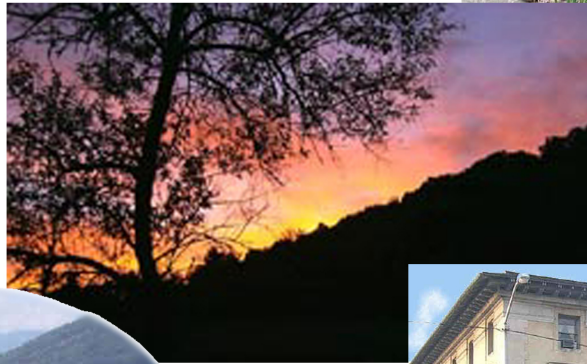


2020 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia

Prepared September 2004



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks is extended to the citizens of Big Stone Gap and interested organizations for their participation in the preparation of this Plan. Their involvement in public forums and their suggestions have helped guide the direction of this document. It is the hope of local officials and staff that the Plan represents the wishes of Big Stone Gap residents and businesses.

BIG STONE GAP TOWN COUNCIL (PREVIOUS)

William Cole, Mayor
Michael B. Mason, Vice Mayor
Angela Davidson-Collingsworth
William J. Hendrick
Edward R. Hutchinson, Sr.
Barbara Orndorff
Everett A. Sadler, Jr.

BIG STONE GAP TOWN COUNCIL (CURRENT)

William Cole, Mayor
Harold R. Lester, Vice Mayor
Michael B. Mason
Edward D. Giles
Edward R. Hutchinson, Sr.
Barbara Orndorff
C. Leonard Rogers

George R. Polly, Town Manager
Joyce M. Page, Town Clerk
William E. Bradshaw, Town Attorney

BIG STONE GAP PLANNING COMMISSION

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James K. Gilley
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Barbara Orndorff, Council Representative
Charles Miller, Director of Planning and Development
Wanda Sorah, Administrative Secretary

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY

K.W. Poore and Associates, Inc.
Community Development Consultants
and
Lane Engineering, Inc.

This Plan was adopted by Town Council following a public hearing on November 9, 2004

TOWN OF BIG STONE GAP MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Big Stone Gap is to promote and maintain our quality of living by providing quality services and facilities to and for its citizens, businesses, institutions, and visitors.

Our Town is a mixture of Southern culture and Appalachian heritage preserving our past and striving to develop our future with all available technology. This is evidenced by our museums and historical sites, Virginia's outdoor drama, "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," parks and recreation, quality of public education, the community college, and advancing use of technology in our commercial and industrial uses.

This mission shall be accomplished with respect, competency, and compassion toward everyone. Citizens and visitors are invited to become part of our Town's mission.

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INTRODUCTION

The Town of Big Stone Gap faces numerous challenges similar to many smaller localities throughout the State of Virginia. A changing economic role in the region, transportation issues, downtown revitalization, an expanding need for social services, and shifts in the development patterns within and outside the community continue to demand attention from local officials and the Town's citizens. The Comprehensive Plan is a document that identifies and addresses these issues and establishes a "Vision" for the future direction of the Town.

Virginia planning legislation under Chapter 15.2, Code of Virginia, requires the Town Planning Commission to update the Comprehensive Plan every five years providing short and long-range strategies and specific recommendations for general growth and development. The plan includes an analysis of existing conditions and problems, growth trends, future land use, transportation, public facility requirements and a plan of action to accomplish specific objectives that address future needs of the community.

The Planning Commission is required to conduct public hearings and recommend the comprehensive plan, or parts thereof, to the Town Council. The Council then considers the plan and possible amendments at public hearings and adopts the plan. In developing this Plan, the Town has solicited citizen participation throughout the planning process through public forums, meetings and community surveys. These afforded specific comments on priority issues, strategies and proposed plans of action that served as a basis for plan recommendations.

Code of Virginia 1950, Title 15.2 generally defines the fundamental elements of the Comprehensive Plan:

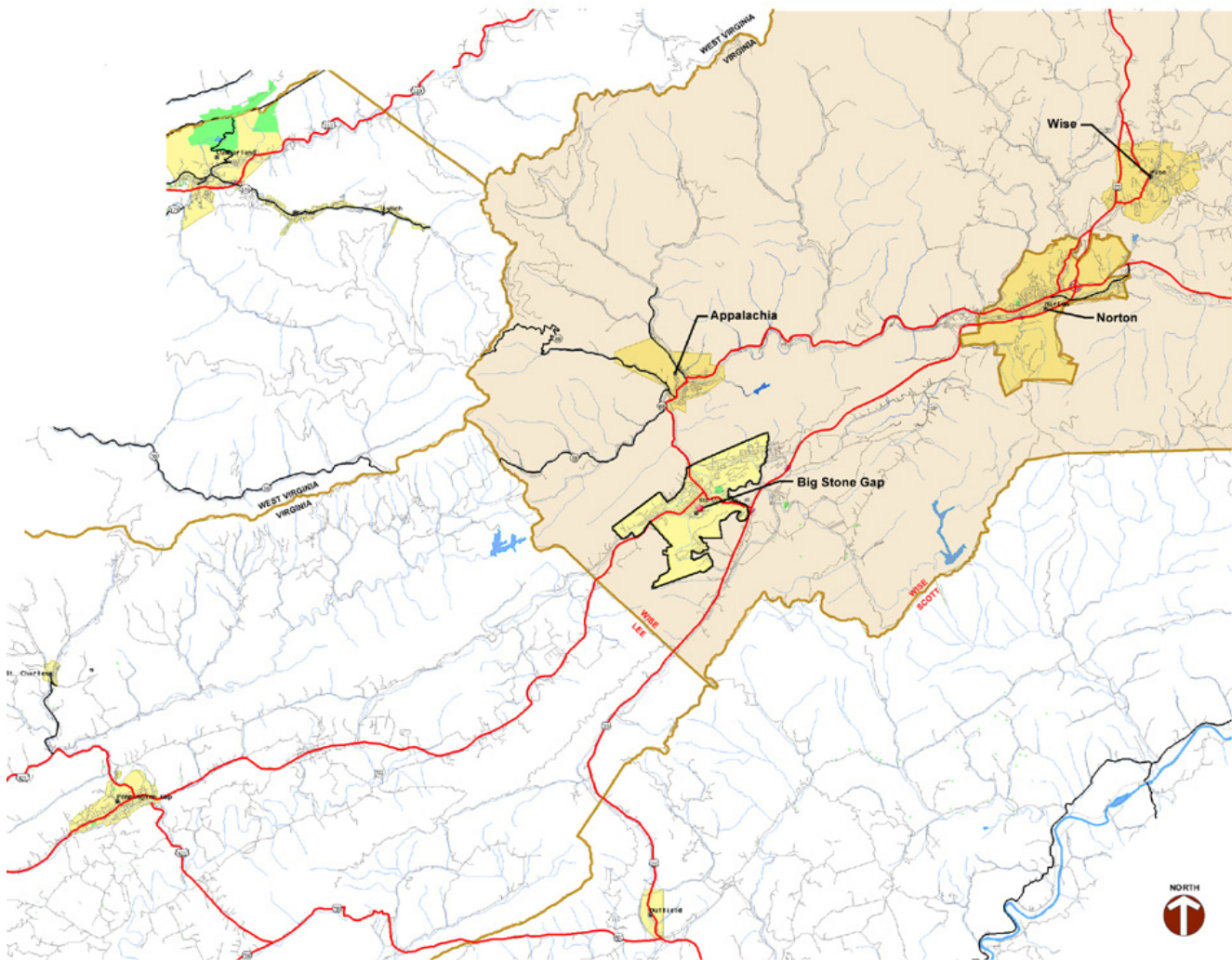
...(It) shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the general and approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be excluded, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use as the case may be. The plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts and descriptive matter, shall show the locality's long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan. It may include, but need not be limited to:

- 1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, business, industrial, agricultural, mineral resources, conservation, recreation, public service, flood plain and drainage, and other areas;*
- 2. The designation of a system of transportation facilities such as streets, roads, highways, parkways, railways, bridges, viaducts, waterways, airports, ports, terminals, and other like facilities;*
- 3. The designation of a system of community service facilities, such as parks, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;*
- 4. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;*
- 5. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable ground water protection measures;*
- 6. An official map, a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps and agricultural and forestall district maps, where applicable;*
- 7. The location of existing or proposed recycling centers; and*
- 8. The designation of areas for the implementation of measures to promote the construction and maintenance of affordable housing, sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.*

The Purpose of the Plan is to provide a basis for future decisions by Town Council on land use development and supporting infrastructure issues and other priorities deemed important by the community. Such priorities range from quality of life, property rights, and land use relationships to economic growth and development. The Plan is intended to provide both the direction and foundation for Town Council to carry out its decision-making responsibility.

REGIONAL SETTING

Big Stone Gap is nestled in the lower Powell Valley in the southwestern corner of Wise County, Virginia. The community lies south of the coalfields of Southwest Virginia separated by Little Stone Mountain. The Town is served by the Powell and South Fork Powell Rivers and abuts the Jefferson National Forest. It serves primarily as a government, medical and educational resource center and retail and service center for southwestern Wise County and northeastern Lee County. The intersection of U.S. Route 23 and Alternate U.S. Route 58, as shown in Map 1, supports the Town's ability to function as a nexus for commercial activity. Surrounding towns include Appalachia, Duffield, Pennington Gap and the City of Norton.



HISTORY

John Jameson, the first settler to the area, arrived in 1786 and established a 300 acre homestead at the fork of the Powell River and South Fork Powell River. He settled in a place that was once inhabited by the Cherokee Indians and used as a hunting ground by the Indians of the Confederacy of Six Nations. Inadequate road access limited the growth of the area for many decades until the vast coal reserves eventually attracted industrialists and laborers. The coal industry and associated rail transportation service spurred an economic boom that has waxed and waned over the decades and contributed to the growth of the Town.

Prior to the incorporation of the Town by the Virginia General Assembly in 1888, Big Stone Gap, originally known as Mineral City, remained dominated by small family farms. The arrival of the railroad in 1891 stimulated the commercial mining of iron ore and subsequently transformed the erstwhile wilderness into a vibrant, lively Southwest Virginia town. Land speculators soon arrived and purchased large tracts for mineral and timber rights. Big Stone Gap novelist and investor, John Fox, Jr. characterized the influx of outsiders as “shrewd investors, reckless speculators, land sharks ... real estate agents, curbstome brokers, saloon-keepers, gamblers, card sharks, railroad hands – all the flotsam and jetsam of the terrible boom.” Luckily, the original town leaders had a grander vision. As Mr. Fox stated, they dreamed of a place for “men of muscle, with families whom they must work for and support.”



The Town of Big Stone Gap weathered both prosperous economic booms and dour economic busts throughout the intervening years. Through modest yet steady population growth, the Town eventually transformed from a mining town into a business center and residential community that supported the coalfields and continues to serve as a commercial and employment center for Wise and surrounding counties.

Today, Big Stone Gap has a population of nearly five thousand residents located within a 5.14 square mile area and enjoys employment of 94.5%¹ of the workforce. Its citizens cherish its quality of life, picturesque location, and small town friendly atmosphere. These are the very elements of the community its citizens and leaders wish to preserve.

¹ US Census, 2000.

PHYSIOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS

The elements of natural beauty that characterize Southwest Virginia also substantially influence the development patterns throughout the region. Steep slopes along Stone Mountain, Little Stone Mountain and Wallens Ridge, the Powell and South Fork Powell rivers, and the Jefferson National Forest dictate how and where areas develop. Similarly, soil conditions, drainage patterns and flood plains determine the amount and nature of growth in and around the Town. An examination of these physiographic conditions provides insight into historical growth patterns as well as the direction and location of future development.

The Powell and South Fork Powell Rivers converge at Big Stone Gap approximately 63 miles northwest of the Tennessee-Virginia state line. The mouth of the Powell River lies at the Norris Reservoir in the Tennessee Valley Basin and its waters serve as the primary tributary for the Clinch River. These waterways provide numerous benefits to the Town and its residents, offering potential trails interconnecting neighborhoods and activity centers, passive parks and public use areas that provide river access for recreation purposes, canoeing, fishing and similar leisure activities. These rivers also pose a potential threat to life and property because of periodic flooding. The Town continually attempts to improve public use while controlling development patterns along the rivers to avoid any such loss.

Flood Plains

The Tennessee Valley Authority has studied the flooding situation along the Powell River and South Fork Powell River and continues to monitor the potential flooding hazard in the vicinity of Big Stone Gap. These studies are intended as reference for future planning efforts and flood mitigation strategies.

Along segments of the Powell River, a flood plain relocation plan was implemented by the Town to minimize potential damage due to flooding. Federal and state funds were used to relocate residences and businesses from the flood plain to higher elevations. A flood management ordinance has been adopted that governs floodways within Town limits and prohibits new construction in flood plains and severely restricts development in the 100 year flood fringe (new construction must be at least one foot above the base flood elevation). Overall, the Town is not as susceptible to flooding as other areas in the region because it is located near the headwaters of the South Fork Powell River and two of its tributaries, Beaver Dam Creek and Butcher Fork.



The U.S. Geological Survey has maintained records of flood stages and discharges on the Powell and South Fork Powell Rivers since 1944. The Tennessee Valley Authority maintains more detailed data. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) identifies flood-prone areas in its Flood Hazard Boundary Map and delineates the 100 year flood plain. These areas are normally dry yet are expected to flood at least once every 100 years from the accumulation of surface run-off and river overflow.

MAP 2 delineates the floodways within the Town and unincorporated areas. Most areas of development lie outside of the flood plain, especially on the northeast and southern sections of the town. The northern area toward Appalachia, the downtown area and low-lying areas at the confluence of the Powell and South Fork Powell Rivers near US Route 58A West remain the most vulnerable to inundation.

Current zoning for flood-prone areas includes a flood plain district with regulations designed to minimize loss of life and property in the event of flooding. The district incorporates flood control measures that severely restrict or prohibit uses that pose a danger or increase flood velocities and heights. Accordingly, development of residential and commercial uses in the flood plain is limited (and prohibited in the floodway) due to the obvious potential health and safety problems.

Topography

Big Stone Gap is characterized with topographical features that reflect on much of Southwest Virginia: rugged mountain terrain with steep slopes and verdant valleys. The Town lies within the Appalachia Plateau Province, a region of the Appalachian Highland and part of the Tennessee Valley River Basin. Stone Mountain and Little Stone Mountain border the Town to the north and Powell Mountain, Wallens Ridge and Morris Mountain border the Town's southern edge. The Powell River traverses the Town in a southwesterly direction and separates Stone Mountain from Little Stone Mountain forming the Town's namesake "Gap." Several streams also travel through the Town, including Roaring Creek, Callahan, Looney, and Pigeon Creeks. To the west lies the Powell Valley with its scenic rolling hills and fertile soils.

Elevations in the area range from 1460 feet above sea level along the Powell River to approximately 3200 feet at Little Stone Mountain. Elevations around Powell Valley and the Jefferson National Forest are higher, with High Knob reaching 4223 feet.

The steep, forested slopes and rugged terrain of the area historically has determined development patterns in the Town. Developable land is mostly located in the hollows and along the rivers and streams.

National Forest

The Jefferson National Forest borders the Town to the north and northwest and serves to delineate the Town's corporate boundary in that area. The Forest Service, a department within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, manages the national forest land including the Glades Wildlife Management Area and High Knob Recreation Area. The natural areas are important to the Town because the forest provides numerous benefits such as preventing soil erosion, controlling run-off, and offering numerous recreational opportunities for sportsmen, outdoor enthusiasts, and naturalists alike.

Under the Organic Act of 1897 and subsequent amendments, the Forest Service is charged with undertaking the following primary responsibilities:

- ❑ Improve and protect the forest
- ❑ Secure favorable conditions of water flow and manage watersheds
- ❑ Furnish a continuous supply of timber and maintain a sustainable yield

Amendments to the original act have since required complete public involvement in the management of the land. The Town should take advantage of this requirement and ensure that forest activities do not damage the visual and environmental asset that the forest provides.

The forest includes 690,000 acres of hardwood and conifer woodland and extends across Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky. It harbors over 40 tree species, 2000 shrubs and plants, 70 types of reptiles and amphibians, 200 bird species and 55 types of mammals, including white-tailed deer and black bear. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists 27 of the plants and animals as threatened or endangered.

Big Cherry Reservoir, which serves as the water resource for the Big Stone Gap water system is located several miles east of the Town near High Knob and offers numerous opportunities for recreational activities. The largely unexploited area surrounding the reservoir holds the potential for camping, hiking, boating and other outdoor activities. Trail development around the reservoir and connections to other trails in the region could offer outdoor recreational options for both residents and tourists.

Development opportunities in the national forest are limited and urban development is strictly forbidden. In the end, these controls benefit the Town by preserving the natural beauty that is so indicative of the region and a major asset to the Town. Heavy timbering, strip mining and other forest activities that can adversely affect the Town should be closely monitored. Vulnerable areas include the steep slopes along Stone Mountain, Little Stone Mountain and Morris Ridge.

