed (RW) Overlay Districts should be established to cover all existing watershed areas in the county. These districts should allow only those uses that would not adversely affect water supplies.
- A special classification for real estate should be considered to allow those land owners who voluntarily agree to preserve land in a relatively unused condition to have their property assessed on the basis of use rather than fair market value. The General Assembly in 1971 passed a law enabling localities, by ordinance, to adopt special use valuation for agricultural, horticultural, forest and open space lands. Special use valuation could be applied to open space and forest land in Wise County as one method to help protect watersheds.

ACTION PLAN - ECONOMY

Existing Condition - Mining employment has declined as a percentage of total employment, with these higher paying basic sector jobs being replaced by lower paying support sector jobs.

Desired Future Condition - Manufacturing employment must be increased to provide higher paying jobs for Wise County's skilled workers.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Identification of several large tracts of land suitable for large industrial sites, while budgeting sufficient funds to maintain options on these properties so they can be marketed by the county's economic development department and the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority.
- Discussions with the coal industry to identify larger sites with relatively flat topography that might be available to the county for use as industrial sites.
- Development of a capital improvement plan that allows for the planning development of infrastructure with excess capacity sufficient to accommodate future industrial site development.
- The targeting and recruitment of wood products industries that can utilize the county's abundant forest reserves.
- Maintaining a dialogue with existing manufacturers in the county to see that their needs are being met, with county government supportive of a regular dialogue for resolving problems.
- Support of a strong local economic development organization, continuing to fund a full-time economic development director.
- Support of the regional economic development initiatives led by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority and LENOWISCO.
- Inclusion of representatives of Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College in its economic development efforts to secure access to these schools' expertise in planning an economic development strategy.

ACTION PLAN - ECONOMY (cont'd)

Existing Condition - Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College maintain an important economic presence in the county, with a combined total of approximately 300 full-time and 300-part-time employees and almost 4,000 full- and part-time students enrolled in 1994-95.

Desired Future Condition - Clinch Valley College attracts students from all over the United States and several foreign countries. Mountain Empire Community College has continued its historic growth pattern as it has changed to meet the needs of the people of Southwest Virginia. Together, the two schools have an enrollment of nearly 6,000 students.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Local leaders and economic development officials should continue to lend support to all three institutions in their efforts to obtain funds for needed expansion and improvement.
- Local community leaders should continue to be advocates for both institutions.
- Wise County should continue to maintain a regular and ongoing dialogue with both institutions to see that their needs are being met.
- Wise County should endeavor to be an attractive location for both institutions by:
 - working with the towns and the City of Norton to improve the overall appearance of the county;
 - adopting policies to promote an adequate supply of suitable housing for employees and students;
 - increasing and improving recreational and cultural facilities;
 - encouraging the location of private businesses in the county that complement and enhance these schools.

ACTION PLAN - ECONOMY (cont'd)

Existing Condition - Wise County has the potential to develop more tourism-related businesses to provide jobs and economic growth, but is now one of the least-visited tourism destinations in the Commonwealth.

Desired Future Condition - Wise County's economy has a healthy tourism sector.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Support of the tourism development strategies developed by the Coalfield Tourism Development Authority and cooperation in their implementation.
- Development of a plan to make the county more visually attractive to tourists, including continuation, and expansion, of the effort to eliminate litter and trash from roadsides and public areas.
- Development of the necessary infrastructure to support tourism, including hotels, restaurants and recreational facilities.

Existing Condition - There is a need for Wise County to provide support for local entrepreneurs who can create businesses and provide jobs.

Desired Future Condition - Wise County's economy includes job creation through local entrepreneurial initiatives.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The creation of at least one small-scale industrial park suitable for small business creation by local entrepreneurs.
- Recruitment of local entrepreneurs with the potential for business creation and procurement of needed assistance.
- Support of regional small business incubator initiatives.

ACTION PLAN - HOUSING

Existing Condition - An overall shortage of housing for all income levels, with most new housing in the county comprised of manufactured housing.

Desired Future Condition - An adequate supply and variety of good quality housing available for all income levels.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Create a county-wide housing board, composed of persons knowledgeable of various aspects of housing in Wise County, to examine the county's overall housing problem and devise strategies to address deficiencies. The county government should take the lead in forming such an organization by:
 - (1) Appointing members from local government; the real estate, construction and banking industries; housing authorities; non-profit housing groups; and Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. to such a board; and
 - (2) Providing a coordinator and office space.
- Encourage the preservation and maintenance of existing residential structures through adoption and enforcement of Volume II of the Virginia Statewide Building Code and the Fire Prevention Code.
- Provide incentives for the rehabilitation of existing deteriorating housing stock.
- Increase home ownership opportunities for all income levels through the provision of utilities and roads in areas designated most suitable for residential development.
- Explore alternative methods of housing construction and delivery.

* * * * *

Existing Condition - A shortage of suitable land for new housing of all types.

Desired Future Condition - Ample available land with few constraints to development at a reasonable cost in suitable locations to serve present and future housing needs.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Develop a county-wide land assessment and infrastructure plan for future housing development, identifying land most suitable for housing development and establishing a priority list for providing infrastructure.
- Seek to maintain and improve existing communities where water, sewer and roads are now available, or can reasonably be expected to be made available in the future, by using all county ordinances and policies.
- Encourage the development of attractive subdivisions with adequate infrastructure by reviewing the county subdivision ordinance and recommending amendments to close loopholes, while at the same time examining ways to make development of subdivisions

with adequate public services more feasible for developers.

- Strictly enforce the subdivision ordinance by working with the circuit court clerk to ascertain that all subdivisions are approved by the planning commission before they are recorded.

ACTION PLAN - HOUSING (cont'd)

Existing Condition - Under-utilization of federal and state low-interest housing programs for new and existing housing for low- and moderate-income families and individuals, and lack of private financing for these persons.

Desired Future Condition - Low-interest loans available for low- and moderate-income families and individuals for new and existing housing.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Consider addressing the problem of potential subsidence associated with deep mining by limiting such activity in those areas already developed with water and/or sewer provided.
- Encourage local banks to participate in low-interest loan programs.
- Determine to what extent local banks are complying with the federal Community Reinvestment Act, which requires that banks have some portion of their portfolios invested in their host communities.

* * * * *

Existing Condition - Pockets of housing blight within some communities in the county.

Desired Future Condition - Sound residential communities throughout the county with concerned, involved citizens living in an attractive, healthy environment adequately supplied with public services and facilities.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Develop a county-wide community assessment and revitalization plan for the unincorporated areas of the county.
- Develop innovative community and housing improvement programs that include both public and private resources. Design such programs to supplement Community Development Block Grant funds and other federal, state or locally funded programs.
- Eliminate abandoned, dilapidated and substandard housing throughout the county through aggressive code enforcement and continuing use of grant funds to implement redevelopment/rehabilitation programs, using care not to remove houses or structures of historical or architectural significance.
- Limit incompatible land uses detrimental to existing communities.
- Encourage the establishment of community improvement organizations and assist such groups with information and public service programs.
- Continue and expand clean-up efforts throughout the county.

ACTION PLAN - HOUSING (cont'd)

Existing Condition - No assisted living housing complexes for older residents with means to pay for such housing. Older residents who are unable to continue to care for a home, yet do not need to be in a nursing home, must currently relocate out of the county if they desire assisted living housing.

Desired Future Condition - At least one assisted living complex located in Wise County.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The county economic development office should explore individual or corporate interest in developing assisted living complexes through county, regional and state economic development contacts.
- The county economic development office should work with Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. to develop feasibility studies and market the concept to developers.

ACTION PLAN - PUBLIC UTILITIES

Existing Condition - Many urban and built-up areas of the county are not served by public water. These areas can be identified by comparing existing water service areas as shown on Plate 8 with existing urban and built-up areas shown on Plates 6 and 7.

Desired Future Condition - Existing urban and built-up areas presently without a public water supply should be provided with such service, as should those areas most suitable for future urban and built-up land uses, also reflected on Plate 6. This proposed service is shown on Plate 8 as future water supply service areas.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The Wise County PSA and, where applicable, individual localities should develop long-range capital improvement plans to serve those urban and built-up areas presently without public water.
- Wise County should vigorously pursue the completion of a comprehensive water and wastewater study, through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's 604(b) program or other means.

Existing Condition - Many areas of the county presently served by public water are unlikely to receive sewerage service by the year 2020, but growth is presently occurring because water is available.

Desired Future Condition - Areas of the county that are unlikely to receive sewerage service are developed only to the extent that septic systems can be expected to support those uses.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County's land use ordinances, including the zoning and subdivision ordinances, should discourage urban-type development in areas unlikely to receive sewerage service.

Existing Condition - Some potential industrial sites within the county do not currently have water and sewerage service.

Desired Future Condition - Wise County's most desirable and marketable industrial sites are fully served with adequate water supplies and sewerage service.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The county should identify and obtain options on the most desirable industrial sites in the county and encourage the Wise County Public Service Authority or, where applicable, individual localities to develop a capital improvement plan that would allow for development of water and sewer service as options on these sites are exercised.

- Wise County should vigorously pursue the completion of a comprehensive water and wastewater study, through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's 604(b) program or other means.

ACTION PLAN - COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Existing Condition - A lack of desired recreation and cultural facilities and events for county residents.

Desired Future Condition - A range of recreational and cultural facilities and activities that are appropriate in number, size and location to accommodate the needs of all county residents.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Initiate the creation of a multi-jurisdictional recreation task force, or alternatively, encourage the Wise County Recreational Authority to work with the Lonesome Pine Office on Youth in developing a comprehensive recreational program for the county's youth and adult populations.
- Conduct a recreational needs assessment to determine what type of facilities and events are needed and desired by county residents.
- Develop a current inventory of recreational and cultural opportunities available to the public.
- Develop a long range master plan for building, improving and maintaining recreational facilities in the county.
- Consider the need to hire a recreational coordinator for the county, on either a part-time or full-time basis.

ACTION PLAN - TRANSPORTATION

Existing Condition - There remain numerous obstacles hindering optimum transportation movement in and through Wise County, as well as access to and egress from the county.

Desired Future Condition - Transportation infrastructure, allowing vehicular movement within the county and access to and from the county, has reached optimum levels.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should support and strongly encourage the completion of various projects, including:
 - Fourth loop of U.S. 23 and U.S. 58A interchange in City of Norton.
 - Construction of U.S. 58A bypass of Big Stone Gap.
 - Construction of four-lane U.S. 58A from Big Stone Gap west to Lee County line.
 - Widening of selected portions of U.S. 23.
 - Construction of I-26 along U.S. 23 corridor.
 - Maintain and expand Lonesome Pine Airport and services to meet area demands.
 - Construction of Coalfield Expressway.
 - Coordinate land use / zoning plans for U.S. 23 and 58A corridors with VDOT plans for access along these corridors.
 - Improvements to Route 160.
 - Improvements to Route 72 between George's Fork and Ft. Blackmore.

ACTION PLAN - TRANSPORTATION (cont'd)

Existing Condition - The availability of public transportation to county residents is limited.

Desired Future Condition - Public transportation is available to all who need it.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Support the development of public transit by encouraging the Commonwealth of Virginia Transportation Board to revise the highway funding formula to increase the percentage of funds earmarked for public transit.
- Work with Mountain Empire Transit to study and implement expansion of its service as needed.
- Encourage VDOT to establish more park-and-ride facilities in cooperation with Mountain Empire Transit.

* * * * *

Existing Condition - The county's present transportation network does not offer many alternatives to private automobiles.

Desired Future Condition - A transportation network is in place offering alternative modes of transportation through bikeway and pedestrian facilities.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Identify areas suitable for development of pedestrian and bikeways, including those that might be located in park settings as well as those that would provide safe interconnections of neighborhoods and communities.
- Work with VDOT to seek to have bikeways constructed whenever possible, as part of regularly scheduled roadway widening and improvement projects.
- Seek federal, state and local funding for priority projects.

PART II

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Part II offers an examination of current conditions as well as past and projected trends regarding Wise County's population, economy, natural features, existing land use, housing, transportation systems, community facilities and historic resources.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Location

Wise County is located in the southwestern portion of the Commonwealth of Virginia (Plate 1). 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

CHAPTER II

NATURAL RESOURCES

Topographic Features

Roughly 95 percent of Wise County is included in the Cumberland Mountain section of the Appalachian Plateau physiographic province. This portion of the county lies to the north and northwest of Stone Mountain but also includes Powell Mountain. Over thousands of years streams have cut so deeply into the underlying rock formations that the plateau-like character has disappeared and the surface consists now of hills and irregular ridges rising to a fairly common height. In such places as Black Mountain and Pine Mountain, mountains originally stood on the surface of the plateau, but over time were also reduced and dissected by streams. These mountains, still standing above the hilltop remnants of the old plateau, have historically been and remain obstacles to transportation. The Appalachian Plateau portion of the county can be described by its degree of dissection: (1) steep, deeply dissected plateau, (2) steep, less deeply dissected plateau, and (3) hilly and rolling ridge land (Plate 2).

The steep, deeply dissected plateau has very steep V-shaped valleys and sharp ridge tops. Slopes in these areas generally range from 50 to 100 percent, with the difference in relief ranging from 500 to 1200 feet. Such terrain is poorly suited for agricultural and urban purposes, but when it is underlain by coal beds, as it is in much of Wise County, its steep, dissected character can be beneficial in allowing coal outcrops to be mined using surface methods. While such dissection allows ease of access to coal, it causes the construction of roads and railroads to be somewhat difficult and expensive. For this reason, transportation networks are confined almost entirely to the narrow valleys along the streams.

The steep, less deeply dissected plateau is characterized by somewhat linear ridges and rounded knobs, with total difference in relief ranging from 200 to 600 feet. Under some circumstances, portions of these areas may be suitable for development.

The hilly and rolling ridge land plateau has been dissected to only a small extent by streams, with the plateau-like surface relatively unchanged. Total relief difference ranges from 100 to 350 feet and slopes range from two to 20 percent. Portions of this area may be suitable for farming and urban type developments.

The Ridge and Valley physiographic province comprises about five percent of Wise County. The area includes Powell Valley and a small area underlain by limestone southwest and northeast of St. Paul. The Ridge and Valley province is a lowland interrupted by long, narrow, even topped mountain ridges tending to run in a northeast-southwest direction. The valley floors are trenched by streams.

Powell Valley is a broad basin-like depression rimmed on three sides by high, steep slopes. The valley floor is rolling with rounded knobs and low linear ridges. Two tributaries to the South Fork of the Powell River have cut shallow channels into the valley. These streams are separated by a limestone ridge with small knobs, not more than 50 to 100 feet high, and sinkholes. Wallens Ridge, extending from the central part of the valley southwestwardly to beyond the Lee-Wise line, has gentle slopes on the southeastern side but steep slopes on the northwestern side.

TABLE 1
ELEVATIONS AT SELECTED POINTS WITHIN WISE COUNTY

Location	Feet Above Sea Level	Location	Feet Above Sea Level
High Knob	4,162	Wise	2,450
Grindstone Ridge	3,400-3,500	Norton	2,135
Morris Mountain	3,250	Coeburn	1,950
Flatwoods	2,050-2,730	Appalachia	1,169
Black Mountain	2,860-4,150	Pound	1,546
Pine Mountain	2,366-4,150	St. Paul	1,600
Little Stone Mountain	2,600-3,250	Big Stone Gap	1,488
Sandy Ridge	2,825		

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, et al., Soil Survey, Wise County, Virginia, Series 1940, No. 12, Issued May 1954.

Geological Features

The general surface configuration of Wise County serves to reflect the underlying geological structure. Rock types exposed in the area are of sedimentary origin and consist of sandstone, shale, coal, dolomite and limestone. These rocks range in geologic age from 600 million to Pennsylvania 280 million years old.

The Appalachian Plateau portion of the county is characterized by generally flat-lying, relatively undisturbed, alternating beds of sandstone, shale and coal.

The Ridge and Valley portion of the county is underlain by limestone, presenting potential development problems. Sinkholes often found in limestone areas indicate the presence of underground drainage and caverns.

Climate and Weather

Wise County has mild winters and warm summers, with average monthly temperatures ranging from 32° to 40° Fahrenheit during the winter and from 67° to 71° during the summer. Record temperatures have been -23° at Wise and 105° at St. Paul. Such extremes are quite rare, although freezing spells do occur during the winter months, while the summers may have periods when daily high temperatures are in the 90's. The frostfree season normally lasts from early May to late September. Temperatures may be five to ten degrees lower in the mountains than in the valley portions of the county.

With total annual precipitation between 45 and 50 inches, Wise County is part of one of the wettest regions of the United States. Due to the mountainous terrain, a wide variation in rainfall can occur within short distances. Precipitation is reasonably well distributed throughout the year but is noticeably less in late summer and early fall. The driest month is usually October, with July generally the wettest. During the summer, hard showers or thunderstorms appear from the west and northwest. Slow, steady rains and light snows occur in the winter, with snow and sleet sometimes falling at higher elevations while rain is falling in the valleys. Snowfall is generally not a significant part of total precipitation, with annual depths in the vicinity of Wise at about 30 inches. Although severe storms have produced snowfall totaling from 41 to 68 inches in depth, there is rarely more than six inches of snow on the ground at one time.

Although roughly 51 percent of the annual rainfall occurs during the growing season, its poor distribution during critical periods may cause drought damage. About 10 drought days, or 50 percent of the total drought days, occur in June, July and August. Drought in April and May is of negligible consequence.

Flooding occurs in most streams on an average of almost once a year. For streams with drainage areas greater than 20 or 30 square miles, about 75 percent of the floods occur from December through March, 15 percent in April and May and 10 percent in June, July and August. Very few floods are experienced in the dry fall months of September, October, and November. For very small drainage basins, locally intense thunderstorms cause floods throughout the year and the frequency of spring and summer floods approaches that of the winter season.

Hydrologic Features

A potable water supply is necessary to sustain human life. A safe, dependable water supply is required for many commercial, industrial, agricultural and recreational purposes as well. Water availability and quality is thus an important consideration in assessing the county's development potential.

Water resources exist as ground water and as surface water. Ground water occurs beneath the earth's surface, stored in open spaces in rocks, while surface water occupies the earth's surface in such forms as streams, rivers and lakes.

Both ground and surface water depend upon precipitation for replenishment. Surface water is replenished directly through runoff of rain and snow melt and indirectly by surface flows of ground water such as springs, and ground water either by direct infiltration of rain and snow melt or by seepage from surface water.

In addition to the intensity, frequency, duration and distribution of precipitation, a complex set of factors influence the water resources of the county. Such factors as topography, geologic structure, temperature, soils, vegetation and land use activities contribute to both the quantity and quality of water available.

Surface Water. The streams and rivers of Wise County are headwaters of two major rivers, the Tennessee and the Big Sandy. The Powell and Guest Rivers and their tributaries lie within the Tennessee River Basin, while the Pound River and its tributaries are a part of the Big Sandy River Basin.

As headwater streams, these rivers and streams have relatively small watersheds and are particularly subject to the wide variation in rainfall that can occur within the county due to the mountainous terrain. The terrain also contributes to rapid runoff during periods of heavy rain. These factors cause stream flows to change dramatically, often in a matter of hours, creating flash flooding situations.

The small size of the watersheds and the fluctuation of stream flows mean that these streams can provide only moderate supplies of surface water unless impoundments are used, allowing water stored during periods of high stream flow to be used during periods of low stream flow. Several impoundments have been constructed in the county, serving as raw water sources for public water systems.

The Clinch River, which skirts the eastern end of the county, is one of the most ecologically diverse areas in the mid-Atlantic or northeastern United States. As noted in Chapter VIII, the Wise County Public Service Authority uses the Clinch River to supply its water treatment plant at Carfax.

A 1993 Department of Conservation and Recreation report assessed water quality and biologic monitoring of point and nonpoint pollution in the county's various watersheds.

Water quality data reveal that the Pound River subbasin, located in the northeastern sector of the county, is found to have bacteria problems, most likely the result of failing septic systems and raw sewage discharges from communities in the area. Also noted are phosphorous level violations, likely due to a municipal point source.

The Clinch River subbasin, including the Guest River, generally includes the central and southeastern portions of the county. Data for this subbasin reveal high levels of bacteria and phosphorous, due in part to municipal point sources.

The Powell River subbasin, which incorporates the western portion of the county, draws moderately impaired biologic readings, likely the result of runoff from active or abandoned mining activities.¹

¹ *Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Nonpoint Source Pollution Watershed Assessment Report, 1993.*

Ground Water. Wise County is divided into three hydrogeologic sections. The northern section, which includes nearly three-fourths of the county, is located north of the Powell and Guest Rivers. The southeastern section lies south of the Guest River and extends to the west on the northern and southern sides of Powell Valley, while the southwestern section is Powell Valley.

The northern section of the county is underlain by nearly horizontal shales, sandstones and coal seams. Wells drilled in this area average 150 feet in depth and yield an average of 10 gallons per minute. More than 70 gallons per minute have been reported from deeper wells, most located in stream valleys. Because the shallow ground water in this area has an undesirable iron and sulfur content, most wells are cased at 90-100 feet. Water from depths between 100 and 200 feet is often moderately hard and sometimes slightly acidic. Although additional stores of ground water are present at greater depths, seepage through coal seams causes much of this deeper ground water to be very acidic with iron deposits.

The southeastern section is underlain by moderately and steeply dipping shales and sandstones. Wells drilled into these rocks average 100 feet in depth and yield an average of 20 gallons per minute. A few deeper wells near the Guest and Powell Rivers are reported to yield more than 100 gallons per minute. Ground water is developed at depths between 70 and 150 feet in most wells. Water quality in this area is similar to that of ground water in the northern section of the county.

