

# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## Town of Marion, Virginia



CERTIFIED BY  
TOWN OF MARION PLANNING COMMISSION

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(DATE)

ADOPTED BY  
TOWN OF MARION TOWN COUNCIL

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(DATE)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**TOWN OF MARION, VIRGINIA  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. The Purpose and Legal Basis of the Comprehensive Plan

There are several fundamental reasons for a local jurisdiction to prepare and implement a Comprehensive Plan, including:

- to forecast and prepare for future changes in the community such as population size, employment base, environmental quality, and the demand for public services and facilities;
- to set goals for the future based upon the concerns, needs, and aspirations of local citizens;
- to establish strategies or courses of action needed to achieve those goals and to protect the public health, safety, and welfare; and
- in Virginia, to conform to State requirements that every local government adopt and maintain a Comprehensive Plan.

Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia requires that every governing body in the Commonwealth adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction. Section 15.2-2230 requires the local Planning Commission to review that plan at least once every five years to determine whether it is advisable to amend the plan.

Section 15.2-2200 of the Code of Virginia establishes the legislative intent of planning and zoning enabling authority. In summary, the Commonwealth's intent is to encourage local governments to:

- improve the public health, safety, convenience, and welfare of the citizens;
- plan for future development with adequate highway, utility, health, educational, recreational, and other facilities;
- recognize the needs of agriculture, industry and business in future growth;
- preserve agricultural and forested land;
- provide a healthy surrounding for family life in residential areas; and
- provide that community growth be consistent with the efficient and economic use of public funds.

Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia specifically states that “the comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probably future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.”

It further states that the comprehensive plan shall be general in nature in that it shall:

- designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of features shown on the plan, including where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, removed, or changed; and
- show the long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory and may include such items as the designation of areas for various kinds of public and private land use, a system of transportation facilities, a system of community service facilities, historical areas, and areas for the implementation of groundwater protection measures.

In Virginia, the local Comprehensive Plan is a guide for making community development decisions and thus the governing body can exercise some discretion in how strictly it interprets and adheres to the plan. However, the Code provides that the construction of streets or other public facilities be subject to review and the extent of the proposed facility be in substantial accord with the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The legal status of the Comprehensive Plan is described under Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia:

A. Whenever a local planning commission recommends a comprehensive plan or part thereof for the locality and such plan has been approved and adopted by the governing body, it shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan. Thereafter, unless a feature is already shown on the adopted master plan or part thereof or is deemed so under subsection D, no street or connection to an existing street, park or other public area, public building or public structure, public utility facility or public service corporation facility other than a railroad facility or an underground natural gas or underground electric distribution facility of a public utility as defined in subdivision (b) of § 56-265.1 within its certificated service territory, whether publicly or privately owned, shall be constructed, established or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has been submitted to and approved by the commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof. In connection with any such determination, the commission may, and at the direction of the governing body shall, hold a public hearing, after notice as required by § 15.2-2204. Following the adoption of the Statewide Transportation Plan by the Commonwealth Transportation Board pursuant to § 33.1-23.03 and written notification to the affected local governments, each local government through which one or more of the designated corridors of statewide significance traverses, shall, at a minimum, note such corridor or corridors on the transportation plan map included in its comprehensive plan for information purposes at the next regular update of the transportation plan map. Prior to the next regular update of the transportation plan map, the local government shall acknowledge the existence of corridors of statewide significance within its boundaries.

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

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

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

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

F. On any application for a telecommunications facility, the commission's decision shall comply with the requirements of the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996. Failure of the commission to act on any such application for a telecommunications facility under subsection A submitted on or after July 1, 1998, within ninety days of such submission

shall be deemed approval of the application by the commission unless the governing body has authorized an extension of time for consideration or the applicant has agreed to an extension of time. The governing body may extend the time required for action by the local commission by no more than sixty additional days. If the commission has not acted on the application by the end of the extension, or by the end of such longer period as may be agreed to by the applicant, the application is deemed approved by the commission.

### **B. Creating and Updating the Comprehensive Plan**

In 2005, the Town of Marion contracted with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) to provide technical assistance to rewrite the Marion Comprehensive Plan. The new plan was adopted in early 2006 after considerable work and public feedback.

In 2011, the Town of Marion contracted with MRPDC to provide technical assistance to update the 2006 Comprehensive Plan. MRPDC staff gathered information from town staff, community representatives, and other key stakeholders; held two daylong, open house-style community meetings at the MRPDC office and Smyth-Bland Regional Library; and conducted online citizen and business surveys. The goals, policies, and strategies of the Plan were updated based on the input received and the demographic and economic trends.

### **C. Implementing the Comprehensive Plan**

This document is designed to fulfill the Town of Marion's obligations under Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia to prepare a Comprehensive Plan. The goals and strategies contained in the plan have been supplemented by detailed studies and discussions of topics such as characteristics of existing development, community facilities, trends of growth and change, land uses, housing needs and trends, transportation, and Downtown Marion.

The Comprehensive Plan also fulfills a number of specific purposes and can be implemented through a variety of methods. It is the basis for the Town of Marion zoning ordinance and serves as a sounding board for examination of an application for rezoning. It permits a consistent approach to capital improvements for the town and enables the expansion and improvements of public utilities to be undertaken in a coordinated manner. It provides a complete frame of reference for the determination of conditions during the review and evaluation of special use permits. It gives official recognition to areas of natural, historical, geological, and archaeological significance, thus ensuring their conservation, protection, and inclusion in the general plan of development. Finally, it provides a guide whereby community facilities and attendant services may be more efficiently delivered.

On the other hand, the Comprehensive Plan is a living document, a continuing study through which issues relating to the future of the town can be resolved by citizens, town staff, and elected leaders. The plan should be revised and supplemented as necessary.

State law requires that the Planning Commission review the plan every five years.

#### **D. Data Used in the Development of the Plan**

To document and analyze demographic and economic trends in the Town of Marion, several data sources were used. Many of the data cited in this Comprehensive Plan were provided by the United States Census Bureau through the decennial census or the American Community Survey (ACS). During the 2000 Census and earlier decennial censuses, the Census Bureau used both short form and long form questionnaires; however, during the 2010 Census only the short form was used. This means that only basic population and housing data were collected during the 2010 Census. In 2005, the Census Bureau initiated the American Community Survey, an annual demographic survey of the United States that captures the long form questions that were not asked during the 2010 Census.

The ACS and decennial census provide the same types of data; however, the methodology of these two surveys differs greatly. The decennial census is a count of the population and specific characteristics on a specific date – a snapshot in time. The ACS is a continuous demographic survey that averages characteristics over time. The decennial census surveys all households in the United States and thus has a lower margin of error and is more accurate. The ACS surveys a sample of households each year that are then totaled and averaged over a five-year period resulting in a higher margin of error and less accurate results.

In December 2011, the Census Bureau released the 2006-2010 five-year American Community Survey estimates for the Town of Marion. There are some data used in this Comprehensive Plan that are only available from the 2000 Census and the 2006-2010 five-year ACS estimates. Generally these data can be compared; however, since ACS variables change over time, comparisons must be made with caution. Where possible, other data sources were used to analyze trends. When it was not possible to use another data source, ACS data were highlighted with a light grey in tables. In some cases, only the 2000 Census data were used. The overall goal was to identify the most current and accurate data possible to document and analyze demographic and economic trends in the Town of Marion.

#### **E. Description of Planning Area**

Marion is the county seat and largest town in Smyth County, which is located in the southwestern part of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Smyth County is bordered by the Counties of Russell and Tazewell to the north, Bland and Wythe to the east, Grayson to the south, and Washington to the west.

Royal Oak, the predecessor of the Town of Marion, was formed in 1776, on the eastern edge of what is now Marion. Marion itself was chartered in 1832, the same year Smyth County was created from parts of Washington and Wythe Counties.

Present day Marion encompasses an area of approximately 4.2 square miles with a population of 5,968 persons in 2010.

## F. Historical Background<sup>1</sup>

The date of the first early settlers' arrival in what is now the Town of Marion is not of record, but the founding of Marion may be dated from May 25, 1832, when the Smyth County Court, in its second term, ordered the five appointed commissioners to lay out the town. These directions were promptly carried out, and the town was laid off in the fertile farmland belonging to a Mr. William Humes.

As originally laid out, the town extended from Staley Creek on the east to the current location of the Blue Ridge Job Corps on the west. Lots along Main Street were sold and the village began to grow on what had been farmland just a year before. The lot on which the old Hotel Marion stood, which is now the Wells Fargo, originally sold for \$220.

On March 15, 1849, the General Assembly passed an act incorporating the Town of Marion. At that time, the population of the town was between 300 and 500. Over the next three decades, during part of which the nation was fighting the Civil War, the town's population declined until about 1890 when it began to steadily grow.

Detailed records of all Town Council meetings since early 1888 have been filed and contain a wealth of information, both generally and historically, recording step-by-step the growth and progress of the town.

Early residents of the town had a water supply, which came from private cisterns like the Shugart Spring (near old N&W station), and the town pump. The town pump located on Main Street where the Lincoln Hotel now stands, was at the time known as Moore's Saddle Shop. A horse trough was conveniently located in front of the saddle shop near the town pump. Sometimes, water was hauled from Shugart Spring in wagons.

On April 1, 1888, the "Preston" Spring was purchased and a six inch pipe laid. Some years later, the "Short" Spring on the old Killinger farm was purchased and an eight inch pipe line laid to it from the old line. After first declining to sell the spring, Mr. Killinger finally agreed to sell it for a \$3,000 insurance policy on his life with the town to pay the premiums. The town paid only one premium, however, as Mr. Killinger died six months later.

In 1910, while Mr. J.P. Sheffey was Mayor, the present springs above Attoway were leased from Mr. George M. Atkins for ninety-nine years for \$1.00 per day. They have furnished Marion with an almost unlimited supply of fine water. In May, 1947, the town exercised its option on the springs and purchased them for a sum of \$10,000.

Before moving on to the modern progress of the town, it is interesting to note that records show quite a bit of time and deliberation being spent in 1888 before the Finance Committee finally agreed to levy a tax of forty cents on each \$100 of assessed value of real estate and personal property. Also, a bill of \$2.40 was presented to the Finance Committee by the Lamp Lighter representing compensation for one month of lighting

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the original Town of Marion Comprehensive Plan; March, 1977.

lamps on Main Street nightly. Also at that time, there was a town ordinance that all male citizens between the ages of 18 and 60 years would be required to give two days of work on the streets and roads.

Town policies similar to those of today were also in effect in 1888. If someone desired a plank walk in front of their home, they could appear before the council at its regular meeting held the first Saturday of each month. Most likely it would have been granted with certain specifications as to the size and spacing of boards, provided the applicant paid one-half the cost of construction.

On January 1, 1959, Marion annexed an additional 885 acres and 682 people. In 1960, the citizens and the town passed a bond issue for one million dollars to renovate the sewer treatment plant. The town had been told several years prior that the plant would have to be brought up to state standards and that primary treatment of all sewerage would be required before effluent could be dumped into the Holston River. The bond issue, which was passed for improvements to the annexed area, also included water service, sewer service, fire and police protection, and other services which would be required by the court in a twenty year period.

Since 1960, the Town of Marion has completed several capital improvement projects. First, the town has operated a water treatment plant, which obtains water from the Middle Fork of the Holston River. The intake for the treatment plant is located east of town (near I-81, Exit 47). The town is now able to supply water to the entire town via strategically located storage tanks. In addition, the town supplies water to the Atkins community east of town, Hungry Mother State Park north of town, and to adjoining areas west and south of town.

A regional sewage treatment plant was constructed in 1994, which meets all water quality standards and has capacity to treat Marion and adjoining areas for many years in the future.

The Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority received funding during the eighties, which enabled the construction of low-income and elderly housing units, which are located on several sites in town.

The Town Charter is dated March 15, 1849, and has been amended from time to time, but there have been comparatively few changes in the original Charter.

Today, the administration and government of the town are vested in one principal officer, the Mayor, and seven Town Council members, all of whom are elected by the people. The Mayor serves a four-year term under the current system and each Council member serves for four years, but the terms have been staggered to preclude the election of seven completely new members. The Charter also provides for the appointment of a Town Manager to assist the Mayor and Council in the administration of town affairs in a professional and unbiased manner.

## II. POPULATION

### A. Population Changes

In the first few decades after Marion's official founding in 1832, the town enjoyed a steady population increase. Location of the town on the Old Wilderness Trail and within the Great Valley of Virginia provided relatively excellent access to the markets outside the region. The beginning of the confirmation as a regional center occurred in 1874 when the Bank of Marion was established. This financial institution was the sole bank between Abingdon and Wytheville and the only one in Smyth, Tazewell, and Grayson Counties. Table 2-A shows the population trend from 1860 to 2010. The large gain between 1870 and 1880 reflects the influence of the bank and the related services generated by its introduction into the town economy.

**TABLE 2-A**  
**Population Change**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Year**  
**1860 to 2010**

Year	Population	Percent Change
1860	445	--
1870	368	-17.3
1880	919	149.7
1890	1,651	79.7
1900	2,045	23.9
1910	2,727	33.3
1920	3,253	19.3
1930	4,156	27.8
1940	5,177	24.6
1950	6,982	34.9
1960	8,385	20.1
1970	8,158	-2.8
1980	7,029	-13.8
1990	6,630	-6.0
2000	6,349	-4.2
2010	5,968	-6.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Smyth County History and Traditions (1932) as appeared in the original Marion Comprehensive Plan, 1977.

In the 1880s, the town water supply was constructed and other municipal and public services were improved, including the establishment of Southwestern State Hospital. As those services improved, additional merchants began to settle in the town, further stabilizing the economy and promoting population growth.

In the 1890s, the development of the Marion and Rye Valley Railroad was undertaken. This transportation facility, originally intended for the hauling of manganese ore out of Currin Valley, was extended and connected to other railway spurs. The town's role in the transportation of ores and timber greatly aided the economy of the region. The founding of Campbell and Associates Lumber Mill and the development of the Lincoln Factories, manufacturers of a superior quality plow handle and wooden wagons, also stimulated growth.

In the first 30 years of the twentieth century, the harvesting of timber became a major industry. Saw mills were distributed throughout the county with a few locating in Marion. The Marion Extract Company, which began operations in 1910, was the second largest extract works in the world. Small industries utilizing timber in their manufacturing processes located in the town, and Marion became a shipping point for the more mountainous surrounding counties.

Since 1960, the Town of Marion has experienced a decline in population, with the greatest decrease coming during the decade of the 1970s. Since 1980, the town's population has declined at an average rate of 5.4 percent per decade.

## **B. Population Trends**

At the time of the 2010 Census, the population of the Town of Marion was 5,968, a six percent decrease from a decade before. Of these, 2,778 were males (46.7 percent) and 3,180 were females (53.3 percent). The male to female ratio remained relatively unchanged between 2000 and 2010.

The town's official school age population, which includes ages 5 through 17, was 794 or 13.3 percent of the total population. If the school age population were expanded to include ages 3 through 21 to account for all individuals at the preprimary level through college, it would comprise 1,320 persons or 22.1 percent of the total population. Approximately 1,387 of the town's residents were enrolled in school, either preschool, preprimary, elementary, high school, or college. This represents 23.2 percent of the total town population and over 100 percent<sup>2</sup> of the expanded school age population.

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), there were 5,003 persons age 16 and over in Marion based on 2006-2010 5-year estimates. Of these, 2,644 were identified as being in the civilian labor force, which means they were either working or actively seeking employment. Within the labor force, 2,426 members were employed, leaving 218 or about 9.0 percent unemployed. Just fewer than 50 percent (47.2 percent or 2,359) of Marion residents age 16 and over were identified as not being in the labor force. This group included discouraged unemployed (those who have given up looking for work), students, homemakers, and retirees.

Approximately 19.7 percent of Marion's population was 65 years old or older (1,178 persons). If this retirement-age group were expanded to include persons age 62 and

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<sup>2</sup> School enrollment data were provided by the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2006 – 2009 5-year estimates. These data are based on a sample size and thus cannot be directly compared to 2010 Census data.

over, the percentage would grow to 23.6 or 1,411 persons. Of these, 836 or 59.2 percent were female.

Approximately 1,368 residents of the Town of Marion (24.5 percent of the population) were considered to be living below the established poverty level by the 2006-2010 ACS. The number of families living in poverty was exceptionally high among female householder families. Within that category, 100 percent of the families with children under the age of 5 lived below the poverty level. Female householder families with related children under the age 18 remained high at 37.6 percent. Approximately 14.6 percent of the total families living in the Town of Marion lived on income below the poverty level based on ACS data.

The population of Marion resided in 2,491 households in 2010, a 5.1 percent decline from 2000. A household includes all persons living in a given housing unit. Among these, approximately 1,043 (41.9 percent) received Social Security as a type of income supporting the household. Approximately 277 households received Supplemental Security Income (11.1 percent), approximately 143 households (5.7 percent) received public assistance, and approximately 531 households (21.3 percent) received retirement income. Nearly 15 percent of households in Marion received assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or similar food assistance program.

### C. Group Quarters Population

Table 2-B shows group quarters population, which includes persons in mental hospitals, from the U.S. Census Bureau for 1970 to 2010. The decline in the number of patients at the Southwest Virginia Mental Health Institute generally correlates to the town-wide population change between 1970 and 2010.

**TABLE 2-B**  
**Group Quarters Population**  
**Smyth County**  
**By Type**  
**1970 to 2010**

Type	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Mental Hospitals and Other Facilities	1,578	595	289	155	106
Nursing Homes	75	210	469	256	301
Correctional Institutions	0	23	246	268	199
Other Noninstitutionalized	213	228	190	406	168
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,866</b>	<b>1,056</b>	<b>1,194</b>	<b>1,085</b>	<b>774</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 1970 – 2010

Table 2-C compares the 2010 group quarters population between Marion and Smyth County. Approximately 75 percent of the persons living group quarters in Smyth County are located in the town. The population housed in nursing homes is the only group quarters type in the county that is not completely located in the Town of Marion.

**TABLE 2-C**  
**Group Quarters Population**  
**Town of Marion and Smyth County**  
**By Type**  
**2010**

Type	Marion	Smyth County
Mental Hospitals and Other Facilities	106	106
Nursing Homes	106	301
Correctional Institutions	199	199
Other Noninstitutionalized	166	168
<b>Total</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>774</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

#### D. Race Composition

According to 2010 Census data, 89.4 percent (5,338 persons) of the total population of the Town of Marion was classified as white. The non-white population of the town totaled 10.6 percent and included 7.1 percent African-Americans, 0.2 percent American Indians/Alaskan Natives, 0.6 percent Asian, 1.0 percent some other race alone, and 1.7 percent two or more races.

**TABLE 2-D**  
**Population**  
**Town of Marion and Smyth County**  
**By Race**  
**2010**

Race	Marion		Smyth County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	5,338	89.4%	30,847	95.8%
Black or African-American	424	7.1%	640	2.0%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	9	0.2%	42	0.1%
Asian	33	0.6%	82	0.3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	0.0%	3	0.0%
Some other race alone	61	1.0%	287	0.9%
Two or more races	101	1.7%	307	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,968</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>32,208</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

The percentage of non-white residents of Marion has always been higher than that of Smyth County as a whole and it has increased noticeably over the last thirty years. According to 1970 Census data, the non-white population of Marion comprised only 4.5 percent of the total population. This figure is 6.1 percent below the current non-white population total of 10.6 percent.

