

# **City of Covington Comprehensive Plan**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### Scope of the Planning Program

The City of Covington has a history of planning activities dating back to the Covington Master Plan completed by Garland Wood and Associates in 1960. Zoning and subdivision regulations are utilized as tools to implement the planning process. Since the original Plan was written, Covington has experienced some changes and has been faced by various problems. The future undoubtedly will present further challenges to the city.

The City's Planning Commission is active and interested in the future of Covington and its development and landscape. In order to minimize some of the uncertainties and unknowns of the future, the City has decided to embark on a course that is guided or managed by a Plan. This Plan is a guide that sets forth the goals of Covington, the objectives or steps by which the goals will be achieved, and policies or actions that will assist the City in meeting goals and objectives.

Initially, the Plan is physically oriented, being concerned with land use, transportation patterns, and environmental factors. This direction can then be changed to meet other needs as the basic physical and environmental needs are understood and have been addressed by the local government.

Planning involves several basic actions and various participants as follows:

1. Planning is Understanding. Knowledge about the locality, topography, climate, land patterns, environmental factors, and how they relate to the community.
2. Planning is thinking. Knowledge must be evaluated, measured, and balanced with local needs and wants, such that questions are raised.
3. Planning is discussion. Questions about local conditions, suggested courses of action, the realities and feasibility of plans, and local priorities must be raised and discussed among the planners, local government, private enterprise, and the public.
4. Planning is doing. Recommendations of the Planning Commission to the governing body should be implemented by resolution, agreement, or ordinances.
5. Planning is Re-evaluation. No plan or design is meant to last forever. The local Planning Commission should examine the plans and ordinances to determine their feasibility and usefulness in light of new information and conditions.
6. Planning is Ongoing. The planning process should not stop when a plan is completed or an ordinance implemented. It is continuous in nature. The goal of planning is not to produce plans and ordinances but to create a process of understanding, thinking, discussing, doing and re-evaluation that will enable a community to reach a future condition that is locally desirable and feasible. Planning is an action that should and must benefit people.

LINK TO CITY OF COVINGTON GENERAL MAP - [GENERAL.PDF](#)

## **II. POPULATION AND ECONOMY**

### **Introduction**

In contrast to the purely physical reasons for making land use decisions, there are other important aspects that should be examined. These include the population and economy; for the movement of people and goods provides some measure of the activity of the community and therefore its health.

Part II, "Population and Economy" will investigate economic and population trends, factors influencing economic growth, population and economic forecasts, and economic problem areas of concern to the City of Covington. These sections, together with the physical information contained in Part III, comprise the existing conditions portion of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Covington.

### **Location**

The City of Covington is surrounded by Alleghany County, in western Virginia, approximately 60 miles northwest of Roanoke and 180 miles west of Richmond. The West Virginia border lies approximately 15 miles to the west of Covington.

Covington is situated in a valley along the banks of the Jackson River. Two large streams, Potts Creek and Dunlap Creek, flow into the Jackson River within the Corporate limits.

The City has a dual importance of being the county seat of Alleghany County and the center for many social and economic activities of a regional nature.

### **History**

What is now Alleghany County was once part of the vast Appalachian wilderness, frequented by Indians in search of game. Wildlife such as the elk, buffalo, deer, bear, puma and wolf abounded. The advent of the white settlers from east of the Blue Ridge drastically changed this picture and ushered in a different society and life style than what was known.

Originally, the first settlers in the Shenandoah Valley (The "Great Valley of Virginia") laid claim to the land of what is now Covington in 1745 when the area was administered by Augusta County. This changed in 1769 when Botetourt County came to control much of the area. Boundaries were not exact and both Bath and Monroe Counties contained portions of present Alleghany County-Covington region.

The Robinson family, the Lewis brothers (Andrew and Thomas) and others were granted land in this area. The first settlers, Peter Wright and Joseph Carpenter, moved into this area in 1746. Other families soon followed.

The unstable conditions on the frontier and the military threat of attack from Indians caused the Governor of Virginia to investigate the situation. Young George Washington visited the string of frontier forts during the French and Indian War in 1756. Fort Young and Fort Carpenter (a

fortified house) were examined. Fort Young was described as sixty feet square with fourteen foot high palisade walls, block houses, ramparts and two (12 foot square) bastions.

Throughout a twenty-year period ending in 1774, this area was constantly under threat of Indian attack. Both Shawnee and Delaware raiding parties visited the Covington vicinity with some damage and loss of life. Lord Dunmore's war and the Battle of Point Pleasant (1774) in West Virginia pushed the Indians from this portion of the "American" frontier.

Early records in the County Court House show that Dr. James Merry anticipated that this area would become a commercial center by being located at the junction of the proposed James River and Kanawha Canals. This was his motivation for purchasing from George Pence 138 acres in 1817 for \$3,000. Dr. Samuel Merry, James' brother, was partner in the purchase. Although Dr. James Merry promoted the idea of the canals and reserved provisions for them up to his death in August 1828, the development of the railroad system squelched all plans for the canals.

