A North Star For Developers & Investors

2045

Shenandoah

COUNTY

A Future Together

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Your Role In Our County's Future

Quick Reference

This handbook provides everything you need to succeed as a developer or investor in Shenandoah County. Here's what you'll find:

Overview and County Introduction (pgs 4–5):
Understand where we are located and why this handbook helps you.

Who Uses the Plan (pgs 6–7):
Discover the role developers and investors play in implementing the Plan.

Land Use Checklist (pgs 8–9):
A decision-making checklist to help evaluate land use requests.

Maximizing Land Use (pgs 10–11):
Guidance on maximizing land productivity while preserving rural character.

Future Land Use Map (pgs 12–13):
A visual representation of planned land uses over the next 20 years.

Infrastructure and Services (pgs 14–15):
Understand how development must address infrastructure and service needs.

Collaboration with Staff and Community (pgs 16–17):
Advice on collaboration with county staff and community members.

General Layout and Vision of the Plan (pgs 18–19):
Explore the overall framework of the plan and its vision statement.

Tools to Use the Plan (pgs 20–21):
Access the resources needed to utilize the plan effectively.

History of the County (pgs 22–23):
Learn about Shenandoah County's historical foundation.

Towns, Villages, and Hamlets (pgs 24–25):
Information on what and where these places are and their planned futures.

Six Big Ideas (pgs 26–27):
An outline of the county's six foundational concepts.

Development and Investment Impact (pgs 28–33):
How development and investment is guided through the comprehensive plan.

Key Terms and Contacts (pgs 34–35):
A glossary of important terms and a directory of key contacts.

Why This Handbook Matters To You

We understand our mutual need: we both want revenue-productive projects.

For you, that means maximizing your investment—whether it's upfront returns from sales or steady income from long-term rentals. For the County, it means generating a reliable tax base over time and ensuring that developments support local needs without creating unnecessary burdens.

So how can we both walk away happy?

This handbook is the answer.

By following the guidance in these pages, you'll not only save time and money, but also build projects that align with Shenandoah County's goals, gain quicker approvals, and earn strong community support. Together, we can create developments that are both profitable and valued.

Why This Handbook Matters:
- Save Time: Avoid unnecessary back-and-forths by understanding exactly what the County expects.
- Save Money: Streamline approvals and focus resources where they matter.
- Build Smarter: Identify areas and approaches that align with the County's plans for investment and infrastructure.
- Gain Support: Develop projects that meet community needs and are welcomed with open arms.

**Why It's Worth Aligning with the Plan:**
By aligning your project with the Comprehensive Plan, you can expect:
1. Faster approval processes since your project will meet the County's established priorities and zoning regulations.
2. Stronger community support, as developments that reflect the County's vision are more likely to receive backing from local residents and officials.
3. Increased long-term value as projects in designated areas are supported by infrastructure improvements and strategic planning.
4. Access to incentives such as grants, infrastructure support, and partnerships for developments that contribute to the County's key goals.

DREAMERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME IN SHENANDOAH COUNTY

No matter what your dream is, we're here to help make it a reality. Shenandoah County spans 508.1 square miles, with six towns along Route 11 like a string of pearls, and villages and hamlets scattered like jewels. This plan reaffirms our commitment to preserving the county's rural charm while supporting strategic growth with our towns, villages, and hamlets. The County provides critical services like public safety, education, libraries, and recreation. Our Comprehensive Plan highlights the importance of collaboration and regional partnerships, ensuring a future where growth and preservation go hand in hand for future prosperity.

Where is Shenandoah County?
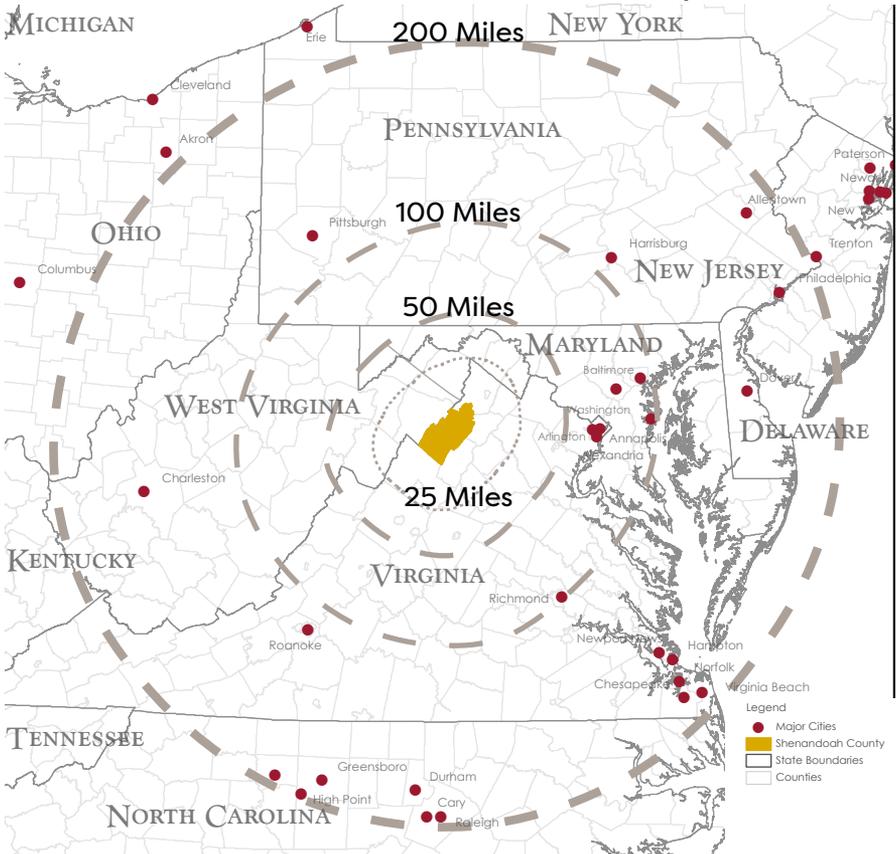
Who will use the plan?

In order for the Plan to be a success, we need to build A Future Together with a variety of stakeholders that helped to create and inform the plan.

Elected Officials

Elected leaders are key to upholding the plan as they must commit to the plan's goals and objectives. It's vital they adopt and consistently apply the plan in land use and policy decisions, leading the way in realizing the vision to ensure responsible, community-focused growth.

Departments & Agencies

Department and agency leaders should know the plan well, aligning their strategies and actions with its recommendations. Their involvement in systematic planning and area-specific initiatives is crucial for the plan's implementation.

Conservation Organizations

Conservation groups are crucial for the plan's environmental goals, especially in strategies involving our precious water and land resources. The plan helps guide where their work is needed and provides recommended actions to support their ongoing work in the community.

Community Organizations

Community organizations should actively engage in strategies and advocate for the plan's recommendations. Their involvement is crucial in implementing actions as part of community-led initiatives which helps to ensure community-driven progress.

The Public

Residents of Shenandoah County are essential to the success of Shenandoah 2045. Staying informed and involved, assisting in strategy implementation, and providing feedback ensures the plan remains relevant and meets the community's evolving needs.

Key Responsibilities of Developers & Investors

Your Role in using the Plan:

As a developer or investor, you play a vital role in shaping Shenandoah County's future. The Comprehensive Plan offers essential guidance on land use, connectivity, and community-building to help your projects align with the County's vision. By following these principles, you can contribute to our long-term prosperity. Here's how you can take action to ensure the Comprehensive Plan, and your dream are realized:

Land Use Decisions:
Refer to the Future Land Use Map to ensure your projects fit within areas designated for strategic investment, such as Towns, Villages, and Hamlets. Aim to balance the community's desire to preserve agricultural lands with the need for modern services, infrastructure, and quality of life enhancements.

Pursue Development That Aligns with the Plan:
Focus on developments that encourage a walkable, community-centered environment while protecting rural landscapes. Prioritize projects in areas identified for growth and investment, ensuring they contribute positively to both the built environment and the surrounding natural resources..

Support Infrastructure and Services:
Ensure your projects align with the County's infrastructure and service needs. This includes considering water, road networks, and public facilities that are part of the long-term Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Your investment should enhance these systems to support local prosperity.

Collaborate with Staff, Officials, and the Community:
Ensure your development meets local regulations, enhances community services, and addresses community concerns or desires. Early and ongoing collaboration will help streamline approvals and ensure alignment.

Your Next Steps:
1. Identify areas for investment by using the Future Land Use Map.
2. Engage staff early to ensure your development is in alignment.
3. Focus on projects that enhance quality of life and connectivity.

