



## **YESTERDAY**

In 1798, William Black gave 38 acres of his land along the old Cherokee and Shawnee trail to establish the village of Blacksburg. The plan arranged the village in a four-by-four grid, creating sixteen blocks. Community buildings were placed strategically throughout the grid. This layout became known as the “Sixteen Squares” and is the foundation on which Blacksburg continues to grow.

Blacksburg also has a long history as a place of higher education. The 1854 preparatory school, the Olin and Preston Institute, became one of Virginia's land-grant colleges, Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, in 1872, and ultimately developed into Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Commonly referred to today as Virginia Tech, the state's largest research university “offers 215 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and manages a research portfolio of nearly \$400 million” (University Overview, 2011-12). The presence of a nationally top-ranked university has shaped how the Town has developed.

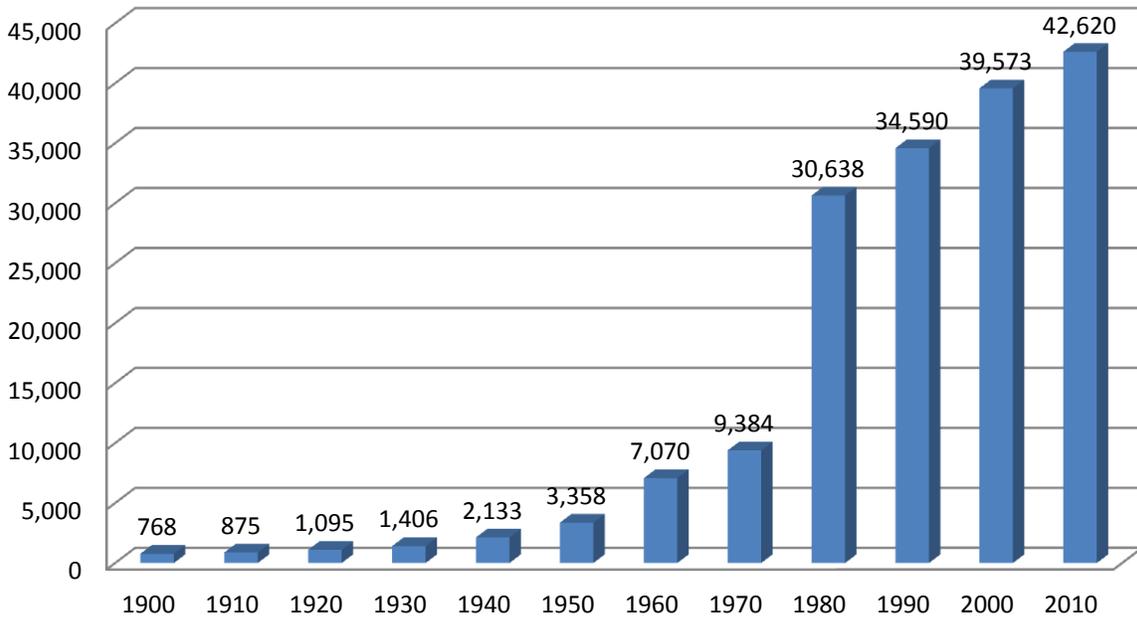
## **TODAY**

The Town of Blacksburg has grown to its present day size of 19.7 square miles and is one of the largest towns in Virginia. According to the 2010 Census, Blacksburg's population includes 42,620 residents, and the daytime population expands to approximately 50,000 people. The 2010 Census population for the Town includes residents, plus Virginia Tech students living on-campus and off-campus. A current population estimate for Blacksburg is 43,204 citizens with approximately 1.4% growth over four years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates).

