

PUBLIC SAFETY & COMMUNITY FACILITIES

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, equitable, 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 Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system standards to provide for lower-impact, resource-efficient and cost-effective operations over the expected life of the facilities.

Citizen Involvement

Meaningful citizen involvement is key to the Town's ethic of governance. Citizens can become involved by attending open houses and volunteering with the Blacksburg Volunteer Fire Department and Volunteer Rescue Squad. Citizens are also encouraged to participate in Citizens Police Academy and attend Planning Commission and Town Council public hearings when related topics are being discussed.

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.

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 NRV Dispatch 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.



Blacksburg Motor Company Building, Certified LEED Platinum

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. The Alexander Black House and St. Lukes and Odd Fellows Hall 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, and the Citizens Police Academy while also supporting several educational advancement opportunities for the Town's young adults.

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 Town's population and framework continue to grow, the Blacksburg Police Department's bicycle patrol program and staffing will need to expand to accommodate these changes. There is a direct relationship between increased population and the number, frequency, and type of crimes committed as well as 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 public safety services will be needed to ensure a stable environment during major events and on Virginia Tech home football game days.

Studies are needed to determine the impact of the increasing citizen and student population on the quality of police services that are provided to the Town citizens. These studies should also be used to determine the optimal officer-to-citizen ratios. Recruitment of qualified public safety personnel has become increasingly challenging due to training requirements and regulations. The Blacksburg Police Department always seeks to maintain a high level of professionalism which is achieved through advanced training opportunities for public safety personnel.

The Blacksburg Police Department strives to build positive and lasting relationships with the community. The Department will continue to maintain strong working relationships with the members of the Virginia Tech and Christiansburg Police Departments as well as the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office in order to provide the best possible public services to its citizens.



Blacksburg Police Department

As of 2018, the Blacksburg Police Department currently operates from one station located at 200 Clay Street. This station is overcrowded with personnel and equipment, also lacking adequate space to house the K-9 unit. The Town is currently exploring the potential for a new Police Station on the site of the Old Blacksburg Middle School through a Public Private Education Act (PPEA) which can be used as an efficient way to construct public facilities.

Blacksburg 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 Fire Department: Station 3

Blacksburg operates three fire stations. Station 1 is located on Progress Street. The Rescue Squad has moved to a new location which resolved the previous overcrowding and parking issues. Fire is operating out of the whole building which has some issues related to age including the need for a new roof, air conditioning system and permanent repair of cracks in masonry. Station 2 is located across from the Hethwood Shopping Center and provides coverage West of Route 460. 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 and technical rescue 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 100% volunteer organization and a Virginia nonprofit 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 also responds regionally to provide unique resources and capabilities when requested by other agencies and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad also conducts community outreach in the form of educational demonstrations at local schools and provides support to community events such as local sporting events, town festivals, celebrations, and Virginia Tech football games. The Rescue Squad maintains state-of-the-art rescue equipment that includes advanced life support ambulances, first response vehicles, specialty technical rescue vehicles, and technical rescue trailers to facilitate full spectrum special operations. As the sole entity tasked with all aspects of technical rescue, the Rescue Squad has established a Special Operations Division that specializes in technical rescue operations such as high angle, confined

space, trench, emergency police operations, vehicle extrication, swift water, dive, basic structure collapse, wilderness search and rescue, and cave rescue operations. The Rescue Squad consistently meets or exceeds the nationally accepted standards for response times, membership certification, and professional conduct.



Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad opened 2016

The Rescue Squad faces many of the same challenges as it moves into the future. The growing population continues to place increased demands on rescue services. A steady increase in requests for service not only demand an increase in available members but also in the professional standards upheld by the volunteer membership. The standard of care and service continues to evolve with the public's expectations of the rescue squad. In order to meet these increased demands Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad has developed a strategic plan to address 24/7 ambulance and technical rescue service coverage, unity of effort within the agency, incident command capabilities to effectively manage larger incidents and multiple scenes, and effective community engagement and outreach. Recruitment of new members to replace those who are no longer able to serve as well as the retention of existing member who have a wealth of experience and institutional knowledge remains a top priority for the agency. Outside of the Rescue Squad, the agency looks for opportunities to improve interoperability with other emergency services organizations within Montgomery County and beyond. Although Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad provides a number of unique services serving the community most effectively requires integration, interoperability, and cooperation with many different entities. The Rescue Squad will continue to meet the challenges of the future head on with its dedication to serve the community.

