PUBLIC SAFETY & COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Ensuring a Safe Community & a Town that Works for You

GOAL
Promote a safe community by providing the highest quality of public safety services and facilities available, with first-class equipment and well-trained personnel who are prepared for a wide variety of emergencies and services and who serve the community in a personable and effective manner. Foster an environment that encourages respect, mutual responsibility, community outreach and cooperation between public safety services and citizens.

Sustainability Goal
Provide public facilities and services that are accessible and responsive to current needs and promote the public health of the community. Protect the environment for future generations by designing new public facilities and renovating existing facilities to meet U.S. Green Building Council rating system standards to provide for efficient and cost-effective operations over the expected life of the facilities. U.S. Green Building Council’s rating system, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), provides building owners a framework for implementing green building design, construction, and maintenance.

Citizen Involvement
Citizens can become involved by attending open houses and volunteering with the Blacksburg Volunteer Fire Department and Volunteer Rescue Squad. Citizens are encouraged to participate in the Blacksburg Citizens Institute and Citizens Police Academy to learn more about Town operations.

OVERVIEW
One of the primary concerns of a Town government is the safety of its citizens. The threat of crime, fire, medical emergencies, and natural or man-made disasters calls for emphasis on the facilities and services that provide protection for citizens and their property. Providing suitable, accessible community facilities and services is a principal function of local government and one that affects the quality of life of every citizen. The effectiveness of local government is measured to a great extent by its ability to plan for and finance these facilities adequately.

The Town provides police services for Town residents. The Town and Montgomery County share libraries, fire, and rescue services. The County provides human services, a court system and schools for all County citizens, including Blacksburg residents. Town residents pay both Town and County real estate property taxes, which help fund all of the above amenities and services.

Accordingly, public safety departments within the Town have established mutual aid agreements with Virginia Tech, Montgomery County, and other surrounding jurisdictions to provide a wide range of assistance from large-scale disasters to an individual health emergency (911) call. Blacksburg’s emergency services maintain good response times that exceed their targets. Response times will benefit from the recently formed New River Valley Emergency Communications Regional Authority between the Towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, Montgomery County, and Virginia Tech. A new center is slated for construction in Christiansburg.
As the community continues to grow, the future types of services requested by citizens will change. Public safety personnel must seek opportunities to obtain a wide variety of training in order to maintain high levels of service. As the community grows, maintaining or improving response times will become more difficult without proper facility and equipment improvements. As existing community facilities age, maintenance becomes more important, and renovations may be required to maintain service levels that meet citizen expectations. Many existing facilities must be retrofitted to meet current building codes, accessibility requirements, and other recommended standards. As demands for services increase, the Town must continue communications and regional cooperation between the Blacksburg Police, Fire, and Rescue Squads, their respective Virginia Tech departments, and regional colleagues. Examples of these collaborative partnerships include the regional firing range located in Montgomery County and the proposed regional 911 center.

**TOWN-OWNED FACILITIES**

The Town-owned Municipal Building, Blacksburg Motor Company Building, Blacksburg Police Department, and the County-owned Blacksburg Branch of the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library serve as an anchor for the southwestern corner of Downtown and a central location for citizens to access Town services. The 2009 conversion of the Blacksburg Motor Company Building adjacent to the existing Municipal Building on Main Street was a key priority in the Downtown Master Plan and has helped to address the Town’s long-term operational needs. This building reflects environmentally conscious building practices, having received LEED Platinum certification, which is the highest rating a building can receive through the U.S. Green Building Council’s rating system. Furthermore, the renovated building provides an attractive main entrance into the Downtown. The Municipal Building and Police Department are now slated for future renovations, with additional space for the Police Department still a long-term need to be addressed. Adequate facilities for storage and maintenance of equipment must also be provided. Upon renovation and restoration of the Alexander Black House, combined with the recently restored St. Lukes and Odd Fellows Hall, these buildings will provide additional Downtown public meeting and gathering space.

