

Back Creek Community Planning Area

September 24, 2024



INTRODUCTION

This Plan Summary highlights the key components of the various sections of the Back Creek Planning Area. The Existing Conditions section features the study area’s demographics, community facilities, natural resources, cultural resources, land use, zoning, and the people that participated in the Plan’s development.

The Back Creek Planning Area’s goals were inspired by public input and used to develop the Plan’s recommendations in the County’s Comprehensive Plan Update. Implementation of this Plan will be completed over the next 15 years.

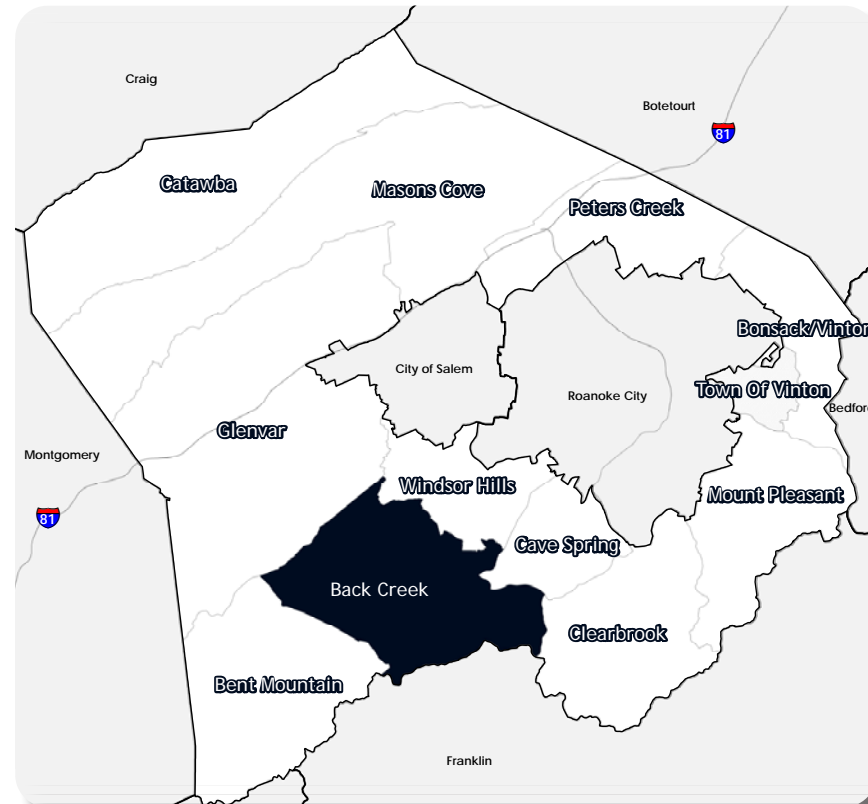


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More detailed information on all of these sections are provided in the Roanoke County 200 Plan.



Natural & Cultural Resources

Protect and improve ground, surface and stormwater resources; beautify the County’s public areas, viewsheds and roadways; clean up garbage; protect steep slope areas; and protect forests, natural areas, and wildlife habitats.



Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Evaluate park, trail and blueway options along Back Creek.



Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Increase trail connections as shown in the Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan and analyze potential road alternatives for outdoor recreation.



General Services

Support recycling options and implement recommendations from the assessments of County Fire Department Facilities and the Administration Center.



Libraries

Improve service and enhance existing facility; evaluate programming needs from consumer feedback that serve people of all ages and backgrounds; raise level of engagement with the community; and ensure timely delivery of all circulating materials.



Communications & Technology

Expand and improve high-speed broadband access and cell phone service availability in underserved areas.



Public Safety

Provide efficient delivery of public safety services with minimal response times; enhance public safety staffing; enhance facilities and equipment; and provide a high-level of citizen engagement and education opportunities.



Transportation (Roads)

Initiate a Route 221/Bent Mountain Road Multimodal Safety Study to determine what kind of improvements could be made to reduce crashes and improve safety for all users in collaboration with VDOT.



Transportation (Roads)

Determine appropriate safety improvements for Twelve O’Clock Knob Road in collaboration with VDOT.



Land Use

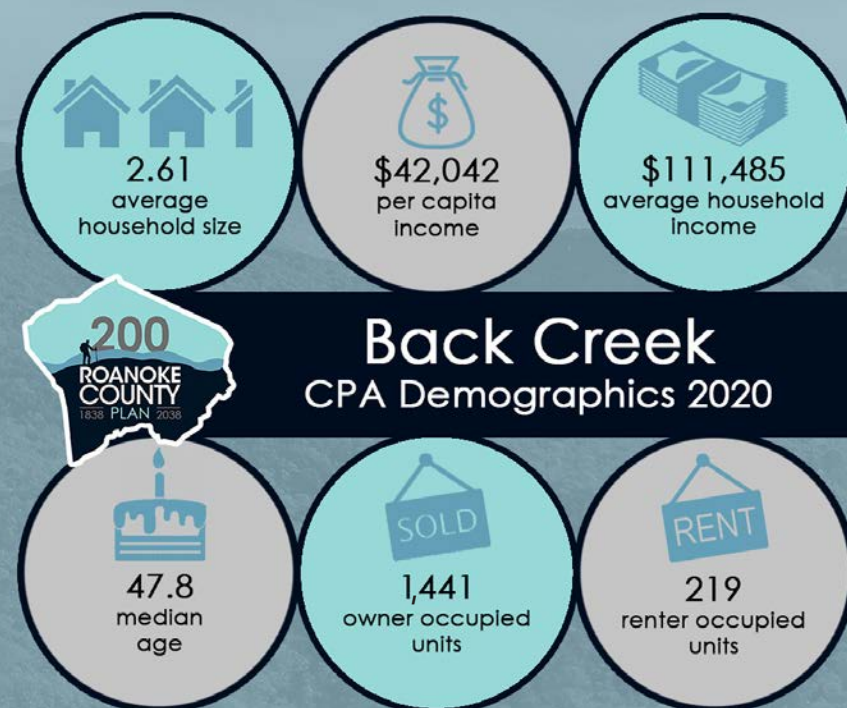
Amend the Future Land Use Map to preserve the rural character of Back Creek. Develop a Rural Center Plan in the Back Creek area around the Bent Mountain Road/Twelve O’Clock Knob Road intersection.



The Back Creek Community Planning Area (CPA) is located in the southern portion of Roanoke County. It is bordered to the north by the Glenvar CPA, Windsor Hills CPA, and Cave Spring CPA, to the east by the Clearbrook CPA, to the south by Franklin County, and to the west by the Bent Mountain CPA and the Glenvar CPA. The study area encompasses 3,044 parcels totaling approximately 14,770 acres. The Back Creek Community Planning Area is home to approximately 4,360 people.

Back Creek Planning Area includes a small number of businesses along Route 221 in the southern region of the County. This planning area has many wonderful amenities including several overlooks along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Back Creek Planning Area is divided by Route 221. The area is located approximately ten miles from the Cities of Roanoke and Salem. The Planning Area is rural in nature consisting of agricultural uses, rural home sites, and several single family subdivisions.



