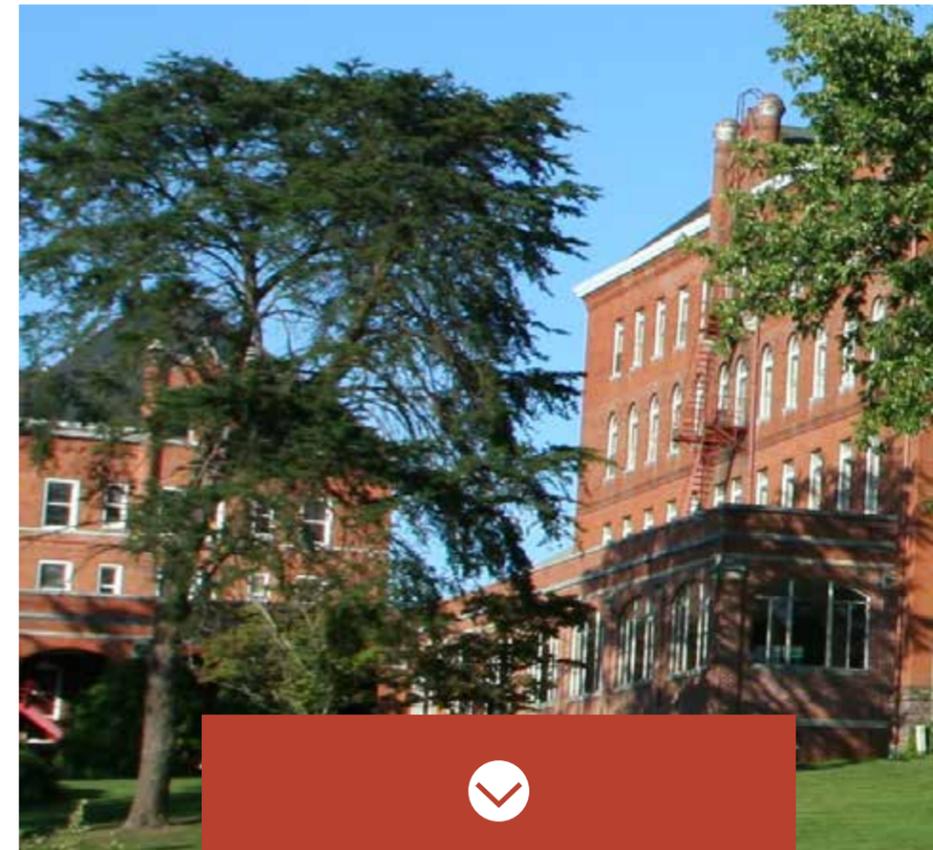




# COMMUNITY FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Community facilities support the provision of services and amenities that define local quality of life and the desirability of living and working in Bristol. This includes critical City services, as well as those services provided by other governmental bodies, such as the public school district, library, private schools, and utilities providers.

The Community Facilities & Infrastructure Plan presents general policies and guidelines to help ensure Bristol remains well-served by high quality facilities and services. However, it is not intended to supersede goals and policies of other agencies, or act as a substitute for more detailed planning that should be undertaken by the City and other providers.



**The Community Facilities & Infrastructure Plan is organized into four sections.**

- Quality Municipal Services
- Intergovernmental Support, Coordination & Cooperation
- Supporting Youth
- Re-Using Virginia Intermont College



## 2035 Goal

Provide high-quality City services, maintain adequate infrastructure and utilities throughout the community, and make Bristol one of the best places to live in Virginia.

### Priority Objectives

#### Objective #1

##### Facilities & Infrastructure

Provide, or support the provision of, community facilities and services that strengthen the quality of life within Bristol.

- **1A.** Conduct a comprehensive life cycle assessment for all City buildings, equipment, vehicles, facilities, and properties.
- **1B.** Regularly identify necessary short-, medium-, and long-term facility, road, and infrastructure projects.
- **1C.** Complete and annually review a 5 year Capital Improvement Program that identifies construction, maintenance, and improvement projects as well as infrastructure replacements and upgrades to be made in the short- and long-term.
- **1D.** Regularly review services offered by the City to determine their impact and identify opportunities to better align services offered with the needs of the community.

- **1E.** Work with other public agencies to maintain adequate sites and facilities.
- **1F.** Ensure adequate levels of police and fire protection throughout the City and ensure that emergency vehicles can effectively serve all areas of the City.
- **1G.** Improve water supply and distribution for firefighting, replacing older lines and smaller feeder lines where necessary.
- **1H.** Continue to evaluate opportunities to replace Fire Department Station #1.
- **1I.** Work with the Bristol Sheriff's Office to explore options to reduce crowding in the City jail, including considerations for a new jail facility or participation in a regional jail in Abingdon.
- **1J.** Initiate a promotional campaign to heighten awareness of community services offered by the City and how residents can take advantage of these amenities.
- **1K.** Work with the Bristol, VA Public Schools (BVPS) as they re-assess their facility needs, including development of new facilities and/or redevelopment and re-use of closed facilities.

- **1L.** Work with schools to review the existing parking facilities, buildings, drop-off/pick-up areas, and bus parking, including ingress and egress to ensure they are adequate and if not, identify opportunities for improvement.
- **1M.** Work with schools to ensure proper buffering surrounding school facilities and provide safe and adequate access to all school sites.
- **1N.** Support the operations of the Bristol Public Library.
- **1O.** Increase cooperation with the City of Bristol, TN and Washington County, including continue evaluation of opportunities for shared services and partnerships.
- **1P.** Maintain positive channels of communication with all public agencies, quasi-public agencies, and community service providers to ensure better coordination of projects, alignment of long-range plans, and evaluate options for shared services.
- **1Q.** Work closely with Virginia Inter-mont College to creatively repurpose the vacant campus for a new higher education user.

#### Objective #2

##### Infrastructure Capacity

Align all new development with infrastructure providers, closely evaluating development proposals to ensure the intensity of new development does not overburden existing and planned utility systems, water resources, schools, roads, and other infrastructure.

- **2A.** Coordinate with utility and service providers such as BVU to establish an inventory and assessment of local infrastructure capacity, with regular updates to maintain a clear understanding of infrastructure needs in Bristol.
- **2B.** Continue to consult critical service and utility providers as the City reviews new development proposals.
- **2C.** Continue to support and advertise Bristol's access to broadband.

#### Objective #3

##### Youth

Strengthen the local education system, support the extracurricular development of the city's youth, and set the foundation for the future.

- **3A.** Engage the City's youth on civic issues through a regular outreach program with local public and private schools.
- **3B.** Evaluate creation of a high school and college student summer internship program at City Hall.
- **3C.** Encourage area employers to offer summer employment opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships to students.
- **3D.** Bolster academic and social linkages between Bristol's schools and Virginia and Tennessee colleges to better prepare students for college or other post-secondary career training program.
- **3E.** Promote mentoring programs of at-risk children in coordination with local non-profit organizations.
- **3F.** Review all existing youth services provided by the City and partner organizations, and identify opportunities to better promote or expand services.
- **3G.** Incorporate dedicated spaces for youth within planned developments, park and recreation facilities, and in Downtown Bristol.
- **3H.** Work with the Bristol Pirates and similar sports-related organizations to offer programs and services which encourage physical activity and recreation.



## Actions & Supporting Information

### Quality Municipal Services

As an independent city, the City of Bristol provides a range of municipal services to its residents. City government operates out of multiple facilities across the city, with the majority of administrative departments housed in the Bristol City Hall at 300 Lee Street in Downtown Bristol.

Operations are split between eighteen departments: Family Resource Center, Youth Services, Building Inspection, Circuit Court Clerk's Office, Finance Department/City Clerk, City Manager, Treasurer, Commissioner of the Revenue, Community and Economic Development, Fire, Human Resources, Parks and Recreation, Police, Public Works, Purchasing, Sheriff's Office, and Transit. Some departments are under the purview of the City Manager while others are elected constitutional offices.

The City should continue to encourage close coordination and communication between departments to ensure municipal services are high quality and identify opportunities for cooperation on projects. Often, the actions of one department will have a direct impact on other departments or elements of the City government. Communication between departments, as integral parts of the City itself, should be a top priority to guarantee civic services and amenities are provided in a quality and efficient manner.

### City Hall

Bristol City Hall is a two-story building located at 300 Lee Street in the heart of Downtown. It houses the majority of the City's administrative departments. It is expected to remain City Hall during the lifespan of the Comprehensive Plan.