**Blacksburg Police Department**

The Blacksburg Police Department protects the life, individual liberty, and property of all people within the Town. The department maintains a positive relationship with the community and fosters a positive working environment for police employees. The Blacksburg Police Department, which has been nationally accredited since 1993, is a full-service law enforcement agency that serves all areas of the Town. The department is charged with a wide range of law enforcement functions, including crime prevention, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), protection of life and property, location of missing persons, recovery of stolen property, traffic and parking enforcement, and the apprehension of criminal suspects. The Police Department also provides the community with school resource officers, crime prevention specialists, criminal justice-certified law enforcement instructors, Neighborhood Services support, the Citizens Police Academy, Neighborhood Watch, and many other public safety education programs.

The Police Department implements a wide range of techniques to keep the community safe, such as utilizing bike patrol officers in the Downtown area and on the Huckleberry Trail, maintaining a state-certified canine unit program, which provides assistance with drug detection patrols, and
participating in the New River Regional Drug Task Force. As the greenway system continues to develop, the Blacksburg Police Department bicycle patrol program will need to expand in conjunction with the bicycle patrol programs in the Virginia Tech and Christiansburg Police Departments and the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office. There is a direct relationship between increased population and the number, frequency, and type of crimes committed and a need for additional emergency safety resources. As festival events on Town and Virginia Tech properties continue to increase, additional police and safety services at community events will be needed, which may tax the existing limited resources of public safety services. Additional coordination and planning for safety services will be needed to ensure safety during major events and on Virginia Tech home football game days.

Studies are needed to determine the impact of increasing population on police services and whether additional officers are needed to maintain accreditation, which includes safe officer-to-citizen ratios. Recruitment of qualified public safety personnel has become increasingly challenging due to training requirements and regulations. The Blacksburg Police Department seeks to maintain a high level of training and expand training opportunities for public safety personnel.

As of 2011, the Blacksburg Police Department currently operates from one station located at 200 Clay Street. This station is overcrowded with personnel and equipment, while lacking adequate space to house the K-9 unit. Some space may become available when the regional 911 center is constructed and the Town’s dispatch center’s primary duties are transferred from the Police Station to Christiansburg. However, the Blacksburg dispatch center is under consideration to become the back-up dispatch center location in case of emergencies in Christiansburg. Once the regional 911 center is operational, a space-needs feasibility study should be conducted to determine the best options for providing additional space for the Blacksburg Police Department, either on site at Clay Street or elsewhere in Town.

Blackburg Volunteer Fire Department
The Blacksburg Volunteer Fire Department protects the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and the area of Montgomery County surrounding the Town. The department provides services such as public fire education, inspections, fire prevention, fire suppression, fire investigations, and hazardous materials containment. The Fire Department operates as a volunteer organization with only two career firefighters, which poses a challenge when the department must respond to routine calls during the day when many volunteers are at work or in class. Fortunately, the Fire Department has a core group of community members with years of experience who provide a continuity of service that balances the high turnover rate of student volunteers, who generally leave after two to three years of service.

Blacksburg operates three fire stations. Station 1 is located on Progress Street and is a shared fire and rescue facility. Station 1 is overcrowded with personnel and equipment, and its accessibility is difficult due to narrow roads, traffic congestion, and lack of parking. Station 2 is located across from the Hethwood Shopping Center. The recently completed Station 3 is located on Hubbard Street and also serves as the department’s administrative headquarters. Station 3 helps provide faster response times to the south end of Blacksburg, including the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, Virginia Tech Montgomery Executive Airport, and the Ellett Valley.
**Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad**