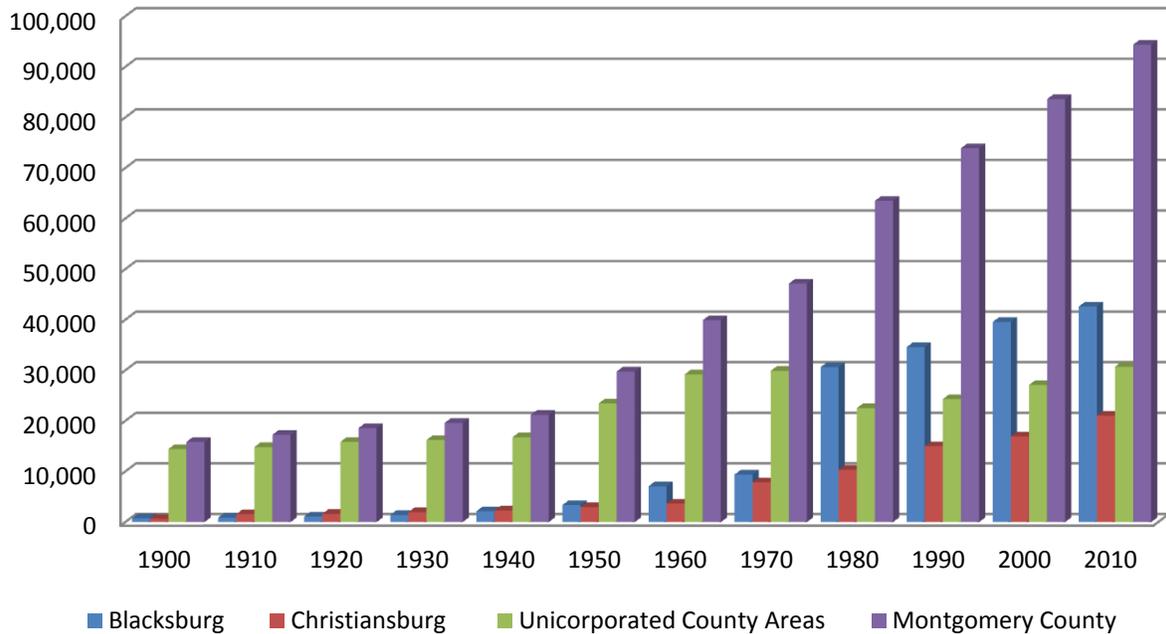
As a university town, the growth of Blacksburg has corresponded to the growth of Virginia Tech. As of 2012, Virginia Tech has a total enrollment of nearly 31,000 undergraduate and graduate students. There are approximately 28,000 students studying at the 2,600-acre campus located within the Town of Blacksburg. Approximately 9,000 students reside in the campus dorms, with the remaining 19,000 students living primarily in the Town of Blacksburg. Many other students live outside Town limits and commute from the Town of Christiansburg, Montgomery County and surrounding areas in the New River Valley and Roanoke Valley.

The two graphs on the next page detail how the Town and surrounding Montgomery County population has grown. Significant population increases occurred in the 1970s when the Town's boundary lines were adjusted and student enrollment at Virginia Tech rapidly increased. In the subsequent four decades, the Town has experienced steady population growth. Student enrollment at Virginia Tech is expected to increase significantly in the next five to ten years. One of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan is to manage the future development and population growth in a manner consistent with the Town's character and vision. Further information is detailed in the Urban Development Areas found in the *Future Land Use Chapter* and the *Blacksburg Administrative Manual*.

## Population Growth in Blacksburg 2010 Census



## Population Growth in Montgomery County 2010 Census



## **TOMORROW**

There are many emerging population trends and shifts that will impact the nation, the state, and the Town. Demographic trends include the aging population, changes from the traditional single-family household to increasing numbers of single-person households, and changes to ethnic and minority compositions. These emerging trends are documented in the 2010 Census and will likely be more pronounced in the next ten to twenty years based upon the 2020 and 2030 Census results. The 2020 Census results will confirm specific demographic trends in Blacksburg that can be used in 2021 when the 25-year midpoint review of *Blacksburg 2046* is scheduled. Part of each five-year update of the plan is to identify the planning implications that need to be addressed to achieve the Town's vision. Below is an overview of demographic trends and correlated planning implications. *Complete Census information can be found at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) with specific 2010 Census results for the Town found in the Blacksburg Administrative Manual.*

## **DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS**

The face of America as a whole is changing. These changes will affect housing, transportation, social services, schools, and the economy, all of which have land use implications that will challenge localities in the future. The six trends detailed on the following pages are based on national demographic trends for the United States. These trends may not always apply directly to the Town or impact the Town in the same manner as other localities. Because Blacksburg is home to a major university, the Town of Blacksburg has a disproportionate number of young adults between the ages of 19-24, with a median age of 22. The Town has a different racial mix than many other localities in southwest Virginia due to undergraduate and international student populations living in Town. According to the 2010 US Census, the Town remains predominantly white, with a smaller than average number of blacks as compared to state and national averages. Asians now comprise the largest minority population in Town. *Further demographic details can be found in the Blacksburg Administrative Manual.*

The Town's demographic mix influences the Town's land use patterns and Town decision making to meet the needs of residents. Detailed below are six demographic trends to watch in upcoming US Census periods. By monitoring these six emerging trends at the local and national levels, the Town can be better prepared to implement the vision of the Comprehensive Plan.