LAND USE DECISIONS

When Special Use Permits, Rezonings, and removals from Agricultural and Forestal Districts go to public hearing there are measures that should be checked in determining if the request should be approved or denied. The following is a review decision table that elected and appointed officials may use to determine if your proposal is in alignment with the comprehensive plan:

#	Question	Yes	No
1	Is the request in line with the Future Land Use Map (FLUM)?	Proceed	Consider Denial
2	Is the use aligned with the comprehensive plan?	Or can advance goals or solve a problem, or not addressed -Proceed	Consider Denial
3	Does the proposal conflict with surrounding uses?	Applicant engaged neighbors & addressed concerns? -Proceed	Proceed.
4	Mitigation plan for impact on water resources?	Or not impacted. -Proceed	Consider Denial
5	Is the soil productive farmland?	Consider denial unless aligned with FLUM.	Proceed.
6	Proposal connection to resources & infrastructure?	Aligned with Towns, Villages - Proceed	Consider Denial
7	Positive impact on jobs, services, quality of life?	Proceed	Consider Denial
8	Adequate infrastructure & public services?	Or proposal offsets public costs -Proceed	Consider Denial
9	Does the proposal address past community issues?	Proceed	Consider Denial
10	Preserves/enhances historical, scenic, cultural resources?	Or not impacted. -Proceed	Consider Denial
11	Contributes to housing goals (affordable, diverse)?	Or not applicable. -Proceed	Consider Denial
12	Improves access to education, healthcare, emergency services?	Or not applicable. -Proceed	Consider Denial
13	Aligned with transportation/ recreation goals?	Proceed to Final Evaluation	Consider Denial
14	Aligned with most questions?	Consider approval.	Consider Denial

Land Use Decision Checklist Based on the 11 Chapters

1. Historical, Cultural, & Scenic Resources
   - ☐ Does the proposal impact historic landmarks or scenic areas?
   - ☐ Does it preserve or enhance these resources?
   - ☐ Does it support adaptive reuse of historic structures?

2. Water Resources
   - ☐ Will the proposal affect water resources (rivers, streams, floodplains)?
   - ☐ Are there measures to protect water quality or manage stormwater?

3. Agricultural, Forestal, & Geological Resources
   - ☐ Is the land better suited for agriculture or forestry?
   - ☐ Does it avoid areas with important geological features (sinkholes, slopes)?

4. Economic Development
   - ☐ How does the proposal contribute to local economic growth or job creation?
   - ☐ Does it provide needed services or help fill economic gaps?

5. Housing
   - ☐ Does the project support affordable or diverse housing (not just single family)?
   - ☐ Is it located in an area designated for residential growth in the FLUM?

6. Community Services & Facilities
   - ☐ Will the proposal increase demand on public services?
   - ☐ Is there sufficient public infrastructure to support the development?
   - ☐ If not, does the project offset costs for new infrastructure?

7. Education
   - ☐ Will the project impact public schools in terms of enrollment or resources?
   - ☐ Does it provide opportunities for educational partnerships (ie training)?

8. Health
   - ☐ Does the proposal improve access to healthcare services?
   - ☐ Will it enhance public health (e.g., through walkability & recreational facilities)?

9. Emergency Services, Infrastructure, & Technology
   - ☐ Will the project enhance infrastructure or technology (broadband, EMS)?
   - ☐ Does it ensure emergency access and improve community safety?

10. Recreation
   - ☐ Does the proposal create or improve access to recreational resources?
   - ☐ Does it help protect natural resources for recreational use?

11. Transportation
   - ☐ Does the project support diverse transportation (paths, bike lanes, car share)?
   - ☐ Will it promote walkability or use of public transportation?
   - ☐ Will it increase traffic, and if so, are there mitigation plans?

Pursue Development That Aligns with the Plan

Developers who align with Shenandoah County's Comprehensive Plan will find their projects well-received, ensuring both economic success and community benefit. By pursuing development that supports county goals, your project can thrive while preserving our rural character.

Build Where Investment Is Encouraged:
Refer to the Future Land Use Map to ensure your projects fit within areas designated for strategic investment, such as Towns, Villages, and Hamlets. You can find a copy of the Map in the following pages, or online at ShenandoahCountyva.us/future

Development Types that Fit the Vision:
Shenandoah County encourages growth in Towns, Villages, and Hamlets by creating mixed-use areas and commercial/industrial spaces while preserving rural and agricultural lands. Developers can align with this vision through:

1. Mixed-Use Areas: With an encouraged base of 30 units per acre, these areas blend residential, commercial, and public spaces. Projects should focus on redevelopment and infill, turning vacant lots or old buildings into vibrant, walkable neighborhoods with active public spaces.
2. Agricultural and Conservation Areas: In rural zones, focus on agribusiness projects like farm-to-market centers or processing facilities, preserving farmland and forests while preventing suburban sprawl.
3. Commercial and Industrial Areas: These are situated on less productive agricultural land or near utilities. Projects should focus on manufacturing, IT, healthcare, tourism, agribusiness, or other industries and businesses that fit into our rural character and economy.

Mid-Rise Mixed Use
Harrisonburg, Va

Courtyard Housing
New Market, Va

Stacked Duplex
Edinburg, Va

Live-Work
Mount Jackson, Va

DETACHED SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES   DUPLEX   TRIPLEX & FOURPLEX   COURTYARD APARTMENT   BUNGALOW COURT   TOWNHOUSE   MULTIPLEX   LIVE/WORK   MID-RISE

-- MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING --

Parking is an economic impediment, rethink spaces.

Surburban areas are static and need new life.

Villages and Hamlets are the seeds for community cores.

Focus on Connectivity and Infrastructure:

Successful developments enhance community connectivity and efficiently use existing infrastructure. Developers should:

1. Invest in areas with existing utilities to save on infrastructure costs and benefit the community economically and enhancing these spaces.
2. Extend streets or add sidewalks to improve walkability and reduce the need for parking, allowing more return on investment on the property.
3. Consider the end user when designing, how can this investment allow them the freedom to choose how they move around multimodally.

Build for the Community:

When developing in Shenandoah County, focus on creating projects that enhance the community's character and long-term vitality:

1. Design with flexibility: Ensure your buildings can adapt over time to community needs, allowing for future growth or changes in use.
2. Prioritize high-quality materials: Invest in durable construction that reflects the county's commitment to long-lasting, well-built environments.
3. Incorporate community-oriented spaces: Include parks, plazas, or social areas that encourage interaction and foster a sense of belonging.

Why It's Worth Aligning with the Plan:

By aligning your project with the Comprehensive Plan, you can expect:

1. Faster approval processes since your project will meet the county's established priorities and zoning regulations.
2. Stronger community support, as developments that reflect the county's vision are more likely to receive backing from local residents and officials.
3. Increased long-term value as projects in designated areas are supported by infrastructure improvements and strategic planning.
4. Access to incentives such as grants, infrastructure support, and partnerships for developments that contribute to the county's key goals.

A Future Land Use Map shows how a community plans to use its land over the next 20 years. It outlines spaces for homes, businesses, parks, and more, reflecting the community's vision. In Shenandoah County, the focus is on staying rural, with four zones to protect natural resources and promote agriculture. We also support industry and commerce, while investing in our Towns, Villages, and Hamlets to diversify the tax base. Service provisions are most available in Towns with the villages of Basye, Orkney Springs, and Maurertown following.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP
OF SHENANDOAH COUNTY

OUR FUTURE IS RURAL AND WALKABLE
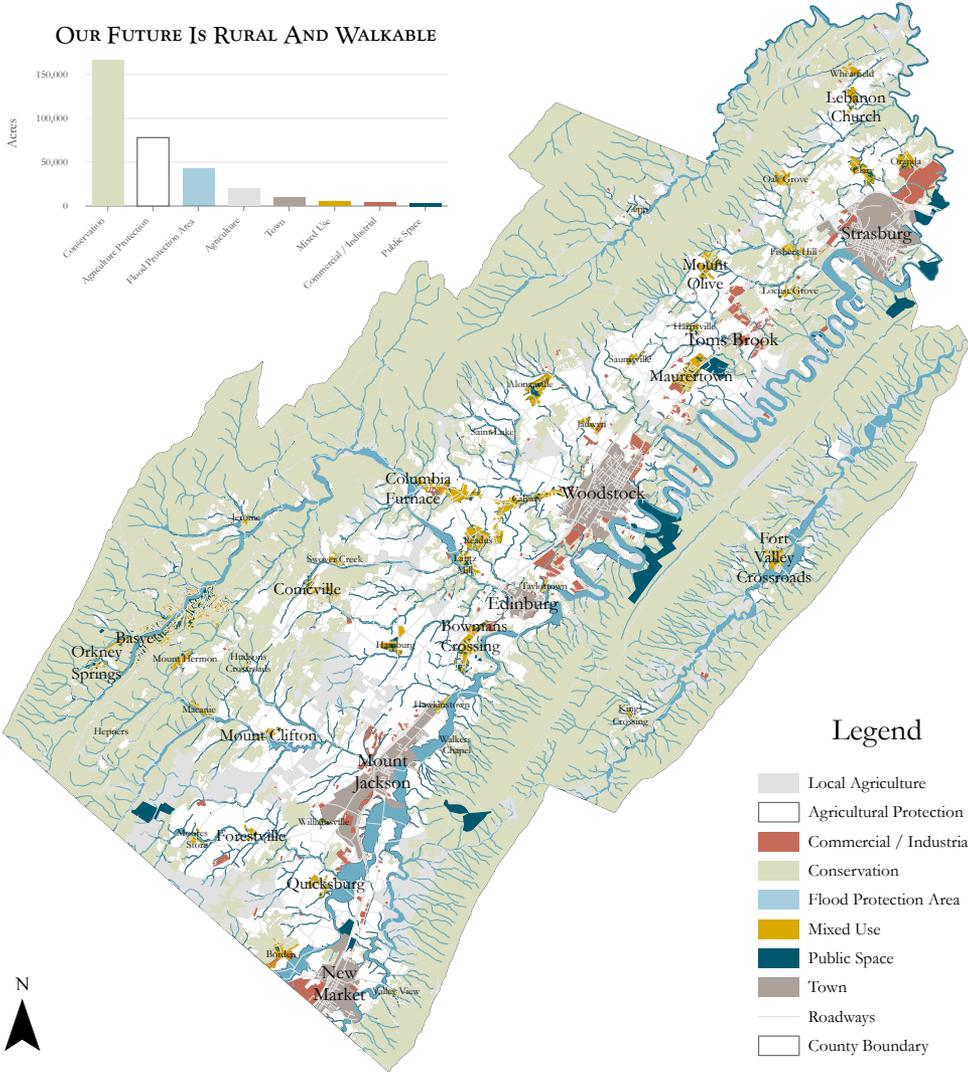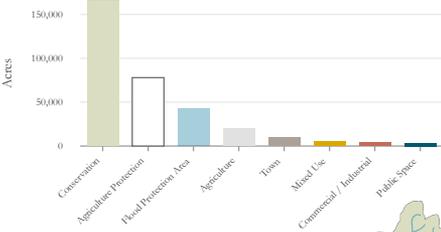
Legend

