

# MONROE COUNTY 2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



**Monroe County**  
West Virginia

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FINAL DRAFT



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Monroe County is a sparsely settled community with a predominately agricultural economy. The County includes three incorporated communities: Alderson, Peterstown, and Union. Alderson lies partly in Monroe County and partly in Greenbrier County, divided by the Greenbrier River. The Monroe County portion of Alderson is an old, established town that contains several historic homes and buildings. The Town of Peterstown borders the Virginia State Line in the southwest corner of Monroe County. Peterstown has maintained several of its small-town businesses while having served as a residential community with many residents working outside of the county, including some who work out of State. Union, the seat of Monroe County, contains significant historic homes and buildings, has maintained its small-town businesses and boundaries, and has experienced little growth. Several small unincorporated communities exist throughout the County, each containing their own unique architecture, history, and culture. In both its culture and economy, Monroe County has greatly been influenced by agriculture and forestry. The agriculture and forestry industries of Monroe County thrive due to the thousands of natural springs that existing within its borders, which act as the main source for the County's drinking water.



Additionally, most county residents feel vested in the County's agrarian community and feel great pride in the farms that make up a vast majority of the County's landscape. However, residents are increasingly concerned about the possible increase in population, development, and housing.

Each of these concerns, if left unaddressed, threaten the integrity of the County's water supplies, the rural atmosphere of the County, and the community's agrarian way of life. Thus, Monroe County wishes to move forward with a plan for balanced growth and development that:

- (1) Protects the agriculture and forestry areas from incompatible development.**
- (2) Protects the integrity of the County's water supplies.**
- (3) Maintains the rural atmosphere of the County.**
- (4) Creates economic development in a way that aligns with the values of the community.**
- (5) Preserves the County's historic sites.**
- (6) Creates public recreation opportunities based on the natural environment.**
- (7) Improves transportation to align with community needs.**
- (8) Enhances access to housing, healthcare, and safety.**



## Monroe County Comprehensive Plan Process

Successful planning seeks to understand what lessons can be learned from the community's history while simultaneously crafting a path for the future. Planning is first done by drafting and adopting a comprehensive plan—a long-term, community blueprint that helps guide growth over the following ten to twenty years. While not a legal document, this plan holds great importance because of its role in providing an unbiased testament to the dreams and goals the community has for itself as well as ideas on how to make those visions become reality. This comprehensive plan, in effect, serves as a guide for local leaders, potential investors, and local property owners as they make decisions involving the community in the coming years.

With a purposefully wide focus, a comprehensive plan can be useful to communities in many different situations. If a community wishes to adopt regulations, a comprehensive plan must first be adopted to better inform the community and local administrators of different issues and factors that could be either helpful or hinder the regulatory process. After identifying issues affecting the community, a comprehensive plan can be later used to effectively allocate tax dollars to ensure that most pressing issues are given the highest priority. The issues a comprehensive plan identifies would therefore be rectified by its use and for the betterment of the community as a whole. Having a comprehensive plan in place is also a prerequisite for many federal and private grants available to small communities to aid their development and having an up-to-date plan can help any community further guide investments in its area as such opportunities arise.

Many of the issues identified in Monroe County's 2006 Comprehensive Plan were again identified as major issues for this updated plan. These high priority issues include maintaining the character of the County through balanced development, protecting the natural resources of the County, and providing residents with greater access to basic needs and services.

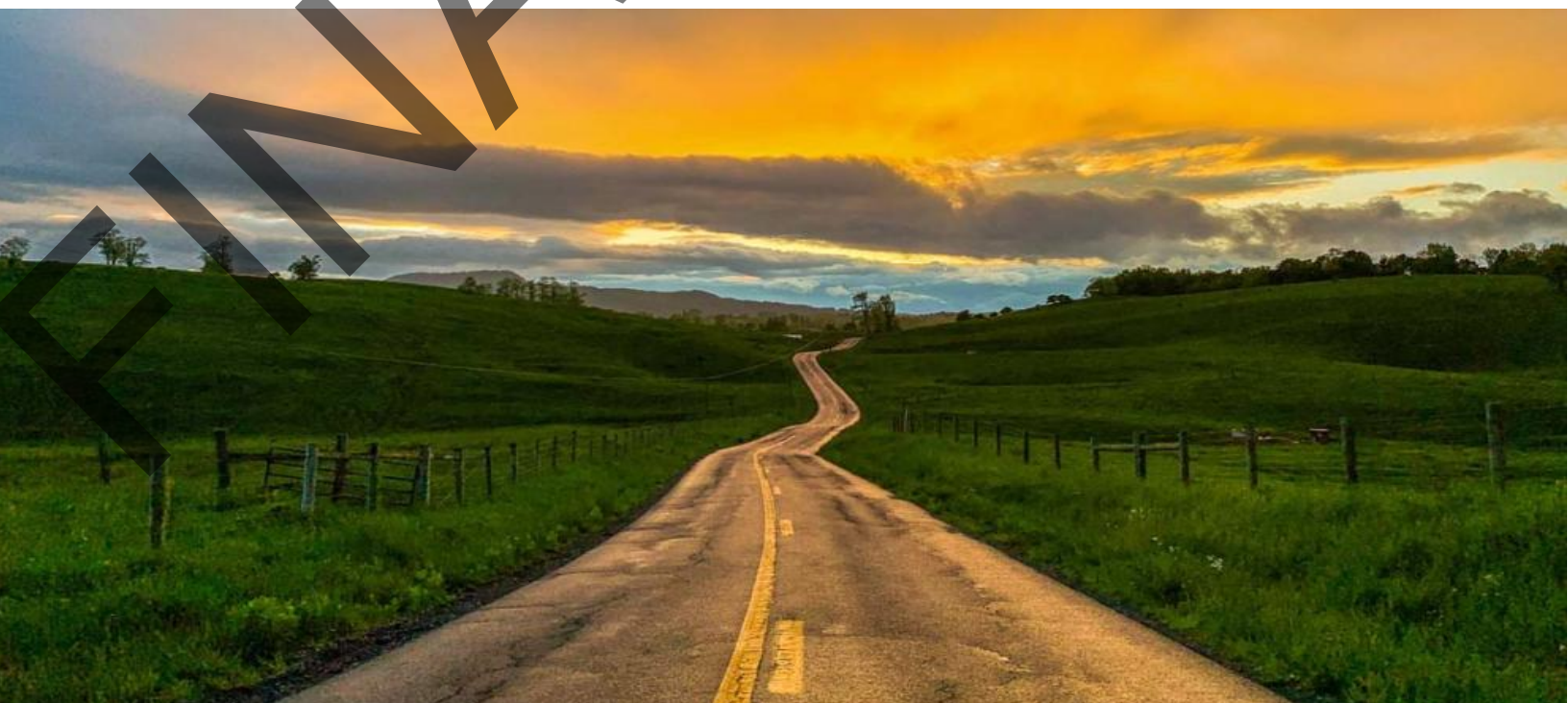
Chapter 8A of the West Virginia State Code outlines elements that must be included in every comprehensive plan. These requirements ensure some level of uniformity between comprehensive plans across the State as plans are implemented or updated. The tables below elaborate on those mandatory elements and what pages they can be found on in Monroe County's Comprehensive Plan.

Required Components of a Comprehensive Plan, W.Va. Code § 8A-3-4(c)	
Code Provision	Page #
<i>Land Use</i>	
Different land uses (e.g. residential, agricultural, historic, conservation)	50-64, 67
Population density and building intensity standards	8
Growth or decline management	8-10, 13-14
Projected population growth or decline	13-14
Constraints on development (including identifying flood-prone and subsidence areas)	38, 63, 67-68
<i>Housing</i>	
Analyze projected housing needs and different types of housing needed (including affordable housing for persons with disabilities)	4, 9, 13-14, 25, 32, 60, 62-63
Identify the number of projected housing units and land needed	13-14
Address substandard housing	15, 25
Rehabilitate and improve existing housing	15, 25
Adaptive reuse of buildings into housing	10
<i>Transportation</i>	
Vehicular, transit, air, port, railroad, river, and any other mode	25, 32, 40, 45-48, 66
Movement of traffic and parking	45, 46, 48
Pedestrian and bicycle systems	45, 47-48
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<i>Economic Development</i>	
Analyze opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses	53-55, 62
Identify and designate economic development sites or sectors	53-55, 62

Identify types of economic development sought	53-55, 62
<i>Miscellaneous Components</i>	
Infrastructure	26, 41-49
Public Services	28, 35-39, 54, 64-68
Rural	11-12, 19-21, 25-26, 39, 42
Recreation	17, 19-27
Community Design	12, 23, 25, 61, 63
Preferred development areas	61, Attachment B
Renewal or redevelopment	59
Historic preservation	12, 16-27
Safety	64-66

## Goals & Objectives

Goals were identified that will help Monroe County reach its vision for the future: utilize the land in an economically efficient way that preserves the vital natural resources and character of Monroe County. Objectives for each goal were developed that are specific steps that are needed to reach the goals. The Comprehensive Plan will go into detail for each goal by examining the issues, deciding how to address the issues, and developing implementable action items.



# Population & Demographics

From 2010 to 2020, Monroe County's population decreased by approximately eight percent from 13,502 residents to 12,376 residents (a loss of 1,136 residents). Furthermore, from 2010 to 2020, the average population density per square mile decreased from 28.6 residents to 26.2 residents. Population density is projected to remain relatively low. From 2020 to 2024, the population of Monroe County increased from 12,376 residents to approximately 12,462.

These data make estimating future population growth in the county difficult. Using the population growth from 2020 to 2024 as a baseline and reducing that growth to take into account population decline in the previous decade, the population of Monroe County is projected to grow to approximately 12,600 residents over the next 10 years.

Monroe County's population is predominantly White with Whites making up approximately ninety-five percent of the total population. The Black and Hispanic/Latino population in Monroe County equates to approximately one percent of the total population each, whereas all other racial groups within the County stand at less than one percent of the total population.

Age demographics in Monroe County have changed within the past ten years. As of 2023, the median age in Monroe County is 46.7 years compared to 39.7 years in 2009. Furthermore, approximately twenty-six percent of the population is over 65 years old, while approximately twenty percent of the population is under 18 years old. Six percent of the population is under 5 years old.