The original plat for the Town of Covington was drawn by William Anderson, surveyor of Botetourt County on July 23, 1818. Assisting Dr. Merry in laying out the plans for the town were a number of persons who had been officers and participants in the War of 1812. In addition to Captain William Anderson, mentioned above, there was Captain John Pitzer Jr. (who was appointed Sheriff of Botetourt County in 1820 by Governor Thomas Randolph), Capt. Peter Wright, Capt. Moses Mann, Col. John Persinger, Capt. Henry Massie, and Col. John Crow. The consensus of these veterans of the War of 1812 and others was that the town be named in honor of General Leonard Covington, friend of Washington, Jefferson, and William Henry Harrison, and who was mortally wounded at the Battle of Chrystler's Field on November 11, 1813 and died two days later. He was the great hero of the War of 1812.

In 1816 Richard Smith was operating a store in Sweet Springs. His store ledger shows that Dr. James Merry was a frequent customer. A year later Richard Smith formed a partnership with Dr. Merry and using his stock from Sweet Springs as his contributory share he opened the store at the terminus of the Lexington-Covington turnpike under the name of Richard Smith & Co. with Dr. James Merry providing the building and additional capital but remaining a "silent partner." Richard Smith was the clerk and sole operator.

Richard Smith had other connections to this area for he had married Martha Ann, oldest daughter of Bernard Pitzer. This store and Dr. Merry's house were located on land later designated as lots 25, 26, and 27 on the town plat. It was at the intersection of Lexington-Covington turnpike (later designated as Lexington St.) and Water Street (later designated as Riverside Avenue.)

A public sale of the lots took place on August 24, 1818. Richard Smith was clerk of the sale and William White was the auctioneer. Lots 26 (store location) and 27 were sold to Richard Smith. Lot 26 was later taken back by Dr. Merry and lot 27 had been bought by Richard for his brother William.

Richard Smith & Co. was not the first store in the area. In 1795 John Pitzer, who lived in Botetourt County on the James River in what is now Gala, started a store with the help of his sons Bernard and Abraham. On March 7, 1800 Bernard Pitzer bought the tract on both sides of

the Dunlap River adjoining the south side of Jackson River from Uriah Humphries and moved the store near "the mouth of the Dunlap." The ledgers of this store all survive and record purchases and transactions of early residents of the area. The store prospered and continued until about the time that Richard Smith & Co. began.

The partnership of Richard Smith and Dr. Merry continued until January 10, 1821 when it was dissolved by mutual consent due to accusations by Dr. Merry that Smith was taking merchandise for his own use.

By the time of the sale of lots in 1818 it was anticipated that it would be advantageous to form a county to provide local administrative and court services. To record deeds required a two day trip to Fincastle by horse. Accordingly, Alleghany County was formed by Act of the Virginia General Assembly from portions of Botetourt, Bath, and Monroe Counties on January 5, 1822.

Despite the sale of the lots, Covington grew very slowly for by 1855 there were only 43 houses on two streets. At this time this was an agricultural community and the prosperity of stores and businesses in the town depended upon those tilling the soil, raising crops and livestock.

Industrial development occurred in the 1890s, and this caused the local population to increase and the town to develop its public services. A bond in the amount of \$10,000 was authorized in 1892 for sidewalks and sewerage, and the high school (now old City Hall) was built for \$30,000 around that time.

The first industries included the Covington Iron Furnace in 1891 (in Sunnymeade) which produced 110 tons of pig iron daily, the steam-powered Deford Tannery (near present Superior Concrete plant) in 1892, the E.M. Nettleton planing mill, and the Covington Machine Shops which produced the patented Coke extractors for use in furnace cleaning in the steel making process. Also there were two flour mills, two brick yards and the Alleghany Pin and Bracket Company. MeadWestvaco did not begin operations until 1900 when A. Adams McAllister sold land to the company at a low price as an inducement to locating in Covington.

All heavy industries had access to the C&O tracks and utilized the modern energy sources of the time. An interesting point was that there existed a Roberson Process Company (1907) which pumped waste sulphite liquor from MeadWestvaco across the Jackson River for reprocessing. A substance called Glutrin was produced which was used as a binder for making sand cores in furnaces, disinfectants, a briquetting agent for fine iron and coal pyrites. It was claimed that this reprocessing "will use the waste product of the pulp mill, which was formerly turned into the river, and thereby cleanse the water (Alleghany County, Its Resources and Industries, p. 20)."

The industries were considerate of their employees, and MeadWestvaco rented company owned houses to the workers or allocated money for individual option for a lot and building.

The 1890s were an economic boon to Covington. Population jumped from 704 in 1890 to 2,950 at the turn of the century. The railroad ran fourteen passenger trains daily through Covington and the City was the fourth largest freight paying station on the entire C&O after Chicago, Cincinnati and Richmond.

The discovery of a higher grade of iron ore in a location served by cheaper water-borne transportation and closer to the steel mills of the cities along the Great Lakes caused the local mines to diminish in importance. The open pit iron ore mines in the northern Great Lakes region were detrimental to mining in Alleghany County and the dependent industries in Covington. Gradually the iron mines lessened in importance and began closing in the 1920s. The coming of the Great Depression sealed the fate of iron ore mining, and this enterprise never recovered again in the area.