- A. America is aging and the composition of households is changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:
- By 2030, one in 5 Americans will be over the age of 65
  - By 2035, the US birth rate is estimated to drop from 1% to .25%
  - By 2050, life expectancy is estimated to increase to 82.6 years, up from 76.0 years in 1993
  - By 2025, the number of single person households is estimated to equal the number of family households
  - By 2050, it is estimated the overwhelming majority of households will be single person households

*Source: US Census Bureau*

- B. Population loss in rural areas is a national trend as people move to more urbanized localities. The rural population is declining due to natural decrease and young adults leaving for economic opportunities elsewhere.
- While this trend does not directly affect Blacksburg and Montgomery County, it could affect the New River Valley. Pulaski County's population declined

between 2000 and 2010. It is a trend to monitor in the future to ensure the New River Valley remains a competitive economic region with a stable workforce.

*Source: US Census*

C. The traditional American Family dynamics are changing:

- Marriage rates among young adults ages 25-34 are declining
- The percentage of children born out of wedlock is increasing

1960	5.3%
1970	10.7%
1980	18.4%
1990	28.0%
2000	23.2%
2009	41.0%

*Source: National Center for Health Studies*

D. Multi-generational households are increasing and reversing the decades long trend of shrinking household size:

- Boomerang children are high school and college students who return to live at home after graduation due to unemployment or underemployment. They often have less purchasing power to rent or purchase their own homes.
- Aging family members who are no longer able to care for themselves or afford the high cost of health care are moving in with family members.

*Source: Ad Age Magazine, US Census*

E. The racial composition of Americans is changing. The diversity amongst minorities and the number of minorities comprising the total population is increasing. This is not due to immigration, but is due to differential birth rates among races. In the future, it is estimated that there will no longer be a majority race in the United States.

- By 2035, it is estimated that minorities will comprise half of all children in the US
- By 2050, it is estimated that the nation's population of children is expected to be 62% minorities
- By 2050, it is predicted the US total population will look very different than it does today:
  - Percentage of Whites expected to decline from 64% to 46%
  - Percentage of Hispanics expected to increase from 15% to 30%
  - Percentage of Asians expected to increase to 10%

*Source: US Census*

F. The workforce is changing:

- There are expected shortages in the workforce as the baby boom generation retires in the next decade.
- Percentage of population in the "working ages" of 18-64 is projected to decline from 63% in 2008 to 57 % in 2050.
- The working-age population is projected to become more diverse as the population becomes more diverse and will be comprised of 50% minorities by 2039.

*Source: Brookings Institution, US Census*

- G. There are growing generational changes in society, with different preferences in lifestyles, jobs, housing, technology and communication by age group. There has been considerable research identifying and classifying these different generational groups, and one such classification is provided below. While there are differences in all aspects of life for each generation, the impact of the growing and pronounced technology and communication gaps between old and young generations will have a tremendous effect on how communities function.

**Greatest Generation                    1901-1924**

- 2012: 88 years or older
- Experienced Great Depression and fought in World War II
- Saw growth in industry and manufacturing with phones and radios
- Parents of Baby Boomers

**Silent/Chosen Generation            1923-1945**

- 2012: 66 to 87 years old
- Postwar generation grew up during suburbanization, emergence of “traditional American family” and single-family homes with televisions
- Era of highways, suburbs, and new construction not downtown

**Baby Boom Generation                1946-1964**

- 2012: 47 to 65 years old
- Lived through Vietnam
- Are in today’s leadership positions but retiring soon
- Rise of information technology and the knowledge economy
- Parents of Generation Y

**Generation X                            1965-1981**

- 2012: 30 to 46 years old
- Moving into leadership and decision-making positions
- Traditional family begins to change, rising divorce rates, women joining workforce, emergence of daycare centers
- Emergence of creative class
- Inception of home computers and cell phones