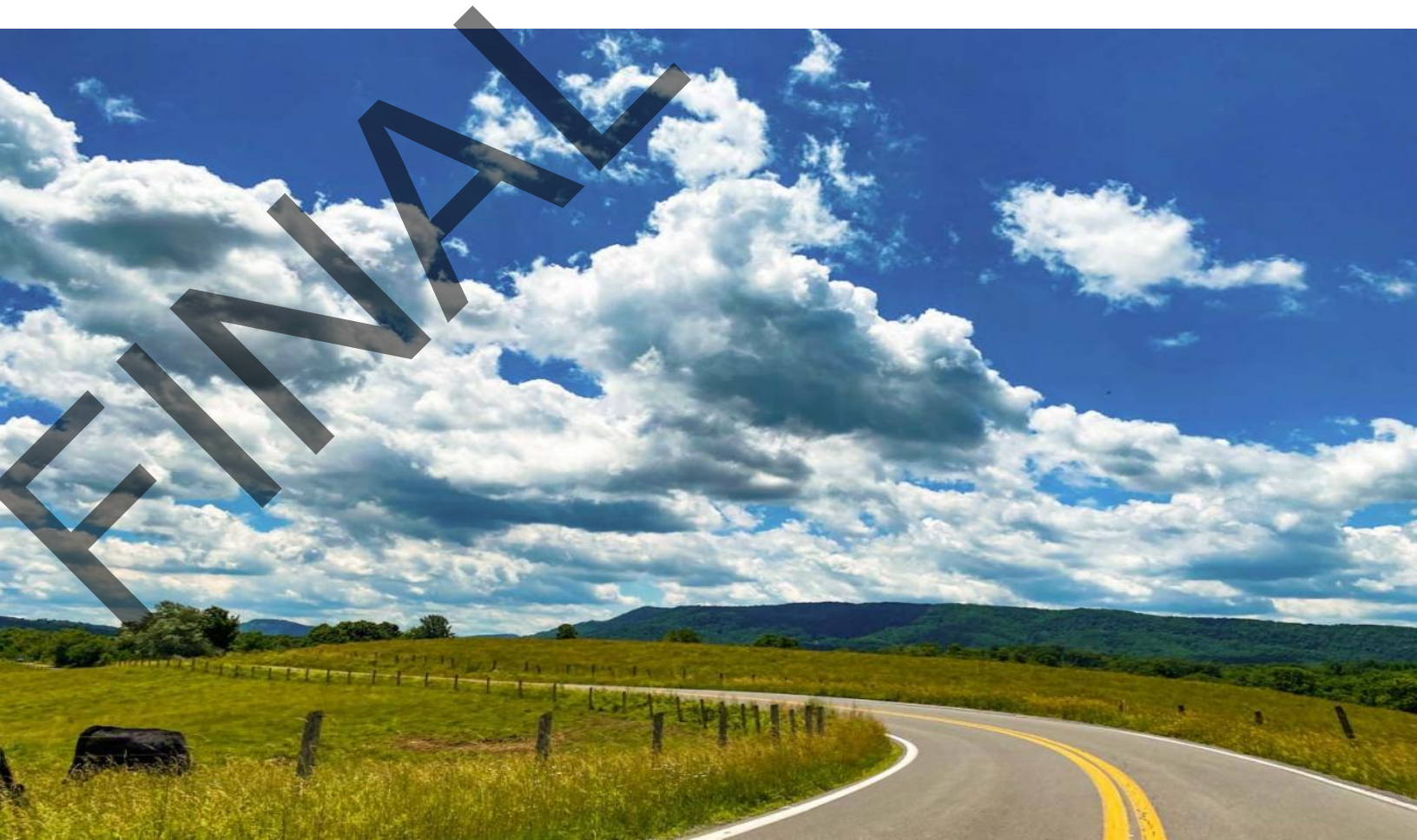




In terms of economic demographics, in 2023, the poverty rate in Monroe County was approximately sixteen percent, almost identical to the state's poverty rate. However, the median household income and the per capita income of Monroe County were lower than that of the state's median household income and per capita income. In 2023, Monroe County had a median household income of \$54,508 compared to the state's median household income of \$57,917. Additionally, in 2023, Monroe County had a per capita income of \$27,648 compared to the state's per capita income of \$32,949. However, Monroe County's education demographics somewhat reflect the same rates as the state, with approximately eighty-eight percent of Monroe County and the state's population possessing a high school diploma in 2023, and approximately fifteen percent of Monroe County's population having a bachelor's degree or higher compared to twenty-three percent of the state's population.

Finally, in terms of housing, Monroe County had approximately 6,247 housing units in 2023. From 2019 to 2023, Monroe County had a home ownership rate of approximately eighty-two percent with an average of 2.6 people per household. Additionally, from 2019 to 2023, the median value of owner-occupied housing units was \$146,000 compared to a median value of \$130,000 in 2010. Furthermore, from 2019 to 2023, the median monthly owner costs in Monroe County without a mortgage was \$346 compared to \$951 for monthly owner costs with a mortgage. Lastly, the median rent in Monroe County from 2019-2023 was \$677 compared to \$543 in 2010.

Given the relatively flat rate of population growth and past declines in population, few, if any, housing units are required for future growth in the county. A dozen or fewer new housing units would provide sufficient housing for new residents, some of whom are part-time residents of the county. Sufficient vacant land exists in the county to accommodate this housing. Some opportunities exist in the county for adaptive reuse of non-residential buildings for residential use. For example, plans exist to convert the old Peterstown Elementary into senior housing



# CHAPTER 2

## QUALITY OF LIFE

Monroe County is one of the most desirable places to live because of its rural character, stable population, historic resources, access to recreation, and low taxes and crime. The county is dominated by farmland, pastureland, and forest. Farming remains the focus of the county's identity and economy. Nestled in the southern Allegheny Highlands, rolling valleys and karst topography create a bucolic setting. The county is home to caves, springs, and trout streams. The ridge-and-valley topography creates long, open views.

The population has been relatively stable in recent decades. This stability makes the demand for public services predictable and leads to a sustainable tax base. The farmhouses, barns and historic districts preserve the character of the area. The mineral springs resorts offer an opportunity to keep the history visible. The landscape also offers a wealth of recreational opportunities. Residents and tourists can hike, view wildlife, fish, hunt and cave in the county, among other activities.





## Rural Character

Monroe County is a rural community, with low density population. The agricultural and historic nature of the county contributes to the rural character of the area. The largest town is Union, with a population of about 425 people. The county includes no interstate highways or big box retail stores, contributing to rural character. More urban amenities are available nearby, allowing county residents to have the best of both worlds.

The presence of national forests and clean mountain air, as well as the abundance of clean water creeks, springs, and rivers add to the rural character. Opportunities for hiking, hunting, and fishing abound. The county's fertile soils are ideal for agriculture, while limestone and timber provide materials for construction. Many scenic viewsheds dot the area. The historic buildings and districts maintain a rural feel even though the county also provides modern amenities. Maintaining rural character while enhancing economic opportunities provides the best of all worlds for residents of the county.



## Stable Population

2010 Population 13,502 housing units 7,581

2020 Population 12,376

2023 Population 12,401 472.8 square miles 26.2 people per square mile (ACS)

Monroe County's overall population has remained relatively stable over the last century. In the late 1990s, the County experienced some growth from the I-81 corridor in Virginia, resulting in several retirement and commuter homes in Monroe County over the years. However, according to United States Census data, the population of the county decreased by 8%, from 13,502 in 2010 to 12,401 in 2023 (American Community Survey).

As of 2023, 6,263 total housing units existed in Monroe County, down from 7,581 units in 2010, a 17.4% decrease. 82.6% of the housing units are owner occupied, exceeding the statewide rate of 73.5%. Since homeowners generally maintain their homes better than renters, the high ownership rate means that the housing is generally in good condition. The median value of these housing units is about \$134,500. The median monthly mortgage plus maintenance costs (and including property taxes and insurance) is \$951, while those without a mortgage pay a monthly median of \$346 for maintenance, property taxes and insurance. Median monthly rent in the county is \$605.





## Population Continued

The number of residents under the age of 19 makes up 24% of the overall population, whereas the number of residents over the age of 65 makes up about 24.9%. The median age is 46.7 years, about 10% higher than the median age in West Virginia. The county would like to retain more of the youth to counteract this trend of an older population and maintain a vibrant community.

Monroe County has one nursing home and one assisted living facility to care for these older residents. County View Assisted Living is near Peterstown and locally owned/operated. Springfield Comprehensive Care Center is affiliated with Princeton Community Hospital and provides assisted living and full nursing home care for elderly residents. Additional senior housing is needed to accommodate the current and expected growth of older residents. Local government and service providers can help provide a range of such housing which can include another nursing home, assisted living facility, or include senior rental housing and handicapped-accessible upgrades to existing homes.

## Housing

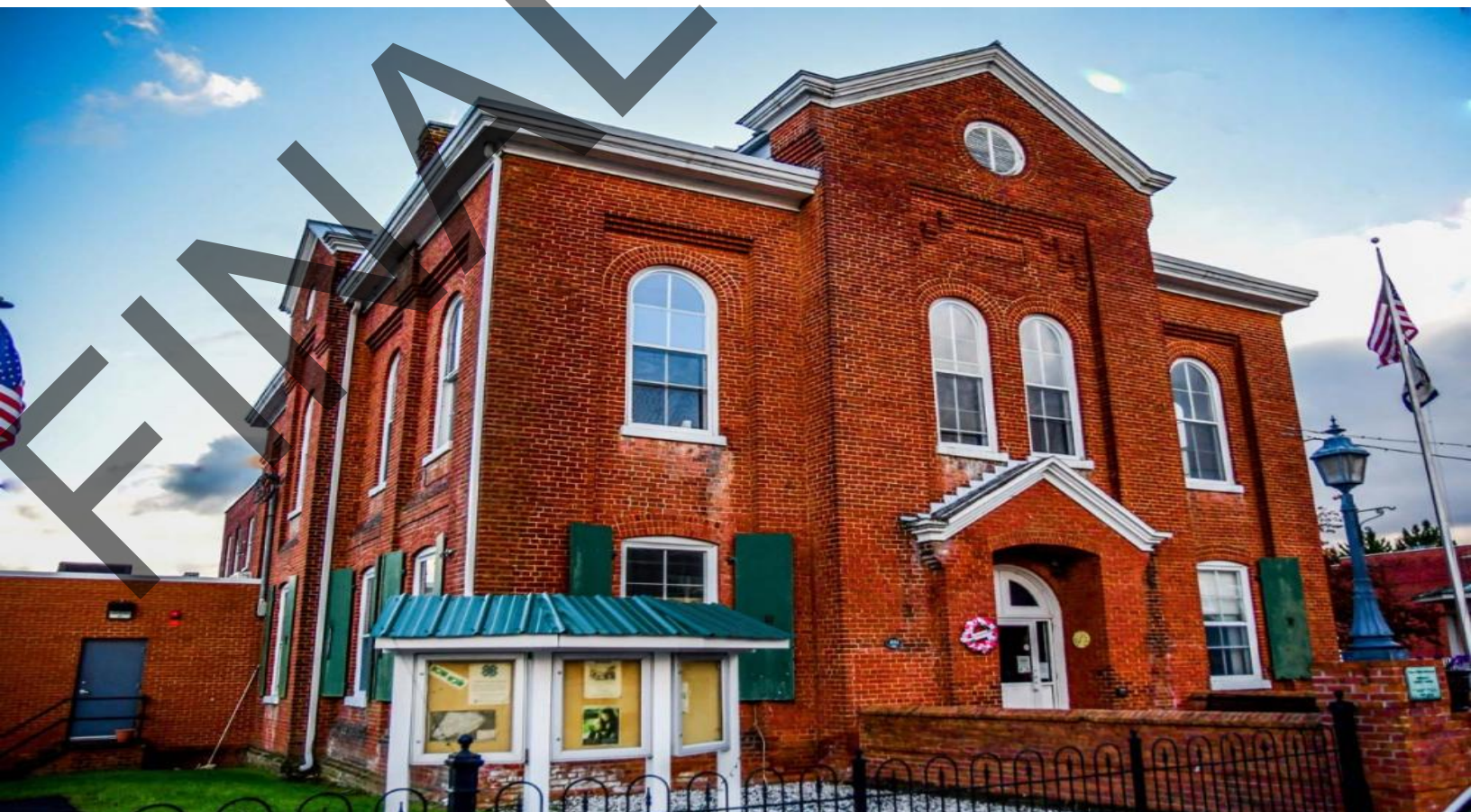
About 28% of the housing units in the County were built after 1990. Older homes contribute to the County's historic and cultural qualities, but many homeowners cannot afford the upkeep needed to make them safe and energy efficient. Federal and state-funded programs to help owners include single family housing repair loans and grants under the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development Program, Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants, administered by the West Virginia Development Office, and the Weatherization Assistance Program under the U.S. Department of Energy.