Fortunately for Covington, other industries moved into the area, of which the most notable was Industrial Rayon (now Applied Extrusion Technology, Inc. or AET, Inc.) and Automotive Industries, Inc. (now Lear Corporation). Also the Allied Chemical Corporation assumed control of the former Extraction Plant and continued its operations.

After several expansions of the corporate limits, the Town of Covington became a City in 1952. It is governed by a Council-Manager form of government. Covington offers a wide range of services and facilities for its citizens and possesses a sound financial base.

As of the year 2001, the City officials are focusing attention on the historic downtown, regional recreational facilities, industrial development at Jamison Commerce Center, neighborhood improvements, commercial growth south of I-64, and tourism.

## Demographics

Demographic information on Covington, such as population characteristics, educational trends, and income averages, are described in this section. These statistics can help City officials plan for public facilities needed for various age groups and design programs to meet specific needs.

### Population Characteristics and Trends

Table 1 summarizes population characteristics for the City from 1980 to 2000. The overall decrease in population during those years is also reflected in decreases in the number of households and families. These changes would have left vacancies in the housing stock, and subsequently the average household size changed from 2.58 persons per unit in 1980 to 2.34 in 1990. This summary table also shows decreases in the youngest and oldest age groups and a 12.2% increase in the median age. In 1990, Covington's median age of 39.6 years was seven years higher than Virginia's overall median age of 32.6 years. The Census Redistricting Data (released in the spring of 2001) shows that Covington's total population decreased 12.4% between 1990 and 2000.

Table 1  
Summary of Population Characteristics  
1980-2000

|   | 1980  | 1990  | 1980-1990<br>Change | 2000  | 1990-2000<br>Change |
|---|-------|-------|---------------------|-------|---------------------|
| Total population                                  | 9,063 | 7,198 | -20.6%              | 6,303 | -12.4%              |
| Total households                                  | 3,511 | 2,990 | -14.8%              | 2,835 | NA                  |
| Total families                                    | 2,573 | 2,015 | -21.7%              | NA    | NA                  |
| Persons under age 19                              | 2,369 | 1,509 | -36.3%              | NA    | NA                  |
| Persons over age 64                               | 1,605 | 1,550 | -3.4%               | NA    | NA                  |
| Average household size<br>(persons per household) | 2.58  | 2.34  | -14.3%              | NA    | NA                  |
| Median age (years)                                | 35.3  | 39.6  | 12.2%               | NA    | NA                  |

Notes: The 1990 population is from the Census revision and this revision is not reflected in the other figures in the table. The 2000 population is from the 2000 Census Redistricting Data. Covington received 781 acres and 53 people in a 1991 boundary adjustment. Census Bureau age statistics differ slightly from VEC age data.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The following table shows population changes from 1900 to 2000. The City's population increased significantly in the three decades between 1900 and 1930, with a 43.5% increase in the first decade, 32.8% in the second, and 16.3% in the third. The next two decades (1930 to 1950)

saw population decreases.

Portions of Allegheny County were annexed by Covington in 1952, a factor which helps explain the 88.8% population increase during the period of 1950 to 1960. Covington's population peak according to Census records came in 1960, when a total of 11,062 persons resided in the City. Since this peak, Covington's population declined to 7,198 in 1990, which is a change of -20.6% from 1980. Although Covington received 781 acres and 53 people in a 1991 boundary adjustment, there was a 12.4% population decrease between 1990 and 2000. Later this year, VEC will issue new projections for the years beyond 2000. Projections made before the 2000 Census predicted decreases at a rate of 1.4% every ten years, but Covington's population decreased more than that between 1990 and 2000.

Table 2  
Population Change  
1900-2000

| Year | Total  | Change from Previous Decade |
|------|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1900 | 2,950  |                             |
| 1910 | 4,234  | 43.5%                       |
| 1920 | 5,623  | 32.8%                       |
| 1930 | 6,538  | 16.3%                       |
| 1940 | 6,300  | -3.6%                       |
| 1950 | 5,860  | -7.0%                       |
| 1960 | 11,062 | 88.8%                       |
| 1970 | 10,060 | -9.1%                       |
| 1980 | 9,063  | -9.9%                       |
| 1990 | 7,198  | -20.6%                      |
| 2000 | 6,303  | -12.4%                      |

Notes: There was an annexation in 1952 and a boundary adjustment in 1991, the 1990 population is from the Census revision, and the 2000 population is from the 2000 Census Redistricting Data.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau

Statistics on population density by Block Group are contained in Table 3, and the boundaries of the two Census Tracts and eight Block Groups within the two Census Tracts are shown on the accompanying map.

Block Group 3 in Census Tract 601 is the smallest in terms of Block Group land area at .22 square miles. Despite this, it is the most densely populated of all the Block Groups, averaging 3,286 persons per square mile. Block Group 4 in census tract 601 has the smallest population at 703 persons. Block Group 2 of Census Tract 601 is the most populous, containing 1,525 people and 685 total households over an area of .56 acres. With 1.54 square miles, Block Group 3 in Census Tract 60298 is the largest of the Block Groups in land area.