- Local Agriculture
- Agricultural Protection
- Commercial / Industrial
- Conservation
- Flood Protection Area
- Mixed Use
- Public Space
- Town
- Roadways
- County Boundary

N

0   2.5   5   10 Miles

Source: Shenandoah County GIS, Virginia Employment Commission, State Of Virginia
Date: 2-22-2024
Author: Tyler Hinkle, AICP

Use Descriptions

Conservation
These are forested lands including the National and State Forests but also 100 acre or more tracts of forest throughout the County conserved for scenic appeal, rural homes, and the creation of wood related products.

Agricultural Protection
Imagine open fields with cows, crops, apple trees, and other agriculture. These lands are just outside Towns, Villages, and Hamlets and the most productive places for agriculture. We want to keep it that way.

Local Agriculture
These are farms far away from any settled place with soils that may not be the best for farming. But these areas make for excellent larger scale operations as well as the homesteader who might want to live in the countryside.

Commercial / Industrial
These lands are either already being used for commercial or industrial purposes or have been identified as key sites due to poor agricultural soils, close proximity to existing businesses, or access to public water and sewer.

Mixed Use
Imagine your favorite downtown, a quaint street with various shops, places to eat, or even the quiet residential street with your neighbors on their front porches waving at you as you walk by. We want that experience here.

Public Space
These are your parks, schools, government centers, but also your semi-public third spaces like churches, Ruritan Clubs, and other non-profits where you can enjoy the outdoors or the comradery of community.

Flood Protection Overlay District
These are lands listed on FEMA floodplain maps, in the breach area of dams, and 100 feet from streams. These areas make for great agricultural fields, parks, and other uses that don't invest in new structures due to flooding.

Support Infrastructure and Services

Building in Shenandoah County means taking advantage of its existing infrastructure while planning for future upgrades. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) outlines where the county is investing in roads, water systems, and public services. By aligning your development with these investments, you can ensure long-term success and smooth integration.

Build Where Utilities Already Exist:
Developing near existing water, sewer, and utility lines can save costs and shorten project timelines. Choosing areas already serviced or slated for upgrades in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) helps developers tap into public investment and avoid infrastructure expansion costs. Check planned improvement areas at ShenandoahCountyva.us/Future

Design Developments That Pay for Themselves:
Not all development generates enough tax revenue to cover the costs of those services over time, especially for maintenance and operations 20–30 years down the road. The County encourages developers to focus on mixed-use and compact projects that diversify the tax base with a base of 30 units per acre. Commercial, office, and multi-family developments generate more property tax revenue per acre, ensuring that public services are sustainable without placing long-term financial strain on County residents.

Pays More Than Itself	Pays For Itself	Doesn't Pay For Itself
Key Facts: Small Parcels (up to 0.3 acres): In downtown areas, small, multi-story buildings (3+ stories) especially those that are mixed use.	Key Facts: Moderate Mixed-Use Parcels (1-3 acres): Parcels with a balanced mix of commercial and residential buildings, typically in 1-2 stories.	Key Facts: Large, Low-Density Residential Parcels (over 0.3 acres): Residential parcels in suburban areas or with larger acreage often lack sufficient revenue to cover service costs.
Commercial Parcels with Active Business Presence: Parcels of various sizes that host multiple businesses, or high valued site investments.	Small Commerial Parcels (under 3 acres): Smaller commerial parcels with water & sewer.	Small Agricultural Parcels: Low-density farming activities, particularly those with fewer than 10 acres or high tax-exempt usage.
Large Agricultural Parcels (10+ acres): Efficient for spreading service costs, especially when few tax-exempt properties are present.	Residential Parcels: Only small, residential parcels (typically less than 0.3 acres) are likely to break even on service costs.	Tax-Exempt Properties: Areas with numerous tax-exempt buildings (e.g., non-profits).

Schools — Existing Demand | Capacity Line | Development Impact

Public Safety

Parks

Utilities

Ensure Capacity for Public Services without Overburdening:

Before your project is approved, it's critical to assess whether nearby schools, fire/rescue services, and other public facilities have the capacity to handle growth. Projects that propose adding these services must also prove that they contribute sufficient long-term revenue to cover maintenance and staffing costs. Compact mixed-use projects on less land are more likely to create enough tax revenue to offset these costs, making them more sustainable over the long term. Check with County Staff on their Capital Impact Analysis.

25+ MPH Street   20 MPH Street   15 MPH Street

Enhance Connectivity with Streets and Sidewalks

Integrating streets, sidewalks, and bike lanes into your development fosters walkability and reduces the need for extensive parking. Another option is for the development to have slower design speed for its streets as slower streets means less infrastructure. Projects that follow this plan help improve safety, accessibility, and long-term infrastructure value.

Collaborate with Staff, Officials, and the Community

As a developer or investor in Shenandoah County, your investment can do more than make a return—it can strengthen and enhance the local community, creating lasting benefits for you and local residents.

Why Engage Early?

Building early relationships with county staff, elected officials, and neighboring landowners will streamline your project's development and help ensure alignment with community values. By involving stakeholders from the start, you reduce potential roadblocks, shorten review times, and foster a project that is both valuable to you and meaningful to the community.

How Do I Get Started?

- Reach out to the Community Development Department by either emailing CommunityDevelopment@shenandoahcountyva.us or calling 540-459-6185. You will want to talk with someone in Planning and Zoning.

- Get on for the next Technical Review Team (pre-application) meeting, which is held monthly on the second Wednesday and is completely free. The meeting brings together VDOT, Fire and Rescue, Health Department, Building Inspections, Erosion and Sediment Control, Planning and Zoning, and any relevant utility providers and Towns to provide you information before you make any major investments. A general site plan with an entrance and a proposed use is all that is needed but more information is always helpful.

- Once you know your project is aligned with the County's vision and won't face major roadblocks following the TRT meeting you should reach out to any nearby landowners as if your proposal goes to public hearing they will be notified and its always best to hear it from you rather than a government notice. Keep an open ear and see if concerns are tied to existing community issues and follow up later on how you could work with them to address those issues and improve the quality of life in the area with your investment.

- Depending on the situation with neighbors, a written agreement can be beneficial and assure parties of what was agreed upon.

- In addition to neighbor concerns you should be following up on what the agencies required from you per the TRT meeting.

Get Involved in Community Beautification Programs:

Make a lasting impact in Shenandoah County through these focused community contributions:

1. Participate in infill development or renovations to bring activity back downtown.
2. Sponsor a Local Facade Improvement: Contribute to enhancing storefronts and maintaining the character of historic buildings.
3. Adopt-a-Spot or Highway: Join VDOT's Adopt-a-Highway program or maintain a specific park or community area.
4. Benches for Downtowns & Parks: Sponsor benches for public seating in parks and gathering areas.
5. Downtown Fund: Support a fund dedicated to downtown improvements, including historic signage, lighting, and public space enhancements.
6. Public Art: Fund murals or sculptures to bring life to community spaces.
7. Park Enhancements: Donate for picnic tables, landscaping, and more.
8. Community Gardens: Sponsor a green space for local gardening.
9. Pathway & Trail Improvements: Invest in enhanced trail connectivity.
10. Sponsor Community Events: Help fund local festivals, markets, and gatherings.