Mountain Heart Community Services offers weatherization services, housing counseling and energy efficiency improvements in Monroe and surrounding counties. Monroe County lacks a Habitat for Humanity affiliate, but nearby counties sometimes include Monroe County in their efforts. The West Virginia Housing Development Fund also offers home repair and energy efficiency programs.



## Historic Preservation

Monroe County offers a blend of historic sites and scenic attractions that reflect its frontier past. Artifacts show that Monroe County's history extends as far back as the pre-colonization time period when the land may have been held by Native American tribes, although not occupied at the time of European settlements. The County wants to preserve historic sites that enhance local, economic opportunities and protect the wealth of historic structures, archeological sites, and landscapes. Throughout the area, there are several historic homes and buildings. Current historical sites in the County include dozens of historic churches ranging from the Rehoboth style circa 1780, to classic revival churches of the mid 1800s, and to the Victorian and Gothic structures built at the turn of the century. Several one-room schools still stand. Other schools are abandoned or have been converted into homes, barns, or various community buildings. Some of the historic, business buildings include two turn-of-the-century train stations, post offices, department stores, and community grocery stores. Additionally, a unique stone roadside fountain pavilion stands along West Virginia Route 219 near Fountain Springs Golf course. This fountain used to be a watering hole from a natural spring that provided a beautiful and fun area for children to play and residents to relax. The original fountain had a hand-carved basin and piped water, and was built by a master Stonemason during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in the 1930's. The fountain is no longer operational but still remains a landmark.





Monroe County was part of Greenbrier County, Virginia until 1799 and was named for the then Governor of Virginia James Monroe, who later became President of the United States. The first settlers, mostly Scotch-Irish and German immigrants from eastern Virginia and Pennsylvania, arrived in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The county supported the Confederacy during the Civil War and resisted the county's inclusion into West Virginia. The county's economy has historically relied on farming, timber, and water-powered mills along creeks. Mineral spring resorts operated in the county from 1790 to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Monroe County has 27 places on the National Register of Historic Places, including 3 places of National significance and 10 places of Statewide significance. Significant places include Old Sweet Springs, Old Sweet Springs Historic District, Rehoboth Church, Alderson Bridge and Alderson Historic District.

Of the historic structures also providing recreational opportunities, there are five Grist Mills still standing in Monroe County. These include Reed's Mill and Cook's Mill that remain in reasonably good shape, McClung's Mill in fair condition, and Roger's and Nickell's Mill in dire need of assistance. Additionally, significant historical architecture remains at two mineral springs resorts that once housed U.S. Presidents and other internationally famous guests. Salt Sulphur Springs dates back to the 1820s. A new facility in Monroe County has been erected: the recreational resort of Four Phillies that provides fun and adventurous vacations for families.

Approximately 25% of the County's total households were built prior to 1950. Of these homes, many include elaborate Ante-Bellum Plantation houses, early log homes, and Victorian farmhouses. Of these classic farm home complexes, there are also vintage wooden barns and complex outbuildings. Unfortunately, these farm structures are rapidly disappearing. Older homes contribute to the historic and cultural qualities of the County, but many homeowners cannot currently afford the upkeep needed to make them safe and energy efficient. Various programs have helped to provide upgrades and rehabilitation such as REACH or Southeasters Appalachian Rural Alliance, but there has not been a consistently utilized program. Monroe County wants to encourage such rehabilitation as a means of further promoting the County's unique identity, improve the area's overall quality of life, and create more tourism opportunities.

The Pepper Bridge in Monroe County is both a historic landmark and still actively taking vehicular traffic today. The County seeks to identify and preserve other historic and archeological sites while avoiding benign neglect to existing historical sites and structures.





## Recreation

One of the biggest assets of Monroe County is their rural character and scenic landscapes. For over 200 years, the County has gained praise for its mineral springs resorts drawing in tourism as early as the Revolutionary War Era and especially during the 1800s. Such resorts include Salt Sulphur Springs, Red Sulphur Springs, Sweet Springs, and other smaller facilities. Salt Sulphur Springs opened as a resort in 1820, and many confederate leaders made their headquarters here during several campaigns. Most of the large resorts closed shortly before, or because of, the Great Depression. Consequently, many private homes began renting out their rooms to summer visitors. Lodging for recreational purposes still exist at unique facilities like Creekside Resort, the Guest Cottage, and Larew Cottage.

The County would like to see further development of the Old Mill complex at Greenville and the Trout House Lodge. Additional recreation opportunities include Fountain Spring golf course, the annual Autumn Harvest Festival sponsored by WVU Extension, 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades in Alderson and Linside, the annual Farmer's Parades hosted by the Union Area Chamber of Commerce, the Willow Bend Agricultural Innovation Center, a Mennonite business at Gap Mills, upscale restaurants, novelty or craft shops, and antique stores. Union's only antique store, however, recently closed but the art supply store and restaurants remain open. Alderson additionally has an arts and crafts shop. Although more specific destination points are less common, and there are few historical buildings open and accessible to the public, the area remains scenic, nonetheless.

An abundance of pastoral and mountain landscapes, clean streams, and historic structures exist in the county. Moncove Lake State Park offers boating, camping, hiking, picnicking and fishing. There are numerous streams throughout Monroe County perfect for fishing including Second Creek Fly Fishing. Second Creek, Indian Creek, and Laurel Creek run through Monroe County providing as a scenic place to fish.

The county offers ample hunting opportunities in national forests at “package hunt” facilities such as Stony Brook, Mountain Meadow, Potts Valley Outfitters, and Hollow Hill Farm as well as various private properties with owner permission. There are 15,000 acres of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest within the County’s boundaries including Hanging Rock Observatory, one of the only two direct access points in West Virginia to the Appalachian Trail, the 4.5-mile-long Potts Valley Trail that follows an old railroad, and areas specific to hiking and biking. The County plans to factor in hiking and biking activities when making future road upgrades and building developments.





The area also has the Slaty Mountain Preserve which is a conserved area of rare shale barren habitat. Various caves offer great exploration opportunities to spelunkers although none currently operate commercially.

In addition, residents may participate in many local clubs, civic groups, sports teams, and hobbies. Such clubs include, but are not limited to, Rotary, Ruritan, Lions Club, Masons and Shriners. Other interest groups include Antique Tractor Club (in existence since 1995), a Spinning and Weaving group, informal literary and bridge clubs, and members of the community who sporadically meet to engage in cultural events such as making apple-butter, molasses, and quilts. The Monroe Arts Alliance also offers classes in various art venues for adults and children to take. They sponsor different art exhibits and musical performances for residents to enjoy.

Broken Poles Catfish Pond in Ballard offers three large ponds for fishing. Tourists and residents alike enjoy this amenity.

<https://brokenpolescatfishdotcom.wordpress.com/questions/>

Many residents can also enjoy watching the local leagues for baseball, basketball, football, and soccer that young people enjoy. Kids are also able to enjoy participating in Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and the national 4-H Program that was originally founded in Monroe County. Community centers will also sponsor other smaller social events through the County with many situated in former public-school buildings.

Monroe County wants to provide more specific and public recreational activities that draw on the surrounding natural environment and promote their creation to grow tourism and economic opportunities based on the needs and wants of residents and visitors of all ages and interests. Organized promotion and increased funding will be necessary to effectuate this desire. Unfortunately, there is a financial risk to opening more tourism related facilities when the rate of tourism is not currently adequate to support such business growth. The combined growth must happen incrementally and concurrently to be efficient. Moreover, another challenge to opening additional historic sites to the public, for recreational purposes, is that the County lacks personnel to provide reasonably constant access, especially if they are privately owned. Funding can be provided through increased hotel or motel taxes, although those have proven not to provide enough revenue due to the lack of current tourism as well.



## Low Taxes, Low Crime

West Virginia real property taxes are among the lowest in the country, lower than bordering Virginia. Among West Virginia counties, Monroe County's real property taxes are lower than the surrounding counties of Greenbrier, Summers and Mercer in West Virginia and the surrounding counties in Virginia. Agricultural lands and forestlands are eligible for use-value assessment based on specified conditions are being met, reducing real property taxes even further.

Monroe County is serviced by the Monroe County Sheriff's Office and West Virginia State Police. The area enjoys a low crime rate compared to the surrounding area and has maintained this low rate over the years. This low rate can be attributed to the County's strong moral compass. In the coming years, Monroe County will work to keep the crime rates low and stable as they progress economically and socially.

Recently, the area has seen an uptake in drug use, by roughly 11-12% as of 2024, resulting in emergency calls to first responders. Moreover, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office and West Virginia State Police Office are currently facing staffing issues.



## Healthcare

Monroe County is currently served by Monroe County Health Center with facilities in Union and Peterstown. Additionally, the County's public schools are staffed by several doctors with a sliding scale fee structure for low-income areas. Monroe County Health Center operates under the guidance of a Board of Directors appointed by the Monroe County Commission and funded with some governmental financing. The Health Center also provides for the Monroe County Board of Health and the County's sanitation in food service inspections, sewer inspections, and other public health issues. Only 9% of residents under the age of 65 do not have health insurance.

The County also has two private healthcare facilities providing medical services, one being a chiropractic clinic and the other being a physical therapy office. There are also dental offices in Union. These towns, and Alderson, each have pharmacies within their borders. Union has an additional FMRS mental health satellite clinic. However, nowhere within Monroe County's borders are there eye-care facilities or hospitals. The nearest hospitals are outside of the County ranging from fifteen minutes to an hour's drive away. More advanced medical treatment hospitals are more than one hour's drive outside of the County's borders. advanced life services ambulance services Monroe County Health looking for dental office in Peterstown.

Two ambulance companies provide ambulance services. Union has a volunteer first responder unit that will go anywhere in the county to treat on-site. Cannot transport patients.



## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTION STEPS:**

### **Goal 1: Enhance Quality of Life for Residents**

Monroe County should preserve its rural character while strengthening the day-to-day well-being of residents by supporting small businesses, volunteer assistance programs, and improved access to essential services. Expanding broadband, enhancing healthcare access, and improving transportation options will help sustain community vitality and ensure a high quality of life for all.

**Objective 1.1:** Maintain Monroe County's desirable rural character while supporting community vitality.

- **Action Steps:**

- Support small businesses
- Encourage volunteer-based programs to assist seniors and low-income homeowners with home repairs (link to USDA and WV Housing Development Fund programs).

**Objective 1.2:** Improve access to essential services that support a high quality of life.

- **Action Steps:**

- Expand broadband internet access to underserved areas.
- Support telemedicine partnerships to improve rural healthcare access.
- Maintain and enhance transportation options for seniors and residents without vehicles (volunteer driver programs, Mountain Transit, regional transit coordination).

## Goal 2: Expand Recreational Opportunities

Monroe County should strengthen its recreation system by enhancing existing outdoor assets, expanding local programs, and protecting scenic landscapes. Investments in trails, parks, and heritage activities, paired with thoughtful promotion of the county's natural and cultural attractions, will support community wellness and position Monroe as a distinctive rural tourism destination.

**Objective 2.1:** Improve and promote existing outdoor recreation assets.

- **Action Steps:**

- Upgrade facilities at Moncove Lake State Park (trails, signage, accessibility features, water and sewer infrastructure). Look for water that Union can pump for water storage – create redundancy in water capacity. The County presently has 3 sources of water now, but would like 4 or 5.
- Promote Second Creek and other trout streams as regional fishing destinations.