Table 3  
Population Density by Block Group  
1990

| Tract and Block Group | Square Miles | Number of People | People Per Square Mile | Number of Housing Units |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 601-1                 | .54          | 858              | 1,589                  | 399                     |
| 601-2                 | .56          | 1,525            | 2,723                  | 685                     |
| 601-3                 | .22          | 723              | 3,286                  | 337                     |
| 601-4                 | .23          | 703              | 3,056                  | 330                     |
| 60298-1               | .41          | 844              | 2,058                  | 443                     |
| 60298-2               | .28          | 472              | 1,686                  | 233                     |
| 60298-3               | 1.54         | 1,102            | 716                    | 492                     |
| 60298-4               | .58          | 764              | 1,317                  | 350                     |
| TOTAL                 | 4.36         | 7,198            | 1,603                  | 3,269                   |

Notes: The revised 1990 Census figure is used for the total population above but is not reflected in the census tract and block group figures.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Population by race statistics for the City are found in Table 4. This shows that Covington was 83.9% white and 15.2% black in 1996. Very small populations of other races were represented in Covington at that time. In addition, there were 31 Hispanics in the City.

LINK TO CENSUS TRACTS AND BLOCK GROUPS MAP - [CENSUS.PDF](#)

Table 4  
Population by Race  
1996

| Category                          | Number of Persons | Percent of Population |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| White                             | 5,687             | 83.9%                 |
| Black                             | 1,033             | 15.2%                 |
| American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut | 6                 | 0.1%                  |
| Asian or Pacific Islander         | 55                | 0.8%                  |
| Hispanic (may be of any race)     | 31                | 0.5%                  |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Age distributions for the years 1970 to 1990 are shown in Table 5, while Table 6 compares the 1990 age distribution to 2000 and 2010 projections. Between 1970 and 1980, there was a 39.9% increase in persons age 65 and over. All other age categories in Table 5 decreased.

Table 5  
Population by Age  
1970-1990

| Age Group | 1970 Population | 1980 Population | 1990 Population | 1970-80 Change | 1980-90 Change |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Under 5   | 866             | 493             | 406             | - 43.1%        | - 17.6%        |
| 5-19      | 2,497           | 2,038           | 1,195           | -18.4%         | - 41.4%        |
| 20-44     | 2,998           | 2,865           | 2,382           | - 4.4%         | - 16.9%        |
| 45-64     | 2,552           | 2,064           | 1,466           | - 19.1%        | - 29.0%        |
| 65+       | 1,147           | 1,605           | 1,542           | 39.9%          | - 3.9%         |
| TOTAL     | 10,060          | 9,065           | 7,198           | - 9.9%         | - 20.6%        |

Notes: The revised 1990 Census figure is used for the total population above but is not reflected in the individual age categories shown above for that year. VEC age statistics differ slightly from Census age data.

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

From 1990 to 2010, it is projected that there will be a further decrease in persons age 19 and under. It is also projected that there will be a 22% increase in persons age 45 to 64 between the years 1990 and 2000 and an 11.9% increase in the following decade. Smaller increases are

expected to occur in the category of persons age 65 and over. The comparison of changes in age groups should be considered in the scope of Covington’s total population. In the year 2000, it is estimated that 22.7% of Covington’s population will be age 65 and over, while 18% will be age 19 and under. This is very different from the situation in 1970, when 11.4% of the City’s population was age 65 and over, compared with the 33.4% that was age 19 and under. This trend of an increasing elderly population is far greater in Covington than it is in the State overall. These projections were made before the population totals from the 2000 Census were released and will need to be amended to accommodate the 2000 figures for age brackets as soon as they are released.

Table 6  
Population by Age  
1990-2010

| Age Group | 1990 Population | 2000 Projection | 2010 Projection | 1990-2000 Change | 2000-2010 Change |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Under 5   | 406             | 382             | 350             | -5.9%            | -8.4%            |
| 5-19      | 1,195           | 898             | 817             | -24.9%           | -9.0%            |
| 20-44     | 2,382           | 2,422           | 2,206           | 1.7%             | -8.9%            |
| 45-64     | 1,466           | 1,788           | 2,001           | 22.0%            | 11.9%            |
| 65+       | 1,542           | 1,610           | 1,629           | 4.4%             | 1.2%             |
| TOTAL     | 7,198           | 7,100           | 7,003           | -1.4%            | -1.4%            |

Notes: The revised 1990 Census figure is used for the total population above but is not reflected in the individual age categories shown. The 2000 and 2001 figures are projections. Covington received 781 acres and 53 people in a 1991 boundary adjustment. VEC age statistics differ slightly from Census age data.

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

For a more detailed examination of population changes, Table 7 shows how births, deaths, and migration rates have changed the City’s statistics between 1990 and 1998. As might be expected with an elderly population the size of which is found in Covington, resident deaths are outpacing births to Covington residents.