Soils and Geology

The Soil Conservation Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducted a soil survey for Big Stone Gap in 1954. Although the survey has not been updated since that time, it still offers important information about general soil conditions and the potential for development in the Town and surrounding area. Soil suitability refers to the ability of certain soil types to support different land uses such as forestry, agriculture and urban development. Soil

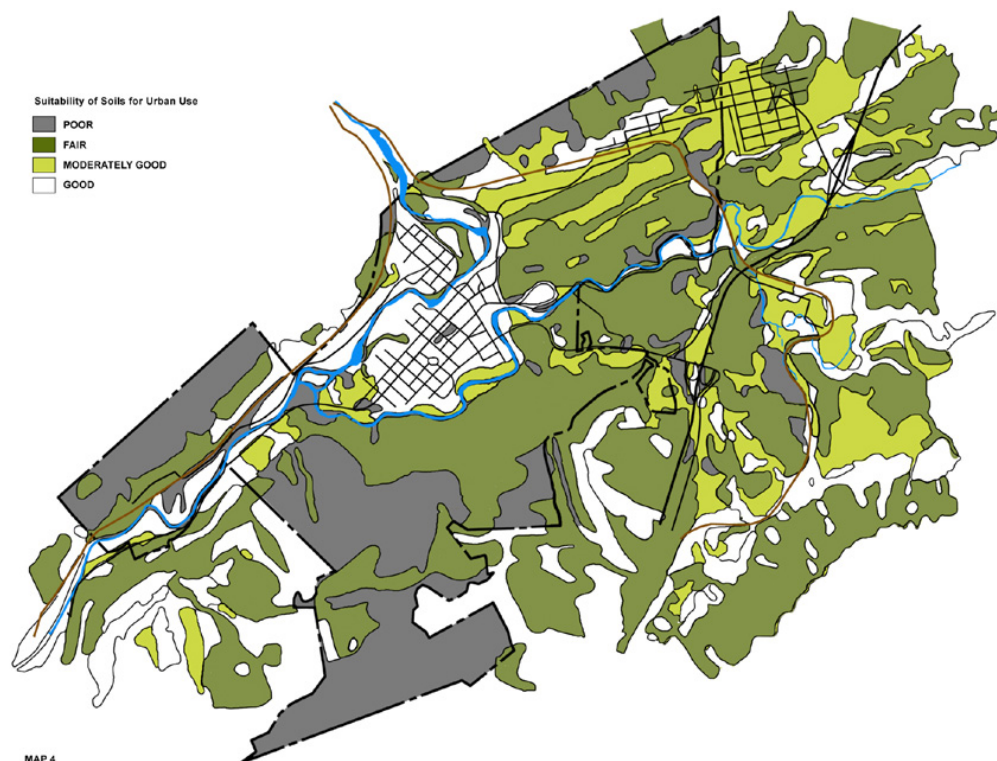
characteristics, such as percolation, compaction, shrink-swell potential, aeration, density, slope, depth to bedrock, underlying material, location, water table and composition contribute to the classification of soils as 'poor,' 'fair,' 'moderately good' and 'good' for urban development.

As Map 4 illustrates, a large portion of the land in Big Stone Gap is rated 'fair' and 'poor.' A significantly smaller portion of the land, primarily located between ridges and along the rivers is rated 'moderately good' to 'good.' As a result, urban land uses are recommended for higher-grade soils in areas between the ridges and rivers, yet outside the flood plain.

Seventy-five percent of the soil in Wise County is the Muskingum variety. Likewise, a similar percentage of this soil type exists in Big Stone Gap. Muskingum soil has extremely narrow limits for urban use since it does not support septic tank drain fields. Without the provision of public sewer connections, this land offers few opportunities for development.

The northwest slope of Wallens Ridge at Irondale and Oreton was the site of extensive iron ore mining in the late 1800's and early 1900's. The low-grade quality of the iron ore eventually became uneconomical to mine and process and remains of little value today. Other minerals such as Manganese are located in the area; however, the deposits are not extensive enough to warrant commercial mining.

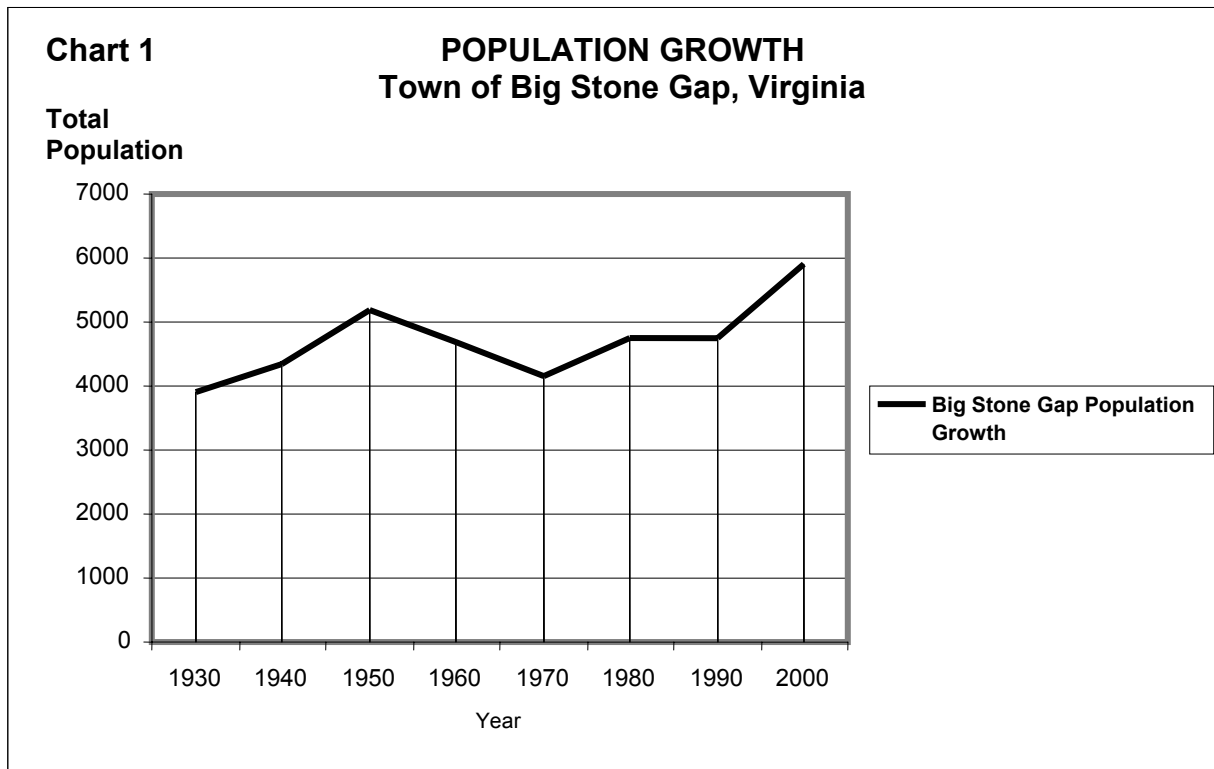
Agricultural use accounts for only a small portion (3.5%) of Wise County and this use exists primarily in Powell Valley. The associated soil classification supports cropland, pastureland, and orchards. Unfortunately, development pressures arising from the scarcity of developable land within the Town threaten the surrounding agricultural land. The provision of public water and sewer service will hasten the development of Powell Valley.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Population and Household Trends

Since incorporation in 1888 until the 1950's, the Town of Big Stone Gap experienced steady population growth. For the next twenty years, the increased mechanization of the coal industry and dependency on alternate fuel resources brought a related decline in labor, which resulted in a loss of population. A decline in employment opportunities resulted in the out-migration of labor to other regions. The energy crisis of the 1970's generated a renewed interest in coal extraction, reversing the trend and spurring a modest growth in population.



Source: US Census Bureau, 1930-2000. NOTE: 2000 population includes the inmate population at Wallens Ridge State Penitentiary.

Improved roadway systems (US Routes 23 and 58A) contributed to increased mining and associated railroad activities and prompted population growth in Big Stone Gap to post World War II highs. According to **The People and the Economy of Southwest Virginia**, a study prepared in 1986 for the Southwest Virginia Economic Development Commission by the Center for Public Services at the University of Virginia, the population rise in Southwest Virginia peaked in 1983. The Town of Big Stone Gap also witnessed a modest increase in population during this time. The general urbanization of the American population likely accounts for this increase. The location of the Town and its role as a commercial center for surrounding counties has minimized the out-migration of population to other areas.

The adjusted population for Big Stone Gap in the year 2000 (which includes the inmate population at Wallens Ridge State Penitentiary) is 5906 persons, an increase of 24.4% over 1990. Excluding the prison population, the Town experienced an increase of 2.27%. All incorporated

areas within Wise County experienced an aggregate increase of 5.6% over the same time period while population in Wise County as a whole increased by 6.7%. Overall, Wise County and its urban areas have experienced fluctuations in population over the last fifty years; however, population totals have shown a modest growth for the region during the last decade.

Population Projections

Population projections provide insight into future demands on localities for public services such as schools, social services, infrastructure, emergency response and public safety. By estimating future populations and their characteristics, localities can plan budgets and capital improvement projects based on the size of future populations and anticipated revenues. In the case of Big Stone Gap, governmental services such as water and sewer, police and fire, sanitation, parks and recreation programs are provided to a larger service area than just the Town. Population growth within the service sector becomes a more important consideration in terms of the future role of Big Stone Gap in serving this population.

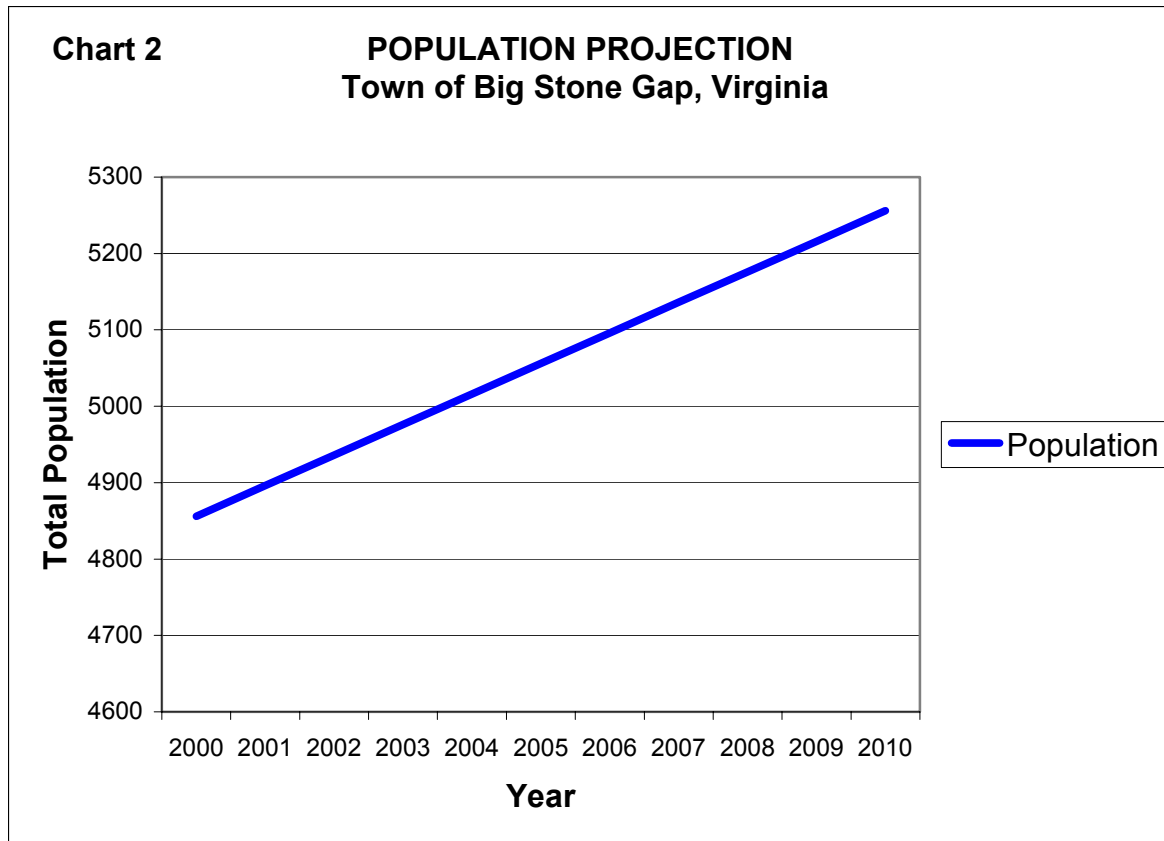
The average rate of growth for Big Stone Gap over the last seventy years is 6.9%. The construction of Wallens Ridge State Penitentiary generated new residents because of the large employment opportunities and the inclusion of the inmates as residents of the Town in official population counts. Such new types of major employers, household size and new housing starts, will serve to determine population growth in the future for both the Town and the surrounding service area.

Table 1 TOTAL POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS 1990 - 2000
Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia

	Total Population	Total Households	Persons per Household
1990	4748	1837	2.58
2000	4856*	1995	2.34
Average New Households/Year = 15.8			
Average Household Size = 2.46			

Source: US Census 1990, 2000. * Excludes inmate population

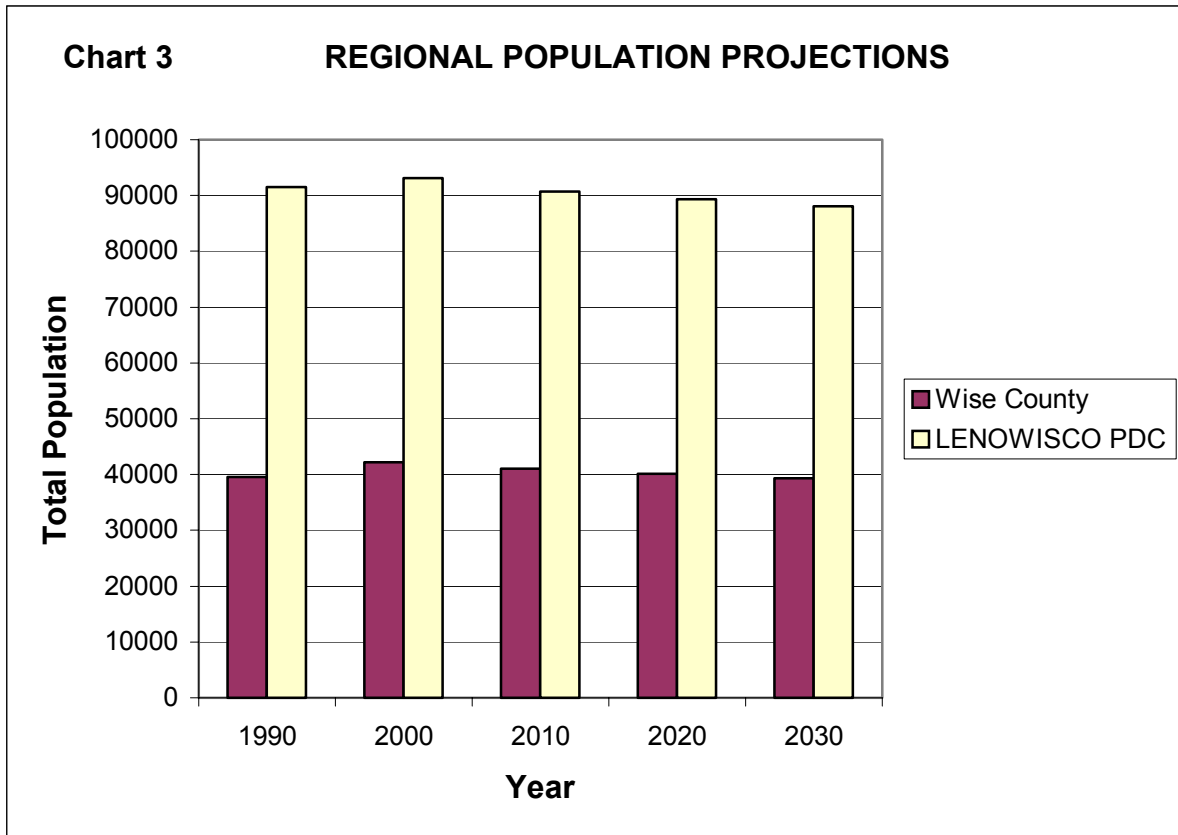
With an average of 15.8 new households created each year in the last 10 years and 2.46 persons per household, Big Stone Gap can expect to grow by approximately thirty-nine persons each year. This projection, like all methods of population projection, assumes that all factors affecting population growth remain constant in the future. Changes in the economy, lack of developable land, and general trends of urbanization can affect growth or decline in population.



SOURCE: Virginia Employment Commission, 2003.

The Virginia Employment Commission produces population estimates for counties and cities using the cohort-survival method. This model bases projections on population statistics relating to survival, fertility, mortality and migration estimates. The first three variables are relatively stable; however, in-migration and out-migration are affected by fluctuations in the economy and, thereby, employment opportunities. If employment opportunities in the area diminish, the population is expected to follow suit. Likewise, if employment opportunities increase, the population can be expected to increase. To account for this fluctuation, standard migration rates have been applied to each age cohort. Chart 2 reflects the cohort-survival estimate for Big Stone Gap. While this projection reveals a small population increase over the next five years, it does not account for the limited availability of housing, lack of developable land, or economic conditions. While useful, this projection method has limitations.