Recommended Process for Successful Project Development:

1. Engage with County Staff: Start by meeting with Community Development and Economic Development departments. They'll provide zoning information, connect you to useful resources, and help align your project with the County.

2. Coordinate with the Technical Review Team (TRT): Working with TRT allows you to incorporate their expertise on issues and evaluate a property before major investment is made. Early collaboration reduces potential roadblocks.

3. Build Community Support: Working with neighbors and engaging residents creates a collaborative project culture. Organize informational events, send out surveys, and address any local concerns proactively.

4. Participate in Community Programs: Our beautification initiatives offer multiple ways to get involved, from clean-up events to public art sponsorship. Participation enhances the local area and builds goodwill for your project.

5. Establish a Long-Term Commitment: Showing ongoing involvement, even after your project is complete, establishes your business as a trusted community partner, setting the stage for future growth.

THIS PLAN IS OUR NORTH STAR

The Shenandoah 2045 Comprehensive Plan is our community's north star, guiding us to the future.

Our Vision for 2045 is to strictly adhere to the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan in order to maintain the rural aspects and the character of Shenandoah County so it continues to be –

1. A responsible steward conserving, preserving, and protecting our environmental, recreational, historic, cultural, and scenic resources for residents and visitors; and

2. A unique place to live with responsible policies, public services, and quality education that enhance the quality of life and promotes appropriate growth within and limits growth outside our towns, villages, and hamlets so that agricultural areas and other open green spaces remain a predominant feature of the landscape; and

3. A great place to work encouraging entrepreneurship, innovative and appropriate businesses and industries with a versatile trained workforce and varied jobs that pay a competitive wage; and

4. A collaborative community that continues to work with private and public entities to ensure Shenandoah County is healthy and vibrant.

Our Greatest Challenges Over The Next 20 Years:

1. Accountability.
2. Stopping suburban sprawl to protect the view and access to the natural beauty that attracts people here.
3. Protecting our water resources while promoting growth.
4. Providing accessible quality public education and community resources built for the 22nd Century while the population lives in a low-density setting.
5. Growing a local economy along with similar outside businesses in a market with neighboring growth centers.
6. Promoting and protecting farming as an occupation while encouraging tourism-based farming.
7. Providing a transportation system built for the 22nd Century.
8. Addressing the decline of participation in civic and community organizations and services.
9. Providing a County that is healthy, affordable, and livable for people of all backgrounds, ages, and incomes.
10. Promoting community-based redevelopment while preventing gentrification.

A Plan For Action

Chapter Vision

Goals

1 2 3 4 5

Objectives

Strategies

Actions

Nearly 250 years ago a man stood up in a church a few blocks down from the County Government Building. He told his congregation that to everything there is a season, a time to pray and a time to fight. We as a community in adopting this plan accept the truth that there is a time to plan and a time to act, and that time is now. Our action plan seeks to make this belief a reality through taking large ideas from very general vision statements and narrow them down through goals and objectives to strategies and detail oriented actions as seen in the diagram to the left.

Organization

This plan is one of five documents that guide the County.

1: Comprehensive Plan

An aspirational visionary guide made from two documents:

The Report

This document summarizes 5 years worth of reports, meetings, workshops, and conversations into a succinct, big idea focused document.

The Action Plan

The Action Plan lays out the vision for each chapter, goals to accomplish that vision, along with objectives, strategies and actions.

2 & 3: Zoning & Subdivision

Specific rules that can be enforced on how land is used.

4: Capital Improvement Plan

Five year financial plan for new buildings and equipment.

5: Budget

Annual plan on how to finance County operations.

Tools To Use The Plan

The Report

The *Shenandoah 2045 Report* is a strategic tool for anyone looking to act in the county by providing a comprehensive vision for Shenandoah County's future. It sets out the community's long-term goals and values, such as balancing growth with the preservation of rural and agricultural character. No matter your background, The Report helps you understand the overarching priorities of the county and ensures your projects align with community expectations. You can use the report to inform your proposals, validate decisions, and demonstrate that your actions support the county's long-term vision. It serves as a guiding document to keep projects on track with broader community goals, making it useful for planning, investment, and collaboration.
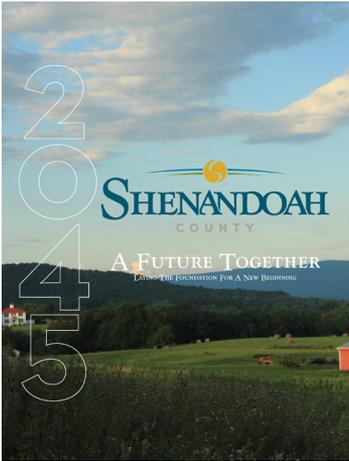
The Action Plan

The Action Plan is a hands-on guide for taking concrete action in Shenandoah County. For those looking to implement projects—whether in infrastructure, business, or community services—this document breaks down the broad vision of the report into specific, actionable steps. If you are involved in executing a project, the Action Plan provides clear goals, strategies, and timelines to follow, ensuring that your actions contribute directly to county priorities. It gives you the roadmap for implementation, such as the exact strategies to improve housing, transportation, or environmental sustainability. This tool allows you to move from planning to action, ensuring that your efforts are aligned with County visions and making it easier to measure success.
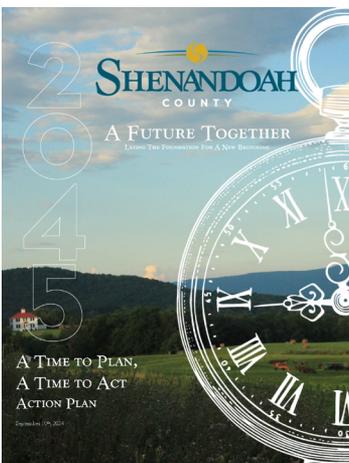
Tools On The Website

The Toolkit (This document!)

There are five other documents just like the one you are looking at right now! We have broken the Comprehensive Plan down into digestible parts based on the user groups. You can choose to consume the information either in a static print version like this, or check out our more dynamic online storymap. Either way we hope these documents make it easier for us to build A Future Together and act.

The Policy Map

The policy map takes all of the maps from The Report and The Action Plan and puts them in one accessible and interactive space. It also provides each chapter's maps and information in individual formats with extra data that did not fit into the Comprehensive Plan such as dynamic data updated regularly from the Census Bureau so its easier to base decisions on adopted maps and updated data.

The Data Dashboard

The data dashboard serves the role a traditional comprehensive plan would serve in many communities, which is being a report on multiple data points. The difference in the dashboard and a static report document is this is updated regularly by various sources including the Bureau of Labor Statistics and VDOT. Examine data per chapter or larger land use data in the main data dashboard.

The Progress Tab

Our number one concern for the future was to hold ourselves accountable. We hope to do this and keep everyone updated with our progress tab which has key indicators for each big ideas as well as a progress chart showing the status of implementation. Note that this information is expected to be updated annually so there may be some tasks completed that have not made it onto our progress tab yet.
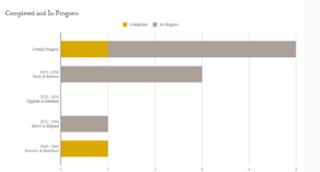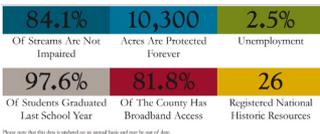
THE STORY OF SHENANDOAH COUNTY
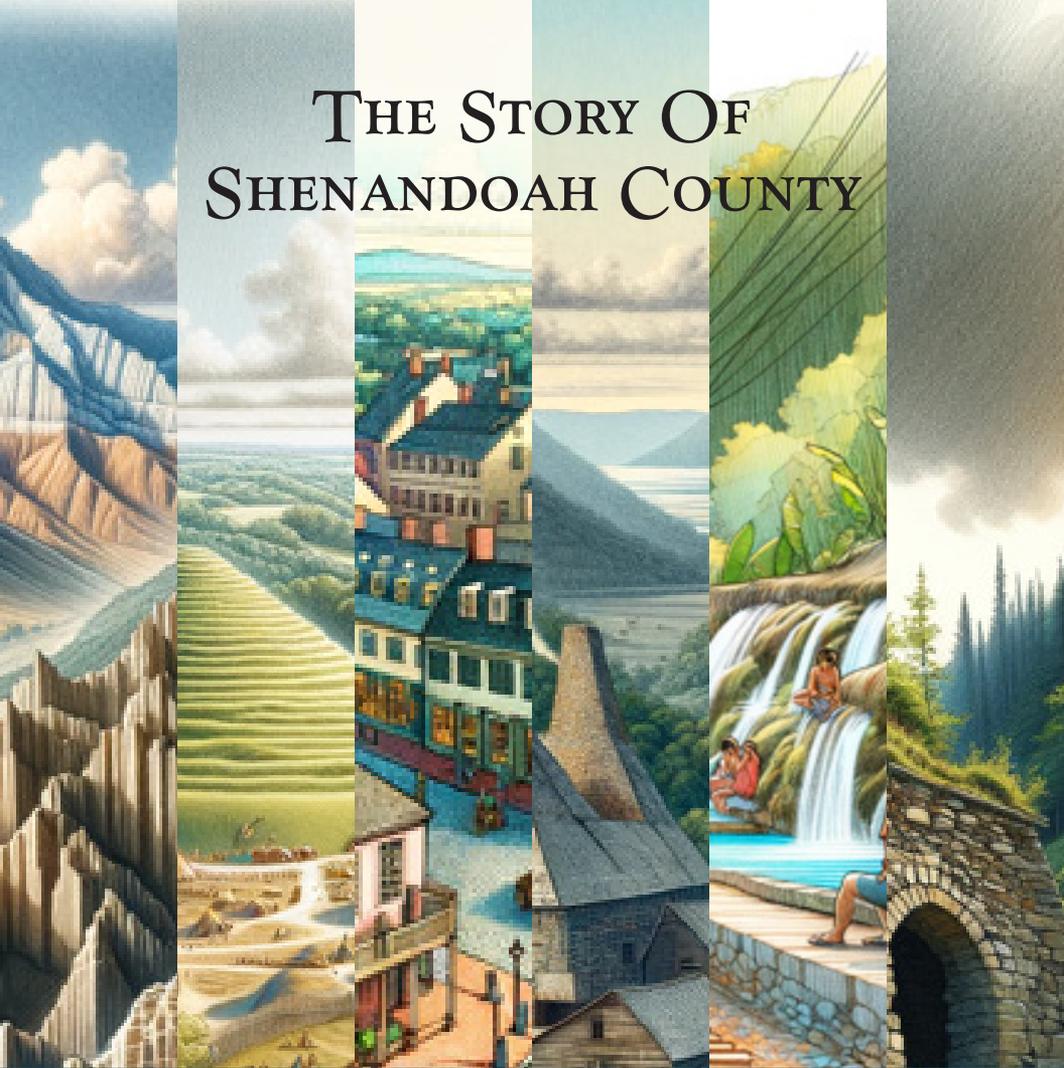
200 million years of erosion of the Appalachian mountains which formed 370 million years ago, formed the streams and our rich soils.