### Police Department

The Bristol Police Department is housed in 501 Scott Street, which is also the western half of the City Hall Building. As of 2015, the department has 53 sworn police officer positions, and a non-sworn support staff of 21 full-time members for a total of 74 members. At this time, the department reports no plans to renovate or add a new facility and there are no issues with the size or location of their facility. Priorities for the department in the short term include improving the departmental garage, adding a second radio repeater and another frequency, and changing the record management system. In the medium to longer-term, the department hopes to increase the number of officers.

The City should continue to provide adequate levels of police protection throughout the City and ensure that emergency vehicles can effectively serve all areas of the City.

### Sheriff's Office

The Bristol Sheriff's Office is responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for the operation of city courts and the city jail, as well as acting as the municipality's process server. They operate out of two locations, the City Courthouse at 497 Cumberland Street, and the City Jail at 417 Cumberland Street. As reported in the public "Analysis of Potential Options for Meeting the City's Jail Needs Report," the City Jail is overcrowded.

The City should continue to explore options to reduce crowding in the City Jail, including participating in a shared regional job or construction of a new jail facility, either on the current site or at a new location in the community. Options for housing inmates during construction, impacts on adjacent uses, and other potential impacts should be reviewed.

### Fire Department

The Fire Department operates out of three facilities: 211 Lee Street (Station #1), 1603 Euclid Avenue (Station #2), and 105 Suncrest Drive (Station #3). They also own and operate a Fire Training Center at 2216 Shakesville Road. The department reports that water supply and distribution is inadequate, although service has gotten better over the years. Older lines and small feeder lines present issues in certain areas. The department expressed concern over the close proximity of Stations #1 and #2, which affects the credit awarded for an insurance (ISO) review. Their current rating is 2, which is much better than neighboring communities.

Over the next decade, the department is looking to replace trucks as well as a ladder unit. The department notes that they sought grant funding for a new station to replace the oldest facility (Station #1), but that the application was unsuccessful.

The City should:

- Provide adequate levels of fire protection throughout the City and ensure that emergency vehicles can effectively serve all areas of the City.
- Improve water supply and distribution for firefighting, replacing older lines and smaller feeder lines where necessary.
- Continue to evaluate opportunities to replace Fire Department Station #1.

### Capital Improvements Programming

The physical infrastructure systems and facilities of Bristol provide the backbone through which public amenities are provided. This includes public roadways, stormwater and sanitary sewers, the electric grid, civic facilities, and other infrastructure systems.

Bristol's financial resources will always be limited, and public dollars must be spent wisely. A Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) is a comprehensive schedule of prioritized public improvement projects, typically extending over a five-year period. A CIP allows the City to be able to appropriately focus infrastructure improvements on supporting the existing population and non-residential users, while ensuring new development and redevelopment can be executed as directed by the Comprehensive Plan.



A Capital Improvements Plan typically schedules the implementation of a range of specific projects, particularly the restoration and upgrading of existing utilities, roads, bridges, and infrastructure facilities. Expansion or improvement of City facilities would also be included in the CIP. A CIP also assigns priorities to identified projects and includes cost estimates and potential funding sources. Non-governmental entities frequently use a CIP to map out growth and investment in facilities and infrastructure. As the City develops and monitors its own Capital Improvement Plan, City staff should coordinate with other community facilities providers to ensure that investment is occurring in a logical manner and synergies can be created between public, quasi-public, and private improvements.

The CIP should be regularly updated in conjunction with updates to the Comprehensive and the development of a five-year Strategic Plan.

The City should:

- Conduct a comprehensive life cycle assessment for all City buildings, equipment, vehicles, facilities, and properties.
- Regularly identify necessary short-, medium-, and long-term facility, road, and infrastructure projects.
- Complete and annually review a 5 year Capital Improvement Program that identifies construction, maintenance, and improvement projects as well as infrastructure replacements and upgrades to be made in the short- and long-term.

## Intergovernmental Support, Coordination, & Cooperation

The efficiency and organization of a municipality is often reliant on the ability to coordinate and cooperate between internal departments, non-jurisdictional agencies, and adjacent government organizations. The City of Bristol, VA should work to maintain positive channels of communication with all public and quasi-public agencies and community services providers, as well as support them in their mission to provide quality services and infrastructure. This will help ensure better coordination of projects and long-range planning on a local and regional scale.

### Commonwealth of Virginia

The Commonwealth of Virginia has several branch offices within the City of Bristol, including:

- **Virginia Department of Health**, located at 205 Piedmont Avenue.
- **Virginia Department of Transportation – District Office #1**, located at 870 Bonham Road.
- **Virginia Department of Social Services**, located at 621 Washington Street.

### Bristol Public Library

The Bristol Public Library is located at 701 Goode Street in Downtown Bristol. The facility is jointly-owned by the City of Bristol, VA and the City of Bristol, TN. Each City Council appoints five members to the Library Board and each municipality provides equal funding to the library annually and each has 50% ownership of its capital assets. The distinctive brick and glass facility was completed in 2006 and is considered a significant educational asset. The City should continue to support the Bristol Public Library, recognizing it is one of the community's greatest assets and is a stabilizing anchor within Downtown Bristol.

### Bristol, VA Public Schools (BVPS)

The Bristol, VA Public Schools (BVPS) is a legally separate entity from the City which operates four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school for students residing in the City. The schools are overseen by an elected School Board, however, the City Council approves the School Board's operational and capital budgets and must approve the issuance of bonded debts.

The office for the BVPS is located at 220 Lee Street in Downtown Bristol. The facility also includes space for the City's Youth Services Department. Six schools are distributed throughout the community. BVPS notes that enrollment has declined over the past five years but enrollment is expected to stay the same over the next five years.

Renovations are expected in the coming years at Van Pelt Elementary School, Virginia High School, and Virginia Middle School. BVPS reports that they hope to consolidate and close three outdated facilities and build a new school at a location to be determined.

The City should continue to:

- Work with the Bristol, VA Public Schools (BVPS) as they reassess their facility needs, including development of new facilities and/or redevelopment and re-use of closed facilities. The closed Oak Street should be repositioned for office uses. If that is not considered market-viable, residential uses compatible with the surrounding neighborhood may be appropriate.
- Work with schools to review the existing parking facilities, buildings, drop-off/pick-up areas, and bus parking, including ingress and egress to ensure they are adequate and if not, identify opportunities for improvement.
- Work with schools to ensure proper buffering surrounding school facilities and provide safe and adequate access to all school sites.



### Re-Use of Closed Public School Buildings

School buildings are neighborhood anchors that attract activity and act as a focal point, but when left vacant they can become a liability to school operations, and a potential burden on the surrounding community. A review of existing adaptive school reuse projects indicates that there is not a strong correlation between structural characteristics and certain types of reuse. The needs of the surrounding community, market demand, and developer willingness have more to do with how the building is adapted.

Public school closures are a growing phenomenon in the nation, but marketing the school sites to buyers for repurposing proves difficult. To begin with, school districts are typically not set up to handle the challenges of property sales – their business is in education administration and not in real estate or economic development. Additionally, other entities compete with school districts to sell vacant facilities, such as private schools, which can make transactions more nimble and often have facilities in better shape than public schools.

Location changes the selling game as well – adaptation of a property on a busy corridor, is significantly more feasible than a property that is tucked away into the heart of a residential neighborhood, such as the vacant Oak Street School. A building in substandard condition that is on an active corridor, will likely have a higher asking price than a less accessible building in great condition.

Structural factors play a major part in the trouble of repurposing vacant school buildings. Typically, the larger the building, the more difficult it is to find a suitable use – smaller buildings are compatible with a wider range of uses and are easier to locate buyers for. Moreover, aged buildings may require serious renovations by the buyer, the need to be brought into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or might have insufficient parking. Excessive associated costs will drive away potential buyers.

School buildings are creatively re-utilized in a wide variety of methods. The most common occupants that take up home in closed schools are charter schools – 42% of large city school closures are reused by charters. Other institutional uses frequently establish themselves in school buildings as well, such as private schools, college and university buildings, health clinics, community or cultural centers, police stations, homeless shelters, and churches. If appropriate, the property is sometimes even bought up by the municipality, and transformed into a green park or other public space.

Commercial, residential, or office space is also sometimes compatible with the property's structure and location. Commercial and office applications have included neighborhood markets, recording studios, day-care facilities, technology centers, shopping centers, medical offices, school administration offices, movie theaters, and hotels. Residential properties, especially mixed-income apartments or mixed use developments, are also typical adaptations.

### BVU Utilities

The BVU Authority provides electricity, water, wastewater, and OptiNet services to Bristol's residents. It is managed and financed separately from the City. BVU operates three substations in Bristol. They report no plans for the renovation or addition of facilities, but do expect to make improvements to water and sewer lines. It is important that the City coordinate with BVU as the City reviews new development proposals.