Source: 2019 US Census Data

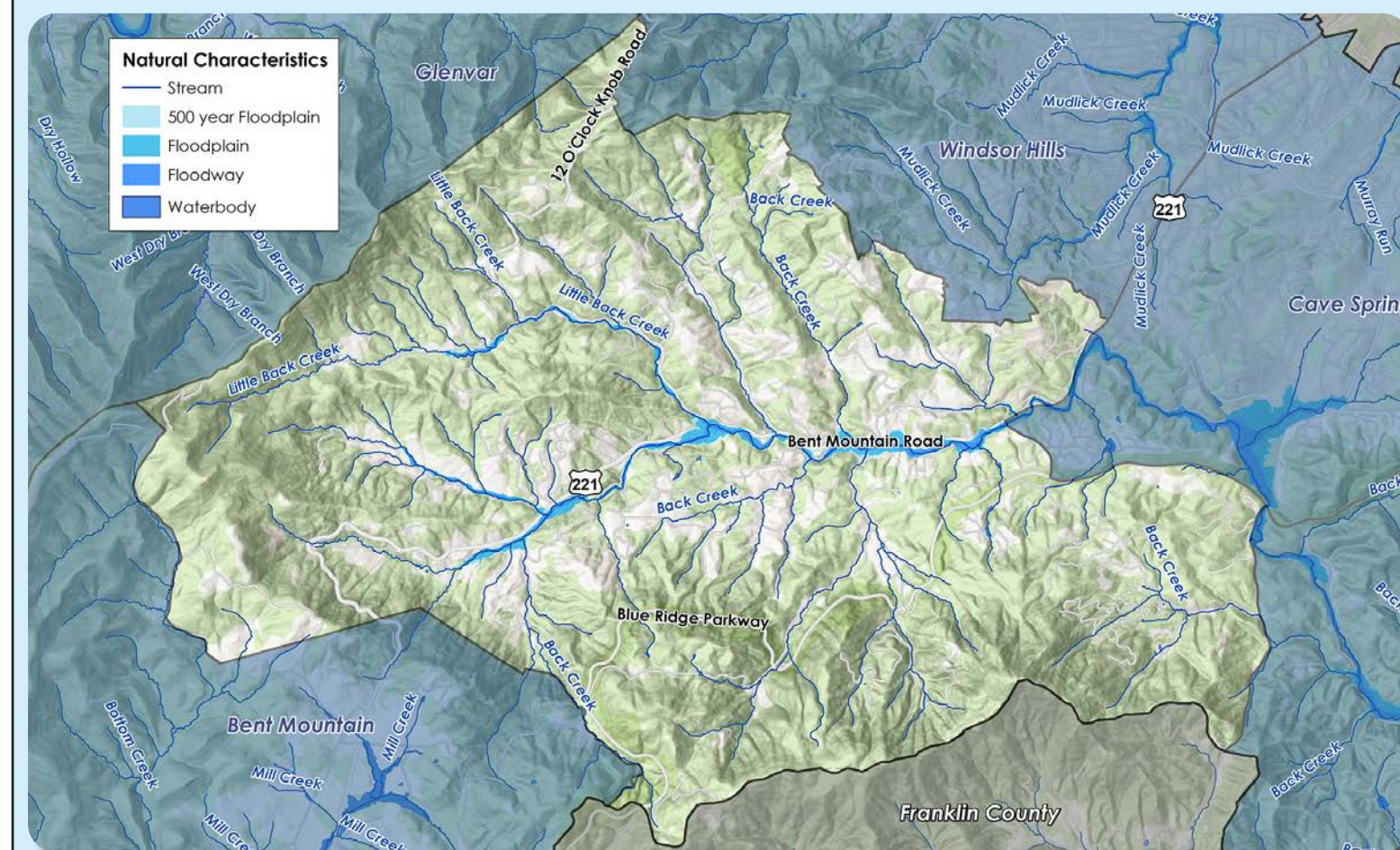
Demographic Trends

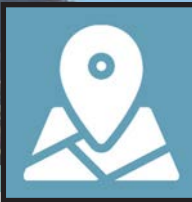
- The median age of residents continues to increase as the baby boomer generation ages. The median age in Back Creek is 47.8 years.
- Countywide, over the last few decades families living in the same house have fewer people and two-person households are increasing.
- Back Creek's population increased by 110% from 1983 to 2010, and grew 7% from 2010 to 2020 to 4,361.
- Countywide there were fewer babies born from 2010 to 2020, but population grew 4.9% due to people moving here from outside the County.
- According to most recent Census data, more than 86% (1,441) of the housing units are owned, while approximately 14% (219) are rental properties.
- Per capita income is around \$42,000 in the Back Creek CPA for each individual and the average household income is approximately \$111,485. This is one of the highest household incomes in the County.
- The average household size is 2.61 persons per household.



The landscape of the Back Creek CPA is characterized by steep slopes, streams and floodplain. On Back Creek, flooding is scattered throughout the length of the stream. One area that experiences house flooding is between Cotton Hill Road (Route 688) and Old Mill Road (Route 752) in southern Roanoke County. The tributaries to Back Creek also experience scattered house flooding. Approximately 45% of the acreage in the Back Creek CPA is calculated as having a “steep slope,” greater than 33%. Control of erosion and sedimentation and the management of stormwater runoff due to steep slopes and erodible soils can make development difficult. The Back Creek CPA has 218 acres, or 1.4% of all total land, located within the 100-year floodplain. An additional 47 acres (0.3%) are located within the 500-year floodplain.

Approximately 451 acres of land (3%) in this CPA are under conservation easements. A conservation easement is designed to protect agricultural, forest, historic, or open space resources. It prevents the development of a property while allowing continued private ownership and rural use such as farming or forestry. An additional 872 acres (6%) of land is under public and private protective management. The Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve, managed by the Department of Conservation & Recreation, includes over 900 wooded acres, partially in Back Creek. Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve protects the world's largest population of piratebush, a globally rare shrub, which is restricted to only a handful of sites in the mountains of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina.





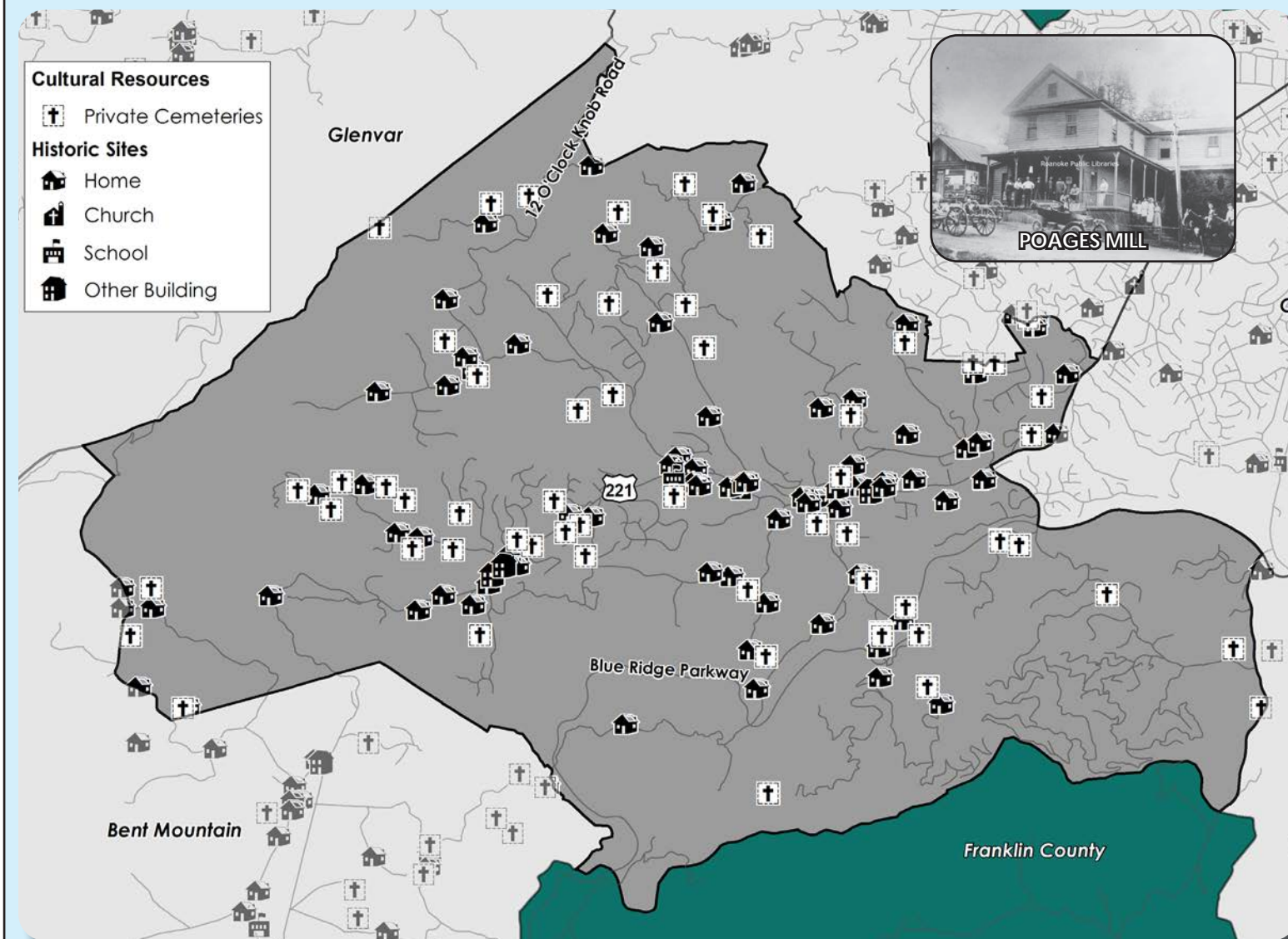
EXISTING CONDITIONS



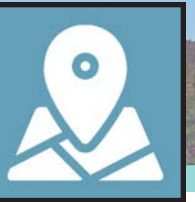
Cultural Resources

Districts
Buildings
Cemeteries

Back Creek is home to numerous historic resources including homes, farms, churches and private cemeteries. The Blue Ridge Parkway (with several overlooks along the route in this CPA) attracts visitors from across the state and beyond.



EXISTING CONDITIONS



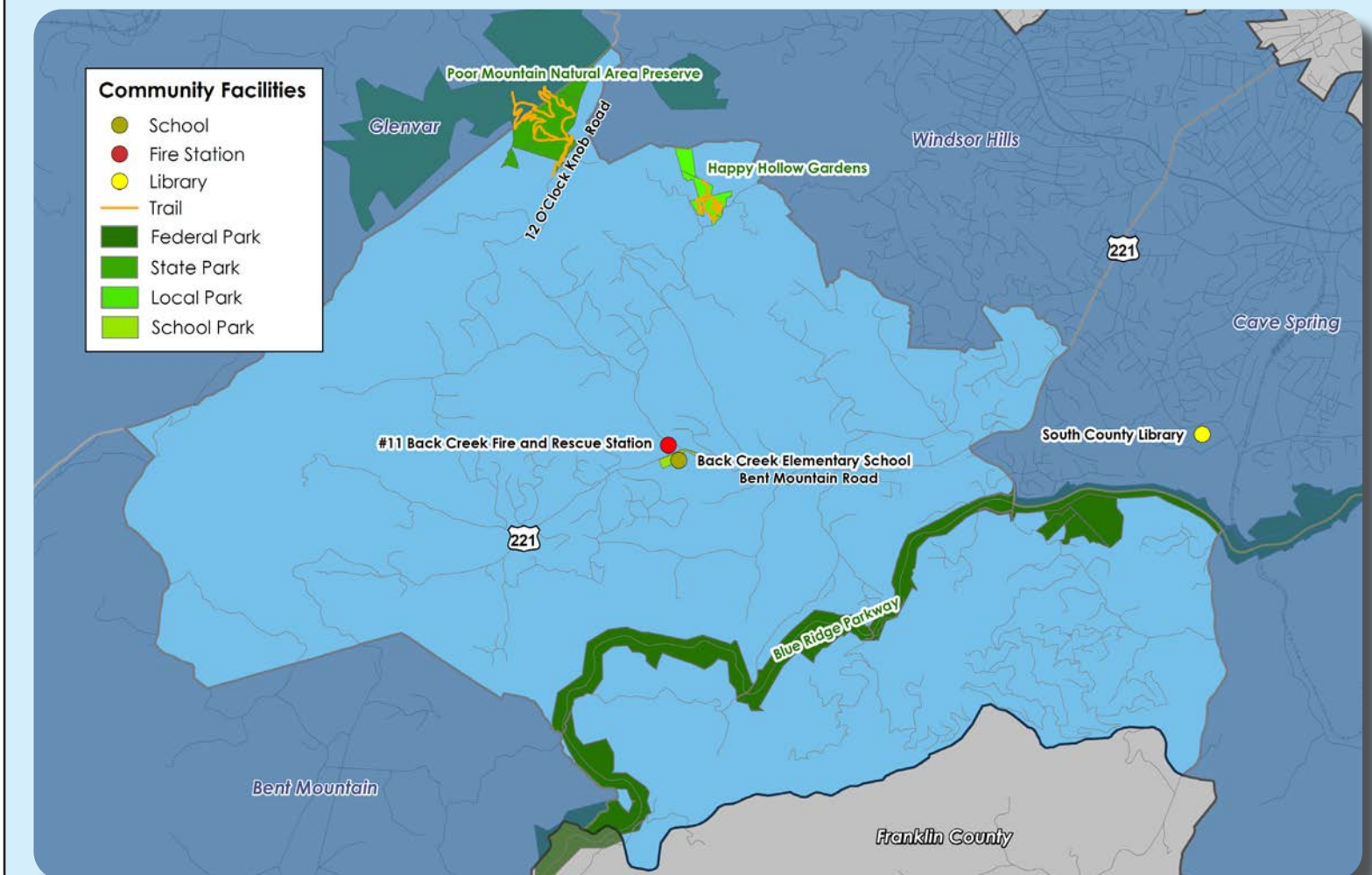
Community Facilities

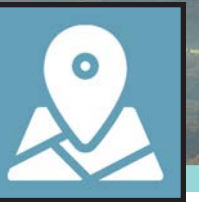
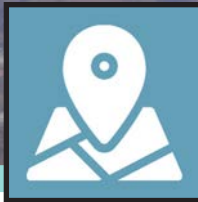
Schools
Libraries
Public Safety
Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Schools serving the Back Creek area are under enrollment capacity. This is consistent with most Roanoke County Public School trends. Back Creek Elementary School, Cave Spring Elementary School, Penn Forest Elementary School, Cave Spring Middle School, Hidden Valley Middle School, Cave Spring High School, and Hidden Valley High School are all under maximum capacity.