Chart 3 illustrates population projections for the LENOWISCO PDC (which includes Lee, Wise and Scott Counties and the City of Norton), Wise County and Norton. The LENOWISCO PDC projection has been included for a regional perspective.



SOURCE: Virginia Employment Commission, 2003.

The Virginia Employment Commission projects a slightly declining population for Wise County and the region through 2030. With the ongoing shift in the regional economy away from mining and the subsequent loss of jobs, population is projected to decrease.

The region surrounding Big Stone Gap is primarily rural with relatively small urban centers scattered throughout. Numerous reasons account for the projected decline in population for the region; however, the national trend of rural migration to urban areas partly accounts for the projected increase in the population of Big Stone Gap. Other key factors are the increased role of Big Stone Gap as an employment and retail center and the availability of public water and sewer service. Factors hindering growth within the Town largely relate to a lack of suitable, available residential land when compared to the surrounding rural environs.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Employment and Labor Force Characteristics

Employment in southwest Virginia and in Big Stone Gap in particular has changed drastically over the past two decades. As recently as 1989, mining and mining-related industries constituted the largest industry employing residents of the region. However, changes in the industry combined with the general economic downturn at the national level have decimated the coal industry. The following table depicts the ten largest employers for the years 1989 and 2001 in descending order from largest to smallest.

Table 2

**LARGEST EMPLOYERS
Town of Big Stone Gap and Environs**

1989		2001	
Name of Employer	Business	Name of Employer	Business
Westmoreland Coal	Mining	Wallens Ridge Correctional Center	Prison
Lonesome Pine Hospital	Health	Wise County Public Schools	Education
Division of Mined Land Reclamation	State Government	Mountain Empire Community College	Education
Heritage Hall	Health	Heritage Hall	Health
Walmart	Retail	Lonesome Pine Hospital	Health
Town of Big Stone Gap	Local Government	Mountain Empire Older Citizens	Social Services
Wise County Public Schools	Education	Town of Big Stone Gap	Local Gov't
Food Lion	Grocery	Division of Mined Land Reclamation	State Gov't
Big Stone Clinic	Health	Walmart	Retail
Piggly Wiggly	Grocery	Food Lion	Grocery
Magic Mart	Retail		

SOURCE: Town of Big Stone Gap, 2003

The shift to state government employment (with the opening of the prison) from mining and its related industries mirrors the general national trend of a transitioning service economy. Services and administrative functions now dominate the manufacturing sector of the economy. Specifically, the Town has witnessed an expansion in medical and health services, educational services and employment related to operations at Wallens Ridge State Penitentiary (420+ employees). Wise County Public Schools remains the largest educational employer and with more than 150 acres of undeveloped land, it is poised for future expansion.

Table 3

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY SECTOR
Big Stone Gap and Wise County

Industry	Wise County		Big Stone Gap		% Change
	1990	2000	1990	2000	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	120	186	0	12	---
Mining	2,515	1,417	296	113	(61.8)
Construction	794	1,086	76	127	67.1
Manufacturing	961	915	112	94	(16.1)
Retail and Wholesale Trade	3,019	2,527	245	270	10.2
Transportation	785	731	75	67	(10.7)
Utilities	298	120	10	11	10.0
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	454	433	66	33	(50.0)
Professional Services	564	751	44	35	(20.5)
Educational Services	1,509	1,749	199	217	9.1
Health Services	1,206	1,770	207	271	30.9
Government	476	1882	58	534	820.7
Other Services	813	2,245	90	246	173.3
Total Employed	13,514	15,812	1,182	2,030	71.7

Source: 1990, 2000 Census of Population, adjusted to include prison employment

The above table illustrates the improvement in employment for both Wise County and the Town of Big Stone Gap over the last ten years. During this ten-year period, employment has increased 35.5% in Big Stone Gap and 10.3% in Wise County and both economies have shifted away from the traditional basic industries of manufacturing and mining to service industries.

Table 4

CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT
Wise County 1993-2002

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Civ. Labor Force	16,232	15,950	16,444	15,074	14,831	14,800	14,778	14,710	14,545	15,126
% Change		-1.7%	+3.1%	-8.3%	-1.6%	-0.2%	-0.1%	-0.5%	-1.1%	+4.0%
Unemployment	12.8%	12.8%	17.1%	15.8%	12.3%	10.3%	9.2%	5.8%	5.6%	5.8%

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, 2003

Wise County continued the pattern of job loss during the past decade, a trend that began in the 1980's. The recent opening of Wallens Ridge correctional facility and expansion in the service industry have improved the job outlook and lessened unemployment for the region.

Sales Trends

In 2003, gross sales within the Town were \$113,493,308, an increase of 12.6% during the past three years. Sales in the County are shown in the following table.

Table 5		TAXABLE SALES Wise County 1977-2002		
	1977	1987	1997	2002
	\$112,669,000	\$173,980,000	\$225,787,890	\$254,071,299

Source: Weldon Cooper Center – Taxable Sales, USDOL CPI

Taxable sales in Wise County have steadily increased from 1977 to 2002; however, the inflation rate as confirmed by the U.S. Department of Labor grew at a faster pace, thereby demonstrating that the rate of growth in sales dropped compared with the overall economy. The increase in retail and other commercial options in neighboring communities has lessened Big Stone Gap's impact on the regional economy. However, the Town's sales remain healthy and the community continues to play an important role in the provision of goods and services for the surrounding environs. Future growth will be a result of continued residential development, improved access (especially U.S. 58A Southwest) and enhanced tourism and employment growth.

Table 6		TAXABLE SALES Big Stone Gap 2000-2003		
	2000	2001	2002	2003
	\$100,715,683	\$105,215,581	\$106,092,642	\$113,493,308

Source: Town of Big Stone Gap, 2004

Total gross receipts in Big Stone Gap have steadily increased over the last several years. The role of the Town as a retail, commercial, and service center for the surrounding area continues to apply. The economic health of the Town continues to improve as it transforms from an industrial-based economy to a service-based economy.

Household Characteristics

Average Family Size and Composition

A total of 1,995 occupied households are located in Big Stone Gap according to the 2000 Census. An additional 202 units are vacant for a total number of 2,197 units. The average household size is 2.34 persons. Elderly householders living alone comprise 13.8% of all households in the Town, which has been on the rise since 1990.

Female-headed households are continuing to increase, which is similar to national trends. Non-family households are also increasing. The following table details the current family composition in Big Stone Gap.

	With Own Children Under 18	Without Own Children ²
Married Couple Households	590	742
Female-Headed Household	156	150

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000.

Single-person households and households without children have a smaller impact on public services such as recreation, schools, and utilities. Similarly, elderly households impact public services and facilities in a different manner such as less water and sewer, less trash, smaller quarters. Family households increased from 1300 total in 1990 to 1332 in 2000. This represents a 2.5% increase in this household type. Single-person households increased 26% (from 487 to 614 households) from 1990 to 2000. Since different types of households have different impacts on public services and facilities, the trends within the Town of these types of households should be considered when allocating capital funds for future public projects such as parks and recreation, streets, sanitation, utilities, lighting and other infrastructure. Such factors should also be considered in addressing new housing starts and the type of housing needed in Big Stone Gap.

Overall, Big Stone Gap exhibits an aging population. The total number of residents aged 0-19 decreased 8% since 1990. Likewise, the number of residents aged 20-34 decreased by 6%. The population growth in the Town occurred in the 35-64 age range (largely family housing). This group increased by 16% while elderly households increased by 9%.

With the maturing of the "baby boomers", the demand for elderly housing is expected to increase in the next decade, and over an extended period will need to address multiple lifestyles from independent living to assisted and nursing care.

² This description includes households with no children under the age of 18 or households with unrelated children under the age of 18.

HOUSING CONDITIONS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Sound neighborhoods constitute the backbone of a locality's stability and health. The Town of Big Stone Gap and its housing authority have long recognized the importance of maintaining vibrant neighborhoods and have utilized local, state and federal funds to improve and maintain the housing stock and its support infrastructure. Since the Town serves as the commercial center and residential community for the immediate area, healthy neighborhoods and quality, affordable housing are a top priority.

Neighborhood Housing Conditions

The following analysis documents the current status of housing conditions within the Town and surrounding areas. The following classifications were used to determine the level of housing deficiencies in Big Stone Gap neighborhoods. Windshield surveys were conducted in 2003.

Sound

Structure with no defects or only slight defects normally correctable by regular maintenance. Examples of slight defects include: minor painting needs; worn floors, doorsills, doorframes, windowsills, or window frames; and broken gutters or downspouts.

Minor Deficiencies

Structures with minor defects requiring immediate attention beyond the course of regular maintenance. Examples include lack of paint; small cracks in walls, plaster, or chimney; shaky or unsafe steps and porches; excessively weathered roof; and signs of rotting around windows and sashes.

Deteriorated

Structures requiring more repair than would be provided in the course of regular maintenance and have more defects of an intermediate nature that must be corrected if the structure is to continue to be safe. Examples of intermediate defects include: holes or cracks in plaster; rotted, loose or missing materials over a small area of the foundation, walls, roof, floors, or ceilings; unsafe porches; rotted or loose windows; frames or sashes that are no longer rainproof; and missing bricks or cracks in the chimney serious enough to be a fire hazard.

Dilapidated

Structures that are no longer safe or adequate for continued use and endanger the health, safety, and well being of the inhabitants. Such structures have one or more critical defects, a combination of intermediate defects in sufficient number or extent to require considerable repair or rebuilding, or are of inadequate original construction. The defects are either so critical or widespread that the structure should be extensively repaired, rebuilt, or demolished.

Substantially Dilapidated

Dilapidated units that would cost more than 80% of the value of the structure (after rehabilitation) to bring the unit into compliance with minimum housing codes are

considered substantially dilapidated. These units are "Unsuitable for Rehabilitation" and warrant clearance to remove blighted conditions.

Neighborhood boundaries are shown on Map 5 and were used in housing field surveys conducted in 2003. The study data summarizes the level of housing deficiencies in each neighborhood using the preceding classifications.

Table 7 HOUSING UNIT CONDITIONS Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia 2003						
Neighborhood	Sound	Minor Deficiencies	Deteriorated	Dilapidated	Substantially Dilapidated	Total
County	71 (19%)	169 (45%)	103 (28%)	22 (6%)	6 (2%)	371
Town	229 (47%)	166 (34%)	66 (14%)	19 (4%)	3 (1%)	483
Intermont	79 (34%)	115 (50%)	25 (11%)	6 (3%)	4 (2%)	229
Beamantown	16 (12%)	49 (38%)	49 (38%)	15 (12%)	0 (0%)	129
Eastern	9 (11%)	58 (69%)	15 (18%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	84
Western I	43 (21%)	132 (65%)	25 (13%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	202
Western II	9 (19%)	21 (45%)	14 (30%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	47
Poplar Hill	85 (29%)	144 (48%)	52 (18%)	12 (4%)	2 (1%)	295
Cadet	22 (18%)	86 (71%)	9 (8%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	119
Dacota	5 (5%)	38 (42%)	30 (34%)	14 (15%)	4 (4%)	91
Phillips Chapel	10 (10%)	14 (15%)	36 (38%)	35 (36%)	1 (1%)	96
Southern	21 (45%)	12 (26%)	5 (11%)	5 (11%)	3 (7%)	46
Total	599 (27%)	1004 (46%)	429 (20%)	133 (6%)	27 (1%)	2192

SOURCE: Field Surveys, 2003 – K.W. Poore and Associates, Inc.

NOTE: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The field survey reveals that 73% of all housing units within Big Stone Gap and the immediate environs are sound or have only minor deficiencies, 20% of all housing units are deteriorated, and 7% require significant repairs or substantial reconstruction. Housing surveys conducted in 1991, show 66% of all housing units were sound or experiencing minor deficiencies, 20% of housing units were deteriorating, and 13% of units were exhibiting major deficiencies or were substantially dilapidated. The new data shows the condition of the housing stock has improved significantly through public and private rehabilitation, maintenance and attrition. Units with major deficiencies have declined by an estimated 45% while sound standard units increased by 22%.

The 2000 U.S. Census reported a total of 2197 housing units with a 90.8% occupancy rate. Vacancy rates in Big Stone Gap are comparable with other similar size communities. A comparison was made of housing conditions in 2003 with survey data compiled in 1988 as part of a neighborhood analysis for the Big Stone Gap Housing Authority. Apart from new building starts and demolitions, the table mirrors the impact both the private sector and the Authority have had in housing improvements.

Table 8 **HOUSING UNIT CONDITIONS, 1988-2003**
Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia

Neighborhood	Sound			Deteriorating			Dilapidated		
	1988	2003	%±	1988	2003	%±	1988	2003	%±
Southern County	55%	64%	9%	24%	28%	4%	21%	8%	(13%)
Southern Town	71%	81%	10%	24%	14%	(10%)	5%	5%	0%
Hosiery Mill/Imboden	58%	84%	26%	30%	11%	(19%)	12%	5%	(7%)
Beamantown	60%	50%	(10%)	18%	38%	20%	22%	12%	(10%)
Italy Bottom	45%	80%	35%	35%	18%	(17%)	20%	2%	(18%)
Eastern	44%	86%	42%	34%	13%	(21%)	22%	1%	(21%)
Western	44%	64%	20%	38%	30%	(8%)	18%	6%	(12%)
Poplar Hill	80%	77%	(3%)	12%	18%	6%	8%	5%	(3%)
Cadet	64%	89%	25%	16%	8%	(8%)	22%	2%	(20%)
Dacota	79%	47%	(32%)	14%	34%	20%	7%	19%	12%
Artesian Well Hollow	83%	25%	(58%)	3%	38%	35%	14%	37%	23%
Big Stone Heights	91%	71%	(20%)	2%	11%	9%	7%	18%	11%
Entire Area	66%	73%	7%	20%	20%	0%	13%	7%	(6%)

SOURCE: Field Surveys, 1988 and 2003 – K.W. Poore & Associates, Inc.
NOTE: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The housing condition field surveys from 1988 and 2003 reveal an improvement in housing stock largely due to revitalization efforts in specific neighborhoods of the Town. However, other neighborhoods, such as Southern (Town and County), Artesian Well Hollow, Dacota and Beamantown have experienced an increase in the number of dilapidated housing units. These neighborhoods should be targeted as priority areas for housing and community revitalization.

U.S. Census and survey data indicate several factors contribute to the condition of these neighborhoods including:

1. Aging Population
The 2000 Census reveals that 43.8% of the population of Big Stone Gap is either school age or elderly (65+ years old). The elderly are often physically and financially incapable of maintaining their homes in a standard condition. Physical infirmities and fixed incomes hamper their ability to maintain or repair their homes.
2. Age of Housing
A large majority (74.3%) of housing units within the Town and surrounding neighborhoods were constructed before 1980 with over half (52.8%) of all housing units constructed prior to 1970 (Census 2000). Most housing units constructed since 1970 are located in eastern and southern sections of Town.
3. Poor Original Construction
The predominate housing type is frame construction. This type of housing unit requires considerable maintenance, and as previously stated, financial and physical limitations prevent many residents from properly maintaining their homes.
4. Small Lot Sizes
Most neighborhoods in Big Stone Gap were developed in the 1950's and consist of small lots that offer little encouragement for market rate housing for today's families.

Priority Neighborhoods for Community Improvement

In 1972, the Town designated the Eastern neighborhood (now known as Italy Bottom) as the number one priority due to the concentration of dilapidated housing and serious environmental deficiencies. The subsequent comprehensive revitalization program addressed the deteriorating and dilapidated housing through rehabilitation efforts, improved the infrastructure and relocated residents out of the flood plain thereby eliminating the damage and health and safety issue of flooding. Since then, the Town has carried out revitalization programs in Artesian Well Hollow and Cadet.

Four neighborhoods remain with problems and have been identified as priority areas because of the increase in dilapidated houses along with environmental and infrastructure deficiencies.

These are: **Southern (Town, County) Beamantown**
 Artesian Well Hollow Dacota

These neighborhoods require a concentrated effort to reverse the declining conditions and reclaim them as viable, healthy areas. Each improvement plan must address the deteriorating housing conditions, substandard infrastructure (i.e. water and sanitary sewer service, roads, storm drainage, etc.), and hazardous environmental conditions such as flooding. The Southern community located in the northwest section of Town along the 4th Avenue corridor, originally referenced to extending east into Wise County is the priority target area because of its location and the level of housing and infrastructure deficiencies.

Southern Neighborhood (4th Avenue Corridor)

This largely residential area mainly consists of single-family homes, yet also contains a limited mix of multi-family units and mobile homes. A pre-1930's working class neighborhood, the southern area consists of a mix of deteriorating housing and infrastructure, poor circulation and inefficient use of the land, collectively creating a serious barrier to the economic growth of the community.

Field studies conducted in 2003 and 2004 reveal deterioration of the housing stock in specific areas of the Southern neighborhood. The neighborhood is comprised largely of low-to-moderate income families (65% to 80%) with 20% of the population living in poverty. Over 60% of the housing units are small cottage designs with an average age of 40+ years. These units suffer from poor original construction, poor maintenance, and general neglect.