### Other Partners

Other planning partners include Washington County, VA; Bristol, TN; Bristol Transit System; and the Bristol Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The City should maintain close communication with these entities to ensure residents continue to have access to quality public services and facilities. Where appropriate, the City should take advantage of opportunities to partner with other organizations and cooperate to improve the efficiency and quality of services provided.

### Supporting Youth

Bristol's future lies in its youth, who represent prospective residents, homeowners, entrepreneurs, business owners, and members of the work force. As such, it is important for the City to prioritize its youth by providing education, services, and activities that support their growth and keep them healthy, happy, and involved. To better engage and support Bristol's youth, the City should:

- Engage youth on local civic issues through a regular outreach program with local schools.
- Evaluate creation of a high school and college student summer internship program at City Hall.
- Encourage area employers to offer summer employment opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships to students.
- Bolster academic and social linkages between Bristol's schools and Virginia and Tennessee colleges to better prepare students for college.
- Promote mentoring programs of at-risk children in coordination with local non-profit organizations.

- Review all existing youth services provided by the City and partner organizations, and identify opportunities to better promote or expand services.
- Incorporate dedicated spaces for youth within planned developments, park and recreation facilities, and in Downtown Bristol.
- Work with the Bristol Pirates and similar sports-related organizations to offer programs and services which encourage physical activity and recreation.

### Re-Using Virginia Intermont College

Virginia Intermont College was a small private four-year college located northeast of Downtown and north of the Virginia Hill Historic District. It was founded in 1884 and ceased operations in 2014 after experiencing financial and reaccreditation issues. The roughly 30 acre vacant campus includes several institutional buildings, a fitness center, gymnasium, a 900 seat auditorium, and a pool. College leadership have put the campus up for sale; however, the college is also exploring options.

The College reports that the historical buildings need roof repair and replacement, most buildings need renovation, and that parking also needs repair. The vacant campus is a valuable asset within Bristol and represents a significant opportunity to retain a higher educational facilities within the community. The campus also has a significant impact on the stability and attractiveness of the surrounding neighborhood.

The City should work close with college leadership to attract a new user to the site. While the site could be repurposed for a variety of uses, the continued use as a college campus is an invaluable opportunity to offer higher educational opportunities to the community. Working together, the City and college should aim to attract a new educational institution to the campus, most preferably an existing larger university within the state or region that could operate the site as a satellite campus. This would ensure that a new tenant has the support and resources to successfully utilize the campus and could be a major factor in promoting Bristol throughout the region as a center for higher education.

# Community Facilities Plan

**GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION**

- 13 Virginia Department of Transportation – Bristol District Office
- 18 Bristol Public Schools – Public Transportation Department
- 22 Bristol Redevelopment & Housing Authority
- 24 Virginia Department of Health – Bristol City Health Department
- 27 Bristol City Courthouse
- 30 Bristol Schools – District Headquarters
- 31 Bristol City Hall

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

- 2 City Fire Department Station #2 & Bristol Life Savings Crew, Station L
- 11 City Fire Department Station #3
- 12 Southwest Virginia Criminal Justice Training Academy
- 14 Fire Department Training Academy
- 16 Appalachia Juvenile Commission – Highlands Juvenile Detention Center
- 23 Police Department
- 28 City Jail
- 29 Fire Department Station #1

**EDUCATION**

- 1 Stonewall Jackson Elementary School
- 4 Virginia Middle School
- 6 Virginia Intermont College (closed)
- 7 Washington–Lee Elementary School
- 8 Virginia High School
- 10 Joseph Van Pelt Elementary School
- 19 Highland View Elementary School
- 25 Bristol Public Library

**SOCIAL SERVICES & PROGRAMMING**

- 5 Girls Incorporated of Bristol
- 9 U.S. Social Security Administration
- 20 Virginia Department of Social Services
- 21 Boys & Girls Club of Bristol

**TOURISM**

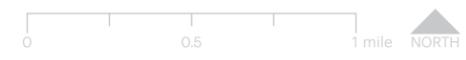
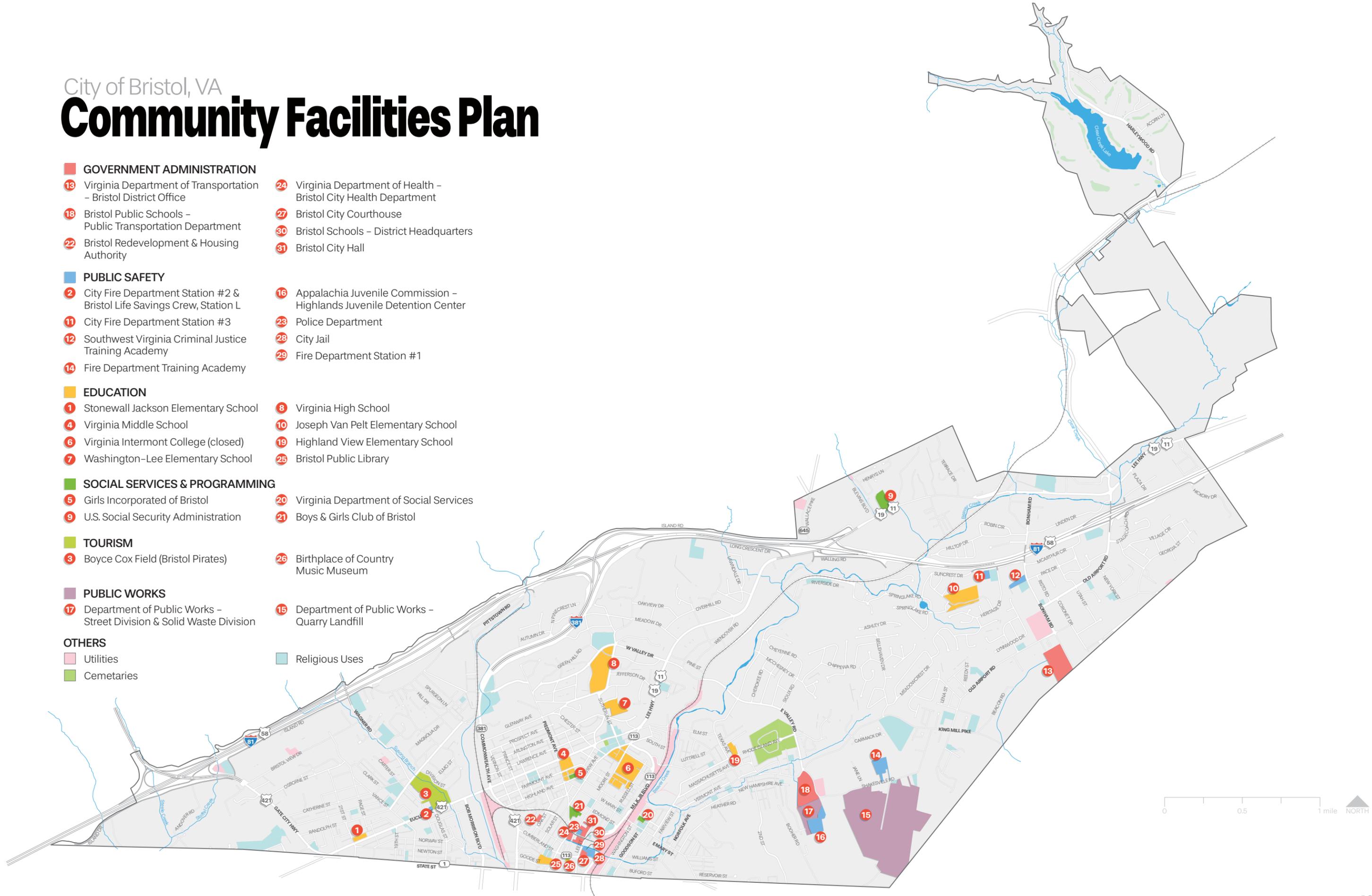
- 3 Boyce Cox Field (Bristol Pirates)
- 26 Birthplace of Country Music Museum

**PUBLIC WORKS**

- 17 Department of Public Works – Street Division & Solid Waste Division
- 15 Department of Public Works – Quarry Landfill