Back Creek is served by nearby South County Library in the Cave Spring Community Planning Area and nearby Bent Mountain Library in the Bent Mountain Community Planning Area. Both offer a variety of services for adults, teenagers, children and families.

Back Creek is served by the #11 Back Creek Fire and Rescue Station and is home to Back Creek Elementary.





Transportation

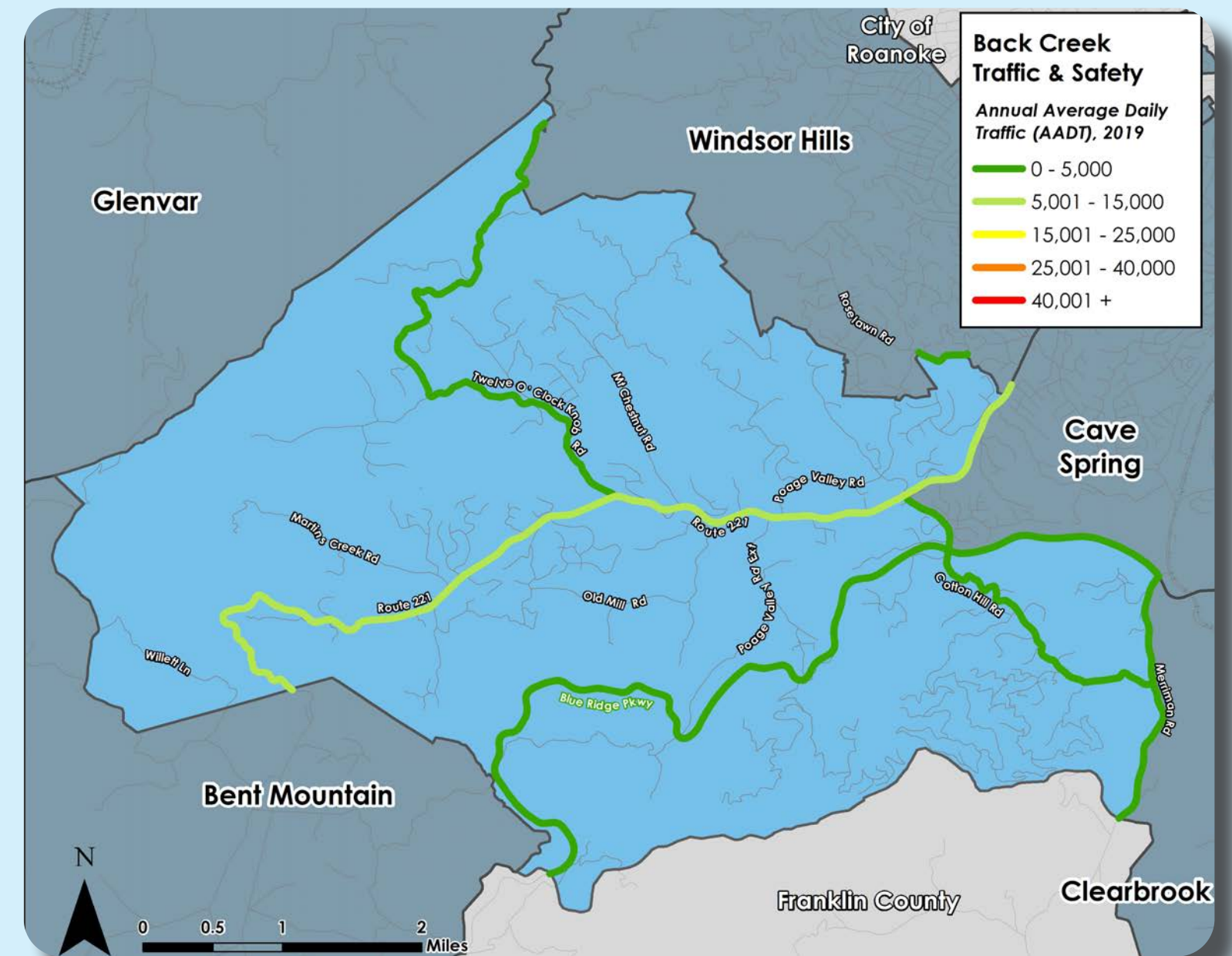
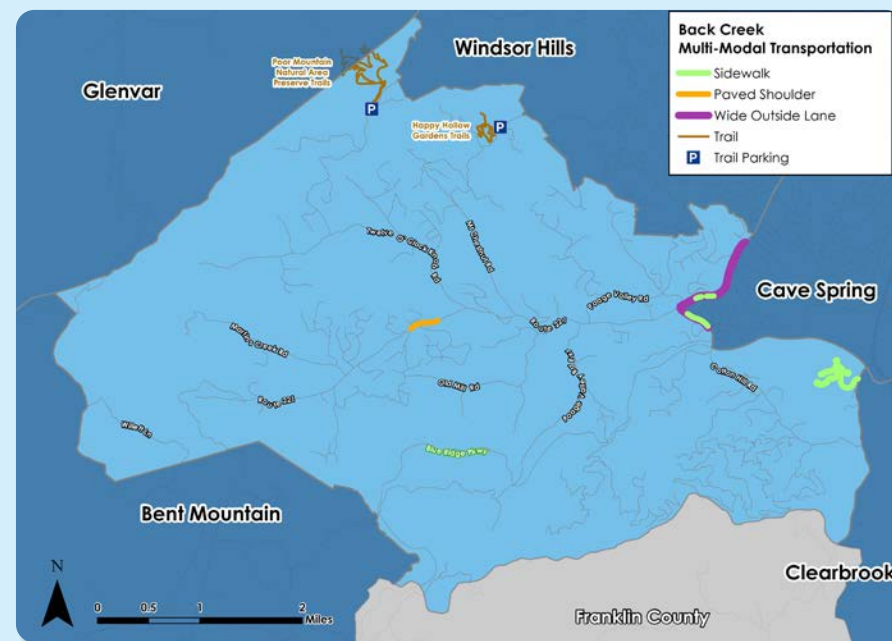
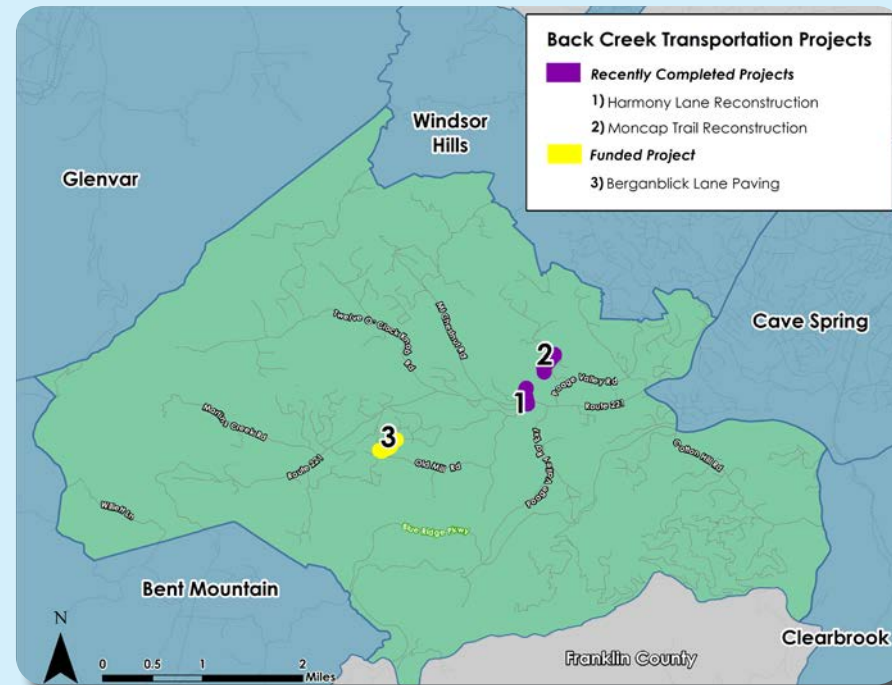
Roads
Transit
Greenways/Trails
Bicycle & Pedestrian Accommodations

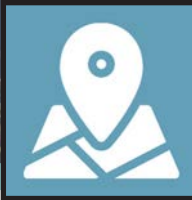
Route 221 is a popular scenic road that serves as a vital link connecting the citizens of Roanoke Valley to the Blue Ridge Parkway and Floyd County. Twelve O'Clock Knob Road winds up Poor Mountain, past the Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve and over to the City of Salem. Happy Hollow Gardens on Mt Chestnut Road is a hidden gem in the CPA where visitors can enjoy blooming rhododendron in the spring.