In addition to the housing challenges, infrastructure problems contribute to the physical condition of the area. An aging, undersized, and deteriorated sewer distribution system dating back to 1930's- 40's is in need of repairs and upgrades. While the system's integrity is generally satisfactory, isolated problems must be addressed in the target area. The Town engineer has mapped locations of odor, standing septic overflows, and ditches in the northeast area near the County schools and deteriorating lines along 22nd, 4th, and Shawnee Avenue. As many as 70 dwellings, mostly east of the Town limits are not hooked to public sewer. The Town's water system presents problems because of undersized lines and water line breaks (24th and 25th Streets) and both are documented as needs to be addressed in the Town's proposed Capital Improvements Plan. Street conditions and storm drainage throughout the neighborhood are also inadequate and deteriorating, particularly on the east side of the neighborhood in Wise County.



Vacant lots are scattered throughout the neighborhood and are suitable for infill single-family ownership. These have not been developed largely because of the deteriorating conditions, mixed residential types, and infrastructure problems.

The Town should develop a revitalization plan for the Southern neighborhood that includes housing rehabilitation and infrastructure upgrades. Local funds and state grants (i.e. CDBG funds) should be utilized to rehabilitate this very important neighborhood within the next 1-5 years.

General Neighborhood Revitalization Goals and Objectives

Long range goals, short range objectives and specific actions are identified to serve as a guide to the revitalization of priority neighborhoods. The goals and objectives build upon opportunities and problems that have been identified through field surveys and analysis of environmental and housing conditions in each target neighborhood. These are the basis for specific actions that represent plan recommendations. Goals and objectives are provided for future actions that may be needed in other neighborhoods.

Goal

Decent, safe and sanitary homes in a stable, healthy residential neighborhood for every family in Big Stone Gap.

Objectives:

- Preserve and maintain existing sound residential structures.
- Conserve existing housing stock by implementing a rehabilitation program that brings housing units up to DHCD Housing Quality Standards.
- Pursue federal, state and local financing options for the provision of financial assistance to low- and moderate-income families and individuals for housing rehabilitation.
- Promote acceptable, architecturally compatible infill housing on vacant lots in existing neighborhoods.
- Promote the development of vacant tracts for new market rate housing.
- Eliminate slums, blight and blighting influences through demolition and redevelopment activities in a coordinated manner while avoiding disruption of the surrounding area and minimizing the displacement and relocation of residents.
- Encourage the participation of neighborhood residents in all phases of planning and executing a neighborhood revitalization program.

Goal

Adequate community services and facilities that meet current standards and provide for both the present and future needs of the neighborhood residents.

Objectives:

- Correct infiltration and inflow problems with the existing storm drainage system.
- Provide landscaped open space for active and passive recreation accessible to all persons regardless of age or ability.
- Increase participation of volunteers in recreation programs.
- Extend public water and sanitary sewer service to those areas that are currently lacking.
- Develop a plan and program for water accountability and correct leakage problems.
- Provide adequate roadway facilities to accommodate neighborhood traffic and provide access to the remainder of the Town.

Goal

Highest and best land use in the neighborhood through new development and revitalization efforts.

Objectives:

- Prohibit intermittent location of mobile homes on small lots that contribute to poor living conditions.
- Limit incompatible land uses that are detrimental to existing development.
- Avoid development in flood plains to prevent property damage. Maintain flood plains as open space and utilize as natural buffers.
- Discourage development of mountain ridges to preserve viewsheds.
- Prohibit residential development adjacent to railways.
- Sponsor a neighborhood clean-up campaign and litter control program.

Implementation of neighborhood revitalization programs can begin at various levels. While the Town should utilize federal, state and local funds for large-scale, comprehensive improvement programs, neighborhood groups should initiate grassroots campaigns such as Neighborhood Watch programs, litter removal, and landscaping and beautification efforts.

NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

A Neighborhood Improvement Program should be developed and adopted by the Town to rectify the problems that currently exist in the four target neighborhoods (Southern, Beamantown, Phillips Chapel and Dakota). The improvement programs should provide comprehensive, actionable plans that address the rehabilitation of housing, improvements to infrastructure (i.e. roads, storm drainage, water and sewer lines) and blight removal to spur economic reinvestment and improved living standards. A Neighborhood Improvement Plan currently is being executed in the Southern Neighborhood and will be implemented in two phases. The other priority neighborhoods can utilize a similar plan to address the similar needs.

AFFORDABLE AND MARKET RATE HOUSING

The presence of mobile homes in and around Big Stone Gap has always posed a significant planning concern for the Town. In 1990, 198 mobile homes were located within corporate boundaries of the Town. That number has been decreasing since the Town prohibited any new mobile homes within Town limits. The popularity of mobile homes continues today because of their relative low cost and the minimal amount of land needed for their placement. The growth in mobile homes outside the Town belies the fact that new market rate housing is not readily being made available in Big Stone Gap largely due to the limited amount of developable land. The primary solution within Town lies in creating more market rate housing opportunities through revitalization/redevelopment of existing residential neighborhoods. The extension of utilities outside the corporate limits to specific developments also can be tied to specific type of housing, namely new market rate housing. Public-private partnerships also provide some opportunity for housing development in unincorporated areas where the Town could obtain some benefits.

EXISTING LAND USE

Current land use acreage for the Town of Big Stone Gap is summarized by standard land use classifications. The Existing Land Use map illustrates the current land use patterns of the Big Stone Gap community as derived by K.W. Poore and Associates through field surveys conducted between September and November 2000. The map shows land use using standard land use classifications and was recorded on the most current Wise County tax maps and planimetric maps furnished by Tuck Engineering, Inc. The maps include topographical information at five-foot contour intervals based on aerial photographs taken in 1995 and 1996. The following information illustrates the existing land use characteristics of the Town. Refer to Table 9 for additional information.

Residential Land Use

Residential land use comprises 676 acres (44.5%) of the total land located within the Town.

Commercial Land Use

The primary commercial areas of the Town include the traditional downtown business district concentrated along East 5th Street and Wood Avenue, various locations along U.S. Route 58, and a regional shopping center near the interchange of U.S. Route 23 Bypass and Gilley Avenue. Commercial use accounts for 104 acres (6.8%) of all developed land.

Public and Semi-Public Land Use

Public and semi-public land uses comprise 380 acres (25%) of all developed land within the Town boundaries. These uses include cemeteries, churches, government services, and parks. A large portion of the total acreage devoted to public use is the park and recreation area along the Powell River in the downtown area and Wallens Ridge State Prison.

Industrial Land Use

Currently, 45 acres (2.9%) are dedicated for industrial use. All industrial uses are located in four areas along the railroad corridor that traverses the Town.

Transportation (Streets, Alleys, Railroads, Rights-of-way)

Calculations of the total acreage of public rights-of-way dedicated to streets and alleys are based on map measurements of street length and standard widths for rights-of-way. Roads and public rights-of-way account for 225 acres (14.8%) of developed land within the corporate boundary of the Town.

Vacant Land

Within the Town limits, 1,589 acres out of the total 3,234 acres of land are currently in use. The remaining 1,645 acres, approximately 50.8% of the Town's total area, is vacant. This figure does not account for environmental constraints such as flood plains or slopes greater than 18%.

The 100-year flood plain of the Powell River, South Fork Powell River and their tributaries restrict development on approximately 119 acres. The most prevalent environmental constraint to development on vacant land is steep slopes of the area. Land with 18% grade or more occupies 1,198 acres and constitutes 72.8% of all vacant land in the Town. Only 328 acres (10.1%) of the land remaining within the Town limits can be considered as vacant and suitable for development.

without extreme environmental constraints. Furthermore, the remaining parcels tend to be small, creating the additional burden of site assembly to form a reasonable site for development. Poor access due to mountainous terrain restricts numerous properties. The restraints reduce the amount of developable land to less than 10%.

The general land use trend has remained consistent over the years as the Town developed outward to its boundaries and into Wise County. The history and character of Southwest Virginia have been preserved here. A dominant commercial core surrounded mainly by residential use illustrates the Town's dual role as a commercial center and bedroom community for the area. The large amount of public and semi-public uses (25%), the amenities associated with these facilities (parks, medical facilities, educational facilities, government services, etc.), and an aging population present the Town with the opportunity to actively pursue the development of elderly housing (independent and assisted living).

Given the direction of growth in the past and the limited amount of developable land within the Town limits, future growth will logically occur outside the Town in Wise County. US Route 23 and the extension of public water and sewer to new service areas in the county will continue to serve as growth generators. The areas of the county adjoining the Town are largely urban in character and will continue to serve as an extension of the Town.

Table 9

EXISTING LAND USE
Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia

<u>LAND USE CLASSIFICATION</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>	<u>AS PERCENT OF CATEGORY</u>	<u>AS PERCENT OF DEVELOPED LAND</u>	<u>AS PERCENT OF TOTAL AREA</u>
Residential Use				
Single Family	571	84.4	37.6	17.7
Multi-Family	60	8.9	3.9	1.9
Mobile Homes	45	6.7	3.0	1.4
Subtotal	676	100.0	44.5	21.0
Commercial Use				
General	58	55.8	3.8	1.8
Retail/Service/Office	46	44.2	3.0	1.4
Subtotal	104	100.0	6.8	3.2
Public/Semi-Public				
Community Facilities/Churches	110	29.0	7.2	3.4
State Correctional Facility	153	40.2	10.1	4.7
Parks and Recreation	117	30.8	7.7	3.6
Subtotal	380	100.0	25.0	11.7
Roads and Right-of-Way	225	100.0	14.8	7.0
Railroad Right-of-Way	95	100.0	6.3	2.9
Industrial	45	100.0	2.9	1.4
TOTAL DEVELOPED AREA	1,525	100.0	100.3	47.2
Rivers and Streams	64.0	100.0	n/a	2.0
Vacant/Forested/Agricultural	1,645	100.0	n/a	50.8
TOTAL AREA	3,234	100.0	n/a	100.0

Source: Land Use Field Surveys, K. W. Poore and Associates, Inc., Sept./Nov. 2000

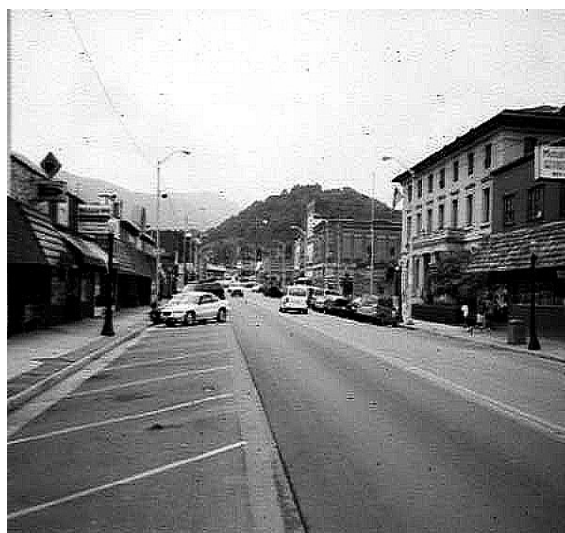
Planimeter readings of developed parcels by land use classification, K. W. Poore and Associates, Inc.

February 2001

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

The Town of Big Stone Gap is served by six major arterial roadways. Arterials serve as major traffic carriers within and through the Town. Business US Route 23 (Gilley Avenue, East 5th Street) follows a northwest-southwest direction connecting Big Stone Gap with Appalachia and Norton to the north. US Route 23 Bypass, a four-lane limited access highway connects Big Stone Gap with Norton to the north and Duffield and Bristol-Kingsport to the south. Two interchanges serve the Town at the intersections with Route 610 and Business Route 23. Alternate US Route 58 (Cumberland Avenue, Wood Avenue, East 5th Street) joins the Town with Pennington Gap and Scott County to the west. Secondary Route 613 (Spring Street) travels along the Powell River and provides a connection to East Stone Gap. Secondary Routes 615 and 683 provide arterial connections between the other routes.

A majority of the secondary routes are narrow, winding two-lane roads in adequate condition. US Route 23-58A is poorly aligned between Appalachia and Big Stone Gap and east-west traffic along Route 23-58 must follow a disjointed circulation route through the center of town. The traffic pattern causes congestion and safety problems on local streets. Other circulation problems result from poor design and layout usually caused by topographic and other physical barriers. Three grade-level railroad crossings exist within the Town limits: 19th Street, 9th Street, and Short Street. Railroad traffic interrupts traffic flow on these roadways for extended periods of time. At this time, alternatives are not available to alleviate the problem.



Funds for new roadway improvements to correct such problems as railway line separations, bypass construction and improved roadway alignments are obtained from highway construction and maintenance funds for State primary and secondary routes allocated by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) pursuant to funding formulas which became effective June 30, 1985. These are outlined in Section 33.1-23-1B3 (Construction) and Section 33.1-41.1 (Maintenance) of the Virginia State Code. Actual construction funds available for a six-year period to implement a specific project in urban systems, which include all jurisdictions with a population exceeding 3500, are allocated on a per capita basis. The amount per capita is adjusted over the six-year funding period in accordance with available funds.

Highway maintenance funds are paid to each city and town in Virginia with a minimum of population of 3,500 based on moving-lane-miles for principal and minor arterials and collector roads and local streets. The Town of Big Stone Gap has 28 lane miles of arterials and collectors roads that are qualified for maintenance under the State system. Minimum standards for right-of-way and road construction are required by VDOT in order for the State to take the improvement into the state system. All new road improvements should meet these minimum requirements.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

The Town of Big Stone Gap is the economic and cultural center for a large geographic area within Wise County, including Powell Valley and the territory largely located southwest of Little Stone Mountain and Powell Mountain to the Wise County line. The strong community of interest between the Town and the surrounding areas results in part from the nature and extent of Town and other government services and facilities, cultural and religious functions, recreation, health and emergency services, and private enterprise. Geographic characteristics also contribute to the strong community of interest.

Community facilities play an important role in the overall health and well being of the Town. They provide services that benefit both mind and body and, therefore, are extremely important to the residents of the Town.

Water System

The Town of Big Stone Gap has maintained and operated a water supply system since the 1900's. The system's raw water intake is on the South Fork of the Powell River approximately 6.7 miles east of the Town's corporate limits. The South Fork Powell River is fed by the Big Cherry Reservoir that is located four miles upstream from the intake. The Big Cherry Reservoir has a capacity of over 400 million gallons. The reservoir's surface area is in excess of 100 acres and drains an uninhabited watershed of 5.6 square miles. While the reservoir dates to the early 1900's, the current impoundment structure was constructed in 1935.

Previous engineering studies have identified that the existing dam at Big Cherry Reservoir has inadequate safety factors that relate to the potential for overflow and sliding. As a follow-up to these studies, engineering consultants suggested in 1999 that the Town undertake a major construction project to build a new dam approximately 200 feet downstream of the existing dam. The proposed new dam would have a height of about 60 feet, a length of about 300 feet, and most significantly, a normal pool elevation approximately five feet higher than the existing reservoir. The new dam will increase water storage by approximately 200,000,000 gallons, giving the impoundment a total storage capacity of 600,000,000 gallons. This will provide a 300 day storage period with no inflow. The increased storage capacity will allow the Town to sell water to the City of Norton, Pennington Gap, Dryden and Wise, Lee, and Scott counties. The cost of this improvement is estimated to be approximately \$7,550,000. Funding for the project is being provided by the Town of Big Stone Gap, Rural Development Agency, Appalachian Regional Commission, Environmental Protection Agency (through the Virginia Department of Health), and Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

The water treatment plant is located at the raw water intake on the South Fork Powell River. The plant operates under the auspices of the State Health Department and was last upgraded and expanded in 1981 from 1.5 mgd to its current capacity of 4.0 mgd. Raw water is treated through chemical coagulation, sedimentation, filtration, and disinfection. The facility is equipped with a 113 kv generator for backup emergency power. Current daily production of finished water averages 1.0 mgd.

Finished water is gravity-fed by a 1,000,000-gallon tank at the treatment plant to Big Stone Gap for distribution throughout the Town and adjacent areas. The distribution network has 20 to 25 miles of water lines, all of which are six inches or larger in diameter. The system has two miles of 18-inch water line, seven miles of 12-inch water line, and three miles of 10-inch water line. The water service area extends as far away as 2-1/2 to 3 miles from the Town. Located at strategic points in the distribution network are seven other water storage tanks, having a combined capacity of 1,650,000 gallons and two pump stations with back-up emergency power generators with the capability to provide water to all parts of the service area. The water supply system includes a comprehensive network of 302 fire hydrants providing access to water for fire suppression throughout the Town and service area.

The Town awarded a \$335,000 construction contract in 2001 for an additional 300,000 gallon water tank at the Wildcat location. This tank, plus the associated one mile of water lines and pump station, will serve the college area and U.S. Route 23 South.

Water service for residential and business use, as well as fire protection, is provided throughout the entire town as well as adjacent areas. There are no known areas of deficient water service relative to the quantity available for use or pressure of water service.

The system currently provides service to 1,759 residential and 225 business connections within the Town limits plus 1,569 residential and 70 business connections outside of the Town. Within the Town, fewer than three or four units located in isolated areas are not connected to the system and, therefore, rely on individual wells.

The Town does have a Mandatory Connection Ordinance with the policy the residence or establishment must connect if service is available. The Town will run 100' of service line for water and 40' for sewer.