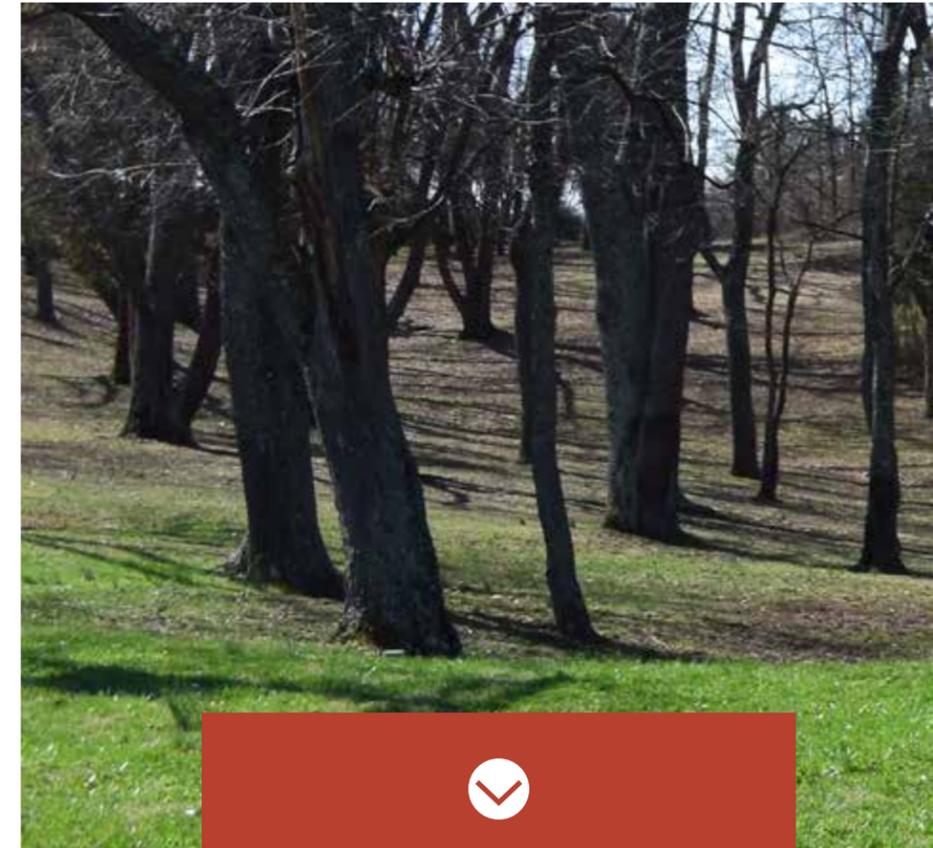
**OTHERS**

- Utilities
- Cemeteries
- Religious Uses



# PARKS, OPEN SPACE & ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES PLAN

Parks, open space and environmental features contribute significantly to the City's appeal, overall quality of life, image, character, desirability, and aesthetics. Public parks and open space provide places for residents and visitors to recreate and enjoy nature. This section of the Comprehensive Plan presents the plan, policies and recommendations which pertain to parks, open space and environmental features. The Plan seeks to preserve and protect important and sensitive environmental features and to provide adequate open space and recreation to the community.



**The Parks, Open Space & Environmental Features Plan is organized into five sections.**

Park Network: Access & Facilities

Connectivity

Recreation Assets

Connecting Downtown to Sugar Hollow Park

Natural Features



## 2035 Goal

Preserve and enhance a network of parks, open spaces, and trails that improve quality of life, safeguard the environment, and strengthen public health.

### Priority Objectives

#### Objective #1

##### Parkland Quantity & Access

Ensure Bristol's residents have equitable access to city parks and open space, expanding the park network, where necessary.

- **1A.** Develop a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that can establish a vision for the park's system, assess quality of existing facilities, forecast park needs over the course of the next ten years, prioritize expansions, and identify needed site improvements.
- **1B.** Explore opportunities for new mini-parks or neighborhood parks in older, developed neighborhoods within the City with park deficiencies identified on the accompanying map.
- **1C.** Encourage private park or open space dedications with large industrial or commercial developments for employee usage.

- **1D.** Continue to plan and budget for expansion or improvement of existing parks.
- **1E.** Evaluate opportunities to develop a shared-use program with the Bristol, VA Public Schools that allows residents to use school fields, playgrounds, and recreational amenities during non-school hours.
- **1F.** Promote the addition of new public gathering spaces, pocket parks, and plazas.

#### Objective #2

##### Connectivity

Provide a network of pedestrian connections between neighborhoods, parks, and recreational destinations.

- **2A.** Establish a long-term connectivity program that identifies needed sidewalks and trails, and prioritizes projects based on prospective impacts such as ease of completion, cost, and benefit to residents.
- **2B.** Develop a continuous trail, sidewalk, and/or path network between Downtown and Sugar Hollow Park along or near Beaver Creek.
- **2C.** Pursue opportunities to connect Sugar Hollow Park and Clear Creek Golf Course to residential areas to the

southwest.

- **2D.** Develop the "Corvette Greenway" proposed within Chapter 6: Bob Morrison Boulevard Sub-Area Plan.
- **2E.** Establish dedicated pedestrian routes between park facilities, neighborhoods, and important destinations that are marked with wayfinding signage and improved pedestrian crossings.
- **2F.** Minimize the impact of physical barriers, such as Beaver Creek, railroad tracks, Interstate 81, and other high traffic roadways, through dedicated pathways, trails, intersection crossings, and larger projects such as pedestrian bridges or tunnels.
- **2G.** Utilize existing waterways or open space corridors to establish dedicated greenways connected with recreational trails.

#### Objective #3

##### Regional Recreation Assets

Leverage major recreation assets such as the Clear Creek Golf Course, Bristol Pirates, and Sugar Hollow Park to enhance local quality of life and stimulate tourism.

- **3A.** Work with the Bristol Pirates to identify and implement long-term facility needs that can elevate the team's position within the region.
- **3B.** Utilize larger recreational facilities to host community events and gatherings that will highlight the amenities these areas offer and foster greater community interaction and activity.
- **3C.** Review and make improvements to wayfinding signage, gateway features, and other branding elements that could elevate awareness of unique recreational amenities for both residents and visitors.
- **3D.** Incorporate unique recreational assets and amenities into branding and promotional efforts for the City.

#### Objective #4

##### Waterways

Enhance the health and appearance of Bristol's waterways and protect them from pollution and encroachment.

- **4A.** Establish a cross-jurisdictional program to regularly monitor waterways and review the quality of water and health of water ecosystems.
- **4B.** Develop minimum setbacks and other regulations within floodplains and near waterways to limit the impact of development and construction.
- **4C.** Update development regulations to require mitigation of storm-water runoff from large paved areas, including incentives for inclusion of raingardens, bioswales, and other methods to reduce runoff and remove pollutants from waterways.
- **4D.** Identify opportunities to leverage and protect waterways by connecting them to recreational opportunities such as dedicated parks and trails.
- **4E.** Beautify Bristol's creeks, where possible, through native plantings and removal of concrete channelization and chain linked fencing.

#### Priority #5

##### Development

Minimize development impacts on natural features such as wetlands, ponds, and mature trees.

- **5A.** Encourage the preservation of mature trees within new developments.
- **5B.** Develop a street-tree program to maintain and expand the City's mature tree canopy by planting new trees and replace dying trees where appropriate.
- **5C.** Elevate unique natural features by incorporating them into dedicated recreational space to improve their prominence and vitality within the community.



## Park Network: Access & Facilities

As of 2016, Bristol contains eighteen parks and recreation facilities: fifteen traditional parks, one golf course (Clear Creek Golf Club), one recreation facility (Douglas Senior Center), and one sports complex (Randolph Field Complex). All are operated by the City of Bristol's Parks and Recreation Division. Collectively, they provide more than 660 acres of park space within the community.

### Development of a Parks & Recreation Master Plan

To effectively guide the long-range provision of park and recreation opportunities for the community, it is recommended that the City build on this Comprehensive Plan with a detailed Parks and Recreation Master Plan. A more specialized planning effort would greatly assist the City in prioritizing park improvements and potential land acquisitions.

### Classifications

The National Recreation Parks Association (NRPA) is the recognized authority for parks and recreation planning in the United States. Each of the City's parks have been classified based on size and function utilizing NRPA's best practices recommendations. A classification hierarchy creates a formal structure for assessing facilities and establishing the role and function of each facility.

The service areas of each park are also shown on the accompanying map to depict which areas are served or not served by the existing park systems.

- **Mini-Parks** address a limited and small-scale recreational need and are smaller than one acre in size. They typically serve the local population that lives within a quarter-mile.

- **Neighborhood Parks** are the basic unit of any park system and serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. They generally range from several acres to fifty acres in size. The NRPA recommends that each resident have access to a neighborhood park within a 0.5 mile walk of their home, reflecting an average walk time of 10 minutes.

- **Community Parks** serve both local neighborhoods as well as the larger population that drives to the park. They serve a larger geographic area and often have ball fields and trails, and offer recreational activities beyond what is available in neighborhood parks. Their service area is two miles.

- **Other Parks** include the Clear Creek Golf Club (a special use park), Douglas Senior Center (a recreation facility), and the Randolph Field Complex (a sports complex park).