**Objective 2.2:** Increase community-based recreation.

- **Action Steps:**

- Support local recreation leagues, youth sports, and senior fitness programs.
- Encourage “heritage recreation” such as farm tours, maple festivals, and craft fairs.

**Objective 2.3:** Protect and expand the county's system of trails and scenic byways.

- **Action Steps:**

- Establish bike trails and a bike-friendly atmosphere.
- Protect the rural beauty and character of state-designated Scenic Byways and Backways within the county, as well as the many other scenic country roads.

**Objective 2.4:** Market Monroe County as a nature and heritage tourism destination.

- **Action Steps:**

- Create a visitor guide highlighting hiking, caving, birding, and scenic drives.
- Partner with regional tourism organizations to brand Monroe as an “authentic rural destination.”
- Encourage local lodging (B&Bs, farm stays) that complements rural character.
- Update and maintain a comprehensive list and map of currently available tourism and recreational opportunities

- Collect and maintain a comprehensive list of potential tourism or recreational opportunities, and steps needed to make them publicly accessible
- Collect, maintain, and distribute data on current level of tourism site usage, visitor numbers, and economic impacts

### **Goal 3: Preserve and Promote Historic Resources**

Monroe County should preserve its historic buildings, districts, and cultural landscapes while making them accessible and engaging for residents and visitors. By restoring key sites, expanding educational opportunities, and encouraging adaptive reuse and heritage-based tourism, the county can protect its historic character and support economic vitality.

**Objective 3.1:** Protect Monroe County's historic buildings, districts, and cultural landscapes.

- **Action Steps:**
  - Support restoration of historic mineral spring resorts (Salt Sulphur Springs, Sweet Springs).
  - Pursue grants for historic preservation through the WV State Historic Preservation Office and National Trust.
  - Develop a county historic register to supplement the National Register listings.

**Objective 3.2:** Make historic resources accessible and educational for residents and visitors.

- **Action Steps:**
  - Expand interpretive signage in Union Historic District and other key sites.
  - Create self-guided walking/driving tours (Civil War history, mineral springs, farmsteads).
  - Partner with schools to integrate local history into curriculum and student projects.

**Objective 3.3:** Use historic resources as an economic driver.

- **Action Steps:**
  - Encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings for shops, restaurants, and community spaces.
  - Develop heritage festivals and events celebrating Monroe's architecture and traditions.
  - Market historic resources alongside outdoor recreation to attract heritage tourists.

# CHAPTER 3

## PUBLIC SERVICES

The West Virginia Code defines public services as “ensur[ing] public safety, and meet[ing] the medical, cultural, historical, community, social, educational and disaster needs of the current and anticipated future residents of the jurisdiction.” W. Va Code Section 8A-3-4(c) (5). Public services typically include law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, medical and healthcare services, education, historical resources, cultural resources, emergency management, and floodplain management. Historical resources and cultural resources were discussed in the quality-of-life chapter.



## Medical Services

The county is currently served by the Monroe Health Center, an entity which receives some government funding and operates under the guidance of a board of directors appointed by the Monroe County Commission. The Health Center operates facilities in Union, Peterstown, and Forest Hill, West Virginia. A clinic and dental office are located in New Castle, Virginia. In addition, the center operates School-Based Wellness Centers in each of the county's schools and at Craig County High School in Virginia. The center is staffed by several doctors and offers a sliding-scale fee structure for low-income residents. The center offers dental services in Monroe County and Craig County Va. in partnership with Kilcollin Dental.

Also housed at the county health center is the Monroe County Board of Health (and the county sanitarian), involved in food service inspections, sewer system inspections, and other public health issues. Monroe Health Center & Monroe County Health Department work collaboratively out of the Union based facility to provide public health services to the community, including health education, immunizations, STI testing and treatment, sanitarian inspections and services. In addition to the health center, an osteopathic physician, physical therapy, and chiropractor offer services in Monroe County. Pharmacies operate in Union, and Rich Creek, VA. Monroe Health Center provides Mental/Behavioral health services at all clinics and including wellness centers at schools. Monroe Health Center also offers hearing and vision screenings, but for more hearing and vision care, residents go to Lewisburg or Princeton.



Residents in central and eastern Monroe generally utilize Greenbrier Valley Hospital, Fairlea, WV, or Alleghany Regional Hospital, Low Moor, VA – both of which are between 20 and 60 minutes away. Residents of western Monroe County are most commonly served by Princeton Community Hospital, Princeton, WV; Giles Carilion Memorial Hospital, Pearisburg, VA; or Montgomery Regional Hospital, Blacksburg, VA. Travel times to these facilities are generally between 15 and 60 minutes for residents of western Monroe. More advanced medical treatments are available at Roanoke Memorial Hospital and Lewis Gale Hospital, both in Roanoke, VA; Charleston Area Medical Center, Charleston, WV; Raleigh General Hospital, Beckley WV; and the University of Virginia Medical Center, Charlottesville, VA. All of these facilities are between one and three hours distant from most sections of the county. Monroe is served by two rescue squads. These entities are discussed in more detail in the Public Safety protocol.





## Cultural, Social, and Community

Cultural, social, and community needs are met locally by a host of clubs and civic groups, including Rotary, Ruritan, and Lions Clubs, Masons and Shriners, church groups, and the Community Educational Outreach Service clubs operated by the extension service. Special interest groups include an Antique Tractor club, a Spinning and Weaving group, and informal literary and bridge clubs. The Monroe Arts Alliance offers classes in various art venues for adults and children, and sponsors art exhibits and musical performances.

Opportunities for young people include baseball, basketball, football, and soccer leagues, girl scouts and boy scouts, and a very active 4-H program. Most activities for youth are during the school year. The community festival concept is represented locally by the annual Farmer's Day Parade, sponsored by the Union Area Chamber of Commerce; the Autumn Harvest Festival, sponsored by WVU Extension, Peterstown Autumn Festival sponsored by Peterstown Rotary Club and Peterstown Fire Department, and 4th of July Parades in Alderson and Lindside. Numerous "community centers" sponsor smaller social events throughout the county. Many of these facilities are situated in former public-school buildings. Neighborhood cultural events like apple-butter making, molasses making, and quiltings are hosted sporadically. A wider selection of musical, art, and theatrical events are available nearby in Lewisburg and Blacksburg.

The county is currently served by one local newspaper, the Monroe Watchman, a weekly newspaper available online and in print via mail delivery. A radio station is located at Monroe County Technical School. Nearby newspapers also circulate within the county – and reception in varying degrees is available for radio and television stations within the region. Cable television services are generally limited to Peterstown, Union, and Ballard. Satellite television is available countywide.

Assistance for low-income families, and other families following fires or other disasters is provided by the Monroe County Family Resource Network, the local Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) office, and CASE Monroe, each with offices in Union. The Greenbrier Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross is also active within the county. The Family Refuge Center, an organization dedicated to assisting abused women and children, is based in Greenbrier County as is the WIC Program, and each provides services in Monroe. All of these entities have well-established plans and protocols, in regard to their roles and responsibilities within the area.

Needs of the elderly are addressed by the Monroe County Council on Aging, which offers social events, a “Meals on Wheels” program, and limited public transportation (as discussed in the Transportation section). However, activities are limited. Low income families are very limited. Funding and transportation pose the greatest barriers.

Country View Assisted Living and Springfield Comprehensive Care Center provide assisted living and full nursing home care, respectively, for area residents. Country View, near Peterstown, is locally owned and operated. Springfield Center is affiliated with Princeton Community Hospital. Greenville Senior Manor, is an affordable housing for senior/disabled individuals with 1&2 bedroom units, with minimum qualifying requirements.

*Greenville Senior Manor*



Animal control and stray animal housing are issues which need more attention whenever such is financially possible. There is currently no pound or animal shelter within the county, although shelters in neighboring counties will accept local strays when space is available. The county employs one part-time animal control officer, who could easily be kept busy full time if again, such funding were available. The Monroe County Animal League, a local volunteer group, has played and continues to play a very important role in helping to adopt homeless animals, and encouraging spaying and neutering of pets. A “Puppy Rescue” program, operated by the group, has quite literally adopted hundreds of unwanted local puppies through agreements with no-kill shelters in Massachusetts and the DC Metro area.



## Education

Monroe is presently served by James Monroe High School and Monroe County Technical Center, located near Lindside, along with two middle schools and two elementary schools. The middle and elementary schools are co-located, one in Union and one in Peterstown. Private schools include: Ballard Christian School, a K-12 facility in the community of Ballard, and Amana Christian Day School at Gap Mills. Some parents within the jurisdiction homeschool their children.

The county board of education offers various adult education classes and GED programs – often working with local libraries in both regards. Public libraries operate in Peterstown and Union. Alderson’s library is on the Greenbrier County side of the municipality. The West Virginia University Extension Office in Union sponsors numerous adult education opportunities ranging in topics from agriculture to health and nutrition and also facilitates local CEOS (Community Education and Outreach Service) clubs.

Several 2-year and 4-year colleges are located within a 90-minute drive of most parts of the county. These colleges and universities include the Greenbrier Valley Campus of New River Community and Technical College; West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine; West Virginia Institute of Technology; Dabney Mountain Gateway Community College; Bluefield University; Bluefield State College; Concord University; Virginia Tech; Radford University; Roanoke College; Hollins College; and Virginia Western Community College.



## Law Enforcement, Fire and Rescue Services

The county is currently being served by volunteer Fire Departments in Union, Lindside, Ballard, Peterstown, Alderson, and Gap Mills. Emergency medical services are available in northern areas of county through STAT EMS LLC services from Union office and Peterstown Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad for southern areas of county. The Alderson area is also served by Alderson Volunteer Fire & EMS located in town of Alderson, on Monroe side, with services provided to northwest areas of Monroe County (some 200 residents). All EMS services are paid staff providing 24/7 response.

Cooperative agreements exist with nearby departments; and such departments have in the past responded when needed. Fire and rescue departments/squads from Paint Bank, Dunlap, White Sulphur, Lewisburg, Fairlea, Alderson, Summers County, and Giles County have all answered calls in Monroe on occasion.

Law enforcement and police services are provided by the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, West Virginia State Police, along with West Virginia Department of Natural Resources. The towns of Peterstown and Union contract law enforcement services from Monroe County Sheriff's Dept.- Monroe is a rural county, with crime rates significantly lower than the state and national averages according to data from Monroe 911 Center. Supporting economic development, improving safety, and accommodating modern freight (larger trucks) vehicles, the widening of county roads has become a top priority.



With respect to law enforcement, fire and rescue services, the county needs additional funding to hire and retain law enforcement officers and to maintain fire and rescue services. The Monroe County Sheriff's Department currently has 8 patrol officers (national average is 12 officers for size of Monroe County), while the state police deploy 4 officers, and two Department Natural Resources (DNR Officers). Coverage is provided 7 days a week/16 hours per day. Night shifts are often short or cover calls from home. There is large turnover in the Sheriff's Department, as officers often move to counties with higher pay after training and certification. Pay scale is not competitive for emergency medical service employees, or Law Enforcement Officers, causing loss of employees.



## Disasters

Most local fire and rescue departments have protocols and locations for establishment of emergency shelters (see attachment A) in the event of power outages in cold weather, extreme storms, flooding, rain, etc. The county should identify all current emergency shelters and evaluate the need for additional shelters, along with resources (trained volunteers) to operate them efficiently during emergency disasters. Training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) (ICS 100, 200) is mandatory for shelter teams," emphasizing the required competency and direct application to incident command within NIMS principles. In this evaluation the resources for transporting evacuees to shelters needs to be identified.