The rate of international migration is small, but the most important change is in the rate of domestic migration. For this data, international migration means persons moving to or from a location outside the United States, while domestic migration means to or from a location within the United States. Covington lost 134 people in domestic migration between 1990 and 1998.

Table 7  
Births, Deaths, and Migration  
1990-1998

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

|                         | Number |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 1990 Population         | 7,198  |
| 1998 Population         | 6,857  |
| Births 1990-98          | 701    |
| Deaths 1990-98          | 885    |
| Natural Increase        | -184   |
| International Migration | 7      |
| Domestic Migration      | -134   |
| Net Migration           | -127   |

Notes: The 1990 population is from the Census revision, the 1998 population is an estimate, births and deaths are by place of residence, and an increase of 30 people is unaccounted for by the reporting agency. Covington received 781 acres and 53 people in a 1991 boundary adjustment.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 8  
Area Population - Adjusted For  
1991 Boundary Change  
1990-2000

| Area                | 1990<br>Population | 2000<br>Population | Change<br>1990-2000 |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Covington           | 7,352              | 6,303              | - 14.3%             |
| Alleghany<br>County | 12,815             | 12,926             | 0.9%                |
| Clifton Forge       | 4,679              | 4,289              | - 8.3%              |
| Virginia            | 6,189,197          | 7,078,515          | 14.4%               |

Notes: The 1990 population is from the Census revision and the 2000 population is from the Census Redistricting Data.

Source: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, UVA

Comparisons of Covington with surrounding communities and the State of Virginia are seen in the table above. This table shows the 1990 population figures as adjusted for the 1991 boundary change. This means that the 1990 figures show what the population would have been if the 1991 boundary adjustment had occurred before 1990. This allows for easier 1990-2000 comparisons between Covington and Alleghany County in this table, but this specific adjustment is not included in other tables in this document. This table shows that between the years 1990 and 2000 in the Alleghany Highlands, Clifton Forge lost 8.3% of its population, Alleghany County gained 0.9%, and Covington lost 14.3%.

**Educational Statistics**

The following table demonstrates that educational attainment rose between 1980 and 1990 for persons 25 years old and over in the City. In 1980, 29.2% of the persons age 25 and over had not completed more than 8 years of school. In 1990, the percentage of persons in that category dropped to 17.6%. The City's percentage of high school graduates among persons age 25 and over rose from 33.4% in 1980 to 38.2% in 1990. Persons age 25 years and over with one or more years of college rose from 10.7% in 1980 to 19.3% in 1990. Individuals with 4 years or more of college showed an increase from 5.3% in 1980 to 7.1% in 1990.

Table 9  
Educational Statistics for Person Age 25 and Older  
1980-1990

| Highest Years of School Completed | 1980 Number | 1980 Percent | 1990 Number | 1990 Percent |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Elementary (0 to 8 years)         | 1486        | 29.2%        | 854         | 17.6%        |
| High School (1 to 3 years)        | 1092        | 21.4%        | 868         | 17.8%        |
| High School (4 years)             | 1703        | 33.4%        | 1856        | 38.2%        |
| College (1 to 3 years)            | 544         | 10.7%        | 939         | 19.3%        |
| College (4+ years)                | 270         | 5.3%         | 339         | 7.1%         |
| TOTAL                             | 5095        | 100%         | 4856        | 100%         |
| High School or Greater            | 2517        | 49.4%        | 3134        | 64.5%        |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

There were 936 students enrolled in Covington City Schools in 1999, compared with 981 students in 1991. The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service estimates that there will be 924 students in the City system in 2004. Covington City Schools are discussed further in the Community Facilities section of this plan.

**Income**

Table 10 shows median and per capita income figures. The 1980 Census showed a 1979 median family income of \$16,551 in Covington. The 1990 Census indicated that this increased to \$26,091 in 1989, representing a 57.6% increase. Median household income increased by 53% and per capita income increased by 79.6% during this time period.

Covington's median family income was 68.3% of the State median in 1989. For median household income, the City was 62.8% of the State's 1989 figure. The per capita income was 68.8% of the State's 1989 per capita. These figures do not take into account the lower cost of living in the Alleghany Highlands.

Median household income estimates for the years 1993 and 1995 are shown in Table 11. A 25% increase is estimated for the six-year period from 1989 to 1995.

Table 10  
Income Statistics  
1979-1989

|                         | Covington<br>1979 | Covington<br>1989 | Change<br>1979-89 | Virginia<br>1989 |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Median Family Income    | \$16,551          | \$26,091          | 57.6%             | \$38,213         |
| Median Household Income | \$13,671          | \$20,913          | 53.0%             | \$33,328         |
| Per Capita              | \$6,021           | \$10,814          | 79.6%             | \$15,713         |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 11  
Median Household Income Trends  
1989-1995

|                            | 1989     | 1993<br>Estimate | 1995<br>Estimate | Change<br>1989-95 |
|----------------------------|----------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Median Household<br>Income | \$20,913 | \$24,038         | \$26,144         | 25%               |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The 1989 median family income levels for the City's two Census Tracts and the four Block Groups in each Tract are shown in Table 12. The highest income in 1989 was in Block Group 4 of Census Tract 60298. This is in the southern part of the City, an area which has seen more residential growth since these figures were released.