The Powell Valley floor portion in the county's southwestern section has static water levels generally within 10 feet of the surface. In the southern foothills, natural flows of 70 gallons per minute have been reported. Most wells in this section are shallow, but some wells deeper than 200 feet yield more than 200 gallons per minute. Ground water from the shale strata of this area often has iron deposits, and water from the limestone formations is moderately hard to hard. On the upper slopes of Powell and Little Stone Mountains adjacent to Powell Valley, wells average 80 feet for small users. Nearly all these wells are cased at least 50 feet because of iron-laden and turbid ground water at shallow depths.

It is difficult to estimate the overall ground water potential in the county due to a lack of sufficient well data. Additionally, extensive mining activity in the northern section of the county has adversely affected the water table. It is unlikely that ground water will furnish any appreciable amount of future water demand.

Mineral Resources

Mineral resources have dominated the history and development of Wise County. While coal has been the most abundant and important of these resources, others such as iron ore, natural gas, shale, limestone, sandstone, manganese and clay are also present in varying quantities and qualities. The geographical extent of the more important mineral resources is shown on Plate 3. The importance of these resources to the nation's economy has changed in the past and will continue to change in the future, with the economy of Wise County in turn greatly affected.

Coal. Although the presence of coal in Southwest Virginia was known prior to the Revolutionary War, it was not mined for shipment from Wise County until 1892. Since that time, bituminous (soft) coal has grown to be the county's single most important natural resource.

Rapidly changing economic and technological conditions make it difficult to offer a definitive statement on the amount of minable coal, as opposed to total remaining reserves, existing in Wise County. At the start of 1993, the county's total coal reserves stood at 1,958 million tons. During the five prior years, an average of 11.9 million tons per year were mined. At this rate of production and assuming 100 percent recovery (an impossibility), these reserves would last 165 years.

In actuality, restrictions imposed on mining -- e.g., government regulatory policies, liability potential, limitations of mining technology, safety concerns and economic considerations -- significantly reduce reserve figures. Researchers now predict that minable reserves state-wide will be used up by 2030, if coal mining continues at current levels.

As shown in Table 2 on the following page, coal production in 1973 stood at 10.37 million tons, increased dramatically during the early '80s, but has dropped since that time. The fact that coal production in the county has exhibited a recent downturn can be construed as one indication that these exterior factors are starting

to affect reserve potential. Declining production portends a significant negative impact on the economy of Virginia's coalfield counties. Based on a survey of Virginia's major producers, it is predicted that production will decrease 15 percent by 1998 and 25 percent by 2003.

TABLE 2
COAL PRODUCTION (IN MILLIONS OF TONS)

Year	Tons	Year	Tons	Year	Tons	Year	Tons
1992	11.25	1987	12.67	1982	13.19	1977	10.99
1991	11.99	1986	11.73	1981	12.40	1976	12.18
1990	11.94	1985	14.11	1980	12.53	1975	10.38
1989	12.21	1984	13.29	1979	12.26	1974	9.86
1988	12.38	1983	12.03	1978	11.13	1973	10.37

Source: Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy; Virginia Department of Labor and Industry.

Surface mining has declined since the late '70s due to more stringent industry regulation and the depletion of coal seams minable by surface mining techniques. This decline will continue as long as the "soft coal" market remains at depressed levels. Most of the existing surface minable coal is known to have higher "overburden ratios" (high ratios of cover material over the usable coal), thus making it uneconomical to mine this coal at today's prices. In 1992, 3.9 million tons or 35.3 percent of Wise County's coal production was from surface mining. This is down from 54 percent in 1975.

Deep mining activity in 1992 resulted in the production of 7.3 million tons of coal. While representing a sizeable increase from 1975, when 4.8 million tons were deep mined, the levels have remained relatively unchanged in recent years. This production is also being accomplished with fewer employees, a trend that is expected to continue.

Natural Gas. Natural gas exploration in Wise County began in the 1890s. By 1989, there were 188 wells producing 5,972,375 Mcf (million cubic feet) of the fuel, with an estimated 70,397,008 Mcf of remaining reserves.

ANR Production Company's Roaring Fork project is the dominant natural gas production operation in the county. Begun in 1984, ANR operated 165 wells at the end of 1988. Additional wells are planned for future years, although recent downward trends in natural gas prices have slightly reduced the rate of drilling.

Natural gas produced in Wise County in 1988 included 4,969,846 Mcf from ANR's 165 wells and 511,257 Mcf from 18 wells drilled by EREX (Philadelphia Oil). More than 95 percent (4,755,986 Mcf) of ANR's gas production was sold to Columbia Gas Transmission Corporation via a line across Pine Mountain to High Hat, Kentucky. The balance was used in field operations. The majority of EREX's production was delivered via a transmission line originating in Dickenson County and heading south to East Tennessee Natural Gas' lines in the Tri-Cities area.

While there has been some interest in developing a local retail natural gas network in Wise County, most feasibility studies completed to date do not justify the need for such services, since there is not a sufficient local market for gas. Natural gas distribution is as much a utility as a water or sewerage system, and such systems must be economically viable from a cost of installation and maintenance standpoint. Interest, however, remains high for natural gas to be distributed locally, and it should be stressed that such a development would be highly desirable. Wise County should encourage the development of such systems, tempered with the knowledge that they will not be economically feasible in every section of the county.

Iron Ore. From the 1890s to 1920, low-grade iron ore from the Clinton formation was mined southeast of Short Hollow, on Wallen Ridge at Irondale and at Oreton. Local mining and smelting of iron ore became uneconomical with the development of extensive iron deposits in the Lake Superior region and the rise of large iron and steel centers in the East and Midwest. Iron ore is not considered to be of economic importance to the county in the foreseeable future due to its low grade, the low available tonnage and the distance to markets.

Other Mineral Resources. Limestone deposits are quarried and crushed for use as road stone, agricultural stone, concrete aggregate and in asphalt. Locally available supply easily meets local demand, and limestone has not been marketed in the past beyond the limits of Wise County due to its general availability.

An abundant supply of sandstone is available in the county. In past years, it has been quarried, crushed to sand and then marketed as mortar and concrete sand, traction sand and for coal production. Although high-grade glass sand is present, its being recovered profitably under present conditions is questionable. Further study of this mineral would also be helpful in evaluating its marketability.

Samples of clay materials occurring in the county have been tested and found potentially useful in the manufacture of brick, tile, quarry tile and lightweight aggregate. Some of the coal refuse accumulations also contain slate potentially suitable for making brick and lightweight aggregate.

While manganese nodules occur southwest of Little Stone Gap, no evidence exists that the deposits are extensive enough to warrant commercial mining.

Forest Resources

Forests are unique among the major raw materials in that they are renewable. They are grown, harvested and grown again. With good management practices, forests not only produce wood but also protect watersheds, provide habitat for a diversity of game and non-game wildlife species, provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and, in general, enhance the environment.

Lumbering operations began in the county in the late 1800s with the harvesting of yellow poplar. It is estimated that by 1923, less than one percent of the 227.3 thousand forest acres remained virgin. The practice of taking the best trees and leaving low-quality stands may have reduced the genetic base for today's forest. Burning logged areas, often more than once, resulted in erosion and site degradation. Some areas on the sleeper slopes escaped, only to be logged later, when the need for wood increased during World War I. As farms were abandoned during the Great Depression, forests reclaimed the landscape naturally.

Fire, environmental conditions, people and pests have produced a relatively even-aged forest. The chestnut blight has eliminated the American chestnut from

the area forest. As oak stands mature, stresses alter tree physiology, rendering them susceptible to root disease and insects. Susceptible trees decline and eventually die, a natural process compounded by past land use, loss of species such as the American chestnut, replacement with species less adapted to the site, and other forces and conditions. This problem, referred to as "oak decline," can be managed by enhancing stand vigor, increasing age and species diversity, or reducing the rotation age, according to USDA Forest Service field researchers.

Table 3 shows that 72 percent, or a little over 190,000 acres, is currently forested, with oak-hickory comprising 92 percent of the county's total forest cover.

TABLE 3
FOREST ACREAGE

	Acres (Thousands)
Total Land Area (including Norton City)	265.6
Commercial Forest (1985)	190.1
Commercial Forest (1977)	210.5
Commercial Forest (1969)	210.0
Commercial Forest (1957)	187.6
Forest Type (1985)	
Oak-Pine	4.8
Oak-Hickory	175.7
Maple-Beech-Birch	9.6
Commercial Forest Land Ownership (1993)	
National Forest	35.9
Federal, State, County or City other than National Forest	7.7
Forest Industry	0.0
Farm Operators	9.6
Private ownership other than forest industry or farm owned	136.9

Source: Unpublished reports, Virginia Department of Conservation and Historic Resources, Division of Forestry, 1985; U.S. Forest Service, Clinch

Ranger District.

In early 1985, Louisiana-Pacific Corporation opened a waferboard plant near the Scott County town of Dungannon, after neighboring Wise County was identified as one of the major suppliers of the soft textured hardwoods required as raw material for this plant. Of the total annual plant consumption of 65,000 cords, or 150,000 tons, 25 percent of this timber (37,500 tons) is expected to be harvested in Wise County. Presently an estimated 90 percent of this harvest is yellow poplar, a number expected to be reduced to 70 percent as other soft-textured hardwoods become more easily recognizable.

The abundance of hardwood species native to Wise County and the surrounding area was also a decisive factor in the recent location of the B. A. Mullican Lumber and Manufacturing Company's dry kiln operation and strip hardwood flooring plant in the county's Blackwood Industrial Park located between Appalachia and Norton.

It is evident that Wise County's forest resources have the potential to contribute significantly to the county's economy. The county's soils and climate are conducive to rapid tree growth. With proper management, the variety of native woods promises the production of quality raw materials for future markets.

CHAPTER III

LAND USE SUITABILITY

Physical Considerations to Land Usage

There are a number of factors that severely limit the amount of developable land in Wise County. This chapter will attempt to address the primary constraints, including steep slopes, poor soil conditions, flood prone areas, mineral land under development, land subject to subsidence from underground mining, and National Forest lands and other public and private property not available for development.

Slopes

Areas with slopes in excess of 20 percent are generally considered unsuitable for urban type development. This by itself presents Wise County with severe development problems, since 92.4 percent of the county's 265,000 acre land area has slopes in excess of 20 percent. Another 2.3 percent has slopes between 10 and 20 percent, leaving 5.3 percent of the county with slopes of 10 percent or less. Approximately 24 percent of the 0-10 percent slope land area is currently classified "urban and built-up." The scarcity of "level" land becomes more apparent when one considers that almost a third (1,743 acres) of the 5,385 acres classified as "urban and built-up" have slopes in excess of 20 percent.

Soil Conditions

The engineering suitability of soils, or the ability of a particular soil to support various land uses, is of primary consideration in evaluating the suitability of land for development. Soil properties such as percolation, compaction, density, slope, shrink-swell potential, depth to bedrock, underlying material, location, water table and composition are factors considered in determining the suitability and limitations a soil may possess for different land uses.

Based on an engineering evaluation of each soil type found in Wise County conducted by soil scientists from Virginia Tech, each soil type as identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's *Soil Survey of Wise County, Virginia* was rated with respect to its engineering suitability for homesites; large building foundations; basements; lagoons; roads, streets, and parking lots; and septic tank drainfields.

Each soil type was given a rating of either good, fair, poor or unsuited for each usage category.

Public sewage collection systems do not generally provide service outside municipal corporate limits (see Chapter VIII), although the C-N-W regional wastewater plant near Coeburn does serve a significant portion of the county. With the incorporated areas of the county having limited quantities of remaining land suitable for development, future residential development will be forced to occur in areas not now served by public sewage collection. The suitability of future residential areas for the construction and use of septic tank drainfields is of great importance to the health of Wise County residents. Existing developed areas may be experiencing health hazards if not served by sewage collection systems.

Plate 4 shows the suitability of the soils of Wise County for the construction and use of septic tank drainfields. This map shows the suitability of generalized areas for septic tank drainfields and *should not* be used in place of an individual site survey. As the map indicates, very little of the county is considered "good" or even "fair" for the use of septic tanks.

The areas rated "good" and "fair" are the areas most suitable for the development without the provision of public sewage collection services prior to initial development. Very little, if any, development should occur in the areas rated "poor" prior to providing public sewage collection services and no development should occur in areas rated "unsuited" unless such services are provided prior to development. Dense development in areas rated "poor" and "unsuited" without public sewage collection and treatment facilities has the potential to create very severe health hazards.

Flood Prone Areas

Plate 5 shows the extent of flood prone areas along the rivers and major streams of Wise County. As was painfully pointed out by the April, 1977 flood, many of the developed areas of the county are subject to flooding. Additionally, a comparison of Plate 4 with Plate 5 shows that many of the areas otherwise "best" suited for septic tank drainfields and thus residential development are also subject to flooding. The future development of flood prone areas is regulated by the county's Flood Plain

Management Ordinance, as required for the county's participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. These regulations allow construction in flood plains if structures are elevated above the reach of the one percent chance flood (commonly called a 100-year flood). No development is allowed within the identified floodways.

The topographic and rainfall conditions typical to Wise County are conducive to high velocity flash floods that may inundate the entire valley floor of the narrow V-shaped mountain valleys. Such floods are particularly destructive to both life and property.

The simplest method of not risking costly and deadly destruction from the ravages of floods is by reserving areas known as "floodways" for the unobstructed flow of flood waters. In the adjacent flood plains, new structures should be elevated above the level of the one percent chance flood (that flood which has a one percent annual chance of occurring) and existing buildings should be floodproofed to at least the level of the one percent chance flood. Those people unable or unwilling to relocate out of flood prone areas should be encouraged to acquire flood insurance.

Mineral Land Under Development

As discussed in more detail in earlier chapters, Wise County is a heavily developed area for coal mining. The extent of this mining, both on the surface and underground, is an important factor influencing surface development.

According to the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, in 1995 there were 26,213 acres of land under permit for mining in Wise County. This included land for which mining was planned, as well as that being actively mined and that having been reclaimed but not released from bond.

Land Owned by Coal and Resource Companies and the U.S. Government

Land ownership can be divided into surface ownership, mineral ownership and "fee simple" ownership. The vast majority of Wise County's mineral acreage is owned by various private coal and resource development companies. A land ownership study conducted from 1978 to 1980 showed corporate ownership of land in the county, usually held in fee, to be approximately 45 percent of the total surface land. Most of this land was owned by major resource development companies. There is no obvious indication of any major change in this ownership pattern since

that time. At the same time, the USDA Forest Service controls approximately 13 percent of the county's surface lands. Thus, about 58 percent of the county's surface is, for all practical purposes, not available to private individuals and nonresource companies for purchase or development. In addition, corporate ownership of most of the minerals beneath the surface create concerns about potential mining and possible subsidence.¹

Land Subject to Potential Subsidence

Only rough estimates are available for total surface acreage disturbed by surface mining in Wise County. Approximately 23,550 acres (8.9 percent) had been mined by August 3, 1977 (the enactment date of the Federal Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1977; P.L. 95-87), and 38,783 acres (14.6 percent of the county) were disturbed between 1975 and 1994. It is not clear, however, how many of these acres have been mined more than one time, thus the total acreage disturbed is not available from current data.

What is clear is that surface mined land is second only to forest land as the county's largest land use. The Virginia Division of Mined Land Reclamation notes that since the Commonwealth's permanent reclamation program was established in 1981, 80 percent of the permits have designated forestry as the post-mining land use, 12 percent were designated as hayland/pasture, and eight percent as commercial/residential/recreation. Although surface mined land has been used for a variety of urban type land uses, including residential development, mobile home parks, school sites, commercial development and industrial sites, the development of surface mined land should be approached with caution. Subsurface conditions are often unstable, and there have been many problems with subsidence and settling after these areas have been developed. Some of these mined areas can be used if the site is properly engineered and subsurface conditions are evaluated carefully. Because of the development costs involved, these areas are generally

¹ *Center for Appalachian Studies, Boone, NC, Land Ownership Patterns and Their Impacts on Appalachian Communities, Volume 6: Virginia, 1981.*

more suited for commercial rather than residential development.

Much of Wise County has been deep mined on at least one coal seam. Any time a void is created below the surface, the possibility of subsidence is present. This problem has grown in recent years with the use of high extraction mining methods, either "longwall" or "room and pillar." In conventional room and pillar mining, only 50 to 60 percent, or less, of the coal is actually removed, with the remainder left in place to provide surface support. In high extraction room and pillar mining, as much as 80 percent of the coal is removed and "controlled" or "uncontrolled" subsidence occurs. In longwall mining, the extraction rate is nearly 100 percent. As the longwall panel moves through the seam, the roof is allowed to cave in behind it. The extent of surface damage due to subsidence depends on many factors, including geology and seam depth.

Deep mining is prohibited by zoning ordinances in all of the county's incorporated towns and the City of Norton, and surface mining is restricted. Deep mining is allowed in all unincorporated areas of the county by the county zoning ordinance, with surface mining restricted only in heavily developed areas.

CHAPTER IV

EXISTING LAND USE

While compiling data for use in the original draft of the *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* in 1977, the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission was heavily involved in the co-authorship of another valuable planning document, the *Southwest Virginia 208 Water Quality Management Plan*. This study, completed in 1978, dealt with sources of non-point water pollution in the seven county area of Planning Districts One and Two. In order to complete the study, remote sensing, or the use of satellite imagery to denote different land use types, was used extensively for data compilation.

The complex nature of the remote sensing process renders it unfeasible for subsequent *Plan* updates. Since, however, the land use designations dealt with broad patterns of land use -- patterns which have not changed significantly -- the data can still be presented and maintain a high degree of accuracy. Using recent structural land use patterns, new maps have been prepared portraying structural land use patterns in more detail.

Current Development Patterns.

Wise County's present land use pattern was created by past decisions and actions, no doubt based on the "best" information available to decision makers at the time, who likely put individual parcels of land into those uses they felt would prove most beneficial. Many decision makers, individuals as well as representatives of corporate and public interests, have over time created the composite picture which is Wise County's existing land use.

Economic conditions, technology and social attitudes are continually changing. As these changes occur, they are reflected in an area's land use pattern. An existing land use map provides a "picture" of the land use pattern at a point in time, the composite of many decisions put into action over time.

Some land use patterns reflect dying trends, i.e. land uses that are ceasing to be functional. Other land use patterns reflect emerging trends, i.e. land uses that will continue to be functional long into the future. It is the purpose of an analysis of

existing land use to discern these trends as a basis for future plans.

Plate 6 shows prevailing structural land use patterns outside incorporated areas. These patterns are classified by function such as agricultural-rural residential, single-family or general residential, limited or general business, light or heavy industrial and recreation-conservation.

Following is a more detailed explanation of each category:

Agricultural/Rural Residential - Predominantly rural uses such as agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, open space and residential use in a rural environment.

Single-Family or General Residential - Low- or high-density concentrations of residential units of all types (single- and multi-family and manufactured homes), plus certain public and/or commercial uses in small concentrations.

Limited or General Business - A wide range of retail, wholesale, service and office uses, either catering to the needs of residents of nearby neighborhoods (limited) or the traveling public (general).

Light or Heavy Industrial - Light or heavy industrial and manufacturing uses, as well as related service, support and business uses.

Conservation-Recreation - Those areas uniquely suited for conservation or recreational uses due to their natural features, association with area history or potential to support development of recreational facilities serving the public welfare.

Following is a description of the land cover types shown on Plate 7, which shows a more generalized picture of Wise County than does Plate 6.

Urban and Built-Up Land. Urban and built-up areas (defined as a reasonably significant number of structures appearing to possess a community relationship and common focal area) are closely aligned with the transportation network that is itself closely aligned with the streams of the mountain valleys. It is only on the flattened mountain tops in the vicinity of Hurricane and Maple Grove and in portions of Powell Valley that the road network, and thus built-up development, does not follow the courses of the county's streams.

An estimated 5,385 acres, roughly two percent, of Wise County's total land area is classified as "urban and built-up land." While examination of Plate 7 reveals that most urban and built-up land is associated with incorporated areas, also apparent is

the considerable amount of built-up type development occurring outside these areas. It is estimated that more than 14,000 of the county's residents live in such unincorporated developments. Typically, and in the case of Wise County, such areas that are not a part of a town or city have fewer public services available to residents and businesses than do their incorporated neighbors.

Comparison of Plates 6 and 7 shows that many of the county's urban and built-up areas have "mixed land uses," i.e. residential, industrial and commercial uses in close proximity to each other. Such a situation is not generally considered aesthetically pleasing or contributing to the health and safety of the population.

Table 4 shows that 32 percent of the county's urban and built-up land has been developed on land with slopes of 20 percent and greater, slopes not generally well suited for urban type developments. The high percentage of urban and built-up development occurring on such slopes in Wise County points up the past lack of "developable" land within a reasonable travel time of places of work.

TABLE 4
EXISTING LAND USE, 1975

Land Type	Slope Categories (Acres)			Total Acres	Percentage of Total Acres *
	0-10%	10-20%	20% +		
Urban & Built-Up	3,277	365	1,743	5,385	2.0
Agricultural	2,962	1,167	5,114	9,243	3.5
Surface Mined Disturbed	547	286	20,691	21,524	8.1
Forest	6,810	4,258	217,270	228,338	86.1
Quarries	0	20	31	51	0
Water Bodies	525	0	0	525	0.2
Undetermined Barren	9	37	35	81	0
Totals	14,130	6,133	244,884	265,147	100.0

* - May not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Southwest Virginia 208 Agency.

A comparison should also be made between Plates 4, 6 and 7. The existence of urban and built-up development in areas of less than "good" suitability for septic drainfields is obvious, highlighting the potential for health problems that could be minimized through the availability of public sewage facilities.

A comparison of Plates 6 and 7 with Plate 5 shows the extensive urban and built-up development that has taken place in flood prone areas of the county. As was pointed out by the major flood in April 1977, such development in flood prone areas can result in disaster that can and should be avoided in the future.