**TABLE 2-E**  
**Comparative Population**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Race**  
**2000 and 2010**

Race	2000	2010
White	5,804	5,338
Black or African-American	367	424
American Indian or Alaskan Native	15	9
Asian	33	33
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	2
Other race	2	61
Two or more races	56	101
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,349</b>	<b>5,968</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000 and 2010

Smyth County has not experienced the growth of its percentage of non-white population to the same degree as the town. While Marion's non-white population grew by 6.1 percent over the last four decades, the percentage of the county's non-white population grew by only 3.3 percent. In 2010, the percentage of the non-white population in Smyth County (4.2 percent) was 6.4 percent lower than the percentage of non-white population living in Marion. Even though the percentage of non-white population increased during the 1990s, the actual population count in each racial category declined. During the 2000s, however, the population of African-Americans in Marion increased by 15.5 percent (57 persons). Persons identified as "other race" or "two or more races" also increased during the 2000s.

**TABLE 2-F**  
**Hispanic Population**  
**Town of Marion and Smyth County**  
**By Population Type**  
**2010**

Population Type	Marion		Smyth County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Hispanic or Latino	148	2.5%	527	1.6%
Not Hispanic or Latino	5,820	97.5%	31,681	98.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,968</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>32,208</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

The Hispanic and Latino population in both the Town of Marion and Smyth County increased over the last two decades. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic and Latino population in the town increased by 105.6 percent, from 72 persons in 2000 to 148 in 2010. The county experienced a similar growth during the decade with an 86.2 percent

increase in the Hispanic and Latino population.

### **E. Population Projections**

The Town of Marion experienced steady growth from the turn of the century until about 1960 when the population peaked at 8,385. The years between 1970 and 2010 proved to be stagnant years for population growth, as the town's population actually declined along with the county as a whole. There are strong indications that the young adult population is leaving the area either to attend college without returning or to find job opportunities elsewhere. In 1980, Marion had 2,094 persons in the 15 to 34 age group, while ten years later the same group (now 25 to 44 years of age) has decreased to 1,829 persons. This trend continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In 1990, there were 1,918 persons in the 15 to 34 age group, but in 2000 the same group had decreased to 1,649 persons. Following that same trend, the 15 to 34 age group in 2000 contained 1,613 persons; however, by 2010 the same group had declined to 1,434 persons.

Based on projections from the Virginia State Demographer, the trend of a slow but steady population decline in Smyth County may continue. Between 2010 and 2030, the state demographer has projected a population decrease of just over one percent in the county. State demographer projections are only available at the county and city level, so projections of the Town of Marion population must be inferred from the county projection and past trends.

Due to a steady decline in the town's population since 1960 and the projected decline in Smyth County's population, a continuing decline in Marion's population can be inferred. The town and county should pursue actions that would ensure a stable population base, a key to preserving the economic vitality of the Town of Marion. As a first step, the town and county should begin working together to develop and implement a strategic plan for economic development. A primary goal of this plan would be to develop diverse, high-quality job opportunities for the working-age population, thereby helping to slow the rate of out-migration. If the strategies formulated in such a plan are successful and other steps are taken, such as bolstering the educational opportunities in the county and ensuring affordable housing, the town could expect a natural increase in population produced by the number of new births exceeding the number of deaths. In addition, the young population would have incentive to return to the area after college and new residents will be attracted to the area, all of which will serve to stabilize the population and promote growth.

There is a strong connection between housing markets, job markets, and population growth that must be considered while pursuing economic development programs. Economic growth influences a demand on the housing market. As jobs are created and filled, population will stabilize and, over time, increase. The demand for housing will also expand; housing prices and rents will increase and vacancy rates will decrease. Localities should generally plan to couple their economic development activities with housing programs that create adequate, affordable, and safe housing for all population groups, including low, middle, and upper income households as well as retirees and senior citizens.

### III. HOUSING

#### A. Housing Availability

The Town of Marion has a total of 2,822 housing units according to the 2010 Census, which is a 1.5 percent decrease from 2,865 housing units in 2000. When compared to the 2.5 percent housing growth during the 1990s, this figure indicates a slowdown in housing development in the town during the 2000s. According to the American Community Survey, multi-family units were the only housing type to experience growth in the town, with a 20.9 percent increase between 2000 and 2010. Single-family units and mobile homes were estimated to have declined by 15.8 percent and 33.3 percent respectively during the same period.

**TABLE 3-A**  
**Housing Types**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Housing Type**  
**2000 and 2010**

Type	2000		2010		Change 2000-2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Total	Percent
Single Family	1,925	73.1	1,621	66.9	-304	-15.8
Multi-Family	607	23.0	734	30.3	127	20.9
Mobile Home	102	3.9	68	2.8	-34	-33.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,634</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>-211</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

In 1970, Marion had 44 manufactured homes within the corporate limits or 2.5 percent of the occupied housing stock. This number had increased to 85 by 1990 and 102 by 2000, representing an overall increase of 131 percent. By 2010, the American Community Survey estimates indicate a 33.3 percent decline in mobile homes in Marion. Statistics do not indicate if mobile homes are vacant or have been removed; however, data from the American Community Survey do show a significant number of total vacant housing units in Marion.

The number of vacant housing units increased by approximately 69.7 percent between 2000 and 2010. A closer look at the vacant structures in Marion reveals that 19.7 percent of vacant units were available for rent, while 18.9 percent were for sale only. Seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units, which make up 3.1 percent of the total housing stock in Smyth County, are only 1.9 percent of the total housing stock in Marion. Occasional use housing units make up 14.9 percent of the vacant units in the town. The rental vacancy rate in Marion is very high, with 20.0 percent of the vacant units rented but not occupied.

**TABLE 3-B**  
**Housing Vacancy**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Vacant Units**  
**2010**

Vacant Units	Number	Percent
Total Vacant Units	370	100.0
For rent	73	19.7
Rented, not occupied	74	20.0
For sale only	70	18.9
Sold, not occupied	0	0.0
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional	55	14.9
Other vacant	98	26.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

### B. Housing Tenure

Approximately 49.6 percent of the housing units in the Town of Marion are owner-occupied. During the 2000s, the number of owner-occupied units decreased by an estimated 7.4 percent, from 1,495 in 2000 to 1,385 in 2010. As shown in Table 4-B, the number of owner-occupied and renter-occupied units declined, while the number of vacant units increased. The average household size is slightly higher in owner-occupied units (2.31 persons per household) than in renter-occupied units (2.13 persons per household.) Table 3-C shows housing tenure in detail.

**TABLE 3-C**  
**Comparative Housing Tenure**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Type**  
**2000 and 2010**

Type	2000		2010		Change 2000-2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Total	Percent
Owner-Occupied	1,495	52.4	1,385	49.6	-110	-7.4
Renter-Occupied	1,139	39.9	1,038	37.2	-101	-8.9
Vacant	218	7.6	370	13.2	152	69.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,852</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,793</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>-59</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

**TABLE 3-D**  
**Housing Tenure**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Occupied Housing Units**  
**2010**

<b>Occupied housing units</b>	<b>2,423</b>
<b>Owner-occupied housing units</b>	<b>1,385</b>
Population in owner-occupied units	3,204
Average household size of owner-occupied units	2.31
<b>Renter-occupied housing units</b>	<b>1,038</b>
Population in renter-occupied units	2,206
Average household size of renter-occupied units	2.13

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

### C. Housing Conditions

There are several ways to assess the condition of the housing stock in Marion, including the standard census method of substandard (lacking complete plumbing facilities) and overcrowded (greater than 1.01 persons per room), visual analysis, a housing age assessment, and a detailed, on-site evaluation. Other than an on-site analysis, these methods are generalized and should be viewed as such. A change in the public policy related to housing conditions should only be undertaken when generalized housing information is sufficiently alarming to warrant a comprehensive, on-site analysis. The generalized information in this plan does not indicate a significant need for such a change.

Since 1960, housing conditions have steadily improved in the Town of Marion. While the high proportion of substandard housing units in the town has been a concern in the past, efforts to alleviate this problem have proven successful. The town has fostered those efforts through a number of housing rehabilitation projects over the past ten years.

**TABLE 3-E**  
**Condition of Dwelling Units**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Condition**  
**1960**

Condition	Number	Percent
Sound	1,671	77.8
Deteriorating	405	18.8
Dilapidated	73	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1960 Census

The 1960 Census identified housing units as either “sound,” “deteriorating,” or

“dilapidated,” with 22.2 percent of housing units classified as deteriorating or dilapidated. As illustrated in Tables 3-E and 3-F, housing conditions have improved since 1960; however, determining the exact level of improvement between 1960 and 2010 is difficult, because the classification method used by the U.S. Census Bureau changed in 1970. Using the current classification system, substandard housing decreased from 2.2 to 0.0 percent of the total occupied housing stock in the Town of Marion between 1980 and 2010, while overcrowded housing decreased from 4.5 to 0.4 percent during the same period.

**TABLE 3-F**  
**Condition Of Occupied Dwelling Units**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Condition**  
**1980, 1990, 2000, 2010**

Condition	1980		1990		2000		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Standard <sup>1</sup>	2,438	97.8	2,622	99	2,621	99.5	2,423	108.4%
Substandard <sup>2</sup>	54	2.2	27	1	13	0.5	0	0.0%
Overcrowded <sup>3</sup>	111	4.5	63	2.4	24	0.9	10	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,492</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,649</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,634</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100</b>

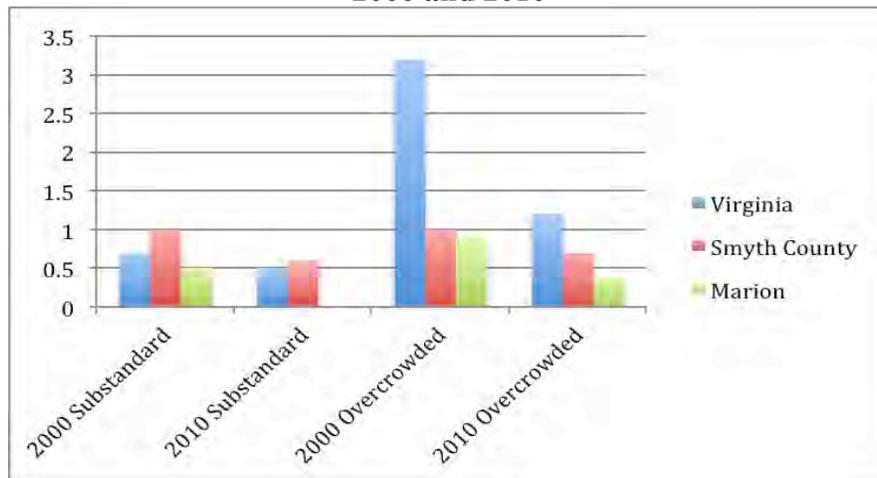
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 1980 to 2000 & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimate

1. Standard is defined as having complete plumbing facilities.

2. Substandard is defined as lacking complete plumbing facilities.

3. Overcrowded is defined as more than 1.01 persons per room. A unit identified as being overcrowded may also be identified as standard or substandard.

**CHART 3-A**  
**Comparative Condition Of Occupied Dwelling Units**  
**Virginia, Smyth County, and Town of Marion**  
**By Percent of Total Housing Units**  
**2000 and 2010**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

A comparative view of substandard and overcrowded housing units in Marion, Smyth

County, and the Commonwealth of Virginia shows that the Town of Marion has a lower percentage of substandard and overcrowded units than both the county and state.

A windshield survey conducted by Mount Rogers Planning District Commission staff in late 2004 resulted in a larger number of residential structures that appeared to be substandard or deteriorated. Conditions were assigned using a ranking system that included an analysis of exterior conditions, including siding, shingles, windows, and exterior paint. Generally, if two of these characteristics appeared to be in poor condition (cracked or broken windows, missing shingles, etc.) the structure was considered to be substandard. A deteriorated structure appeared to have more than two of these characteristics in poor condition and seemed unsuitable for habitation.

**TABLE 3-G**  
**Condition Of Residential Structures<sup>1</sup>**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Condition**  
**2004**

Condition	Number	Percent
Standard	1,986	73.6
Substandard	584	21.7
Deteriorated	126	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,696</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Mount Rogers Planning District Commission

1. Based on exterior conditions

#### **D. Age of Housing**

In the Town of Marion, 45.6 percent of the housing stock is more than 50 years old, while only 19.8 percent of the housing stock was constructed after 1980. A windshield survey of the housing in the town conducted by Mount Rogers Planning District Commission staff in 2004 did not identify a high proportion of deteriorated residential structures (4.7 percent); however, there are small, older neighborhoods in the town that are in need of rehabilitation.

**TABLE 3-H**  
**Year-Round Housing Units**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Year Built**  
**1990, 2000, and 2010**

Year	1990		2000		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2005 or later	--	--	--	--	11	0.4
2000 to 2004	--	--	--	--	115	4.1
1990 to 1999	--	--	67	2.4	172	6.2
1980 to 1989	426	15.2	375	13.3	253	9.1
1970 to 1979	459	16.4	454	16.1	529	18.9
1960 to 1969	439	15.7	357	12.7	440	15.8
1950 to 1959	671	24	689	24.5	578	20.7
1940 to 1949	357	12.8	355	12.6	259	9.3
1939 or earlier	443	15.8	519	18.4	436	15.6
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2,795</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,816</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,793</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 1990 and 2000 & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

### E. Housing Conditions by Race

The Town of Marion has a small minority population; nevertheless, there are some disparities between housing conditions by race. Homeowners in the town are composed of only two specific racial classifications, white and African-American, with six households classified as “some other race alone” or “two or more races.” The remaining racial groups, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, live in rented housing units.

**TABLE 3-I**  
**Comparative Tenure**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Race**  
**2010**

Classification	White		African American		Some Other Race Alone		Two or More Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Owner	1,296	54.6	30	45.5	1	7.7	5	20.0
Renter	1,076	45.4	36	54.5	12	92.3	20	80.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,372</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

A primary indicator of the condition of owner-occupied housing by race is the median value of housing units. This information is not available from the American Community Survey or the 2010 Census; however, according to the 2000 Census, the median value of units owned by African-Americans (\$33,800) was one-half of the median value of units owned by whites (\$67,600). This discrepancy indicates a major gap in the value and condition of housing between minority households and white households.

**TABLE 3-J**  
**Median Value Of Owner-Occupied Housing Units**  
**Town of Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia**  
**By Race**  
**2000**

Race	Value
White	\$67,600
African American	\$33,800

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census

Note: White and African American were the only racial classifications identified as being homeowners in 2000.

#### F. Housing Conditions for the Elderly

In 1970, there were 1,100 persons age 65 or older in the Town of Marion and 12.8 percent of the occupied housing units were headed by those in this age group. By 1990, the total had increased slightly to 1,147; however, because of the decrease in population, the percentage had increased significantly to 31.2 percent of the occupied households. This trend continued to 2000 when the population of persons age 65 or older increased to 1,312 and the number of households headed by those in this age group rose to 34 percent. Between 2000 and 2010, the population of persons age 65 or older decreased to 1,178 persons, close to the 1990 level, with 27.8 percent of occupied households headed by this age group.

**TABLE 3-K**  
**Elderly Households<sup>1</sup>**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Tenure**  
**2010**

Classification	Number	Percent
Owner	564	71.8
Renter	222	28.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>786</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

1. Elderly households are identified as those headed by a person 65 years or older.

The elderly have structural and locational housing needs that differ from those required by the general population. The Town of Marion and the Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority have been working to meet the housing needs of the elderly, as well

as those of the general population. Since the initial comprehensive plan was adopted by the town, 238 units of public housing have been constructed by the Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

### G. Housing Affordability

Housing affordability has become a critical issue for families in the United States. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the median owner-occupied housing value in the Town of Marion increased by 100 percent in non-constant dollars between 1990 and 2010. As shown in Table 3-L, the only housing value categories that lost units during the 2000s were the less than \$50,000 and \$50,000 to \$99,900 categories. All other value categories from \$100,000 and up saw increases in housing units between 2000 and 2010, although when adjusted for inflation, the real median value only increased by approximately 21.5 percent during that period. The distribution of housing units across the value ranges indicates availability of affordable housing should not be an issue in Marion even though housing values are increasing.

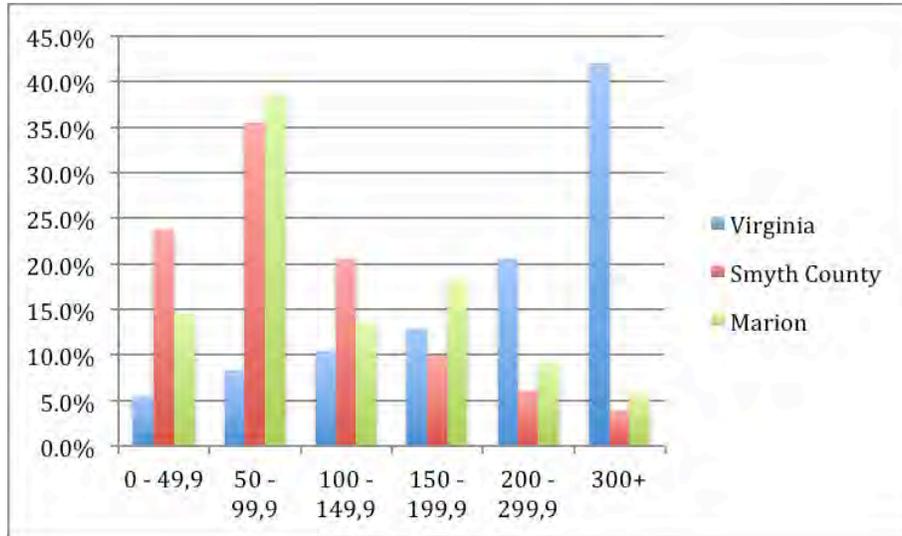
**TABLE 3-L**  
**Housing Value**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Owner-Occupied Units**  
**2000 and 2010**

Value	2000	2010	Percent Change 2000-2010	
Less than \$50,000	532	202	-330	-62.0
\$50,000 - \$99,999	591	535	-56	-9.5
\$100,000 - \$149,000	169	188	19	11.2
\$150,000 - \$199,999	44	252	208	472.7
\$200,000 - \$299,999	23	126	103	447.8
\$300,000 - \$499,999	15	69	54	360.0
\$500,000 or more	0	13	13	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,374</b>	<b>1,385</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 1990 and 2000 & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

Chart 3-B compares owner-occupied housing values between Marion, Smyth County, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Housing values peak between \$50,000 to \$99,900 in Smyth County and Marion; however, housing values in the state peak in the \$300,000 and great category. Over 53 percent of Marion's housing stock is valued at less than \$100,000, which indicates a limited stock of housing in the middle and upper value classifications.

**CHART 3-B  
Comparative Housing Values Of Owner-Occupied Units  
Virginia, Smyth County, and Town of Marion  
By Percent of Total Owner-Occupied Units  
2010**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

While housing costs are declining in many parts of the nation, the value of housing in Marion has been increasing. Tables 3-M and 3-N show the percent change in median housing value and median rent in Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia. Change in the ratio of median housing value to median family income indicates the general trends in housing affordability in the town, although other factors such as interest rates also affect affordability, especially in today’s housing market.

**TABLE 3-M  
Median Value Of Owner-Occupied Housing Units  
Town of Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia  
By Jurisdiction  
2000 and 2010**

Jurisdiction	2000	2010	Percent Change
Marion	\$65,900	\$97,200	47.5
Smyth County	\$62,600	\$86,900	38.8
Virginia	\$118,800	\$255,100	114.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

In 2010, the median value of homes was \$97,200 in Marion, \$86,900 in Smyth County, and \$225,100 in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Compared to the median values in 2000, this indicates a considerable increase over the ten-year period. Median contract rent increased similarly, with a 40.3 percent increase in median contract rent in the town between 2000 and 2010.