# Parks, Open Space & Recreation Plan

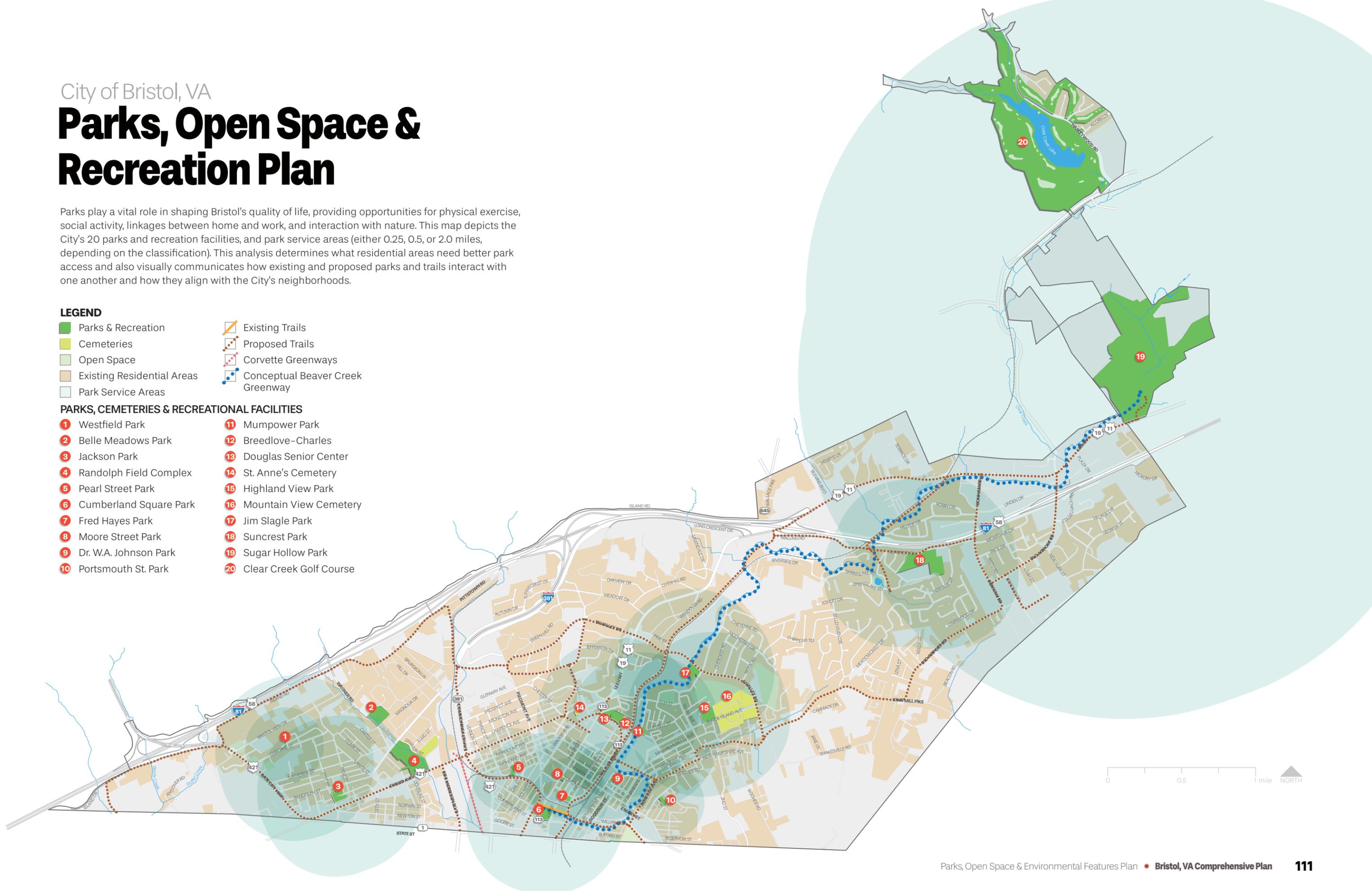
Parks play a vital role in shaping Bristol's quality of life, providing opportunities for physical exercise, social activity, linkages between home and work, and interaction with nature. This map depicts the City's 20 parks and recreation facilities, and park service areas (either 0.25, 0.5, or 2.0 miles, depending on the classification). This analysis determines what residential areas need better park access and also visually communicates how existing and proposed parks and trails interact with one another and how they align with the City's neighborhoods.

## LEGEND

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Parks & Recreation         |  Existing Trails                  |
|  Cemeteries                 |  Proposed Trails                  |
|  Open Space                 |  Corvett Greenways                |
|  Existing Residential Areas |  Conceptual Beaver Creek Greenway |
|  Park Service Areas         |  |

## PARKS, CEMETERIES & RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Westfield Park           |  Mumpower Park             |
|  Belle Meadows Park       |  Breedlove-Charles         |
|  Jackson Park            |  Douglas Senior Center    |
|  Randolph Field Complex |  St. Anne's Cemetery     |
|  Pearl Street Park      |  Highland View Park      |
|  Cumberland Square Park |  Mountain View Cemetery  |
|  Fred Hayes Park        |  Jim Slagle Park         |
|  Moore Street Park      |  Suncrest Park           |
|  Dr. W.A. Johnson Park  |  Sugar Hollow Park       |
|  Portsmouth St. Park    |  Clear Creek Golf Course |





### Park Supply Evaluation

The NRPA endorses an extensive list of best practices for local parks and recreation planning that commonly serve as “baseline” standards. Although these best practices are conventional, it is important to recognize that individual communities must respond to demographic changes, land use context, funding for maintenance and installation, and other factors. Considering variations in outdoor recreation environments throughout the country, the City should select guidelines that best serve its planning needs. Acknowledging this, the City can evaluate its parks and open space inventory with its own developed standards, as well as the two major NRPA standards: population-based standards and service area/geography-based standards.

### Population Based Standards

On the whole, the NRPA suggests a standard of 10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents, not including school properties or golf courses. Bristol exceeds this rule-of-thumb significantly by more than 260 acres. However, it is important to note that 90% of the City’s parkland is found in one park in the northeastern portion of the community, Sugar Hollow Park.

More specifically, it is suggested that a community have 0.5 acres of mini park space per 1,000 residents, 2.0 acres of neighborhood park space per 1,000 residents, and 7.5 acres of community park space per 1,000 residents. Outside of a very small deficit in the Mini Parks category, Bristol has a significant surplus of park space from a volume perspective.

### Park Supply Evaluation: Population Based Standards

Park Type	Existing Acreage	NRPA Recommended Acreage	Deficit / Surplus
Mini Parks	6 acres	8.9 acres	- 2.9 acres
Neighborhood Parks	44 acres	35.6 acres	+ 8.4 acres
Community Parks	400 acres	133.5 acres	+266.5 acres
All Parkland	447 acres	178 acres	+ 269 acres

*Note: golf courses and school properties excluded. The 2010 Census population of 17,835 was used for calculations.*

### Service Area Standards

In addition to ensuring an adequate overall supply of parkland, it is important that parks are located in areas that are convenient and accessible to the population. Park and recreation master plans typically utilize service area standards to analyze the location of parks and recreation facilities. The NRPA provides suggested service standards for neighborhood parks and community-wide facilities. These standards should be used to assess the effectiveness of Bristol’s parks and identified underserved areas.

All of Bristol’s parks have been classified with an associated service area, which are shown on the accompanying map to depict which areas are served or not served by the existing park systems. Many of Bristol’s residential neighborhoods are not served by parks based on NRPA standards.

### Conclusions

Providing the Bristol community with quality parkland access requires a widespread and diverse system of park facilities that offer recreational opportunities within reasonable proximity to residents. Overall, Bristol has an adequate supply of parkland available to residents in terms of quantity. However, much of the parkland is found within one large park, and many neighborhoods fall outside of park service areas, including neighborhoods in the central-north (roughly between Wagner Road in the west and Lee Highway in the east) and eastern (around King Mill Pike and Old Airport Road) lack local park access.

It is recommended that the City:

- Develop a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that can establish a vision for the park’s system, assess quality of existing facilities, forecast park needs over the course of the next ten years, and identify needed site improvements.
- Explore opportunities for new mini-parks or neighborhood parks in older, developed neighborhoods within the City with park deficiencies identified on the accompanying map.
- Continue to plan and budget for expansion or improvement of existing parks.
- Evaluate opportunities to develop a shared-use program with the Bristol, VA Public Schools that allows residents to use school fields, playgrounds, and recreational amenities during non-school hours.