Table 12  
Median Family Income by Census Tract and Block Group  
1989

| Census Area       | Median Family Income | Census Area         | Median Family Income |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Block Group 601-1 | \$23,611             | Block Group 60298-1 | \$26,172             |
| Block Group 601-2 | \$20,526             | Block Group 60298-2 | \$29,643             |
| Block Group 601-3 | \$27,750             | Block Group 60298-3 | \$28,140             |
| Block Group 601-4 | \$25,962             | Block Group 60298-4 | \$34,886             |
| Census Tract 601  | \$23,750             | Census Tract 60298  | \$28,719             |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 13  
Mean Household Income by Type  
1989

| Type of Income           | Covington - # of Households | Covington Mean | Virginia Mean |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Wage and Salary          | 1997                        | \$24,633       | \$39,615      |
| Non-Farm Self Employment | 214                         | \$9,390        | \$18,896      |
| Farm Self Employment     | 5                           | \$3,500        | \$6,694       |
| Social Security          | 1271                        | \$8,386        | \$7,223       |
| Public Assistance        | 185                         | \$3,832        | \$3,394       |
| Retirement               | 705                         | \$6,065        | \$12,652      |

Note: A household can have more than one type of income.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 13 shows the type of income for the City's 2,990 households in 1989. This question is from the 1990 Census and respondents were permitted to note more than one type of income if applicable. The largest number of households in Covington had wage and salary income. This was followed by households where one or more persons received social security benefits.

The number of individuals receiving social security benefits was 3,490 in 1989. The Census Bureau estimates the 1995 figure to be 1,967 persons. The Consolidated Federal Funds Report shows a total of \$31,891,474 in social security payments to residents of Covington in fiscal year 1999. During this period, there was a total of \$2,928,525 in Medicaid payments for Covington residents.

The 1990 Census showed 909 persons and 244 children in poverty. This represented 13.1% of persons and 17.6% of children for whom poverty was established. The 1993 and 1995 figures are found in Table 14. The percent of both persons and children in poverty increased during that time period. The annual definition of poverty (i.e., the poverty threshold) varies with the size of household.

Table 14  
Poverty Statistics  
1993-1995

|                        | 1993     |         | 1995     |         |
|------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
|                        | Number   | Percent | Number   | Percent |
| Persons in Poverty     | 1,016    | 14.5%   | 1,061    | 14.9%   |
| Children in Poverty    | 299      | 21.2%   | 328      | 22.7%   |
|                        | 1993     |         | 1995     |         |
| Definition of Poverty  |          |         |          |         |
| One Person Household   | \$7,363  |         | \$7,763  |         |
| Two Person Household   | \$9,414  |         | \$9,933  |         |
| Three Person Household | \$11,522 |         | \$12,158 |         |
| Four Person Household  | \$14,763 |         | \$15,569 |         |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

### Economy

The economy of the City of Covington cannot be isolated from that of Alleghany County nor of this part of Virginia. History and geography have dictated Covington's role in the area in the past. The importance of the Jackson River and other streams; the forest resources of Alleghany County, nearby West Virginia and the surrounding counties; the transportation routes and modes

of transport available; and the untapped and under-utilized water and mineral resources of the region indicate that there is economic potential at hand for the future. Covington possesses an economic influence over a region encompassing several counties of two states.

The manufacturing sector in Covington revolves around the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company (MeadWestvaco), AET, Inc., Lear Corporation, and several smaller industries. Looking at these industries from a regional point of view, it is evident that MeadWestvaco benefits from its proximity to the forestland and timber products. The availability of and access to rail lines and interstate highway routes ease the movement of both raw materials and finished products to and from these industries. MeadWestvaco relies on and encourages private woodcutters to deliver cut wood (of specific dimensions) to the plant in Covington. Again the economics of such operations are beneficial to the City as a whole as this money will filter into the local retail and service markets.

Regarding the non-manufacturing sector of the economy, the location of Covington in the Alleghany region and the range and choice of goods and services has enhanced the economic life of the City. However, these benefits are secondary to and dependent upon the wages and salaries paid by the local industries to local people. Both manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors are tied closely together.

### **Labor Force and Employment**

Regionally, Covington draws from a labor market that is both within and outside its corporate limits. Tables 15 and 16 show data on persons commuting to work within the Alleghany Highlands. This information from the 1990 Census is the most recent data available in this detail until the 2000 Census results are released. As illustrated by Table 15, of the 2787 Covington residents who were employed, 923 worked outside the City. This represents more than a third of the entire Covington work force. The majority of out-commuters worked in Alleghany County and Clifton Forge, at 487 and 211, respectively.

Table 16 shows that the greatest number of in-commuters to Covington were from Alleghany County, which had 706 residents working in the City. The total number of in-commuters to Covington was 997. The net gain (in-commuters minus out-commuters) was 74 persons.