**Generation Y                            1982-1995**

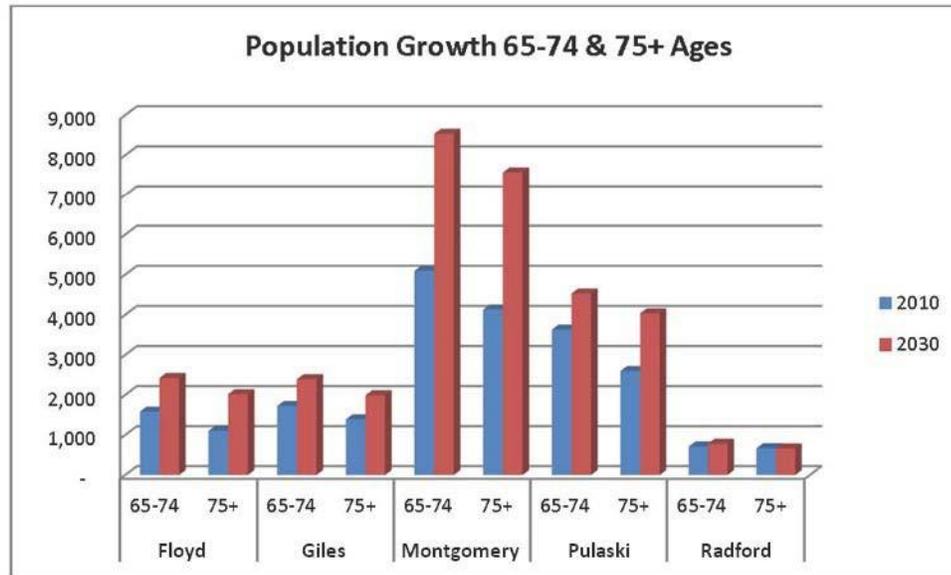
- 2012: 16 to 29 years old
- Emerging workforce and young professionals and students in high school and college today
- Tech savvy growing up with instant communication, email, texting, instant message, etc.
- Generation Y is a larger population group than Generation X, with the potential to impact society and culture similar to the Baby Boom Generation
- Often prefer the urban lifestyle; place matters, not just the job

**Generation Z                      1996-Today**

- 2012: 15 years and younger today
- Smaller population group due to declining national birth rates
- Living through the Great Recession, 9/11, Katrina and Sandy
- Tech savvy at an early age: smart phones, iPads, MP3 players
- Rise of social media: Facebook, Twitter, Skype
- Children of youngest baby boomers, plus Gen X and Y

**PLANNING IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACKSBURG**

1. The Town’s population is diversifying age-wise. The Town of Blacksburg has historically been a university town with undergraduate students comprising the majority of the population. The number of permanent residents has been increasing in Town over the past decades and is expected to continue to increase. Blacksburg has been recognized nationally as a good place to raise children. University towns are popular places for young professional graduates who desire urban lifestyles with easy access to cultural amenities such as restaurants and commercial services. The University has indicated a desire to increase its graduate research programs. In 2015, the University announced its intention to grow undergraduate student enrollment significantly in the next decade. Due to changes in technology, there is the ability to teach more classes online. These population shifts may transition the Town towards a community with more equal representation of all age groups, which, in turn, will drive housing, transportation, and retail demands.
2. The Town’s retirement population, included in Montgomery County’s population, is increasing, as detailed in the next chart. Not only are there an increasing number of retirees already living in Town, there are more people retiring to Blacksburg. In general, university towns are popular places to retire, and Blacksburg has been nationally ranked as such a place.
  - The growing retiree population could spark additional needs for educational programs and outreach to this group.
  - Housing demands for people to age in place will influence market demands for new housing styles with universal access, preferably located within walking distance of services.
  - Transit demands will increase as more people are no longer able to drive themselves. To better serve the community, Blacksburg Transit will need to expand from a student-focused route system to a complete residential neighborhood route system with connections to the rest of the New River Valley and the Roanoke Valley.
  - The economic tax base could be restricted as citizens living on fixed incomes seek property tax relief. This could affect the County and the Town’s ability to raise the necessary capital to maintain and expand utilities and infrastructure.



3. Blacksburg’s current housing stock will need to diversify and expand to meet the new market demands of the changing household dynamics. This raises the following questions:

- If children are getting married at a later date and/or having children out of wedlock, what are the new housing market demands?
- Will single-family households with children want to live or be able to afford to purchase a traditional family home located in the suburbs?
- Will preferences for renting or purchasing a home change?
- Will preferences for smaller houses emerge?
- Will there be a balance of available housing stock and housing demands, or will there be an imbalance in existing inventory?

The undergraduate student market has driven much of the housing market in Blacksburg, often to the exclusion of other market segments. With the shift in housing styles, demand and location, there are secondary associated impacts on the planning and usage of local schools, daycares, and parks that must be addressed.

4. Economic Development strategies will need to be expanded to address the retention of a talented workforce. This raises the following questions:

- What is needed to keep talented graduates from local high schools in the area and encourage them to pursue work in the skilled trades and service industries?
- What is needed to retain college graduates in the area instead of relocating to another state or country?
- What is needed to encourage and support entrepreneurial ventures?