### Planned Upgrades

The City reports several plans to expand and improve the existing system. The City should continue to plan future projects and upgrades to facilities within the parks system both in the near future and long term. The regular inventory and review of all existing parks and recreation facilities will help identify aging amenities that should be replaced or renovated as well as opportunities to introduce new programming. Planning and review of future upgrades and projects should be completed annually as part of the City's Capital Improvement Program and budget allocation process.

### Connectivity

Connectivity is necessary to ensure that residents not only have a variety of parks to visit, but have safe methods by which to visit them from their homes, schools, place of work, and beyond. Efforts to increase connectivity should be a central step in improving the parks system by complementing new park facilities with greater accessibility. This is provided by trails, pathways, and dedicated routes that allow pedestrians and bicycles to move safely through the community.

Note: information within this section is also included in **Chapter 7: Transportation & Mobility Plan**.

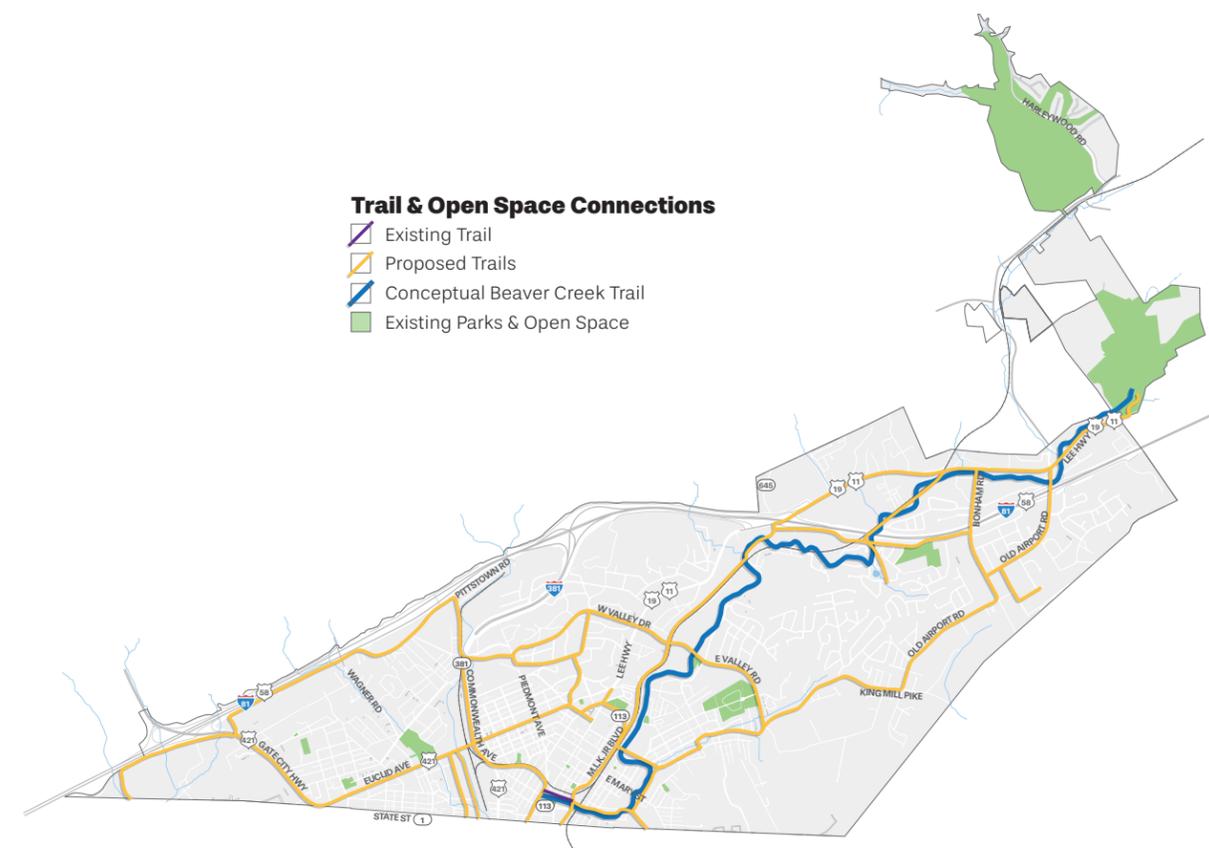
### Existing & Proposed Trails

Bristol contains two multi-purpose trails: (1) a small two-block trail along Beaver Creek between Moore Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and (2) the Sugar Hollow Park trail, comprised of several nature trails totaling 8.5 miles of trails and 2.5 miles of paved walkways. Prior planning efforts have been undertaken or proposed to extend the existing trail network within Bristol. They include:

- **Local network.** The Bristol Metropolitan Planning Organization's Long Range Transportation Plan of 2011 recommended a comprehensive trail network for Bristol, including sections along rail right-of-way.
- **Beaver Creek Riverwalk.** A Beaver Creek river walk and trail that snaked through Downtown was proposed in the City's 1999 Ignite Plan.

Bristol, VA also sits within the midst of several existing regional trails spanning Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee. These include:

- **Virginia Creeper Trail,** a 34 mile trail running from Abingdon, VA through Damascus, VA and ending at the VA/NC state line in Whitetop, VA.
- **US Bicycle Route 76 Trail,** a cross-country multi-purpose trail that originates in Kansas and ends in Virginia.
- **Cherokee National Forest,** which includes over 600 miles of trails throughout several states including the nearly 150 mile Appalachian National Scenic Trail.
- **Wes Davis Greenway,** a 2800 foot trail built along a former rail bed in Bristol, TN.
- **Steele Creek Park** includes several trails in Bristol, TN.





Trail development should not only focus on development of a network within Bristol, but also opportunities to connect to the larger regional trail network. Expansion will not only increase resident quality of life and encourage healthy lifestyles, but also better link residents and non-residents alike to Bristol's many important destinations.

### Connectivity Program

The City should review the pedestrian system to establish a comprehensive, phased Connectivity Plan & Program that identifies improvements needed to connect disparate elements of the existing network. A comprehensive network could be comprised of multiple types of pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks, dedicated off-road trails, on-road shared roadway trails, on-road shoulder trails, informal pathways, and more. The program should aim to comprehensively connect residents to park and recreational facilities, community facilities, and important destinations within Bristol. This program should be long-term, providing an action plan with projects and improvements prioritized based on ease of completion, costs, benefits to residents, and other prospective impacts. Opportunities to plug into the regional trail network should also continue to be evaluated.

One of the greater challenges for improved connectivity will be significant physical barriers that challenge mobility within the community. Examples of barriers include grade changes, Beaver Creek, local railroad tracks, and high traffic roadways. I-81 is a key example which blocks pedestrian and bicycle access to Sugar Hollow Park for residents who live south of the interstate. As part of the connectivity program, the City should look to minimize the impact of these barriers through pathways, trails, intersection crossings, and other projects. As a longer-term solution, the City should analyze the feasibility of larger projects, such as pedestrian and bicycle bridges and tunnels, which can transcend physical barriers.

### Blueways/Greenways

The City should review existing open space corridors, rail, and utility easements, and establish plans for dedicated greenways within the community. This can be accomplished either within the connectivity program or through a separate effort. The Beaver Creek and Little Creek waterways show strong potential for development as greenways, with ample room and opportunity for trails and related amenities. Development of greenways can help to protect open space and environmentally sensitive areas within the City and create safe, extended routes through the community.

An initial project could be development of the Corvette Trail & Greenway, described within **Chapter 6: Bob Morrison Boulevard Sub-Area Plan**. While small in scale, it could provide a starting point for a much larger greenway and trail network.

The development of a dedicated Beaver Creek greenway or trail network is another opportunity. For more information, please see pages 114-115.

### Recreation Assets

Bristol contains a number of recreation assets unique to the region, including Clear Creek Golf Course, Sugar Hollow Park, and the Bristol Pirates minor league baseball team. The City should aim to leverage these amenities to enhance the local quality of life and stimulate tourism within Bristol. This can include efforts to reposition and highlight existing facilities as well as better publicize recreation assets both locally and regionally.

The City should place an emphasis on utilizing larger recreational facilities to host community events and gatherings, particularly Sugar Hollow Park. This will help to highlight the amenities these areas offer and foster greater community interaction and activity. In addition, the City should work with the Bristol Pirates to identify potential projects and expansions to improve their operations, including relocation to a facility that could draw larger crowds and provide better amenities.



As both a tourist attraction and recreation asset, the Bristol Pirates and their facilities can have a significant impact on the City's image. Improvements to these and other significant recreation assets will elevate the team and City's position within the region.

## Natural Features

Any urbanized area is located within an existing natural landscape, which typically has played an important role in shaping how the community developed. Bodies of water, topography, vegetation, and wildlife can all play an important role in understanding a community and planning for its future. Bristol is located in some of the most recognizable and distinctive environmental areas in the United States, and capturing this natural setting is important for future land use and development planning.