The mission of the Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad is to provide professional and responsive emergency medical services that enable residents and visitors to enjoy a high quality of life within a planned diverse community. The Rescue Squad has been providing emergency medical and technical rescue services to the Town of Blacksburg and a large portion of Montgomery County since 1950. The Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad is a Virginia non-profit organization separate from the Town, yet services and coordination with the Town are seamless. Not only does the Rescue Squad respond to emergency calls in Town and on the Virginia Tech campus, but it conducts educational demonstrations at local schools and provides support at local sporting events, including Virginia Tech football games. The Rescue Squad maintains state-of-the-art rescue equipment that includes advanced life support ambulances, first response vehicles, heavy duty rescue trucks, a boat with dive rescue equipment, a wilderness search and rescue team with trailer, and a bike team with trailer. As the sole entity tasked with all aspects of technical rescue, the Rescue Squad has established a Heavy Tactical Rescue team that specializes in high angle, confined space, vertical, trench, emergency police operations, and heavy vehicle extrication operations. The Rescue Squad consistently meets the national standards for response times and encourages membership certification.

The Rescue Squad faces many of the same challenges as the Volunteer Fire Department. The Rescue Squad and Fire Department share Station 1, which is well beyond capacity. The growing population on the north end of Town is placing increased demands on fire and rescue services. Additional fire and rescue station(s) on the north end of Town will be needed in the future to meet these increased demands. Additionally, the Rescue Squad must respond to routine calls during the day when many volunteers are at work or in class. To address this issue, the Rescue Squad actively recruits members with daytime availability, such as students, retirees, etc. Fortunately, the Rescue Squad also has a core group of community members with years of experience who provide a continuity of service that balances the high turnover rate of student volunteers.

**Town of Blacksburg Comprehensive Emergency Management Strategic Plan**

The Town’s goal is to have a Comprehensive Emergency Management Strategic Plan that prepares for, responds to, recovers from, and mitigates natural and man-made emergencies and disasters. This comprehensive plan would enhance the Town’s capabilities and capacities to prevent and reduce its vulnerability to disasters. Adopting an all-hazards approach to planning, training, and exercising for emergency response and recovery will greatly enhance the Town’s overall readiness. Completing the Town’s Comprehensive Emergency Management Strategic Plan is an exceedingly complex task, both to draft and implement, and requires coordination, cooperation, communication, and focused efforts from the entire Town and all partnering organizations.

Currently, individual Town departments, Police, Fire, Rescue, Public Works & Transit, have their own respective emergency response management plans. Additionally, the Town participates with the Local Emergency Planning Council, which is coordinated by the State-recognized Montgomery County Emergency Management Department.

Regional communication is an important part of the success of implementing the plan between the Town and its many partners, which include neighboring jurisdictions, State government, citizens, the private sector and non-profit organizations. Using existing and new technologies
will make the emergency management initiatives more efficient and effective. The Town will need to continue its ongoing efforts to provide quality planning, training, and exercise assistance to those agencies and organizations responsible for prevention and emergency response and recovery. This will ensure that the Town’s readiness and prevention capabilities are among the best in the nation.

One issue that must be taken into account in all planning efforts is the sustainability of programs and strategies. Efforts will be taken in the implementation of these strategies to ensure that they can be maintained or upgraded as necessary to reflect anticipated changes and concerns associated with the national and statewide requirements and standards.

OTHER PUBLIC FACILITIES LOCATED WITHIN TOWN

Public Schools
Although the Blacksburg public schools are an area of community focus and a gathering place for both adult and youth activities, their location and administration is under the direction of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). While the existing four elementary schools in the Blacksburg Strand of the MCPS are and should remain neighborhood based schools, the Blacksburg Middle School and Blacksburg High School are regional schools serving students from the Town of Blacksburg, the Village of Prices Fork, Merrimac, Ellett Valley, and other northern areas of the county. The new Prices Fork Elementary School was completed in fall 2011, and the new Blacksburg High School on Prices Fork Road is slated to open in fall 2013. In spring 2012, MCPS updated school districts to address the impact of new schools coming on-line and projected population trends. For more detailed information about each public school and the school districts please visit the Montgomery County Public School website at www.mcps.org.