**TABLE 3-N**  
**Median Contract Rent**  
**Town of Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia**  
**By Jurisdiction**  
**2000 and 2010**

Jurisdiction	2000	2010	Percent Change
Marion	\$273	\$383	40.3
Smyth County	\$281	\$364	29.5
Virginia	\$550	\$815	48.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

Affordability may also be evaluated by comparing the change in housing costs with the change in household income. Table 3-O shows that the change in home values has increased more than the change in household income in Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia.

**TABLE 3-O**  
**Ratio Of Median Home Value To Median Household Income**  
**Town of Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia**  
**By Jurisdiction**  
**2000 to 2010**

Jurisdiction	Change in Median Home Value	Change in Median Household Income	Ratio
Marion	47.5	28.5	1.7
Smyth County	38.8	15.9	2.4
Virginia	114.7	31.6	3.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

Table 3-P shows that the change in household income has also lagged behind the change in contract rent in the town, county, and state.

**TABLE 3-P**  
**Ratio Of Median Contract Rent To Median Household Income**  
**Town of Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia**  
**By Jurisdiction**  
**2000 to 2010**

Jurisdiction	Change in Median Contract Rent	Change in Median Household Income	Ratio
Marion	40.3	28.5	1.41
Smyth County	29.5	15.9	1.86
Virginia	48.2	31.6	1.53

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

The “fair market rent” established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development in 2011 was \$588.00 per month for a two-bedroom unit in Smyth County. Based on assumptions that a household should not spend more than 30 percent of its income on housing, approximately 37.5 percent of the households in rental units in the Town of Marion could not afford the fair market rent. By using the median gross rent being paid in the Town of Marion, this same analogy reveals that approximately 30 percent cannot afford the actual rent being paid. The actual case is that 35.5 percent of the renter-occupied households in the town pay more than 30 percent of their gross income for rent and 22.1 percent of the owner-occupied households pay more than 30 percent of their gross income for owner costs, based on American Community Survey data. According to 2010 Census data, owner-occupied households that pay more than 30 percent of their gross income for owner costs are predominantly low- to moderate-income families with household incomes ranging from less than \$10,000 to \$34,999 per year.

#### **H. Current Housing Programs**

The town has been very successful in addressing the housing problems identified in the town's first Comprehensive Plan. Several reasons for the improvements are noted below.

##### ***Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority***

Since the initial Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority received funding for and constructed 238 rental units on eight different sites. There are approximately 250 families or individuals on waiting lists for housing assistance from the housing authority.

##### ***HUD Section 8 Program***

Marion Redevelopment & Housing Authority administers the HUD Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher rental subsidy program that serves eligible low-income residents in Smyth County. Presently, there are 246 households scattered throughout the county being served by this program with 173 families or individuals on the waiting list.

##### ***Housing Rehabilitation Projects***

In addition to these programs, the town is eligible to apply for funds under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development to rehabilitate homes for low- and moderate-income, eligible citizens. The Town of Marion has been successful at utilizing the CDBG program to rehabilitate housing in the town. In 2007, the Town of Marion secured a CDBG planning grant to evaluate housing needs in the south-central portion of town along Matson Drive, Buchanan Street, Pearl Avenue, Spruce Street, and various side streets. The project resulted in 136 households surveyed and the development of two housing rehabilitation projects, one along Pearl Avenue and Buchanan Street and the other along Spruce Street and Matson Drive.

The Pearl/Buchanan project was funded in 2009 to rehabilitate 21 houses and substantially reconstruct 1 unit. The project area included 339 Pearl Avenue to 516

Pearl Avenue and all of Buchanan Street. The project also addressed blight conditions in the project area through the purchase and demolition of three blighted structures and general removal of trash and debris. The Pearl/Buchanan project is scheduled to be completed in 2012.

The Spruce Street and Matson Drive project was funded in 2011 and extends from house number 704 to 846 on the west side of Spruce Street, from 659 to 723 on the east side of Spruce Street, from 812 to 840 on the west side of Matson Drive and 829 to 833 on the east side of Matson Drive. The project will rehabilitate 19 houses and substantially reconstruction 1 house in the project area. The Spruce/Matson project is in the initial stages of implementation and should be completed by 2014.

Smyth County receives approximately \$60,000 per year from the HUD Indoor Plumbing Program; however, the indoor plumbing program has limited use for the town's residents. Mountain Cap, Inc. is a federally funded Community Action Agency that has funds available for minor home repairs for emergency and/or energy related circumstances for very low-income persons. In addition, there are volunteer organizations (Crossroads Project and Habitat for Humanity) located in the region that can provide limited assistance to improve the housing stock in the town.

#### ***Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA)***

The Virginia Housing Development Authority was created by the General Assembly of Virginia in 1972 to make seed money loans, finance site development costs, provide construction financing, act as a permanent lender, and provide technical assistance to municipalities, nonprofit corporations, and private builders. Virginia Housing Development Authority funds have been used to rehabilitate apartments along the Town of Marion's Main Street as part of a project initiated by Marion Downtown.

#### **IV. ECONOMY**

The boundary between Marion and Smyth County is political rather than economic, and the town's economy is functionally interrelated with that of the county. Because of this interrelatedness and the fact that much of the economic data available for analysis does not treat the town as an entity distinct from the surrounding county, this chapter will discuss the economic characteristics of the two jurisdictions together.

Marion's economic growth and vitality have been influenced by a number of factors. For example, the town's location along the Interstate 81 corridor has proved beneficial over the years, as population and economic growth have tended to concentrate along the I-81 transportation corridor.

Other, more recent changes and developments in the local economy are now affecting the Town of Marion. During the early 1990s, the national policy of defense downsizing forced many local employers who were contracted with the Department of Defense to scale down production, which resulted in heavy workforce cuts. More recently, a series of manufacturing and industrial plant closings and downsizing between 1998 and 2003 had devastating impacts, leaving over 2,000 people unemployed in Smyth County. Nevertheless, manufacturing increased during the first half of 2004, and the unemployment rate dropped in Smyth County from 10.6 percent in June 2003 to 5.0 percent in April 2004. With the national economic downturn that began in 2007, high unemployment and economic stagnation have returned to Smyth County, and by 2010 unemployment in the county had increased to 10.5 percent.

##### **A. Labor Force and Unemployment**

Since 2000, the unemployment rate in Smyth County (and by implication, the Town of Marion) generally has been higher than that of the state and nation as a whole. Federal agencies such as the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Economic Development Administration have addressed both the causes and effects of unemployment through various projects in Smyth County. Industrial parks in Atkins, Chilhowie, and Saltville were constructed in the mid- to late-1980s using funding from the above federal agencies in the hopes of directly addressing the unemployment problem by providing sites for new industries and businesses. Locally, both the Town of Marion and Smyth County have endeavored to attack unemployment through the issuance of industrial revenue bonds, regional water and sewer cooperative ventures, industrial park acquisitions and developments, downtown revitalization, and the enhancement of the tourism industry.

**TABLE 4-A  
Labor Force  
Smyth County  
By Year  
2000 to 2010**

Year	Civilian Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
2010	15,226	13,630	1,596	10.5
2009	15,393	13,657	1,736	11.3
2008	15,074	14,151	923	6.1
2007	15,109	14,287	822	5.4
2006	15,356	14,646	710	4.6
2005	15,686	14,966	720	4.6
2004	15,620	14,823	797	5.1
2003	15,975	14,770	1,205	7.5
2002	15,545	14,297	1,248	8.0
2001	15,497	14,513	984	6.3
2000	15,764	15,084	680	4.3

Source: Virginia Employment Commission - LAUS Unit and Bureau of Labor Statistics

These efforts have produced mixed results as shown by Table 4-A. Although the size of the labor force has remained relatively constant since 2000, unemployment has increased. This is primarily a result of the series of manufacturing plant closings and downsizing between 1998 and 2003 and the recent national economic recession that began in 2007. Table 4-B compares the 2000 and 2010 rates of male and female workforce participation between the town, county, Mount Rogers Planning District, and Virginia. In 2010, labor force participation in Marion was 52.8 percent of the population, which was 12.6 percent lower than the participation rate of the state.

**TABLE 4-B  
Percentage Of Persons Age 16 And Over Participating In The Labor Force  
Town of Marion, Smyth County, MRPDC, and Virginia  
By Sex  
2000 and 2010**

	Marion		Smyth County		MRPD	Virginia
	2000	2010	2000	2010	2010	2010
Male	55.7	63.8	66.7	59.6	62.2	70.0
Female	45.9	43.2	51.0	47.6	51.4	61.3
Total	50.4	52.8	58.4	53.4	56.6	65.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

**TABLE 4-C**  
**Comparative Unemployment**  
**Smyth County, MRPDC, Virginia, and the United States**  
**By Year**  
**2000 to 2010**

Year	Smyth County	MRPD	Virginia	United States
2010	10.5	9.8	6.9	9.6
2009	11.3	10.1	6.8	9.3
2008	6.1	5.7	4.0	5.8
2007	5.4	4.9	3.0	4.6
2006	4.6	4.6	3.0	4.6
2005	4.6	4.7	3.5	5.1
2004	5.1	5.0	3.7	5.5
2003	7.5	5.9	4.1	6.0
2002	8.0	6.6	4.2	5.8
2001	6.3	6.0	3.2	4.7
2000	4.3	4.0	2.3	4.0

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, 2011

As Table 4-C shows, Smyth County has had the highest unemployment rate per year for seven of the past ten years when compared to the Mount Rogers Planning District, Virginia, and the United States. This is an indicator of an economy with a non-diversified industrial base and poor retail performance.

### **B. Income Levels**

Monetary income of Marion residents is a key indicator of the economic health of the community. Like the rest of Southwest Virginia, the town and surrounding county have lower income levels than many other areas of the state due to a lack of higher-skilled, higher-paying job opportunities. Also, as evident in counties throughout the state, per capita incomes of county seats, like Marion, tend to be the highest in the county.

**TABLE 4-D**  
**Comparative Income**  
**Town of Marion, Smyth County, and Virginia**  
**By Income Type**  
**2010**

Type	Marion	Smyth County	Virginia
Median Household Income	\$32,913	\$34,864	\$61,406
Median Family Income	\$44,141	\$43,790	\$73,514
Per Capita Income	\$22,289	\$19,906	\$32,145

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

Income levels in the Town of Marion and Smyth County in 2010 were well below state averages; however, Marion's per capita income continued to be slightly higher than the county's as a whole. Marion's per capita income was 69.3 percent of Virginia's per capita income and exceeded the countywide per capita income by approximately 12 percent. One explanation for the higher per capita income in the Town of Marion is the greater number of persons residing in Marion who are employed in professional and related services. Traditionally, more professional persons locate in county seats, which are centers of law, finance, medicine, and related fields.

To get a complete picture of incomes in the Town of Marion, it is important to consider not only median and per capita figures, but also to look at how income is distributed in the community. Just over 13 percent of the town's households had annual incomes of less than \$10,000. This compares poorly to the same state parameter, which was only 5.8 percent of the total households statewide.

**TABLE 4-E**  
**Distribution Of Household Income**  
**Town of Marion and Virginia**  
**By Income Category**  
**2010**

Income Category	Marion		Virginia
	Number	Percent	Percent
Less than \$10,000	320	13.2	5.8
\$10,000 - 14,000	216	8.9	4.4
\$15,000 - 24,999	373	15.4	8.6
\$25,000 - 34,999	388	16.0	8.9
\$35,000 - 49,999	320	13.2	13.2
\$50,000 - 74,999	446	18.4	18.3
\$75,000 - 99,999	211	8.7	13.2
\$100,000 or more	149	6.1	27.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

Two additional breakdowns of household income show similar trends between Virginia and Marion. When looking at the lower end of the household income spectrum (\$0 to \$24,999), a total of 37.9 percent of Marion households fell into this category as compared to only 18.8 percent statewide. A review of the high-income level (\$50,000 or more) shows a similar disparity. While 59.1 percent of the households statewide could be classified as "high-income" based on American Community Survey data, only 33.2 percent of the households in the Town of Marion.

Another indicator of income distribution and general economic vitality is the poverty status of the population. Table 4-F provides information on persons and families below the poverty level for the town as compared to the state as a whole.

The percentage of persons and families who were living below the established poverty level in 2010 was higher in the Town of Marion than in Virginia in all categories except persons aged 65 and older. This disparity is particularly striking when one looks at families with children and female-headed households. “Female-headed families with children under eighteen” is the category with the highest percentage living below the poverty level. The percentages in this category exceed those in other categories in both the state and the town. Approximately 33 percent of all families with children under 18 in the Town of Marion have income below the poverty line, which is 21.7 percent higher than the poverty rate for this family group at the state level.

**TABLE 4-F**  
**Poverty Status**  
**Town of Marion and Virginia**  
**By Population Group and Family Type**  
**2010**

Population Group or Family Type	Marion			Virginia
	All persons or families for whom poverty status was determined	Number below poverty level	Percent	Percent
All persons	5,590	1,368	24.5	10.1
Persons 65 and older	1,078	77	7.1	8.9
All families	1,341	196	14.6	7.2
Families with children under 18	496	162	32.7	11.0
Female householder families	341	33	23.2	23.4
Female householder families with children under 18	181	68	37.6	30.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates

### C. Retail Trade

Taxable retail sales data are an excellent indicator of the health of the local retail trade industry, as they portray the size and volume of the retail trade in a given locality. Specifically, taxable retail sales reflect the total taxable value of retail goods exchanged within a locality. As can be seen in Table 4-G, the rate of growth and the actual number of retail establishments in Smyth County declined steadily from 2006 to 2010. While no hard retail sales data exists for the Town of Marion alone, it should be safe to assume that the number of retail establishments also declined in the town.

**TABLE 4-G**  
**Retail Establishments**  
**Smyth County**  
**By Category**  
**2006 to 2010**

Category	Number of Establishments					Percent Change	
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006 - 2010	2009 - 2010
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	30	24	24	22	22	-26.7%	0.0%
Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	17	13	15	13	11	-35.3%	-15.4%
Electronics and Appliance Stores	8	8	6	6	6	-25.0%	0.0%
Building Material and Garden Supplies Dealers	19	16	15	13	17	-10.5%	30.8%
Food and Beverage Stores	35	36	37	39	39	11.4%	0.0%
Health and Personal Care Stores	12	14	12	13	13	8.3%	0.0%
Gasoline Stations	46	38	31	33	30	-34.8%	-9.1%
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	27	23	22	23	21	-22.2%	-8.7%
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book and Music Stores	35	27	24	29	22	-37.1%	-24.1%
General Merchandise Stores	11	13	9	12	12	9.1%	0.0%
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	52	57	59	57	56	7.7%	-1.8%
Nonstore Retailers	29	26	25	28	30	3.4%	7.1%
Rental and Leasing Stores	36	27	24	19	16	-55.6%	-15.8%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7	7	12	8	11	57.1%	37.5%
Amusement and Recreation Industries	9	9	10	8	9	0.0%	12.5%
Accommodation	17	18	16	18	19	11.8%	5.6%
Food Service and Drinking Places	62	60	60	57	59	-4.8%	3.5%
Repair and Maintenance	18	15	18	19	23	27.8%	21.1%
Personal and Laundry Services	13	15	14	11	10	-23.1%	-9.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>-11.8%</b>	<b>-0.5%</b>

Source: Virginia Department of Taxation, 2011

Table 4-H shows that the actual retail sales over the same period held relatively steady with a modest 0.9 percent increase in total taxable sales between 2006 and 2010. Health and personal care stores experienced the greatest increase during the period with 98.4 percent growth in taxable sales, while electronics and appliance stores experienced the greatest decline in taxable sales at -62.6 percent.

**TABLE 4-H**  
**Taxable Retail Sales**  
**Smyth County**  
**By Category**  
**2006 to 2010**

Category	Taxable Sales					Percent Change	
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006 - 2010	2009 - 2010
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	\$5,433,803	\$7,927,792	\$6,155,774	\$6,384,040	\$6,698,266	23.3%	4.9%
Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	\$2,181,966	\$1,686,801	\$1,544,582	\$1,807,208	\$1,260,973	-42.2%	-30.2%
Electronics and Appliance Stores	\$854,946	\$626,249	\$617,912	\$457,521	\$319,653	-62.6%	-30.1%
Building Material and Garden Supplies Dealers	\$11,653,645	\$5,558,135	\$3,828,961	\$3,236,190	\$3,221,357	-72.4%	-0.5%
Food and Beverage Stores	\$44,025,015	\$46,500,161	\$48,698,434	\$49,284,077	\$48,483,798	10.1%	-1.6%
Health and Personal Care Stores	\$1,650,406	\$2,890,946	\$3,141,932	\$3,173,483	\$3,274,453	98.4%	3.2%
Gasoline Stations	\$14,708,298	\$13,566,942	\$11,286,431	\$10,822,532	\$11,568,862	-21.3%	6.9%
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	\$3,029,342	\$2,482,067	\$1,873,862	\$2,254,313	\$2,264,967	-25.2%	0.5%
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book and Music Stores	\$433,395	\$544,373	\$1,078,648	\$891,205	\$611,431	41.1%	-31.4%
General Merchandise Stores	\$35,592,009	\$39,053,284	\$41,009,075	\$40,880,080	\$40,675,576	14.3%	-0.5%
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$3,782,604	\$3,930,404	\$3,876,294	\$5,073,882	\$4,529,858	19.8%	-10.7%
Non-store Retailers	\$2,072,610	\$1,580,879	\$2,241,450	\$1,732,010	\$2,472,032	19.3%	42.7%
Rental and Leasing Stores	\$1,031,183	\$1,540,879	\$1,503,860	\$452,865	\$1,020,357	-1.0%	125.3%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$126,638	\$88,075	\$363,485	\$139,764	\$170,095	34.3%	21.7%
Amusement and Recreation Industries	\$483,693	\$433,824	\$403,239	\$199,858	\$279,373	-42.2%	39.8%
Accommodation	\$3,261,482	\$3,368,411	\$3,569,230	\$3,012,485	\$3,233,204	-0.9%	7.3%
Food Service and Drinking Places	\$21,672,174	\$21,638,140	\$23,091,114	\$22,805,569	\$22,836,241	5.4%	0.1%
Repair and Maintenance	\$2,129,819	\$1,772,361	\$1,545,092	\$1,677,801	\$1,751,901	-17.7%	4.4%
Personal and Laundry Services	\$2,600,226	\$3,580,846	\$3,360,615	\$3,728,779	\$3,495,613	34.4%	-6.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$156,723,254</b>	<b>\$158,770,569</b>	<b>\$159,189,990</b>	<b>\$158,013,662</b>	<b>\$158,168,010</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>

Source: Virginia Department of Taxation, 2011

The growth and vitality of retail trade continues to be a primary goal of the Town of Marion. The town is a designated Virginia Main Street Community, which makes available technical assistance for the restoration of downtown architecture and offers retail training for merchants. Through the Main Street program and grant programs through various state and federal agencies, Marion has successfully completed several projects focused on the economic and physical revitalization of Downtown Marion, including streetscape improvements, building façade enhancements, pedestrian connectivity, a farmers' market, and heritage tourism attractions. Ongoing projects in the downtown area include the adaptive reuse of the 1908 Schoolhouse as the Wayne C.

Henderson School of Appalachian Music and Arts and streetscape improvements along North Iron Street and Broad Street.

The Marion Downtown Revitalization Authority, which was created to oversee the rehabilitation of Downtown Marion, has become the primary source of small business assistance and development in the town. Since the initiation of Marion's Main Street Program, the town has experienced a net gain of 52 new businesses resulting in 210 new jobs. Research into additional plans and strategies for the restoration and development of the town's Main Street is ongoing, and the Marion Downtown Revitalization Authority has been successfully promoting the town's benefits to entrepreneurs and small business leaders. Nevertheless, recent economic conditions both locally and nationally have resulted in a commercial vacancy rate of approximately 14 percent in Downtown Marion.