The multimodal accommodations available in Back Creek include trails at both the Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve and at Happy Hollow Gardens. Recent widening of Route 221 to Cotton Hill Road included wide outside lanes. Reconstruction of Cotton Hill Road from Route 221 to the Blue Ridge Parkway included a new bridge over Back Creek, a wide outside lane for cyclists and sidewalk. The Masons Crest subdivision includes sidewalk on all neighborhood streets.

Route 221, Bent Mountain Road, splits the Back Creek CPA in half and is also the busiest roadway in the area with 7,500 vehicle trips per day. The second busiest roadway, Cotton Hill Road, carries less than half of that traffic with about 3,500 trips per day. Just over half of the crashes that have taken place in the Back Creek CPA occurred on Route 221.

Two road improvement projects on Harmony Lane and Moncap Trail were recently completed by VDOT. These roads now include paved surfaces and turnarounds. Berganblick Lane is a VDOT-maintained gravel road that will be paved in 2027.





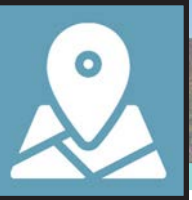
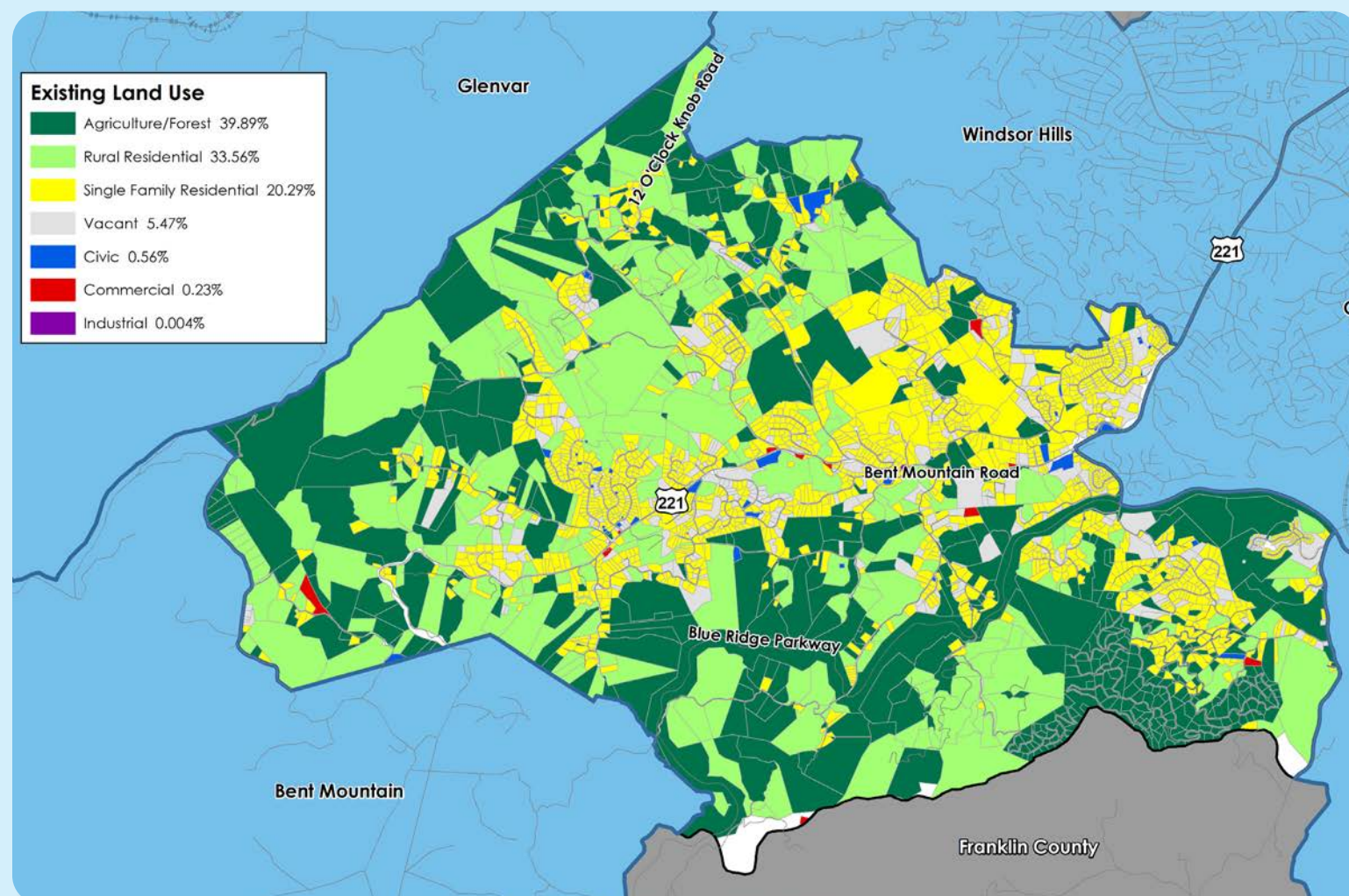
EXISTING CONDITIONS



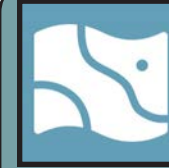
Existing Land Use

The rural residential community of Back Creek is distinguished by its many beautiful views of Mount Chestnut, Masons Knob, Poor Mountain and Bent Mountain. Typical land uses include low density housing, agriculture and forests, outdoor recreation, civic uses and small businesses. Key resources include creeks and streams, nature preserve and forests, the Blue Ridge Parkway and scenic views. 40% of the land in Back Creek is agriculture and forests.

There are many active and passive farms and forests along with multiple creeks and streams that run through the area. 54% of the land developed is rural home-sites and single-family neighborhoods. 6% of the land is being used for commercial, industrial, and civic activities, or is vacant. Multiple large mountains surround the area. The Blue Ridge Parkway and Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve are important recreation and outdoor tourism assets for Back Creek and the larger region.



EXISTING CONDITIONS



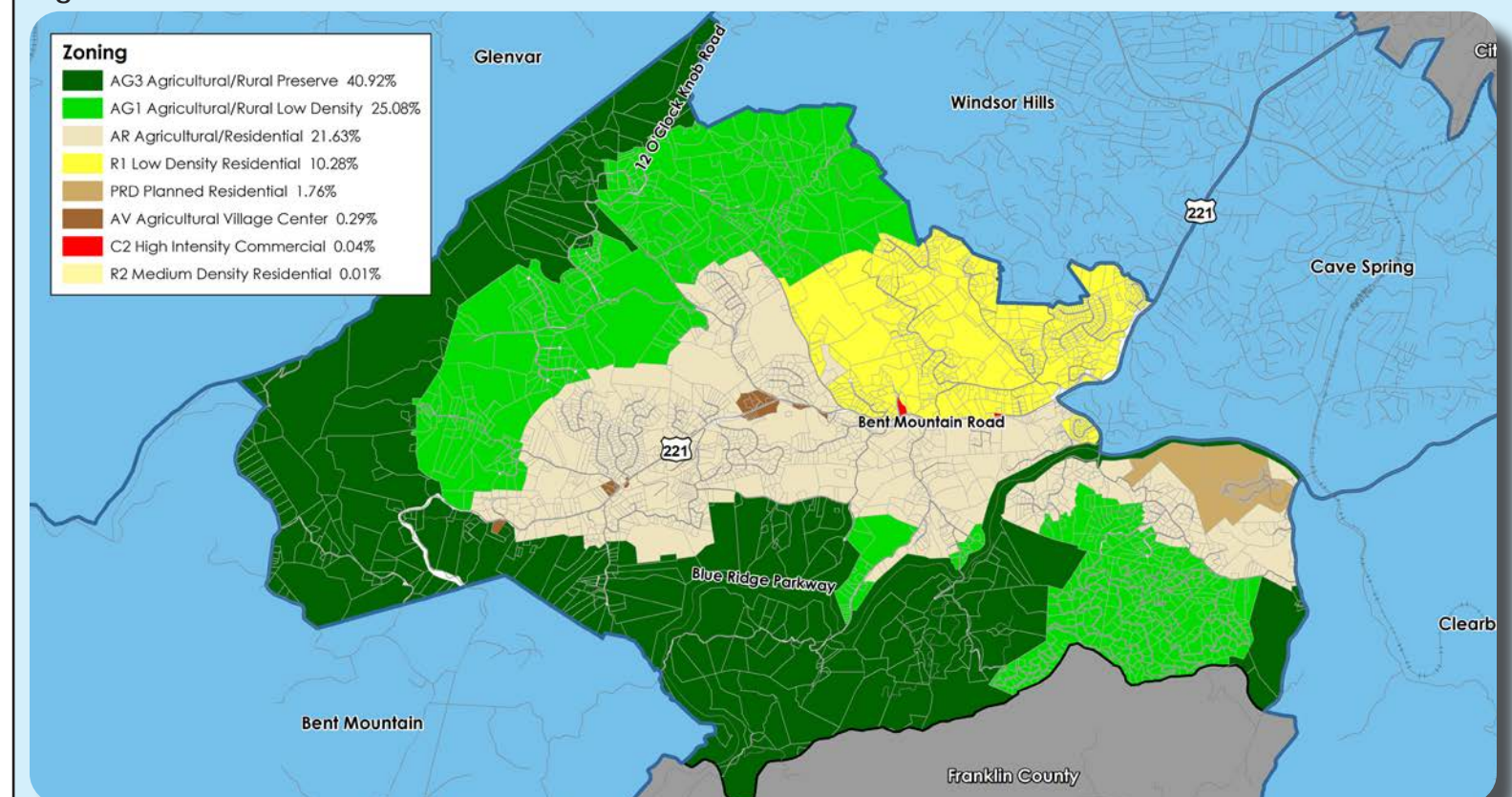
Zoning

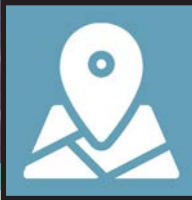
The majority of land (87%) in Back Creek is zoned agriculturally. Residential districts cover 12% of the planning area, while less than 1% is zoned for commercial uses.

The AG-3 Agricultural/Rural Preserve district and the AG-1 Agricultural/Rural Low-density district consist of land primarily used as farmland, woodlands, and widely scattered residential development located within the rural service area. The AR Agricultural/Residential district is generally characterized by very low density residential and institutional uses mixed with smaller parcels that have historically contained agricultural uses, forest land and open space outside the urban service area. The AV Agricultural/Village Center district serves as the focal point for cultural and commercial activity of the rural service areas of the County.