Route 11 is based on the Great Trail developed by the first human inhabitants who arrived around 15,000 B.C.E. they had villages and mound temples until mid-1600.

In the 17th and 18th centuries European settlers built connected communities, attached dwellings, and multi-use structures similar to their home communities.

The communities were markets for the plantation economy with grains, hemp, and livestock and the timber that fueled iron furnaces and the Confederacy.

The railroad connected places in the 1860's and in the 1890's the Dinky line enhanced mining while a tourism economy began to flourish with visits to vistas and springs.

In 1907 the iron industry collapsed, its lands became National Forests and the Dinky line was lost to private owners.
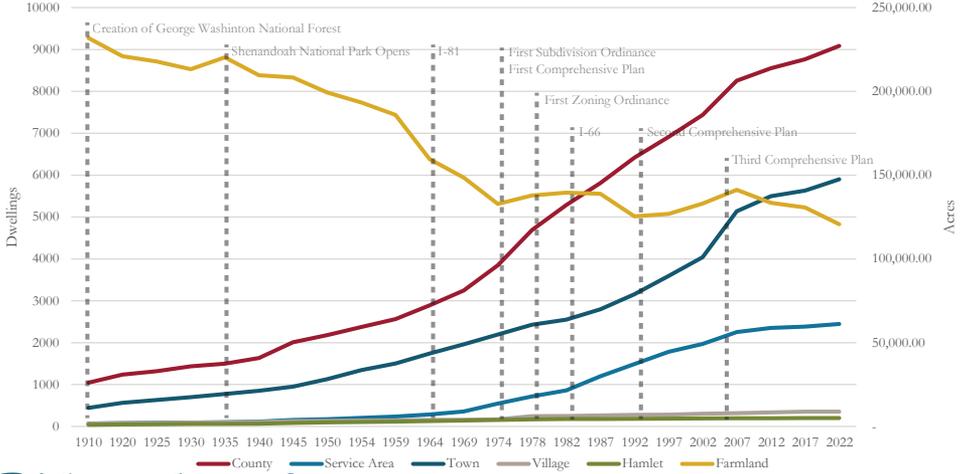
Did you know?

Data shows that as dwellings in our community increase, the farmland acreage has decreased. This is one of the fundamental items we seek to change, we must be able to increase our resident population in our Towns, Villages, and Hamlets while sustaining our farmland. As you can see beginning with the first comprehensive plan our locality has worked to increase housing while limiting farmland lost. It is an effort we will continue.

Post World War II and Suburban Growth

After World War II, people began moving to the County for both primary homes and vacation spots due to improved road networks, including VDOT improvements in the 1930s and Interstate 81 in the 1960s. This made it easier to purchase farmland and develop housing. Despite efforts in comprehensive plans since 1973 to limit farmland loss, housing has continued to grow outside Towns, Villages, and Hamlets.

The Great Recession and Suburbanization Decline

The 2008 Community Planning Project (CPP) addressed concerns about unregulated subdivision development in rural areas. Projections showed that if trends continued, the County could lose up to 25% of its agricultural land to residential development, creating tens of thousands of new rural lots. To mitigate this, the County updated subdivision and zoning ordinances and worked with several Towns on annexation agreements. Still, more than 50% of new housing continues to be built outside of designated growth areas.

De-suburbanization and a New Beginning

Since 2019, efforts have focused on placing rural lands into conservation easements and protecting farmland from development. This fourth Comprehensive Plan continues the vision of protecting rural areas while promoting growth in existing Towns, Villages, and Hamlets.

AN ANCESTRAL SOLUTION TO A COMMON THREAD

For sixty years Shenandoah County has been wrestling with one common thread which weaves throughout time: Suburbanization. While the emphasis on the loss of rural land due to suburbanization has always been a concern, the greater threat is the loss of a sense of community and place. This means that the solution to this common thread is not to cut all development off entirely but rather to rethink the form that development takes so we build more places for people. We find that solution by looking to the past to help us with the present.

When our ancestors first stepped foot in Shenandoah County they laid our their new communities based on where they came from. These places were naturally dense, walkable, and had a variety of different uses with a hard edge to the working lands. This model both protected productive agricultural lands and made the most use of land which the community invested infrastructure.

Woodstock founder from Zweibrecken, GER

Strasburg founder from Strasbourg, FR

Toms Brook founder from Steinweiler, GER

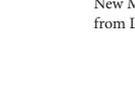Coniciville & Orkney Springs founders from Zurich, Switzerland

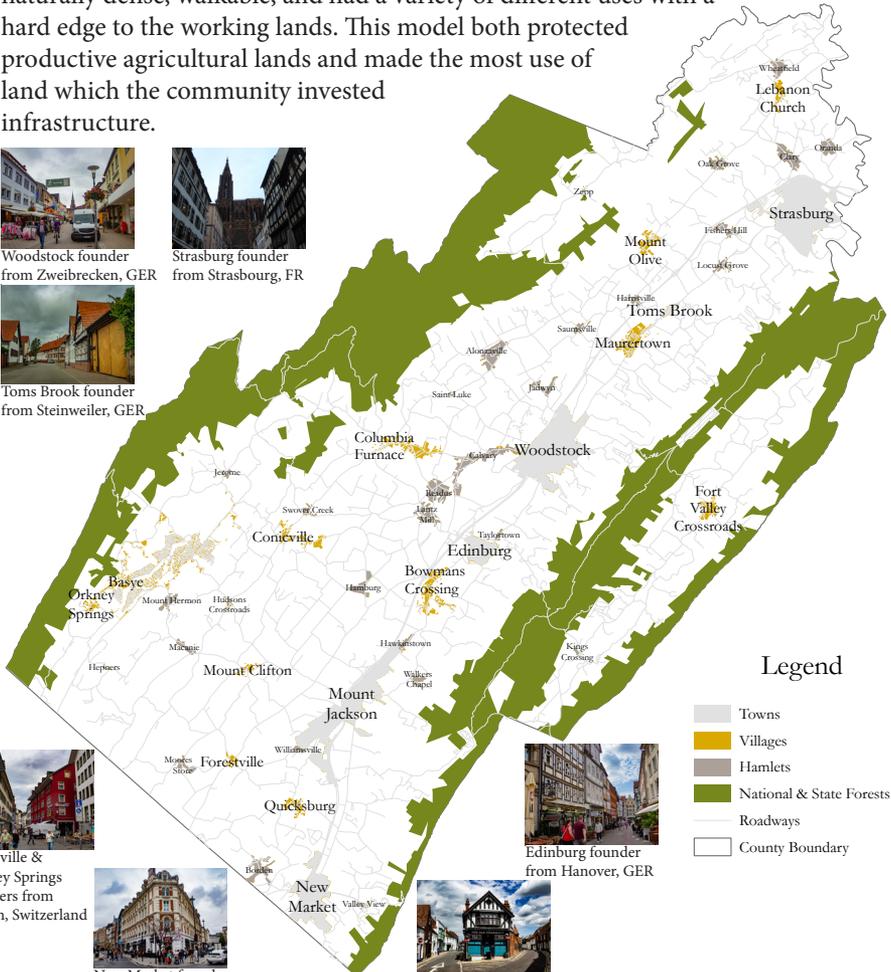New Market founder from London, UK

Edinburg founder from Hanover, GER

Mt Jackson founder from Sandwich, UK

Legend

�	Towns
▩	Villages
▩	Hamlets
▩	National & State Forests
—	Roadways
▢	County Boundary

What Are Villages and Hamlets?