Town of Blacksburg Comprehensive Emergency Management Strategic Plan

The Town's goal is to have a Comprehensive Emergency Management Strategic (CEMS) Plan that prepares for, responds to, recovers from, and mitigates natural and man-made emergencies and disasters. This CEMS 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 Blacksburg 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. In 2012, MCPS updated school districts to address the impact of new schools coming on-line and projected population trends. The MCPS admissions policy does require residency within the school district with a limited exception procedure. For more detailed information about each public school and the school districts please visit the Montgomery County Public Schools website at www.mcps.org.

In 2013, Montgomery County surplused the Old Blacksburg High School on Patrick Henry Drive. 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. The future development of the site is a topic of interest to community residents, particularly with regard to uses on the property and compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. The Town will work with the new owners to determine if public space can be incorporated into future development on the site.

In 2011, Montgomery County surplused the Old Blacksburg Middle School on South Main Street.

The property was sold in 2016 and planning efforts are underway to redevelop the site. *For information regarding site redevelopment, please refer to 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 operates out of the Montgomery County Courthouse, located in Downtown Christiansburg.

Health Care

Access to quality health care is a key component to a sustainable and healthy community for residents of all ages. The two primary care providers in the region are LewisGale and Carilion. Like many other issues, the best way to build a reliable health care network is at the regional network. The region is actively participating in health care education through programs at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, the new Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Radford University, and New River Community College.

PLANNING FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES

Meeting Future Needs

Local government must provide public community facilities that meet the needs of a growing population and are also responsive to the types of facilities that citizens desires.

Typically, sites are identified and acquired well in advance of the need and construction of the public facilities. However, when unpredicted public needs develop or unexpected opportunities arise, the Town must be nimble in pursuing these. For example, the Town acquired an additional parcel in the Downtown adjacent to the Progress Street Parking Lot when it became available for sale. Seizing this unexpected opportunity has allowed for the future planning of a parking garage on this enlarged footprint.

Properties owned and operated for public use should be identified as such on the Town's Future Land Use Map and compliant with Virginia State Code §15.2-2232. Projects are funded through

the Capital Improvement Plan. The design of new public facilities should reflect the identity of the Town and its commitment to sustainability.

Design of New Public Facilities

Citizens value public buildings and these facilities are often important elements in placemaking. Public buildings reflect the character of the community and the time in which they were built. New facilities should not only meet their functional need but contribute to the fabric of the community. The community is committed to sustainability and this commitment should be reflected in construction of new public buildings and retrofitting of existing public facilities. 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 such as the practices prescribed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

In order to remain good stewards of public funding, design of spaces within new buildings should be flexible in order to easily adapt to varied future needs. In planning for new facilities, the Town must be mindful of the upfront construction costs as well as ongoing costs including building maintenance.

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

- 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.
- PS&CF.1.1. Continue citizen involvement opportunities for community interaction with public safety personnel to foster positive relationships.
 - PS&CF.1.2. Utilize programs such as Be Safe Blacksburg to foster this environment.
- 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.
- PS&CF.2.1. 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.
- PS&CF.3.1. 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:
- PS&CF.4.1. 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.
 - PS&CF.4.2. 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.
- PS&CF.6.1. 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.
 - PS&CF.6.2. New public facilities should emphasize efficient service delivery systems to meet existing and anticipated community needs.
 - PS&CF.6.3. 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.

PS&CF.8.1. 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.

PS&CF.8.2. Conduct an examination of potential uses of public property prior to disposal by the Town.

PS&CF.8.3. Prioritize and provide emergency power capability to critical Town facilities for temporary and extended power outages to ensure continuity of services to Town citizens.

PS&CF.8.4. 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.

PS&CF.9.1. Work cooperatively with Virginia Tech to plan for potential university growth and development.

PS&CF.9.2. Work with Montgomery County to keep community resources on existing school properties.

PS&CF.10. Expand on the Climate Action Plan with completion of a Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Resiliency Plan.