The county Office of Emergency Services (OES) also has contingency plans in place for such events. A Threat Preparedness Group, sponsored by the Health Center has recently developed plans for dealing with potential bioterrorism and epidemics or pandemics. Region 1 Planning and Development has completed a "Hazuz" plan for the six counties within their jurisdiction. The Local Emergency Planning Commission (LEPC) is tasked with planning for threat preparedness and updating Emergency Response Plans for the county.



The county's topography (with the exception of Alderson) limits flooding to small stream events, wherein typically only small numbers of residents could be displaced. Lengthy power outages from wind, snow, and ice storms have been uncommon in recent years.

Hurricanes have (at least thus far) never traveled this far inland, and tornados are rare and generally not intense. Earthquakes, likewise, are uncommon and have not caused significant damage. Wildfires occasionally occur in the forestlands but have not impacted communities or farmlands. Wildfires in this region are known as leaf or foliage "brush" fires, low flames, only fuel is leaves from fall foliage. Slow burning and manageable for local fire departments.

Floodplains are managed with the Monroe County Floodplain Ordinance. The FEMA FIRM maps were updated in 2024. Alderson and Peterstown experience flooding due to New & Greenbrier Rivers that causes issues with some houses classified as repetitive loss. People from outside the county sometimes purchase property in the floodplain. Purchasing property by internet sales is causing flood plain issues due to lack of knowledge of buyer and absence of notification from real estate brokers to the potential buyers.



## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTION STEPS

### Goal 4: Improve Access to Essential Public Services Across Monroe County

Monroe County should expand access to essential public services by strengthening emergency response, law enforcement coverage, and coordination among local agencies. Investing in training, staffing, and volunteer support, while enhancing programs for seniors and at-risk residents, will help ensure safety, resilience, and reliable services across the county's rural communities.

**Objective 4.1:** Ensure all residents have reasonable access to emergency services (fire, EMS, law enforcement)

- **Action Steps:**

- Expand training, equipment, and volunteer recruitment for fire departments and rescue squads
- Explore funding avenues for EMS services for 7/24/365 services. Increase hourly rates to retain/recruit EMS employees.
- Create a new animal control service and provide for stray animal housing

**Objective 4.2:** Maintain and expand law enforcement coverage in rural areas

- **Action Steps:**

- Continue to support full staffing of the Monroe County Sheriff's Department

**Objective 4.3:** Facilitate increased coordination between related agencies and organizations

- **Action Steps:**

- Support fundraising and volunteer recruitment efforts, with assistance from West Virginia State University.
- Explore educational opportunities with Monroe County Technical Center and WVU Fire Service Extension to offer Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement, and 911 Dispatcher training/education. Bring the new generations onboard.
- Promote continuation of existing services in the county with an increase in opportunities for youth and the elderly.

#### **Objective 4.4:** Strengthen senior and at-risk population services

- **Action Steps:**

- Expand programs under the Monroe County Council on Aging, including transportation and wellness
- Identify at-risk seniors and isolated individuals during disaster planning
- Coordinate with churches and nonprofits to maintain home meal delivery, check-in calls, and winter heating aid. Note: Monroe 911 with support from Council of Aging has a county wide list of seniors that has no family and requested “touch base” calls. Dispatchers are assigned “friends” to call and check on these folks at a frequency of the “friends” request. Program has 30-40 residents currently.

#### **Goal 5: Support and improve disaster preparedness in the county**

Monroe County should strengthen disaster preparedness by updating its emergency plan, expanding shelter options, and improving training for emergency responders. Enhancing public education, supporting local healthcare providers, and increasing access to mental health, telehealth, and specialty services will help ensure that residents across the county are better protected and supported during emergencies.

**Objective 5.1:** Ensure that the county emergency plan is adequate to meet the needs of the residents in all parts of the county

- **Action Steps:**

- Update the current Emergency Plan (last updated 2010) (underway by LEPC)
- Identify additional emergency shelters across the county, but particularly in the Peterstown area, Alternatives are to re-open the Methodist Church in Peterstown or relocate shelter to new school. No other buildings in this area have the infrastructure to house residents for sheltering needs.
- Continue to support and expand emergency preparedness training for the 911 center, rescue squads, and fire departments.
- Continue to seek opportunities to provide public education in disaster preparedness
- Support Monroe Health Center and its satellite clinics in recruitment of providers
- Work with state agencies to attract visiting mental health professionals and telehealth options. (Telehealth is available at all clinics currently, along with mental health at all clinics and school wellness centers.)
- Partner with regional hospitals to bring mobile diagnostic or specialty clinics to Union and Peterstown.
- Advocate for Medicaid-supported dental and vision care access.

# CHAPTER 4

# INFRASTRUCTURE

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## Water & Wastewater Management Infrastructure

Due to its rural nature, public water and sewer lines in Monroe County are mostly centered around the incorporated towns. For the majority of Monroe County, citizens gain access to drinking water through private wells or springs and utilize septic tanks for their sewage needs. As for the incorporated towns, Red Sulphur Public Service District (PSD) services Peterstown and some of the surrounding rural areas. Red Sulphur PSD, currently serving 5300 customers, provides both water and sewage services. The water provided by Red Sulphur PSD is sourced primarily from two springs, Coburn and Hancock at the base of Peters Mountain. Furthermore, Red Sulphur PSD provides service along U.S. 219 near the border of Rock Camp, the Dry Pond area, and along Rt. 12 toward Ballard. Greenville has had water service for approximately 12 years. In 2024, Red Sulphur PSD received a grant of \$4.8 million from the United States Department of Agriculture to extend a waterline that would serve an additional estimated 80 customers in Cashmere and Ballard area, which would tie the two systems together and add Bozoo and Greenville. Bozoo has had water for a number of years, sourced by Coburn spring and powered by a pumping station in Rich Creek, Virginia. The entire Red Sulphur district is tied into the Giles County, VA system. The access to different water sources provides redundancy, ensuring reliability of the water supply system. 380,000 gallons a day is processed by water processing center, which only operates 10 hours/day. Therefore, capacity exists to add customers.



Union and Alderson have their own municipal water and sewage systems. However, these systems generally only provide for residents of the respective towns. Union provides a water-only service along Rt. 3 east and some water and sewage services along Rt. 219. Furthermore, like Peterstown, Union sources its water from a Peters Mountain spring along with a local well. The sewer has a capacity of 750,000 gallons/day but is only treating about 250,000 gallons/day. Therefore, substantial capacity exists.

Gap Mills also has a PSD, like Peterstown. However, Gap Mills PSD provides a water-only service to the residents of Gap Mills. Like Peterstown and Union, Gap Mills also sources its water from Peters Mountain Spring at the headwaters of Second Creek. Gap Mills PSD extends along Rt. 3 and along Zenith Road. Furthermore, Gap Mills PSD is seeking to expand with the Monroe Lake Water Project. The Monroe Lake Water Project would upgrade or replace existing Gap Mills PSD water lines and extend the water lines along Rt. 8, Moncove Lake Road, and adjacent side roads. However, funding is still being sought for this project.

While most of the incorporated towns in Monroe County have some form of municipal water system or PSD, these systems are in need of funding to repair, replace, and extend them. The same can be said of the County's stormwater infrastructure. Flash floods are an issue in Monroe County, particularly in the Peterstown/Lindslide area and the Alderson Area. These flash floods have caused U.S. 219 to close repeatedly due to storm drains not being able to handle the influx of stormwater. Large-scale development should utilize cooling towers.



## Transportation

Monroe County contains neither four-lane roads nor traffic lights. The county should consider roundabouts to control traffic in some areas. As of now, Monroe County contains one two-lane U.S. Highway, four two-lane state highways, and numerous secondary roads that are either two-lane paved, one-lane paved, or one-lane gravel or dirt surfaced. The County lacks jurisdiction over these roads for the most part, as any road deemed a “county route” is now under the jurisdiction of the West Virginia Department of Transportation. In terms of traffic congestion though, the County only experiences traffic congestion in certain areas at certain times of the day, whereas the rest of County experiences little traffic. However, because the County only has two-lane roads, this limited congestion creates potentially dangerous situations when large trucking companies attempt to pass through the County or make deliveries.

In addition, several roadways are no longer suitable for vehicular travel. The state still retains ownership of these abandoned roads. This situation makes it impossible for the County to close down these roads while the state still holds jurisdiction. Furthermore, these abandoned roadways have piqued the interest of ATV enthusiasts, which has created noise pollution and concern for safety due to the County possessing little to no emergency services. Public transit forms another matter of concern within Monroe County. A rail service exists within Alderson. However, no commercial airports exist within the County, nor do bus or taxi services. However, an extensive bus service operated by the school district serves students in the county.

Finally, no transit options are available via water, as none of the waterways within and adjacent to the County are navigable for anything bigger than a canoe, kayak, or raft. The Mountain Transit Authority (MTA) (<https://www.mtawv.com>) just joined partnership with county government to provide transportation through the county for various needs and routes. The service is being provided currently 5 days a week with special needs such as medical appointments on scheduled pickup and return.



Pedestrian transit for the most part is adequate in the incorporated towns of Monroe County. Alderson, Peterstown, and Union all have efficient sidewalk systems mainly located in their downtown business district. Furthermore, Alderson and Union have worked to renovate their sidewalks to greatly improve the attractiveness of their downtown business districts. However, almost no sidewalks exist in the smaller villages within the County given that these villages lack a density of businesses to justify foot travel. Parking space is another aspect of transit that is generally sufficient in the incorporated towns of the County. However, Alderson, Peterstown, and Union could stand to gain from additional small municipal parking lots to accommodate peak congestion. Neither parking nor sidewalks are seen as a major issue in Monroe County's smaller villages, as there is usually not enough concentration in business or residential areas to justify foot travel. Biking and foot travel is currently done along less heavily traveled roads. No walking or bicycle lanes exist within the County, but Willow Bend Road has long been used for bicycle and foot travel. Finally, the County has taken an interest in creating bicycle and walking lanes if funding became available.

The closest airports are the Greenbrier Valley Airport in Lewisburg and the Roanoke Regional Airport, 29 and 72 miles away, respectively.



No active railways operation in the county. The closest rail service is in Alderson. No intermodal transportation exists in the county.

### **Internet & Telecommunications**

As of now, Monroe County contains a limited number of cellphone towers, with T-Mobile, AT&T, and Verizon providing service. While cellphone service is adequate in most of the County, a dead zone exists in the easternmost and westernmost portions of the County. About 40% of the county lacks adequate cell coverage. However, landline telephone services are still available in the County. In terms of internet services, parts of the County utilize Starlink satellite internet. However, Starlink charges congestion fees for using satellite internet. Broadband internet has been in the works for several years and is approximately 1-2 years away from providing internet to most of the County. Infrastructure delays have led to a shift in the public utilizing satellite services, such as Starlink. Furthermore, a majority of the County utilizes satellite television, as only the three incorporated towns generally have access to cable television. Finally, emergency services have also shifted from using emergency radio services to communication via Starlink, as the satellite internet is generally more dependable than creating additional radio infrastructure.

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## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTION STEPS

### Goal 6: Expand, improve, and regulate transit with the County.

Monroe County should enhance its overall transportation network by improving major and secondary roads, coordinating closely with the State Department of Highways, and expanding safe, efficient travel options. Upgrading road infrastructure, strengthening mass transit, supporting pedestrian and bicycle access, and regulating ATV use will help create a more reliable, accessible, and well-managed transit system across the county.