Table 15  
Out-Commuters by  
Place of Work, 1990

| Category   | Number of<br>Persons |
|--|----------------------|
| People who live and work in Covington  | 1,864                |
| Covington residents who are employed   | 2,787                |
|  |                      |
| <b>Out-commuters</b> (Covington residents commuting to the following locality to work) |                      |
| -- Alleghany County  | 487                  |
| -- Clifton Forge   | 211                  |
| -- Bath County   | 42                   |
| -- Roanoke City  | 23                   |
| -- Botetourt County  | 21                   |
| -- Greenbrier County, WV   | 21                   |
| -- Roanoke County  | 17                   |
| -- Salem   | 12                   |
| -- Fairfax City  | 11                   |
| -- Rockbridge County   | 9                    |
| -- Cleveland County, NC  | 8                    |
| -- Worked Elsewhere  | 61                   |
|  |                      |
| <b>TOTAL Out-Commuters</b>   | <b>923</b>           |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 16  
In-Commuters by

Place of Work, 1990

| Category   | Number of Persons |
|--|-------------------|
| People who live and work in Covington  | 1,864             |
| Covington residents who are employed   | 2,787             |
|  |                   |
| <b>In-commuters</b> (outside residents commuting to Covington for work from the following locality of residence) |                   |
| -- Alleghany County  | 706               |
| -- Clifton Forge   | 56                |
| -- Greenbrier County, WV   | 50                |
| -- Botetourt County  | 33                |
| -- Monroe County, WV   | 16                |
| -- Nelson County   | 14                |
| -- Owen County, KY   | 12                |
| -- Roanoke County  | 12                |
| -- Bedford County  | 11                |
| -- Danville  | 10                |
| -- Harrisonburg  | 9                 |
| -- Reside Elsewhere  | 68                |
|  |                   |
| <b>TOTAL In-Commuters</b>  | <b>997</b>        |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 17 shows Covington’s labor force statistics for the years 1990 and 1999. It shows that between those years, the civilian labor force increased by 43 persons, the total employment increased by 114 persons, and the number of unemployed persons decreased by 71.

Table 17  
Labor Force Statistics  
1990-1999

| Year | Civilian Labor Force | Total Employment | Total Unemployment | Rate of Unemployment |
|------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1990 | 3,241                | 2,923            | 318                | 9.9%                 |
| 1999 | 3,284                | 3,037            | 247                | 7.5%                 |

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

Table 18  
Monthly Labor Force Statistics  
September 1999-August 2000

| Month & Year | Civilian Labor Force | Total Employment | Total Unemployment | Rate of Unemployment |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 9-99         | 3,245                | 3,039            | 206                | 6.3%                 |
| 10-99        | 3,232                | 3,058            | 174                | 5.4%                 |
| 11-99        | 3,304                | 3,087            | 217                | 6.6%                 |
| 12-99        | 3,262                | 3,082            | 180                | 5.5%                 |
| 1-00         | 3,121                | 2,916            | 205                | 6.6%                 |
| 2-00         | 3,130                | 2,921            | 209                | 6.7%                 |
| 3-00         | 3,126                | 2,953            | 173                | 5.5%                 |
| 4-00         | 3,105                | 2,970            | 135                | 4.3%                 |
| 5-00         | 3,120                | 2,988            | 132                | 4.2%                 |
| 6-00         | 3,082                | 2,972            | 110                | 3.6%                 |
| 7-00         | 3,328                | 2,944            | 384                | 11.5%                |
| 8-00         | 3,075                | 2,991            | 84                 | 2.7%                 |

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

In 1990, Covington's unemployment rate was 9.9% and Virginia's was 4.3%. In 1999, Covington's was 7.5% and Virginia's was 2.8%. In August 2000, Covington's unemployment rate was 2.7%, Virginia's was 2.6%, and the overall U.S. unemployment rate was 4.1%.

Labor force statistics often vary from month to month, and Table 18 provides information on Covington's monthly labor force statistics for September 1999 through August 2000. The two lowest unemployment rates were August 2000 (2.7%) and June 2000 (3.6%), with the month between those (July 2000) showing a high unemployment rate of 11.5%. Statistics for the previous year also indicate a jump in unemployment from 6.7% in June 1999 to 12.7% in July 1999. These seasonal fluctuations may be indicative of a flow of students entering the summer work force or seasonal changes in workloads at major employers.

Table 19  
Employment by Industry  
1993-1997

| Industry by Year                                    | Number of Establishments |            | Number of Employees |              | Annual Payroll (in \$1000) |                  |
|---|--------------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|----------------------------|------------------|
|   | 1993                     | 1997       | 1993                | 1997         | 1993                       | 1997             |
| Agricultural Services, Forestry, Fishing and Mining | 2                        | 2          | <20                 | <20          | Data Withheld              | Data Withheld    |
| Construction  | 25                       | 27         | 248                 | 224          | \$5,596                    | \$6,519          |
| Manufacturing                                       | 13                       | 16         | 2,731               | 2,704        | \$102,164                  | \$114,282        |
| Transportation and Public Utilities                 | 10                       | 9          | 75                  | 81           | \$2,670                    | \$2,921          |
| Wholesale Trade                                     | 20                       | 16         | 97                  | 87           | \$1,499                    | \$1,952          |
| Retail Trade  | 96                       | 70         | 1,112               | 664          | \$11,664                   | \$8,861          |
| Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate                 | 26                       | 22         | 140                 | 133          | \$2,616                    | \$2,341          |
| Services  | 99                       | 85         | 471                 | 583          | \$5,657                    | \$8,337          |
| Unclassified  | 1                        | 1          | <20                 | <20          | Data Withheld              | Data Withheld    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>293</b>               | <b>248</b> | <b>4,882</b>        | <b>4,479</b> | <b>\$131,971</b>           | <b>\$145,284</b> |