The MCPS has existing schools no longer in use that are being surplused to Montgomery County for sale to help fund construction of new schools. This includes the old Blacksburg High School site on Patrick Henry Drive. The future development of the site will be a topic of concern to Town residents. The site is currently designated as Civic on the Future Land Use Map because of its previous use as a school. Due to the close proximity to the Blacksburg Community Center and Aquatic Center, the old Blacksburg High School site is ideal to meet a number of Town facility needs.

For information regarding the Old Blacksburg Middle School Master Plan and site redevelopment, please refer to the Jobs & Housing Chapter and the Land Use Chapter.

Whether designing a new school or renovating an existing school, the school community facilities and recreational amenities need to be planned and operated to seamlessly integrate into the community. The joint-use of all public facilities, particularly schools, with other compatible civic uses, especially parks and recreation, will maximize the use and cost efficiency of public education facilities in the community. The future of the schools in Blacksburg is critical to the continued strength of the community. When planning for any changes to the school system, the future needs of the entire community must be considered.
Public Libraries
Citizens have access to the largest library in the state on the Virginia Tech campus. Additionally, all citizens have access to the Blacksburg Branch of the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library and to the regional resources of the library system. The Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library system is funded through joint contributions from the counties and towns that participate in the regional partnership. It is desired to keep the Blacksburg Branch in a central location.

Court System & Social Services
Due to Blacksburg’s classification as a Town, all district court proceedings and social services are referred to Montgomery County. The Montgomery General District Court did operate a local office, the Blacksburg Division, within the Town’s Municipal Building. In 2012, upon completion of the new Montgomery County Courthouse, the Blacksburg Court Division ceased operation. This will allow for additional office space in the Municipal Building for Town services. The relocation of court services poses new operational challenges to the Blacksburg Police Department as they account for traveling to Christiansburg for court proceedings at the new Montgomery County Courthouse. Travel to Christiansburg could potentially impact the number of hours department personnel are outside the Town’s limits instead of proactively working with citizens in the community.

Health Care
Quality health care is provided within Town limits at the Montgomery Regional Hospital and at various urgent care and other private facilities. While located within Town limits, these facilities are privately owned and operated. Health care is one key component to a sustainable and healthy community, especially as the Town’s population ages and has a greater need for services. Please refer to the Transportation Chapter and the Jobs & Housing Chapter for additional information on other key components to sustainable community health.

FUTURE PUBLIC FACILITIES

Future Town Properties
Local government must provide public community facilities that are responsive to citizens’ desires. The selection and acquisition of Town property is a delicate process that is often time-sensitive. The Town is poised to take advantage of opportunities as each property is evaluated upon its individual merits to ensure that the property fulfills the multitude of Town needs at the time of purchase and in the future. Prior to any land acquisition, the Town Manager and staff shall conduct a site selection study to ensure that the property adheres to the goals and objectives of the Blacksburg Comprehensive Plan. Projects requiring land acquisitions are normally funded through the Capital Improvement Plan. Land acquisition ideally will be followed by construction of the facility or intended use and public use of the property within a reasonable time. Pending approval of the site selection by Town Council, negotiations are initiated for land acquisition. Appropriate state-mandated comprehensive plan reviews, as stated in the Virginia State Code §15.2-2232, are accomplished prior to completion of the property purchase.
**Design of New Public Facilities**

Existing public facilities are sources of pride in Blacksburg. New facilities should be held to the same standard. At the same time, however, they should also be cost-effective and serve the long-term needs of the Town. The construction of new facilities should be consistent with projected needs and costs. Recurring costs, notably the funds required to maintain and staff the buildings, should also be accounted for in the final “price tag” of a facility. Plans for new facilities should include opportunities for future additions and expansions. New facilities should be capable of containing multiple Town departments and agencies and offices from other government entities, where appropriate. Finally, new facilities should demonstrate environmentally-friendly design practices with respect to sustainable sites, indoor environmental quality, energy efficiency, and the efficient use of materials and resources as prescribed by the U.S. Green Building Council to provide examples for the community to replicate in construction of privately-owned buildings. *For more detailed information regarding public facility and service standards, please refer to the Blacksburg Administrative Manual.*