The R-1 Low Density Residential district and R-2 Low Density Residential district are established for areas of the County within the urban service area with low and medium density residential development such as single family homes and duplexes. The Planned Residential Development (PRD) district is intended to allow greater flexibility than is generally possible under conventional zoning district regulations to allow developers to incorporate a variety of housing options as well as certain limited commercial and office uses designed to serve the inhabitants of the district.

The C-2 High Intensity Commercial district provides for a wide variety of high-intensity commercial land uses at a regional scale.





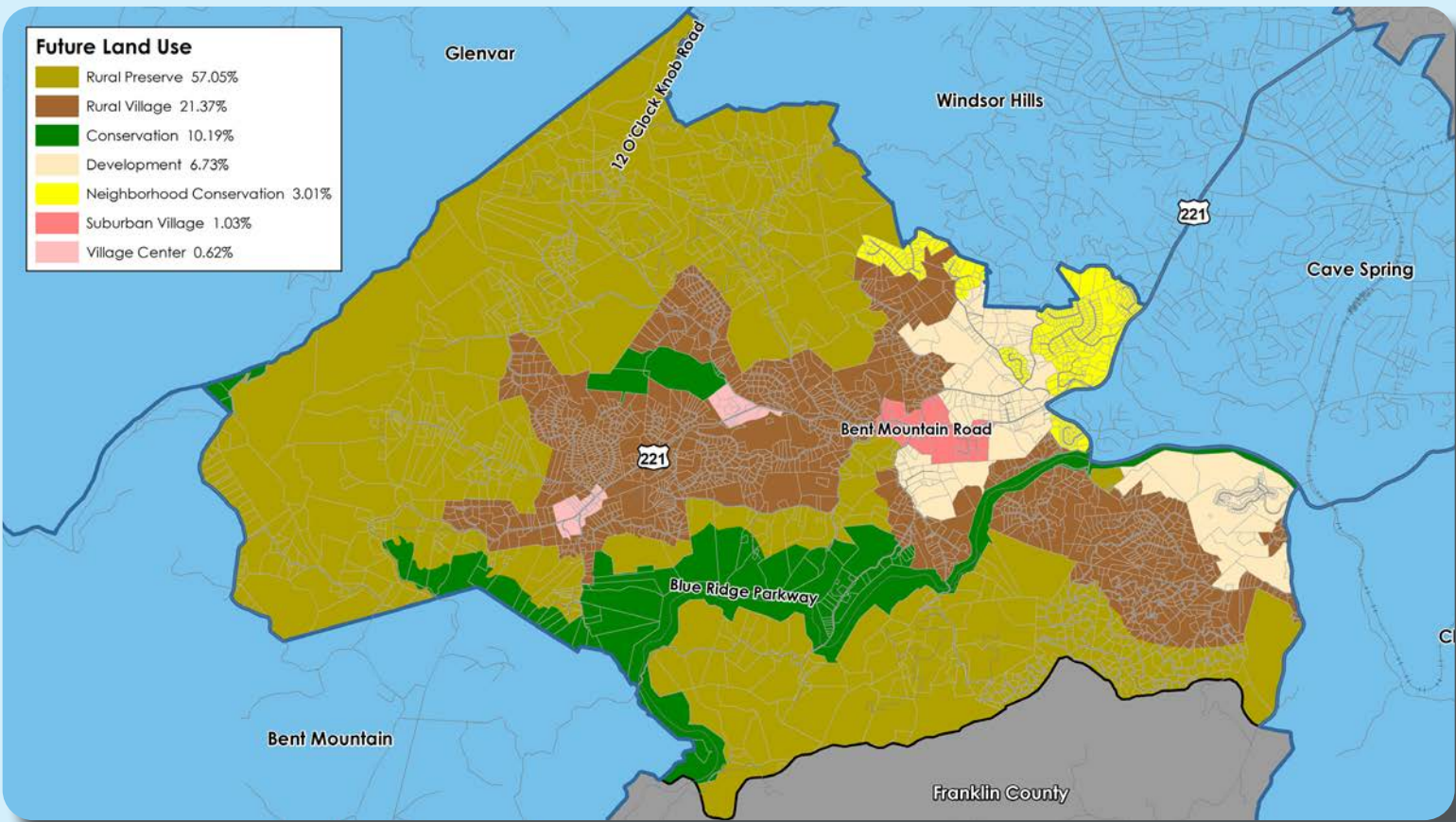
Future Land Use

The map below shows the future land use designations in the Back Creek CPA from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan.

Most of the land in Back Creek is intended to remain rural and agricultural. 78.4% of land is designated as Rural Preserve and Rural Village to protect the rural character of the area. 10.2% is designated as Conservation, which includes forest lands near the Blue Ridge Parkway and the peak of Poor Mountain. The Conservation future land use designation is intended to protect environmental, natural, or cultural features from encroaching development.

3.0% of the CPA is designated as Neighborhood Conservation future land use, which is intended to protect existing residential neighborhoods. A future land use unique to the Back Creek CPA is Suburban Village, which is 1.0% of the CPA. The Suburban Village is intended to permit single family residential development while preserving surrounding rural land uses such as agriculture or environmentally sensitive lands. It also allows some types of small-scale commercial uses, such as convenience stores. 6.7% of the land is designated as Development, which is intended to promote future residential development.

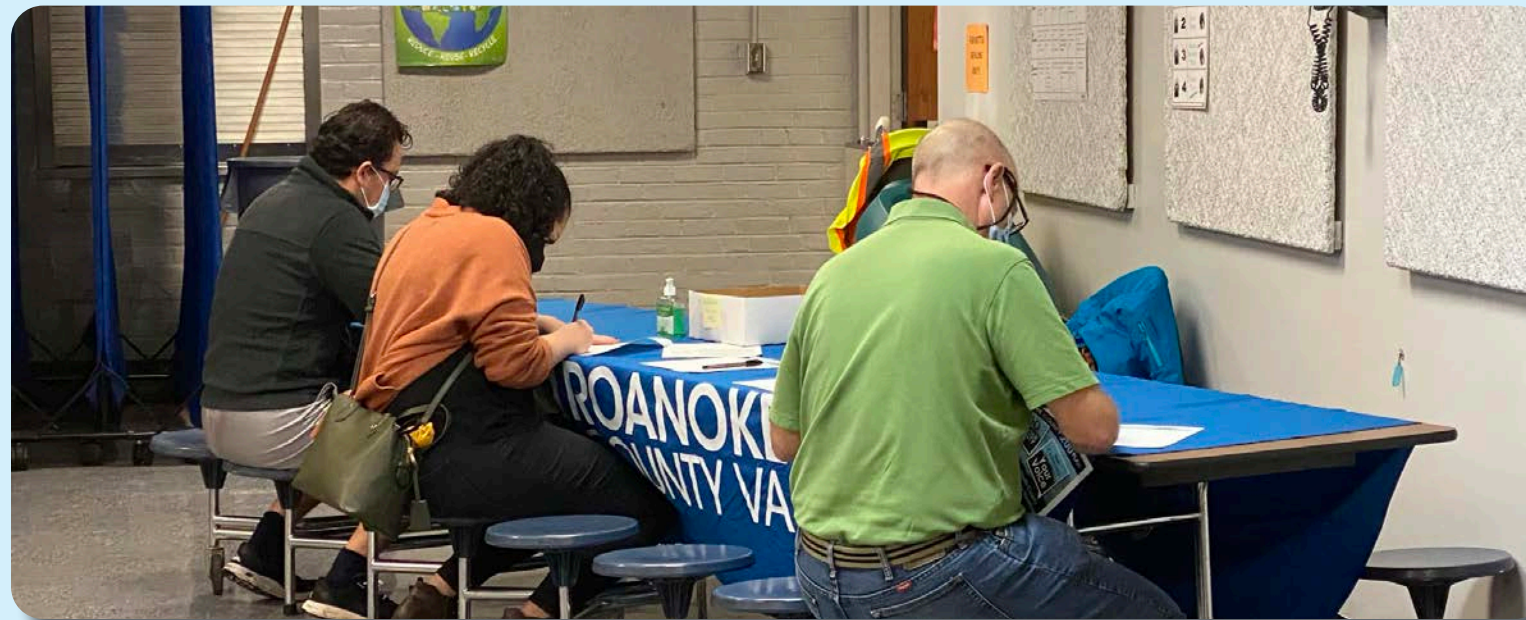
The remaining land is designated as Village Center surrounding the junction of Apple Grove Lane and Bent Mountain Road and the Back Creek Fire Station. These areas are intended to function as rural village centers that serve the local area.





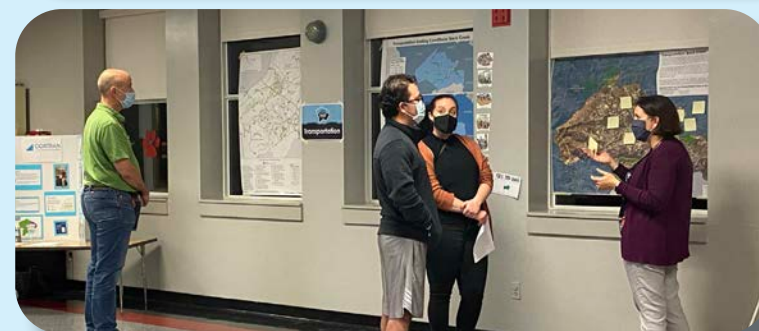
Fall 2021 Community Meetings - Existing Conditions

Twelve (12) planning meetings were held around Roanoke County in Fall 2021 to collect preliminary feedback about community issues and needs. The community meeting for the Back Creek CPA was held on October 28, 2021, at Back Creek Elementary School. There were 17 attendees. Citizens were invited to comment on Land Use, Community Facilities, Transportation, and Protection and Preservation. Comments and suggestions from citizens were collected and assembled by staff into a "Post Meeting Summary" document. A digital copy of this document can be found on the Roanoke County 200 Plan webpage.