A VILLAGE is an established neighborhood standing free in the countryside. The strong center of a village can usually be attributed, not to the population, but to its location on a transportation corridor and presence of more than one third space.

A HAMLET is a neighborhood in the making. Standing free in the countryside, by virtue of its location away from transportation, the hamlet has a weak center not due to its population but the lack of multiple third spaces or a strong sense of community.

A First Place is our home. A Second Place is our workplace. Third places are where you find locals and strangers like a:

Cafe | Place of Worship | Post Office | Store | Restaurant | Park | Community Center | Library | Theater | Salon | Gym | Bar | Bowling Alley

"(Imagine) eight houses are forming a square in the middle of a crossroad. So here we have a...
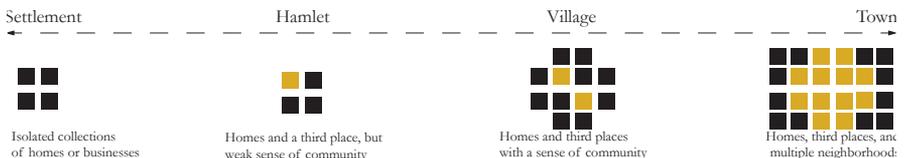
Communication Route

Private Spaces

Public Spaces

where we can have a meeting between inhabitants and strangers. And this meeting, is the beginning of civilization... If you go (on vacation) and find places that you really like, it will be places that have a local hangout and strangers together. " Peter Elmlund
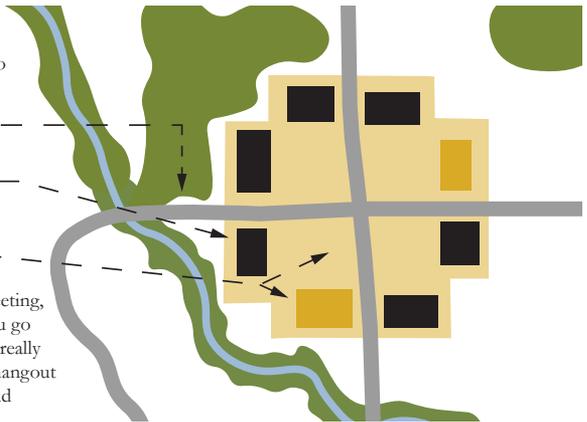
Shenandoah County has 6 incorporated towns, 12 villages, and 36 hamlets. Our Towns started as hamlets then grew into villages. Some villages incorporated as Towns, such as Mount Pleasant which in 1826 became the Town of Mount Jackson. These places didn't take up much land, were close to water, existed at the crux of trade routes, and were both markets and homes for the farmers. As we look to the future investment in our community we can look to the past to see how we built these places people already live and enhance them.

Settlement | Hamlet | Village | Town

Isolated collections of homes or businesses

Homes and a third place, but weak sense of community

Homes and third places with a sense of community

Homes, third places, and multiple neighborhoods

WHAT ARE THE 6 BIG IDEAS?

Our Six Big Ideas are the framework for Shenandoah 2045. These are core aspects of all chapters of the Action Plan and cover a variety of topics from land use to the economy and more. This framework helps facilitate all partners and stakeholders in the big picture vision we as a community have for the next twenty years.

A CONCEPT is a step down from a BIG IDEA and outlines the general approach we want to take to making the vision of the Plan a reality. These are the core values that will guide us based on the goals and objectives of the Action Plan.

A PROPOSAL is a step down from a CONCEPT and generally outlines how we could realistically implement the vision of the plan. These are the general ways we can implement the vision for the future based on the specific strategies and actions from the Action Plan.

BIG IDEA

We respect that **WATER IS LIFE**. We are committed to cherishing our water for the next generation. Knowing that clean and abundant water is finite but also vital for agriculture, economic growth, and overall well-being.

LAND IS VALUABLE to us. We keep our countryside beautiful and productive, balancing growth with preservation. Thriving farms, bustling downtowns, and scenic landscapes ensures land for generations to enjoy.

Our community is **ACTIVELY CONNECTED**. We've nurtured a community reflecting our values and actively connected with the places we live and work through streets, trails, and programming for a healthy life.

We invest in the next generation and our workforce with **QUALITY EDUCATION**. Education is the key to the next generation being prepared for the future and ensuring our workforce is versatile with market shifts.

We pride ourselves on **DEPENDABLE SERVICES**. Healthcare, public safety, and infrastructure are our backbone. Every resident feels supported and valued with these dependable services.

Our community believes **THE PAST INSPIRES THE FUTURE**. We cherish our history and learn from it. By combining old lessons with current knowledge, we make wise plans to create a better tomorrow.

CONCEPT   PROPOSAL

A. Next Generation Foundation
B. Community Action
C. Lasting Infrastructure

I. Reform Codes
II. Conduct Studies
III. Invest Today

A. Maximizing Land Productivity
B. Small Town Feel
C. Preserving Our Landscapes

I. Reform Codes
II. Invest Downtown
III. Protect Farmland

A. Personal Freedom
B. Culture Of Physical Activity
C. Community Connectivity

I. Reform Codes
II. Enhance Connections & Spaces
III. Community Programming

A. Evolving Education Infrastructure
B. Community Opportunities
C. Workforce Readiness

I. Quality Infrastructure
II. Early Childhood Development
III. Bridge Education & Workforce

A. Integrated Service Delivery
B. Health & Safety
C. Dependable Infrastructure

I. Update County Systems
II. Reduce Healthcare Barriers
III. Future Infrastructure

A. Study First, Act Next
B. Data-Driven Decisions
C. Be Inspired

I. Conduct Studies
II. Integrate Data
III. Style Guide

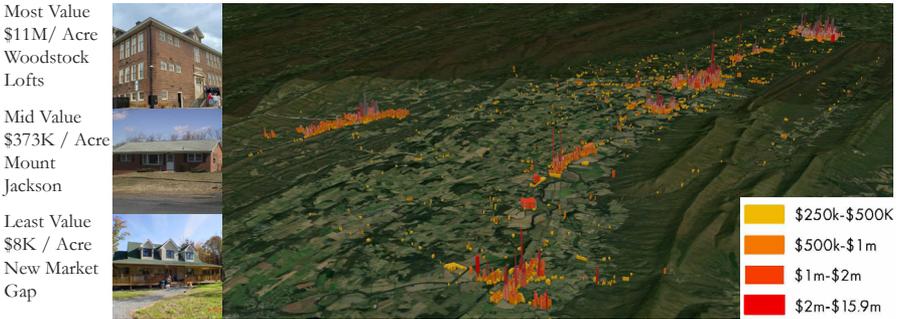# How Does This Impact Development & Investment?

50 years ago, Shenandoah County stood at a similar moment that we do today. Housing appeared in our rural areas and locals and new arrivals alike came together to develop the first Comprehensive Plan, a north star which guided the implementation of zoning and subdivision rules on how investments were made.