#### D. Manufacturing

Table 4-I provides comparative data on manufacturing employment by industry type in Smyth County between 2005 and 2010. As in some other sections of this chapter, information is not readily available for the Town of Marion, so Smyth County data are used. As identified in Table 4-I, the manufacturing base in Smyth County suffered major job losses during the second half of the last decade; however, the number of manufacturing establishments grew and manufacturing still accounts for the largest concentration of employment and private investment in buildings and equipment in the county. During this period, all industry types where data were available suffered some losses, with the greatest job losses occurring in the transportation equipment industry. The transportation equipment sector had experienced the greatest growth during the early 2000s. The decline in employment in the transportation equipment industry is particularly significant to the Town of Marion, where some of the largest transportation equipment firms are located.

**TABLE 4-I**  
**Manufacturing Employment**  
**Smyth County**  
**By Industry Description**  
**2005 and 2010**

Industry	2005		2010	
	Employees	Establishments	Employees	Establishments
Wood products	706	7	285	7
Chemicals	***	***	58	4
Plastics and rubber products	***	***	569	4
Fabricated metal products	130	6	113	6
Machinery	237	5	207	4
Transportation equipment	2,297	4	1,515	4
Furniture and related products	***	***	280	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,954</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>3,200</b>	<b>44</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Covered Employment and Wages in Virginia, 2011

\*\*\* – Indicates data was withheld by the Virginia Employment Commission; however, data was included in the totals.

Note: Industries undisclosed in both 2005 and 2010 were not included in the table, but were included in the totals.

**TABLE 4-J**  
**Major Employers**  
**Smyth County**  
**By Size**  
**1st Quarter 2011**

	<b>Employer</b>	<b>OC *</b>	<b>Size Code**</b>
1	Smyth County School Board	30	8
2	Utility Trailer Manufacturing	50	8
3	Southwest Virginia Mental Health Center	20	8
4	General Dynamics Armament	50	8
5	Mountain States Health Alliance	50	7
6	Royal Mouldings	50	7
7	Masco Builder Cabinet Group	50	7
8	Food City	50	7
9	MT. Rogers Community Services Board	30	6
10	Smyth County	30	6
11	Marion Correctional Treatment Center	20	6
12	Mountain Empire Operation	50	6
13	Wal-Mart	50	6
14	TRW Automotive Us, LLC	50	6
15	W & L Construction and Paving	50	6
16	Woodgrain Millwork	50	6
17	Scholle Packaging Inc.	50	6
18	Atwork Personnel Service	50	6
19	Kennametal, Inc.	50	6
20	District Three Government	30	6
21	GCS (NOW CLOSED)	50	6
22	Saltville Medical Center	30	6
23	Keystone Marion LLC (NOW CLOSED)	50	5
24	Town of Marion	30	5
25	The Bank of Marion	50	5

**Table 4-J Continued**

<b>Ownership Code (OC)*</b>	<b>Ownership Type</b>
10	Federal Government
20	State Government
30	Local Government
50	Private
<b>Size Code**</b>	<b>Number of Employees</b>
9	1000+ Employees
8	500-999 Employees
7	250-499 Employees
6	100-249 Employees
5	50-99 Employees

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, 2011

Table 4-J lists the top 25 major employers in Smyth County. This list includes a number of large manufacturing firms, such as General Dynamics and Utility Trailer, which each employ well over 500 workers. Although manufacturing in Smyth County suffered major losses between 1998 and 2003, this listing is evidence that manufacturing is a viable industry in Smyth County and the Town of Marion. Additional evidence of growth in the manufacturing sector was discovered through a survey compiled by Smyth County's Office of Economic and Community Development. The results of this survey, which polled 30 manufacturing and non-manufacturing employers, indicated an 8.2 percent increase (368 new jobs) in manufacturing employment between March 2003 and March 2004. Every effort should be made to retain these existing businesses and industries, while also recruiting new, diverse industries into the county.

**TABLE 4-K**  
**Vacant Industrial Buildings**  
**Town of Marion**  
**2011**

<b>Industrial Buildings</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Total Square Feet</b>
Coffman Plant B	1500 Industrial Rd	78,000
Buster Brown Building	618 Dover St	48,028
Rt 16 South Warehouse	1209 Highway 16	45,880
Coffman Plant C Warehouse	320 Johnston Road	15,000
<b>Office Buildings</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Total Square Feet</b>
Marion Plaza	1573 N Main St	25,000

Source: Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2011

While industrial expansion and recruitment are important goals, the Town of Marion is limited by the lack of available industrial buildings and sites. Currently, there are only four vacant industrial buildings and one vacant office building in the town, as can be seen in Table 4-K. It is imperative that the town focuses on utilizing the existing

industrial property to the highest extent possible.

### E. Services

Smyth County, in keeping with national employment trends, has shown increases in the proportion of its workforce employed in the service industry. Employment statistics for the service sector are often vague and largely undefined as they could include nearly all non-agricultural, non-manufacturing employment or could be more narrowly focused to include only what could be considered personal, business, or professional services. The Virginia Employment Commission, which compiles and publishes data for all employers covered with unemployment compensation, uses the latter definition and does not include trade, finance, insurance, real estate, government, transportation, communications, or public utilities as services. Table 4-L shows recent trends.

**TABLE 4-L**  
**Non-Manufacturing Employment**  
**Smyth County**  
**By Industry**  
**2005 and 2010**

Industry	2005		2010	
	Employees	Establishments	Employees	Establishments
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	126	6	***	***
Construction	757	78	462	61
Educational Services	936	3	***	***
Finance and Insurance	187	40	177	37
Health Care and Social Assistance	2,318	64	2,420	216
Information	107	12	94	15
Other Services (except Public Administration)	247	61	201	49
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	290	40	245	36
Public Administration	644	35	664	36
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	85	20	70	17
Retail Trade	1,333	128	1,207	110
Transportation and Warehousing	216	29	217	33
Utilities	52	5	***	***
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,298</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>5,757</b>	<b>610</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Covered Employment and Wages in Virginia, 2011

### F. Tourism

Several tourism projects have been completed or are still underway in Southwest Virginia that are designed to market the region and to bolster the economy through tourism dollars. There is an array of tourism opportunities in the Town of Marion and Smyth County, including Hungry Mother State Park, the Lincoln Theatre, the Museum

of the Middle Appalachians, the Settlers Museum of Southwest Virginia, and various annual festivals. Marion's economy already benefits greatly from these attractions, and further development of local and regional tourism opportunities will continue to add dollars to the town's economy. An example of such development is the planned reuse of the historic 1908 Schoolhouse as the Wayne C. Henderson School of Appalachian Music and Arts.

### **G. Business Development Incentives**

In 2005, Smyth County was awarded an expanded Virginia Enterprise Zone designation that included a majority of the commercial and industrial property in the Town of Marion. The expanded zone included 444.7 acres inside the town, including Downtown Marion and all of Main Street / U.S. Route 11. The enterprise zone will be in effect until 2020.

The purpose of the Virginia Enterprise Zone program is to support job creation and private investment in areas designated for growth through grants based on real property investment and the number of jobs created over a five year period. In addition to state grants, Marion offers several local incentives: building permit fee rebate, water and sewer cost rebate, economic stimulus grant, real estate rehabilitation tax exemption, Business and Professional Operators License Tax Credit, loan application and train assistance, tourism-business marketing incentive, downtown revitalization design assistance, and downtown revitalization façade grant. A proposal will be submitted in 2012 to expand the Marion Enterprise Zone to include the old Smyth County Community Hospital facility on Radio Hill Road and adjacent medical arts properties.

#### IV. TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES AND SYSTEMS

The transportation system serving the Town of Marion primarily includes U.S. Route 11, running east-to-west, and State Route 16, running north-to-south. Interstate 81 travels along the town's southern boundary with three interchanges leading into Marion. I-81 serves as the major regional transportation route for the area, providing for through traffic, commuters, visitors, and freight trucks.

Alternative transportation modes include the Marion Transit System and several privately owned taxicabs, as well as the Greyhound bus line. For hikers and joggers, the town maintains the Riverwalk trail system. The Riverwalk overlaps the main sewer interceptor line along the Middle Fork Holston River, going from Baughman Avenue to North Church Street. Another segment of the Riverwalk follows the Middle Fork Holston River along Campbell Avenue.

The Norfolk Southern Railway Company generally follows the I-81 corridor as the trains connect the Valley of Virginia with the industrialized South. The railroad crosses several streets in Marion, all of them at-grade and all of them are either gated or lighted.

##### A. Highways and Streets

As part of the interstate highway system, I-81 serves as one of the major transportation routes across Virginia. It has been designated the Crescent Corridor and is one of the designated Corridors of Statewide Significance. The highway has been subject to an on-going corridor study by the state, due to continued growth in traffic volumes and the increasing effects of freight hauling trucks. Parts of the I-81 corridor are heavily overloaded by traffic, especially in and around major urban centers such as Roanoke and Harrisonburg and along difficult ascents such as Christiansburg Mountain. The heavy traffic issues are less extreme in southwest Virginia, although traffic volumes have generally increased in the region as a whole.

The **I-81 corridor** presently is the subject of a major environmental impact study to widen the four-lane highway into at least six and in places eight lanes in the future. A Draft Tier I Environmental Impact Statement was released to the public in November 2005.

For the area in and around the Town of Marion, the total daily traffic volume on I-81 has decreased 6.8 percent from 2002 to 2010, going from 31,000 to 29,000 vehicles daily. While it is common to blame the congestion problem on freight hauling trucks, the actual story is more complicated, based on data collected by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The proportion of truck traffic during that period has dropped to 22 percent from 26 percent, but the proportion and volume of four-tire traffic<sup>3</sup> has increased. The proportion of four-tire traffic went from 74 percent in 2002 to 78 percent in 2010. Passenger cars and freight truckers together continue to add to the congestion of the interstate system in the Marion area.

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<sup>3</sup> Four-tire traffic includes motorcycles, passenger cars, vans and pickup trucks.

**TABLE 5-A**  
**Town of Marion's Streets and Roads\*\*\***  
**Average Annual Daily Traffic**  
**By Route**  
**2002 and 2010**

Route	Route Name	From	To	Avg. Annual Daily Traffic Counts		% Change 2002-2010
				2002	2010	
I-81	Northbound both sides	State Route (SR) 16	Rt F-10*	14000	14000	0%
				31000	29000	-6.40%
I-81	Southbound both sides	SR 16	US 11**	17000	14000	-17.60%
				31000	29000	-6.40%
US 11	S. Main St.	Western Corporate Limits	Greenway Ave.	9900	8700	-12.10%
US 11	S. Main St.	Greenway Ave.	College St.	10000	8700	-13.00%
US 11	Main St.	College St.	SR 16	11000	9100	-17.30%
US 11/SR 16	Main St.	SR 16 N	Commerce St.	19000	17000	-10.50%
US 11	E. Main St.	Commerce St.	N. Main St	18000	12000	-33.30%
US 11	Main St.	Park Blvd.	Keller Lane.	14000	11000	-21.40%
US 11	N. Main St.	Keller Ln	Eastern Corporate Limits	11000	11000	0%
SR 16	S. Commerce St.	I-81	SR 217	9000	8500	-5.50%
SR 16	S. Commerce St.	SR 217	US 11 Main St.	9100	7600	-16.50%
SR 16/US 11	Main St.	US 11 Main St.	US 11 Main St.	19000	17000	-10.50%
SR 16	Park Blvd.	US 11 Main St.	Northern Corporate Limits	4400	5800	31.80%

\* The 2002 segment went from SR 16 to Northern Corporate Limit Marion.

\*\* The 2002 segment went from SR 16 to Northern Corporate Limit Marion.

\*\*\* This represents the most recent data available. In 1997 VDOT changed some of its data-collection methods, so comparisons with earlier data sets may be misleading.

Source: Annual traffic counts/estimates on roadway segments by Virginia Dept. of Transportation.

What happens in the long run to improve conditions on I-81 will depend largely on decisions made by Virginia and the surrounding states. The Town of Marion can help influence the decision-making process by acting as an advocate for its interests and by

closely following (and commenting on) developments regarding future improvements for I-81.

**U.S. Route 11** (Lee Highway in the county, Main Street in the town) continues its function as an important collector route in and around the town. Traffic volumes on some sections of U.S. 11 approach those of the interstate highway, though the most recent traffic counts show declining use of U.S. 11 since 1999 and again since 2002. These data appear in greater detail in Table 5-A.

It is possible U.S. 11 has become so heavily traveled in recent years that more drivers are using I-81 as a local by-pass route. As pointed out in the *Marion 2020 Transportation Plan*, U.S. 11 along North Main Street is mostly a four-lane roadway with center shared turning lane that constricts and becomes a heavily traveled two-lane (without center turning lane) roadway in the center of town (on East and West and South Main Street). During the afternoon peak travel hour, the downtown section of U.S. 11 becomes overloaded, has “moderate” congestion, and traffic movement is impeded. There is also a morning rush hour (traffic heading to the Marion schools on Dabney Drive) and a noon/lunch rush hour.

Adding to the downtown bottleneck is Pendleton Street at the intersection with U.S. 11. Westbound traffic on U.S. 11 often stops in the designated left turn lane to turn left onto Pendleton, a shortcut, rather than proceed directly to the downtown intersection with State Route 16 (Commerce Street). Suggestions have been made to convert Pendleton into a one-way northbound street or to simply ban left turns from U.S. 11. The town considered those suggestions but has opted against pursuing them at the present time. Realignment of the intersection and the addition of a signal at Pendleton Street is a future consideration.

U.S. Route 11 attracts the greatest volume of traffic near the intersection with **State Route 16**, which goes in a north-south direction and cuts through the center of Marion on South Commerce Street, North Main Street, and Park Boulevard (and is coincident with Route 11 along North Main Street). The overlapping section of U.S. 11 and State Route 16 was carrying an average of 19,000 vehicles daily in 2002 and 17,000 in 2010. Other than the downtown bottleneck problem already discussed, State Route 16 generally functions at an acceptable level and is expected to continue doing so through 2020.

One high-priority local project for the town was successfully completed under the state Public-Private Transportation Act. This resulted in an extension of Fowler Street from Prater Lane to Park Boulevard, including a new traffic signal at Park Boulevard. The new street, known as Callan Drive, fulfills two important roles for the community – to provide a second east-west pathway through town and to open up land for residential development. Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts for Callan Drive in 2010 were 3700.

## **B. Marion Transportation Plan**

The Town of Marion is classified as a small urban area (communities with populations

from 5,000 to 50,000) and qualifies for special transportation studies done in cooperation with VDOT. These localized 10-year plans are done from the standpoint of “providing effective, safe, and efficient movement of people and goods,”<sup>4</sup> with the main focus placed on the thoroughfare highway system. The studies are limited to the transportation needs of a few selected roadways designated as the urban thoroughfares. In Marion’s case these roadways included Main Street (south, north, east and west), Church Street (north and south), Cherry Street, Chilhowie Street, Pendleton Street, South Commerce Street, Chatham Hill Road, Park Boulevard, Keller Lane, and Johnston Road.

In addition to the items contained in the current Marion 2020 Plan, a 2011-published plan contains recommendation for the Town of Marion. The report is titled Mount Rogers Planning District 2035 Rural Long Range Transportation Plan (RLRP.)

The Rural Long Range Transportation Plan and the current Marion 2020 Transportation Plan together made the following recommendations:

- Pendleton Street at Main Street – realign and add signal.
- N. Main Street at Park Boulevard – improve pedestrian crossing and improve signal. The signal has been reconfigured at this time.
- S. Main Street – widen between Greenway Avenue and College Street from two lanes to urban standard four lanes.
- Cherry Street - widen and improve from Poston Street to S. Commerce Street and improve turn radius at Poston Street intersection.
- Chilhowie Street - widen and improve to an upgraded 2-lane urban collector from the west corporate limits to Chatham Hill Road.
- Chatham Hill Road - widen and improve to an upgraded 2-lane urban collector from the north corporate limits to Fowler Street.
- Church Street – a 2-level parking deck for 100 vehicles is scheduled for completion in 2012.
- Medical Park Drive – a new signal with added turn lanes is in place for the entrance off U.S. Highway 11, North Main Street, to the new Smyth County Community Hospital opened in 2012.
- Callan Drive – a 2-lane urban collector street completed in 2004 under a Public/Private Partnership.
- Highway 16 at south corporate limit – reconstruct road to full-width lanes and shoulders.

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4. Language taken from the Executive Summary of the Marion 2020 Transportation Plan of August 2001. The Plan was last modified April 13, 2010 with no changes to this section. A 2030 Transportation Plan is anticipated but no timetable has been set by VDOT for its availability.

- Baughman Avenue – replace bridge over the Middle Fork of the Holston River.

### **C. Air Travel**

The nearest air service is available at Mountain Empire Airport, a general aviation facility in Groseclose approximately 12 miles northeast of Marion. The airport stands halfway between Marion and Wytheville, adjacent to Interstate 81 (near Exit 54). The site elevation is just over 2,500 feet above sea level. There is one lighted 5,250-foot hard surface runway and a parallel taxiway. Construction on a new terminal was initiated in 2011.

The nearest commercial aviation service can be found at Tri-Cities Airport near Bristol, Tennessee and at Roanoke Regional Airport in Roanoke, Virginia.

### **D. Rail**

Freight service is provided by the Norfolk Southern Railway Company on its rail system that generally follows the I-81 highway corridor. Norfolk Southern provides long-haul service for coal from far southwest Virginia and also makes stops at several local industries in and around Marion. The trains pass through town several times a day and often create short-term traffic delays, especially at the North Main Street crossing. In recent years the railway added special inserts where the train tracks cross the roadway to reduce wear-and-tear to motor vehicles (particularly passenger cars) that cross the uneven track surface.

An effort known as the TransDominion Express has been underway for several years to provide passenger rail service throughout much of the state, including Marion and Southwest Virginia. The effort to establish passenger rail service has been complicated by the future development plans for I-81; there has been an effort among some to include rail development as a much more prominent feature of the proposed improvements to the interstate highway. In the past,<sup>5</sup> Marion has been identified as a likely location along the route for a passenger rail station. It remains a recommendation that the Town of Marion and Smyth County undertake a detailed study of the local area to identify the best location for a proposed rail station.

### **E. Public Transportation**

Regular service by Greyhound Bus Lines provides for one form of public transportation going into and out of the town. The existing Greyhound station is located off Dabney Drive in the northern part of town.

The town also is a local government affiliate of the District Three Governmental Cooperative, which provides a range of services to the elderly and the handicapped. These include local transit systems, such as Marion Public Transit. This mini-bus transportation service is available to all members of the public Monday through Saturday. Special transports for medical appointments and weekly shopping are available through the transit system for people aged 60 and over. District Three was

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<sup>5</sup> Based on the results of the 1998 feasibility study for passenger rail service.

chartered in 1975 as a public agency and began providing public transportation service to its member localities in 1985.

There is no recommendation at the present time to expand public transportation service for the town. Alternative, private transportation is available in Marion through at least two local taxicab services (Diamond Cab Company and Red Bird Taxi).

#### **F. Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation**

A multi-use pedestrian/bicycle path was developed along Park Boulevard in 2004, which is described in detail in the Special Projects section below. The project became the first designated biking path in the Town of Marion. Hiking trails are also available in town, such as the Riverwalk trail, and in Hungry Mother State Park.

The Riverwalk trail, in two distinct (and separated) sections, has been in existence for several years in the town. The original part of the Riverwalk follows the Middle Fork Holston River starting near Baughman Avenue (at the newly developed Riverbend Park) and ending at North Church Street. The second section of the Riverwalk stands further upstream on the other side of Main Street. That newer trail section follows Campbell Avenue opposite a residential neighborhood. The original Riverwalk contains a graveled surface, while the Campbell Avenue section is paved to allow access by people with physical disabilities.