Fall 2021 Community Input Highlights:

- a. Residents of Back Creek appreciate living in the country with the convenience of a short drive to suburban amenities.
- b. Overall, Back Creek citizens are satisfied with the community facilities and services in the area, but would like to see more options and financial support that other parts of Roanoke County have received in recent years to create a greater sense of community.
- c. Bicycles were a topic of discussion at the Back Creek meeting. Several attendees are concerned about cyclists riding on Route 221, particularly in the curvy areas where cars can come up quickly behind slower cyclists.
- d. Attendees were concerned about preservation of the landscape of Back Creek and wanted to encourage higher development standards to protect natural spaces.



Spring 2022 Open House Meetings - Draft Goals and Recommendations

Seven (7) Roanoke County 200 Plan open house planning meetings were held around Roanoke County in Spring 2022 for citizens to review draft goals and recommendation options based on the feedback received throughout the Fall 2021 community engagement. Draft goals were developed based on input that we received at the community meetings and online surveys in Fall 2021. Citizens reviewed and provided comments on the new draft goals and recommendations that will shape the draft Roanoke County 200 Plan document. The draft goals and recommendations displayed included natural and cultural resources, land use, community facilities and infrastructure, and transportation. The community meeting for the Back Creek CPA was held in conjunction with the Bent Mountain CPA on April 18, 2022, at the Bent Mountain Center. There were 29 attendees.

Spring 2022 Community Survey Highlights:

Natural and Cultural Resources:

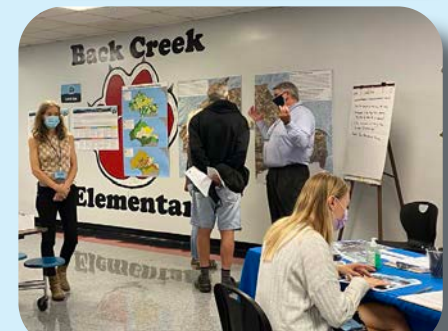
The vast majority (95%) of survey respondents and community meeting participants support recommendations to protect and improve ground, surface and stormwater resources; beautify the County's public areas, viewsheds and roadways; clean up garbage; protect steep slope areas; protect trees and forests, natural areas and wildlife habitats; as well as protection of historic and cultural resources.

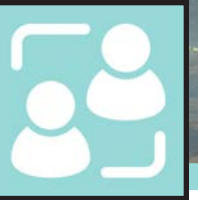
Community Facilities and Infrastructure:

- a. Parks, Recreation and Tourism: 83% of respondents support the Countywide recommendations as well as the following items pertaining to the Back Creek CPA: 1. Trail connections shown in the 2018 Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan. 2. Evaluate park, trail and blueway options along Back Creek. 3. Collaborative efforts for programming and marketing the Bent Mountain Community Center. 4. Evaluate park and trail needs. 5. Analyze potential on- and off-road alternatives for transportation and outdoor recreation. 6. County supported volunteer workdays (i.e. Clean Valley Day).
- b. General Services: 80% of respondents support recycling options and assessments of County Fire Department Facilities and the Administration Center building.
- c. Public Libraries: 89% of respondents support the Countywide library system recommendations.
- d. Communications and Information Technology: 91% of respondents support expansion and improvement of broadband and cell phone access.
- e. Public Safety: 97% of respondents support Countywide public safety recommendations.

Land Use:

92% of respondents support the activity centers as shown on the Activity Center Map, while 3% indicated interest in additional activity centers in Back Creek. 81% of respondents support the proposed changes to the Future Land Use Map.





Winter 2023 Community Meetings - Draft Plan Reveal

Six (6) Roanoke County 200 Plan open house planning meetings were held around Roanoke County in Winter 2023 for citizens to review the Draft Roanoke County 200 Plan Countywide Summary Document and Draft Community Planning Area Documents based on the feedback received throughout the community engagement process. Citizens reviewed and provided comments on the draft Roanoke County 200 Plan documents. The community meeting for the Back Creek CPA was held in conjunction with the Bent Mountain CPA on March 13, 2023, at the Bent Mountain Center. There were 91 attendees.

In general, the comments provided by residents were concerned with the following:

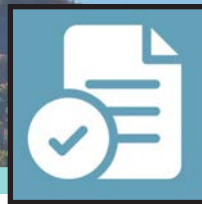
- a. Unsafe conditions on Route 221.
- b. Vandalism on abandoned buildings.

These issues and concerns are addressed by a recommendation in the Back Creek CPA Summary Document. This recommendation is:

- a. Initiate a Route 221/Bent Mountain Road Multimodal Safety Study to determine what kind of improvements could be made to reduce crashes and improve safety for all users in collaboration with VDOT.

In addition to the Draft Plan reveal meetings, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors held public hearings on the Roanoke County 200 Plan. Information on these hearings is contained in the main document of the Roanoke County 200 Plan.





Natural & Cultural Resources

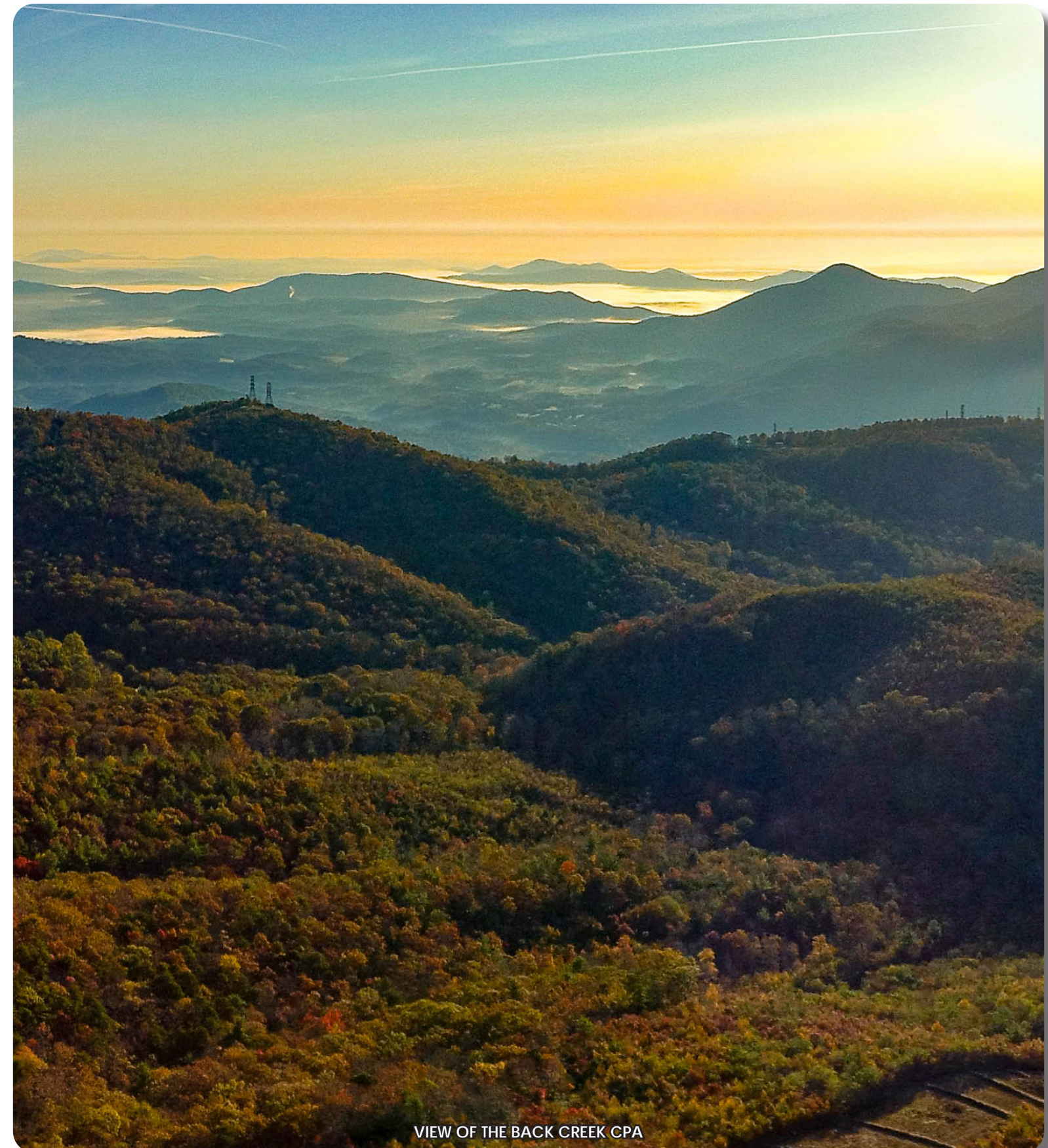
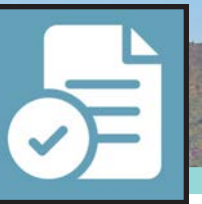
Topography/Viewsheds
Hydrology/Floodplains
Water Quality/Pollution Prevention
Vegetation/Natural Areas
Historic & Cultural Resources

Recommendations

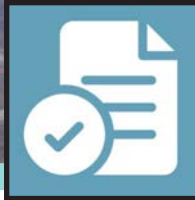
1. Protect and improve the quality of water in our streams, creeks and rivers.
2. **Coordinate with State agencies regarding floodplain risks and prevention.**
3. Reduce quantity and improve quality of stormwater.
4. Protect and prevent risks to surface waterways, reservoirs, underground aquifers and drinking water wells.
5. Beautify County roadways and public areas.
6. Protect viewsheds from the ridges and from the valleys.
7. Clean up and prevent litter and illegal dumping.
8. Protect steep slope areas.
9. Protect trees and forests and increase tree canopy.
10. Protect natural areas and wildlife habitats.
11. Coordinate with State agencies regarding historic and cultural resources, including cemeteries and archaeological sites.