#### Objective 6.1: Create a more efficient primary transportation system.

- **Action Steps:**
  - Incentivize state action to expand U.S. 219 from two lanes to four lanes.
  - Widen U.S. 219 uniformly from 11 feet to 12 feet.
  - Consider creating roundabouts to control traffic in certain areas.
  - Build passing lanes and truck pull-offs between Union and Rock Camp
  - Widen WV Rt 122 through Greenville and to Summers County
  - Increase the amount of non-skid pavement on road curves.
  - Increase the number of center-line reflectors to improve visibility at night. In particular, County Route 17 needs center line markers and needs to have lane markers painted.

#### Objective 6.2: Work with State Department of Highways on these issues.

- **Action Steps:**
  - Work with State Department of Highways to maintain and repair roads

#### Objective 6.3: Create a more efficient secondary road system.

- **Action Steps:**
  - Widen secondary County roads where applicable.
  - Survey areas where secondary one lane roads could be upgraded to two-lane roads.
  - Survey areas where gravel or dirt roads could be paved.
  - Only maintain secondary roads to match the use of said roads.

**Objective 6.4:** Create a more efficient mass transit system.

- **Action Steps:**

- Maintain the railway service in Alderson.
- Seek to expand the present service provided by Mountain Transit Authority by surveying areas where bus, taxi, or van services would be appropriate.

**Objective 6.5:** Create opportunities for alternative forms of transportation.

- **Action Steps:**

- Maintain sidewalks in the downtown districts.
- Survey areas for parking availability where needed.
- Survey areas for bicycle lanes where appropriate.
- Survey unmaintained or lightly traveled roads to walking/hiking opportunities/
- Maintain active walking/hiking trails and bicycle lanes.

**Objective 6.6:** Limit all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) use where appropriate.

- **Action Steps:**

- Seek state action to reduce the number of abandoned County roads.
- Restrict ATV use on public and paved roads.

**Goal 7: Expand and improve critical infrastructure throughout the County.**

Monroe County should strengthen essential infrastructure by expanding modern internet and telecommunications services and improving water, wastewater, and stormwater systems. Increasing broadband and cellphone coverage, upgrading public utility networks, and supporting safe private well and septic use will help ensure that residents across the county have reliable, sustainable, and resilient services.

**Objective 7.1:** Create an expanded internet and telecommunications system.

- **Action Steps:**

- Expand high-speed internet access in the county through the use of satellite internet, expansion of broadband infrastructure, or any combination of providers.
- Expand cellphone service into the eastern-most and western-most portions of the County.

**Objective 7.2:** Improve the current water and wastewater system.

- **Action Steps:**

- Expand public service districts and municipal water systems to applicable residents.
- Find additional sources of water for public service districts and municipal water systems.
- Provide information and technical resources to aid residents in ensuring that private wells remain safe to use and that private septic tanks remain functional and do not pollute adjacent groundwater.
- Expand stormwater infrastructure where applicable.
- Expand municipal sewer systems to applicable residents.
- Expand and improve wastewater treatment facilities.

FINAL DRAFT

# CHAPTER 5

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Monroe County, West Virginia, is a predominantly rural county characterized by a land-based economy rooted in agriculture, forestry, and small-scale local services. Its scenic landscape and historic character define both its identity and its economic opportunities. Agriculture has always been at the center of Monroe County's economy since settlers occupied the area. Pioneer farming for survival transformed into profitable farming as hotels and spas sprang up in the area in the early 1800s. The gentle climate and healing springs in the area provided the backdrop of a thriving tourist industry.

As the role of farming has waxed and waned in this county, other means of employment have been sought and occasionally provided. Often, civic and business leaders in the early 1900's were successful in attracting industry to areas in close proximity to the county. This industry has provided work opportunities as many of the county's residents travel outside county lines to obtain jobs. While helping to maintain the economy, these off-the-farm jobs have also helped sustain many farms of a smaller scale that are not independently financially stable. And the communities in the county have adjusted along with the changes in farming to maintain a support system that still functions as an integrated agricultural economy.



Farming continues to play a significant part in the county's economy – although not nearly to the extent of its historic role. Farming accounts for 18% of full and part-time jobs in the county. In an era when corporate farms have become the norm, 96% of Monroe's farms are operated by a family or individual.

But while farms cover nearly half of Monroe County's landscape, farm wages account for 2% of the wages paid out in the county. In 2002, there were 682 farms in Monroe County, with an average size of 213 acres. 465 of those farms, or nearly 70%, had farm sales of less than \$10,000 in 2002. In 2022, the number of farms had increased to 864, but the average size was 164 acres. Two-thirds of the farms, or 577 farms, in Monroe County had farm sales of less than \$10,000 in 2022.

In 2023, median household income in Monroe County was \$54,508, compared to the state's median household income of \$57,917. The per capita income was \$27,648, compared to \$32,949 in West Virginia. The county has a 15.7 percent poverty rate, slightly lower than the state's 16.6% poverty rate. The employed population is 4,569, with an unemployment rate of 5.3%, compared to 3.8% in West Virginia. The average commute time for people in Monroe County is 36.9 minutes, with 39.5% working outside of Monroe County. Although no data could be found for percentage of workers commuting out of state, a considerable portion of the workforce is believed to commute to Virginia.



Monroe County should build on its strength as a scenic rural county with a high quality of life and low crime rate to focus on cultural and agritourism opportunities. Retirees, telecommuters, and entrepreneurs would be attracted to the area. The county has a number of tourist attractions, including:

Hanging Rock Observatory

Moncove Lake State Park

Rehobeth Church (1786)

Indian Creek Covered Bridge

Laurel Creek Covered Bridge

Civil War Trail Union

Appalachian Trail

Allegheny Trail

Potts Valley Rail Trail

Organ Cave

Ames Clare Hall (Union) (1857 African American)

Old Brick Church (Union) (1845)

St Johns Catholic Chapel (Sweet Springs, oldest used Catholic in WV) (1840 appx)

McClung, Reeds, Cooks, and Nickell surviving grain mills.

Scenic mountain top views.

Natural Springs

Majestic Creeks & Streams for fishing.

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTION STEPS:**

### **Goal 8: Strengthen and Diversify the Local Economy While Preserving Rural Character**

Monroe County's economy should continue to value its agricultural and natural resource base while encouraging new opportunities that fit the county's scale and community values.

**Objective 8.1:** Encourage business development.

- **Action Steps:**

- Partner with the Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation and New River Community and Technical College to provide small business training and mentorship programs.
- Promote adaptive reuse of historic or underutilized buildings for local business use.
- Foster collaboration among government, educational institutions, and the private sector.

**Objective 8.2:** Support small businesses, home-based enterprises, and entrepreneurship.

- **Action Steps:**

- Establish a small business support initiative offering technical assistance, marketing, and low-interest loans for startups and home-based businesses and seek state business tax and county tax relief for new businesses.

**Objective 8.3:** Promote workforce development that aligns with local employment needs.

- **Action Steps:**

- Encourage regional collaboration with Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation and adjacent counties to attract small-scale manufacturers and service businesses suited to Monroe County's workforce.

### **Goal 9: Expand Agricultural and Forestry-Based Economic Opportunities**

Agriculture remains central to Monroe County's economy and identity. Sustaining and diversifying agricultural and forestry operations will strengthen both income and land stewardship.

**Objective 9.1:** Preserve prime farmland and encourage farm succession planning.

- **Action Steps:**

- Work with the Monroe County Farmland Protection Board to protect agricultural land through easements and voluntary preservation programs while maintaining to right of ways for utility needs.

**Objective 9.2:** Support value-added agricultural enterprises and agritourism.

- **Action Steps:**

- Partner with business owners and Farmers to support a local stock sales yard for farm animals. Retain the business within Monroe for selling livestock.
- Work with meat processing businesses to develop slaughterhouses within the county and ship out processed ready for the whole sale stores.
- Encourage dealers, mills, and large corporation support for timber purchases. Cut out the middleman and buy the timber straight from the timber cutters.
- Develop an Agritourism Promotion Program in collaboration with WVU Extension and local farms to attract visitors through events, farm stays, and local product trails.

**Objective 9.3:** Encourage sustainable forestry and conservation-based industries.

- **Action Steps:**

- Partner with state agencies to promote forest management education and sustainable timber harvesting.

**Goal 10: Promote Tourism and Heritage-Based Economic Development**

Monroe County's scenic beauty, historic sites, and outdoor recreation potential are important economic assets. The county should continue to promote the natural assets of the county in tourism and economic development.

**Objective 10.1:** Develop Monroe County as a destination for heritage and outdoor recreation tourism.

- **Action Steps**

- Create a County Tourism Development Plan emphasizing the Monroe County Scenic Byway, Hanging Rock Raptor Observatory, Indian Creek Covered Bridge, and historic towns such as Union and Salt Sulphur Springs.
- Partner with the Greenbrier Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau to market Monroe County as part of a regional tourism corridor.
- Use an existing structure or develop a new structure to house a farm market that could operate almost year round, including Christmas events. Consider the examples of Floyd County, Virginia and Charleston, West, Virginia.
- Encourage farmers to support "ride alongs" for Summer months allowing students/families to live and work on a real farm for a daily/weekly/monthly fee. Conduct farmhand tasks, while learning how heritage became a business. Capitalize on the founder of 4-H and support weekly camps for young people to get out with nature. Establish the campgrounds in Monroe. Currently most camps are located in Summers County.

**Objective 10.2:** Enhance community appearance and signage to improve visitor experience.

- **Action Steps**

- Encourage the development of bed-and-breakfasts, craft galleries, and farm markets along key travel routes.

**Goal 11: Support a Skilled and Resilient Workforce.**

Monroe County's future economic success depends on a workforce that is adaptable, educated, and able to meet emerging employment needs.

**Objective 11.1:** Encourage youth retention and engagement in the local economy. **Action Steps**

- Enhance access to technical and vocational training.
- Work with employers to identify evolving skill needs and tailor training accordingly.
- Find a source for emergency services training (fire, EMS, Law enforcement) for in-county needs.

**Objective 11.2:** Strengthen links between education and local employers.

- **Action Steps**

- Expand adult education and remote learning access through improved broadband.
- Promote workforce re-entry programs for veterans, displaced workers, and retirees seeking part-time employment.

## **Goal 12: Enhance Regional Collaboration and Strategic Planning**

Economic development efforts benefit from partnerships that cross jurisdictional and sectoral lines. Monroe County should strengthen regional alliances and coordinate economic development plans within and across county lines.

**Objective 12.1:** Build strong regional alliances for grant funding and technical support.

- **Action Steps**

- Participate actively in regional planning initiatives through the Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation and Region 1 Planning and Development Council.
- Pursue regional grants for broadband, workforce development, and tourism development.

**Objective 12.2:** Coordinate economic development with land use, housing, and environmental policies.

- **Action Steps**

- Develop a five-year Economic Development Strategy consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and updated annually.

**Objective 12.3:** Promote a unified economic vision across communities.

- **Action Steps**

- Consider an ordinance that would require developers of all historic preservation or restoration renovation projects to meet standards set out by ordinance passed by the county commission including cost analysis, development steps, and financial ability to pay.

# CHAPTER 6

## LAND USE

Monroe County can be divided into four general geographic regions: winding stream valleys typical of the Allegheny Plateau make up the county's northwestern section; a belt of rolling karst tableland (primarily underlain by the Greenbrier Limestone) begins in the south central portion of the county and extends beyond the county boundary to the northeast; the southeastern branch of the rugged Allegheny Mountains enters the county from the northeast and terminates near Gap Mills; and the parallel ridges of the Appalachian Ridge and Valley Range extend along Monroe's southeastern border, represented primarily by Peters and Potts Mountains. Monroe County contains 473 square miles, or 302,957 acres.