Pedestrian connectivity in the Town of Marion is very good along Main Street, with sidewalks extending from the east side of town to the west. Much of the commercial strip is accessible to pedestrians, although there are areas of disconnect between residential neighborhoods and the commercial centers. Pedestrian connectivity though the downtown area has been improved through grants from the Virginia Department of Transportation.

#### **G. Special Projects**

In summer of 2004, the shoulders of Park Boulevard went into construction for a widening project to install 1.8 miles of biking lanes under the TEA-21<sup>6</sup> program. The new pathways, a 4-foot wide paved shoulder separated from traffic by a solid white painted line, extends from North Main Street to Mitchell Valley Road in Smyth County, near Hungry Mother State Park. A short ride along Mitchell Valley Road allows access to West Lake Road and the boat launch area on Hungry Mother Lake. A series of hiking and mountain biking trails can be picked up there to follow the lakeshore to other features of the state park. Another TEA-21 project, the rehabilitation of the historic East Chilhowie Street Bridge, the only remaining bridge of its type in the VDOT system, was completed and reopened to traffic.

As part of a planned expansion of the Smyth County Courthouse, a 99 space parking deck has been constructed in downtown Marion between East Strother Street and East

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<sup>6</sup> TEA-21 stands for the Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. TEA-21 is funded through the federal government and in Virginia is administered by VDOT. The federal transportation enhancement program was undergoing reauthorization in Congress in 2004 and in subsequent years to 2010.

Court Street. The two-level parking deck is located one block northeast of the existing courthouse and jointly owned by the county and the town.

## VI. COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

### A. Education

The public school system in Marion is part of the Smyth County school system, which happens to be based in Marion in the county office building at 121 Bagley Circle. The schools located in Marion are listed in Table 6-A.

**TABLE 6-A**  
**School Facilities**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By School**  
**2011**

School	Acreage	Average Daily Enrollment Oct. 13, 2011	Functional Capacity	Year Built
Marion Senior High (grades 9-12)	30	708	1,102	1960
Marion Middle School (grades 6-8)	3	527	724	1938
Marion Intermediate School (grades 3-5)	6	382	547	1953
Marion Primary School (grades K-2)	14	467	521	1962

Source: Smyth Co. School Board Daily Attendance Data - [www.scsb.org/vdhgetdata](http://www.scsb.org/vdhgetdata)

A new elementary school is being built to serve K-5 students living on the western area of Marion and the surrounding area of Smyth County. A site just west of Brown subdivision which comprises 14.91 acres has been purchased and construction is currently under way. A bid for construction was accepted in November 2011 for the new school and for the upgrading of the current Marion Primary School. The new elementary school is scheduled to open fall 2013.

Marion schools, along with the entire Smyth County system, are now fully accredited by the Virginia Department of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. All schools in Marion have fully met requirements set by the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), which have set statewide expectations for student learning in English, math, science, history and social sciences, technology, fine arts, foreign languages, health and physical education, and driver education. Testing for SOLs first began during the 1997-1998 school year. Passing at least six of the SOL tests became a requirement for graduation to earn a regular high school diploma starting in the 2003-2004 school year.

Marion schools, as part of the Smyth County school system, also are subject to the state Standards of Quality (SOQs). These set statewide standards for staffing, including teachers, specialists, administrators, and student-to-teacher ratios.

In the 2011 – 2012 school year, an Anti-Bullying campaign was launched which held bullying to a Zero Tolerance level at all school and school-sponsored functions whether on campus or off and whether during school hours or not.

Schools in Marion also serve other functions, such as offering adult education, some community college classes, and meeting places for civic and community groups. School facilities, including track, tennis courts, and gymnasiums, are also part of the town's recreation program.

For its part, the Smyth County school system participates in various initiatives designed to strengthen school program offerings and help prepare students for the workplace. These include nationwide initiatives, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, and regional initiatives, including the Crossroads Educational Consortium (a cooperative effort with Wytheville Community College) and the Highlands Tech Prep Consortium (a cooperative effort with Virginia Highlands Community College).<sup>7</sup>

The Smyth County school system also has an approved Six-Year Technology Plan (2010-2016) to improve computer facilities and skills development for students and teachers. Needs identified by the plan include: increasing the number of computers available to students at the elementary and middle school levels, an ongoing professional development program for teachers, more instructional technologists to assist students and teachers, more space for computer labs, and methods to encourage students to improve their solid technology skills (i.e., working with spreadsheets, databases, CAD/CAM, network administration, and programming applications) as opposed to simply surfing the Internet.

In August 2004, the county school board approved a request by the superintendent of schools to pursue plans for an efficiency review of school system buildings, staffing, student arrangement, and general operations. Included in these are plans to equip all the schools with security cameras, digital video recorders, and access control systems and to train administrators, staff, and teachers how to use each. This Facilities Master Plan was published April 21, 2008 and is available from the Smyth County School Board website.

Aside from the Smyth County school system, another major educational institution in Marion is the Blue Ridge Job Corps Center, located at 254 West Main Street. Job Corps is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor - Employment and Training Administration. The program is aimed at low-income youth between the ages of 16 and 24. The Blue Ridge center offers a wide-ranging program at no cost to the student that includes high school diplomas, general education diplomas, off-center training, advanced training, and vocational training for business technologies, computer service technicians, food service, health occupations, and licensed professional nursing. The self-paced programs last from 8 months to 2 years. The Blue Ridge center has 60 dorm rooms and can accommodate up to 160 female students. An additional 30 women

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<sup>7</sup> Both consortiums formed in 1991 and are designed to help prepare students for the workplace through programs such as accounting, computer-aided drafting, engineering and industrial technology, building trades, information technology, nursing, and other similar programs.

and 10 men may attend classes as non-residential students.<sup>8</sup>

In the southwest Virginia region, higher education is available through the state community college system (with the nearest branches in Abingdon and Wytheville), Emory & Henry College, Radford University, Virginia Intermont College, and Virginia Tech. The Smyth County Education Center, located at Mountain Empire Industrial Park in Atkins, about three miles east of Marion, offers a range of adult education classes in affiliation with Wytheville Community College. Smyth County is represented on the board of the Crossroads Rural Entrepreneurial Institute in Galax. The Crossroads Institute offers a variety of higher education opportunities, business training, and entrepreneurial development. The opportunity exists to expand the Crossroads Institute through a satellite campus in or around the Town of Marion.

The Smyth County Historical and Museum Society also operates a local history museum open on a part-time basis at the corner of Strother and Church Streets in downtown Marion. The town participates in the Virginia Civil War Trails program, with a pull-off area and information display located just off U.S. Route 11 on the east end of Marion.

## **B. Library**

The Smyth-Bland Regional Library<sup>9</sup>, located at 118 South Sheffey Street in the downtown area, is an outstanding resource for the region it serves. Among its stated roles, the library provides lifelong learning opportunities and assistance for home-schooled students, English-as-a-second-language patrons, and patrons with disabilities. The existing facility, built in 1979, was nearly doubled in size in 1989 to encompass 15,000 square feet. The library has since, in 2000-2001, undergone some interior remodeling that included new carpeting and new tiled flooring bordering the main circulation desk. The Copenhagen Meeting Room, which can accommodate up to 75 persons, is available free to local government, non-profit, and civic organizations during regular operating hours, along with use of library-owned audio-visual equipment.



Behind and immediately adjacent to the library is the historical D. C. Miller Law Office building, built in 1880. It is also available for community use during library hours. The main room can hold 8-10 people and a small anteroom would be suitable for tutoring or other small group meeting.

The library has one of the few pieces of public sculpture in the town in its front garden.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, see the Blue Ridge Job Corps Center web site at <http://blueridge.jobcorps.gov>.

<sup>9</sup> Library information is taken from at [www.sbri.org](http://www.sbri.org) and from information from library staff.

Titled “Summer Readers”, the almost life-size bronze is from the Randolph Rose Collection and was installed in 2007.

Library offerings include books, ebooks, audio-visual materials (videos, audio cassettes, books on tape), public access computers, a computerized card catalog system, periodicals, reference materials, an inter-library loan service, books in large print, and an outreach service for those who are homebound or live in nursing homes. There are also programs and resources aimed at youth aged 6 months to 18 years. The computerized offerings include *Chamo*, a web-based card catalog; *Find It Virginia*, a statewide service provided in cooperation with the Library of Virginia; *Net Library*, providing access to thousands of full textbooks; *Heritage Quest Online*, a subscription service that includes Census records, out-of-print local history books, and genealogy books. The facility also includes the *Sherwood Anderson Archive* and the Southwest Virginia Heritage Library, which include local history and genealogy resources.

As a regional facility, the library operates branch facilities in Bland, Chilhowie, and Saltville. The Chilhowie branch is the newest facility, which opened in the fall of 2003 in the old Chilhowie High School.

### C. Healthcare

The healthcare industry is at the core of Marion’s economy, and the Smyth County Community Hospital is a cornerstone of the local medical community. In addition to the hospital, the Lifetime Wellness Center, the Smyth County Health Department, the Smyth County Free Clinic, and several private practices create a regional medical hub in the town. Institutional care for the mentally ill is available at the Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute, which serves all of Southwest Virginia, and community-based mental health care is available through the Mount Rogers Community Services Board, a regional organization that operates several facilities in Marion.

For over 40 years, *Smyth County Community Hospital*<sup>10</sup> functioned as a 170-bed, not-for-profit community hospital just off Parkway Boulevard. In April 2012, Smyth County Community Hospital relocated to a newly constructed facility near Exit 47 on the east end of Marion. The new facility has a total of 150,373 square feet, four intensive-care unit beds, 14 inpatient rehabilitation beds, and 13 emergency department exam rooms. The new hospital, which meets LEED (Leadership Energy and Environmental Design) building guidelines, houses a full array of services, including urology, othopedics, gynecology, plastic surgery, general surgical services, neurology, and oncology.

A portion of the old hospital facility will become a health education campus through a



<sup>10</sup> For more information, see the hospital’s web site at [www.scchosp.org](http://www.scchosp.org).

partnership with Emory & Henry College. Emory & Henry will initiate a Physical Therapy program in fall 2012 with 30 students projected for the first class. Adjacent to the health education campus are the 109-bed intermediate care nursing home (Francis Marion Manor) and the Lifetime Wellness Center, which opened in January 2001. The Lifetime Wellness Center plays a major role in the health maintenance and recovery of good health after accident or illness of persons who are members by fee or who are prescribed by their physicians. The hospital is currently an affiliate partner of the Mountain States Health Alliance, which includes the Smyth County Community Foundation, owner of the Wellness Center.

As mentioned previously, hospital services are wide-ranging and include acute care, heart and lung rehabilitation, home health care, emergency services (offered 24 hours a day, seven days a week), a range of imaging services<sup>11</sup>, laboratory services, long-term care through Francis Marion Manor, outreach clinics<sup>12</sup>, pharmacy services, rehabilitative services,<sup>13</sup> and surgery. The hospital is also part of a telemedicine network that includes the East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine and can provide patient consultation with specialists in obstetrics, gerontology, pediatrics, and infectious diseases.

Smyth County Community Hospital is accredited through the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. That recognition includes the Emergency Room, a certified Level II department, and Francis Marion Manor.

Health-related services are also available through the *Smyth County Health Department*<sup>14</sup> located at 201 Francis Marion Lane next to the nursing home. The county health department is part of the Mount Rogers Health District and the Virginia Department of Health. Health services include maternal and child health care, female reproductive care, various disease prevention programs, wellness programs (for heart health, worksite health screenings, and health education), and home-based health care.

The Smyth County Health Department also enforces state-mandated environmental health programs through inspection, permitting, and testing services. This work relates to private well water supplies, on-site septic disposal, restaurants, milk sanitation, rabies prevention and control, insect and rodent control, institutional sanitation (for child and adult care facilities, hotels, and motels), migrant labor camps, campgrounds, and swimming pools.

For county residents – the working poor, the non-working (i.e., those laid off within the past nine months), those without health insurance, seasonal and part-time workers, and working people who are waiting for health insurance to take effect – health care is also available through the *Smyth County Free Clinic* in Marion. The free clinic is a service that began offering health care three nights a week in the offices of the county health

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11 These include x-rays, mammography, nuclear medicine (including cardiac stress tests), CT and MRI scanning, ultrasound and bone density testing.

12 Outreach clinics include the Rural Retreat Community Pharmacy, Crossroads Clinic, and Glade Spring Community Clinic.

13 These include rehabilitation for speech, hearing, physical injuries, and occupational therapy.

14 For more information see [www.vdh.state.va.us/mtrogers](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/mtrogers).

department. The private, nonprofit corporation that runs the free clinic earned federal tax-exempt status in February 2000. In January of 2002, the Smyth County Free Clinic moved to offices in the Marion Plaza, also known locally as the old K-Mart shopping center. The clinic now operates almost on a full-time basis, Mondays through Fridays<sup>15</sup>. It employs a full-time director and nurse practitioner, part-time nurses, and part-time clerical help. The clinic also accepts volunteer service from other members of the medical community.

The Smyth County Free Clinic is a member of the Virginia Association of Free Clinics, an organization formed in 1993 with a mission of providing health care to the uninsured and the under-insured. The Smyth County clinic provides medical care for free, though it charges a small co-pay fee for prescription drugs. Financial contributors to the Free Clinic include the Smyth County Community Foundation, the Virginia Health Care Foundation, and local governments. The Free Clinic also works in cooperation with Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems<sup>16</sup>, an independent clinic that treats some patients who happen to live in Marion. The Free Clinic is able to exist because Smyth County holds a federal designation as a medically underserved county. This designation excludes the Town of Marion, which in the past has been deemed as a community offering enough health care to meet the needs of town residents.

The *Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute* (SWVMHI) stands at 340 Bagley Circle on a large campus-like setting atop what is locally known as Hospital Hill. The entire facility consists of 24 buildings on more than 40 maintained acres<sup>17</sup> of land. SWVMHI is a state psychiatric institute with 176 beds that is run by the state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. Like the county hospital, the mental health institute is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations.

Originally established as the Southwestern Lunatic Asylum in 1887, the institution<sup>18</sup> has undergone many changes throughout the years. It grew to serve people with tuberculosis, the criminally insane, and the ever-increasing population of the mentally ill. The institutional name had changed by 1935 to Southwestern State Hospital and it included 1,200 acres of agricultural land to raise food for the institution's patients. By 1964, State Hospital reached a peak population of nearly 1,500 patients and a staff of more than 500; however, trend to downsize mental institutions decreased the patient population to 500 by 1981. In 1986, demolition began on some of the original buildings from the Henderson Complex. New construction led to what is now known as SWVMHI, which went into operation starting in March 1990, when all the adult and elderly patients were moved into the new building. The original 1887 structure that served as the lunatic asylum, known as the Henderson Building, achieved recognition on the Virginia Landmarks Register in 1989 and on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

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15 In 2011, the hours were Mondays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; Wednesdays, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.; and Fridays, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

16 Formerly known as the Saltville Medical Center.

17 Total acreage, including the areas left wild, comes to roughly 100 acres.

18 See the history section of SWVMHI's web site at [www.swvmhi.state.va.us](http://www.swvmhi.state.va.us) for more information.

The Finley Gayle Building was built in the late 1960s to house those with mental health issues. In time, the Virginia Department of Corrections took over maintenance of the Gayle Building, which is now known as Marion Correctional Treatment Center. The prison stands apart from the rest of the mental health institute campus.

SWVMHI presently serves adolescent, adult, and elderly populations from a wide region of southwest Virginia. The adolescent unit which served young people aged 13 through 17 was closed in 2010. The adult treatment facility is designed for those aged 18 through 64; it includes 64 beds for acute psychiatric admissions, four beds for medical detoxification, and 50 beds for long-term care for the most serious cases of mental illness. In the geriatric unit, there are 20 beds for Medicare intensive care and 20 beds for Medicaid intermediate care, as well as six beds in the infirmary.

Community-based care for mental, physical and substance use intervention needs is offered through the *Mount Rogers Community Services Board*, with administrative offices based at 770 West Ridge Road in Wytheville<sup>19</sup>. Facilities located in Marion include a full-time counseling center at 416 East Main Street, a psychosocial rehabilitation program located at The Friendship House on 506 East Main Street, and Transitions, a halfway house for patients with substance abuse problems at 115 North Church Street. The Community Services Board also operates a supervised apartment program (small-scale group homes) consisting of The Smyth Apartments (three two-bedroom apartments located within town limits).

#### **D. Social Services**

In Marion, social services are provided through government and community-oriented agencies, such as the Smyth County Department of Social Services, Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services, Virginia Employment Commission, Mount Rogers Community Services Board (discussed in the previous section on health care), Mount Rogers Alcohol Safety Action Program, Marion Redevelopment & Housing Authority, and the W.W. Scott Senior Citizens Center in Marion.

The W.W. Scott Senior Citizen Center, located at 307 S. Park Street near downtown, offers a variety of services in education, health, and recreation for citizens 60 years old and older. Daily activities may include exercise, dance, and craft classes, a hot meal frequently with entertainment, card games or billiards, and other individual pursuits. Monthly activities offer health screenings, outings to various regional destinations, and longer travel trips. The center even has an on-site beauty parlor open Wednesdays and Fridays. Regular center hours are Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.; closed holidays and snow days.

Services offered on a regional basis include organizations such as the District Three Governmental Cooperative<sup>20</sup>, based in Atkins, and the Appalachian Independence Center, based in Abingdon. The Independence Center provides services to help the

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<sup>19</sup> For more information, visit [www.mtrogerscsb.com](http://www.mtrogerscsb.com).

<sup>20</sup> Also, see the transportation chapter for more information on District Three.

physically handicapped become integrated into the community.

Other social services are provided by non-profit organizations such as the Guardian Angel Program, Mountain Community Action Program, Project Crossroads, Retired Senior Citizen Volunteer Program, Salvation Army of Smyth County, Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society, Smyth County Chapter of the American Red Cross, S.C. Fuller Center for Housing, the Family Resource Center (based in Wytheville), and United Way of Smyth County.

### **E. Recreation**

Recreational offerings available within Marion are varied, including programs offered through the town recreation department, the Lifetime Wellness Center, the Riverwalk hiking trail, trout fishing along the Middle Fork Holston River, and the newly reopened Lincoln Theatre.

The town recreation department<sup>21</sup> is stationed in the William G. Carrico Recreation Building at 100 East Chilhowie Street.

Department staff includes the recreation director, programs coordinator, programs support technician, maintenance supervisor, and pool manager. Next to the recreation department stands the Carl Taylor Municipal Swimming Pool, a facility used by residents from the town, as well as from the surrounding area in Smyth County. Town recreational program offerings are shown in Table 6-B on the following page.

Marion's recreational offerings also include the town's system of parks and picnic areas. These include Ogburn Park, Royal Oak Park, Steele Park, Riverbend Park, Calhoun-Gwyn-Civitan Park, Wilderness Road Garden Club Park, Riverwalk Trail, and the Park Boulevard walking/biking trail. Riverbend Park represents one of the town's newest parks, complete with a picnic shelter, public restrooms, and a paved pathway that creates a link to the main stem of the Riverwalk Trail off Baughman Avenue on the west end of town.

In cooperation with the Grassroots Conservancy, a local citizen's action group, the Civitan Club has developed a "pocket park" at North Church Street. The pocket park, named the Calhoun-Gwyn Park, includes a parking area and a picnic shelter and offers river access to add to the outdoor recreational opportunities in Marion. More details on the recreational offerings in Marion appear under the community services and facilities chapter of this comprehensive plan.

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<sup>21</sup> For more information, see the town's web site at [www.marionva.org/services/recreation](http://www.marionva.org/services/recreation).