Agricultural Land. Plate 7 reveals very little of Wise County being used for agricultural purposes, with only 9,243 acres (3.5 percent) of the county classified as agricultural land. This classification includes cropland, pasture land and orchards but does not include woodlands on farms.

The small percentage of the county's land area being used for agricultural purposes reflects the overall unsuitability of the topography for such pursuits. The largest area of the county in agricultural usage occurs in Powell Valley. This same land has great potential for future urban and built-up development.

Surface Mined Disturbed Land. Plate 7 shows the land area disturbed by the extensive surface mining that has taken place in Wise County. Approximately 23,553 acres (8.9 percent) of the county's land area had been disturbed through such activities by August 3, 1977 (the enactment date of the Federal Surface Mining and Reclamation Act; P.L. 95-87). As previously noted, an accurate figure for total area disturbed by surface mining is not available.

This surface mining activity produced coal, created jobs, polluted streams, created high walls and many acres of relatively "flat" land. The potential uses of this newly created "flat" land are uncertain. Possible potential uses include practically everything from residential to industrial, agricultural to commercial.

There is precedent for the establishment of cooperative arrangements between the mining industry and local government for dedicating some of the corporately owned lands for public use. Sites for the former and present Wise County landfills were provided by mining companies, as were sites for the county's industrial parks. A mining company donated a tract on the border of Wise and Dickenson Counties

to the state for use as a state prison site. Such agreements help advance the goal of economic development and industrial diversification and should be encouraged by Wise County's elected officials whenever appropriate.

Actual development of these areas will hinge primarily on economic considerations, i.e. development costs. Particular care should be exercised in the development of these surface mined areas since their "flatness" may hide potentially costly or dangerous subsurface features.

Forest Land. The bulk of Wise County's land area is in forest, with 72 percent, or more than 190,000 acres, of the county being classified in this usage by 1985. Plate 7 shows the extent of the county's forests. As discussed in Chapter II, this is a very valuable resource not presently being utilized to its fullest potential.

Nearly 13 percent, or 35,850 acres, of the county's forest land is presently managed by the USDA Forest Service as a part of the Jefferson National Forest. This land is managed on a "multiple use" basis, not only to produce commercial timber and other forest products, but to provide improved game habitat, protect and improve watersheds and biological diversity and to provide access and facilities for the public to enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational experiences such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, swimming and picnicking.

Fully developed on a "multiple use" basis, Wise County's forests will be a valuable resource to both present and future generations, and such development should be encouraged.

Areas of Expansion

Much of the county's previous urban development has occurred in the south central portion of the county, primarily along U.S. 58A. A major concentration of commercial development has taken place in the Wise/Norton area, despite both localities' having lost population between 1980 and 1990 (population gains are forecast by the year 2,000). This area has one of the most complete public utility infrastructure systems in the county and also contains three of the county's four hospitals, a four-year liberal arts college and one of the county's two industrial parks. A regional cancer treatment center is under construction.

With new state prisons slated for construction, new urban development is likely to occur in the Big Stone Gap and Pound areas, especially in the latter case, where access roads and utility extensions will open previously inaccessible land to development.

Implications for Future Land Use

Wise County has many factors limiting the amount of land available for future residential, commercial and industrial development, including steep slopes, shallow depth to bedrock, sinkholes, poor soil percolation, flooding and potential mining-related subsidence. All these factors can create very high or prohibitive development costs. Moreover, additional burden may fall on the taxpayers when, after initial development is completed and as residential densities increase, problems arise which the public sector is called upon to solve.

Another factor limiting the amount of land for future development in Wise County is that sizeable areas of the county are not generally available for private commercial or residential development, instead held by resource development companies or the federal government. All this makes it extremely important to delineate those areas most suitable for various uses, to acknowledge limitations to development and, where possible, mitigate these limitations through sound planning and public investment decisions. Furthermore, recognition of the limited land suitable for development heightens the importance of developing policies that will maximize the potential of those areas already developed.

Careful thought should be given to the determination of population densities that can be supported in a given area of the county without the provision of public utilities. Provision of public water generally spurs residential development, creating potential health hazards unless sewerage service is also provided or densities are encouraged to remain low through various land use policies.

One of the positive aspects of Wise County's previous development is that the population is relatively compact in certain areas of the county, and joint efforts among towns and the county have resulted in water and sewer service being made available to a larger area of the county, with the potential for future extension.

Careful, creative, long-range planning could alleviate some of the limitations that presently exist regarding land development in Wise County. Once areas have been developed, especially where public dollars have been spent to provide infrastructure, the county can use all its policies and ordinances to protect those areas from adverse impacts.

CHAPTER V
POPULATION

Total Population Trends and Projections

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 (Table 5).

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.

At the same time, the latest population projections provided by the Virginia Employment Commission place the combined population figure at 41,694 persons by the year 2000 and 40,248 by the year 2010. This differs markedly from prior projections, based on the 1980 population figures, which called for a county/City population of 58,800 by the year 2000.

TABLE 5
POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

	Wise Co.	Norton	Combined		Wise Co.	Norton	Combined
1890	9,345	a	9,345	1960	43,579	5,013	48,592
1900	19,653	a	19,653	1970	35,947	4,172	40,119
1910	34,162	a	34,162	1980	43,863	4,757	48,620
1920	46,500	a	46,500	1990	39,573	4,247	43,820
1930	51,167	a	51,167	2000	37,754	3,940	41,694
1940	52,458	a	52,458	2010	36,316	3,932	40,248
1950	56,336	a	56,336				

a - Norton City was not chartered until 1954.

Sources: Historic counts: U.S. Census of Population; Projections: Virginia Employment Commission.

Population Distribution and Density

In 1990, just over 90 percent of the combined population of Wise County and the City of Norton resided in the county. The remainder lived within the corporate limits of the City of Norton, which accounts for just 1.8 percent of the land area within county boundaries. At the same time, all the county's incorporated towns accounted for 14,102, or 32.1 percent, of the combined population, while comprising just 3.7 percent of the county's land area.

The population density of Wise County/Norton was 105.6 persons per square mile in 1990. This density changes rapidly, however, when only the City and towns are considered. Norton has a rather low incorporated place density of just under 570 persons per square mile, due mainly to large incorporated areas that are uninhabited. The Town of St. Paul, meanwhile, had a density of 1,598 persons per square mile, followed closely by the Town of Coeburn at 1,535 and the Town of Wise at 1,093. All other localities within the county had densities less than 1,000 persons per square mile. Steep slopes have precluded the urbanization of large portions of the incorporated areas of the county's towns and the City of Norton.

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 — under 20, 20-64 and 65 and over — has certain needs and desires that are quite different from those of the other age groups.

Table 6 on the following page shows the past and present composition of Wise County's population by age group, as well as its median age, while Table 7 on the next following page reveals the rate of change in each age group over the past two decades.

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 "under 20." These combined changes point to increased goods and services needs in both the "20-64" and "65 and over" groups.

TABLE 6
POPULATION, PROJECTIONS AND PERCENTAGE BY AGE GROUP

	Total Population	Percentage of Total Population		
		Under 20	20 - 64	65 & Over
1970				
Virginia (000)	4,764	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 (000)	5,347	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 (000)	6,187	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 (000)	6,897	27.5	61.3	11.2
Wise County	37,754	27.7	57.6	14.7
Norton City	3,940	29.8	56.6	13.6
Wise Co / Norton	41,694	27.9	57.5	14.6
2010				
Virginia (000)	7,451	26.1	61.7	12.2
Wise County	36,316	26.6	56.7	16.7
Norton City	3,932	30.0	56.8	13.2
Wise Co / Norton	40,248	27.0	56.7	16.3

Sources: U.S. Census of Population, 1970, 1980, 1990; Virginia Employment Commission.

TABLE 7
RATE OF POPULATION CHANGE BY AGE GROUP

	1970 to 1980	1980 to 1990	1990 to 2000	2000 to 2010
<u>Wise County</u>				
Under 20	+ 6.4 %	- 21.2 %	- 12.0 %	- 7.6 %
20 - 64	+ 34.5 %	- 7.1 %	- 3.2 %	- 5.3 %
65 & Over	+ 21.4 %	+ 13.9 %	+ 6.5 %	+ 9.4 %
<u>Norton City</u>				
Under 20	+ 8.9 %	- 20.0 %	- 6.5 %	+ 0.8 %
20 - 64	+ 23.3 %	- 7.3 %	- 7.0 %	+ 0.1 %
65 & Over	+ 30.2 %	- 1.3 %	- 9.9 %	- 3.5 %
<u>Wise Co / Norton</u>				
Under 20	+ 6.6 %	- 21.1 %	- 11.5 %	- 6.8 %
20 - 64	+ 33.3 %	- 7.1 %	- 3.6 %	- 4.8 %
65 & Over	+ 22.3 %	+ 12.1 %	+ 4.8 %	+ 8.2 %

Source: Computed from Table 6.

Racial Composition of Population

Table 8 views non-white population as a percentage of total population for the past three Census years and projections for the years 2000 and 2010.

TABLE 8
NON-WHITE POPULATION
AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Wise County	2.5 %	2.5 %	2.3 %	2.4 %	2.9 %
Norton City	6.0 %	5.7 %	7.6 %	9.2 %	11.9 %

Sources: U.S Census of Population, 1970, 1980, 1990; Virginia Employment Commission.

CHAPTER VI

ECONOMY

Economic Base Analysis

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. Obviously, such dependence on one basic industry makes an area's economy highly susceptible to changes in that industry. In Wise County that dependence has historically resulted in a series of coal related "booms and busts."

An attempt is made to analyze certain economic factors associated with Wise County in an effort to identify current trends and provide a basis for future planning and decision making. Only limited reference is made to the pre-1970 period, relying primarily on post-1970 employment to show the reversal of the 1950-1970 trends, which were followed by a subsequent decline again after 1980.

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.

Table 9 on the following page supplies economic base analyses reflecting a single month in each of the last four census years. As shown, Wise County's basic sector generally consists of mining, manufacturing and agriculture.

TABLE 9
ECONOMIC BASE ANALYSIS

	March 1960	March 1970	March 1980	March 1990
Population	48,592	40,119	48,620	43,820
Employment by Place of Residence	11,825	11,415	15,710	14,959
Employment by Place of Work	11,074	11,426	13,479	16,632
Basic Employment	3,711	3,874	6,043	4,808
Agriculture	280	213	23	22
Mining	2,585	2,339	5,161	3,870
Manufacturing	671	1,084	859	916
Supporting Employment	7,363	7,552	7,436	11,824
Basic Employment as percentage of Total Employment	33.5 %	33.9 %	44.8 %	28.9 %
Support Employment as percentage of Total Employment	66.5 %	66.1 %	55.2 %	71.1 %

Sources: Virginia Division of State Planning and Community Affairs, "Projections and Economic Base Analysis" for Wise County and the City of Norton; Virginia Employment Commission, Covered Employment and Wages; U.S. Census of Population, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990; LENOWISCO Planning District Commission.

In 1960, basic employment comprised just over one third of the county's total employment, with mining accounting for 69.7 percent of basic employment and 23.3 percent of total employment (by place of work). By 1970, basic employment had risen slightly as a percentage of total employment, with mining dropping considerably in its relationship to both basic and total employment.

In 1980, fueled by the dramatic increase in mining employment during the 1970s, basic employment accounted for nearly 45 percent of total employment. Mining employment alone stood at 85.4 percent of the county's basic employment and 38.3 percent of its total employment.

During this same span, the level of supporting employment in the county remained relatively constant. By 1990, however, a rapidly growing supporting sector and the noted decrease in mining employment resulted in a significant shift in the relationship of basic and supporting sector employment within the county. By that

year, supporting employment had grown to more than 71 percent of total employment. While mining continued to represent more than 80 percent of basic employment, levels of mining employment and basic employment had dropped sharply, with mining dropping to just 23.3 percent of the county's total employment.

Mining does, however, remain the single most important of the county's basic industries. In addition to those employed in mining activities in Wise County, a good number of residents commute to neighboring Virginia and Kentucky counties for coal mining jobs.

Basic Industries

Mining. As noted, although mining employment has decreased in recent years, mining remains important to the economy of Wise County and the region. In 1990, 3,870 persons were employed in the mining industry in the county, with most of the LENOWISCO district's 117 mining establishments (and ninety percent of mining employees) located in Wise County.

At that time, most coal mines are small, frequently employing 20 or fewer persons. On the other hand, Westmoreland Coal Company, with about 1,000 employees, was the largest private employer in Wise County (and the district), with Paramount Coal Company, part of the Pittston Coal Group, another large employer.¹

Manufacturing. Manufacturing is the second largest basic sector employer in the county, with 916 persons employed in 1990. As seen in Table 9, manufacturing employment reached a high point, in terms of both employment levels and percentages of basic and total employment, in 1970. That year, the 1,084 persons employed represented 28 percent of basic employment and 9.5 percent of total employment. By 1990, manufacturing accounted for 19.1 percent of basic employment and 5.5 percent of total employment in the county.

Many of the newly created manufacturing jobs have been in apparel manufacturing and have been filled by women. The low labor force participation rate

¹ *Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, An Economic Profile of the LENOWISCO Planning District, 1993.*

among the county's females, noted in more detail later in this chapter, coupled with potential in-migration, makes the county attractive to additional industries that might typically employ females.

In 1994, Buster Brown Apparel, Fournier Furniture and Mullican Lumber were the county's largest manufacturers, employing a total of 850 persons. Planned expansions at Buster Brown and Mullican will increase that figure by at least 500 persons in the subsequent 2-5 years.

While manufacturing has played a lesser role to mining over the years, ongoing trends in the mining industry, including decreasing employment levels, heighten the importance of alternative industry in the county's economic future.

Agriculture. Mirroring nationwide trends, Table 9 reveals a tremendous drop in agricultural employment in Wise County in recent decades, from 280 persons in 1960 to 22 persons in 1990. The largest drop occurred between 1970 and 1980, when agricultural employment fell from 213 persons to 23 persons.

In 1982, there were 161 farms in the county, with 45 run by operators who classified farming as their principal occupation. By 1992, the number of farms had fallen to 122, with 37 operated by "full time" farmers. During that period, the number of "part time" farm operators dropped from 116 to 85. Meanwhile, however, the amount of land in farms in the county remained fairly constant, with 13,050 acres in 1974 and 13,237 acres in 1992.²

Agriculture remains the most productive sector of the nation's economy, with two percent of Americans producing food for the rest of the population. While it is clear that agriculture makes up an increasingly smaller portion of the county's basic sector employment, agriculture will continue to play a role in Wise County's development. The county's urbanized population provides a stable market for local producers of fruits and vegetables and nursery and greenhouse crops. There will also be future opportunities for increased grazing of surface mined land that is in permanent grass cover. The Powell River Project, sponsored by Virginia Tech and the coal industry, has demonstrated the suitability of reclaimed land for cattle

² U.S. Department of Commerce, Census of Agriculture.

production over the past 15 years at its research site near Norton.

Supporting Sector Employment

Supporting sector employment includes local contract construction; transportation/public utilities; wholesale/retail trade; finance, insurance and real estate; local government and services. According to the Virginia Employment Commission, supporting employment stood at 71.1 percent (11,824 of 16,632 persons) of the county's total March 1990 employment.

Government. The government sector in Wise County and the City of Norton employed 3,224 persons in 1990. As in many localities, local public schools paced state and local government employment in Wise County. With more than 1,000 employees, the Wise County school system was the largest government employer, while the county's two colleges employed approximately 400 persons.

Planned state correctional facilities near Pound and Big Stone Gap will add 600-700 government employees within the county.

Wholesale/Retail Trade. The wholesale/retail trade sector in Wise County and Norton employed 3,877 persons in 1990, roughly the same number as were employed in the coal industry that year.

Other. Other supporting sector employment in Wise County and Norton in 1990 stood as follows: local contract construction, 525; transportation/public utilities, 686; finance, insurance and real estate, 443; and services, 3,069.

Employment Characteristics

Employment figures are reported via two different methods. The United States Census of Population reports "employment by place of residence," defined as the number of residents of an area who are employed. These data, reported on a ten-year basis, may be used as indicators of broad trends in employment. In conjunction with other indicators, these data may also assist in the analysis of the economic well being of a given area's population.

Meanwhile, the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) and others report "employment by place of work," defined as the number of people employed within an area with no regard to where they may reside. These data are reported continually by the VEC and may be used as an indicator of an area's ability to provide jobs for its residents, as well as more detailed trends in employment.

Commuting. Table 10 reveals commuting patterns.

TABLE 10
WORK RESIDENCE INFORMATION - 1980 AND 1990

Place of Work for Wise County and Norton City Residents	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>
Total resident workers	15,282	14,959
Total resident workers reporting a place of work	14,207	11,221
Place of work reported as Wise County or Norton City	12,819	8,684
<u>Out-Commuters from Wise County and Norton City</u>		
Buchanan County	12	42
Dickenson County	445	288
Lee County	58	192
Russell County	345	287
Scott County	100	179
Washington County	27	72
Harlan County (KY)	55	113
Letcher County (KY)	125	108
Pike County (KY)	42	24
Sullivan County (TN)	n/a	94
Elsewhere	179	263
Total	1,388	1,662
<u>In-Commuters to Wise County and Norton City</u>		
Buchanan County	17	30
Dickenson County	622	692
Lee County	1,103	849
Russell County	617	528
Scott County	419	335
Washington County	n/a	131
Harlan County (KY)	58	n/a
Letcher County (KY)	76	235
Pike County (KY)	7	n/a
Sullivan County (TN)	n/a	196
Elsewhere	17	729
Total	2,936	3,725
Net In-Commuters (Out-Commuters)	1,548	2,063

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1980 and 1990. n/a - not available.

In 1990, 77.4 percent of the county's resident workers worked within the county, down from 90.2 percent in 1980.

Commuting patterns to neighboring coal-producing counties of Virginia and Kentucky represent a large portion of all commuting from the county. In 1990, 575 (34.6 percent) of Wise County's "out-commuters" worked in Russell and Dickenson Counties (down from 790 and 56.9 percent in 1980), while another 245 commuted to nearby Kentucky counties. All told, out-commuting increased from 1,388 persons in 1980 to 1,662 persons in 1990. At the same time, in-commuting to the county increased, with the number of non-residents who chose Wise County as a place of employment rising from 2,936 in 1980 to 3,725 in 1990.

Due to the overall lack of reliability of such data, however, caution should be used in their interpretation and application to other uses.

A review of Table 9 suggests that much of the out-commuter increase can be attributed to fewer mining-related jobs in the county, while the in-commuter rise reflects the county's improved ability to provide supporting sector employment.

Labor Force Participation. Just under half of the county's working age population was in the labor force in 1990³, far below the state level of 68.9 percent. Part of this can be attributed to the county's relatively large number of retirees, typically a "nonemployed" age group. In 1990, 13.2 percent of the county's population was age 65 or over, compared to 10.7 percent at the state level.

Recent statewide population projections suggest this older age group will increase as a proportion of the total county population and remain a larger part of the total population than will be the case for the state (see Chapter IV). This may be viewed as an increased burden on that portion of population that is employed.

³ U.S. Census of Population, 1990.

At 38.0 percent, labor force participation rates of the county's females were significantly below the county's male participation rates (62.2 percent) as well as Virginia female rates (60.7 percent).⁴ This low level of female labor force participation places a heavy burden upon those who are employed, reducing per capita and family income levels.

Unemployment. Table 11 shows April 1990 unemployment rates, while Table 12 presents annual unemployment rates from 1983 to 1997.

TABLE 11
PERCENT OF CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE UNEMPLOYED

	Male	Female	Total
Virginia	4.1%	4.9%	4.5%
LENOWISCO	9.4%	10.6%	9.9%
Wise Co/Norton	10.2%	9.6%	9.9%

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1990.

TABLE 12
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES, 1983 - 1997

	Wise County	Norton City	Virginia
1997	12.3 %	8.9 %	4.0 %
1996	15.9 %	11.0 %	4.4 %
1995	17.0 %	13.1 %	4.5 %
1994	10.8 %	8.0 %	4.9 %
1993	11.1 %	7.5 %	5.0 %
1992	13.2 %	7.7 %	6.4 %
1991	11.1 %	8.1 %	5.8 %
1990	7.9 %	6.9 %	4.3 %
1989	9.4 %	8.8 %	3.9 %
1988	10.1 %	8.8 %	3.9 %
1987	10.7 %	8.4 %	4.2 %

⁴ *U.S. Census of Population, 1990.*

1986	15.5 %	11.3 %	5.0 %
1985	15.7 %	9.8 %	5.6 %
1984	11.6 %	10.6 %	5.0 %
1983	12.9 %	9.8 %	6.1 %

Source: Virginia Employment Commission.

The effects of coal mining layoffs are evident from the unemployment rates for this heaviest coal producing portion of the district, which remains vulnerable to industry-wide work stoppages, technological changes and shifts in product demand, a symptom of heavy economic reliance upon one basic industry.

Income

As shown in Table 13, per capita personal income of county residents rose from \$7,699 in 1979 to \$13,734 in 1989, a 78.4 percent increase.

TABLE 13
PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME - 1979 AND 1989

	1979	1989	% Increase
Virginia	\$8,483	\$18,979	123.7
LENOWISCO District	\$6,645	\$12,100	82.1
Wise Co/Norton	\$7,699	\$13,734	78.4

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis.

This is overshadowed by the fact that the Commonwealth's per capita income rose by an impressive 123.7 percent (\$8,483 to \$18,979) over this same time period. Furthermore, the county's income level was only 72.4 percent of the state figure in 1989, down from 90.8 percent in 1979.