The concerns on development and investment occurred then as they do now as people were looking around saying they did not like the way their community was turning out. This was due to suburban sprawl as prior to WWII US communities were connected with uses and housing types varied throughout, but after WWII development was more segregated forcing people to drive to everything and making communities less safe. We call this period the Suburban Experiment and as it nears its end we seek to look to the way we built before it so development fits into the historic charm and character emblematic of Shenandoah County.
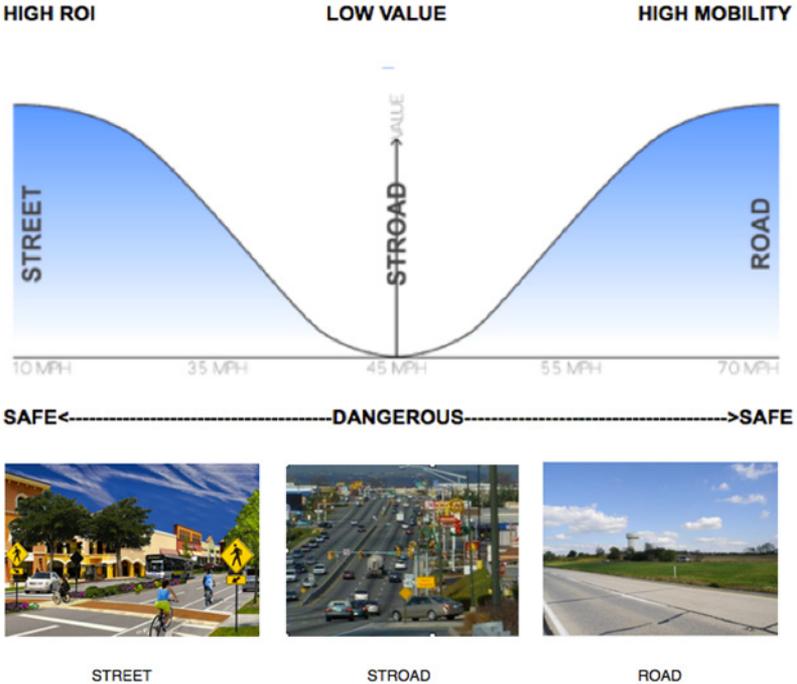
The Suburban Experiment
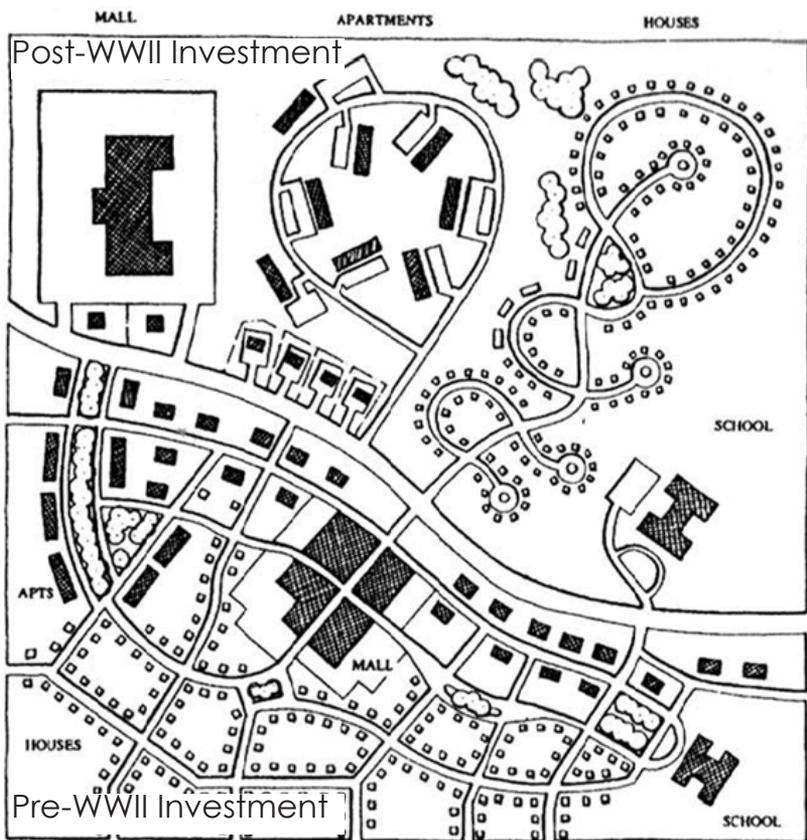
We believe by rediscovering our culture, the way we used to build, will bring the greatest prosperity to our community and ensure the most productive use of our most valuable lands. To test this belief out we conducted a Value Per Acre analysis which takes the taxable value of a property and divides it by its acreage so we can compare the 100 acre farm to the 2 acre house in a fair manner. The results below show that without any names on the map each town can be identified, as well as the unincorporated village of Bayse to the west, and within each town a spike in value is seen in the downtowns. This means the way our community used to build was more financially sustainable than practices during the Suburban Experiment.

Most Value
$11M/ Acre
Woodstock
Lofts

Mid Value
$373K / Acre
Mount
Jackson

Least Value
$8K / Acre
New Market
Gap

$250k-$500K
$500k-$1m
$1m-$2m
$2m-$15.9m

Applying the same logic to infrastructure we find that wider roads with multiple uses cause high crash rates and require long term public investment and maintenance. We want to promote investment in our streets and ensure our roads remain open for long distance travelers. By doing this we can maximize the productivity of land.

HIGH ROI   **LOW VALUE**   **HIGH MOBILITY**

STREET   STROAD → ALLE   ROAD

10 MPH   35 MPH   45 MPH   55 MPH   70 MPH

SAFE<----------------------------DANGEROUS---------------------------->SAFE

STREET   STROAD   ROAD

We know all of this is true because its the way the cores of our Towns, villages, and hamlets function. While all of the Towns were not founded in the same time period, each Town has a block that takes close to seven minutes to walk the perimeter and similar street designs. The diagrams show two Towns' street designs and their block layouts to show how local design uses less land and is more diverse:
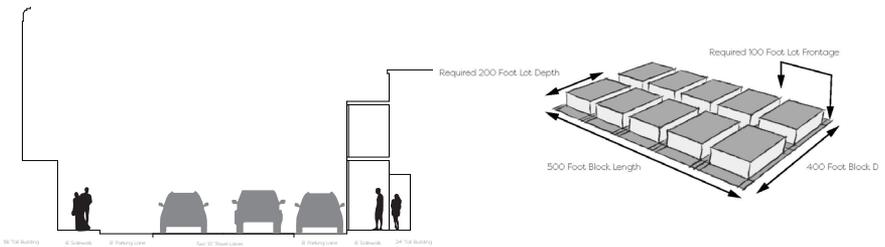
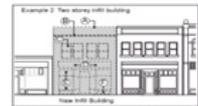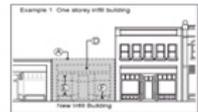**Existing Layout In Woodstock**

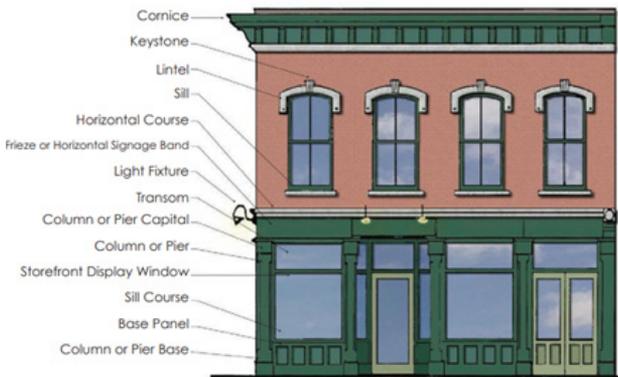Design by Tyler Hinkle, AICP 10/11/2024

Existing Layout In Mount Jackson

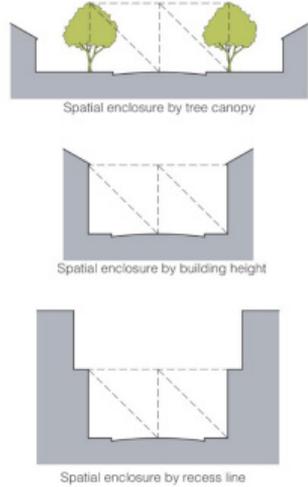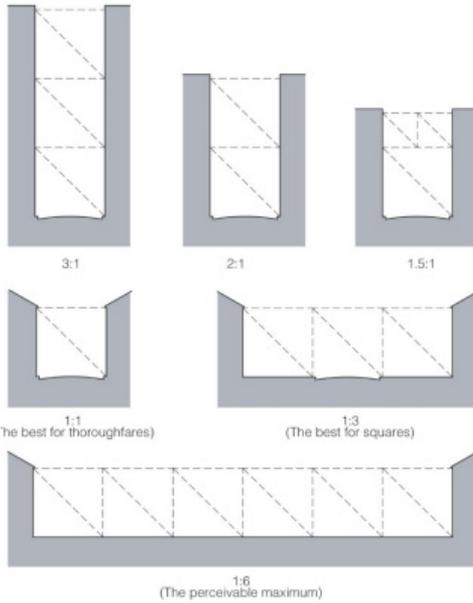Design by Tyler Hinkle, AICP 10/11/2024

Not only are the streets and blocks more diverse, but so are the facades of the buildings that face the streets. In some cases the buildings themselves may be the same design but the facade changes which provides individual character to the structures. We want to ensure future investment blends in with the existing investment, and that will require diversity in blocks, streets, facades, and buildings.

The architecture of a storefront has an important role in a business's marketing strategy by establishing the business as a unique place. The storefront should entice customers into the building and promote the business in an effective way.
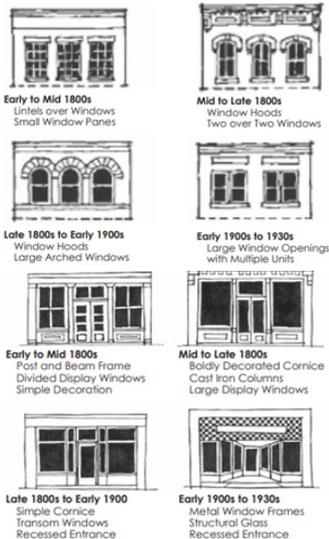
3:1   2:1   1.5:1

1:1
(The best for thoroughfares)

1:3
(The best for squares)

1:6
(The perceivable maximum)

Spatial enclosure by tree canopy

Spatial enclosure by building height

Spatial enclosure by recess line

Spatial Definition: the fabric achieved when enfronting facades are aligned in a coherent manner and the defined space does not exceed a certain height-to-width ratio.