Waste Water Treatment and Sewer

Big Stone Gap initiated a sanitary sewer system in the 1950's. In the early 1990's, the Town began a project to replace its 800,000 gallons per day trickling filter treatment plant with an expanded and updated facility. The Big Stone Gap Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant was constructed as a joint project with the Town of Appalachia and began service in 1995. The plant has a permitted capacity of 2,000,000 gpd and serves the southern portion of Wise County.

The sewer system serves 1,701 residential customers and 218 commercial customers within the Town of Big Stone Gap and 522 residential customers and 31 commercial customers in the adjacent areas. A 1998-1999 construction project funded by the Town and VDHCD extended sanitary sewer service to the Artesian Well Hollow neighborhood to serve twelve customers. There are only about 60 dwellings within the Town that are not connected to the sanitary sewer system and rely on individual septic tank systems. Any failure of tanks or drain fields requires connection to the Town's system. The Town also requires new construction within the town limits to connect to the sewer system unless such connection is not physically feasible where a below grade connection would require pumping.

Under the terms of a 1992 Intermunicipal Agreement with the Town of Appalachia, Big Stone Gap paid 80% of the construction cost for the Treatment Plant and Appalachia paid the remaining 20%. Flow is allocated proportionately, with 1,600,000 gpd to Big Stone Gap and 400,000 gpd to Appalachia. The share of the operational costs of the plant is determined each year by a flow ratio of each municipality during the preceding twelve months. For the period of February 2000 to January 2001, the incoming flow was 383,945,830 gallons, with 23.6% from the Town of Appalachia. Thus for that period, the plant operated at 52.6% of its capacity and the Town of Big Stone Gap utilized 50.2% of its allocation.

The Big Stone Gap Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant is the terminus for two major sewer force mains – a 16-inch line from the Aviation Road pump station and a 10-inch line from the Town of Appalachia pump station. Two minor force mains, a 4-inch line from the former Maloney's Store pump station and a 3-inch line from the Cadet pump station, are also terminal points for sewer force mains. Three other pump stations are utilized to convey wastewater from customers in such areas as Spring Street and Artesian Well Hollow.

The entire Town of Big Stone Gap and some portions of Wise County outside of the Town's limits are served by the sanitary sewer collection system. Approximately 20 miles of sewer lines 8-inches and larger comprise the collection system.

Flow entering the Plant is metered and channeled through the mechanical bar screen to remove large debris. An aerated grit chamber removes solids such as eggshells and sand. A screw conveyor deposits the collected screenings and grit into a collection bin for disposal at the Wise County landfill.

A flow equalization basin with a capacity of 2,000,000 gallons provides the capability to manage increased influent flow rates during precipitation events. The basin has mixers and aerators to keep organic solids in suspension until the wastewater is pumped into the oxidation ditch for secondary treatment. In the oxidation ditch, conditions are adjusted to match the population of microorganisms that consume organic solids to the amount entering the plant. The microorganisms and other suspended materials are removed in parallel clarifiers with a portion returned to the oxidation ditch for further treatment and a portion wasted to the aerobic digester for further solids reduction. The clarified water is disinfected by ultraviolet light and aerated prior to its discharge into the Powell River. A 350 kilovolt generator provides back-up power for the plant.

The effluent from the plant must comply with the Town's discharge permit issued by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ). After aerobic digestion, remaining solids are dewatered by a filter belt press and land applied in compliance with requirements of United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Four full-time operators and one part-time operator, under the supervision of the Director of Utilities, staff the plant. The staff operates an extensive approved laboratory that performs all required analyses in-house except for annual toxicity and bio-solids testing.

Solid Waste Collection and Disposal

Big Stone Gap operates a weekly curb service solid waste collection and disposal system within the Town limits. There are currently 1,759 residential customers and 225 business customers. Oversized refuse and debris is picked up once a month. Leaf removal is available upon request. A recycling program also operates within the Town that collects plastic, glass, paper and aluminum waste. Residents of adjacent areas outside of the Town limits arrange their own solid waste collection and disposal.

Four Town employees provide the collection service under the direction of the Public Works Supervisor. The Town maintains three vehicles for waste collection: two 18-cubic yard garbage trucks and one 20-cubic yard truck. All three trucks have a rear loader with compactor.

All solid waste from the Town is transported to the Wise County Landfill located 8 miles outside of Big Stone Gap. The County directly charges each household and business for waste disposal.

Police Department

Big Stone Gap has had a police department since its incorporation. The Department is headed by the Chief of Police who is selected by the Town Manager. The Chief, one lieutenant, three investigators, 11 patrol officers, and two secretaries staff the department. There are a total of 16 professional police officers, all of whom have received minimum training by the State Police as required by the Commonwealth of Virginia and most receive additional training above the minimum required level. They provide police and public safety services to town residents and are available to assist the County Sheriff's office in surrounding areas. Given the size of the Town and the resources within the Police Department, the average response to a call for service is two to four minutes.

In the early 1990's, the Town renovated a Wise County elementary school for new Town offices, which include facilities for the Police Department. The Police Department currently utilizes the Wise County jail, located approximately 14 miles away. The present County facility is undersized and the Town will participate in a proposed regional jail system. The site for the new regional jail is Duffield, a distance of 14 miles south of the Town. The facility is expected to be operational in the 2003-04 fiscal year.

The Department currently operates with four shifts to provide full-time services to the Town. Most shifts have a minimum of two patrol officers. In 2000, the Police Department responded to approximately 3,500 calls for service. The Town also responds to service calls from the Wise County Sheriff's Department for adjoining areas outside the Town limits. In 2000, the Town Police Department responded to approximately 50 calls for service outside of the Town limits.

In addition to these basic services, the Police Department provides additional service activities in areas adjacent to the Town. Other Services include D.A.R.E., police chaperone for school functions, participation in Developmental Services Incorporated (mentally and physically handicapped individuals), functions of State, area health fairs, support for Boy and Girl Scouts, and educational tours of the Town including the Police Department, Town Hall, and historic and

cultural facilities. All dispatching and emergency 911 services for the Police Department are provided through the Wise County Sheriff's Department.

As compiled by the Police Department, the Town had a year 2000 crime rate of 4,300 per 100,000. The crime clearance rate was 32%.³

Fire Service

Fire Service in Big Stone Gap is provided by a volunteer fire department, supervised by a paid Fire Chief who reports to the Town Manager. The volunteer force has 27 members.

The Town owns the Fire Department buildings, contributes to equipment purchases and makes annual contributions to the department's operational costs. Wise County also contributes financial support because the service area includes the Town and areas outside the corporate limits. To provide efficient response, the Fire Department operates two fire stations: one in the downtown area and the other in the Big Stone Heights area. From these two stations, the Fire Department can respond to a call for service within an average of 3 minutes. All volunteers carry pagers to notify the volunteer of the location and nature of the call. In addition, during daylight hours, a general alarm is sounded. Calls for service are dispatched by Wise County Emergency 911.

Firefighting water is supplied by a system of fire hydrants operated as part of the Town's water system. The Town is served by 302 fire hydrants, which are maintained by Town forces and are tested yearly for flow volumes and pressure.

The Virginia Department of Emergency Services has mandated that every local government have and maintain an emergency services plan. The Town has joined Wise County and the City of Norton in developing and maintaining this plan.



All volunteer firefighters are required to participate and obtain certification under the State Firefighters Certification Program. Certificates are awarded including renewals by the State in accordance with its guidelines.

³ SOURCE: Police Department, Town of Big Stone Gap

Emergency Medical Services

The Big Stone Gap Rescue Squad, Inc. provides emergency medical services in the Town of Big Stone Gap and surrounding areas. This organization was established in 1961. It is headquartered at 361 Shawnee Avenue in the downtown area. To provide services, the rescue squad has a staff of approximately 25 volunteers and a fleet of four rescue vehicles. The squad responds primarily to calls for emergency needs while there is a private service predominately responding to non-emergency needs.

In 2000, the rescue squad responded to 968 calls for service in the Town and 196 calls for service in the adjacent areas. The County dispatcher provides dispatch service for the rescue squad.

In addition to response calls for service, the rescue squad provides these other services for Big Stone Gap and the surrounding community:

- ❑ Stand-by at community events such as the Fourth of July festivities, the Christmas Parade, athletic events, and community gatherings.
- ❑ Host for Emergency Medical Service classes that provide training and certification to people in such areas as CPR, EMT, and shock trauma.

The Town supports the rescue squad with an annual contribution from the Town's general fund. The contribution for FY 2000-20001 was \$5,000, which covered approximately 5% of the rescue squad's annual budget. Wise County also makes contributions annually to the squad's operational budget.

Libraries

The C. Bascom Slemple Memorial Library in Big Stone Gap is a branch of the Lonesome Pine Regional Library System. It was built in 1973 and houses approximately 45,000 volumes with an annual circulation in excess of 150,000. The branch is operated by a staff of seven and is open seven days a week. Representatives of Lee, Wise and Scott Counties and the City of Norton sit on the Board of Trustees. The Regional Library system offers a full range of library media services that are available to all patrons through interlibrary loans. It also offers a "Dial-a-Story" program and weekly story time sessions for young readers as well as summer reading programs for all age groups.



The Regional Library System receives financial support directly from the Town. In FY 200-2001, the Town contributed \$2,000 and also provided additional in-kind services, such as grass mowing, amounting to \$2000.

Cemeteries

Glencoe Cemetery and Oakview Cemetery are located in Big Stone Gap. They are both owned and operated by the Town. Although a mausoleum was constructed at Glencoe Cemetery to provide additional burial choices, both cemeteries are nearing capacity. Expansion of Glencoe Cemetery is possible to the north. The Department of Parks and Recreation is responsible for the maintenance of the cemeteries and funds are derived from the sale of cemetery lots.



Parks and Recreation

The Department of Parks and Recreation provides facilities and programs to residents of the Town and County. The director reports to the Town Manager. The staff of the Department consists of the Director and one full-time employee. This staff is supplemented by 10 to 15 part-time employees who provide programs on a seasonal basis at various locations around the Town.

The Town owns, operates and maintains the following parks and recreation facilities located within its boundaries:

Bullitt Park
Aviation Road Park
Frog Level Park

Fraley's Park
Cadet Park
Carnes Park

Italy Bottom Park
Archery Range Pool
Greenbelt Trail

Bullitt Park is the largest and most versatile park in the Town offering athletic fields, a playground, picnic shelters, a track, and large areas of open space. It also serves as a major entryway to the Greenbelt Trail. The facilities and amenities at Bullitt Park are in need of repair and a general reorganization of space may be in order. The Master Improvement Plan (1997) includes a rehabilitation plan for Bullitt Park, Frog Level Park and Carnes Park.

Standards established by the National Recreation and Park Association recommend 6.25 to 10.5 acres of local parks and recreation sites per 1,000 residents. Big Stone Gap provides over 15 acres of public parks and recreation per 1,000 residents, which is well above the recommended standard.

In 1997-1998, the Town secured Transportation Enhancement Assistance grants from the Virginia Department of Transportation for the improvement of a pedestrian trail that interconnects neighborhoods with existing recreation facilities and key cultural features in the Town. The Greenbelt provides improved access to the Powell River, historic areas, and the downtown district.

The Department of Parks and Recreation is also responsible for the management and operation of the Town-owned lands adjacent to Big Cherry Reservoir. This 2,200 acre site provides a resource for large-scale outdoor recreation such as boating, hunting and primitive camping.

SUMMARY OF CRITICAL COMMUNITY ISSUES

Citizens of the Town were solicited through newspaper advertisements and public hearings to identify the critical issues that face the Town now and in the future. These issues were solicited in public forums, Planning Commission meetings, and newspaper advertisements. After compiling all the responses, five critical issues emerged that represent the residents' immediate concern for Big Stone Gap.

Downtown Revitalization and Economic Development

Downtown areas serve an important purpose to communities – they provide a focal point for commercial, cultural, and social activity. Traditionally, downtowns served as a retail and commercial nexus for the larger community. However, general trends in development have altered the need and purpose of downtown areas. Big Stone Gap's downtown has suffered the same fate as many other communities – large retail operations have left the downtown and moved to retail centers on the outskirts of town. Effective strategies need to be developed to economically restructure the downtown and develop a new, more useful purpose for this district.

Vacant storefronts, under-utilized upper floors, and traffic congestion currently plague the downtown area of Big Stone Gap. Like most urbanized areas, the downtown has lost a significant portion of its previous function as a commercial, governmental and industrial hub to new commercial and retail centers on the fringes of the Town. Measures have been taken by the Town to improve the physical conditions downtown in order to attract new businesses and spur the economic transformation of the Town from an industrial-based economy to a service-based economy. These measures include new sidewalks with decorative accents, improved lighting, directional signage, and historical markers. While these actions have contributed to the aesthetic improvement of the district, additional measures must be taken to improve the overall functionality of the downtown area.

History of Action

The Town of Big Stone Gap adopted a Master Improvement Plan in 1997 and has instituted several of the recommendations contained within the plan. The recommendations include streetscape improvements along Wood Avenue and East Fifth Street (i.e. street trees, decorative sidewalks, period lighting), paving of the federal courthouse parking lot, creation of a farmers market, development of a café district at Miners Park, a building façade improvement program, upper floor housing, trail and park development, town entrance enhancements, and walking tour improvements. Since the adoption of the plan, the Town has added decorative bluestone accents to the sidewalks, paved the courthouse parking lot, installed period lighting along Wood Avenue and developed the greenbelt trail along the Powell River.

Additional efforts undertaken by the Town in the downtown include the refurbishment of Miners Park, implementation of a self-guided walking tour, and installation of directional signage to sites of interest. Construction of the Lonesome Pine School and Historical Center will add to the diverse cultural options in the downtown. All of these efforts have improved the downtown area, however, additional steps and comprehensive action must be taken to maintain the downtown's place as a nexus for service, retail and cultural activity.

Opportunities

Master Improvement Plan

The Town of Big Stone Gap adopted a Master Improvement Plan (Hill Studio, PC) in December 1997. This plan focuses on physical improvements in the downtown to spur business and tourism development. As the plan states:

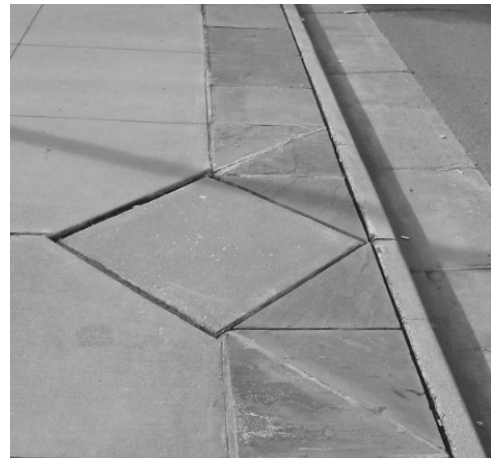
The focus of the Master Improvement Plan is the Town of Big Stone Gap's downtown area that serves as a regional center for the retail, arts, service and government sector. The plan makes provisions for enhancing accessibility, restoration of historic facades, enhancing public areas and maximizing parking. Several projects are incorporated into the plan to provide a comprehensive scope of development. The Master Improvement Plan is to be implemented over ten years, as funds are available.

An effective downtown revitalization strategy addresses deficiencies with infrastructure, vacant storefronts, aesthetic improvements, underutilized buildings and upper floors, traffic flow and circulation and an overall economic restructuring to alter the role and purpose of the downtown area. A strategy to revitalize the downtown area encompasses elements of the other four critical issues: zoning and historic area, roads and transportation, middle-income housing, tourism and economic development, and youth activities.

Economic development strategies include revitalization of the downtown area and the calculated implementation of land use strategies. The Town has the ability to spur economic development by creating renewed interest in the downtown area through infrastructure improvements, tax abatement programs, and façade improvement projects.

Upper Floor Housing

Under-utilized space above storefronts presents a unique opportunity for the Town: increase the number of residents in the downtown area by converting upper floor space to residential use. By promoting the conversion of this space through tax abatement programs, façade improvement plans, and low-interest loan initiatives, the Town has the ability to increase the population in the



downtown core and stimulate ancillary business development (such as convenience goods and entertainment) to support residential living.

Upper floor housing can cater to a variety of lifestyles that have different needs and desires.

- Married couples that no longer have children living at home often seek low-maintenance housing that is convenient to employment and services.
- Elderly persons may want to live near medical and government facilities so that they have immediate access to healthcare and other necessities.
- Young individuals or couples often seek affordable housing that is located near entertainment and retail centers and requires little maintenance.



The idea of accessible residential space in an urban environment appeals to a wide range of the population and offers the Town an exciting opportunity to re-energize the downtown district.

Façade Improvement Program

Efforts can be undertaken by the Town to initiate the physical rehabilitation of storefronts in the downtown. A Façade Improvement Program implemented by the Town would typically provide matching funds to property owners who voluntarily improve storefronts to mutually acceptable standards. The Town must establish clear eligibility requirements including a defined geographic area, minimum investment amount of the property owner, architectural design guidelines, and time of required action.