Quality farmland exists throughout the central limestone belt, and within the valleys of each of the other regions. Monroe's limited section of the Alleghenies includes Moncove Lake State Park, and many acres of woodland currently used for commercial timbering. The Peter's Mountain aquifer is of considerable importance; currently supplying three public water systems, two commercial water operations, and many households through use of private springs. The southeastern face of the mountain is mostly protected from development by the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. The mountain's northwestern slopes are nearly all privately owned, although thus far, development has been scattered and minimal. Towns and villages are scattered within each of the county's geographical regions. Likewise, historic buildings and beautiful (though varied) scenery abounds throughout the entire jurisdiction.



Many county residents still utilize wells or springs as private sources of household water. A USGS study of the county's groundwater makes Monroe County the most well-studied groundwater county in the state.

Compared to many areas, agricultural lands, forest lands, and open space are still abundant in Monroe County. The 2022 Census of Agriculture reported 864 farms and 141,346 acres of farmland (almost 47% of the county), down from the 144,640 acres reported in the 2012 Census of Agriculture. Consistent with recent trends, the number of farms reported in 2022 shows an increase from the 796 farms reported in 2012, as farm size continues to decrease. The county ranks second in the state in cattle production and third in milk production.

### **Agriculture in Monroe County (2022 Census of Agriculture)**

Number of farms: 864

Number of acres in farms: 141,346

Average size of farm: 164 acres

Average value of agricultural products sold per farm: \$30,390

Average total farm production expenses per farm: \$28,961

The value of livestock, poultry, and their products as a percentage of the total value of agricultural products sold: 83.62%

Harvested cropland as a percentage of land in farms: 24.42%

Call out box]



The county has an abundance of available land for development with strong water supply. The county seeks to establish more businesses in Monroe County so that residents need not commute.

In the past ten years, development has included six turkey farms, a sheet metal shop, the Ballard Peterstown Middle School, some wedding venues, and a wild game business in Mountain Meadows. The towns have gained a few new businesses. A number of second and vacation homes have been developed in the county, but the population is not increasing. The county was discovered during COVID. However, the county needs tax revenue to pay for services. The county seeks to keep the ambiance, quality of life, beauty, but allow for economic development.

Monroe County's three principal towns, Peterstown, Alderson, and Union still exhibit vitality, and are not greatly impacted by vacant storefronts, decay, or derelict neighborhoods. The county's smaller villages, however, have been significantly impacted by the removal of schools, post offices, and most businesses from their localities. Mennonite-operated businesses have helped preserve a certain amount of commerce in Gap Mills. For many other smaller communities, however, only a church and in some cases, a convenience store/gas station remain as the town centers.

Given the vitality of the towns, very few renewal or redevelopment opportunities exist. The main opportunities center on the historic mills and resorts discussed in Chapter 2 under historic preservation.



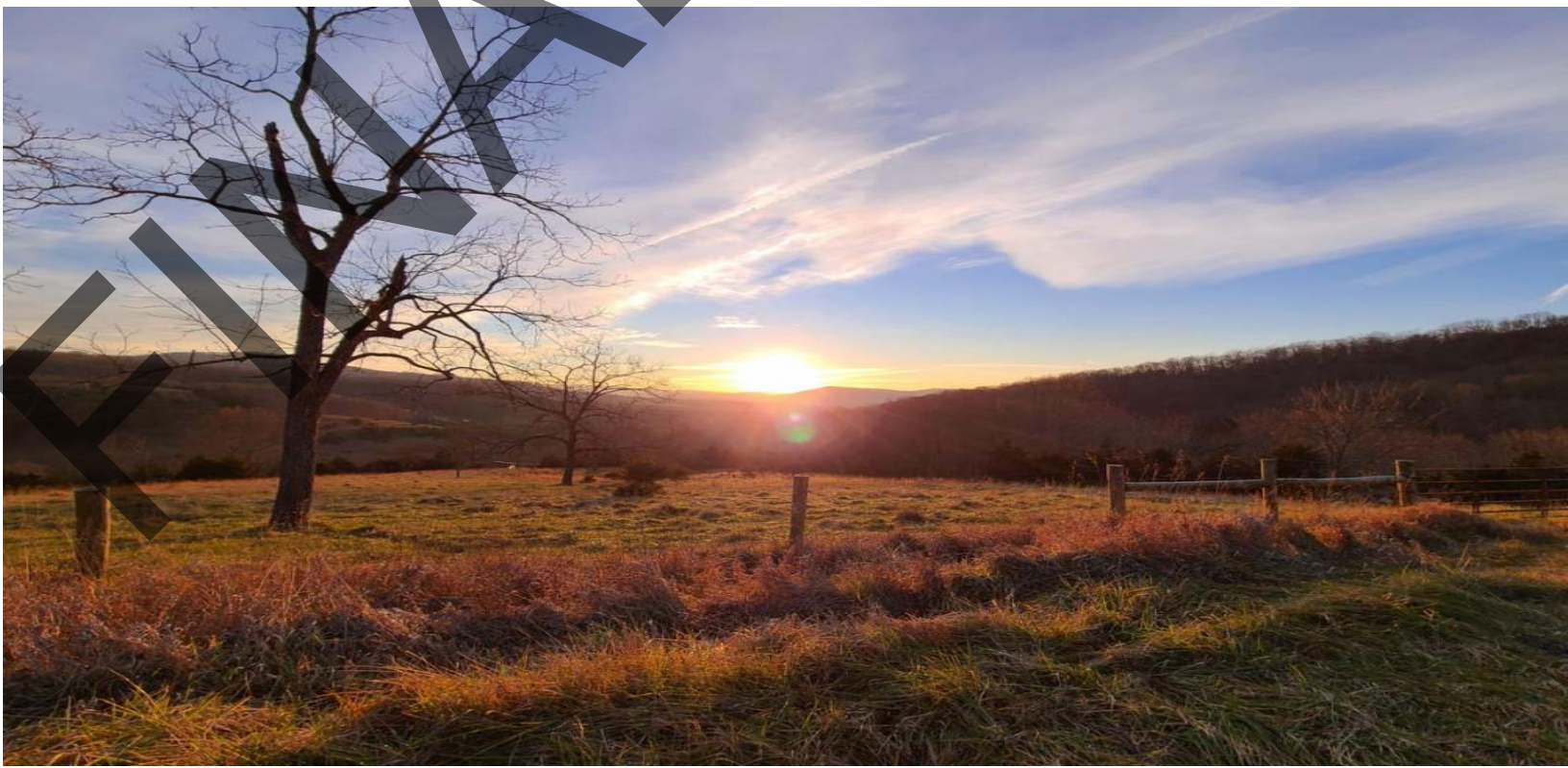
The overnight accommodations in the county are limited. Four Phillie's Lodge in Peterstown offers a variety of accommodations. Some Airbnb rentals are scattered throughout the county, and some cabins are available for rental in Mountain Meadows.

The creation of Airbnb rentals has contributed to an increase in housing prices in the area. Land is relatively inexpensive, but a lack of housing and demand for short term rentals has caused prices to increase to a point where first-time home buyers cannot afford to purchase a home in the county.

The county attracts off-road 4-wheeler enthusiasts. However, the county lacks trails to accommodate off-road 4-wheelers. Consequently, the 4-wheelers create dangerous conditions on secondary roads. If an accident occurs the county lacks emergency response capacity to respond.

For grocery shopping, an IGA is located in Union and three Family Dollars are located in the county. Many people in the southern part of the county shop in Virginia.

At this point, no bars, nightclubs, adult entertainment facilities, vape shops, and video lottery venues exist in the county. Monroe County residents have consistently voiced concern over the establishment of these types of facilities. At a minimum, businesses in this category should not be sited near churches, schools, and parks.



Observatory – closed by federal government; getting funding to tear down and rebuild. Moncove Lake, Trails, historic sites. Railroad, civil war trail – they will get me a list.

The county should collect and disseminate data on recreational opportunities in the county. A number of historic and cultural tourism opportunities exist. The county should promote these opportunities. Increased tourism would create new tourism-related businesses such as restaurants and accommodation for overnight stays. The county should also promote the trails and scenic byways in the county. Moncove State Park should be expanded by extending water and sewer and adding more cabins

Preferred Development Areas PDAs) in the county can be identified on the future land use map (attachment B) and are highlighted in red. PDA are mainly located at the corridors from incorporated townships to the county line. Peterstown-Union-Alderson. The county should maintain rural character outside of the PDAs. The PDAs serve as targeted density areas.

Monroe County can maintain its rural character and accommodate development in appropriate areas. The county should consider incentives to develop in appropriate areas and disincentives to develop in areas that should be preserved. The county should consider ordinances to direct development to appropriate parts of the county.



## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTION STEPS:**

### **Goal 13: Balance appropriate economic development with maintaining open space and agricultural lands.**

Monroe County should guide economic development toward towns, villages, and the Route 219 corridor while preserving farmland, open space, and the county's scenic rural character. Growth should support recreation, tourism, and community needs, maintain compatibility with rural landscapes, and expand housing options in a way that aligns with local values and standards.

#### **Objective 13.1:** Promote appropriate economic development in towns, villages, and along Route 219.

- **Action Steps:**

- Consider ordinances to prioritize development in priority development areas, towns, and villages, and along Route 219.
- Consider an ordinance to limit the establishment of bars, nightclubs, adult entertainment facilities, vape shops, and video lottery venues, particularly near schools, churches, or residential areas.

#### **Objective 13.2:** Maintain the rural nature and scenic beauty of the county by discouraging development of farmland and scenic areas.

- **Action Steps**

- Work with the state to create a farm link program.
- Create an agricultural stakeholder committee in the county.
- Consider ordinances that limit or prohibit solar arrays and wind turbines in the county.
- Designate appropriate areas in the county for wireless telecommunications facilities and consider ordinances to prioritize development of wireless telecommunications ordinances in appropriate areas.
- Consider ordinances to ensure that signage in the county will be compatible with the rural nature and natural beauty of the area.

**Objective 13.3:** Increase the supply of affordable housing in the community.

- **Action Steps**

- Conduct a study of housing in the area and explore ways to increase the supply of housing in the county.

**Goal 14: Protect the environmental resources of the county.**

Monroe County should protect its groundwater and natural landscape while managing development in ways that support public health, safety, and quality of life. Efforts should include educating the community, guiding growth away from sensitive areas, and establishing local standards that balance environmental stewardship with opportunities for tourism, small business, and modern agricultural innovation.

**Objective 14.1:** Maintain and improve the quality of the county's groundwater resources.

- **Action Steps:**

- Educate the public about the county's karst and groundwater resources.
- Consider ordinances that discourage development in the karst areas of the county.
- Consider limits on development on steep slopes.

**Objective 14.2:** Manage environmental impacts of development at the local level to promote health, safety, and adequate living conditions for all residents and guests of the county.

- **Action Steps:**

- Develop a subdivision and land development ordinance.

# CHAPTER 7

## **SAFETY, HAZARD MITIGATION, AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Safety is a foundational element of community well-being, economic stability, and long-term resilience. Monroe County's rural character, mountainous terrain, and flood-prone areas require deliberate planning, coordination, and sustained investment. This chapter addresses hazard mitigation, public safety services, transportation safety, land use considerations, and community engagement to protect residents, visitors, and public infrastructure.