The City should take steps to preserve its natural features and environmentally sensitive areas from future development or encroachment which may lead to loss of habitat, flooding, or other negative impacts to the environment. This can be accomplished through the adoption of regulatory measures to protect natural areas. This should include areas of extreme topography, wetlands, waterways, floodplains, and open spaces surrounding these and other important recreational or environmental features. The overlay district should prohibit development within these areas and put in place a mechanism to review construction or expansion that could affect environmentally sensitive areas.

Where appropriate, the City can further protect unique natural features by incorporating them into dedicated recreational spaces. This will help improve their prominence and vitality within the community while converting potentially developable land into unique recreational spaces for residents and visitors.

## Elevation & Topography

Bristol sits within the foothills of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and the elevation of the community ranges from 1,670 feet to 2,000 feet. For comparison, the mean elevation in Virginia is 950 feet. 29% of the City's land is sloped at greater than 15% and 61% of the City is sloped at between 5% and 15%. This hilly terrain provides for scenic vistas and a beautiful landscape but can pose challenges for development.

## Tree Canopies

Tree canopies, or a city's tree cover, act as an urban forest and help shield direct sunlight, absorb rainwater, and improve air quality. Trees also increase the quality of life by beautifying the streetscape. Outside of the city core and industrial areas, Bristol's tree canopy is relatively well-preserved.

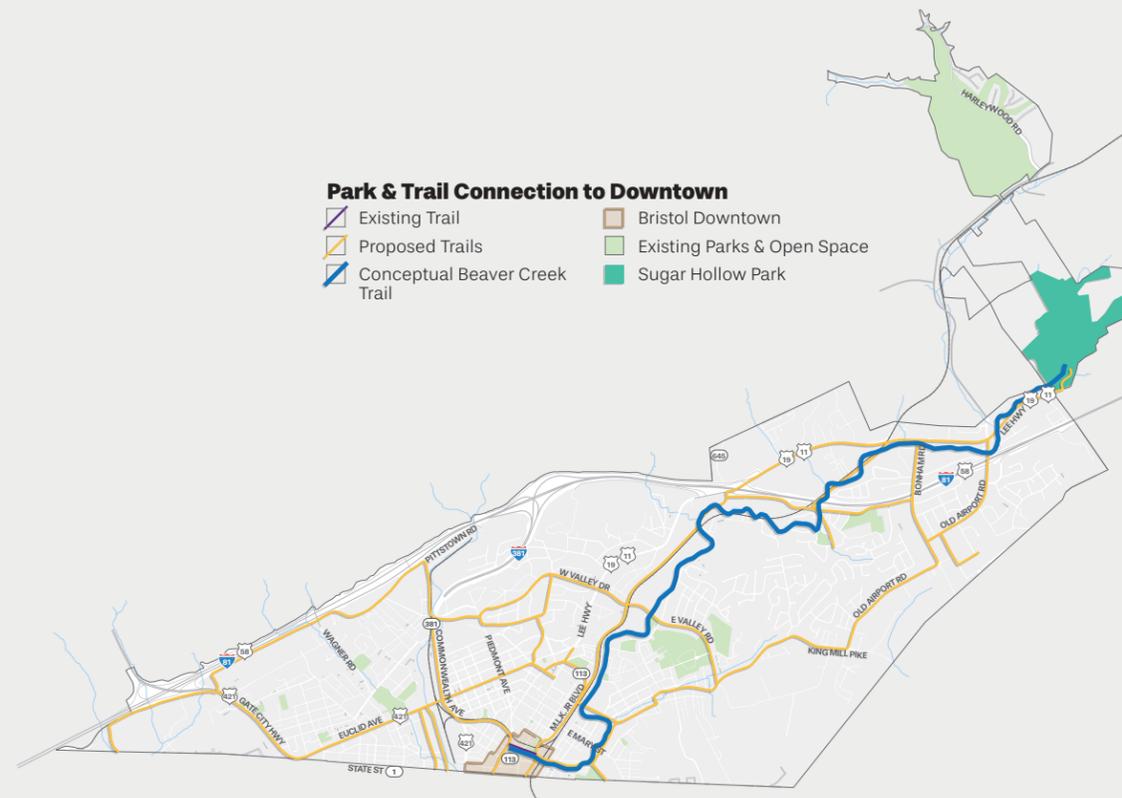
The City should take steps to preserve the existing tree canopy by protecting mature trees during redevelopment. In addition to or as part of a tree preservation policy, the City should create a street-tree program that incentivizes maintenance of existing trees and replacement of removed or aging trees where appropriate. This can apply to developments which will remove trees from the City's canopy as well as areas that have been historically deforested. Closer to Downtown, this program could be used to carefully maintain and expand parkway trees that contribute to the City's scenic image.

# CONNECTING DOWNTOWN TO SUGAR HOLLOW PARK

## BUILDING A BEAVER CREEK TRAIL

The proposed Beaver Creek Trail is a scenic, multi-use trail route that would follow Beaver Creek, connecting Downtown Bristol with four local parks and terminating at Sugar Hollow Park. Passing through a mix of land uses, the trail would serve both recreational and active-transportation users, providing an opportunity for residents and visitors to traverse Bristol while experiencing the City's natural and cultural amenities.

This section establishes a conceptual framework for the future development of a Beaver Creek Trail. The signed trail would likely be comprised of integrated sidewalks, greenways, off-street trails, and pathways, depending on the development program. Along some stretches, the trail would likely follow the flow of Beaver Creek; where this is not possible, the trail may route along nearby sidewalks, paths, or streets. In appropriate locations, new residential or mixed-use development could capitalize on views of and access to the creek.



### Benefits

A new Beaver Creek Trail would provide many benefits to the community

### Recreation & Community Health

Access to recreational amenities such as trails not only provides opportunities for leisure activities, but also improves public health and wellness. Community members that regularly take advantage of local parks and trails are shown to have lower body mass indexes, lower blood pressure, lower levels of stress, and improved quality of life.

### Active Transportation

The ability of trails and greenways to function as transportation corridors make them critical components of a community's transportation network. Further, increased active transportation may reduce traffic congestion, decrease pollution, and spur economic development.

### Conservation

Trails and greenways promote environmental protection and conservation. By maintaining greenways free of development, a community can maintain and enhance potential biological, aesthetic, and cultural features of a community. The natural areas that comprise a greenway offer educational and recreational opportunities, as well as environmental benefits such as cleaner air and water.

### Flood Control

Comprised of natural areas with permeable surfaces, greenway components can provide critical flood management. Trails that follow bodies of water, such as Beaver Creek, serve as critical buffers to adjacent development. These natural buffers can reduce flood risks to developed area, which contribute to safer, more resilient communities.

### Past Planning: Ignite (1999)

The City's 1999 Ignite Downtown Plan established the foundation for the Beaver Creek Trail. Ignite proposed a Beaver Creek Walk, or an activated walkway along the creek in Downtown Bristol that could drive new development and activate the downtown. Ignite rightly noted that Beaver Creek is underutilized and could be leveraged for environmental, recreational, and commercial benefits. The Comprehensive Plan builds upon this recommendation by proposing a city-wide path that would extend from a new Bristol Creek Walk in Downtown to Sugar Hollow Park in the northeastern part of the city.



Source: City of Bristol

## Planning Process

Planning and constructing a trail network is a community effort. The chart below outlines a typical process for implementing a trail project:

## Planning Considerations Rails-with-Trails

The Norfolk Southern rail line that follows much of the proposed Beaver Creek Trail alignment provides an opportunity to take advantage of existing right-of-way and/or may require cooperation with the rail company to obtain trail easements. Trails located adjacent to active rail lines are not uncommon. As of September 2013, the Rails to Trails Conservancy identified 161 "rails-with-trails" projects in 41 states. Research has shown that these trails include a range of designs and prove to be safe, with only three reports of injury involving a trail user and train in a 20-year period.

## Landowner Cooperation & Buy-In

The successful implementation of the Beaver Creek Trail will require close cooperation with adjacent land owners. While land acquisition is the most effective strategy to maintain control over trail corridors, easements provide an effective alternative. As such, landowners should be active participants in the planning process, helping to define public use under an easement, including the type of access, when and under what conditions access can be used. Easements should also be granted that limit liability to landowners. Where/when easements are not available, the usage of sidewalks or the shoulders of roads may be possible.

## Potential Funding Sources

Trails and greenways can be funded through a number of state and federal programs:

- Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program funding for transportation alternatives
- Recreational Trails Program
- Virginia Recreational Trails Fund (VRTF)
- Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF)
- Virginia Open-Space Lands Preservation Trust Fund (VOSLPTF)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Virginia Outdoors Fund
- Virginia Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLPP)

Additional information about these programs can be found in the Implementation Chapter.