Adaptive Reuse of Existing Buildings

Vacant buildings often remain unused because they have not been transformed from their original use. Effective adaptive reuse strategies recognize unmet needs in the current market and retrofit existing buildings for these new uses. The Miner Building and former headquarters of the Westmoreland Coal Company present two opportunities for investment. Both buildings appear to be structurally sound and both are located in prime downtown locations. Each building could accommodate new uses such as office space, residential units, or commercial space. A combination of several uses often proves to be the best option.



The Town can institute a tax abatement program that will value the building at its current assessment for the next ten to fifteen years, even after rehabilitation has been complete. This offers a financial incentive to a developer to invest money into the property without having the additional burden of higher taxes. Connection of these structures to the broadband system will increase the marketability and attractiveness of adaptive reuse possibilities.

Broadband Connectivity

The Town is in the process of being connected to a regional broadband internet connection sponsored by the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission. The initial phase of the connection will allow government and emergency services increased internet and communication capacities. Additional phases of the project will allow business and residential subscribers to connect to the system. The initial focus of the connection on the downtown and major corridors will increase the marketability of the area and promote business development in the district.

In anticipation of broadband connectivity, the Town has implemented a Technology Zone that covers the whole town. This special designation allows businesses to expand and improve their properties while having their taxes abated for a specified period of time. Additional incentives apply to businesses that create additional jobs. This tax abatement program combined with access to high speed internet will serve as major incentives to businesses to locate and expand in the Town. The Town should also seek additional grant funding such as the Rural Development Business Grant to assist those businesses that locate and/or expand in the Town.

Zoning in Areas Adjacent to the Town and Historic Areas

Development in Wise County adjacent to Town boundaries poses a threat to controlled growth patterns and compatible uses. Differences in the zoning classifications used by the Town and the County have conflicting acceptable uses and may lead to incongruent development patterns that threaten the stability of Town neighborhoods and commercial centers. The two localities should work together to address the potential conflicts in the zoning classifications and create harmonious development strategies for those areas that border the Town limits. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and Wise County will allow for compatible development and land uses in bordering areas.

Establishing a Historic District in Big Stone Gap offers several opportunities to control the amount and type of development that occurs in the center of town. An architectural review board or similar entity must be established to review any modifications to the buildings or land within the district. A Historic District zoning classification should address minor and major alterations to building facades in order to preserve historic character or rectify changes to the historic fabric of the area. Minor modifications include painting, door, window and gutter replacement, surface repair, and the installation of fencing or landscaping. Major modifications include the construction or removal of buildings, additions, accessory buildings, porches, awnings, or decorative details as well as the



alteration of doors, windows, roofs or decorative materials. The preservation board will have the authority to establish guidelines for any alteration to buildings and land within the district.

Additional actions include:

- Mirror zoning in adjacent areas with those in the Town as best as possible to maintain consistency and continuity of land use and development.
- Designate the area surrounding the June Tolliver Playhouse as a Historic and Cultural District and establish design guidelines for any future development or alterations to existing structures.

Roads and Transportation

Traffic volume, flow and circulation have remained serious issues in Big Stone Gap for several years. The lack of efficient thoroughfares across and around the Town forces heavy truck traffic to travel along secondary roads through commercial and residential areas. This type and volume of traffic increases noise and environmental pollution along with increased safety issues for pedestrians and motorists alike. The Town has already passed a resolution calling for the completion of the Route 58A Bypass. Other actions can be taken in the near-term to minimize the existing problem.

- Introduce traffic calming measures on heavily traveled downtown streets. Such measures include new traffic patterns, crosswalks, and coordinated traffic signals.
- Promote the use of bicycles with the expansion of the greenway and the development of additional biking trails.
- Partner with Wise County and develop creative financing strategies amenable to VDOT for the completion of the bypass.

Middle-Income Housing

Affordable housing for middle-income residents has become a priority issue due to the increase in a deteriorating housing stock and lack of developable land. Quality, affordable homes are quickly becoming scarce within the town limits and mobile homes increasingly are becoming the only option for some homeowners. The Town must take action to revitalize and/or redevelop the neighborhoods within the corporate limits and work cooperatively with Wise County to address the neighborhoods that border and are serviced by the Town.

Additional actions include:

- Revitalize existing neighborhoods through the Community Development Block Grant program. The Town has successfully implemented the CDBG program in the past and continues to pursue additional funding for its most critical neighborhoods.
- Create new housing opportunities that are attractive to retirees and first-time homebuyers. These developments should capitalize on the natural beauty of the area and offer convenience to the amenities that cater to various households.
- Support quality medical care in the community and expand assisted living and nursing care facilities in the Town.
- Include neighboring residential areas that utilize Town services, facilities and amenities for the purpose of securing state financial aid for revitalization efforts as in the Southern neighborhood.

- Enforce building codes and ensure that existing residential structures comply with safety ordinances.
- Identify concentrations of blight within the community and target these areas for rehabilitation.
- Establish public/private partnerships for the development of new housing and/or the redevelopment of underutilized residential areas.
- Improve facilities, services, and amenities of the Town and its associated housing image in order to attract a larger share of the retirement population.
- Support the conversion of vacant upper-floor space in the downtown area.

Tourism Development

Big Stone Gap currently participates in regional tourism development through the Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority. The Authority represents the City of Norton and Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell and Wise counties. It hosts a website and produces a free travel brochure that details the numerous attractions and activities throughout the region. While Big Stone Gap's participation in this organization is vital to tourism development, the Town must take initiatives of its own to promote Big Stone Gap as a travel destination.

The Town should consider creating a Director of Tourism position within the Town government to actively promote tourism opportunities in the Town. While this position is critical to implementing a successful tourism development plan, the position may not require full-time attention and may possibly be combined with other responsibilities such as Main Street Coordinator. This person will be responsible for all aspects of tourism and development including marketing, planning, coordination and implementation.

Big Stone Gap offers several unique opportunities for visitors and travelers alike: the Trail of the Lonesome Pine Outdoor Drama, the setting for the novel Big Stone Gap, numerous outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, fishing and biking, and other attractions. To further tourism development, the Town should actively participate in promoting the unique tourism options the Town provides.

Current sites of interest include:

John Fox, Jr. House

Constructed in 1888, this Virginia Historic Landmark displays 19th Century furnishings and other household items from the family of John Fox Jr. Admission is charged, with discounts offered to students and senior citizens. The house is open to the public for guided tours from approximately Memorial Day to Labor Day.

June Tolliver House

Elizabeth Morris, widely believed to be the inspiration for the character of June Tolliver, the heroine of The Trail of the Lonesome Pine, lived in the house during the winter of 1893 while she attended Stonega Academy's Primary Department. Originally constructed in the 1880's for Jerome H. Duff and his family, the June Tolliver House offers examples of 19th Century furnishings and a memorial room dedicated to John Fox, Jr., the author of The Trail of the Lonesome Pine. Admission is free and volunteers provide guided tours through the house.

The June Tolliver House, a Virginia Historic Landmark, is open from June to December to coincide with the outdoor production of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* located next door. Annual events include a flower show and a Christmas exhibition.

The Trail of the Lonesome Pine Outdoor Drama

Virginia's official and longest running outdoor drama, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* runs from July through August. The play is based on the novel written by Big Stone Gap native John Fox Jr. and includes original folk mountain music. Admission is charged, with discounts available for children and senior citizens.

Southwest Virginia Museum

The museum is located within the mansion formally occupied by the family of Rufus Ayers, a Virginia Attorney General. It was built in the 1880's and was officially dedicated by the Commonwealth of Virginia as a state park in 1948. The museum provides an exploration of the area during the pioneer days through the coal boom of the 1890's through a collection of more than 20,000 pieces, one-third of which is on display at any given time.

Activities offered by the museum include scout and school programs, workshops, walking tour, and an annual Festival of Trees. A gift shop and conference room provide additional services.



Harry Meador, Jr. Coal Museum

Dedicated to the memory of Harry Meador, a tireless advocate of the coal industry, the Coal Museum chronicles the history of coal in the region and its dramatic effect on the local way of life. The museum is open year round and admission is free. The Town owns and operates the museum through the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Christ Episcopal Church

Built in 1892, this church houses one of the oldest congregations in the area and has historical ties to many families in Virginia. It is designated as a Virginia Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Walking Tour connects many of these sites together. Additional efforts by the Town and local community can strengthen the cultural foundation that currently exists in Big Stone Gap. These comprehensive strategies will enable the Town to create a sense of 'place' that will enhance the tourist draw.



Strategies to spur Tourism Development include:

Main Street Program

This program is coordinated by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and applies a proven methodology for preserving and revitalizing downtown cores. As an affiliate member, the Town will receive limited technical support from DHCD staff in the implementation of revitalization strategies. Once the Town exhibits proficiency in this area, it should apply for full Main Street partner status in order to receive the full benefits of the program.

June Tolliver Playhouse

The June Tolliver Playhouse hosts Virginia's Official Outdoor Drama, the Trail of the Lonesome Pine, which has run during July and August each summer for the past thirty years. In addition to the Trail of the Lonesome Pine, the space is used sporadically for children's theater presentations and a Halloween Haunted Theater.

Currently, the playhouse serves as a tourist attraction for only two months of the year. With a seating capacity of 400 patrons, the playhouse provides an excellent location for additional events that will entertain residents and attract tourists throughout the year. Areas of expansion for the Playhouse include:



- The Crooked Road – Virginia's Music Heritage Trail extends from Clintwood to Floyd, Virginia and passes through Pound, Norton, Appalachia, Big Stone Gap, Hiltons, Bristol, Abingdon, Damascus, Independence, Galax, and Hillsville. Currently, only six venues promoted with the Trail exist along this route. Big Stone Gap has the ability to utilize this existing facility to sponsor musical events associated with the coordinated efforts of the Crooked Road. The Town has a natural link to mountain music, bluegrass and country music through its native son, Carl Martin, a pioneer jazz musician who was born and raised in Big Stone Gap. Just as other localities promote ties to Dock Boggs, the Carter Family, and the Stanley Brothers, Big Stone Gap can lay claim as the birthplace of Carl Martin. Appalachian crafts tie in nicely with the music trail and provide an opportunity to schedule coinciding events to maximize turnout.



The new Lonesome Pine Historical Center will add another tourist attraction for the Town. Currently under construction, the center will add another dimension to tourist's experience with the outdoor drama, the Crooked Road, and Southwest Virginia life.

The Maggard Recording Studio is also located in Big Stone Gap. Founded in 1963 by local musician Charlie Maggard, the studio specializes in Country, Southern, Mountain, and Bluegrass Gospel music recording. The studio has hosted hundreds of local, regional, and national artists over the years and provides a technical and historic connection to the Crooked Road.

- The Barter Theater – Abingdon has enjoyed success with theater arts for several years. Big Stone Gap currently has an informal relationship with Abingdon through the actors that perform at venues in both locations. Big Stone Gap should formalize the relationship with the Barter Theater and establish actor exchanges, performing arts workshops, and other related events. These functions would establish a working relationship between the two venues and would allow for cross-promotional opportunities.

The Town should work cooperatively with the playhouse and jointly seek funds to rehabilitate the structure and grounds. A Rehabilitation Program should be developed to guide the efforts.

Cultural District Development

The area around the June Tolliver Playhouse includes the Duff Academy, Lonesome Pins Arts & Crafts, and the future Lonesome Pine School and Historical Center. A de facto cultural district already exists but has the potential to truly become a focal point for cultural activities in the Town. As the district evolves into a defined area, the Town will have the ability to market the whole area and not just specific events or venues. The 'experience' of the Cultural District will be another avenue to promote tourism in the Town. Development of this Cultural District may include:

- Acquisition of property for the development of surface parking to serve the Cultural District. Parking and traffic circulation currently pose problems for the Town and the creation of a Cultural District may exacerbate these issues. Several locations are suitable for new or improved parking lots:
 - A. Properties directly across from the June Tolliver Playhouse. The parking lot should include landscaping, curb and gutter and a brick or masonry wall around the perimeter. The installation of a parking lot at this location may require the acquisition and demolition of the existing structures.
 - B. The vacant lot at the corner of Clinton Avenue and East 4th Street and the vacant lot at the corner of Wyandotte Avenue and East 4th Street. While not necessarily located within the Cultural District, these locations can provide convenient parking for the attractions.
 - C. The narrow field behind the future Lonesome Pine School and Historical Center.

- Installation of decorative signage that directs visitors to the Playhouse and parking. The signage should be strategically placed along major thoroughfares that provide access to the Town and exhibit clear direction to the facilities.
- Landscaping and street furniture along the routes leading to cultural facilities. Appropriate landscaping includes street trees with manicured tree wells, decorative borders along sidewalks, and hanging flower baskets on street lamps. Easily maintained and durable varieties of vegetation are best for street and parking lot landscaping. Examples of street furniture include metal benches along pedestrian paths or sidewalks, metal trash bins, and street shelters. Landscaping and street furniture convey a warmth and hospitality to visitors and residents alike.

Streetscape and Storefront Improvements

The Town has already undertaken streetscape improvements along Wood Avenue and East 5th Street. Additional efforts in these areas as well as surrounding streets should continue. Recommended improvements include sidewalk installation/rehabilitation, period lighting, street trees and permanent benches and trash receptacles. The Town should focus on the areas around the June Tolliver Playhouse, post office, Southwest Virginia Museum and connecting routes between these sites.



Walking Tour

Expand the walking tour through the Town to include historic and scenic points of interest such as Glencoe Cemetery, Bullitt Park, and Terrace Park Cabin. Increase the amount of directional signage so that individuals can follow the tour without using a printed map. The walking tour should traverse residential, commercial, historic and recreational areas of the Town, thereby offering a wide range of experiences to a larger segment of visitors.

Trail Expansion, Development and Connectivity

The Town has already implemented a greenbelt along the Powell River and has an opportunity to expand the trail as a connector route between numerous venues and tourist sites around the Town. Pedestrian access to the June Tolliver Playhouse from an expanded greenbelt trail along the Powell River caters to local residents and minimizes parking pressures for tourists.

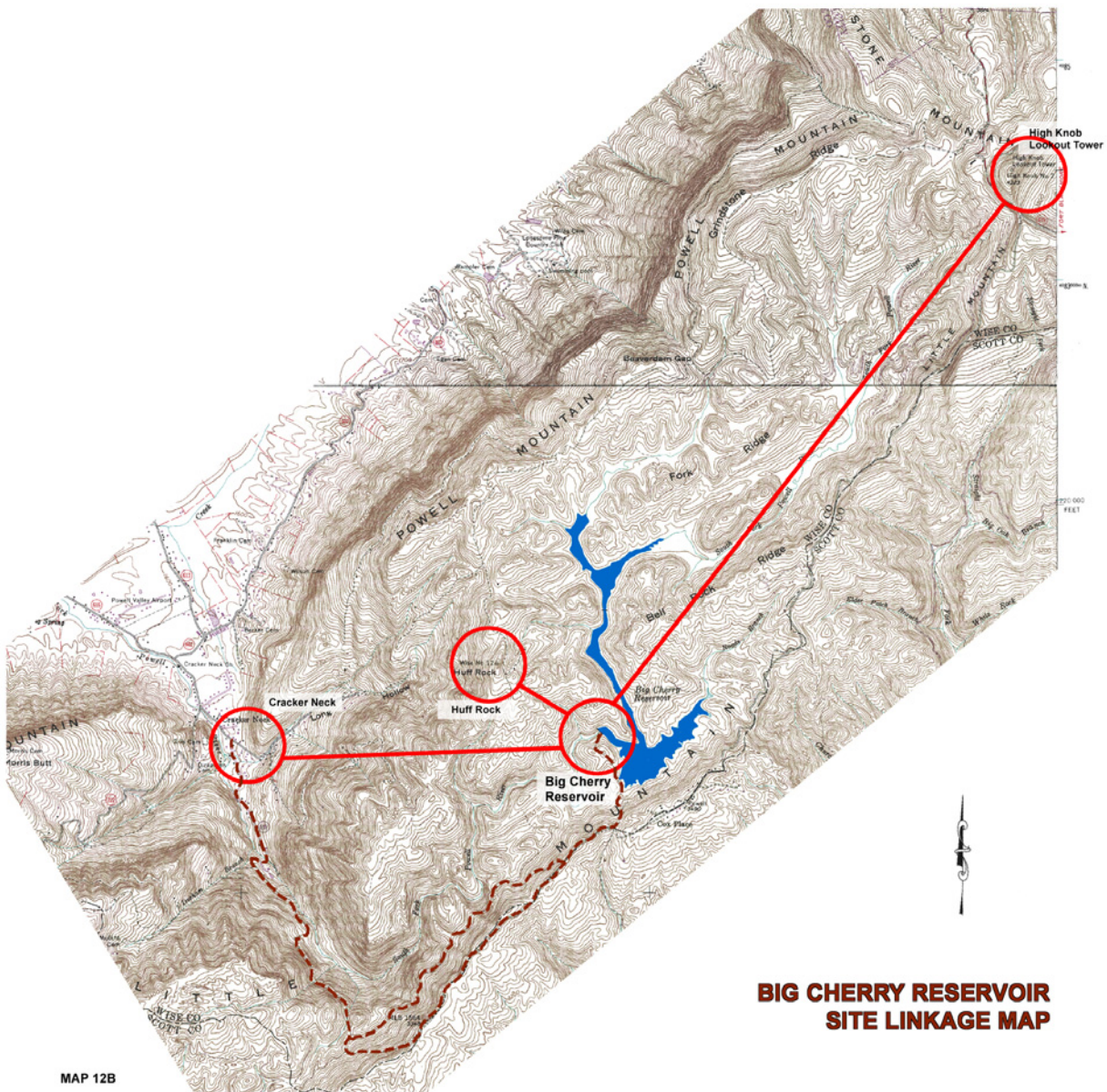


▪ Greenbelt

The Town has developed a greenbelt trail along the Powell River through the Town that accommodates pedestrians and cyclists. The greenbelt provides a passive outdoor recreational facility that has the potential to be a transportation link for important sites around the Town.