Transfer payments -- those payments to persons not made in exchange for current work, such as Social Security and unemployment benefits -- account for a relatively large share of total personal income in Wise County, providing 25.8 percent of the total personal income of county residents in 1989 and ranking Wise County/Norton in the state's top five in this category.⁵ This large share of total personal income accounted for by transfer payments also helps explain the relatively large supporting sector in the county. Transfer payments tend to stimulate

⁵ *U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis.*

supporting sector activity without increases in basic activity.

As shown in Table 14, median family income has increased significantly in Wise County and Norton, but still remains considerably lower than the state figure.

	1959	1969	1979	1989
Virginia	\$4,964	\$9,049	\$20,065	\$38,213
Wise County	\$3,450	\$5,875	\$16,942	\$23,007
Norton City	\$3,918	\$7,223	\$15,864	\$21,836

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990.

Retail Sales

In recent years, Wise County has become something of a retail trade center, with retail sales in the county the highest in the region. This is at least a partial reversal of the not-too-distant past, when many local retail dollars flowed to the Kingsport-Bristol region.

Despite a few minor differences in the tax base, taxable sales figures are fairly representative of retail sales figures.

Taxable sales data for the LENOWISCO district in 1992 showed a relatively low level of retail activity, as per capita taxable sales stood at just 68 percent of the statewide level. Within the district, however, there was wide disparity. Per capita taxable sales in Norton were nearly three times the statewide level. Wise County was slightly above the state average, while Lee and Scott Counties fell well below. Wise County's larger towns (Big Stone Gap, Coeburn and Wise) had per capita sales figures comparable to Norton's. Together, Wise County and Norton accounted for a little more than 64 percent of the district's taxable sales in 1992.⁶

⁶ *Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, An Economic Profile of the LENOWISCO Planning District, 1993.*

Wise County/Norton taxable sales are shown in Table 15. After a 15.8 increase from 1982 to 1987 and a 23.4 percent gain from 1987 to 1992, the county's taxable sales increased by another 20.9 percent from 1992 to 1997.

TABLE 15
TAXABLE SALES - 1982, 1987, 1992 AND 1997

Business Group	1982	1987	1992	1997
Apparel	\$ 6,094,395	\$ 6,668,543	\$ 44,452,455	\$ 17,239,315
Automotive	13,171,270	14,842,453	15,173,064	18,464,930
Food	80,906,573	94,918,196	97,266,251	111,243,741
Furniture	5,227,457	6,174,251	4,436,517	4,714,710
General Merchandise	30,446,288	45,595,711	34,856,794	45,565,575
Lumber, Building Materials	8,689,565	18,344,858	17,864,775	29,413,522
Fuel	5,952,171	2,813,648	1,164,716	3,849,953
Machinery & Equipment	3,632,884	5,402,567	8,775,546	11,758,025
Hotels, Motels	1,415,019	2,609,366	3,509,138	748,308
Miscellaneous	36,375,289	24,836,821	46,616,367	88,402,385
TOTAL	\$ 191,910,911	\$ 222,206,414	\$ 274,105,623	\$ 331,400,464

Source: Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Taxation, Taxable Sales in Virginia Counties and Cities, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997.

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.

Discussion of Economic Issues

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. This is primarily due to the increasingly mechanized production methods employed in the coal industry. Because of depletion of the more accessible coal reserves, however, both production and employment are expected to decline in the future, as noted in chapter II. It is predicted that production will decline 15 percent by 1998 and 25 percent by 2003, with most mineable reserves projected to be exhausted by the year 2030.

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 -- with roughly the same number of persons as were employed in the coal industry in 1990 -- these jobs cannot provide an economic base for Wise County, for reasons previously discussed.

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 relatively untapped 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, Clinch Valley College 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, employing a combined total of approximately 400 persons in 1990 in mostly high wage jobs.

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.

CHAPTER VII
HOUSING

Housing Inventory

Housing Stock. Despite a decrease of 4,800 persons in the county's population during between 1980 and 1990, Table 16 reveals an increase of 94 housing units within the county and Norton during that time. It should be noted, however, that the number of persons per housing unit dropped from 2.78 in 1980 to 2.49 in 1990.

TABLE 16
HOUSING STOCK

Locality	Single Family Units	Multi-Family Units	Mobile Homes Units	Total Year Round Units				
<u>1980</u>								
Wise County	11,353	1,048	3,244	15,645				
Norton City	1,222	370	247	1,839				
Total	12,575	1,418	3,491	17,484				
<u>1990</u>								
Wise County	10,394	1,226	4,138	15,758				
Norton City	1,100	391	329	1,820				
Total	11,494	1,617	4,467	17,578				
<u>CHANGE 1980 - 1990</u>								
	Single Family		Multi-Family		Mobile Homes		Total Units	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Wise County	-959	-8.4	178	17.0	894	27.6	113	0.7
Norton City	-122	-10.0	21	5.7	82	33.2	-19	-1.0
Total	-1,081	-8.6	199	14.0	976	28.0	94	0.5

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1980 and 1990.

Public Housing. Recent year's public sector efforts have increased the quantity and quality of public housing available to county residents. Even so, a July 1990 survey of housing agencies throughout the coalfields revealed nearly 575 families in Wise County and Norton on waiting lists to obtain public housing in one of the 840 public housing units in projects financed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) or the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA). These projects include:

Appalachia:	20 units on Ridge Avenue (HUD) 36 units elderly on West Main Street (HUD) 88 units in Inman (FmHA)
Big Stone Gap:	97 units in Popular Ridge subdivision (VHDA) 20 units at Monte Vista (HUD) 56 units (18 elderly) Big Stone Heights (FmHA)
Coeburn:	56 units in Bondtown (HUD) 57 units in Sheffield Acres (FmHA)
Pound:	34 units on Old Mill Road (FmHA)
St. Paul:	60 units in Gray Hill section (HUD)
Wise:	60 units elderly at Gilliam Court (Hurricane Road) (FmHA)
Norton:	90 units elderly on Sixth Street (HUD) 50 units in Ramsey (HUD) 27 units on Virginia Avenue (HUD) 38 units at Norton Heights (FmHA) 51 units at Hawthorne near Ramsey (HUD)

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 has 525 of these units, with 520 persons on waiting lists. Big Stone Gap, with its own program, has 110 units with 80 on waiting lists, while the City of Norton has **XXX** units and a waiting list of **XXX**.

A 60-bed facility providing adult care services is proposed for a site adjacent to Heritage Hall nursing home near Clinch Valley College in Wise. The facility will be financed through HUD's Section 232 Mortgage Insurance Program.

Housing Condition. According to the Virginia Division of State Planning and Community Affairs publication, *Survey of Substandard Housing in Virginia*, the best overall indicator of substandard housing is the number of occupied units lacking complete plumbing facilities. State, county and city data are shown in Table 17.

In 1990, four percent of the county's housing units lacked complete plumbing facilities (i.e., piped hot and cold water, a flush toilet and a bathtub or shower), down from eight percent in 1980. When compared to 1970, when 29 percent of all units lacked complete plumbing, it is evident that progress has been made in increasing this aspect of the quality of life for county residents.

TABLE 17
SUBSTANDARD HOUSING STOCK - 1990

Category	Virginia	Wise County	Norton City	Total
Total occupied / vacant year round units	2,496,334	15,929	1,845	17,774
Total occupied year round units	2,291,830	14,513	1,697	16,210
Occupied units w/o complete plumbing	35,788	703	13	716
Occupied units / more than one person per room	65,042	422	33	455
Occupied units / more than one person per room w/o complete plumbing	3,348	34	6	40

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1990.

While some deficient units may have been replaced by mobile homes, thus providing plumbing facilities, sewerage problems may have resulted. Availability of full plumbing facilities typically generates an increase in both water consumption and wastewater disposal. In an area as unsuited as Wise County for septic fields and with a general lack of public sewage disposal, the new problem of wastewater disposal may be as great as the original problem of the lack of plumbing facilities.

There are limited data available on other aspects of the condition of county housing stock. Several towns and the City of Norton have undertaken detailed surveys of housing structures within their jurisdictions, delineating those that are sound, deteriorating or dilapidated. A 1988 Big Stone Gap survey showed 66.2 percent of the town's housing units to be in sound condition, 20.4 percent deteriorating and 13.4 percent dilapidated. A 1985-86 survey in Wise showed 63.3 percent of its housing units as sound, 33.2 percent deteriorating and 3.5 percent dilapidated.¹ No survey of housing conditions has been made in the county's unincorporated portions, although a 1994 housing questionnaire revealed that various housing interests within the county view housing blight as one of the most important problems affecting existing neighborhoods in the county's unincorporated areas. According to 1990 Census data, nearly 50 percent of conventional housing in the county was built before 1960, with more than 20 percent built before 1939.

Housing Trends and Projections

Construction. The salient trend in Wise County housing is an increasing number of mobile homes as a proportion of total housing units. According to projections noted elsewhere in this document, the population in Wise County and Norton is projected to drop slightly, at least until the year 2010. Even if this occurs, however, it does not necessarily follow that there will be no demand for new housing in the county. This demand is likely to be filled by manufactured housing.

As noted, population dropped significantly in Wise County and Norton from 1980 to 1990, falling from 48,620 to 43,820 persons. During that time, total housing stock increased slightly (0.5 percent). Conventional housing (shown as single and multi-family units in Table 16) decreased by 6.3 percent, while the number of mobile homes increased by 28.0 percent. Further, by 1990, 25.4 percent of the year round housing units in the county were mobile homes (with nearly 25 percent of these being rental units), up from 20 percent in 1980 and six percent in 1970. In contrast, mobile homes represented only six percent of total housing stock in Virginia, and just over seven percent in the United States.

¹ *Comprehensive Plans, Towns of Big Stone Gap and Wise.*

This local trend is continuing and accelerating in the 1990s. Mobile homes accounted for 80 to 90 percent of all new housing in the county by 1994, mirroring a nationwide trend. On the national level, mobile homes accounted for roughly 30 percent of total new housing in 1980, rising to a projected 75 percent by 1990. Unless strategies are developed to provide affordable alternatives, it is doubtful this trend will be reversed or even slowed in the county in coming years.

Rehabilitation. There are several programs in the county directed at the rehabilitation of low income housing. 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.

Deficiencies. There are significant shortages in certain sectors of the housing market in Wise County. According to 1990 Census data, the homeowner vacancy rate for Wise County and Norton City was 1.4 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively. Owner-occupied housing comprised 76.4 percent of total housing stock in Wise County and 60.9 percent in Norton, compared to 66 percent for the state as a whole. That year, there were 99 units for sale and 331 units for rent in Wise County.

Long waiting lists for the county's public housing units attest to the housing shortage for low income families. Responses to a 1994 housing questionnaire from those associated with housing interests indicate a shortage of single-family, owner-occupied housing at all income levels. Additionally, responses cite a need for available and affordable building lots and subdivisions. Realtors report a far greater demand for land than the available supply can provide, as well as a shortage of middle- and upper-income rental housing for newly arriving families.

Areas of housing blight in existing neighborhoods is also a problem, according to questionnaire responses.

According to local non-profit housing organizations, there is an acute need for housing repairs, both for the elderly and low-income families, that far exceeds available resources.

Finally, there are 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.

Problem Analysis

Most of the new housing in Wise County is provided by mobile home units. 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 (in the early 1990s, roughly one-third of all new mobile home set-ups) 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.

As noted elsewhere in this document, the constraints limiting the amount of developable land in the county include steep slopes, poor soil conditions, flood prone areas, mineral land under development, land subject to subsidence from underground mining, land that has been surface mined (which may or may not be suitable for housing development), forest and other public lands, and land owned by large mineral holding corporations and not available for development. These constraints have resulted in a shortage of land suitable for housing development.

It is therefore extremely important to plan carefully to maximize the potential of land that is available and suitable for housing and to preserve and improve existing housing and communities. Preservation and, where needed, upgrading of existing stable communities and housing, where public services are already provided, should be a priority for the county. At the same time, areas with the fewest constraints to development should be delineated and targeted for public services for future housing. Incentives to promote preservation and rehabilitation of existing housing should be considered.

Finally, 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, according to local realtors, is the lack of suitable housing. Efforts should be made to devise a housing plan that will offer the potential for a variety of suitable housing types for all income levels.

CHAPTER VIII

PUBLIC UTILITY SYSTEMS

Water and Sewerage Planning Efforts

Beginning with the *Comprehensive Water and Sewage Plan* in 1969, considerable planning attention has been given to Wise County's public water and sewerage needs. Subsequent studies, including LENOWISCO's *Water Quality Management Plan* (1973), the Virginia State Water Control Board's *Tennessee and Big Sandy Comprehensive Water Resources Plan* (1976) and the Wise County Public Service Authority's *Wise County Regional Water Study* (1976), were based on population projections contained in a 1972 LENOWISCO document, *Regional Land Use Plan - 1990*. The *Regional Land Use Plan* projected the population of Wise County and Norton to decline to 39,100 in 1980 but to gradually increase, reaching 50,400 by 2020.

As noted in previous chapters, these projections have proven to be inaccurate. The 1980 population was in excess of 48,000, but the 1990 population fell below 44,000. These changes, however, do not make existing plans for future water and sewer facilities invalid.

Existing Public Water Supply and Watersheds

One of the most valuable resources available to any area is its water supply. This is no less true in Wise County than anywhere else. With access to major rivers limited at best and groundwater difficult to access, lakes and reservoirs, whether natural or man-made impoundments, are vital to the continuing health and welfare of the county and its citizens.

Those areas of Wise County presently served by public water supplies are shown on Plate 8. Each of the county's towns and the City of Norton owns and operates a waterworks system. The Wise County Public Service Authority (PSA) also provides public water.

Most water providers in the county depend on a reservoir as a main (or only) source, although several do have backup sources. These reservoirs combine for a capacity of more than six billion gallons and serve more than 30,000 people,

not all of them within county boundaries. Two exceptions wherein providers do not rely primarily upon reservoirs are the Town of St. Paul and the Wise County PSA, which both utilize the Clinch River as their source of water.

Table 18 shows watershed data for each water provider, with descriptions of each system following.

TABLE 18
WISE COUNTY WATERSHEDS

Locality	Water Source	Capacity (million gals)	Population Served	Watershed (acres)
Appalachia	Ben's Branch Reservoir	100.0	5,000	340
Big Stone Gap	Big Cherry Lake	580.0	9,000	2,800
Coeburn	Tom's Creek Reservoir	12.7	4,500	2,000
Norton City	Norton Reservoirs	120.0	6,000	560
Pound	North Fork Reservoir	5,037.2	2,000	10,300
St. Paul	Clinch River	--	2,000	--
Wise	Wise Reservoir	200.5	5,500	920
Wise Co PSA	Clinch River	--	2,500	--

Source: Municipal records

Town of Appalachia. A one million gallon per day (MGD) water treatment plant completed in 1983 produces water for Appalachia and users in Andover, Arno, Derby, Osaka, Roda, Stonega, Exeter and Lee County's Kookeke. Additional tank and line upgrades have been made in the past few years.

The Town's only regularly used water source is the reservoir at Ben's Branch, approximately two miles east of town and one mile south of U.S. 23 Business. Ben's Branch is a 100 million gallon man-made impoundment, a relatively small but deep mountain reservoir. Its relatively small watershed of approximately 340 acres yields an estimated average flow of 0.8 million gallons per day. Water from the reservoir flows by gravity to the filter plant located below the dam.

The reservoir is located within the boundaries of the Jefferson National Forest,

making watershed preservation somewhat easier to accomplish. Further aiding the situation is the fact that the entire watershed is owned by the Town.

It should be noted that this reservoir, like most of the others, is susceptible to drought, and that lines and pumps have been set up to supply the Town with water from the Powell River if the need arises. This arrangement has been utilized only once, at the time of its creation in 1980.

Two six-inch water mains leave the plant. One is a low pressure supply line, meeting a pressure reducing tank further down the mountain before continuing to Appalachia. Excess water from this line goes to a 100,000 gallon covered steel standpipe located on a hill above the town. The other six-inch main is a high pressure line, extending from the filter plant through Andover and on to Arno, Derby, Osaka, Roda and Stonega. There are 13 storage tanks on the system with total storage of 1.856 million gallons.

Approximately 1,600 connections are served by the Appalachia system. A significant number of users, approximately 40 percent of all customers, are outside the corporate limits.

Town of Big Stone Gap. The Town's sole water source is the Big Cherry Lake, formed by an impoundment on the south fork of the Powell River. This lake is located less than a mile from the Wise County/Scott County border, approximately six miles east of the Town. Big Cherry Dam, a masonry structure, was constructed in 1935. The 100-acre reservoir impounds approximately 580 million gallons of water and has a watershed of 2,800 acres. The watershed land lies within the Jefferson National Forest in Wise and Scott Counties. The watershed itself is primarily (90 percent) owned by the Town, with the remainder largely Forest Service property. There are a few privately-owned tracts at the northeastern end of the area, mostly quite remote from major corridors. As the largest of the county reservoirs, the lake is less susceptible to drought, but has shown itself vulnerable during severe drought conditions. The Town has no backup source of water.

From the reservoir, water flows through a natural channel to an intake just above the filter plant, then to a 4 MGD filter plant for treatment. The finished water flows into 11 storage tanks with a combined volume of 3.337 million gallons.

The Big Stone Gap system presently has approximately 3,060 connections, with average daily usage at 1.016 million gallons. Like Appalachia, a significant number of customers are outside the town's corporate limits, with the bulk of those being located in the Powell Valley area northeast of the town.

Town of Coeburn. Coeburn is served by a waterworks system that has also been recently upgraded. The supply is taken from a 12.7 million gallon, man-made impoundment on Tom's Creek, located just off State Route 652, approximately three miles east of State Route 72, 3.5 miles northeast of Coeburn. The watershed has a drainage area of approximately 2,000 acres, with a safe yield estimated at 0.3 million gallons per day.

The watershed is owned largely by the Town, although it is located fairly near some residential development along Route 652, including the community of Franco. The Town's administration, however, has not expressed great concern over future development in this region, and does not anticipate a need for any special protection. The Town is also fortunate in that its secondary water source is near the Tom's Creek reservoir. Water from an underground cavern, with a capacity of several million gallons, can be pumped directly into the impoundment on an as-needed basis.

The recently expanded filtration plant has a capacity of 1.15 MGD and the distribution system consists of eight, six and four inch mains. The system serves Toms Creek, Coeburn and the Flatwoods Job Corps Center. Four storage tanks provide 1.65 million gallons of water storage.

The system has approximately 1,300 connections, with average daily water usage of 500,000 gallons.

City of Norton. The Norton water plant was constructed in 1949 and much of the water distribution system is approximately 60 years old. The supply is obtained by gravity from a pair of impoundments on Benge's Branch, the Upper and Lower

Norton Reservoirs. Like others in the county, these reservoirs are man-made, holding approximately 120 million gallons of water. They are located inside the City's corporate limits, about one mile south of the City Hall. The reservoirs' 560-acre watershed is located entirely within either the corporate limits, the Jefferson National Forest or both, an arrangement that gives a certain amount of protection to the water supply.

As a secondary source, the City may purchase water from the Wise County PSA or utilize an emergency source, which it has been forced to do on several occasions. Pipe casings and pumps have been set up in abandoned mine shafts northwest of the City to add groundwater to the system when called upon, but with nearly three miles of primarily uphill terrain from the shafts to the reservoirs, such an operation is extremely expensive.

Before remodeling in 1973, the treatment plant had a capacity of 720,000 gallons per day (GPD), but now has a filtration capacity of 2.0 MGD. Total plant capacity, however, is limited to 1.44 MGD due to limited sedimentation capacity. Recent improvements have included pipeline extensions and an additional 288,650 gallons of finished raw water storage. Present finished water storage capacity is 2.338 million gallons.

The Norton system has about 2,200 connections, and average daily production is approximately 1.07 million gallons.

Town of Pound. The Pound waterworks system was constructed in the 1930s and initially operated by the Pound Sanitary District. After the town was incorporated, it assumed operation of the water system. Improvements were made to the distribution system in 1954, and additional improvements consisting of a 0.5 MGD treatment plant, a 150,000 gallon storage reservoir and new water mains were made in 1967-68.

Pound's principal water supply is the Army Corps of Engineers-operated North Fork Reservoir on the North Fork of the Pound River. This man-made impoundment, with its enormous five billion gallon capacity, is located along the North Fork, beginning above the confluence of the North Fork and Laurel Fork, less

than a mile east of Pound and U.S. 23. It continues nearly two-thirds of the way to Flat Gap, a stretch of more than two miles. About half of the 10,300-acre watershed is located within National Forest land, and the Town has expressed little concern with possible development in that area. Serving the Town and surrounding areas of the county, the North Fork Reservoir has not been adversely affected by drought.

The combined finished water storage for the town is 300,000 gallons and the distribution mains consist of four- and six-inch cast iron pipe. This system serves approximately 575 connections, 115 of which are located outside the corporate limits. The present water production is estimated to be 0.3 MGD. At one time, Pound's system suffered from low accountability (water lost through leaks), but recent improvements have been made to lines, plant and storage facilities.

Town of St. Paul. St. Paul's raw water is drawn from the Clinch River by an intake located inside the corporate limits. A drainage area of approximately 615 square miles feeds the river above the intake. Questions of capacity and watershed preservation on a local scale are largely meaningless.

The 500,000 GPD filtration plant was constructed in 1965. The distribution system, consisting of eight-, six- and four-inch mains, was constructed in 1930. The system has four water tanks providing 530,000 gallons storage.

Presently 450 connections are being served by this system. Daily water production averages 153,000 gallons.

Town of Wise. Initial construction of the Wise waterworks system was completed in 1966, and the plant was expanded in 1976. The supply is obtained from a 200 million gallon impoundment on Bear Creek approximately three miles east of town. The average yield of this watershed has been estimated at 1.22 MGD.