## Case Studies Roanoke Valley Greenways

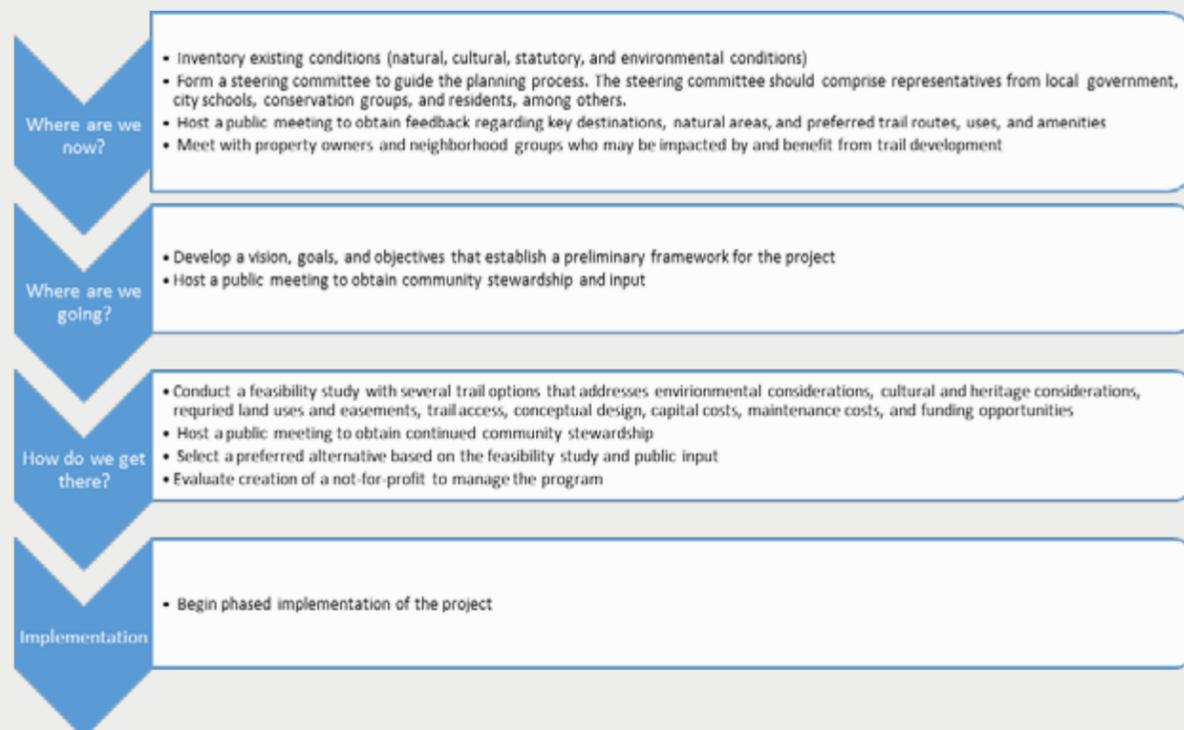
The Roanoke Valley Greenways is a network of greenway corridors throughout the Roanoke area that comprise a combined 270.9 miles of paved, cinder-surfaced, on-road, and natural surface trails. The project began in 1995, when a members of the non-profit group, Valley Beautiful Foundation, led the charge to engage and educate local officials on the benefits of greenways. With support from local officials, a Steering Committee was formed that helped to engage the public to create a community-based greenway plan.

In 1996, the committee secured funding through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) to launch a pilot program for the Mill Mountain Greenway, the first of more than a dozen area greenways. The Steering Committee then organized the creation of the Greenway Commission, an advisory body with appointed citizen and staff representatives from Roanoke Valley jurisdictions that coordinates greenway planning, development, and maintenance; and Pathfinders for Greenways, a citizen non-profit group that assists with greenway education and promotion, volunteer coordination, maintenance, and fund raising.

## Tobacco Heritage Trail

The Tobacco Heritage Trail is greenway trail network that spans five counties and 18 municipalities in southern Virginia. The project began in 2003, when a group of citizens and local officials presented a proposal to form a tax-exempt corporation that would acquire abandoned railroad property to develop a trail system. This established the Roanoke Rails-to-Trails Corporation (RRRT), which began work to brand the project as the Tobacco Heritage Trail and obtain approval to utilize a segment of abandoned right-of-way between the towns of La Crosse and Brodnax that was acquired by local governments in the 1970s for public use. Once obtained, the RRRT met with Norfolk Southern to acquire additional abandoned rail rights-of-way to expand the trail network.

Initial segments of the trail network were funded through a grant from the Bikes Belong Coalition, VDOT Enhancement Program, USDA Rural Development, Virginia Land Conservation Fund and the Recreational Trails Fund. The project also received advisory assistance from the National Park Service through the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA). RRRT continues to work with local municipalities to implement the Tobacco Heritage Trail Overall Master Plan (2008), which when complete, would encompass 160 miles of rail rights-of-way linked to 110 miles of on-road trail, new trail, and active rail right-of-way.



Source: Tobacco Heritage Trail, Flickr, East Coast Greenway, 2015

## Wetlands

Wetlands are lands inundated or saturated with water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation and animals adapted for life in such conditions. Examples include marshes, bogs, and swamps. If properly maintained, they can filter water from impurities, recycle nutrients, capture rainwater and melting snow, and provide a habitat for wildlife. Bristol contains several small pockets of fresh water emergent wetlands and fresh water forested/shrub wetlands. The City should strictly prohibit development on wetlands.

## Floodplain

Floodplains are any areas of land that are susceptible to being overcome from floodwaters in the event of a 100 year flood. In other words, during any given year, there is a one-percent chance that the area will be flooded. The City's zoning code restricts development in the floodplain. The floodplain is mostly concentrated within Downtown Bristol and along the City's streams and creeks. New development within a floodplain should be built out of the floodplain and include adequate green infrastructure.

## Waterways

Four main waterways run through the City of Bristol, including Beaver Creek, Mumpower Creek, Susong Creek, and Little Creek. They are supplemented by three minor creeks: Clear Creek, Goose Creek, and Steele Creek. These waterways are shallow, narrow, and slow moving, but play an important role in the health and ecology of the community. Waterways support plant life and wildlife, and are vital to the cycle of water moving through a region. Pollution and encroachment by development can have a significant impact on waterways and the surrounding environment within Bristol and other communities located downstream. Further, waterways are seen as valuable amenities to residents, improving the appearance and atmosphere of an area.

The City should take proactive steps to protect these waterways from encroachment and pollution. Given historic development patterns within Bristol, this can be a challenging endeavor as many existing structures are within close proximity to the streams and many neighborhoods lack any sort of riparian buffer. However, the City could work with existing property owners, where possible, to institute a buffer on existing development or, as redevelopment occurs, ensure that new development does not encroach upon the waterway.



*Development should not encroach upon waterways such as rivers and creeks.*



# Environmental Features

Bodies of water, topography, vegetation, and wildlife can all play an important role in understanding a community and planning for its future. Open spaces and environmental features also sustain a healthy ecosystem and provide a beautiful landscape. Bristol is located in some of the most recognizable and distinctive environmental areas in the United States, and preserving this natural setting is important for future land use and development planning. The City should take steps to preserve its natural features and environmentally sensitive areas from future development or encroachment which may lead to loss of habitat, flooding, or other negative impacts to the environment.

## LEGEND

- **Parks / Open Spaces** are green spaces throughout the community that are utilized for either active or passive recreation.
- **Wetlands** are lands inundated or saturated with water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation and animals adapted for life in such conditions. The City should strictly prohibit development on wetlands.
- **100-Year Floodplains** are any areas of land that are susceptible to being overcome from floodwaters in the event of a 100 year flood. New development within a floodplain should either be built out of the floodplain or not permitted; if built out, the site should include adequate green infrastructure.
- **Streams & Creeks** include four major creeks and three minor creeks. Waterways support plant life and wildlife, and are vital to the cycle of water moving through a region. Pollution and encroachment by development can have a significant impact on the surrounding environment within Bristol and other communities located downstream. The City should take proactive steps to protect these waterways from encroachment and pollution.
- Proposed Riparian Buffer & Development Set-Back** are areas along the banks of major creeks that should not be encroached upon with development.
- **Proposed Beaver Creek Trail** is a conceptual trail that would run along Beaver Creek, with both recreational and environmental benefits.



■ **Tree canopies**, or a city's tree cover, act as an urban forest and help shield direct sunlight, absorb rainwater, and improve air quality. The City should take steps to preserve the existing tree canopy by protecting mature trees during redevelopment.