- Expand the greenbelt trail so that it completes a loop through the Town.
- Connect the June Tolliver Playhouse with the expanded greenbelt trail. A pedestrian-friendly link with the residential areas will benefit local attendance and alleviate parking pressures.
- Rails-to-Trails Conversion and Rails-with-Trails Development
The abandoned Southern rail line that extends north of Town towards Appalachia provides an opportunity for trail expansion and interconnectivity between towns. Rail lines frequently traverse scenic pathways that are ideal for trail ways.
 - In cooperation with the Town of Appalachia and Wise County, Big Stone Gap should pursue the conversion of the rail bed to a paved trail. Rail lines naturally travel over long distances from town to town and can serve as ready-made trails.
 - Active rail lines also have the potential for trail development. A ‘Rails-with-Trails’ approach safely incorporates trail development along active rail beds thereby expanding opportunities for connectivity between localities.
- Regional Wilderness Trail Development – Big Cherry Reservoir
The construction of a new dam at Big Cherry Reservoir provides an opportunity to develop recreational facilities that cater to residents and visitors. The largely underutilized land surrounding the reservoir has the ability to support numerous recreational activities such as hiking, biking, camping, fishing, horseback riding, and boating. The proximity of Big Cherry Reservoir to High Knob (northeast of the reservoir) allows for the development of a regional trail that ultimately could connect numerous localities. Connection to the successful Virginia Creeper Trail through Abingdon should be a long-term goal.





The access road to Big Cherry Reservoir begins at Cracker Neck. A trailhead located at the access road entrance could link to Big Cherry Reservoir and Huff Rock providing a trail loop appropriate for day users. A trail between Big Cherry Reservoir and High Knob would provide a lengthier trail for more avid enthusiasts.

Youth Activities

Productive activities for youth within the Town are severely lacking. Aside from after-school academic and athletic programs, very little is available for meaningful social interaction. Residents of the Town recognize the importance of offering constructive activities for youth to stave off inappropriate or illegal behavior and creative solutions must be devised to accommodate limited resources. Funding is available through DHCD for the development of a community center; however, that funding is competitive and limited. Near-term solutions include the organization of a youth-oriented outdoor adventure group that utilizes the natural resources in and around Big Stone Gap. This group could be organized through local churches or schools and could offer outings for hiking, biking, camping, and other outdoor activities. The Town should sponsor and mediate a Youth Summit and invite local children and teenagers to express their desires for activity options. Offering positive opportunities for young people to interact with their peers and other age groups can benefit the Town in a number of ways: reduced juvenile crime, increased desire for younger generations to remain in the area, and the attraction of middle-income families to the Town.

Other options include:

- Develop a teen center in an existing unoccupied structure that offers entertainment opportunities. The center could include a skating rink, video arcade, mini-golf course, or other such amenity.
- Organize a regional YMCA to offer athletic opportunities to young people.
- Re-evaluate existing outdoor athletic facilities and improve placement, design, and maintenance where needed.

LAND USE PLAN

The proposed Land Use Plan depicts the generalized land use pattern recommended to accommodate future growth of the Town. The land use plan recognizes traditional development patterns and generally expands on those trends. Major changes in general land use concepts are not anticipated.

The present lack of developable land within the corporate boundaries severely limits the options available to the Town for future growth. Two options are available to the Town to remedy this situation: 1) expansion of the corporate limits through boundary adjustments or annexation to include unimproved tracts of land suitable for development, and; 2) redevelopment of under-utilized areas within the Town limits to create the highest and best use of the land. One or both options must be implemented if the Town is to experience any new substantial development.

The recommended Land Use Plan intends to preserve and enhance existing residential neighborhoods for the betterment of living conditions for the residents. New residential development is limited to scattered infill construction in existing residential neighborhoods and larger scale development in targeted areas in Big Stone Heights. Currently, revitalization efforts in existing residential neighborhoods offer the greatest opportunity for improving the overall housing stock. The downtown center has the potential for residential use in underutilized spaces on the upper floors of commercial establishments. The growth in single person households and families without children provides a potential market for users of upper floor residential units.

Three classifications of residential use are illustrated on the Future Land Use map: low-density, medium-density and high density (multi-family). The multi-family classification on Big Stone Heights merely indicates a potential location for this type of development if future market forces create a need for rental/condominium units. With the modest population growth of the Town expected over the next ten years, this location might be better suited for single-family residential development (low-to-medium) density.

Commercial land uses are limited to existing commercial centers within the downtown and along the major thoroughfares and entrance corridors into the Town. General commercial functions such as highway-oriented services or wholesale operations should be limited to areas along major thoroughfares. Adequate buffers should be maintained or implemented between residential and other uses. Retail development in the downtown should serve the nearby residents and their convenience needs as well as the needs of the tourist market. Additional retail uses are appropriate at the interchanges with the major arterials and other major intersections. The dense nature of development in the downtown provides the necessary critical mass for specialty retail and restaurants. Competing with suburban retail centers in this context is not a viable option for downtown development.

Industrial land use is restricted primarily to the northern part of Town along the railroad. This area is unsuitable for residential or commercial development and should be reserved for industrial uses. The Town should institute provisions for the reuse and expansion of older and/or abandoned facilities to spur industrial growth in this area. The industrial park and areas immediately around the sewage treatment plant are prime locations for further industrial development.

Conservation/Parks & Recreation areas are scattered throughout the Town. Expansion of the greenbelt along other courses of the Powell River is encouraged. The conversion of the rail line leading north to Appalachia to a pedestrian/bicycle trail is also recognized. Conservation of one of Big Stone Gap's greatest assets, its prominent ridgelines and vistas, should be pursued and the connection with the existing greenbelt will lead to greater recreational opportunities for residents and tourists.

Community facilities are interspersed throughout the Town to provide convenience to those who utilize their services. These facilities include fire stations, police stations, hospitals, public works installations, cemeteries, social services, religious institutions, etc. In addition to providing services to the public at large, these facilities lend a sense of permanence to their surroundings and thereby serve as anchors in their respective neighborhoods. Careful consideration should be given to any new placement of a community facility so that harmony with its surroundings and convenience to its customer base are achieved.

The Town currently provides urban services to all areas within its corporate limits. Due to the concentrated development patterns in the Town that have occurred over the last twenty years and the limiting factors to further development, it is recommended that the Town concentrate its efforts on revitalizing existing residential neighborhoods, spurring economic development along established commercial corridors, and encourage industrial development on the north side of Town along the railroad tracks.

Proposed land uses outside of the Town boundaries are addressed to provide a context for development within the Town limits and to illustrate how growth outside of the Town follows traditional suburban tenants.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

VDOT, in conjunction with the Town of Big Stone Gap, developed a long-range transportation plan for the Town in February 2002, which was subsequently adopted by Town Council. This plan evaluates the existing transportation system and sets forth numerous improvements needed to safely handle the future transportation needs of the Town through the design year 2020.

According to the plan:

The Virginia Department of Transportation will use this plan when evaluating requests from the local governments for specific transportation projects and/or for implementing projects that the Department initiates. The list of recommendations will also be used in the statewide transportation planning process in order that the statewide magnitude of needs can be better quantified.

The study area includes only major thoroughfares in and around the Town of Big Stone Gap. The thoroughfare system is defined as those roads that serve as major collector and arterial roadways. The analysis and recommendations relate to these roads only. The plan considers secondary roads only if the Town has designated them for future improvements. VDOT has identified the following projects through the year 2020:

Phase I – Base Year

- 1) *Citywide Signal Upgrade* – All traffic signals should be brought up to current VDOT standards.
- 2) *Intersection of East 5th and Gilley Avenue* – Stop line should be moved back to improve the sight angle between the stop line and traffic signal.
- 3) *Intersection of East 5th and Wood Avenue* – Expansion of the right turn lane radius on the west approach will improve traffic flow and safety. Corner of Miners Park should be used for expansion.
- 4) *All approached to East 5th and Wood Avenue* – Consolidation of driveways, enhanced lighting and signage, improved sight angles, and a review of parking will improve traffic flow and safety.
- 5) *Gilley Avenue from East 5th to Hamblen Street* – New center turn lane will ease traffic congestion.
- 6) *Gilley Avenue from Dogwood Avenue to Eastern Corporate Limit* – Extension of four-lane highway to Dogwood Avenue will improve traffic flow and ease congestion.
- 7) *Signage along US Route 23* – Combining signage for the Coal Museum and Southwest Virginia Museum and adding directional signage for other attractions will advertise the Town's amenities more effectively. Trimming foliage near the signage will improve sight lines.

Phase II – Through 2010

- 1) *East 5th Street* – Re-stripe existing roadway to accommodate four lanes.
- 2) *19th Street from 2nd Avenue to 4th Avenue* – Expand to four lanes and install sidewalk, curb and gutter to control storm drainage and improve pedestrian access.
- 3) *4th Avenue from 19th Street to East Corporate Limit* – Expand to four lanes and install sidewalk, curb and gutter to control storm drainage and improve pedestrian access.
- 4) *Big Stone Gap Bypass* – Construct the US Route 58A Bypass from the West Corporate Limit to US Route 23 to minimize through truck traffic from Town streets.
- 5) *Bridge on Gilley Avenue* – Replace the existing bridge with a new bridge that meets current VDOT standards.

Phase III – Through 2020

- 1) *East 5th Street from Aviation Road to North Corporate Limit* – Expand from three lanes to four lanes with sidewalk, curb and gutter to control storm drainage.
- 2) *Gilley Avenue from East 5th Street to Hamblen Street* – Expand to four lanes with sidewalk, curb and gutter to control storm drainage and improve pedestrian access.
- 3) *Intersection of Gilley Avenue and East 5th Street* – Add a dedicated left turn lane to improve traffic flow and alleviate traffic congestion.
- 4) *Intersection of Gilley Avenue and Dogwood Avenue* – Develop two through lanes in each direction to improve traffic flow and alleviate traffic congestion.
- 5) *Intersection of 2nd Avenue and East 5th Street* – Install traffic signal to improve traffic flow.
- 6) *Intersection of Wood Avenue, 1st Avenue and Shawnee Avenue* – Install traffic signal to improve traffic flow.

VDOT has identified numerous transportation enhancements for Phase 1 of Big Stone Gap's 2020 Transportation Plan that are necessary in the near-term for the general improvement of the transportation system. A majority of the improvements involve updating the road system to modern acceptable standards including the realignment of sight angles at various traffic signals, the refinement of signage, and the review of parking in the downtown. Major improvements recommended by the Plan include the extension of the four-lane roadway along Gilley Avenue from Dogwood Avenue to the eastern corporate limits. The other recommended major improvement of replacing the bridge on Cumberland Avenue is already in progress.

Phase 2 of the Plan involves a more intensive and long-term approach to the Town's transportation needs. Major expansion of roadways from two lanes to four lanes along Wood Avenue and 4th Avenue, coupled with the expansion from three lanes to four lanes along a section of 19th Street are suggested for this phase. Safety upgrades at railroad crossings, pedestrian throughways and intersections are also included.

Lastly, Phase 3 of the Transportation Plan includes the additional expansion of East 5th Street and Gilley Avenue, sidewalk, curb and gutter, and traffic signal installation at various locations throughout the Town. This phase completes the recommended transportation improvements through the design year 2020.

The Big Stone Gap Bypass (US Route 58) is the largest and, therefore, the most expensive project for the Town. Increased traffic of all vehicle types through the Town has prompted the development of a plan to construct a bypass around the downtown area. Current VDOT planning does not allow for the construction of the bypass; however, the Town Council has passed a resolution calling for the inclusion of the US Route 58 Bypass in VDOT's schedule.

Additional Projects

In addition to the aforementioned VDOT projects, the Town has identified other areas not associated with major thoroughfares that require improvements through the year 2010. The additional projects include:

- 1) *West 5th Street and Gilley Avenue Connection* – Create a mini-bypass around the East 5th Street and Wood Avenue intersection to discourage truck traffic through the downtown area.
- 2) *Armory Road and East Shawnee Avenue Connection* – Provide alternate access between the central and northeast parts of town to discourage through truck traffic and alleviate traffic congestion.
- 3) *West 4th Street Railroad Crossing* – Install warning lights to improve safety.
- 4) *East 9th Street Railroad Crossing* – Install quad gates and other safety measures.

Increasing traffic volumes on outdated roadways present a growing problem for the Town. A growing number of large vehicles currently traverse the Town using major arterial roadways that also serve local and residential traffic. The existing roadways are not designed to accommodate the current volume or type of traffic. Additionally, fiscal stress at the state level currently prevents the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) from addressing these problems.

Parking

Adequate parking exists throughout the Town for regular usage; however, on-street parking on the approaches to the intersection of E. 5th St. and Gilley Avenue should be reviewed for safety reasons. Large events or the implementation of the Farmers Market will require additional study of the current parking situation.

Bicycle/ Pedestrian Pathways

Dedicated bike lanes do not currently exist along Town roadways. The greenbelt that traverses through certain parts of the Town offers cyclists the opportunity for off-road traveling. Sidewalks exist throughout most of the Town and along most of the major thoroughfares. The Town has recently made efforts to replace deteriorating sidewalks within the downtown area. The replacement of sidewalks should continue in the downtown area, and once completed, extend outward into the residential areas.

The Town has the opportunity to transform abandoned rail lines to trail ways. The line that extends north from Big Stone Gap to Appalachia is owned by Southern Railway but is no longer in use. Using the Rails-to-Trails program, Big Stone Gap has an excellent opportunity to expand its recreational opportunities and establish a regional trail system. Opportunities also exist for trail development alongside working rail lines. This Rails-with-Trails program provides an additional avenue for the creation of a local and regional trail system.

Transit, Paratransit, and Taxi

Paratransit service is offered to seniors of the Town and surrounding communities by the Mountain Empire Older Citizens organization. Private companies also provide taxi service.

Intercity Rail, Bus, and Air Travel

Intercity rail, bus service, or air service currently are not offered in the Town. Passenger bus service is available in Kingsport, Tennessee (35 miles south) and Abingdon, Virginia (60 miles southeast). Air travel from the Tri City Airport is also available in Kingsport. Lonesome Pine Airport in Wise County provides air service to private and corporate customers. Passenger rail service is not offered in Southwest Virginia.

Gateway Development

Entranceways to the Town provide visitors with an initial impression of Big Stone Gap. They offer an instant characterization of the Town and convey the level of civic pride. Attractive gateways serve to visually promote a locality to travelers who may otherwise pass through the Town without stopping. Big Stone Gap has installed impressive entrance signs that include the Town logo at three locations. While these signs add visual appeal to the gateways, additional landscaping around the signs and along the entrance corridor is needed to enhance the visitor's experience of entering the Town. Building on the attractiveness of the signage in this manner will create a visually stimulating experience to visitors that complements the aesthetic appeal of the surrounding mountains and waterways. The Master Improvement Plan (1997) includes a landscape design for the signage.

Signage and landscaping are the initial actions needed to enhance the gateways into the Town; however, additional measures should be taken to increase the effectiveness of the entranceways. Both the Business Route 23 entrance from Route 23 (southeast entrance) and the Business Route 23 entrance from the Town of Appalachia (north entrance) serve as the two primary corridors into Town. These entranceways are prime areas for redevelopment (both residential and commercial) including additional attention to infrastructure needs such as sidewalks, crosswalks, bridges and traffic patterns. Entranceway development requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all visual and functional aspects of the corridor.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND UTILITIES PLAN

The plan for Community Facilities is a simple statement of needs based on a review of current conditions and general population forecast. Each feature requires additional study, which may lead to a different recommendation. The amount, location and type of community facilities will determine the future growth of the Town.

Generally, the provision of community facilities and utilities in the area should continue as a joint regional effort by the Town of Big Stone Gap and Wise County. Additional regional efforts with the Town of Appalachia should also be encouraged.

Water and Sanitary Sewer

The improvements to Big Cherry Reservoir should alleviate water pressure problems in the Town. Additional efforts are required to eliminate inflow and infiltration problems as directed by the Department of Environmental Quality. Eight inch and twelve inch lines should be utilized in business and industrial areas to maximize water and sewer efficiency. The Town should also consider extending water and sewer service to adjoining areas outside of the Town limits.

The 2004 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) allocates funds over the next four years for upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant, water treatment plant, and sewer system. The upgrades to these facilities include flow equalization pumps, a new disinfection system, inflow/infiltration corrections, extension and repair of service in the Southern, Cadet East, Artesian Well Hollow, and Beamantown neighborhoods, and general maintenance/repair.