**TABLE 6-B**  
**Recreation Programs**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Program**

Youth Sports	Season	Grade/Age	By League
Boys' Basketball	Dec.-Feb.	Grades 1-6	Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6
Girls' Basketball	Oct.-Nov.	Grades 1-6	Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6
Co-ed Soccer	April-May	Grades K-8	K-2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8
Wrestling	-	Grades 1-6	Grouped by age, experience, weight class
Co-ed Tennis	June	Grade 1-8	Grouped by age and experience
Boys' T-Ball	June-August	5-7 yrs old	5-7 yrs old
Girls' T-Ball	June-August	5-7 yrs old	5-7 yrs old
Boys' Pitching Machine	June-August	8-10 yrs old	8-10 yrs old
Girls' Pitching Machine	June-August	8-11 yrs old	8-11 yrs old
Boys' Baseball	June-August	11-13 yrs old	11-13 yrs old
Girls' Softball (fast pitch)	June-August	12-15 yrs old	12-15 yrs old
Football	Sept.-Oct.	Grades 1-6	Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6
Cheerleading	Sept.-Oct.	Grades 1-6	Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6
Adult Sports		Season	Age
Women's Softball		May-July	16 years and older
Men's Softball		May-July	16 years and older
Women's Volleyball		March-April	HS graduate and older

Source: Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, 2011

Note: Programs are offered using both town facilities and in cooperation with the school system.

The Lifetime Wellness Center, owned by the Smyth County Community Foundation, has greatly added to the recreational and exercise programs available to the town and the county. The facilities include an indoor six-lane pool, indoor track, full-size gymnasium, group exercise studio, volleyball, weight/strength training area, and racquetball courts, as well as programs and services more directly related to health care and outpatient rehabilitation. The Marion Senior High School swim team uses the facility for practices and swim meets. The Lifetime Aquatic Swim Organization (LASO) formed in March 2001 also utilizes the pool for age-group swim teams in area wide competition.

Holston Hills Community Golf Course, a publicly owned golf course, provides recreation for town and county residents through a user fee and is available for use by the school golf and swim teams. The facility can be used for conferences, concerts, plays, and other special events. The Town of Marion acquired the golf course through a loan provided by the Smyth County Community Foundation at a cost of \$1.5 million, with the town paying interest-only for 5 years at 2.5 percent. Payment of the full amount of principal will then be due.

Other recreation facilities within easy reach of Marion include Hungry Mother State

Park, the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Rural Retreat Lake, and the Settlers Museum of Southwest Virginia.

#### F. Marion Downtown

The Town of Marion has a vibrant, walkable downtown that has undergone considerable revitalization over the past 10 years. Due to the efforts of the town to revitalize the historic downtown area, Marion's downtown has been recognized as a National Main Street Community by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and as a semifinalist for the Great American Main Street Award. The downtown district also lies within Marion's state-designated Historic District, the Marion Technology Zone, and the Marion Enterprise Zone.



The Lincoln Theatre, standing in the heart of Marion's downtown area, reopened its doors in the spring of 2004 as a revitalized facility that aims to serve as a community cultural arts center. The old-time movie house originally opened in 1929 and served the community until the theater closed in 1977. Lincoln Theatre has since been named to the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. It is one of three remaining theaters in the country decorated in Mayan Revival (art deco) style. It is the home of the Public Broadcasting System television series *Song of the Mountains* with monthly performance tapings of bluegrass and old time music now in its sixth season.

The Marion Regional Farmers Market was established in 2009 at the corner of Cherry Street and Chestnut Street. Area growers and backyard gardeners alike can display their produce under permanent pavilion-style shelters in the Town Square Public Parking lot. Hours of operation are Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to noon commencing on Mother's Day weekend until the end of October. During peak season the Farmers Market is open on Tuesday evenings as well. It is also open on certain holidays and special events. Twenty-two covered spaces with electrical hookups and access to potable water are available, as well as free parking, a small performance stage, and public restrooms.



Marion Downtown hosts an Art Walk on the second Fridays from May until December

with evening hours at such local galleries and businesses as the Appalachian Spirit Gallery, the Black Rooster Gallery, and Handsome Molly's Bistro. Live music, refreshment, and artist receptions are included. These events also take advantage of the Downtown Marion streetscape of mature trees, hanging plants, and old-fashioned street lighting.

### **G. Smyth County Courthouse**

Smyth County has undertaken the design of an expanded and renovated courthouse, with construction expected to begin in the fall of 2012 with completion in fall of 2015. The project consists of approximately 44,600 square feet of 3 stories of new construction and a renovation of the existing 3-story courthouse building. Upon completion, the courthouse will contain four courtrooms and a hearing room, housing the three courts (Circuit, General District, and Juvenile/Domestic Relations) and their respective Clerks, Juvenile Court Services Unit, Commonwealth's Attorney, Treasurer, and Commissioner of Revenue. The site will accommodate 41 parking spots. The estimated construction cost of the project is \$17,340,000.

A parking deck to serve the court system is being constructed immediately east of the courthouse and spans between East Strother and East Court Streets. The structure provides 99 parking spaces split between 2 levels. The lower level is accessed from East Court Street and the upper level is accessed from East Strother Street. The pre-cast structure is accented by brick inlay and colored concrete to blend into the downtown setting. The parking deck will only be available for public use on weekends and during evening hours. The approximate construction cost of the facility is \$1,500,000, which was equally divided between the Town of Marion and Smyth County. Construction began in November 2011 with completion anticipated in May 2012.

### **H. Public Safety**

The Marion Volunteer Fire Department, Marion Lifesaving Crew, Marion Police Department, and the Smyth County Sheriff's Department all help protect public safety in town. The fire department is located in a new building finished in 1999 and located on West Main Street next to the Blue Ridge Job Corps Center. The Marion Lifesaving Crew, with 38 members, operates out of a separate building on South Sheffey Street; though still organized as a volunteer service, the Lifesaving Crew has hired fulltime responders to provide service during daytime hours on Monday through Friday.

The Marion Police Department, formerly located next to Marion Town Hall on West Main Street, is now quartered at 555 South Main Street. The police department is staffed by a chief, two lieutenants, three sergeants, 12 officers, an animal control officer, a chaplain, and an executive assistant.

Because Marion also serves as the administrative seat for Smyth County, public safety services also are provided through the Smyth County Sheriff's Department, with 47 full time and 10 part time employees, located in the jail behind the Smyth County Courthouse in the downtown section of Marion. In 2012, the Smyth County Sheriff's

Department will relocate to a facility on the former Harwood Industrial Property on Matson Drive near Interstate 81 Exit 45. The Smyth County Sheriff's Department transports prisoners to the Abingdon Regional Jail located near Interstate 81 Exit 22 in Washington County.

On the countywide level, the sheriff's department also handles all emergency radio communications through the central dispatch and E-911 center located in the basement of the county courthouse with eleven dispatchers. In 2012, the Smyth County E-911 Center will relocate to a facility on the former Harwood Industrial Property on Matson near Interstate 81 Exit 45. Smyth County upgraded its E-911 capabilities, so that callers using cellular telephones can be located to the nearest tower by either a GIS-based system, which is more accurate, or through triangulation.<sup>22</sup>

By 2010 Smyth County installed four strategically located towers to serve its communications system for police, fire and emergency rescue with the ability to communicate across all their radio systems.

## **I. Water Supply and Treatment**

The Town of Marion draws its water supply from a spring system located near the junction of State Routes 16 and 601 (4.5 miles southeast of Marion), as well as from the Middle Fork Holston River. The town's system serves approximately 10,000 users in Marion, the communities of Atkins and Attoway, and Hungry Mother State Park.

The spring system includes a large limestone spring encased by a concrete structure that impounds 65,000 gallons of water, with chlorine and fluoride added to the basin water. Three smaller springs are connected to the main spring basin. The water flows by gravity into the town distribution system. The excess water is stored either in a 1-million-gallon covered reservoir on a hill west of the VDOT district maintenance shop or in a 500,000-gallon steel-covered reservoir on a hill south of the Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute. A booster station on Prater Lane pumps water to two covered reservoirs (365,000 gallons and 100,000 gallons) located north of town.

A water filtration plant with treatment capacity for 3-million-gallons per day draws its supply from the Middle Fork Holston River, via an intake located at the east end of Marion. Water storage for the treatment plant is provided by two steel-covered reservoirs (total capacity of 1 million gallons each)<sup>23</sup> located next to the plant and a 350,000-gallon high service tank located northeast of the treatment plant.

Additional water storage capacity has been developed via a 500,000-gallon storage tank in Mountain Empire Industrial Park, a 30,000-gallon storage tank in the Riverview Subdivision, and a 6,000-gallon tank at the end of Williams Road.

The total water system storage capacity is 4.85 million gallons. The town's mission statement for the water treatment plant is to meet all quality and pressure standards set by the state and to maintain a fire reserve of three million gallons. The water treatment

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22 Smyth County Comprehensive Plan 2010.

23 These are the locally famous "Hot" and "Cold" water reservoirs visible from Interstate 81.

plant is located east of town near the Middle Fork of the Holston River.

### **J. Sewage Transport and Treatment**

The sewage treatment system in Marion centers on a wastewater treatment plant completed in December 1993 and located just off Lee Highway, west of town. The treatment system at the plant includes pre-treatment, primary treatment, and secondary treatment with ultraviolet disinfection. Chlorine is not part of the process. The treatment plant can process 3.4 million gallons per day and has an average flow 1.5 million gallons per day.

The town completed a \$1.9 million renovation to the sewage treatment plant in 2012, which included the replacement of the ultraviolet system, bio tower repairs, and improved influent collection. These repairs also included a green reserve bio gas project that replaced the use of oil and gas with recycled methane gas from the digester to power a generator.

The plant's effluent is discharged into the Middle Fork Holston River. The effluent is regulated by quality standards for total suspended solids, ammonia, and fecal coliform content.

### **K. Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling**

The town, through its public works department, provides door-to-door collection of solid wastes from roughly 3,500 homes and 20 businesses, once a week<sup>24</sup>. Other waste-hauling from commercial and industrial sources is handled through private contracts.

The Smyth County landfill, closed since 1994, has been replaced by a transfer station located on the old landfill site off State Route 107 in Chilhowie. Most solid wastes collected in the Town of Marion are delivered to the transfer station, which compacts the material and has it hauled away by a private contractor for disposal in a licensed landfill<sup>25</sup> (Iris Glen Landfill, Johnson City, Tennessee).

The town does not run its own solid waste recycling program; town residents are free to make use of the Smyth County system, which consists of 11 convenience stations for drop-off recycling of plastics, newspapers, telephone books, aluminum cans, steel cans, and used oil. The county discontinued glass recycling due to the lack of a market. Scrap metal and tires go to the county transfer station in Chilhowie. Private recycling of aluminum cans is available from a tractor-trailer stationed in the parking lot at the Food City shopping center and open 5 days a week.

In 2010, Smyth County's recycling rate was 24.6 percent<sup>26</sup>, which is higher than the 15 percent recycling rate mandated by the Virginia General Assembly for rural counties.

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24 Taken from the *Mount Rogers Regional Solid Waste Management Plan for: Bland County, Smyth County, Washington County, Wythe County and Their Incorporated Towns*. July 2004.

25 Taken from the *Mount Rogers Regional Solid Waste Management Plan for: Bland County, Smyth County, Washington County, Wythe County and Their Incorporated Towns*. July 2004.

26 April 30, 2011 Recycling Rate Report to the Department of Environmental Quality Solid Waste Division for the Mount Rogers Region.

This recycling rate was met in part because of commercial recyclers.

#### **L. Utilities**

Utilities include services such as electricity, natural gas, telephone, and Internet service. For Marion and Smyth County, American Electric Power supplies electricity, as has been the case for many years.

The East Tennessee Natural Gas Company pipes natural gas into the region, with local distribution in Marion handled through Atmos Energy Corporation, which acquired the former United Cities Natural Gas Company in 1997. Most parts of Marion have access to natural gas, and individuals who are not presently served can make arrangements with Atmos Energy to install a new connection.

Telephone service has taken on new forms with the rise of cellular telephone service and the installation of cellular communications towers along the Interstate 81 corridor through Smyth County. Landline telephone service is primarily provided through Centurylink.

For large and well-established communities such as Marion, Internet service is available through several providers, including independent Internet Service Providers (ISPs) as well as local providers. The Bristol Virginia Utilities Board (BVUB) leased and installed fiber optic lines along Interstate 81 from the City of Bristol to Interstate 77 in Wythe County. While the Town of Marion has no immediate plans to provide further local access to that broadband capability, BVUB does provide broadband Internet service to the Mountain Empire Industrial Park in the community of Atkins and several other industrial and governmental facilities in Smyth County.

## VII. EXISTING LAND USE

### A. Current Land Use By Categories

During the 2006 Marion Comprehensive Plan update, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) staff collected information about existing land use and housing conditions through a windshield survey of all properties located in the town. In 2011, MRPDC staff updated the results of the earlier land use survey using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. The updated results of the survey are tabulated in this chapter and presented on the Existing Land Use Map.

As Table 7-A indicates, Marion's total land area is approximately 2,682 acres. About 74 percent of this land is developed, with residential uses making up 46.3 percent of total land use; public/semi-public uses, including street and roads, comprising 13.5 percent; industrial uses accounting for 2.4 percent; and commercial uses making up 9.4 percent. Approximately 26 percent of the land in the Town of Marion is vacant.

**TABLE 7-A**  
**Existing Land Use**  
**Town of Marion**  
**By Land Use Classification**  
**2011**

Classification	Acres*	Percent of Total
Vacant	705	26.3
Medical Arts	58	2.2
Commercial	252	9.4
Industrial	65	2.4
Residential	1241	46.3
Public/Semi-Public	361	13.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,682</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\*Figures rounded.

Source: Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, 2011

Table 7-B shows percentage of developed land by type of land use and percent change over time. In Marion, residential land, as a percentage of the total developable land in the town, makes up approximately 63 percent, while public/semi-public uses constitute 18 percent, industrial uses are 3 percent, medical arts uses are 3 percent, and commercial uses are 13 percent.

**TABLE 7-B  
Developed Land  
Town of Marion  
By Year  
1974, 1994, 2011**

Year	Total Developed Acres	Commercial	Industrial	Residential	Public / Semi-Public	Medical Arts
1974	1,579	7%	12%	45%	36%	NA
Change from 1974 to 1994	99	1%	0%	1%	-2%	NA
1994	1,678	8%	12%	46%	34%	NA
Change from 1994 to 2011	298	5%	-9%	17%	-16%	NA
2011	1,976	13%	3%	63%	18%	3%

Source: Town of Marion Comprehensive Plan, 2006 and Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, 2011

A considerable amount of the land in Marion is vacant and suitable for development. The vacant classification includes land that is being used for agricultural purposes; however, active agricultural operations appear to have ceased throughout much of the town, including on the land adjacent to the drive-in movie theater on Park Boulevard and on the land east of Prater Lane adjacent to the quarry. GIS analysis of the town indicates that approximately 368 acres of the vacant land is marginal for additional development in that it occurs on the areas with slopes greater than 20 percent. In addition, 76 acres of the vacant land are unsuitable because they are located in the 100-year floodplain.

### **B. Current Land Use Controls**

Marion adopted a zoning ordinance and an official zoning districts map in 1960. Five zones were delineated at that time: residential (R-1), residential (R-2), local business (B-1), general business (B-2), and industrial (M-1). Later amendments added a Special Uses Area (SA-1) and definitions for manufactured homes, automobile trailers, and tents.

The Marion Planning Commission prepared and presented a revised ordinance to the Town Council in 1982. That ordinance was subsequently adopted in July 1982 and has been amended several times since. A complete comprehensive rewrite of the town's zoning ordinance occurred between 2000 and 2004 with adoption in the fall of 2004.

The intent of the town's zoning ordinance is to carefully balance the fundamental property rights and interests of the private citizens with the needs of the community as a whole, as set forth in the Town of Marion Comprehensive Plan. Through the zoning ordinance, the Town of Marion is authorized to provide for the establishment of

districts within the corporate limits, in which the town may regulate, restrict, permit, prohibit, and determine:

1. the use of land, buildings, structures and other premises for agricultural, business, industrial, residential, flood protection 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 the establishment of minimum lot sizes based on whether a public or community water supply or sewer system is available and used; and
4. the excavation or mining of soil or other natural resources.

The 2004 Marion Zoning Ordinance identifies 12 unique zones including, residential districts (R-1), (R-2), (R-3), (R-4) and (R-2 MH), industrial district (IG), medical arts (MA), commercial limited (CL), commercial general (CG), commercial downtown (CD), floodplain district (FP), and historical (H). The purpose, uses and requirements of these zones are described in the zoning ordinance, which serves as a flexible tool to guide the growth and development of the Town of Marion.

### **C. Constraints to Development**

Several factors are at work in the town that serve as constraints on future development and that, in some instances, produce problems on land that is already developed. Due to these constraints, there are areas in the town in which intensive development should be prohibited because of one or more of the following factors: 1) they are within the 100-year floodplain; 2) they are on lands with slopes in excess of 20 percent; and/or 3) they are in areas susceptible to sinkholes. In addition to these natural constraints, there are also several manmade barriers to development, such as bridges and railroad tracks, that can influence development in the Town of Marion.

#### ***Floodway Constraints***

Three streams in Marion, Staley Creek, Hooks Branch, and the Middle Fork of the Holston River, have a tendency to flood, causing property damage and disrupting traffic flow and business activities. The Tennessee Valley Authority studied these streams in 1961, following the then flood of record, which occurred on January 29, 1957. The record flood was mapped along with the projected regional flood and maximum probable flood, both of which occurred in 1977. Subsequently, the minimum area necessary to carry the waters of the 100-year floodplain was identified and mapped. This area does not coincide with the boundaries of the 100-year floodplain. Instead, it is an area that varies from 50 to 200 feet on either side of the three streams through which a calculated volume of water would move at high velocity during the projected 100-year flood. Structures in the floodway have the effect of serving as a dam during periods of high water and could cause areas upstream to flood, which might not otherwise be susceptible to flooding. Another equally undesirable possibility is that

structures will succumb to the flood waters, (because of the energy created by the velocity and volumes of water trying to get through a constricted space), creating artificial debris dams downstream resulting in additional problems.

The Virginia State Wide Building Code requires special construction techniques in the 100-year floodplain. This code should have the effect of preventing further residential construction in the floodway and restricting development in the 100-year floodplain. As table 7-C shows, approximately 37 percent of the land in the 100-year floodplain is developed in Marion.

**TABLE 7-C**  
**Developed Land In Floodplain Zone**  
**Town of Marion**  
**2011**

Classification	Total Acres	Developed Acres	Percent Developed
Land in 100-year Floodplain	121	45	37%

Source: Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, 2011

Staley Creek drains a large area south of Marion roughly parallel to State Route 16 from the State Fish Hatchery through the town. The confluence with the Middle Fork Holston River occurs just west of W.E. Francis Bridge. Approximately 93 percent of the acreage in the Staley Creek floodplain is developed inside town limits. In some cases, buildings and roads are constructed directly over the creek at a lower elevation than the projected 100-year flood.

Hooks Branch roughly parallels Matson Drive southwest of Staley Creek and joins Staley Creek just west of the Virginia Department of Transportation's maintenance shop. The floodplain along Matson Drive is approximately 78 percent developed predominantly with residential structures.

As for the Middle Fork Holston River, it is sparsely developed with few of the structures in the floodplain intended for human habitation.

As Table 7-C points out, approximately 76 acres in the 100-year floodplain are still undeveloped. A limited amount of this land could be viewed as having potential for development in conformance with sound planning and development techniques for floodplains.