Height-to-Width Ratio: the proportion of spatial enclosure related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street wall than open sky, the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. As a general rule, the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place and, often, the higher the real estate value. See: **Sense of Place**

Spatial Enclosure: the physical definition of thoroughfares and open spaces contributing to a sense of place. It is shaped, as an outdoor room, by walls of buildings: their facades. Controlling the degree of enclosure is one of the principal variables in the creation of an urban-to-rural Transect. Enclosure is adjusted through the selection of frontage types or by a build-to line specifying the minimum building frontage and the minimum building height. It can also be extended on very wide thoroughfares by aligning regularly-spaced trees to provide spatial enclosure by tree canopy.

Figure 2: Height/Width Ratios from 'The Lexicon of New Urbanism' by Duany Plater-Zyberk

Early to Mid 1800s
Lintels over Windows
Small Window Panes

Mid to Late 1800s
Window Hoods
Two over Two Windows

Late 1800s to Early 1900s
Window Hoods
Large Arched Windows

Early 1900s to 1930s
Large Window Openings
with Multiple Units

Early to Mid 1800s
Post and Beam Frame
Divided Display Windows
Simple Decoration

Mid to Late 1800s
Boldly Decorated Cornice
Cast Iron Columns
Large Display Windows

Late 1800s to Early 1900
Simple Cornice
Transom Windows
Recessed Entrance

Early 1900s to 1930s
Metal Window Frames
Structural Glass
Recessed Entrance

One of the characteristics of the cores of our communities is the sense of enclosure one has on the street. This is created from the relationship of the height of the building to the width of the street. A greater height-width ratio provides a greater sense of enclosure, it also provides a greater return on investment per acre. We can achieve this by reducing street widths, bringing buildings closer to the street, and increasing building heights. To provide diversity we can look to missing middle housing types, anything from duplexes and townhouses to quadplexes and live-work buildings to fill in the blank or vacant lots in and around our cores. By building in this fashion, with quality and maximizing the use of land, we all can achieve prosperity with an improved community and a greater return on investment.

Theoretical Development Proposal

Lets take a theoretical development proposal at the intersection of Allen Road and Wayland Lane. The land was identified in the Comprehensive Plan as mixed use on the Future Land Use Map and the site already has access to public water and sewer. The site is currently a farm and is partially forested, there are no adjacent neighbors, and the property is zoned R-2 Medium Density Residential. The zoning limits the development to 20,000 sqft lots so the developer requests a rezoning to R-3 High Density Residential to reduce it to 10,000 sqft through the use of duplexes.
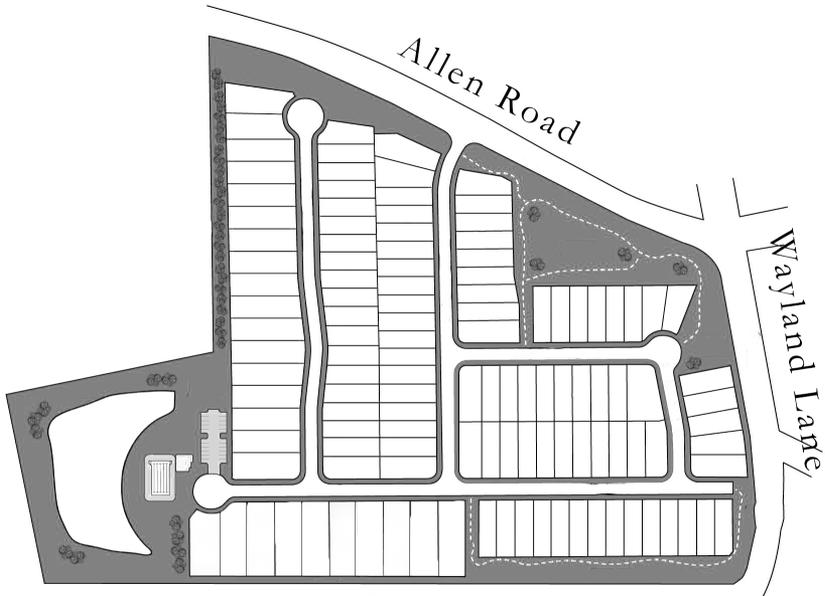
As part of the rezoning the developer proposes open space, trails, and includes a club house and pond in the design. To reduce costs the site is proposed to have one way in and one way out to serve 131 houses, which limits the connectivity of the community as well. There are no businesses proposed in the design as the zoning district forbids it, so the developer faces addressing the capital impact of the development and its new residents in full as there are no commercial assets to offset it. There is also no diversity in the style of housing so the capital impact model predicts that the development is to generate more future students.

When the development is sent to the Planning Commission members of the community come out to speak their opinions on it. Many raise concerns with traffic, overcrowding of schools, monotonous housing, and that the site typifies suburbia, which the County states it seeks to enter a period of desuburbanization. Ultimately the request goes to the Board who deny it due to its character and inability to address current capital impacts as well as future maintenance due to a low value per acre.
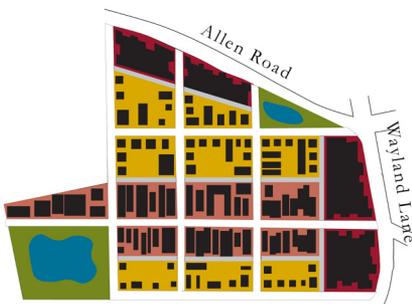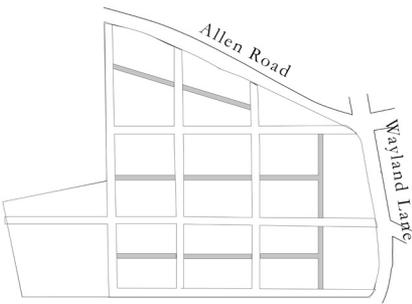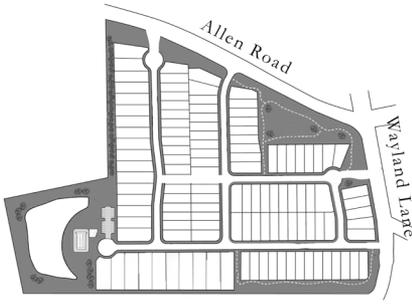
The developers did not give up there, instead they did their research and first pitched addressing design by turning culdesacs into road connections. While this was an improvement, community members noted the financial impacts remained the same and it was found that intersections not aligning with existing intersections could lead to more accidents.

Going back to the drawing board the developers took what worked well in the community, its downtown, and applied its design to the site. By doing this the site began to address Allen Road and Wayland Road as part of the same fabric and not as walls that separate the new neighborhood from the community. The new blocks, streets, and alleys allowed for more flexibility in the design and layout of the site. It also allowed for flexibility in the future as adjacent lands are rethought and how to connect with existing streets.

Adhering to the principles of the community, how it already looks, the developers proposed more intense density along Allen Road and Wayland Lane with moderate density adjacent and a new main street leading to a new park in the center. This transition of different spaces on the site allowed for commercial sites, both standalone and mixed use, to be worked in along with a variety of housing types.

When the developers went back to the Planning Commission they went with the support of the community. They were no longer providing a generic product, but one that fit the individual needs of the community and paid for itself due to a higher value per acre. The Board approved the site.

KEY TERMS & CONTACTS

Acronym	Full Name
All Towns	New Market Mount Jackson Edinburg Woodstock Toms Brook Strasburg
BOS	Board of Supervisors
CA	County Administration
CD	Community Development
CLUM	Current Land Use Map
COR	Commissioner Of The Revenue
DHR	Virginia Department of Historic Resources
FLUM	Future Land Use Map
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
Landfill	County Landfill
NSVRC	Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission
P&R	Parks and Recreation
PC	Planning Commission
SCPS	Shenandoah County Public Schools
SD	Sanitary Districts
SS	Social Services
TED	Tourism and Economic Development
VCE	Virginia Cooperative Extension Office
VDH	Virginia Department of Health
VDOT	Virginia Department of Transportation
VH	Valley Health

Email	Phone Number
n.garrison@newmarketvirginia.com	540-740-3432
ohilton@mountjackson.com	540-477-2121
town@shentel.com	540-984-8521
agrisdale@woodstockva.gov	540-459-3621
ljgcurrie@yahoo.com	540-436-8000
wcoggsdale@strasburgva.com	540-465-9197
See County Administration	
afauber@shenandoahcountyva.us	540-459-6165
lhancock@shenandoahcountyva.us	540-459-6185
See Community Development	
mhockman@shenandoahcountyva.us	540-459-6170
stephanie.williams@dhr.virginia.gov	804-482-6446
See Community Development	
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ahounshell@shenandoahcountyva.us	540-984-8573
bdavis@nsvregion.org	540-636-8800
jhoover@shenandoahcountyva.us	540-459-6777
See Community Development	
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raclark@vt.edu	540-459-6140
todd.lam@vdh.virginia.gov	540-459-3733
matthew.smith@VDOT.virginia.gov	540-534-3210
jcraig@valleyhealthlink.com	540-459-1100