**COMMUNITY FACILITIES MAP**

All of the existing facilities previously discussed, regardless of ownership, are shown on the following Community Facilities map. The location of existing facilities also helps illustrate where future facilities will be needed to meet increasing demands. The map can be used as an aid to site future public facilities.
PUBLIC SAFETY & COMMUNITY FACILITIES
Objectives and Policies

Please refer to the Transportation Chapter — Road Network Objectives and Action Strategies regarding pedestrian safety and traffic-calming measures.

PS&CF.1. Create an environment that encourages respect, mutual responsibility, community outreach, and cooperation between public safety officials and citizens through citizen education programs, safety education programs, mediation and conflict resolution services, and other outreach opportunities. Continue citizen involvement opportunities for community interaction with public safety personnel to foster positive relationships.

PS&CF.2. Provide citizens with the highest quality public safety services and facilities by maintaining high levels of training opportunities for Police, Fire, and Rescue personnel. Establish public safety levels of service and consider these levels when evaluating the impact of future land uses on Town service demands and costs.

PS&CF.3. Provide resources for ensuring the highest quality police, fire and rescue services, and maintain the Police Department’s National Accreditation Status, including the recommended national ratio of officers-to-citizens.
- Provide police, fire and rescue with adequate building space.

PS&CF.4. Expand emergency response capabilities through collaboration with Virginia Tech, Montgomery County, and other surrounding jurisdictions to ensure quality public safety services by:
- Working with regional governments to construct a collaborative training center for Fire, Rescue, and Police personnel and a centralized 911 dispatch center.
- Maintaining an alternate Town emergency operations center and coordinating with the regional emergency response teams, assisting where appropriate with the New River Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Continually monitoring emergency response times to ensure quality service delivery.

PS&CF.5. Enhance the Town’s all-hazards disaster preparedness, mitigation and response by completing the Town’s Comprehensive Emergency Management Strategic Plan, which focuses on improving communications, providing training opportunities, and working regionally.

PS&CF.6. Provide public facilities that serve as examples of the desired development quality in Town.
- The design of new public facilities and the renovation of existing facilities will meet U.S. Green Building Council rating system standards and meet current best management practices that provide for efficient and cost-effective operations over the expected life of the facilities.
- New public facilities should emphasize efficient service delivery systems to meet existing and anticipated community needs.
- All Town facilities must meet ADA requirements and should be equipped with proper emergency medical supplies such as Automated External Defibrillators (AED).

PS&CF.7. Continue to ensure that building needs assessments and cost evaluations are thoroughly explored prior to construction of any new public facility or renovation of an existing public facility and that the final public facility is compatible with other public facilities surrounding it. Where feasible, integrate the development of new public facilities as components of regional programs or public/private partnerships.

PS&CF.8. Maintain and fully utilize existing Town facilities according to their level of service and in a manner consistent with the community’s high level of expectation.
- Establish a program to routinely review the adequacy and needs of existing public facilities and financial cost for upgrades and improvements through the Town’s Capital Improvement Program and annual budget process.
- Conduct an examination of potential uses of public property prior to disposal by the Town.
- Prioritize and provide emergency power capability to critical Town facilities for temporary and extended power outages to ensure continuity of services to Town citizens.
- Ensure the coordination of development with adequate and accessible existing and future public facilities.

PS&CF.9. Work with Montgomery County Boards and Agencies, the Town of Christiansburg, Virginia Tech, and other public and private agencies to plan for future needs, develop shared facilities, and provide joint-use of existing facilities.
- Work cooperatively with Virginia Tech to plan for potential university growth and development.
- Work with Montgomery County to keep community resources on existing school properties.