### ***Slope Constraints***

As listed in Table 7-D, approximately 37.9 percent of the land in steep slopes in the town is developed. As would be expected where commercial, industrial, and public demands for land have suitable alternatives, practically all of this land is used for residential purposes. Some parts of the town provide excellent examples of how steeply sloped land can be developed. For instance, the residential neighborhood in the

Panorama Drive area preserves the aesthetic qualities of the land and, at the same time, avoids undue engineering problems associated with the effects of storm water run-off from developed slopes.

**TABLE 7-D**  
**Developed Land On Slopes Greater Than 20 Percent**  
**Town of Marion**  
**2011**

Classification	Total Acres	Developed Acres	Percent Developed
Land on Slopes Greater Than 20 percent	593	225	37.9%

Source: Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, 2011

Additional residential developments on steep slopes occur on Spruce Street, Matson Drive, North Main Street, Staley Street, Prater Lane, Chatham Hill Road, Gilman Street, Prescott Avenue, Wolfe Avenue, Henderson Street, and Pearl Avenue. Again, some of these are well developed; however, in other instances residential development on steep lands is characterized by narrow streets without off-street parking or sidewalks.

### ***Drainage Constraints***

The geological formations underlying the town are susceptible to the creation of solution channels, which may collapse, forming depressions called sinkholes. These depressions tend to be unstable, causing buildings to sag and masonry to crack. Other problems associated with developing in sinkhole areas are: the difficulty of building streets, the increased cost of maintaining streets, the difficulty of providing gravity flow sewer service, and problems associated with isolated flooding.

One of the major difficulties associated with development in areas with drainage problems is the provision of sewage systems. Since the areas are generally lower than the surrounding terrain, traditional gravity flow sewage facilities are often impossible to install and thus, more expensive pumping systems are required. Although interceptor and collector lines currently serve most of the areas in the town that are located near sinks, some structures are prevented from using the lines via gravity flow.

Another problem associated with sinkholes relates to the run-off of surface waters. Through development, the surface character of the land is changed and vegetation that would normally absorb large amounts of rainwater is removed. This increases storm water volume and greatly accelerates run-off. Generally speaking, run-off volume can be increased 50 percent by converting rural land to urban with six or more residential units per acre. Run-off in areas with sinkholes can become an especially acute problem when the sinkhole becomes plugged or when the volume of water exceeds the absorptive capacity of the formation. This phenomenon has occurred at the playground on Groseclose Street, the old drive-in theater site on Park Boulevard, and the sink east of the state hospital.

### ***Man-made Constraints to Development***

In addition to the physical factors mentioned above, there are three man-made features in Marion that serve as barriers to future development, despite the fact that all three have stimulated economic development in the town. The first is Interstate 81, which bypasses the town to the south. In concert with natural features such as the ridges south of town and the Middle Fork Holston River, the interstate limits the expansion of the town limits to the south, east, and west.

The second man-made barrier to development is the Norfolk and Western Railroad, which runs along the Middle Fork of the Holston River and roughly bisects the town into a northern, predominantly residential section and a southern, predominantly commercial section. The northern section is deprived of desirable access to downtown Marion because at-grade crossings must be negotiated on every approach to the central business district. Moreover the noise and vibration associated with railway operations can discourage new residential development or the rehabilitation of existing residential structures.

A third man-made constraint to development is the quarry in the northeast section of town. Although the quarry is located on vacant land that has provided an adequate buffer to existing development, its location has discouraged additional growth due to safety issues and the potential for structural damage to homes. The location of the facility is particularly unfortunate, since it is situated on a large tract, which would otherwise be ideally suited for additional residential or commercial development.

### **D. Land Use Change**

Since the founding of the Town of Marion in 1832, land use changes have occurred spontaneously without regard to a preconceived plan. This spontaneity has been evidence of vitality; however, at the same time, unplanned growth can create problems.

One of the major problems created by unplanned development is a lack of connectivity in the town transportation system. For example, in the section east of Prater Lane and north of the railroad, streets have no relationship to community facilities, shopping centers, or the inter-neighborhood movement of people and goods. North and west of Chilhowie Street, local streets intersect at odd angles and, on occasion, streets that should meet, do not. The same can be said for portions of Marion between the Norfolk and Western Railroad and Interstate 81. Although the original grid pattern of development has been adhered to for the most part, some streets—Poston, Miller, Greenway, Hull, Palmer, among others—appear to have been constructed without consideration for the future.

Another problem related to the spontaneous development of the town is associated with the size, shape, and serviceability of town lots. Lots and parcels vary from as small as 2,500 square feet to over 100 acres. Many lots are oddly shaped or poorly drained, while others are not provided with 25 feet of frontage. Although this practice has been discontinued, the results will make it difficult to rationally plan areas that have been so divided in the past. The town government has the authority to prevent the creation of

such lots and has exercised the responsibility to see that future subdivisions of land take into account the need for services and for access.

A third problem associated with unplanned growth is a lack of appropriate buffers between residential, commercial, and industrial developments and the railroad rights-of-way and major roads. An example of this development concern be readily observed along Chilhowie Street, North Main Street, and South Main Street. In addition, strips or corridors of residential and commercial land use are evident on Prater Lane, Matson Drive, South Church Street, and Chatham Hill Road. North Main Street, from the river to the town boundary, is typical of linear commercial or strip development. In some instances, development along highway strips is necessary or even desirable. Generally speaking, however, strip development increases the cost of providing municipal services, lowers resale value of residential and commercial property, and forces people to drive to obtain services, thereby creating highway safety hazards, congestion, and generally unattractive conditions.

Finally, as mentioned above, past development has severely encroached the floodplain along Hooks Branch and Staley Creek. This practice should be curtailed in the future, and the town should gradually convert existing intensive uses to uses more compatible with the limitations of a floodplain.

#### **E. Future Land Use**

Population is projected to hold steady or continue to decline in Marion, and there appears to be an adequate amount of residential land in town to support the projections. However, there are several major changes occurring in Marion that have a potential for future land use changes. The Future Land Use Map included as part of this Comprehensive Plan shows the planned future land use needs to meet the anticipated demands of these changes.

Major developments in the Town of Marion are occurring near the three Interstate 81 interchanges – Exit 44, Exit 45 and Exit 47. The Smyth County School Board purchased a site for a new elementary school in the Adwolfe community near the west end of Marion. The construction of this school will likely promote development around Exit 44 and along the U.S. Route 11 corridor between Marion and the Town of Chilhowie.

Immediately adjacent to Exit 45, the site of the former Harwood Industrial Property is undergoing several changes. Smyth County purchased two of the former industrial buildings to be renovated and used by the Smyth County Sheriff's Office and Smyth County E-911 Office. The main industrial building was demolished by a private owner who plans to market the site for hotel and restaurant development.

Mountain States Health Alliance opened a new community hospital facility adjacent to Exit 47 just inside Marion town limits. With this new facility, traffic patterns are changing with the addition of at least one new stoplight and related commercial and medical arts development is likely to occur in the vacant land around the interstate exit.

A fourth potential land use change to take place in Marion over the next five to ten

years is the relocation of medical arts uses away from the predominantly residential area near Radio Hill Road, Snider Street, and Terrace Drive. With the construction of a new hospital near Exit 47, medical uses near the old hospital on Radio Hill Road may relocate. A portion of the old hospital facility is expected to be used as a teaching center for the Emory & Henry College Physical Therapy program; however, possible uses for the rest of the old hospital facility have not yet been determined.

Finally, a planned commercial development immediately south of Interstate 81 Exit 47, which has been on hold due to the poor national economic climate, may move forward in the near future. If that development occurs, the Town of Marion could experience a shift in commercial uses toward Exit 47 and away from established shopping centers, such as the Wal-Mart/Ingles shopping center. Commercial development at Exit 47 could impact businesses in Downtown Marion as well.

## VIII. THE PLANNING PROCESS

### A. Methods of Identifying Issues

During both the 2005 and 2012 Comprehensive Plan updates, several methods were used to identify the major issues that face the Town of Marion. The 2012 Comprehensive Plan update built on the input collected during the 2006 update, and the methods used during the 2012 planning period are described below.

*Public Input Surveys.* In late 2011, two surveys, a general public input survey and a Main Street business survey, were developed and made available at two public input sessions. The surveys were also available online between November 16 and December 27, 2011 at [www.planmarion.org](http://www.planmarion.org), a website created to provide information concerning the 2012 Comprehensive Plan update. Through the website, 84 public input surveys were submitted and 7 business surveys were submitted.

*Community Input Sessions.* Two daylong, open house style public input meetings were held on December 6 and 8, 2011 at the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission office and the Smyth-Bland Regional Library Copenhaver Meeting Room. The citizens who attended one of the open house style meetings were presented with several informative posters describing the economic and demographic trends in Marion and the goals and strategies from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. Attendance at the meetings was low; however, the citizens who did attend were passionate about the future of Marion. Citizen input was collected via surveys, one-on-one discussions, and brainstorming posters.

*Technical Research and Analysis.* Between September 2011 and January 2012, staff from Mount Rogers Planning District Commission conducted additional research and analysis to identify and update the demographic and economic trends in the Town of Marion. Various data were used from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Virginia Employment Commission, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, and Virginia Economic Development Partnership. Information about Marion was also gathered through discussions with town staff and local and regional leaders.

### B. Highlights from the Public Input Surveys

Highlights from the general public input survey include:

- Approximately 92 percent of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 64.
- 71 percent of respondents were employed full-time and 76 percent of respondents were employed in Smyth County or the Town of Marion.
- 68 percent of respondents were homeowners and less than 4 percent of respondents lived in a house that was constructed in the last 10 years.
- 43 percent of respondents said the quality of life in Marion was fair, while 44 percent said the quality of life was good.

- Only 14 percent of respondents expected the quality of life in Marion to improve.
- Shopping & dining, entertainment, job opportunities, and recycling were rated as poor by a majority of the respondents.
- Housing availability, property taxes, and the public school system were rated as fair by a majority of the respondents.
- When asked about the most important issues facing Marion, almost every respondent identified job creation or unemployment as the primary issue, specifically mentioning industrial jobs and career-oriented jobs, not retail or service-oriented jobs. Other main issues include the development of shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities to keep dollars in the local economy and improve quality of life for young adults and families with young children. Housing availability and affordability, leadership, and citizen involvement were also identified as important issues. For the full responses, please see the appendix.

Only seven Main Street business surveys were submitted, so generalizing the information obtained from the basic questions is difficult. However, when asked about the most important issues facing Marion in the next five to ten years, job losses and limited economic opportunities were the most common issues identified.

## **IX. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES**

The preceding chapters establish the rationale for the goals and strategies listed in this chapter. The goals are meant to be broad, long range targets for future achievement. The objectives are targeted approaches to achieving the goals, and the strategies are specific courses of action to carry out the objectives. Preceding each set of goals, objectives, and strategies is a “situation summary” that describes the key forces that are expected to shape the future of each major element in the Town of Marion during the next 10 to 20 years.

Decision-making based on strategies to achieve stated goals separates contemporary long-range planning from traditional planning. This approach is recommended, because it permits the optimum flexibility for making decisions by the Town Council, Planning Commission, builders, developers, departments, and authorities.

### **A. General Goals**

Several general goals were identified in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, and many of those goals are still relevant to the current conditions in the Town of Marion. Those goals are:

1. Encourage the orderly conversion of vacant land to urban use.
2. Guide new development into a pattern that will complement, rather than conflict with, existing uses.
3. Encourage an orderly land use pattern by adopting and enforcing effective land use controls.
4. Provide proper and efficient road system connectivity between different land uses.
5. Encourage adequate and affordable housing for all socio-economic groups.
6. Provide community facilities that are efficient, effective, and strategically located.
7. Designate areas for and create a viable environment for commercial development.
8. Encourage targeted industrial development.
9. Utilize federal and state programs to the maximum extent possible in the achievement of the town’s goals.
10. Provide for the enhancement of the cultural life of Marion.
11. Encourage the preservation of historic sites.

## **B. Population & Housing**

### ***Situation Summary***

The Town of Marion has experienced a steady decline in population since 1960, and between 2000 and 2010, the population in Marion declined by six percent. The decline was shared among practically all age groups, with the only growth experienced in the birth to 5, 50 to 64, and 80 to 84 age groups. The largest growth, 15.43 percent, was seen in the 60 to 64 age group. The median age in the Town of Marion increased from 41.6 years in 2000 to 42.5 years in 2010. The population in Marion is aging, but not in the same manner typically seen in other Southwest Virginia towns. Furthermore, the population decline was primarily composed of white residents. Other racial groups generally experienced stable populations or population growth. The population in Marion is projected to continue declining unless actions are taken to improve the quality of life, create career-oriented job opportunities, and strengthen the local education system.

Housing in Marion is predominantly single-family detached, although the proportion of single-family units declined by 15.8 percent over the last decade. Multi-family units increased by 20.9 percent during the same period. The cost and value of housing for both owners and renters increased at a much faster pace than family income during the 2000s. Maintaining and improving the affordability of both housing prices and rents requires critical consideration as Marion officials plan for the future. The quality of the town's housing stock appears to be good based on objective measures from the U.S. Census Bureau, and housing appears to be readily available in all price categories, although the percentage of middle and upper value homes is low. The number of vacant units increased from 218 in 2000 to 370 in 2010, with many of the vacant units available for sale or rent. The town should continue to implement housing rehabilitation projects to improve the quality and availability of low to moderate-income units, while encouraging the supply and diversity of all housing types.

### ***Goals***

*Maintain a population level that provides adequate support and resources for the town and establishes a steady rate of growth.*

*Promote safe, sanitary, and affordable housing with a diversification of housing opportunities for all residents of Marion.*

### ***Objectives***

- Create an environment in the Town of Marion that supports and encourages a high quality of life for all population groups.
- Promote an adequate supply of safe, high-quality, affordable, and well-maintained housing for all residents of Marion.
- Encourage subdivision development for households in all income levels.

- Promote home ownership among all income levels in the town.
- Pursue opportunities for neighborhood housing rehabilitation with preference to owner-occupied housing.
- Encourage an adequate supply of safe, sanitary housing for lower and middle-income families, the elderly, and disabled residents.

### *Strategies*

1. Pursue overall objectives that create a high quality of life in Marion, such as diversifying the local employment and industrial bases, ensuring educational opportunities for all citizens, developing cultural and recreational amenities, recruiting businesses for improved shopping, dining, and entertainment, and supporting the expansion of healthcare services.
2. Encourage housing rehabilitation through available grant programs, such as the Community Development Block Grant program, USDA Rural Development, and the Virginia Housing Development Authority programs.
3. Consider the adoption of a housing maintenance code to establish minimum standards for upkeep and maintenance of all residential properties.
4. Support the development of cooperative housing projects targeted for the retired and disabled population.
5. Encourage the development of multi-family housing for middle and upper income families, especially townhouse and condominium developments.
6. Work with Smyth County to ensure an adequate supply of quality rental housing for students enrolled in the Emory & Henry College Physical Therapy Program.
7. Pursue innovative methods to expand the amount and range of affordable housing for existing and prospective employees and other residents. Such efforts may include:
  - Pursue public/private cooperation in expanding the supply of affordable housing for the town’s labor force.
  - Establish and maintain a database to provide information to prospective housing developers as to suitable locations for housing development and rehabilitation.
  - Cooperate with existing local companies to find ways to meet the housing needs of employees.
  - Promote the development of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).
  - Promote well-designated, compatible infill development on appropriate sites.

## **C. Economy**

### ***Situation Summary***

The economy in the Town of Marion and Smyth County has been in decline since the late 1990s. Employment losses between 2005 and 2010 include the loss of 1,754 manufacturing jobs and 1,541 non-manufacturing jobs. Commercial and retail sales were flat between 2006 and 2010, while the number of retail establishments declined by 11.8 percent. Labor force participation in the Town of Marion is just over 50 percent of the total population, which is lower than the regional and statewide participation rates. For those residents who are in the workforce, unemployment is a critical issue. Driven largely by the national economic downturn, the unemployment rate in Smyth County was 10.5 percent in 2010.

Income in the Town of Marion consistently lags behind incomes in the state as a whole. The town's median household income in 2010 was only 53.6 percent of the median household income in Virginia. The distribution of household income in Marion is weighted toward the lower end of the spectrum with 66.7 percent of households having an annual income of less than \$50,000, compared to only 40.9 percent in the Commonwealth. Approximately 25 percent of the town's population lives below the poverty level.

With almost 3,300 jobs lost in the county between 2005 and 2010, the Town of Marion and Smyth County must work together to combat the deteriorating economic conditions that are eroding jobs and limiting commercial growth. Like many communities in Southwest Virginia, Marion has focused on expanding the tourism industry and promoting small business and entrepreneurial growth; nevertheless, Marion and Smyth County must continue to focus on traditional industrial recruitment, work to maintain existing industries, and continue to develop commercial and entrepreneurial opportunities.

### ***Goal***

*Promote a vibrant local economy that is diversified, stable, and provides meaningful employment opportunities for all residents who desire to work.*

### ***Objectives***

- Foster the vitality and expansion of existing businesses and industries within the town.
- Pursue opportunities to diversify the local economy and create new high paying, career-oriented jobs.
- Promote regional cooperation in economic development initiatives to achieve economies of scale.
- Encourage commercial development that will support the needs of town residents and increase the tax base.

- Promote entrepreneurial growth and opportunities.

### *Strategies*

1. Develop a taskforce with Smyth County, Virginia's aCorridor, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, citizens, and other partners to develop and implement a detailed, goal-oriented economic plan for the Town of Marion.
  2. Work with Smyth County to develop and implement an industrial marketing program for the town.
  3. Work with Smyth County to establish a business retention and expansion program to ensure that existing companies are satisfied with conditions in Marion and to assist those companies to remain and expand their operations in the town.
  4. Encourage rehabilitation of industrial properties in Marion to create marketable sites for industrial development.
  5. Support Smyth County in the development, maintenance, and marketing of industrial sites around the county, such as the Mountain Empire Industrial Park.
  6. Encourage Smyth County to develop the relationship with the Crossroads Rural Entrepreneurial Institute in Galax to provide small business and entrepreneurial support and training and educational opportunities in Smyth County.
  7. Work with Smyth County to identify target industries that would be complementary to the existing industrial base, while offering needed economic diversity. Focus marketing efforts to attract and recruit the target industries.
  8. Continue to market the town's Enterprise Zone and the incentives available to businesses that locate or expand in the Enterprise Zone.
  9. Encourage Smyth County to pursue expansion of the town's Enterprise Zone to include areas of commercial and industrial growth.
  10. Continue to revitalize Downtown Marion through projects such as the 1908 Schoolhouse rehabilitation, enhancements on Broad Street and Iron Street, and additional façade improvements on Main Street.
  11. Encourage the Virginia Department of Transportation to relocate the maintenance shop located on South Commerce Street near Exit 45 so the property can be developed for commercial use.
  12. Pursue the creation of a comprehensive redevelopment and economic renewal plan for the Commerce Street area from Staley Creek Crossing on Route 16 South to Main Street then to the Broad Street intersection with River Street.
  13. Encourage the planned development of commercial establishments near Exit 47 and along South Main Street toward the west end of Marion.
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14. Encourage high quality, affordable childcare programs to serve working parents, specifically before and after-school programs and programs for infant and toddler care.
15. Consider the use of existing public facilities and available industrial park lots to provide space for childcare and eldercare facilities.
16. Coordinate economic development efforts with housing and land use efforts to help expand the supply of affordable housing for existing and prospective employees.
17. Enhance efforts to expand the tourism industry in conjunction with local businesses and non-profit groups, on a regional scale with organizations like The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail and 'Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network, and in cooperation with state efforts.
18. Develop and promote the central business district (Downtown Marion) as a small regional shopping center. Ensure adequate parking spaces throughout the central business district and develop pedestrian connectivity throughout downtown and between downtown and residential zones.