The Town is in the most difficult position with respect to watershed protection. The Wise Reservoir is located in the heart of one of the major remaining areas of developable land in the county. While the Town does own the majority of the 920-acre watershed, there are some parcels off Pole Bridge Road still owned by private interests and which could be developed. In addition, there presently exists an industrially-zoned area north of the reservoir (near the Lonesome Pine Airport)

which could be utilized in the future. The residential possibilities of the former issue are the driving concern, however, since those areas do lie within the watershed itself. This area is the most likely to need some type of protection to maintain the integrity of the drainage area. The Town has no major secondary source of water.

The filtration plant, which can treat 1.5 MGD, is located at the south end of the Bear Creek Dam. Storage is provided by seven tanks with a total capacity of 2.625 million gallons. The system has approximately 2,281 connections, with present average daily production at one million gallons.

Wise County Public Service Authority. The WCPSA's fairly new 2 MGD water treatment plant at Carfax serves the central portion of Wise County. The plant is tied into the existing system through a series of connections and interconnections with existing systems managed by other Wise County towns, as well as the City of Norton. The WCPSA service area is divided into six different sections that will be treated as a combined system for this report. The sections are (1) the Norton section, which serves the Dorchester, Needmore and Stephens area, (2) the Esserville section, which serves those customers between the City of Norton and the Town of Wise, (3) the Hurricane section, which serves the area northeast of the Town of Wise through the Hurricane section and the area around the Town's reservoir, (4) the Stephens section, west of the Town of Wise, (5) the Banner section, serving that area east of Coeburn, and (6) the Sandy Ridge section, serving that area north of Coeburn. The latter two sections are the newest and are served via a flow-through agreement with the Town of Coeburn. The other four sections are interconnected with the distribution system of either the Town of Wise, the City of Norton, or both.

There are a total of 1,500 connections on the Authority's system, which has a total finished water storage capacity of 1.1 million gallons.

The distribution system is relatively new, the Norton and Wise sections having been completed in 1973-74 and the Esserville and Hurricane sections in 1980-81. The Stephens, Banner and Sandy Ridge sections are later additions. With the numerous interconnections with the three central Wise County localities, the Carfax plant will provide a supplementary/emergency water supply as needed.

Should future demand warrant construction of an additional treatment plant at the Carfax site, oversized distribution lines already in place will be capable of carrying more than 4 MGD once pumps are replaced. The safe yield of the Clinch River at Carfax is greater than 28.3 MGD, so source capacity will not restrict the growth of the Authority's system.

The WCPSA currently plans two additional expansions to its overall system. The Tacoma to Parson Gap transmission line will run along U.S. 58A to Ramsey, then north through Parson Gap to a connection with the existing distribution system in Esserville. It will then continue along U.S. 23 to Glamorgan, where it will serve the Stephens System.

The last phase of the project will extend water service up Guest River toward Dixiana, then across the dividing ridge into the upper Powell River area.

Both of these phases are dependent on high levels of grant/loan funding from the Farmers Home Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission and/or other sources.

Existing Public Sewerage Systems

The areas of Wise County presently served by public sewerage systems are shown on Plate 9, with those areas generally limited to the county's incorporated areas. A brief description of each sewerage system follows:

Towns of Appalachia and Big Stone Gap. A regional treatment plant serving both localities went on line in 1994. This plant, located in Big Stone Gap, has a 1.6 MGD capacity. Presently, the Town of Appalachia has an average daily flow of 300,000 gallons, while Big Stone Gap generates 500,000 GPD.

Big Stone Gap's previous facility was designed to provide secondary treatment for 800,000 GPD, while Appalachia's present flow had fully utilized the design capacity of its 1967-vintage contact stabilization treatment plant.

C-N-W Regional Plant. In a cooperative venture, the Towns of Coeburn and Wise and the City of Norton utilize the Coeburn-Norton-Wise (C-N-W) regional wastewater treatment plant located near Coeburn. This 4 MGD facility, built in 1991, provides full secondary treatment to all three communities, with a present average usage of 3 MGD.

The C-N-W plant replaces systems in all three localities. Coeburn's previous

system, constructed in 1964, consisted of a stabilization pond with a design capacity of 4,000 people or 400,000 GPD. Average daily flow registered around 460,000 gallons. The Town of Wise used a sewage treatment plant and collection system constructed in 1964 and upgraded in 1984. Its aerated lagoon system provided both primary and secondary treatment. Norton previously used two treatment plants providing primary treatment only.

Town of Pound. A 175,000 GPD extended aeration treatment plant became operational in late 1976. Until that time, Pound had no central sewerage system. Despite the fact that the system is relatively new, poor maintenance over the years has resulted in several problems that must be addressed.

Town of St. Paul. St. Paul is served by a central sewerage system constructed in 1973. This facility has a design capacity of 400,000 GPD and provides treatment with an aerated lagoon system. Average daily flow through the plant is approximately 200,000 gallons.

Other Sewage Disposal Methods. Smaller sewerage systems serve specialized areas of the county. A state correctional camp, the Flatwoods Job Corps, and the bathhouse and campsites of the High Knob Recreation Area are each served by small treatment facilities. Sheffield Acres, a subdivision near the Flatwoods Job Corps, is served by a 40,000 GPD extended aeration plant. A small package plant also serves the Wise County Department of Social Services, Wise County Christian School and several private residences west of the Town of Wise.

No other existing central sewerage systems serve Wise County. Disposal of wastewater by residents not served by existing central sewer systems is accomplished through septic tank drain field systems, pit privies, home package treatment plants, sand filters and, in remote cases, direct discharges to area streams. As was pointed out under the heading "Land Use Suitability," the soils of Wise County are not well suited to wastewater disposal by means of septic tank drain fields. Pit privies and direct discharges are well-recognized health hazards.

Solid Waste

Although it might be properly termed a "service," solid waste collection and disposal is now a major responsibility for municipal governments. Due to the importance of this service and its fundamental role in each resident's daily life, solid waste can also be termed a "public utility."

"Garbage collection" has been a function of municipal governments for many years, purely out of the necessity to deal with the large quantities of waste a concentrated population generates. Until the early 1970s, this waste was collected in open trucks and deposited in open dumps, where it was burned to reduce the volume. Such operations are inconceivable by today's standards.

Until the early '70s, county residents outside incorporated areas were left to dispose of household waste as best they could. Unauthorized roadside dumps were common, and area streams were subjected to tons of waste each year.

In 1972, a sanitary county landfill was established near Appalachia, and a "green box" collection program established for county residents. The "town dumps" were closed and reclaimed, and door-to-door collection systems were implemented in the towns and the City of Norton.

The amount of waste generated in Wise County today is staggering, nearly 150 tons per day. The collection system includes nearly 200 public "green boxes" at 44 sites throughout the county, plus a convenience center at Flatwoods. Both the collection and disposal systems presently used by the county have been the subject of detailed studies in recent years.

The county began operation of a new landfill at Blackwood in 1988. This site is expected to meet the county's solid waste needs for 30-40 years, although it will require a significant capital outlay each three to four years for expansion of the line, leachate collection system and other requirements.

The county has investigated ways to improve the efficiency of its collection system, such as door-to-door collection and increasing the number of convenience centers in unincorporated areas. Although the financial feasibility of door-to-door collection is questionable, plans are being considered to build more convenience

centers. These issues are addressed in the county's Solid Waste Management Plan, adopted in 1991.

Long-term solid waste disposal plans for Wise County might include resource recovery or even incineration, although the capital outlay and operational costs for an incinerator large enough to handle Wise County's waste volume would be immense and not cost-effective considering the absence of opportunities for electrical cogeneration or steam sales to partially offset these costs. In addition, even the most efficient incinerators do not provide total waste load reduction, with the residual ash still winding up in an approved landfill.

Recycling, being more environmentally acceptable and less costly, is also being used as a partial alternative to landfilling waste. The county documented a 25 percent reduction of solid waste at its landfill in 1991, thereby meeting requirements set out in the Code of Virginia for all localities to achieve by 1995.

All of the aforementioned options are part of an integrated solid waste management system. No single approach will work. While Wise County already has landfilling, recycling and source reduction programs in place, the county must be constantly aware of the limitations of landfills and changes in the "state of the art" on solid waste disposal and collection. The county must also be cognizant of the growing costs for solid waste disposal. It will be incumbent on local officials to find the most cost-effective and most environmentally acceptable means of handling waste in future years. This is one of the greatest service challenges facing Wise County's local government.

Finally, due in large part to the development constraints discussed in Chapter III (poor soil conditions for landfills and unstable geology due to mining), it is difficult to find a suitable site for a landfill, and therefore the county should continue to try to minimize the landfilling of solid waste. In any event, Wise County will do well to deal with, and control the management of, the volume of solid waste generated within its boundaries. Proposals to import solid waste from other areas should therefore be discouraged.

CHAPTER IX

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

General Function

Public services and accompanying facilities contribute toward a community's quality of life. Many such services are mandatory, as government's role in protecting its constituents' health, safety and welfare has resulted in the provision of police, sanitation and educational services. Other services such as recreation, libraries and public works are also now demanded by most residents.

This chapter notes current community facilities and those planned for the near future. Public water and sewerage facilities are treated separately in Chapter 8 due to their important role in the area's ability to grow. With certain exceptions, Wise County's community facilities are adequate to serve the existing population.

Educational Facilities

Wise County has a wide range of educational facilities providing services to its residents. These include elementary, middle and high schools, a vocational and technical school and two colleges.

Elementary, Middle and High Schools. The Wise County School Board operates the school system serving Wise County, with a separate school system consisting of an elementary school and high school operated by the City of Norton.

The Norton school system served a fall enrollment of 799 students during the 1997-98 school year, while the Wise County system, with at least one elementary and one high school in or near each of the county's six towns, had 1997-98 fall enrollment of 7,541 students. Including the Vocational Education Center, the county system operates 16 school facilities. Wise County also maintains an "electronic classroom" originating from its vocational school in Wise, which serves not only the county's high schools but 47 other schools in 56 divisions across all of Virginia.

With the completion of St. Paul Elementary in 1992, Wise County has completed a comprehensive upgrade of most elementary schools. Most high schools across the county are approaching 50 years of age.

The Virginia Department of Education conducted a review of Wise County's school facilities in the spring of 1994. Based on the locations and general conditions of facilities and a review of enrollment projections for the next 15 years, the committee recommended some consolidation at the high school level and the development of a middle school program.

These recommendations, if implemented by the Wise County School Board, will close two existing high schools and will require some cross-bussing between communities to fully implement a middle school program in the other existing facilities. Two existing high schools will require additional space to accommodate the high school enrollment in fewer buildings. All high school buildings will require significant upgrading to extend their useful life span. Details concerning specific recommendations can be obtained from the Virginia Department of Education.

The basis for these recommendations is a dropping school enrollment, mirroring local population decreases noted elsewhere in this document. Table 19 illustrates the degree of student loss from 1987 to 1997.

TABLE 19
FALL MEMBERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1987 - 1997

	Wise County	Norton City	LENOWISCO
1987	9,209	952	19,680
1988	8,940	966	19,099
1989	8,804	941	18,455
1990	8,658	880	18,166
1991	8,482	890	17,902
1992	8,365	884	17,650
1993	8,179	876	17,363
1994	8,047	829	17,098
1995	8,048	829	17,063
1996	7,718	773	16,500
1997	7,541	799	16,196

Source: Virginia Department of Education, *Fall Membership in Virginia's Public Schools*.

Vocational and Technical Schools. The Wise County Vocational School, established in 1942, provides instruction to those county students who desire training in a craft or trade in addition to their regular high school education. There are 22 programs offered at the Vocational School in Wise. Students attend the Vocational School for one-half day and their respective high schools the remaining half-day. Adult training courses are also offered at the facility.

The Wise Skills Center is a jobs training center that provides work force development for the county and City of Norton. Operated by the Wise County School Board, the Center offers a variety of classes aimed at providing an employable work force for the area.

The Flatwoods Job Corps Center, located near Coeburn, provides education and vocational training. The Center enrolls more than 200 students, who reside at the center for up to two years while being trained in one of seven construction trades. The center is operated jointly by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Forest Service. The center often performs construction services for non-profit organizations within the community.

Colleges. Two colleges located in Wise County serve residents not only of the county but the region, state and scattered portions of the country as well.

Located in Wise, Clinch Valley College is a multiple-purpose institution with a liberal arts foundation. A four-year branch of the University of Virginia, CVC is co-educational with dormitory facilities. The college provides undergraduate programs in the arts and sciences as well as select undergraduate professional programs in business, nursing, teacher education and other fields. Its Continuing Education Program is offered at sites both on and off campus. There are 20 academic, administrative and athletic buildings and six residence halls on the campus. Recent improvements include \$1 million in state-of-the art equipment, with \$8.5 million in new campus construction is planned during the next few years.

Mountain Empire Community College, near Big Stone Gap, is a two-year state-supported college offering both university-parallel and occupational-technical degree programs. MECC offers Associate of Arts, Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science degrees, as well as certificates in a number of

programs. MECC also offers Continuing Education courses and services designed to promote economic development, serving persons of all ages throughout the region. College facilities and personnel are available to provide specialized services to meet the cultural and educational needs of the area through credit and non-credit courses, cultural events, workshops, conferences and special community projects. The college's Master Plan through the year 2040 includes the additional construction of a student center, the John Fox amphitheater, a rustic inn and conference center, and additional academic and administrative buildings.

Private Schools. There is one private Christian school in the county, with the main campus of the Wise County Christian School located just east of Wise.

Health Facilities

Wise County, including the City of Norton, is the location of a number of health facilities, including hospitals, clinics, mental health facilities, nursing and rest homes, a health department and a number of physician and dentist offices.

Hospitals. The county's three hospitals — St. Mary's and Norton Community in Norton and Lonesome Pine in Big Stone Gap — provide more than 300 beds. Recent construction and expansions have placed the county in good position to address its population's future hospital service needs.

Clinics, Physicians and Dentists. Four health clinics, affiliated with local hospitals and the Dickenson County Medical Center, operate within the county and provide a base of operations for many of the county's 57 physicians, while others maintain private office practices. Ten dentists have offices within the county.

Wise County Health Department. The Wise County Health Department, operating from facilities located in the Town of Wise, provides public health services to the county's residents.

In the summer of 1995, the Oxbow Human Services Consortium brought health and human services to older citizens and the general public. This collaborative effort between the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau Planning Districts was constructed in St. Paul.

Nursing and Rest Homes, Extended Health Care Facilities. Four nursing homes operate in the county, with a total 341-bed capacity. Although availability of nursing

and rest homes is continuing to improve, projected continued increases in the county's elderly population will likely require additional facilities in the future.

Seven home health care service agencies provide in-home individual care.

Public Safety and Administration

Each of the county's towns and the City of Norton has a town or city hall for municipal administrative purposes. Each has a police department, fire department and volunteer rescue squad, with the exception being St. Paul, served by the Castlewood Rescue Squad. In addition, the Powell Valley and Sandy Ridge Volunteer Fire Departments serve their respective areas.

Cooperative efforts should be made on the part of the county, towns and the City of Norton to locate fire and rescue facilities to optimize the fire protection and medical services available to all county and city residents.

The building housing the Wise County jail was built in 1974, and may need to be expanded within the planning period. The county needs a juvenile detention facility. Among other needs are those regarding the expansion or relocation of existing town halls and police department facilities due to overcrowding.

An Enhanced 911 emergency telephone system with central dispatching was implemented in 1993.

Public Transportation

As noted in Chapter 10, Mountain Empire Transit provides general public transportation to county citizens of all ages. MET provides service to aging services, human service agencies and Medicaid recipients.

Recreational and Cultural Facilities

Numerous recreational facilities and programs are scattered throughout the county. These services are provided by the individual municipalities, educational institutions, federal and state agencies and private concerns.

Most of the county's towns have recreational facilities, as do Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College.

More than 36,000 acres in the county lie within the Jefferson National Forest, and there are seven developed National Forest recreation sites in the county. Included in these sites are campgrounds, picnic and swimming areas, and High

Knob, at 4,162 feet the region's highest peak. Development of the Guest River Gorge Trail near Coeburn further expands recreational opportunities, as do state parks in neighboring counties — Breaks Interstate Park in Dickenson County and Scott County's Natural Tunnel State Park.

The Wise County School Board offers its facilities for recreational purposes and community gatherings, allowing the facilities' full utilization. Efforts should be made to upgrade these facilities as recreational and community needs increase.

Private golf courses are located in Powell Valley (Lonesome Pine) and Coeburn (Dan Hall Mountain) and in nearby Jonesville (Cedar Hill) in Lee County.

The Lonesome Pine Regional Library System serves county residents through its headquarters at Wise and branch locations in Big Stone Gap, Coeburn and St. Paul. The library serves outlying areas of the county through a "Books by Mail" program at no cost to the users. Circulation for all four facilities was 549,290 volumes in 1993, with a total regional circulation of 976,118 volumes.

Lonesome Pine Regional Library has developed a network among all the high school, college and public libraries in its service area of Wise, Dickenson, Lee and Scott Counties and the City of Norton. Students at all 15 high schools and both colleges in the service area can, through equipment provided by Lonesome Pine Regional Library, access Lonesome Pine's database and have requested material either faxed or delivered by the library's van. Plans call for the same network access to library collections at Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College when these libraries are automated.

The county and its towns host a number of local festivals each year, centered around various topics — arts and crafts, music and the county's historic heritage. Big Stone Gap is home to "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine" (officially designated the state outdoor drama) and the Lonesome Pine Community Concert Association, while the Town of Wise hosts the Virginia-Kentucky District Fair and the Pro-Art Association. The Association, supported by commitments from local governments, the private sector and the Virginia Commission for the Arts, brings a year-round calendar of events in the visual and performing arts to the region.

Cultural facilities available to county residents include the Southwest Virginia

Museum and Harry C. Meador Coal Museum, both in Big Stone Gap, and the Harris Gallery located inside the Wise County Public Library in Wise.

Historic Resources

It is the policy of the Wise County Planning Commission and the Wise County Board of Supervisors to preserve and enhance all sites, buildings, structures and objects with significance to American history, architecture, archaeology and culture. Inherent within this policy is the goal of avoiding any adverse impacts on any property or district included or pending inclusion on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

County sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register are the June Tolliver House, John Fox, Jr. House, Southwest Virginia Museum, U.S. Post Office and Christ Episcopal Church in Big Stone Gap, the original structure of the Wise County Courthouse, the Inn at Wise and the Country Cabin in Josephine.

In 1994-95, the county, the City of Norton and all county towns participated in a cost-sharing program with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, wherein two consultants were hired to survey architectural resources and provide an assessment of archaeological resources in the towns, city and county.

In the architectural survey, selected historic resources over 50 years of age were surveyed and recorded. These resources were, in most cases, the least altered and best preserved examples of the historic themes dominant during the county's developmental years, or, in a few cases, the only known building of its type or form in the county. In some cases the resource represented changes in the stylistic interpretations that occurred during the years of greatest change in the county, 1880 to 1940. A notable exception to the 50-year rule was the late-1940s enameled-metal Lustron homes in Norton and Big Stone Gap.

Using United State Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps, the consultant mapped, numbered, photographed and described nearly 500 properties containing 700 historic resources. These resources are the physical expressions of the residential, agricultural, government, education, religious, commercial, industrial, transportation, recreation, funerary and ethnic themes dominant in the county during

its years of development.

The survey data have been entered into a new Integrated Preservation Software (IPS) system. Through the use of this system, all Wise County Architectural Survey data will be permanently stored and can easily be retrieved. In addition, a set of nearly 500 "hard copy" files of all surveyed properties will be located at the Wise County Public Library in Wise and the Department of Historic Resources, with a written report of the survey in county, town and city offices.

As part of the survey, the consultant identified nine proposed historic districts and 47 individual properties and sites that may be eligible for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Before a property is nominated to the registers, a determination of eligibility must be made by a state review board. A completed Preliminary Information Form for each of the nine districts has been filed with VDHR in Richmond to determine whether an application can be made for these districts to be listed.

The nine districts are: Appalachia Historic District, an area encompassing three residential neighborhoods; Big Stone Gap Historic District, centered around the Poplar Hill neighborhood; Blackwood Historic District, in the community west of Norton; Coeburn Historic District, containing a collection of residential, commercial, religious and transportation resources; Derby Historic District, in the community northwest of Appalachia; Norton Historic District, with a wide variety of residential and other structures; St. Paul Historic District, with a collection of residential, commercial and religious resources; Stonega Historic District, in the community north of Appalachia; and Wise Historic District, centered around the Wise County Courthouse and the Inn.

Among individual properties identified as potential register listings are:

Wycliffe Nash House, east of Wise	Glencoe Cemetery, Big Stone Gap
Bond/Lawson Log House, Bond Gap	Bondtown Cemetery, Coeburn
Ennis House, St. Paul	Railroad Tunnel, St. Paul
John K. Taggard House, Big Stone Gap	Holbrook Tunnel, Dwina
Ted Wentz House, Big Stone Gap	Bee Rock Tunnel, Appalachia
Dotson House, Wise	Inman Street Bridge
Hillman/ Banner House, Coeburn	<u>Sites</u>
George Esser House, Norton	Sugar Hill, St. Paul
Taylor House, East Stone Gap	Church Ruins, Big Stone Gap
Fraley House, Norton	<u>Threatened Properties</u>
Pelligrini Lustron House, Norton	Bartley Hollyfield House, Bold Camp
Hamm House, Carfax	Richmond House, Big Stone Gap
Blue Sulphur Hotel, St. Paul	Old Bull Run Church, Banner
Last company house, Toms Creek	Collins School, Roberson district
Appalachian Towers, Appalachia	Baker School, Roberson district
Virginia City Church	Andover School
Cherry Grove Church, Dry Fork	Stonega School
Imboden Methodist Church	Osaka Store
Roda Baptist Mission	Andover Store
Williams Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Big Stone Gap	Toms Creek Freight Station, Coeburn
Mt. Hermon Presbyterian Church, Big Stone Gap	Stonega Freight Depot
	Westmoreland Coal Co. Warehouse, Appalachia

Archaeological Resources

The assessment of Wise County's archaeological resources has documented a full range of sites, from 8,000-year-old Native American camp sites to historic iron mines abandoned in the early twentieth century. Although only 141 archaeological sites have been recorded so far, these sites reveal thousands of years of past land use. Of the 141 sites, 137 were already contained in Virginia Department of Historic Resources files, with four more identified during the assessment. Nearly 90 percent of the sites are from the prehistoric period, with rockshelter sites within Jefferson National Forest lands accounting for a majority of these. Documented historic period sites include log cabins in mountain hollows and the remains of a French nobleman's two-story house overlooking the Clinch River and St. Paul.