Public Safety

Little growth in the Town's population has kept the need for additional public safety officers to a minimum. Extending the service area for fire and police protection into adjoining areas surrounding the Town obviously would require additional staff. Current plans do not call for the extension of service.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Many projects undertaken by the Town can receive leverage funding from sources other than the Town itself. Various funding agencies contribute money to a variety of projects such as neighborhood revitalization, economic development, recreational facility development, public space rehabilitation, etc. A list of possible funding sources for assorted Town projects follows:

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The CDBG program addresses a wide range of community needs including housing, infrastructure and economic development provided that the specific project meets at least one of three national CDBG goals. These include:

- (1) activities benefiting low- and moderate- income persons;
- (2) activities which aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight; and
- (3) activities designed to meet community needs having a particular urgency.

The application for a CDBG grant through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD) for Planning Grants and Community Improvement Grants (CIG) is available competitively at up to 24 million dollars annually from the State.

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

The ARC serves a 200,000 square-mile region that includes sections of 13 states, including Western Virginia. The ARC seeks to improve the quality of life in the Region and make it more economically sustainable.

ARC funding can address a comprehensive range of community needs, which are grouped by either *project type*:

- 1) Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Development
- 2) Housing
- 3) Education
- 4) Leadership Development
- 5) Telecommunications
- 6) Business Development

Or *sources of funding*:

- 1) Federal
- 2) Foundation

Main Street Program

Although not a funding source, the Main Street Program offers a successful framework for revitalization efforts in downtowns. In addition, the program provides technical and marketing assistance to participating localities. The Main Street Approach includes:

- 1) Design/Planning – both in rehabilitation and new construction that is in character with its surroundings.
- 2) Organization – building a consensus among various public and private entities that are involved in the process.
- 3) Promotion – marketing the downtown to potential businesses and customers
- 4) Economic Restructuring – creating and attracting new opportunities and industries to the downtown.

Each project is focused on these general categories, but is tailored towards the individual community.

Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are run by professional staff and citizen boards, who have undertaken responsibility for a defined geographical area. Many of the members of these boards live in the community they serve, and not only have a personal interest in improving it, but also have intimate knowledge of how to do it. Other board members represent businesses and institutions and bring valuable resources and insight to the development process. CDCs are creating opportunities in their communities through the right blend of commercial, industrial, and residential initiatives. They have buy-in from the community. Using their own diverse skills as entrepreneurs, along with financing, marketing, and management tools, they are uniquely able to bring success to community programs.

Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA)

APVA operates a revolving loan fund for the purpose of buying and restoring qualified historic structures throughout Virginia. They also offer technical assistance and can provide localities with strategies for preserving historic character and charm.

Private

YMCA funding typically comes from private donations. Residents in the area should organize a regional fundraising effort to construct a facility that caters to all age groups in the community. Other charitable organizations or local businesses may be enlisted to either raise or contribute money to the facility construction.

Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF)

The VLCF is used to conserve certain categories of special land. Those categories are open spaces and parks, natural areas, historic areas, and farmland and forest preservation. A portion of the fund may be used for developing properties for public use. Matching grants provided to holders and public bodies for acquisition are generally used only for current projects; only in exceptional cases - where considerable public benefit and compelling, unusual financial need and circumstances have been shown - might grants be made for already complete purchases.

Virginia Outdoors Fund (VOF)

The Department of Conservation and Recreation administers a grant-in-aid program for acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. These grants are for public bodies only. Towns, cities, counties, regional park authorities and state agencies may apply for 50 percent matching fund assistance from the Virginia Outdoors Fund (VOF). When available, these funds are provided through state general fund appropriations and from federal apportionment from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (L&WCF) meant for the acquisition and/or development of outdoor recreation areas. This is a reimbursement program meaning that the sponsoring agency should be capable of financing the project while requesting periodic reimbursement. Grant amounts are not to exceed \$200,000 (\$400,000 total cost of project) or fall below \$50,000 (\$100,000 total cost of project).

Virginia Recreational Trails Fund (VRTF)

The VRTF provides grants for developing and maintaining recreational trails and trail-related facilities. Funding may be provided to private organizations, local governments, other government entities, and federal agencies if teamed with private trail groups and organizations. This grant cannot be used for condemnation of private property, upgrading trails to motorized uses that weren't so previously and for planning proposals of future trail facilities.

Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA)

Federal funds for the development of greenways are available through the third iteration of this program, now known as TEA-3. The authorizing federal legislation for the funding states:

TEA-21 continues and expands provisions to improve facilities and safety for bicycles and pedestrians. The eligibility of NHS funds is broadened to include pedestrian walkways, and safety and educational activities are now eligible for TE funds. Other changes ensure the consideration of bicyclists and pedestrians in the planning process and facility design.

Basic guidelines accompany the allocation of TEA-21 funds, including a 20% local funding match, a public hearing, and local government endorsement. Big Stone Gap's greenbelt project qualifies for TEA-21 funding under the Pedestrian and Bicycling Facilities category.

Virginia's Transportation Enhancement Program makes special grant funds for qualified projects that add value to the community's transportation network. Eligible projects include: additional facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists; acquisition of scenic programs; landscaping and other scenic beautification; historic preservation; rehabilitation and operations of historic transportation buildings, structure or facilities; preservation of abandoned railway corridors; control and removal of outdoor advertising; archeological planning and research; and pollution mitigation due to highway runoff.

Virginia Coalfields Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) Tourism Capital Improvement Matching Fund

VCEDA offers several loan and grant programs for tourism and economic development, including:

- 1) Revolving Loan Fund – is designed to attract new industry to the Coalfield Region by providing fixed asset financing for businesses bringing new income into the Region.
- 2) Seed Capital Matching Loan Fund – provides a source of matching loan funds to assist new, start-up, and emerging small business in the Region.
- 3) Tourism Capital Improvement Matching Fund – provides a source of matching loan and grant funds for tourism-related Capital improvements in the Region.
- 4) Shell Building Assistance Program – provides financing for the construction of speculative industrial shell buildings in the Region. Funding only available to counties/cities that have an uncommitted VCEDA fund balance of \$1 million.

Non-profits and certain public entities may apply for a loan or grant. Private for-profits may apply for loan funds only, and no applicant may receive more than \$700,000 in any given fiscal year. Funds must be matched at least 1:1. Loans will be collateralized, and 10 years is the maximum loan term.

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)

Continue to champion the completion of the bypass to VDOT and request that the project be added to VDOT's schedule. VDOT also provides assistance in promoting bicycling and walking within the community. The State Bicycle and Pedestrian Program offers planning assistance to state and local transportation planners, activity coordination for various bicycle committees and bicycle and pedestrian education and safety programs.

The National Arbor Day Foundation

Communities can apply to become a Tree City USA. This enables put a community in a more likely position to receive financial aid for trees or forestry programs. A community must have a tree board or apartment, a tree care ordinance, a community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation.

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Provides teachers with small amounts of money for environmental education. Any school division is encouraged to apply for a grant of \$500, \$750 or 1,000 for the purpose of conducting meaningful outdoor experiences with their students.

Virginia Tobacco Commission

The Tobacco Regional Opportunity Fund (TROF) offers incentive grants to assist in creation of new jobs and investment, whether through business attraction or expansion. They are targeted for larger more competitive projects with a regional impact due to the magnitude of the new employment and investment, and the possibility of economic spin-off and related economic multiplier effect. The TROF is also intended to diversify the economy and attract or encourage growth in the immediate communities of Virginia's tobacco producing region.

Stewardship Virginia

Stewardship Virginia is a statewide initiative held twice annually to help citizens with projects that enhance and conserve Virginia's natural and cultural resources. Its focus is on projects that enhance water quality; control invasive species; improve recreational species; preserve historic and cultural resources; preserve natural heritage resources; educate people about recreational, historical, cultural, wildlife and water resources, and improve wildlife habitat.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE PLAN

The Big Stone Gap Comprehensive Plan update represents the continuation of formal, organized planning for the Town. The Plan serves as a foundation for addressing current needs and projecting future needs. The demands of future growth under strong development constraints require public officials to adopt practical policies that benefit all the residents of the Town.

Legal Status of the Plan

Excerpts of Title 15.2-2226 (effective December 1, 1997) explain the legal status of the Comprehensive Plan and what role the Plan serves in the future development of the locality.

15.2-2232 – A. – Whenever a local planning commission recommends a comprehensive plan or part thereof for the locality and such plan has been approved and adopted by the governing body, it shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan. Thereafter, unless a feature is already shown on the adopted master plan or part thereof or is deemed so under subsection D, no street or connection to an existing street, park, or other public area, public building or public structure, public utility facility or public service corporation facility other than railroad facility, whether publicly or privately owned, shall be constructed, established or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has been submitted to and approved by the commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof. In connection with any such determination, the commission may, and at the direction of the governing body shall, hold a public hearing, after notice as required by Title 15.2-2204.

B. – The commission shall communicate its findings to the governing body, indicating its approval or disapproval with written reasons therefore. The governing body may overrule the action of the commission by a vote of a majority of its membership. Failure of the commission to act within sixty days of a submission, unless the time is extended by the governing body, shall be deemed approval. The owner or owners of their agents may appeal the decision of the commission. The appeal shall be by written petition to the governing body setting forth the reasons for the appeal. The appeal shall be heard and determined within sixty days from its filing. A majority vote of the governing body shall overrule the commission.

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

D. – Any public area, facility or use as set forth in subsection A which is identified within, but not the entire subject of, a submission under either Title 15.2-2258 for subdivision or provision 8 of Title 15.2-2286 for development or both may be deemed a feature already shown on the adopted master plan, and, therefore, excepted from the requirement for submittal to and approval by the commission or the governing body;

provided, that the governing body has by ordinance or resolution defined standards governing the construction, establishment or authorization of such public area, facility or use or has approved it through acceptance of a proffer made pursuant to Title 15.2-2303.

Plan Adoption

The following provision taken from Title 15.2 Chapter 22, Article 3 outlines the general procedures to be followed by the Town of Big Stone Gap in adopting the Comprehensive Plan.

15.2-2225 Notice and hearing on plan; recommendation by local planning commission to governing body. – Prior to recommendation of a comprehensive plan or any part thereof, the local planning commission shall give notice in accordance with Title 15.2-2204 and hold a public hearing on the plan. After the public hearing, the commission may approve, amend and approve, or disprove the plan. Upon approval, the commission shall by resolution recommend the plan, or part thereof, to the governing body and a copy shall be certified to the governing body.

15.2-2226 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 by Title 15.2-2204, shall proceed to a consideration of the plan or part thereof and shall approve and adopt, amend and adopt, or disprove the plan. In acting on the plan or part thereof, or any amendments to the plan, the governing body shall act within ninety days of the local planning commission's recommending resolution.

15.2-2227 Return of plan to local planning commission; resubmission – If the governing body disapproves the plan, then it shall be returned to the local planning 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.

15.2-2228 Adoption of parts of the plan. – As the work of preparing the comprehensive plan progresses, the local planning 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 locality or one or more functional matters.

Maintenance of the Plan

15.2-2229 Amendments. – After the adoption of a comprehensive plan, all amendments to it shall be recommended, and approved and adopted, respectively, as required by Title 15.2-2204. If the governing body desires an amendment it may direct the local planning commission to prepare an amendment and submit it to public hearing within sixty days after formal written request by the governing body. In acting on any amendments to the plan, the governing body shall act within ninety days of the local planning commission's recommending resolution.

15.2-2230 Plan to be reviewed at least once every five years. – At least once every five years the comprehensive plan shall be reviewed by the local planning commission to determine whether it is advisable to amend the plan.

Significant new developments such as state highway proposals, the location of new industries, shopping centers, or residential subdivisions, or expansion of major public/private developments should instigate a re-evaluation of the adopted comprehensive plan. Changes to the plan should only be made within the context of established goals and objectives and development proposals that are contrary to the plan should be considered only within the context of the plan's provisions.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Private property development and public improvement efforts can be coordinated with the plan through the use of applicable regulatory measures such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and building and housing codes. An adopted Capital Improvement Program also 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.

15.2-2239 Local planning commissions to prepare and submit annually capital improvement programs to governing body or official charged with preparation of budget.

– A local planning 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 locality for a period not to exceed the ensuing five years. The commission shall submit the program annually to the governing body, or to the chief administrative officer or other official charged with preparation of the budget for the locality, at such time as it or he shall direct. The capital improvement program shall include the commission's recommendations, and estimates of cost of the 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 locality. 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 locality., the heads of departments and interested citizens and organizations and shall hold such public hearings as it deems necessary.

15.2-2240 Localities to adopt ordinances regulating subdivision and development of land.

– The governing body of every locality shall adopt an ordinance to assure the orderly subdivision of land and its development.

15.2-2280 Zoning Ordinances generally – Any locality 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 purpose of this article, and in each district it may regulate, restrict, permit, prohibit, and determine the following:

1. The use of land, buildings, structures and other premises for agricultural, business, industrial, residential, flood plain and other specific uses;
2. The size, height, area, bulk, location, erection, construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair, maintenance, razing, or removal of structures;

3. 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; or
4. The excavation or mining of soil or other natural resources.

15.22281 Jurisdiction of localities. - For the purpose of zoning, the governing body of a county shall have jurisdiction over all the unincorporated territory in the county, and the governing body of a municipality shall have jurisdiction over the incorporated area of the municipality.

The 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.

Regional Plan Review

Local town planning requires coordination with Wise County, regional, federal and state development proposals and plans. Coordination among these jurisdictions eliminates conflict and duplication of planning efforts and provides a cooperative framework for the successful implementation of development projects. The LENOWISCO Regional Planning District Commission is the most appropriate agency to provide regional coordination and review of related plans.

Level of Professional Planning Assistance

The Town currently receives planning assistance from the staff at the LENOWISCO PDC and through contracted services with private planning consultants for special projects. Communities with smaller than 10,000 population typically do not require an in-house planning staff to perform daily planning functions. Professional planning assistance from LENOWISCO and/or a planning consultant may be needed for the following activities:

1. Maintenance of the Comprehensive Plan – Unforeseen changes in development trends, population growth, or economic changes resulting from new industrial or commercial development, boundary changes, or consolidation. All would have a major impact on long-range community planning and would require changes to the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Expansion of major elements of the Comprehensive Plan. The need for neighborhood studies, a plan for the downtown, housing needs analysis, economic development studies, and grant applications may evolve from the recommendations contained in the Comprehensive Plan. Such special studies should be used to expand on generalities contained within the Plan and be treated as amendments to the adopted Comprehensive Plan.
3. Review and administration of housing, building, zoning and subdivision regulations, and development proposals that affect provisions of the Comprehensive Plan.

4. Guidance in determining the most appropriate State and Federal assistance programs through which the Town may participate to augment local financing of proposed community improvements.
5. Promotion of local resident involvement in planning by conducting public education programs on the Comprehensive Plan and related planning processes.

Public Education and Community Involvement

Continued involvement of the Town's residents in the planning of the Town's future is crucial to the successful implementation of the recommendations contained within the Plan. Public meetings and forums are an effective way of soliciting comments and concerns for individual projects and actions taken by Town leaders. The Town government should continue to operate in an open and conciliatory manner to promote citizen involvement.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

The Town has adopted its Capital Improvements Program (CIP) through 2008. The CIP includes expenditures for various projects throughout the Town.

Sanitary Sewer

- Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades
- Gravity line rehabilitation in the Southern, Cadet East, Artesian Well Hollow, Beamantown, and Western neighborhoods
- Inflow/Infiltration rectification in nine critical areas.

Water System

- Water Treatment Plant upgrades
- Water distribution and storage system repairs

Streets, Roads, Sidewalks and Bridges

- Repair/Improvement to Cadet East, Southern and Artesian Well Hollow streets
- Widening of streets in Beamantown
- Gilley Avenue and Frog Level bridge repair/replacement
- Expansion of Greenway project

Storm Drainage

- Repair to drainage problems in Artesian Well Hollow and Southern

Equipment

- One (1) new dump truck

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

With each revision of the Land Use Plan, the Town must revisit its zoning and subdivision ordinances. Changes in land use will need to be reflected these ordinances. New techniques that reflect the change in land use may be needed to adequately accommodate the changes. Incompatible zoning in the areas adjoining the Town but located in Wise County poses a potential conflict between existing and future uses. Since the Town holds no jurisdictional powers over these areas, the County zones the land according to its future development plan. The Town and County must work together to minimize any conflict of land uses, particularly in terms of industrial and commercial encroachment on residential uses and provisions for mobile homes and multi-family uses. Achieving compatibility of uses in this regard will require a strong working relationship between the Town and County leaders.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Joint Participation on Planning and Community Development in Urban Areas

Cooperation between the Town and the County will enable both jurisdictions to effectively implement neighborhood and infrastructure improvement programs as well as development controls and the expansion of amenities such as trails and broadband connectivity. Both the Town and County have a vested interest in cooperation since each jurisdiction provides services across the corporate limits. The Town provides water and sanitary sewer to areas outside of the Town and the County provides educational services within the Town. Continued cooperation will enable Big Stone Gap and Wise County to improve and expand their services as well as address specific needs that affect both localities. Joint participation in rehabilitation/redevelopment programs in neighborhoods is essential to the rectification of the problems that currently detract from the quality of life for the residents.