## **D. Transportation**

### ***Situation Summary***

The transportation facilities in an urbanized area determine to a large extent the identification people have with the area. The efficient movement of existing and projected traffic is the primary objective of the transportation system; however, it is absolutely essential that transportation planning and development be integrated into the planning for churches, homes, businesses, industries, playgrounds, schools, and other community facilities.

Citizens in the Town of Marion generally did not cite transportation as a major issue during the community meetings or through the public input survey in 2011. Traffic congestion along U.S. Route 11 (Main Street) can be come heavy at certain times during the day. Sidewalk improvements, including extending new sidewalks through residential neighborhoods, were identified by some residents as a need in Marion. Pedestrian access and connectivity has improved in Downtown Marion through projects such as the Iron Street enhancements. The following street improvements are recommended for Marion.

### ***Goals***

*Maintain a safe, efficient, compatible, and balanced town transportation network.*

### ***Objectives***

- Ensure that the capacity of the town's major arterial and collector roadways are maintained as development occurs.

- Ensure that all new roadways are designed to balance the multiple functions of the road; to serve motor vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic; and to be visually and environmentally compatible with surrounding land uses.
- Design transportation systems to minimize through-traffic in residential areas, to cause the least possible disruption of public parks and recreation areas, and to create the least displacement of homes and businesses, while promoting connectivity between land uses.
- Promote an effective, economical, and well-used public transit system.
- Develop an effective, safe, and convenient pedestrian and bicycle system.

### *Strategies*

1. Maintain and apply standards and procedures for design, access, zoning, and site plan review to ensure safe and coordinated access to arterial and major collector roads and limit or prevent the impacts of conventional strip development on safety, traffic capacity, and aesthetic quality.
2. Segregate high volume through-roads from local neighborhood streets to protect the function, capacity, and safety of the neighborhood street system.
3. Encourage new roads and road extensions that will connect to the existing road network to balance traffic loads and provide alternative routes for traffic flow.
4. Ensure that new developments are sized and designed to be compatible with the function and capacity of the adjacent roadways that will serve them.
5. Ensure that new commercial, industrial, and residential developments provide adequate transportation system improvements to mitigate the impact of the development and to supplement the town's existing transportation system.
6. Establish and maintain a priority list for future transportation system improvements, including schedule and funding commitments.
7. Work with the Virginia Department of Transportation to monitor the traffic flow and safety conditions of the town's roadway system.
8. Review and update landscape and setback standards for parking areas adjacent to roadways to minimize the visual impact of parking areas on the town's scenic quality.
9. Support increased federal and state funding for the expansion of public transportation services by the District Three Governmental Cooperative.
10. Continue to support the expansion and improvement of the Mountain Empire Airport.

11. Pursue opportunities to expand the sidewalk network throughout the town with specific focus on connecting residential neighborhoods to commercial centers.
12. Evaluate the feasibility of extending bicycle routes through town along primary transportation corridors.
13. Promote the Mountain Empire Airport as an important component of the regional transportation system.

## **E. Community Resources**

### ***Situation Summary***

The majority of residents who responded to the 2011 public input survey were generally pleased with the municipal and community services available in the Town of Marion. Community services and facilities encompass a broad range of amenities in the town, including utilities, schools, medical facilities, parks, emergency services, and the library. To stabilize Marion's population, recruit new jobs, and support the needs of population groups, such as young adults and families with young children, the Town of Marion must maintain comprehensive services and provide modern facilities.

Planning for community services and facilities should be directed toward providing the maximum benefits for present and future residents of Marion at the safest and most convenient locations and in the most efficient and economical way. Site selection for these services should reflect present growth trends within the town, as well as an effort to direct growth patterns of the future.

### ***Goals***

*Maintain a town government that is responsive, responsible, and accountable to its citizens and that is capable of efficiently providing high quality public services consistent with available resources.*

*Provide and promote diverse community services and facilities that will enhance the quality of life for town residents.*

*Maintain adequate open space, recreational facilities, and cultural opportunities for the benefit and enrichment of all citizens.*

### ***Objectives***

- Pursue regional solutions for the provisioning of public services such as education, public safety, and recreation.
- Provide an infrastructure of local government facilities and services that is adequate to meet the needs of present and future citizens, while striving to maintain reasonable and competitive tax and utility rates.
- Achieve broad-based cooperation within the community to provide excellent services, including public/private partnerships.

- Support projects and programs that will expand recreational opportunities and promote a healthier population.

### *Strategies*

#### *Government Administration*

1. Maintain a small, efficient, innovative, and responsive town government.
2. Ensure that all members of the community have the opportunity to participate in town decisions and foster community leadership.
3. Continue to recognize that “services cost money” and that the town must continually balance the need for services with the ability and willingness of citizens to afford them.

#### *Services and Utilities*

4. Encourage cooperative regional efforts to achieve economies of scale in government functions, including water and wastewater services, economic development and marketing, telecommunications, and solid waste disposal.
5. The town should continue to upgrade and expand the water and wastewater systems using federal, state, regional, and local funding sources, such as the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission Water/Wastewater Fund.
6. Be open to exploring the feasibility of a central countywide water services management plan and pricing system with the Smyth County Board of Supervisors, Thomas Bridge Water Corporation, Rye Valley Water Authority, Town of Chilhowie, and Town of Saltville.
7. Work with Bristol Virginia Utilities and/or other providers to extend last mile telecommunications infrastructure to businesses and residents, which will increase service provider options and result in more affordable services.
8. Implement expanded recycling and litter control efforts through public/private cooperative efforts with local companies and residential neighborhoods.
9. Continue to participate in the regional transfer station with Smyth County for solid waste disposal in a regional landfill.
10. Study the feasibility of installing free public Wi-Fi in Downtown Marion.

#### *Education*

11. Continue to support the Smyth County Public School System so that it is recognized as among the highest quality systems in the state.
12. Support Smyth County in the upgrading and modernization of the county’s public school buildings, facilities, and programs.

13. Work with Smyth County to expand the educational and training programs offered at the Crossroads Rural Entrepreneurial Institute into the county, which include workforce training, certificate courses, and higher education programs.
14. Continue to support the operations, development, and enhancement of the Smyth-Bland Regional Library.
15. Support the development and implementation of the Emory & Henry College Physical Therapy Program at the former Smyth County Community Hospital facility.

#### *Public Safety*

16. Maintain and improve the actual and perceived safety of public places through policies that promote well-equipped, highly trained emergency services.
17. Encourage all emergency response agencies to comply with the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which provides a systematic, proactive approach to guide departments and agencies at all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to work seamlessly to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity, in order to reduce the loss of life and property and harm to the environment.
18. Support, maintain, and improve the capabilities of the Marion Police Department, Marion Lifesaving Crew, and Marion Volunteer Fire Department through additional training, modern equipment, and innovative programs. Seek state and federal grant funding to provide training and purchase equipment.

#### *Healthcare*

19. Support and assist the healthcare community in attracting qualified physicians to the town and county by promoting the area's strengths and making improvements related to housing and cultural needs.
20. Support the operation of the Smyth County Community Hospital, and encourage opportunities to expand the services and programs available at the hospital.
21. Support infrastructure development and improvements for senior citizens and those with disabilities, including facilities such as retirement homes, assisted living, and specialized medical and recreation facilities.
22. Support the operation of the Lifetime Wellness Center, and encourage the development and expansion of programs and opportunities available at the center.

#### *Cultural Amenities*

23. Support the continued success of the Hungry Mother Arts & Crafts Festival, the Art Walk, and other cultural attractions and events.

24. Continue to promote and support the Lincoln Theatre and Song of the Mountains.
25. Support efforts to rehabilitate and reuse the 1908 Schoolhouse as the Wayne C. Henderson School of Appalachian Music and Arts. On-going efforts include a \$600,000 Virginia Industrial Revitalization Fund grant project, a grant application to the Appalachian Regional Commission for \$338,000, and potential grant applications to the Virginia Tobacco Commission and USDA Rural Development.
26. Continue to promote and participate in regional organizations such as Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway and 'Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network.
27. Investigate opportunities to enhance Downtown Marion through the development of museums, historical attractions, and venues for traditional music.
28. Support the continued development and operation of the Smyth County Historical & Museum Society.
29. Encourage residents to "buy local" by continuing to support the Marion Farmer's Market.
30. Support the development and enhancement of local museums and historical attractions, such as the Settlers Museum of Southwest Virginia.
31. Implement the use of community sign boards in strategic locations to advertise town and community events, festivals, and organizations.

#### *Parks and Recreation*

32. Promote Hungry Mother State Park as a community asset and capitalize on the benefits the park provides for residents and as a tourism attraction.
33. Encourage the continued development of a system of "greenways" and linear parks along the creeks in and around the town.
34. Provide a full range of modern and accessible recreational facilities and services to local residents. Focus on establishing smaller parks and playgrounds within neighborhoods to make recreation facilities as accessible as possible to local residents. Connect recreation facilities with linear parks and trails where possible.
35. Focus on providing appropriate activities, facilities, and programs to meet the social and recreational needs of the town's youth. Work with the county to determine the feasibility of a jointly funded year-round recreation program.
36. Ensure that recreation activities, facilities, and programs are structured and adapted as necessary to be readily available to the elderly population.

37. Maintain the Holston Hills Community Golf Course and related facilities (formerly Holston Hills Country Club) as an affordable, high-quality public recreation facility.
38. Study the feasibility of new recreation facilities, such as soccer fields, baseball fields, and hiking/biking trails, on the former Holston Hills Country Club property.
39. Study methods to make Marion a “trail-friendly” town, such as ways to support Appalachian Trail hikers and the development of longer regional trails that connect Marion to other communities.

## **F. Land Use**

### ***Situation Summary***

The Town of Marion is a living thing, and it has a vitality that makes a resident identify with it, because each resident is a component part. Consequently, decisions made by public and private officials regarding the shape, character, or form of the town has a potential to affect everyone in it for better or for worse. The policies in force concerning the uses of land in the town become very important from an aesthetic point of “how does it look,” and the practical point of “how much is it going to cost?” Since cost considerations have first priority in most public decisions, it is intended that the goals and strategies in this section serve that purpose while establishing the Town of Marion as a vibrant, attractive, livable, but dynamic small town in Southwestern Virginia.

Like most towns and cities in Southwest Virginia, Marion has a relatively limited supply of land available for development; nevertheless, there should be enough suitable land to meet the expected needs during the next two decades. Major challenges include providing for affordable housing, continuing to strengthen the viability of the downtown, and enhancing the quality of the residential neighborhoods. Marion also faces the challenge of encouraging new, modern commercial services to locate in convenient areas along major roadways, while at the same time limiting the negative impacts that such development usually creates, especially traffic congestion and aesthetic degradation.

The town’s visual appearance is important for economic development and the overall quality of life and sense of community pride. Encouraging property maintenance and beautification, buffering industrial sites, screening expansive parking lots, and controlling the visual appearance of signs, are among the strategies that the town can initiate to improve its aesthetic quality.

The Future Land Use Map found in this Comprehensive Plan reflects a blend of desired growth patterns, traditional or existing patterns, and patterns created inadvertently by the desire for convenient vehicular access to commercial uses. The balance between the supply and demand of land available for various desirable uses will need to be monitored by the town as development continues.

**Goals**

*Land within the town will be developed in a balanced and reasonable manner, with consideration given to public health, safety and welfare, economic viability, and historic significance.*

*Conserve and protect the town's natural resources and the beauty of its natural environment.*

*Protect the integrity of the town's historic buildings and streetscapes.*

**Objectives***Overall Land Use Pattern*

- Provide an adequate supply of land for expected future development needs.
- Ensure that new development is well planned, orderly, and attractive.

*Downtown*

- Maintain a vibrant downtown, with locally owned businesses, professional services, and housing opportunities.
- Improve, maintain, and strategically utilize vacant lots and buildings.

*Residential Neighborhoods*

- Preserve and enhance the integrity and quality of residential neighborhoods.
- Ensure that zoning regulations protect neighborhoods from the encroachment or indirect impacts of incompatible land uses.
- Ensure that neighborhoods have adequate lighting, utilities, sidewalks, recreation areas, and other infrastructure.
- Provide residential areas with safe and convenient access to shopping, entertainment, and employment.
- Encourage innovative design techniques in new residential development that reduce costs and conserve natural resources.

*Commercial and Industrial*

- Achieve diverse and plentiful opportunities for shopping, lodging, entertainment, and dining within the town.
- Maintain attractive, well planned, and harmonious entrance corridors to Marion.
- Enhance Marion as a major tourism destination, focusing on its traditional heritage, natural beauty, outdoor recreation, and overall quality of life.

*Historical Preservation and the Environment*

- Promote the preservation and rehabilitation of significant historic buildings.
- Promote Marion as a clean, environmentally active town.
- Prevent the pollution of air and water resources, and alleviate pollution that has already occurred.

***Strategies****Overall Strategies for Future Land Use and Development.*

1. Continue to enhance Downtown Marion as a unique regional center by continuing to focus public and institutional uses in and around downtown whenever possible, and by encouraging infill, redevelopment and rehabilitation, and mixed-use development projects.
  2. Preserve the traffic capacity of major corridors by requiring coordinated access points to major roadways and encouraging inter-parcel road connections whenever possible.
  3. Enforce the maintenance of vacant lots and buildings, particularly in the historic downtown area, to enhance the value of all adjacent properties.
  4. Preserve and enhance the visual quality of major corridors by requiring substantial vegetative buffering and screening between new developments along the corridors and by encouraging developments to enhance existing vegetative buffers and screens.
  5. Develop and implement a town beautification plan, including a review of the town's signs ordinance and the development of a property maintenance/trash ordinance.
  6. Protect and enhance the visual quality of major entrances to the town by:
    - Locating visually compatible uses along entrance corridors,
    - Improving vegetative buffers along all major corridors,
    - Keeping signs to a minimum necessary size, height, and complexity, and
    - Maintaining the "Tree City" designation with a continued long term effort to foster the planting and maintenance of indigenous trees on public and institutional sites, within neighborhoods, and on new development sites. Marion has received the "Tree City" designation annually since 2002.
  7. Maintain the essential character and function of steep slopes by:
    - Encouraging low-density development and open space uses on steep slopes,
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- Considering the creation of an overlay district for areas with severely steep slopes, and
  - Considering the restriction of tree removal on steep slopes.
8. Coordinate water, sewer, telecommunications, and road improvements with land use objectives, and adopt a five-year capital improvement program to implement projects.
  9. Land developers and builders should be expected to follow reasonable conservation practices, such as:
    - using an incremental system for breaking ground,
    - constructing sediment traps to control run-off,
    - applying temporary and/or permanent ground cover, and
    - not using spoil to fill in floodplains and drainage ways.
  10. Coordinate planning and regulatory efforts with Smyth County to ensure that the land development process does not harm regional water supplies from point and non-point pollution sources.
  11. Maintain flexibility with land uses around the former Smyth County Community Hospital facility as the uses of that facility and adjacent medical arts facilities are determined.
  12. Recognize and take advantage of opportunities where town boundary adjustments can create and support economic and community development.

#### *Residential Uses*

13. Maintain an adequate supply of land for a full range of residential types.
  14. Locate medium and high-density residential uses in and around the downtown, in proximity to major road corridors, and adjacent to existing medium and high-density residential.
  15. Locate low-density residential uses farther from downtown and on land that is less suitable for higher density development.
  16. Promote the development of Planned Unit Development (PUD's) and clustered developments to utilize denser development, promote walking communities, and minimize impact on open parcels.
  17. Land subject to excessive runoff and all surfaces with greater than 20 percent slope should have only low-density development.
  18. Approved streets or roadways, providing access to all residents, should be developed preliminary to any large-scale residential development.
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19. Residential development should be pre-planned, incorporating housing with open space for playgrounds, parks, and adequate service facilities.
20. Multi-family units should meet density requirement for sewer and water and should be located near existing or planned shopping and other service facilities, such as schools, parks, and recreational developments.
21. Multi-family developments should be planned to harmonize with surrounding developments and should be located in anticipated areas of growth.
22. Multi-family units should be located apart from centers of congestion, but should have good access to transportation facilities.

#### *Commercial and Industrial Uses*

23. Focus general commercial uses in and around the downtown area and in compact nodes within or adjacent to existing centers and adjacent to Interstate 81 Exits 44, 45, and 47.
24. Maintain an adequate supply of land for industrial and commercial expansion adjacent to or within existing sites.
25. Industrial and commercial development should be planned to offer maximum protection to adjoining, existing, or planned residential areas.
26. Promote infill development as the top priority for small-scale businesses and industries.
27. Promote the reuse and redevelopment of existing sites and structures as a higher priority than developing open space.
28. Industrial areas must be protected from encroachment by incompatible, non-industrial activities.
29. Adequate access without congestion should be provided in advance of any industrial development, with access ways from public streets and highways designed to meet anticipated needs without disrupting normal traffic flow.
30. Access points to industrial sites should, when possible, avoid conflict with residential traffic flow and should never be channeled into local streets or roads serving residential areas.
31. Commercial activities complementing industrial development should be permitted in industrial zones.
32. Commercial centers should be planned in keeping with the cluster concept where practical to prevent commercial “strip” developments and should be attractively designed and landscaped. Commercial design should:
  - provide for convenient vehicular and pedestrian access to the site;

- effectively control and separate on-site vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems;
  - provide adequate on-site parking, loading, and storage facilities well screened from any adjacent residential areas;
  - provide easily accessible and sanitary solid waste collecting areas shielded from public view and contact;
  - minimize noise, glare, and visual impact on surrounding area; and
  - provide uniform sign treatment in harmony with the surrounding landscape.
33. Gas stations, “fast-food”, and similar highway oriented establishments should be clustered in appropriate sites or located in planned centers to avoid mixed stripped development.

*Public, Semi-public, and Institutional Uses*

34. Provide safe and efficient pedestrian and vehicular linkages between residential areas, Downtown Marion, and commercial centers.
35. Maintain and enhance vehicular and pedestrian access through Downtown Marion.
36. Establish adequate and convenient recreational areas for all neighborhoods.

*Historic Preservation and the Environment*

36. Review the town’s ordinances to identify potential updates for the protection of environmentally sensitive resources, and maintain a subdivision ordinance that will restrict development on unsuitable lots.
37. Support the enforcement of current and future federal and state regulations regarding air and water quality and the continued monitoring of air and water quality by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.
38. Continue to encourage and support the recycling and reuse of solid waste materials by businesses, industries, residents, and the town government, to achieve and maintain at least a 25 percent recycling rate.
39. Encourage the use of voluntary environmental conservation practices among residents, such as composting, trash compacting, tree planting, chemical and fertilizer reduction programs, etc.
40. Encourage the establishment, enhancement, and maintenance of vegetative buffers and planted areas along the town’s major road corridors.

41. Promote a tree protection and planting program to encourage landowners and developers to preserve trees during the development process and to replant forested areas subsequent to clearing and grading.
42. Encourage effective visual screening of high density commercial and industrial uses from the town's major road corridors through the use of vegetative buffers, earthen berms, existing topography, and the placement and design of buildings.
43. Continue to encourage the restoration, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic structures, particularly within Downtown Marion.
44. Establish a Historical Landmarks Preservation Committee, perhaps in connection with the Smyth County Historical Society, with the objective of identifying, documents, classifying, and listing historical landmarks on an official register. Such landmarks as are identified should be registered and protected through an established preservation program.
45. Historic landmarks should be identified, mapped, and protected against encroachment from incompatible land uses. Land uses, which will be a detriment to the historic landmark, should not be permitted to locate adjacent to the landmark.
46. Private groups or individuals should be encouraged to preserve features of historic significance over which they have control.
47. Establish a special landscape review board for the purpose of reviewing and commenting on rezoning applications and development plans in areas surrounding validated historical landmarks.