CHAPTER X

TRANSPORTATION

Topographic constraints and resultant costs associated with the construction of transportation facilities have played major roles in the county's development.

Highways. Two major U.S. highways, seven primary highways and numerous state secondary highways serve the county. U.S. 23, an Appalachian Corridor "B" Highway, is a major north-south artery connecting Columbus, Ohio with Asheville, North Carolina. U.S. Alternate 58 is an east-west highway that connects Norfolk, Virginia with Middlesboro, Kentucky. With the 1995 completion of the Norton bypass, U.S. 23 is completely four-laned through Wise County. U.S. 58A is four-laned from St. Paul to Norton, with the exception of the St. Paul bypass and the Coeburn bypass, a portion of which was completed in 1995.

Rail. The construction of railroads into Wise County provided the initial stimulus at the turn of the twentieth century for development and growth. Originally devoted primarily to the transportation of coal, the railroads remain a necessary ingredient for the vitality of the county's economy. Two major railroad corporations, Norfolk Southern Corporation and CSX Transportation, serve the county.

Air. Lonesome Pine Regional Airport, located on a 417-acre site four miles east of Wise, is "home base" for many business and personal aircraft, serving the general aviation needs of the area's public and corporate community.

The facility has a 5,400-foot long, 100-foot wide asphalt runway; 35-foot wide taxiway; 10,875 square yard apron; six T-hangars, three corporate hangars and a conventional hangar; 12,000 gallon storage for both Avgas and Jet-A fuel; a 4,000 square foot germinal building; and 32 automobile parking spaces. Airport terminal Nav aids include an airport beacon; AWOS III; CATF/UMICOM communications; VOR/DME; segmented circle and wind cone; SDF localizer; ODALS; REILS; VASI-4; and MIRL lighting for the runway and MIRL lighting for the taxiway and exits.

Public Transportation. Mountain Empire Transit, the transportation department of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., is the only public transit system serving Wise County and the LENOWISCO district. Utilizing a fleet of 35 vehicles (as of January 1995), MET provides ambulatory and wheelchair passengers both fixed-route and paratransit service, Medicaid and aging services, human service transportation and general public transit at nominal fares.

PART III

THE PLAN

Part III contains, within seven "elements," an examination of present and future needs as well as long-range goals and the short-term strategies to accomplish these goals.

CHAPTER XI

LAND USE ELEMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to outline the plan for land uses over the coming years. Much of the information set out in this section will be restated and/or expanded upon in following sections; this section described changes to the future land use map and reasons for those changes.

Before setting out a description of proposed future land uses, however, a brief description of the purpose of the future land use map, the various types of land use classifications and citizen comments is useful. The following future land use map descriptions define the future land use designations and assist in interpreting the intent of the *Comprehensive Plan*. These descriptions are to be used in conjunction with the future land use map when considering any development proposal affecting areas with the county. The land use map and *Comprehensive Plan* are intended to be guidelines for development decisions over the next five years. Unless there are compelling reasons to deviate from the map and *Plan*, they should be followed when making zoning and other development decisions. The land use map and *Plan* should be reviewed when there are significant new development proposals. Development proposals that are contrary to the *Plan* require serious consideration within the context of the *Plan's* provisions. Changes to the *Plan* should only be made if such changes conform to the *Plan's* established goals and objectives.

Land Use Classifications

Agricultural - Rural Residential (A-RR) -- County areas that are predominantly rural, containing farms, forests and scattered houses, where little or no public services exist and are not planned for the future. Primary uses in this classification include agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, open space, recreational and conservation activities, together with support and institutional uses that may require a spacious site and are compatible with the natural and rural surroundings.

Single-Family Residential (R-1) -- Areas suitable for low-density single family residential development where public sewer and water systems may or may not be available. Areas should be suitable to encourage new residential development in accordance with modern subdivision standards, to protect single-family residential areas from encroachment by potentially incompatible commercial land uses and higher-density development, and to maintain a low density of development to avoid undue burden on utilities and other public services.

General Residential (R-2) -- Areas appropriate for relatively high-density residential development with a variety of housing types and non-residential support uses, where water and sewer are available. These areas tend to be near county towns and the City of Norton.

Limited Business (B-1) -- Areas not directly accessible to primary highways and those areas near residential areas that may accommodate low intensity retail, personal service and office uses that are compatible with adjacent and nearby rural areas and residential uses, and that provide for the convenience and day-to-day needs of residents of nearby neighborhoods. Other suitable areas are those that can serve as a transition between residential areas and heavier business uses.

General Business (B-2) -- Areas that can accommodate a wide range of retail, wholesale, service and office uses, that cater to the traveling public and serve the county as a whole and are located along principal highways and in areas having direct access to principal highways, and that would not require routing of traffic through residential areas or on minor roads. Use of individual sites is allowed in order to promote business opportunities.

Light Industrial (M-1) -- Areas along or near primary highways that facilitate access and avoid industrial traffic impacts on minor roads. Light industrial uses generally involve minimal hazards and do not create significant amounts of smoke, noise, odor, dust or other potential nuisance.

Heavy Industrial (M-2) -- Areas not in close proximity to residential, business or other industrial areas. Heavy industrial uses may involve greater amounts of smoke, noise, odor or dust than typically associated with uses permitted in light industrial and business districts.

Conservation and Recreation Overlay (C-R) -- Areas of Wise County that are uniquely suited for conservation and recreation because of their natural features, association with the history of the area or potential to support development of recreational facilities that will serve the public welfare.

Lonesome Pine Airport Overlay (LPA) -- Area around Lonesome Pine Airport described in the Wise County Lonesome Pine Airport Zoning Ordinance adopted on May 12, 1966 and Map adopted September 30, 1965.

Flood Plain Overlay (F-P-O) -- Areas along county streams and rivers for which certain building and development restrictions apply.

Reservoir Watershed Overlay (R-W) (proposed) -- Areas covering all town and city reservoir watersheds.

Powell Valley Overlay (proposed)

Citizen Comment on Future Land Use

Input from the public regarding desired future land use in the county was obtained primarily through a community survey carried out in the spring of 1995. A compilation of this survey is contained as Appendix A.

Survey results showed most respondents (77 percent) wanting a separation of future residential development from other types of development. Of those opposed to such separation, however, only six percent advocated commercial development without restriction in all residential neighborhoods in the county's unincorporated portions. Most who opposed separating such uses (76 percent) wanted flexibility in allowing commercial development in some residential neighborhoods, depending on the type of commercial development proposed. Only 15 percent of the total respondents to the survey, however, favored this type of flexibility.

Regarding the location of commercial development in the unincorporated portions of the county, most respondents (62 percent) favored locating future development of this type in shopping centers or industrial parks. Slightly less than half thought such development should occur immediately outside town or city limits, on U.S. 23 and U.S. 58A. A minority (21 percent) favored locating future commercial development anywhere in the county.

Land uses that should be prohibited everywhere in the county, according to the respondents' written comments, were uses involving the dumping of outside wastes (cited by 180 of 460 respondents), strip mining (20 persons), forestry (20), low-income housing (7), prisons (7) and trailer parks (2). Twenty-five persons said there were no uses that should be prohibited everywhere in the county.

Many (128) people noted in their written comments the need to improve the appearance of the county, including cleaning it up, removing abandoned, dilapidated buildings and beautification. Next to the need for jobs, this was the most frequent comment concerning what could be done to make Wise County a better place to live.

Of the land use/zoning concerns mentioned in written comments, seven persons felt commercial and industrial uses should not be allowed in residential areas, while three thought low impact commercial uses could be allowed in or near residential areas. Examples of low impact uses given were craft co-op, country stores and offices. Individual respondents favored: flexibility in land use guidelines; the consideration of conditional zoning; commercial and residential development occurring together, thereby lessening crime and traffic problems; more sidewalks, bike and running paths to promote alternatives to automobile use; the ability of persons to do whatever they wished with their land within the law of nuisance; and a special emphasis on the use of land during the next five years and on the regulation of mobile home parks.

Significant majorities thought it very important for local government to protect historic structures, scenic areas, water supplies and open space and recreation areas; less than one percent thought it not important to protect these resources. Fifty-six percent of those responding also thought it very important to protect agricultural land, with two percent indicating that it is not important.

Future Land Use by Type

Residential. There is a definite need for residential development in Wise County, across the county geographically and across income levels. This need is hindered by several factors, the most notable being the lack of suitable privately owned land. Much of the land in the county has slopes typically considered unusable for residential development, rendering sewer extensions extremely expensive and

difficult to engineer. Additionally, much of the land in the county is owned by mineral resource companies, further reducing the amount of land open for development.

Finally, an apparent local bias in favor of single-family housing seems to limit construction of multi-family units, except for public housing. Furthermore, new high-density single-family housing is limited due to the shortage of undeveloped land with sewer and water available. These factors combine to severely limit new housing in the county. Thus, one goal of this planning effort is to identify areas that will be appropriate for new high-density residential development.

Potential expansion areas were initially identified by two conditions. First, water must already be provided to the area in question. Second, sewer must either be already extended to the area or planned for the relatively near future. These sites were then visited and examined for the actual potential of residential development (for example, the area's accessibility and the presence of adjacent uses that would make the site more or less attractive).

Eventually, five areas with potential for General Residential (R-2) classification were identified. Indicated on the corresponding land use map, these are:

1. Along Guest River Road above Esserville, up to and along Rock Switch Road toward Stephens.
2. From Hurricane Road along Yellow Creek toward both the Lonesome Pine Airport and Darden Drive.
3. Darden Drive from the end of the existing Single Family Residential (R-1) zone to the edge of the plateau.
4. In sections of Riverview along the old Norton-Coeburn road.
5. Along most of Rock Bar Road near Wise.

All these sites have water available and sewer at least proposed. All are relatively near towns and all are near existing residential areas. These areas should be considered for rezoning to a General Residential classification only as full public utilities are provided.

Commercial. The need for commercially developable land in the unincorporated portions of the county may not be as urgent as that for residential land, but for economic development to succeed, there must be room for commercial uses to develop. Further, there is a need to guide commercial growth into the county's urban corridors, where it will both flourish and be least harmful to other uses. Future sites for commercial uses along U.S. 23 and U.S. 58A thus need to be identified.

The criteria for commercial sites are similar to those for residential sites. The provision of water and sewer are, if anything, even more important than for residential developments. Proximity to the highways was, as mentioned above, a second criterion. Finally, for reasons of accessibility and visibility, proximity to one of the county's towns was an important point.

Based on these criteria, two potential sites were identified. Both have at least proposed sewer, the Tacoma site has water presently available, and both are located along a major highway and near a town. Both are enlarging smaller zones that currently exist in the same areas. These sites, shown on the land use map, are:

1. The eastern side of U.S. 23 south of the southern Pound exit. Recommended for future General Business (B-2) use.
2. The northern side of U.S. 58 A, west of Coeburn to Tacoma. Recommended for future General Business (B-2) use.

Industrial. Without even taking into consideration the decline of the coal mining industry, it is undeniable that diversification of the economy, and particularly of the industrial base, is a desirable goal. To that end, sites for industrial development are important to locate. But here a second set of concerns must be addressed. Unlike residential and commercial development, new industrial sites must be placed very carefully so as to minimize their impact on both the natural environment of the county and the quality of life for the county's residents. Thus it is desirable to consolidate such new development into fewer, larger sites such as industrial parks. To that end, the following recommendations are made:

First, that the current Blackwood heavy industrial (M-2) district be extended to total approximately 500 acres. The entire area between Bear Creek and the Pardee

road, between U.S. 23 Business and Canepatch Creek, is designated on the land use map as a future industrial area, and is ideal for such a use, being at the same time convenient to easy transportation out of the area and distant from other uses.

Second, that a wide variety of current heavy industrial zones across the county, which were placed there to cover mining-related uses, be eliminated and returned to A-RR. Most of these zones indicated on the existing land use map have no real potential for industrial development, being located away from easy highway access. The industrial zone designations are not needed, as the mining uses they cover are all allowed within an agricultural-rural residential (A-RR) zone. Combined, these two points would consolidate much of the M-2 classification and thus minimize its impact on the county. Exceptions to this recommendation are the current heavy industrial (M-2) sites at Andover and just outside the town limits of Appalachia, which do seem to have some potential as future industrial sites, and thus are recommended for rezoning to light industrial (M-1) rather than rezoning to A-RR. Other exceptions to this recommendation are several sites currently being considered by county officials as potential light industrial sites.

Among sites thus identified by the county for possible future development, one is now zoned heavy industrial (M-2) and one is already zoned M-1. These sites, identified on the future land use map and shown as existing and future light industrial zones, are:

Currently zoned M-2 and recommended to be rezoned to M-1:

1. Glamorgan coal property -- on the west side of U.S. 23 at the Glamorgan intersection.

Currently zoned M-1 and recommended to remain M-1:

2. Lonesome Pine Airport site -- south of the airport toward the Wise reservoir.¹

¹ Some concern has been expressed regarding the light industrial zone surrounding the airport. One of the main purposes of zoning is to attempt to limit conflicting land uses. It is thought by some that the light industrial zone at the airport thus poses a potential problem. The area around the airport is already developed as residential, with additional future potential. The light industrial zone at the airport does not have direct access to a primary highway, and any industrial traffic would have to be routed through residential neighborhoods. Serious consideration should be given to alternative uses for this property, such as recreational, offices, certain types of limited commercial uses, etc. Developing the area for recreational uses could complement and enhance the surrounding residential uses, the Town of Wise's recreational facilities now being constructed, and Clinch Valley College, and could minimize the problems posed by the site's surface mined land.

Currently zoned A-RR and shown on the future land use map as suitable for light industrial use; to be considered for rezoning when specific development proposals occur:

3. Glamorgan site -- along U.S. 23 and U.S. 23 Business north of Wise.
4. George's Fork site -- north side of State Route 83 west of the Dickenson County line.

It should be noted that some of these sites have at one time been considered as possible locations for one or more public or private prisons, facilities that could house several thousand inmates. County officials should carefully consider the impact these proposed prisons could have on the availability of industrial sites and public utilities for future industrial prospects; the availability of utilities, especially sewerage service, for future residential development; and public services and facilities before approving any of these proposed facilities. As noted elsewhere in this document, responses to a 1995 community survey indicated county residents were evenly divided regarding the desirability of prisons as an economic development component.

Watersheds. For the purposes of protection of the county's valuable surface water sources, it is recommended that watershed protection overlay areas be set up as detailed in a later section. These areas include:

1. Ben's Branch reservoir (Appalachia) -- east of Appalachia and south of U.S. 23 Business.
2. Big Cherry Lake (Big Stone Gap) -- between the Powell Valley and the Scott County line.
3. Tom's Creek reservoir (Coeburn) -- northeast of Coeburn, running east toward the Dickenson County line.
4. Norton upper and lower reservoirs (Norton) -- small area south of the Norton city limits (the rest of the watershed is inside the City).
5. North Fork of Pound River reservoir (Pound) -- large area west of Pound, north of Flat Gap, to the Kentucky state line.
6. Wise Reservoir (Wise) -- area north of Darden Drive north toward Lonesome

Pine Airport.

Other Protection Areas. At least two other areas -- the Yellow Creek gorge southeast of Wise and the Powell Valley -- should be considered for protection.

The Yellow Creek gorge has a similar, if less expansive, profile to the Guest River Gorge, already protected by a Recreation and Conservation District overlay. The gorge is of great scenic beauty and historic significance, with the current road being the site of an old railroad bed for Wise-Norton (via Ramsey) passenger and freight trains. This makes the gorge an ideal location for development of some type of small park or series of nature trails, bicycle and/or pedestrian paths, and thus it is shown on the future land use map as a conservation-recreation area. It is recommended that development of such use be explored with the Town of Wise.

An area facing even greater potential impact is Powell Valley, stretching nearly from Norton to Big Stone Gap. There is concern that Powell Valley be protected from land uses that would encroach upon or destroy the historic nature of the valley, including its agricultural and forest lands and other lands of significance for protection of surface and groundwater. An overlay district protecting these resources should be created for Powell Valley; the boundaries of such a district are outlined on the future land use map.

Historic Resources. Wise County has a wide range of architectural resources, including schools, churches, cemeteries, houses, company towns, commercial buildings and farms. Some of these resources are threatened through neglect, others have potential that is not being realized. Many could add to the county's effort to promote tourism in the area and to the county's quality of life.

The county, towns and City of Norton took an important first step toward recognizing, appreciating and protecting these resources through a 1994-95 architectural survey, the results of which could form the basis for protecting the county's historic resources. A possible next step is to seek to have more resources listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places and/or creating zoning overlay districts incorporating these resources.

Both courses of action can help facilitate access to funds that can improve the prospect of preserving these resources for present and future residents of the

county. For instance, the state has preservation grants available only to local governments with an architectural review board and preservation ordinances in place; tax credits are available to individuals and companies for renovations in certain cases if a property is listed on the National Register; state and federal preservation funds are available only if a property is listed on the Registers.

Another important step in protecting these resources is the development of an overall preservation plan for the county, prioritizing the resources identified in the survey and developing strategies to protect them. Public involvement in this process should be encouraged.

Archaeological Resources. Although the archaeological assessment conducted in 1995 reveals much about Wise County's past, it also uncovers important gaps in our knowledge that should be addressed in future studies.

None of the archaeological properties in the survey files are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or the Virginia Landmarks Registry. This, according to the assessment report, is due to a lack of nomination efforts rather than a lack of significant sites. The report adds that, with additional data gathering, several sites in the county could qualify for one or both registers.

Most recorded sites are in the one-third of the county drained by the Guest River, with a notable scarcity of recorded sites in the Pound River drainage area. Sites from the historic period are vastly under-represented with only 15 sites from that period, although the county contains numerous sites that should be recorded. All categories of historic sites should be identified, but priority should be on recording sites associated with the coal mining industry, which has no representative sites on the inventory. While coal mining is integral to the history of Wise County, continued mining, by its nature, is removing previous traces of earlier mining activities (as well as other historic sites of significance). The assessment report suggests ways such an inventory can be carried out, and it also suggests that it be combined with an oral history project to record memories of long-time residents of early twentieth-century Wise County.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

There is a need for suitable land for future residential, commercial and industrial development in locations having adequate public services and not adversely affecting adjacent properties.

Desired Future Condition

A pattern of land use and development that reinforces and improves the quality of life for citizens, and assists in achieving the goals of the *Comprehensive Plan* in promoting economic diversity, protecting the environment and providing housing, public facilities, transportation and recreation.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Areas of the county that are most suitable for future residential development should be identified and provided with public utilities in advance of development to encourage dense development patterns that conform with modern subdivision standards.
- Encourage the concentration of industrial uses in areas served by adequate utilities, railroad and/or highway facilities where there will be minimum impact on residential uses.
- Encourage commercial development to cluster in well-defined locations along primary highways where water and sewer service is available.
- Enforce zoning regulations to protect property values and preserve the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods.

Specific Physical Development Actions Recommended

- Efforts at recruitment of heavy industry should be centered around the Blackwood Industrial Park to the extent possible, with the park being expanded as funds allow.
- Consideration should be given to developing one or more industrial parks for small light industrial uses. Such parks could accommodate the needs of new businesses or existing businesses that need room to expand.

Existing Condition

Wise County has many historic resources, but at the present time there are few mechanisms in place to encourage the preservation of those resources.

Desired Future Condition

Wise County's historic resources are recognized and preserved through a variety of public and private initiatives.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should, in cooperation with the property owners in those communities, apply to have the Blackwood, Stonega and Derby historic districts listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.
- Wise County should develop a historic preservation overlay district as part of its zoning ordinance.
- Wise County should encourage, through a public awareness program, owners of those private historic properties identified in the survey as having a potential for listing, to apply to have the property listed on the state and national registers.
- Wise County should encourage, through all of its ordinances and county policies, the protection of historic resources.
- Wise County should develop a long-range historic preservation plan.

Existing Condition

Wise County's inventory of archaeological resources contains gaps in location and time; no archaeological properties in the county have been listed on state or national landmark registers; the county has no overall strategy for identifying and protecting such properties.

Desired Future Condition

Wise County has a complete inventory of archaeological resources and a plan for protecting those sites, including the use of volunteer stewardship.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should develop a Historic Preservation Plan that can be included as an element in future comprehensive plans.
- The county should support the expansion of the inventory of known archaeological sites, possibly working with local colleges and historical societies to achieve this goal.
- The county should encourage the use of volunteer stewardship to help protect sites, seeking information from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources on how to develop such a program.

CHAPTER XII

ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT

Present and Future Needs

Mineral and Forest Resources. Mineral resources have dominated the history and development of Wise County. While coal is the most abundant and economically significant of these resources, natural gas, limestone and sandstone are also present and provide an important contribution to mineral development.