BACK CREEK VALLEY OVERLOOK FROM THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



VIEW OF THE BACK CREEK CPA



RECOMMENDATIONS

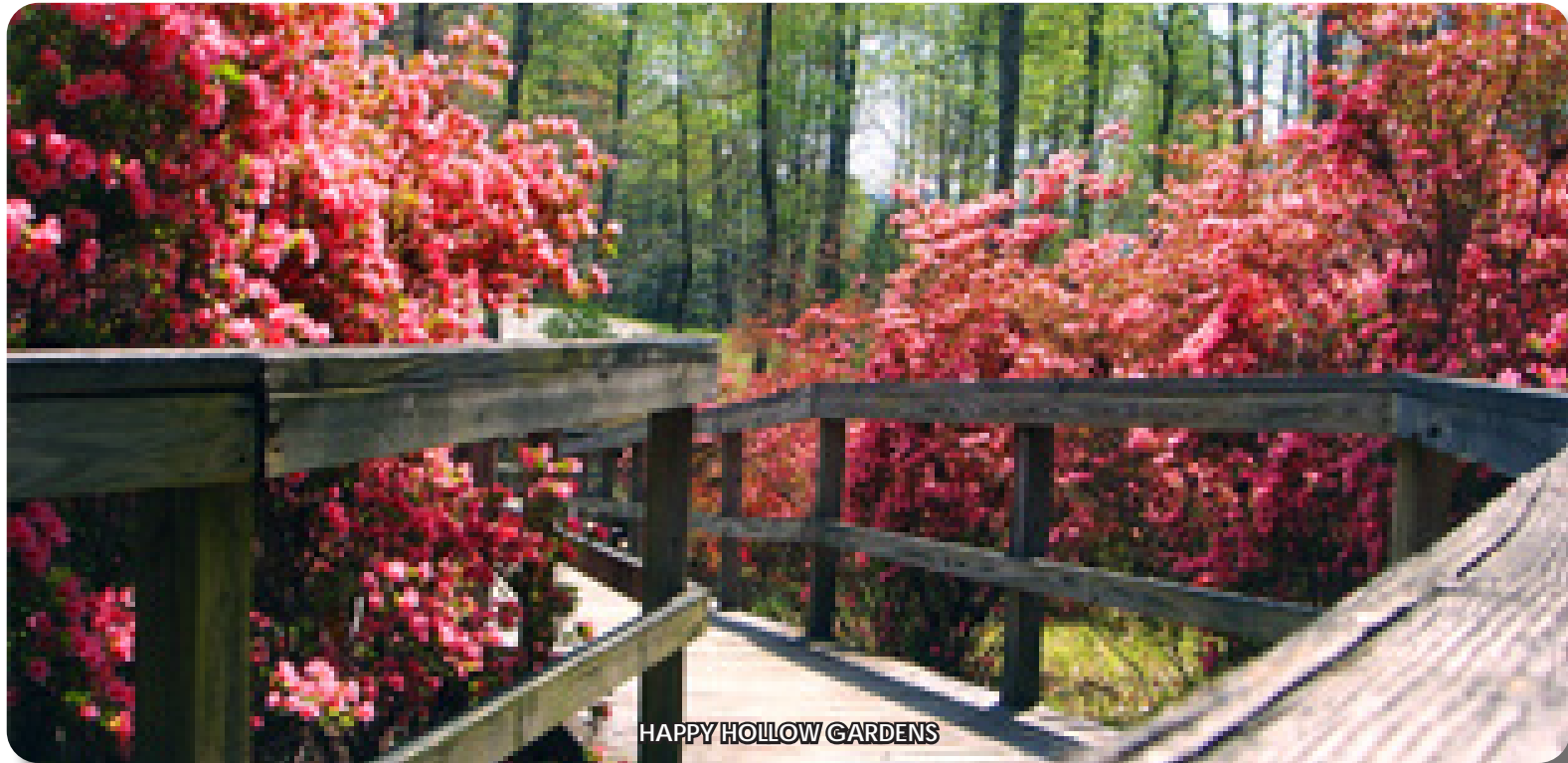


Community Facilities & Infrastructure

Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Parks, Recreation and Tourism Recommendations

1. Evaluate new park, greenway, and blueway opportunities in the community.
2. Evaluate on- and off- road connectivity options between parks, neighborhoods, and community facilities.
3. Continue coordination on regional efforts to enhance and develop outdoor recreation opportunities in our communities.
4. Update the Parks, Recreation & Tourism Master Plan.
5. Continue promotion of the Park Partners Program to encourage citizens and businesses, and organizations to adopt a park, greenway, or trails.
6. Educate citizens on park ordinance updates (i.e., park sign updates, dog-friendly parks/special events and leash laws, drones, etc.).
7. **Continue developing programs that balance community needs with available staffing resources.**
8. Make trail connections between Happy Hollow Gardens and Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve as shown in the 2018 Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan.
9. Evaluate park, greenway/trail, and blueway options along Back Creek.
10. Evaluate the needs of existing parks and trails (i.e., trail maintenance, tennis court conversion to pickleball, etc.).
11. Host volunteer workdays (i.e., Clean Valley Day).



RECOMMENDATIONS



Community Facilities & Infrastructure

General Services
Libraries
Communication & Information Technology
Public Safety

General Service Recommendations

1. Evaluate recycling program options.
2. Implement recommendations from the Roanoke County Fire Department Facilities Assessment.
3. Implement recommendations from the Roanoke County Administration Center Assessment.



Public Libraries Recommendations

1. Improve services and continue enhancing facilities.
2. Evaluate programming needs and wants based on a variety of data and customer feedback.
3. Implement responsive, community focused program that serves people of all ages and backgrounds.
4. Ensure timely delivery of all circulating materials.
5. Raise level of engagement with the community, and increase awareness about library services and programs.



Communication & Information Technology Recommendations

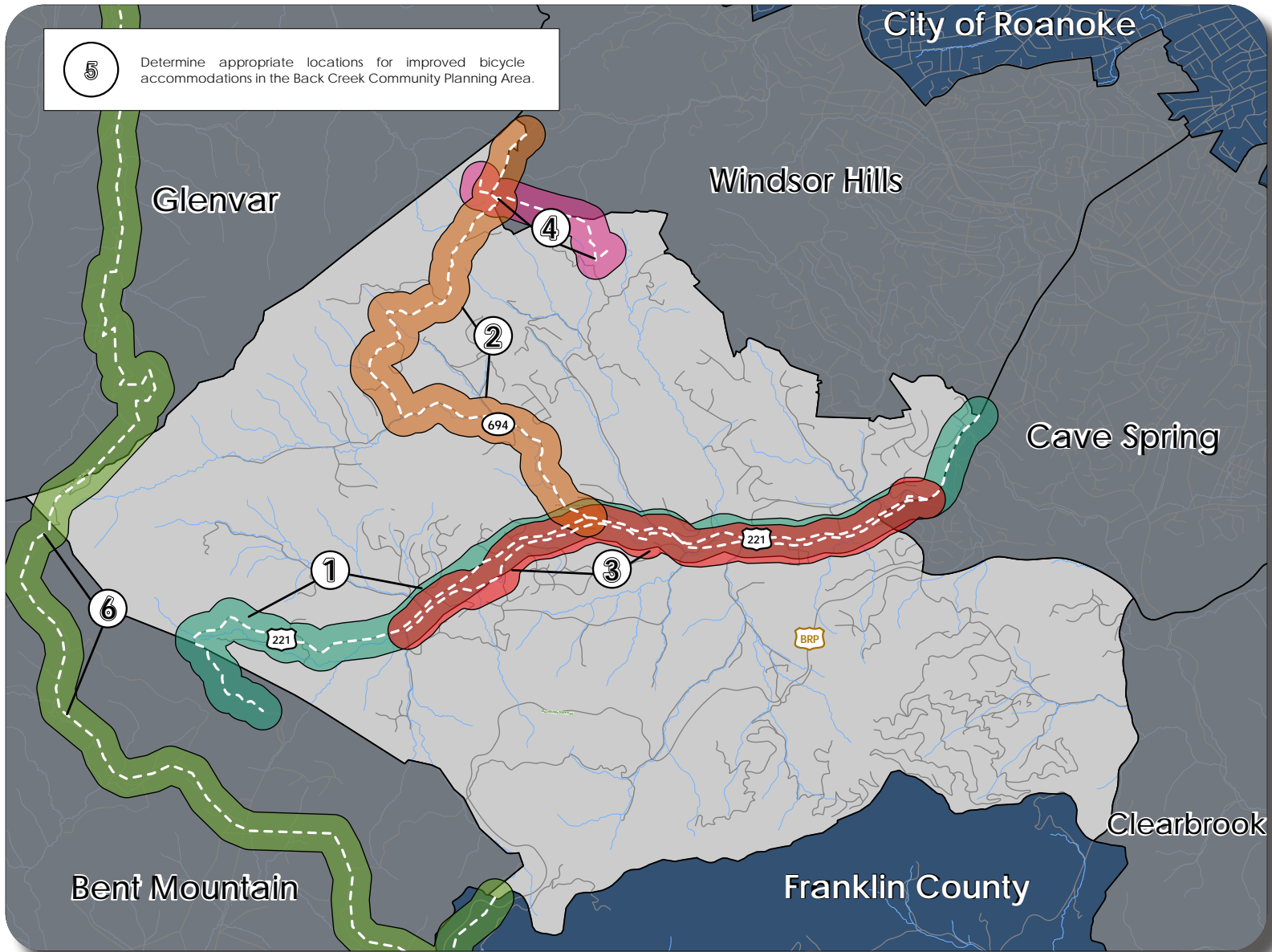
1. Explore opportunities to extend broadband service with universal availability and access to high-speed Internet in unserved and underserved areas.
2. Explore alternative broadband and cell phone service providers for choice and competition.
3. Explore more public-private partnerships to implement more stages of Roanoke County's Rural Broadband Initiative to bring high-speed Internet to homes without broadband access.
4. Explore providing improved cell phone service in unserved and underserved areas.



Public Safety Recommendations

1. **Provide the efficient delivery of public safety services with minimal response times.**
2. **Enhance and maintain public safety staffing.**
3. Enhance and maintain facilities and equipment.
4. Provide a high-level of citizen engagement and educational opportunities.