5. Development strategies will need to be expanded to address the needs of a more racial and ethnically diverse Town. As the nation’s racial mix becomes more diverse, the Town’s population will continue to diversify, including the general student body at Virginia Tech. The international population, in particular the Asian community, has an increasing presence. Increasing diversity will bring unique cultural values as well as economic and housing preferences that will reshape the community.

6. Communication styles will need to be expanded and changed to reach all generations. Information about the Town of Blacksburg needs to be marketed and communicated in different manners including public meetings, direct mail, newspaper, the internet, social media, interactive webinars, and by future technologies.
7. The character of the Town is a strong recruitment tool. The Town's quality of life is one of its greatest assets and is a strong commodity that needs to be capitalized upon to support economic development and the desired quality of life in Town. The Town of Blacksburg needs to carefully monitor and market this commodity as a recruiting tool, especially during the next 10-20 years as society, workplace values, and attitudes change and generations transition in and out of the workforce. Many young professionals first select places they wish to live and then find job opportunities that are increasingly mobile.

## **BLACKSBURG'S VISION OF 2046**

Blacksburg is much more than population statistics, historical dates, and demographic data. Blacksburg is an attractive and thriving community renowned for quality of life, natural beauty, civic pride, and educational leadership. The citizens of Blacksburg respect and maintain certain key community values to achieve a quality of life so one can "live, work, shop and play" within the Town of Blacksburg. The following values of Blacksburg are reflected throughout the Comprehensive Plan:

- A "whole life community" with varied housing opportunities within neighborhoods, employment opportunities, a good public education system, medical services, and retail opportunities.
- An intellectual and culturally stimulating environment with ethnic and international diversity that is centered in the heart of Blacksburg's Downtown but connected to the world through telecommunications.
- Economic development with an emphasis on Downtown, mixed-use developments, and high-tech industrial opportunities throughout Town.
- Environmental stewardship that includes resource protection of natural surroundings, open space, watersheds, and viewsheds, made possible in part by alternative transportation options.
- Open government, with strong citizen involvement and open meetings of governing bodies and advisory committees.
- A sense of regionalism and connections to Virginia Tech, Montgomery County, the New River Valley, and beyond.

These community values have resulted in national recognition. In 2011, Blacksburg was named by *Bloomberg Businessweek* as one of the best places in the United States to raise children. In 2012, *Livability.com* named Blacksburg as one of Top 10 U.S. College Towns to live. Blacksburg has also been ranked among the nation's best places to live by *Blue Ridge Country Magazine*, *50 Best Small Southern Towns*, and *Retirement Places Rated*. *Outside Magazine* ranked Blacksburg a top-10 "dream town" for outdoor enthusiasts because of its proximity to the Appalachian Trail and the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Regionally, the Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Radford Metropolitan Statistical Area has been named to *Forbe's* 2012 list of ten "Best Small Cities for Jobs."

These values illustrate what is important to the community today and represent aspirations for the Town tomorrow. There are emerging demographic trends that are impacting and changing American society. These trends of tomorrow are detailed further on the following pages, as well as the land use planning implications of each trend for Blacksburg. The challenge for the Town of Blacksburg as the year 2046 approaches is how to monitor, prepare, and work best with the changing society and technological advances to achieve the Blacksburg that is envisioned for the future.

### **ACHIEVING BLACKSBURG'S VISION OF 2046**

The Town is trying to meet the needs of citizens today and plan for a sustainable community tomorrow. In the context of changing demographics, economy, and technology, Blacksburg faces the same challenges as other communities across America. These challenges include addressing development and redevelopment, providing infrastructure, protecting the environment, keeping historical resources, and growing cultural amenities. All of these elements are in the chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. Balancing the competing priorities in the Comprehensive Plan is key to achieving the quality of life desired by citizens in this 50-year vision.

In the chapters that follow, detailed descriptions of the various aspects of the Town of Blacksburg are presented, from roads to buildings to green spaces and parks, from historical treasures to affordable housing, from water and sewer lines to the latest in information technology. Many issues have ramifications outside the Town's borders. Communication and cooperation between the Town and adjoining jurisdictions, especially Virginia Tech, Montgomery County and the Town of Christiansburg, are important aspects of governmental and other civic activities. This Comprehensive Plan includes goals for the various aspects of Town government and activity, including chapter-specific goals, objectives, and policies that support the Town's mission and values.

Also supporting the Town's mission is the *Blacksburg Administrative Manual*. This separate document, adopted in conjunction with *Blacksburg 2046*, supports the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. The *Blacksburg Administrative Manual* contains valuable Town statistics, historical data, public participation results and plan implementation.