A recent downturn in coal production can be construed as one indication that the factors of regulatory policies, liability potential, limitations of mining technology, safety concerns and economic considerations are starting to affect reserve potential. Based on a survey of Virginia's major producers, it is predicted that production will decrease 15 percent by 1998 and 25 percent by 2003.

Surface mining has declined since the late 1970s due to more stringent industry regulation and the depletion of coal seams mineable by surface mining techniques. In 1992, 35 percent of Wise County's coal production came from surface mining, down from 54 percent in 1975.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has assessed water quality in the county's various watersheds. While the Powell River subbasin draws moderately impaired biologic readings, likely the result of runoff from active or abandoned mining activities, other county basins are not reported to have this problem. Generally, surface water quality has been improving over the last decade.

The natural gas industry has only developed a small portion of the estimated reserves. Although recent downward trends in natural gas prices have slightly reduced the rate of drilling, additional development of the reserves will continue as prices increase and local use of the gas increases.

More than 70 percent of the county's land area is covered with forests that provide a renewable resource for the county. Forest lands not only produce wood but also protect watersheds, provide habitat for a diversity of game and non-game wildlife species and outdoor recreation when managed using Virginia's best management practices. The majority of forest land is in private ownership.

Watershed Preservation. Water resources are among the most precious resources a locality has to protect and use. It is clear that Wise County residents responding to a 1995 community survey recognized the importance of this resource; 95 percent of those responding to the survey thought it very important for local government to protect water supplies, four percent deemed it somewhat important and one percent thought it not important.

Threats to watershed areas come primarily from land uses. Among those land uses that can negatively affect water supply and quality are improper harvesting of forest land, high-density residential development, mining, manufacturing, garages and underground storage tanks, fertilized vegetation and other uses with impacts on vegetation or hydrology.

There are six town reservoirs in the county, containing over seven billion gallons of capacity. At the present time, at least one of the county's reservoir watersheds is vulnerable to land uses with potential negative impacts on the water supply. Concern has been raised regarding the immediate protection of the Wise reservoir watershed from adverse effects of near-term development. Further, problems for other watersheds could arise if current land ownership patterns change (i.e., if the towns or the USDA Forest Service are forced to sell off properties), or private owners change their current land uses (e.g., a current open space lot owner decides to commence intensive farming within the watershed).

The town and city watersheds, delineated on the future land use map included in this Plan, are described in Chapter VIII.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

The county's mineral resources are being developed while meeting government regulations to protect the safety of employees and the environment.

Desired Future Condition

To encourage continued mineral resources development through the proper use of methods that will be least destructive to the environment and through the conscientious enforcement of reclamation methods that will restore an environmental balance as soon as possible.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should continue to work with government agencies that regulate the development of mineral resources to assure continued enforcement of environmental protection and long-term beneficial reclamation.
- The county should continue to work with conservation groups and state and federal agencies to acquire and manage tracts of land that provide unique or special wildlife habitats or watershed protection.
- The county should designate unique scenic areas within the county where land and resource development should be reviewed to assure the area's unique qualities are maintained.

Existing Condition

Within all ownerships in the southern mountains of Virginia, the net annual growth of sawtimber exceeds harvest by 60 percent, as reported by the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station of the USDA Forest Service in 1992.

Desired Future Condition

The forest products industry utilizes the renewable wood resources within the county's forests on a sustainable basis and is a leader within the Commonwealth of Virginia in implementing best management practices to protect water quality and wildlife resources found within the forests.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should continue to work with the state and federal agencies that manage and oversee the development and protection of the county's forest resources to assure an increased implementation of the state best management practices.
- The county should continue to work with conservation groups and state and federal agencies to acquire and manage tracts of land that provide unique or special wildlife habitats or watershed protection.
- The county should continue to encourage landowners with forest lands to retain those lands in forest cover to assure a sustainable wood products industry.
- The county should continue to work with the industrial development agencies and existing wood products businesses with the county to develop value-added wood products businesses.
- The county should encourage a greater utilization of wood products from both public and private lands.

Existing Condition

At the present time, at least one of the county's town watersheds is vulnerable to land uses posing potential negative impact on those supplies; changing conditions could expose other of the town watersheds to similar threats.

Desired Future Condition

The preservation of all major water sources in Wise County, i.e., reservoirs and their watersheds, in the near as well as indefinite future.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- A series of Reservoir Watershed (RW) Overlay Districts should be established to cover all existing watershed areas in the county. These districts should allow only those uses that would not adversely affect water supplies.
- A special classification for real estate should be considered to allow those land owners who voluntarily agree to preserve land in a relatively unused condition to have their property assessed on the basis of use rather than fair market value. The General Assembly in 1971 passed a law enabling localities, by ordinance, to adopt special use valuation for agricultural, horticultural, forest and open space lands. Special use valuation could be applied to open space and forest land in Wise County as one method to help protect watersheds.

CHAPTER XIII

ECONOMY ELEMENT

Present and Future Needs

Wise County is undergoing fundamental changes in employment patterns that will profoundly affect the future development of the county. Basic sector mining jobs are being replaced by support sector jobs that require lower skills and provide lower wages. The important role that basic sector employment plays in fueling economic development has been discussed in Chapter VI. As basic sector employment continues to decline, Wise County's government leaders must decide what role county government will play in fostering future development.

During the early 1980s, the coal industry was such a strong economic engine that local government adopted a policy of standing on the sidelines and utilizing the increased coal severance taxes to expand services for citizens while keeping property taxes low. This hands-off attitude to economic development began to change during the recession of the '80s, when local leaders began to recognize that even after a recovery, mining employment would never reach its previous high levels. A county economic development director was hired, industrial parks were established and infrastructure investments were made to allow for the creation and expansion of manufacturing enterprises. Recognizing the importance of a regional approach to the problem, the General Assembly in created the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) in 1988 to provide funding and marketing to complement county economic development efforts.

These efforts have borne fruit, with the successful establishment of manufacturers such as Fournier Furniture, Buster Brown Apparel and Mullican Lumber. In at least one industrial location decision, the expansion of Bristol Compressors, Wise County lost in the competition to another locality offering more incentives. Such setbacks are to be expected as a normal experience in such a competitive process, and should not be viewed as evidence that Wise County cannot attract manufacturing facilities.

Without a strong focus for economic development efforts, there is a risk of county government's once again slipping into the role of spectator rather than active player. In the face of stiff competition from other localities in Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee, Wise County must clearly market its strengths to manufacturers and make investments in infrastructure and preparedness now that will allow the county to compete and win when manufacturing facility location decisions are made. It is not always politically popular to spend public money on investments in infrastructure when the payoff in new jobs may be years away, but Wise County's recent experience shows the long-term wisdom of this strategy. Failure to make these decisions will place Wise County behind more progressive localities in the race to participate in economic growth.

The three strategies typically included in the area of economic development are "traditional" industry recruitment, assistance to existing industries and cultivation of "home grown" businesses.

Along "traditional" lines, the county should continue to progressively develop and promote all viable industrial sites and to further pursue shell building initiatives.

But while the emphasis on basic sector employment should remain at the center of Wise County's economic development strategy, there must also be complementary strategies that will result in job creation, strategies that should not be neglected in a misguided effort to focus entirely on basic sector industrial recruitment. The goal of a diversified economy cannot be met unless a variety of economic development strategies are pursued.

With more than 19,000 economic development agencies competing for approximately 1,600 industry relocations each year, it is evident that Wise County cannot rely solely upon recruiting new industry to fuel its economy. By aiding in job retention, promotion and support of existing industry is an important facet of a community's economic well-being. Every effort should be made to strengthen and maintain existing industry within the county.

A crucial and often overlooked facet of economic development is small business growth and development from within a community. Wise County's government, in cooperation with LENOWISCO, the Small Business Development Center at

Mountain Empire Community College and other agencies, can play a positive role in encouraging local entrepreneurs to start or expand small businesses that will provide growth and jobs. Among the proven tools in this strategy are small business incubator facilities and micro-enterprise loan programs, which are anticipated to be examined more closely in Wise County and the surrounding area in the near future. Should such enterprises come to fruition, Wise County should offer its full support and participation.

The county should also consider creating at least one small-scale industrial park suitable for small businesses, including light manufacturing. These parks would be less expensive to create and would require less elaborate services than traditional parks. Wise County's industrial development office should actively recruit local entrepreneurs who have potential for business creation and assist them in locating needed assistance.

The county's two postsecondary institutions, Mountain Empire Community College and Clinch Valley College, should also be fully utilized as key components of long-term economic strategy for the region. Both have the opportunity to play roles in research and education, utilizing training, re-training and other components to provide a qualified workforce within the county and region. Additionally, the direct economic impact of these two schools should be noted as, together, they put nearly \$18 million into the local economy in 1994-95. Local leaders should recognize that helping these schools grow and prosper is an investment in a healthy economic future.

Another complementary strategy should be the development of targeted support sector industries such as tourism. Following national and statewide trends, an increased emphasis on the tourism industry represents a growing element of economic development in Wise County and southwestern Virginia as a whole.

While this area is one of the least visited in Virginia, there is a great deal of unmet tourism development potential. Although tourism-related jobs are generally lower paying, they are important jobs for young and unskilled workers and will help to provide diversity to the local economy. The only approach to tourism development likely to be successful is a regional approach, in cooperation with other

localities in southwest Virginia. Wise County's historic heritage and scenic beauty position it to take advantage of local and regional tourism initiatives, and the county should work closely with the Virginia Coalfield Regional Tourism Development Authority in developing successful tourism strategies.

Another economic development strategy that has received a great deal of recent attention is the prospect of emphasizing correctional facilities, both public and private, as a source of job creation. This coincides with the Commonwealth's strategy to embark on an ambitious prison construction program.

While the Red Onion prison near Pound and the Wallens Ridge site at Big Stone Gap will be state-operated facilities, with their workers being state employees, some of the other proposed facilities in Wise County have represented private development initiatives. Evidence suggests that the attractiveness of a state- or federally-operated facility lies in higher wages, better benefits and the likely higher degree of stability over the long haul when compared with private facilities. With the private prison industry still in its infancy, management and performance concerns in existing facilities raise legitimate questions concerning the role of private prisons as an appropriate development tool.

With two prisons already planned for Wise County, the county should exercise caution in encouraging further prison development, fully analyzing the availability of sufficient labor force and the impact of devoting valuable industrial sites and utility capacity to such an endeavor. A careful examination of actual social and economic costs and benefits of the two facilities would be beneficial to this process. In any event, the county should maintain open dialogue with its citizenry about this and all other economic development options.

Citizen Comment on Economic Development

Not surprisingly, a recurring primary concern noted by respondents to the 1995 community survey is the need for more jobs in Wise County. At the same time, 99 percent of respondents felt it important and 80 percent felt it very important that new industries locating in the county be environmentally compatible.

There was general support for encouraging most types of new economic development in the county. Education centers led the list with 91 percent of

respondents giving it high or moderate preference. More than 80 percent of respondents indicated a high or moderate preference for more construction, manufacturing, tourism, recreational facilities and health center development. A majority also supported increasing agriculture, forestry, retirement homes and mining, while just under half those responding gave an increase in prisons development high or moderate preference.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

Mining employment has declined as a percentage of total employment, with these higher paying basic sector jobs being replaced by lower paying support sector jobs.

Desired Future Condition

Manufacturing employment must be increased to provide higher paying jobs for Wise County's skilled workers.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Identification of several large tracts of land suitable for large industrial sites, while budgeting sufficient funds to maintain options on these properties so they can be marketed by the county's economic development department and the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority.
- Discussions with the coal industry to identify larger sites with relatively flat topography that might be available to the county for use as industrial sites.
- Development of a capital improvement plan that allows for the planning development of infrastructure with excess capacity sufficient to accommodate future industrial site development.
- The targeting and recruitment of wood products industries that can utilize the county's abundant forest reserves.
- Maintaining a dialogue with existing manufacturers in the county to see that their needs are being met, with county government supportive of a regular dialogue for resolving problems.
- Support of a strong local economic development organization, continuing to fund a full-time economic development director.
- Support of the regional economic development initiatives led by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority and LENOWISCO.
- Inclusion of representatives of Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College in its economic development efforts to secure access to these schools' expertise in planning an economic development strategy.

Existing Condition

Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College maintain an important economic presence in the county, with a combined total of approximately 300 full-time and 300-part-time employees and almost 4,000 full- and part-time students enrolled in 1994-95.

Desired Future Condition

Clinch Valley College attracts students from all over the United States and several foreign countries. Mountain Empire Community College has continued its historic growth pattern as it has changed to meet the needs of the people of Southwest Virginia.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Local leaders and economic development officials should continue to lend support to both institutions in their efforts to obtain funds for needed expansion and improvement.
- Local community leaders should continue to be advocates for both institutions.
- Wise County should continue to maintain a regular and ongoing dialogue with both institutions to see that their needs are being met.
- Wise County should endeavor to be an attractive location for both institutions by:
 - working with the towns and the City of Norton to improve the overall appearance of the county;
 - adopting policies to promote an adequate supply of suitable housing for employees and students;
 - increasing and improving recreational and cultural facilities;
 - encouraging the location of private businesses in the county that complement and enhance these schools.

Existing Condition

Wise County has the potential to develop more tourism-related businesses to provide jobs and economic growth, but is now one of the least-visited tourism destinations in the Commonwealth.

Desired Future Condition

Wise County's economy has a healthy tourism sector.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Support of the tourism development strategies developed by the Coalfield Tourism Development Authority and cooperation in their implementation.
- Development of a plan to make the county more visually attractive to tourists, including continuation, and expansion, of the effort to eliminate litter and trash from roadsides and public areas.
- Development of the necessary infrastructure to support tourism, including hotels, restaurants and recreational facilities.

Existing Condition

There is a need for Wise County to provide support for local entrepreneurs who can create businesses and provide jobs.

Desired Future Condition

Wise County's economy includes job creation through local entrepreneurial initiatives.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The creation of at least one small-scale industrial park suitable for small business creation by local entrepreneurs.
- Recruitment of local entrepreneurs with the potential for business creation and procurement of needed assistance.
- Support of regional small business incubator initiatives.

CHAPTER XIV

HOUSING ELEMENT

Present and Future Needs

Census data from 1990 indicate an overall housing shortage in Wise County, a revelation confirmed by responses to a 1994 housing questionnaire from those associated with housing interests in the county. Those responses revealed a shortage of low-, moderate- and upper-income single-family, owner-occupied housing. In addition, those responding cited a need for available and affordable lots upon which to build and for more subdivisions. Respondents also cited the need for more rental units, especially for newly arriving middle- and upper-income residents around the Town of Wise. As mentioned elsewhere in this document, there exists a need for more low-income rental housing unless methods are devised increasing the potential for more low-income families to own homes. Finally, according to Mountain Empire Older Citizens staff, assisted living housing units are needed for those citizens with means to pay for such housing. There are no such facilities in the county at the present time.

In addition to responses from those associated with housing interests, input regarding housing needs was solicited from the general public during focus group meetings and through questionnaires distributed county-wide.

Among the focus groups, the lack of affordable housing led the list of the county's negative features, with a wide range of issues mentioned in connection with the county's housing needs. Among these were the need for retirement villages, assisted living complexes and apartment complexes for middle-income working people; and the need to preserve existing housing, to encourage small housing development suitable to the terrain, to keep businesses from locating in residential areas, to enact and enforce ordinances on the care of property, to identify land that can be used for future housing, and to examine the banking industry's commitment to home financing in the county.

The questionnaire showed that only seven percent of those responding found affordable housing one of the county's primary assets. Fifteen percent found lack of

affordable housing to be one of the county's greatest negatives, and 22 percent indicated lack of suitable land for housing to be a primary negative feature of living in the county.

Obstacles to Solving Local Needs

Lack of available, suitable and affordable land is one of the primary obstacles to solving the county's housing needs. Land development costs, lack of credit availability and inadequate incomes also contribute to the housing problem.

In 1989, median family income in Wise County was \$23,007 and \$21,836 in Norton, compared to the statewide median of \$38,213. And although the median value of existing owner-occupied units in Wise County was only \$43,500 (compared to a statewide median of \$91,000), the cost of new conventional site built housing is prohibitive for many residents. It is not surprising, then, that most new housing in the county is provided by manufactured homes.

Presumably, low interest loans would help many Wise Countians enter the housing market or upgrade existing housing. These loans are hard to come by, however. While 1990 census data suggest that more than 90 percent of the existing owner-occupied homes in the county fall within the 1994 maximum sale price necessary to qualify for low interest loans from the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), and while well over 50 percent of Wise County families and individuals are below the maximum income guidelines, these loans are not readily available to county residents. VHDA, for instance, financed only 18 homes in the county from 1989 to 1994, and provided funds for the rehabilitation of only six. In the first eight months of 1994, FmHA financed ten homes and provided two loans for housing repairs.

VHDA cites the lack of participation by local lending institutions as a major obstacle to providing loans in Wise County, with no lending institutions in the county participating in the VHDA program as of 1994. Two other problems VHDA cites are the lack of sufficient septic systems and underground mining, stating that mining places the security of its loans at risk. In areas of the county where underground mining is prohibited by zoning ordinances, VHDA claims to have no problem financing properties.

FmHA representatives acknowledge their agency's many requirements prevent all but a few applicants from obtaining these loans, even though they qualify on the basis of income and credit history. Noted as major obstacles to providing loans in Wise County were the poor quality of a portion of the housing stock and lack of infrastructure. It was also noted that while new manufactured homes can be financed through FmHA, previously owned manufactured homes cannot. It was suggested that development of small subdivisions with roads, water and sewer service would help increase the number of properties qualifying for FmHA loans.

On the other hand, local realtors claim that "red tape" prevents many local residents from obtaining these loans from either agency.

Obviously, better participation in these programs would, by itself, not solve the housing problem in Wise County. It would, however, provide an avenue for home ownership for some county residents who could not otherwise afford to own a home. Equally as important, the issues raised by these agencies point to some fundamental problems that need to be addressed if the county's housing situation is to improve.

Conclusion

Meeting Wise County's present and future housing needs will require a concerted and coordinated effort by public officials and private individuals. Creative plans will be needed to overcome the problems associated with providing adequate, affordable and attractive housing in the county for all income levels.

The basic problem of lack of available, suitable land for housing could be mitigated through sound planning and public investment decisions. Credit availability for low- and moderate-income families and individuals could be enhanced by working with lending agencies to increase participation in available low interest loan programs and by targeting suitable land for public improvements. Existing neighborhoods and communities could be protected and improved through the use of all the tools available to the county, including land use ordinances and additional building code enforcement measures.

Adequate, affordable and suitable housing is critical to the economic vitality of the county and to a good quality of life for county residents. Unless plans and strategies are developed and implemented, however, it is likely that the housing problem will worsen rather than improve. One thing is clear. The county's housing problems will not be solved spontaneously.

At the present time, there is no position in county government and no private or public county agency or organization that is focused on the county's overall housing problem. A possible first step will be for the county to initiate the formation of a housing organization to examine this problem and devise strategies to correct deficiencies. The county could appoint members to serve in this organization who are knowledgeable of and involved in housing issues, e.g., in the banking, construction and real estate industries; the housing authorities; non-profit housing organizations; Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc; and county officials.

Initially, at least, the county should consider providing a coordinator and office space for the organization. The Board of Supervisors should also consider creating a position for a county planner who could act as coordinator as well as perform other planning functions for the county.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

An overall shortage of housing for all income levels, with most new housing in the county comprised of manufactured housing.

Desired Future Condition

An adequate supply and variety of good quality housing available for all income levels.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Create a county-wide housing board, composed of persons knowledgeable of various aspects of housing in Wise County, to examine the county's overall housing problem and devise strategies to address deficiencies. The county government should take the lead in forming such an organization by:
 - 1) Appointing members from local government; the real estate, construction and banking industries; housing authorities; non-profit housing groups; and Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. to such a board; and
 - 2) Providing a coordinator and office space.
- Encourage the preservation and maintenance of existing residential structures through adoption and enforcement of Volume II of the Virginia Statewide Building Code and the Fire Prevention Code.
- Provide incentives for the rehabilitation of existing deteriorating housing stock.
- Increase home ownership opportunities for all income levels through the provision of utilities and roads in areas designated most suitable for residential development.
- Explore alternative methods of housing construction and delivery.

Existing Condition

A shortage of suitable land for new housing of all types.

Desired Future Condition

Ample available land with few constraints to development at a reasonable cost in suitable locations to serve present and future housing needs.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Develop a county-wide land assessment and infrastructure plan for future housing development, identifying land most suitable for housing development and establishing a priority list for providing infrastructure.
- Seek to maintain and improve existing communities where water, sewer and roads are now available, or can reasonably be expected to be made available in the future, by using all county ordinances and policies.
- Encourage the development of attractive subdivisions with adequate infrastructure by reviewing the county subdivision ordinance and recommending amendments to close loopholes, while at the same time examining ways to make development of subdivisions with adequate public services more feasible for developers.
- Strictly enforce the subdivision ordinance by working with the circuit court clerk to ascertain that all subdivisions are approved by the planning commission before they are recorded.

Existing Condition

Under-utilization of federal and state low-interest housing programs for new and existing housing for low- and moderate-income families and individuals, and lack of private financing for these persons.

Desired Future Condition

Low-interest loans available for low- and moderate-income families and individuals for new and existing housing.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Consider addressing the problem of potential subsidence associated with deep mining by limiting such activity in those areas already developed with water

and/or sewer provided.

- Encourage local banks to participate in low-interest loan programs.
- Determine to what extent local banks are complying with the federal Community Reinvestment Act, which requires that banks have some portion of their portfolios invested in their host communities.

Existing Condition

Pockets of housing blight within some communities in the county.