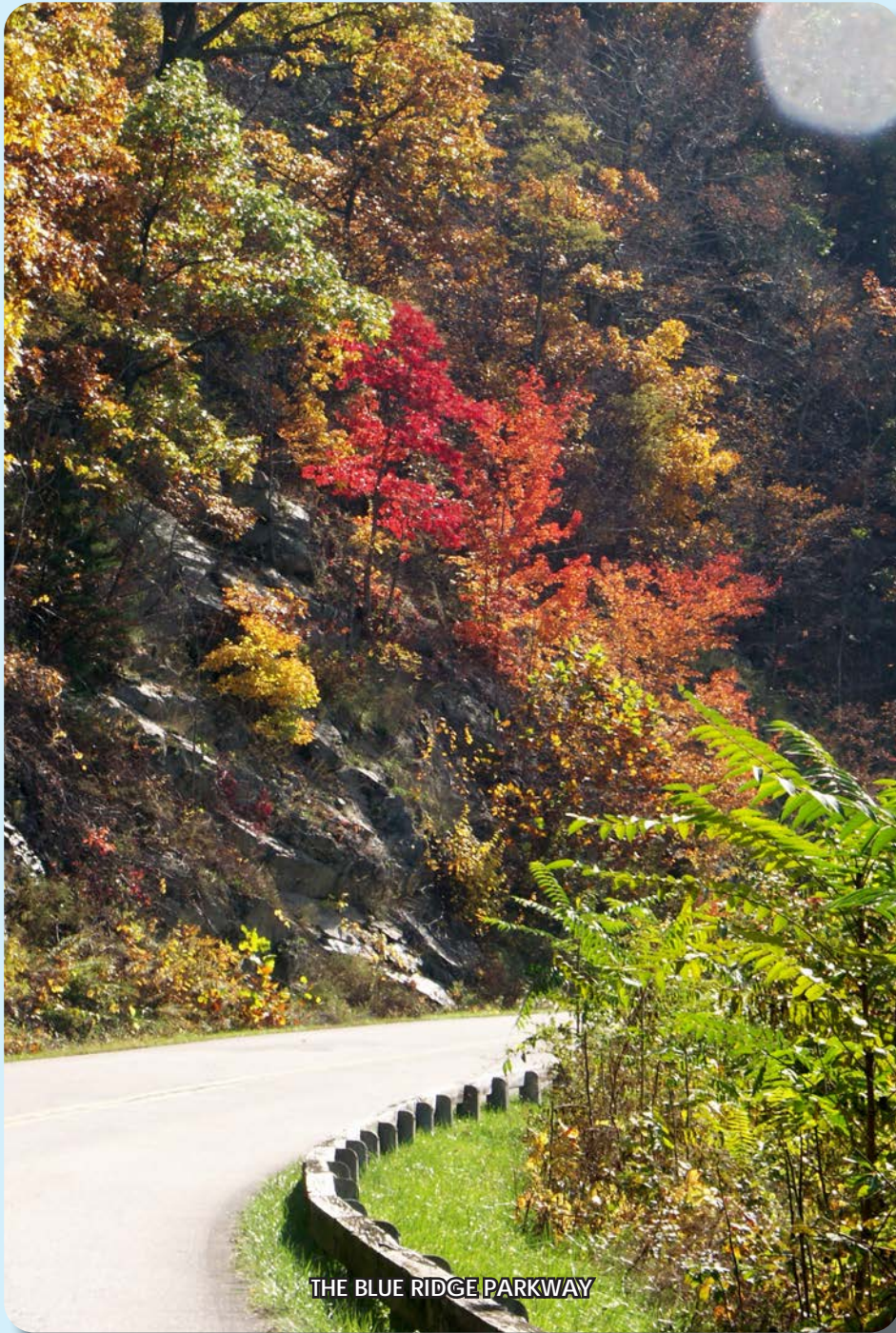


Transportation

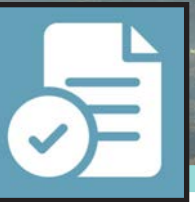
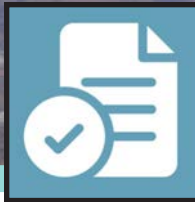
Roads
Transit
Greenways/Trails
Bicycle & Pedestrian Accommodations

Recommendations

- **Priority transportation projects:**
 1. Initiate a Route 221/Bent Mountain Road Multimodal Safety Study to determine what kind of improvements could be made to reduce crashes and improve safety for all users in collaboration with VDOT.
 2. Determine appropriate safety improvements for Twelve O'Clock Knob Road in collaboration with VDOT.
- **Other transportation projects:**
 3. Evaluate locations for the Back Creek Greenway between Sunnycrest Road and Apple Grove Lane.
 4. Evaluate connecting Happy Hollow Gardens and the Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve trails with the Long Ridge Trail.
 5. Determine appropriate locations for improved bicycle accommodations in the Back Creek Community Planning Area.
 6. Consider identifying potential alignment(s) for the Perimeter Trail to connect the Roanoke River Greenway near Dixie Caverns along Poor Mountain Road to the Blue Ridge Parkway on Bent Mountain.



THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



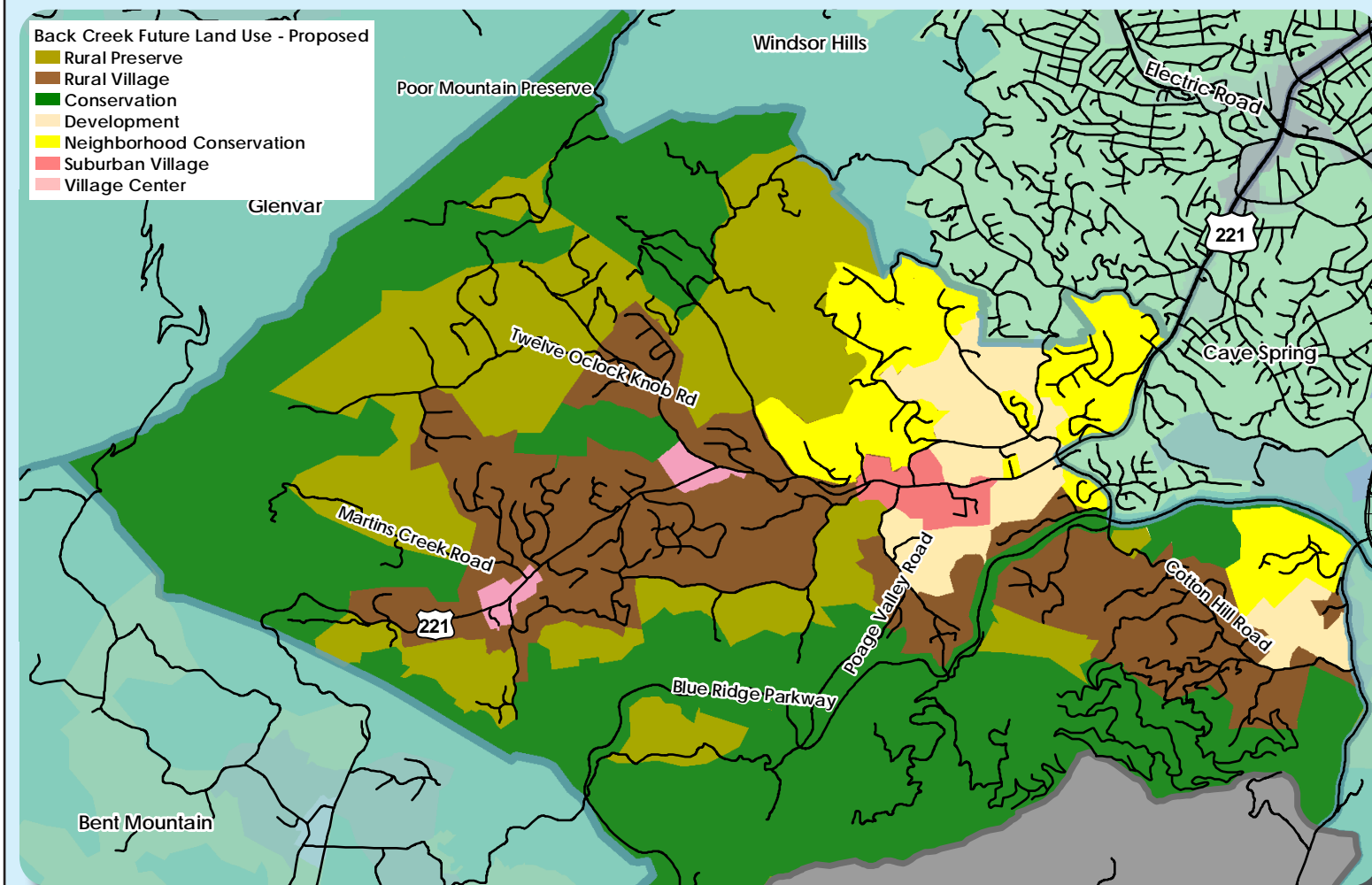
Land Use

Future Land Use
Rural Center

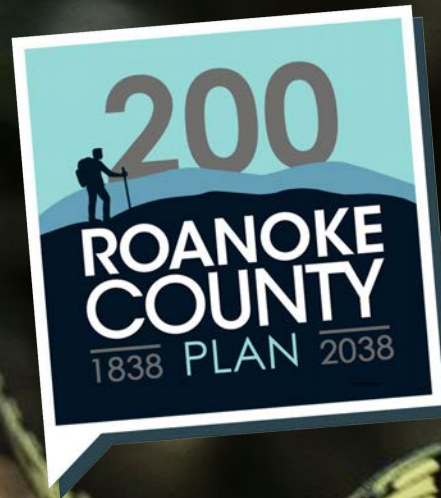
Residents supported the six (6) proposed changes to the Future Land Use Map in the Back Creek CPA during the Spring 2022 open house and on the accompanying survey. Three (3) of these changes were from Rural Preserve to Conservation due to steep slopes greater than 33% grade. Two (2) of these changes were from Development and Rural Village to Neighborhood Conservation to protect existing residential neighborhoods. The remaining proposed change was from Village Center to Rural Village due to the floodplain in the area. A few residents suggested that an activity center be developed in the Back Creek area.

Recommendations:

1. Amend the Future Land Use Map as shown in the map below to preserve the rural character of Back Creek.
2. Develop a Rural Center Plan in the Back Creek area around the the Bent Mountain/Twelve O'Clock Knob Road intersection.



POAGES MILL PROPERTY



www.RoanokeCountyVA.gov/200Plan

BACK CREEK

Roanoke County 200 Plan
2024 - 2038



Back Creek Community Planning Area

September 24, 2024