## **Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness**

Flooding remains one of the most significant natural hazards in Monroe County. The adoption of a three-foot base flood elevation (BFE) increase represents a critical step toward reducing flood losses and improving long-term resilience. This policy requires consistent enforcement, professional oversight, and public education. Stormwater management, erosion control, and emergency management accreditation further strengthen the County's ability to prevent and respond to disasters.

The County should maintain Emergency Management oversight as a WV EMC Accreditation Level 1 as a requirement for all new managers. This oversight allows for preplanning at the proper levels and a knowledge base to keep citizens of Monroe safe and informed during natural events.

The county should also develop planning modules for post disaster remediation and mitigation tasks. This development should be a diverse team with Emergency Management leading the way for corrective actions and remediation efforts recommended by State and Federal Government.



## **Public Safety Services**

Reliable public safety services are essential for protecting lives and property. Monroe County should evaluate service distribution, staffing levels, and emergency communications compliance. Integrated service models, such as fire-based EMS, may provide cost savings while improving continuity of care. This model allows for multidisciplinary personnel work from fire stations, responding in fire apparatus for EMS first response and fire suppression, while offering continuity.

## **Transportation Safety**

Roadway design and maintenance significantly influence safety outcomes. Data-driven identification of high-risk corridors, including Route 219, should guide targeted infrastructure investments.

Data analysis shows that narrowing roadways and curves add risk to hazardous driving conditions. Focus study on Route 219, documenting increased injury/death accidents to show where the roadway is a contributing factor and repairs are needed. Use the data to identify locations for engineering studies and repairs for added safety on major routes in Monroe County.



## **Land Use and Development**

Land use decisions directly affect safety outcomes. Encouraging Best Management Practices (BMPs) in forestry and development can reduce erosion, flooding, and environmental degradation.

## **Community Engagement and Governance**

Public safety requires transparency, accountability, and participation. Annual safety plan reviews, building inspections, and recycling initiatives promote long-term resilience.



## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTION STEPS:**

### **Goal 15: Reduce the risk and impacts of natural hazards.**

#### **Objective 15.1: Reduce the risks and impact of natural hazards.**

- Action Steps:
  - Develop a safety plan for floodplain management for construction while providing the safest possible building platform

### **Goal 16: Provide accessible, efficient, and professionally staffed public safety services.**

#### **Objective 16.1: Provide accessible, efficient, and professionally staffed public safety services.**

- Action Steps:
  - Establish a satellite Sheriff's Office in the Peterstown area for cost effective and early access to satisfy tax needs.

Attachment "A"

Shelter Name	County	Jurisdiction	Street Address	Heat	A/C	Capacity
United Methodist Church	Monroe	Peterstown Area	47 Rae St, Peterstown, WV 24963	Y	Y	50
Lindside United Methodist Church,	Monroe	Lindside Area	8998 Seneca Trl South, Lindside, WV 24951	Y	Y	100
Ballard VFD	Monroe	Ballard Area	19 Pinhook Rd, Ballard, WV 24918	Y	N	50
Church of God "Lighthouse"	Monroe	Union Area	96 Bud Ridge Rd, Union, WV 24983	Y	N	100
Sweetsprings Sweetsprings Rescue	Monroe	Sweetsprings Area	19766 Sweet Springs Valley Rd, Sweet Springs, WV 24941	Y	N	50
Waiteville Community Center, (warming center)	Monroe	Waiteville Area	1735 Ray Siding Rd, Waiteville, WV 24984	Y	N	50

Monroe side of Alderson reports to Greenbrier side at old school for sheltering and is managed by Greenbrier Emergency Management. Capacity 150.

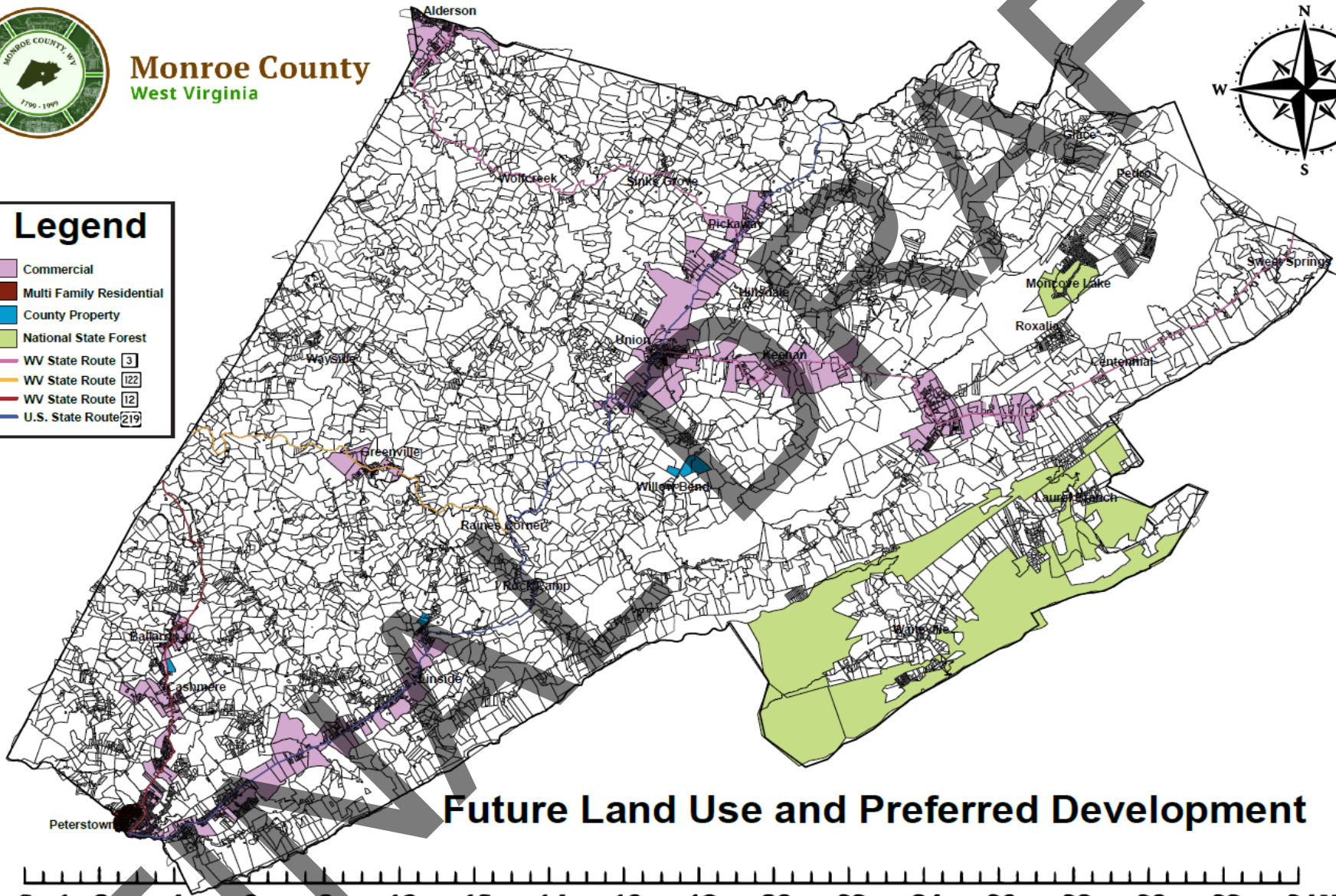


# Monroe County West Virginia

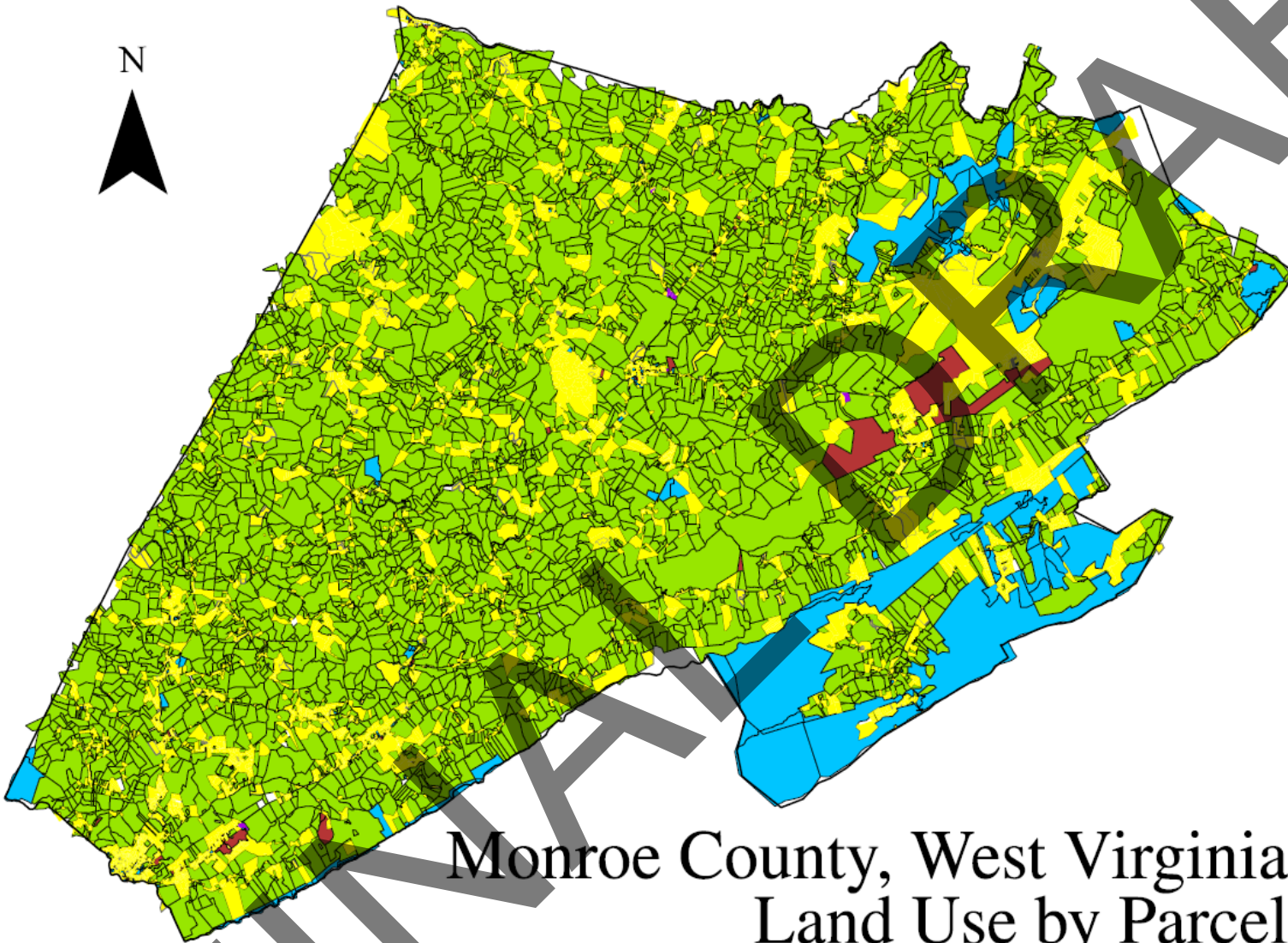


### Legend

- Commercial
- Multi Family Residential
- County Property
- National State Forest
- WV State Route 3
- WV State Route 122
- WV State Route 12
- U.S. State Route 219



## Future Land Use and Preferred Development



**Legend**

- Agriculture
- Public / Semi-Public
- Single Family Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Multifamily Residential

# Monroe County, West Virginia Land Use by Parcel



FINAL DRAFT