Desired Future Condition

Sound residential communities throughout the county with concerned, involved citizens living in an attractive, healthy environment adequately supplied with public services and facilities.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Develop a county-wide community assessment and revitalization plan for the unincorporated areas of the county.
- Develop innovative community and housing improvement programs that include both public and private resources. Design such programs to supplement Community Development Block Grant funds and other federal, state or locally funded programs.
- Eliminate abandoned, dilapidated and substandard housing throughout the county through aggressive code enforcement and continuing use of grant funds to implement redevelopment/rehabilitation programs, using care not to remove houses or structures of historical or architectural significance.
- Limit incompatible land uses detrimental to existing communities.
- Encourage the establishment of community improvement organizations and assist such groups with information and public service programs.
- Continue and expand clean-up efforts throughout the county.

Existing Condition

No assisted living housing complexes for older residents with means to pay for such housing. Older residents who are unable to continue to care for a home, yet do not need to be in a nursing home, must currently relocate out of the county if they desire assisted living housing.

Desired Future Condition

At least one assisted living complex located in Wise County.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The county economic development office should explore individual or corporate interest in developing assisted living complexes through county, regional and state economic development contacts.
- The county economic development office should work with Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. to develop feasibility studies and market the concept to developers.

CHAPTER XV
PUBLIC UTILITIES ELEMENT

Present and Future Needs

Water Service. The development of a water supply for a single housing unit can be prohibitively costly, a factor that has undoubtedly contributed to the high number of housing units in the county without complete plumbing facilities (see Chapter VII). The provision of public water to those areas presently without such a supply can provide individual homeowners an opportunity to upgrade their dwelling units.

Future housing growth and development will also hinge in large measure on the availability of public water. Population growth requires housing, and housing growth usually requires water service. For housing of an acceptable standard to be made available to accommodate present and future housing needs, public water supplies must be made available.

Sewerage Service. As discussed in Chapter III, very little of Wise County is suitable for wastewater disposal using septic tanks. Health hazards render pit privies and direct stream discharge unacceptable methods of wastewater disposal, especially in densely settled areas. Public sewage collection services are thus needed in the county's urban and built-up areas.

As noted in Chapter VII, in 1990 more than four percent of the county's housing units lacked complete plumbing facilities. For this situation to be improved, given the general unsuitability of the county's soils for septic tank usage, public sewage collection services must be made available.

Only limited additional development can safely take place in the county unless public sewerage services are extended to future growth areas. These extensions should be made prior to residential development, thus encouraging a more economical, dense settlement pattern.

Plate 9 shows those areas of the county that should be considered for future public sewage collection services.

Industrial/Commercial Utility Needs. Very little industrial and economic development can occur without reliable water supply and wastewater disposal. The provision of water and sewerage service will, therefore, also play a major role in the future economic development of the county.

While many of the county's present and potential industrial sites are located outside the incorporated areas of the county, existing water and sewerage service is provided through a direct extension of municipal lines or through the Wise County Public Service Authority (PSA). Every effort should be made to continue cooperative efforts among these entities in matters concerning the county's economic development.

The extension of public utilities to potential industrial sites not presently fully served will increase the county's opportunities to attract new industries or to accommodate the expansion of present industries, as will the expansion, where possible, of current water and wastewater plant capacities.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

Many urban and built-up areas of the county are not served by public water. These areas can be identified by comparing existing water service areas as shown on Plate 8 with existing urban and built-up areas shown on Plates 6 and 7.

Desired Future Condition

Existing urban and built-up areas presently without a public water supply should be provided with such service, as should those areas most suitable for future urban and built-up land uses, also reflected on Plate 6. This proposed service is shown on Plate 8 as future water supply service areas.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The Wise County PSA and, where applicable, individual localities should develop long-range capital improvement plans to serve those urban and built-up areas presently without public water.
- Wise County should vigorously pursue the completion of a comprehensive water and wastewater study, through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's 604(b) program or other means.

Existing Condition

Many areas of the county presently served by public water are unlikely to receive sewerage service by the year 2020, but growth is presently occurring because water is available.

Desired Future Condition

Areas of the county that are unlikely to receive sewerage service are developed only to the extent that septic systems can be expected to support those uses.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County's land use ordinances, including the zoning and subdivision ordinances, should discourage urban-type development in areas unlikely to receive sewerage service.

Existing Condition

Some potential industrial sites within the county do not currently have water and sewerage service.

Desired Future Condition

Wise County's most desirable and marketable industrial sites are fully served with adequate water supplies and sewerage service.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- The county should identify and obtain options on the most desirable industrial sites in the county and encourage the Wise County Public Service Authority or, where applicable, individual localities to develop a capital improvement plan that would allow for development of water and sewer service as options on these sites are exercised.
- Wise County should vigorously pursue the completion of a comprehensive water and wastewater study, through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's 604(b) program or other means.

CHAPTER XVI

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES ELEMENT

Community facilities have traditionally been constructed to serve existing populations. During periods of growth, these facilities may quickly become inadequate, causing a decline in a community's quality of life. The time required for the planning and construction of new or expanded facilities may cause a continued decline in the quality of life after a need has been identified. While, with the exception of water and sewer service, the provision of community facilities cannot, in most cases, be expected to be based upon stimulating or deterring growth in particular areas, efforts should be made to anticipate and provide for future needs.

Present and Future Needs

Based on the results of a 1995 questionnaire, Wise County residents are generally satisfied with the level of most community facilities and services in the county. The big exception is recreational facilities.

Recreational facilities were considered "good" or "excellent" by only 16 percent of those responding to the survey, while cultural events were rated good or excellent by only 24 percent. By contrast, Wise County library facilities received a good or excellent rating from 76 percent of respondents.

When asked to rate the quality of services in their respective communities, respondents gave "good" or "excellent" ratings to various services in the percentages shown below:

<u>Service</u>	<u>Percent of respondents giving "good" or "excellent" rating</u>
Rescue Squads	80 %
Schools	75 %
Fire Protection	65 %
Water Service	61 %
Police Protection	55 %
Sewer Service	50 %

Other responses to the survey reinforce the impression of general dissatisfaction with the level of recreation services and facilities. Sixty percent said lack of recreational facilities was one of the three things least liked about living in Wise County. A large portion of the written comments concerning needed changes in the county concerned the need for more and better recreational facilities.

With careful planning, addressing the need for more and better recreational facilities for county residents could also complement local tourism initiatives and efforts to attract retirees to live in Wise County.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

A lack of desired recreation and cultural facilities and events for county residents.

Desired Future Condition

A range of recreational and cultural facilities and activities that are appropriate in number, size and location to accommodate the needs of all county residents.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Initiate the creation of a multi-jurisdictional recreation task force, or alternatively, encourage the Wise County Recreational Authority to work with the Lonesome Pine Office on Youth in developing a comprehensive recreational program for the county's youth and adult populations.
- Conduct a recreational needs assessment to determine what type of facilities and events are needed and desired by county residents.
- Develop a current inventory of recreational and cultural opportunities available to the public.
- Develop a long range master plan for building, improving and maintaining recreational facilities in the county.
- Consider the need to hire a recreational coordinator for the county, on either a part-time or full-time basis.

The County should continue to work with the Wise County School district in the review of the Virginia Department of Education study of high school and middle school facilities.

If school consolidations are implemented, excess facilities should be considered for business development.

The County should continue to work with both Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College in the implementation of their master plans.

The County should continue to work with the local hospitals, clinics and Health Department in providing specialized medical services in the local area.

The County should continue to support the cooperative efforts of local fire and rescue units to optimize fire protection and emergency medical response services.

The Wise County Public Recreation Facilities Authority should work closely with the Coalfield Regional Tourism Authority in the promotion of the recreational resources within the county.

CHAPTER XVII
TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

Future Transportation Facilities

For purposes of explanation, future public sector transportation improvements in Wise County can be divided into four major categories: primary highways, secondary highways (including local coal haul roads), urban systems and airports. It is easy to develop a "wish list" of transportation improvements while ignoring funding, cost justification or actual need. The following planned transportation improvements, therefore, are compiled from the Virginia Department of Transportation 1997-98 "Six-Year Plan" for Interstate, Primary and Urban Systems and can thus realistically be expected to be implemented within the planning period.

Primary Highways. Improvement projects planned under the Primary System classification are:

U.S. 23	Reconstruction at Kentucky state line (0.3 miles) Construction under way
U.S. 23 Bus	Appalachia downtown sidewalks Construction 1996
U.S. 58A	Coeburn Bypass (1.7 miles) - Phase I (west of Coeburn to Rt. 72) Construction completed 1995
U.S. 58A	Coeburn Bypass (2.5 miles) - Phase II (east of Rt. 72 to east of Little Tom Tunnel) 2 lane construction completed 1997 Phase III - widen to 4 lanes - Construction 1999
U.S. 58	St. Paul Bypass Construction 1996-1998
Rt. 361	Red Onion Correctional Site Access Road (1.8 miles) Construction 1996-1998
Coalfield Expressway Connector Road	Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise Counties Preliminary engineering 1995-96 Ramsey / Clinch Valley College Preliminary engineering 2000
Rt. 83	Red Onion Mountain - Climbing lane Construction 2001
Rt. 83	Pound High School turn lanes Construction 1999
Rt. 83	Intersection with U.S. 23 - lane improvements and signalization Construction 2001

U.S. 58A corridor improvement projects with an impact on Wise County are:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| U.S. 58A | East of Rt. 620 near Olinger to Wise County line (3.5 miles)
Construction 1997-99 |
| U.S. 58A | Lee County line to west end Big Stone Gap Bypass (1.3 miles)
Construction 1997-99 |
| U.S. 58 | Big Stone Gap Bypass (3.1 miles)
Preliminary engineering 1995-99 |

Secondary Highways. Allocations of state funds used for improvements to secondary highways are made through the cooperative effort of the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Wise County Board of Supervisors. Needed improvements to specific secondary roads are too numerous to be included in this plan. Reference should be made to the current "Six Year Plan" for planned secondary road improvements.

Coal Haul Roads. One half of the receipts under the coal and gas severance tax program go into a special coal haul road fund, which in turn finances needed improvements on primary and secondary roads. A four-person committee -- one member from the Wise County Board of Supervisors, two representatives from the local coal and gas industries and the Virginia Department of Transportation's resident engineer for Wise County -- makes all recommendations for expenditures.

Urban Systems. All road maintenance in Wise County and the towns therein is the responsibility of the Virginia Department of Transportation, with the exception of towns with a population of 3,500 or more. At the present time, this includes the Towns of Big Stone Gap and Wise and the City of Norton.

There are presently five major capital improvement projects planned under the Urban System classification. They are:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Big Stone Gap | Short Street bridge replacement
Construction under way |
| Big Stone Gap | Gilley Avenue/Dogwood Road intersection improvements/ signalization
Construction 1997-98 |
| Big Stone Gap | Fourth and Second Avenues intersection improvements at Norfolk
Southern railroad crossing
Construction 1998 |
| Norton | Second Street bridge and approaches
Construction 1998 |

Wise	Lake Street extension to Vanover Avenue - feasibility study Preliminary engineering 1995-97
Wise	U.S. 23 Business - from Rt. 757 to existing 4 lane - additional turn lane Construction 2000

The following projects are presently included under the Transportation Enhancement Program:

Wise County	Guest River Gorge Construction under way
LENOWISCO District	Rt. 58 Talking Highway (Va. Museum of Natural History) Construction 1995

Lonesome Pine Airport. As noted previously, Lonesome Pine Airport has undergone expansion in recent years. Future improvements will hinge on need. The development of aviation activity forecasts is difficult since long-term growth will be highly influenced by the stability of the region's economy.

Other Transportation Concerns. Public transportation in the county is extremely limited at the present time. With an aging population, and some interest in trying to attract retirees to Wise County, exploration of all public transportation options should be encouraged. Mountain Empire Transit's future plans are to continue service provision at levels consistent with funding and demand.

Additionally, facilities for pedestrian and bicycle traffic should be investigated for recreational purposes as well as alternative transportation.

ACTION PLAN

Existing Condition

There remain numerous obstacles hindering optimum transportation movement in and through Wise County, as well as access to and egress from the county.

Desired Future Condition

Transportation infrastructure, allowing vehicular movement within the county and access to and from the county, has reached optimum levels.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Wise County should support and strongly encourage the completion of various projects, including:
 - Fourth loop of U.S. 23 and U.S. 58A interchange in City of Norton.
 - Construction of U.S. 58A bypass of Big Stone Gap.
 - Construction of four-lane U.S. 58A from Big Stone Gap west to Lee County line.
 - Widening of selected portions of U.S. 23.
 - Construction of I-26 along U.S. 23 corridor.
 - Maintain and expand Lonesome Pine Airport and services to meet area demands.
 - Construction of Coalfield Expressway.
 - Coordinate land use / zoning plans for U.S. 23 and 58A corridors with VDOT plans for access along these corridors.
 - Improvements to Route 160.
 - Improvements to Route 72 between George's Fork and Ft. Blackmore.

Existing Condition

The availability of public transportation to county residents is limited.

Desired Future Condition

Public transportation is available to all who need it.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Support the development of public transit by encouraging the Commonwealth of Virginia Transportation Board to revise the highway funding formula to increase the percentage of funds earmarked for public transit.
- Work with Mountain Empire Transit to study and implement expansion of its service as needed.
- Encourage VDOT to establish more park-and-ride facilities in cooperation with Mountain Empire Transit.

Existing Condition

The county's present transportation network does not offer many alternatives to private automobiles.

Desired Future Condition

A transportation network is in place offering alternative modes of transportation through bikeway and pedestrian facilities.

Strategies to Achieve Desired Condition

- Identify areas suitable for development of pedestrian and bikeways, including those that might be located in park settings as well as those that would provide safe interconnections of neighborhoods and communities.
- Work with VDOT to seek to have bikeways constructed whenever possible, as part of regularly scheduled roadway widening and improvement projects.
- Seek federal, state and local funding for priority projects.

PART IV

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

*Part IV addresses the legal status of the Plan
and the various policy and administrative functions
related to its implementation.*

CHAPTER XVIII
PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* serves as a foundation for addressing local problems, future needs and demands of growth. The *Plan* offers an opportunity to the county's leaders to apply appropriate controls and direct both public and private investments in a logical manner to achieve short range objectives and long range goals.

The following sections address the legal status of the *Plan* and various policy and administrative functions related to its implementation, all necessary to promote and efficient application of the *Plan's* provisions.

Plan Adoption

The following provision taken from Title 15.1 Chapter 11, Article 4 of the *Code of Virginia*, 1950 (as amended through 1989) outlines the general procedures to be following by Wise County in adopting a comprehensive plan.

15.1-448 - Notice and hearing on plan; recommendation by local commission to governing body. Prior to the recommendation of a comprehensive plan or any part thereof, the local commission shall give notice and hold a public hearing on the plan. After such public hearing has been held the commission may approve, amend and approve, or disapprove the plan, after as required by 15.1-431. Upon approval of the plan, the commission shall be resolution recommend the plan to the governing body.

15.1-449 - Copy to be certified to governing body. Upon recommendation of the comprehensive plan or a part thereof by the local commission, a copy thereof shall be certified to the governing body.

15.1-450 - Adoption or disapproval of plan by governing body. After certification of the plan or part thereof, the governing body after a public hearing with notice as required shall proceed to a consideration of the plan or part thereof and shall approve and adopt, amend and adopt, or disapprove the same within ninety days after date of adoption of such resolution.

15.1-451 - Return of plan to commission; resubmission. If such governing body disapproves the plan, then it shall be returned to the local commission for its

reconsideration, with a written statement of the reasons for its disapproval. The commission shall have sixty days in which to reconsider the plan and resubmit it, with any changes, to the governing body.

15.1-452 - Adoption of parts of the plan. As the work of preparing the comprehensive plan progresses, the local commission may, from time to time, recommend, and the governing body approve and adopt, parts thereof; any such part shall cover one or more major sections or divisions of the county or one or more functional matters.

Codes and Ordinances

The *Wise County Comprehensive Plan*, in order to have any noticeable effect on future conditions, must be backed by and in agreement with county ordinances, specifically the zoning and subdivision ordinances and the county's official zoning map. The following provisions taken from Title 15.1 Chapter 11, *Code of Virginia*, discuss the right of the County to pursue these ordinances.

15.1-465 - Counties to adopt ordinances regulating subdivision and development of land. The governing body of any county shall adopt an ordinance to assure the orderly subdivision of land and its development.

15.1-486 - Zoning ordinances generally; jurisdiction of counties. The governing body of any municipality may, by ordinance, classify the territory under its jurisdiction or any substantial portion thereof into districts of such number, shape and size as it may deem best suited to carry out the purposes of this article, and in each district it may regulate, restrict, permit, prohibit and determine the following:

- (a) The use of land, buildings, structures and other premises for agricultural business, industrial, residential, flood plain and other specific uses;
- (b) The size, height, area, bulk, location, erection, construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair, maintenance, razing or removal of structures;
- (c) The areas and dimensions of land, water and air space to be occupied by buildings, structures and uses, and of courts, yards and other open spaces to be left unoccupied by uses and structures, including variations in the sizes of lots based on whether a public or community water supply or sewer system is available and used;
- (d) The excavation or mining of soil or other natural resources.

For the purpose of zoning, the governing body of a county shall have

jurisdiction over the unincorporated area of the county.

The *Wise County Comprehensive Plan* must be used as the reference by which zoning requests, development proposals and the zoning and subdivision regulations are reviewed for approval or disapproval. Zoning and subdivision regulations are the tools intended to accomplish the *Plan's* objectives.

Planning Commission Staff

Although planning assistance is presently provided to Wise County by the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission, a county of more than 40,000 persons requires the services of an in-house planning staff, both to administer daily planning functions and to produce the *Comprehensive Plan*, a task currently undertaken by Planning Commission members and additional citizen volunteers.

It is recommended that a County Planner be hired in the near future. Special needs of the local Planning Commission warranting the services of such a position include the following:

1. Maintenance of the *Comprehensive Plan*. Unforeseen changes in development trends, population growth or effects of economic changes resulting from new industrial commercial development, annexation or consolidation would all have a major impact on long range community planning that would need to be reflected in the *Comprehensive Plan*.
2. Expansion of major elements of the *Comprehensive Plan*. The need for localized studies, detailed housing needs analysis and economic development studies may evolve from the recommendations contained in the *Comprehensive Plan*. Such special studies should be used to expand on plan generalities and be treated as amendments to the adopted *Plan*.
3. Review and administration of housing, building, zoning and subdivision regulations and development proposals affecting provisions of the *Comprehensive Plan*.
4. Assistance in determining the most appropriate State and Federal assistance programs through which Wise County may participate to aid in implementing proposed community improvements.
5. Promotion of local citizen involvement in planning by conducting public education programs on the *Comprehensive Plan* and related planning processes.

6. Development of a county-wide Geographic Information System (GIS) that would facilitate and increase the efficiency of the above planning staff functions. It must be noted, however, that such a system must aid a planning staff, not attempt to act as one in and of itself.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Local planning in Wise County requires coordination with the member towns; other adjacent jurisdictions; other public institutions (such as Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College); and regional, state and federal development proposals and plans. Without coordination among these jurisdictions, the danger of planning efforts being duplicated or conflicting will result in ineffective programs and unnecessarily high development costs. The LENOWISCO Planning District Commission is the agency capable of providing regional coordination and review of related plans.

Coordination of Plan with Decisions on Local Public Facilities

An adopted Capital Improvement Program provides a mechanism for the local governing body to schedule public improvements in accordance with the plan over both a five-year period and on an annual basis.

Section 15.1 Chapter 11 of the *Code of Virginia* enables the production of a capital improvement program by a local commission, at the request of the governing body.

15.1-464 - Local commissions to prepare and submit annually capital improvement programs to governing body or official charged with preparation of budget. A local commission may, and at the direction of the governing body shall, prepare and revise annually a capital improvement program based on the comprehensive plan of the county for a period not to exceed the ensuing five years. The commission shall submit the same annually to the governing body, or to the chief administrative office or other official charged with preparation of the budget for the county, at such time as it or he shall direct. Such capital improvement program shall include the commission's recommendations, and estimates of costs of such facilities and the means of financing them, to be undertaken in the ensuing fiscal year and in a period not to exceed the next four

years, as the basis of the capital budget for the county. In the preparation of its capital budget recommendations, the commission shall consult with the chief administrative officer or other executive head of the government of the county, the heads of departments and interested citizens and organizations and shall hold such public hearings as necessary unless otherwise required.

Under such an arrangement, a list of needed improvements is developed and prioritized, and costs are estimated according to the best information available. With the forecast of revenue and expenditures and the estimate of cash requirements in hand, it becomes possible to anticipate financial problems, investigate means of financing them, and postpone as necessary the execution of less urgent projects. As each year of the program is completed, an additional year is projected to maintain a five-year plan for the future.

Public Understanding and Support

Wise County should develop a public awareness program to inform local citizenry, including local commission members, on local planning efforts and issues. The intent of such a program is to solicit citizen participation in making planning decisions and to promote public support for existing and future community improvement efforts. A classroom-type program could be offered to adult and student groups through Clinch Valley College and/or Mountain Empire Community College or through a series of lectures for citizen advisory groups, civic organizations and other interested individuals.

Additional measures that can be promoted by the County to increase public awareness of local planning include the following:

1. Development of a brochure or graphic foldout depicting the Comprehensive Land Use and Transportation Plan on one side and executive summary of major plan elements on the reverse.
2. Exhibits and displays of important plan elements place in the County Courthouse, the assorted Town Halls, local bank lobbies, the libraries, Clinch Valley College and Mountain Empire Community College, public schools, major employers and other like locations.
3. Newspaper coverage of the plan adoption process; highlights of land use and special zoning issues; in-depth series of articles on land use problems and opportunities in Wise County; and series of interviews with individuals in responsible positions in local and regional governmental agencies, business and industry who influence future land use decisions.