Note: The number of employees was computed for the week of March 12.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Business Patterns Report

In Table 19, the number of establishments, number of employees, and annual payroll in Covington is shown by type of industry for the years 1993 and 1997. The largest industry sector

(by number of employees and annual payroll) in 1993 and 1997 was manufacturing, followed by retail trade and services.

Wholesale trade (by annual payroll) is the smallest industry sector, followed by the finance, insurance, and real estate sector. The services sector had the largest increase in number of employees from 1993 to 1997, while manufacturing saw the largest increase in payroll.

The largest decrease between 1993 and 1997 was in retail trade. However, due to the opening of Wal-Mart and other stores at the new Riverbend Shopping Center, it is anticipated that a reversal in this retail trade trend will be documented when statistics for later years are released.

Covington's major employer is MeadWestvaco Corporation, with over 1500 employees. The next largest employers are Lear Operations Corporation (300-399 employees), Wal-Mart (200-299 employees), Covington City School Board (100-199 employees) and AET (100-199 employees). Table 20 shows the major employers with at least 40 employees in Covington in June 1999.

Covington's Plan for Economic Development outlines strategies for bringing additional business into the City. For example, it outlines steps for improving the Commerce Center Area and Downtown Covington, describes future facility improvement projects, and notes proposed general improvement projects. Recently Covington has joined with Alleghany County and Clifton Forge in an application to the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program. Designation as an Enterprise Zone encourages development through state tax credits and job grants to businesses and industries that locate in the zone.

The following is a list of available commercial and retail sites found on the City's Web Page (one of the key factors in the City's Marketing Plan). More information on the City's Plan for Economic Development is included in the Goals and Objectives section herein.

#### Sites Available for Construction

AET Slab - previously held 18,000 sq.ft. fiber operation  
Jamison Commerce Center - 2 outparcels still available

#### Available Buildings

Former Halmode Building - over 25,000 sq.ft., zoned C-3  
Former J.C. Penney site - retail space in downtown  
Former Magic Mart Retail Store - Rt. 154 off Exit 14 of I-64

Former Craft Building - office space in downtown near MeadWestvaco  
Former Craft Building - 105 West Main St., 1700 sq. ft.  
304 West Main St.- 6400 sq. ft.

#### Available Buildings (continued)

340 West Main St.- sq. ft.

221 North Court St. – 7,118 sq. ft. (part)  
300 Block North Court – 3,344 sq. ft.  
135 North Maple Street  
161 North Maple St.  
225 North Maple St.- 2,400 sq. ft.  
441 Riverside Ave.

Table 20  
Major Employers  
Offices Located In Covington  
March, 2000

| Employer                     | Range of Employees |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| MeadWestvaco                 | over 1,500         |
| Lear Operations Corporation  | 300-399            |
| Wal-Mart                     | 200-299            |
| Covington City School Board  | 100-199            |
| AET                          | 100-199            |
| Manpower International       | 100-199            |
| K-Mart                       | 75-99              |
| WACO                         | 55-74              |
| Team Carriers                | 55-74              |
| Merit Electrical and Instru. | 55-74              |
| Food Lion                    | 40-54              |
| D.D. Kerns Construction Co.  | 40-54              |
| Alleghany Motor Corp.        | 40-54              |
| Covington Motor Company      | 40-54              |
| H&M Electric                 | 40-54              |
| F&M Bank of the Highlands    | 40-54              |
| Kroger Company               | 40-54              |
| Covington Virginian          | 40-54              |

Note: Excludes Rail Companies  
Source: Virginia Employment Commission

## Travel and Tourism

Covington's location on a major interstate and its proximity to ski resorts, fishing areas, and other attractions contribute to travel and tourism revenues generated in the City. The following table provides information on travel spending, payroll, employment, and taxes generated in Covington.

Travel spending represents the *direct* spending by all travelers and includes factors such as meals, lodging, shopping, and entertainment. Travel employment indicates employees hired to *directly* accommodate travelers. Travel payroll represents the *direct* wages, salaries, and tips corresponding to *direct* travel employment. State travel taxes and local travel taxes represent tax revenues to the state and locality, respectively, that are generated by *direct* travel spending in the locality.

The travel-related establishments and travel-related employment are those related to travel in any way. They also include the *direct* travel figures. For example, if the presence of travelers requires that a restaurant hire 10 workers instead of the 5 workers it would need to meet only local trade, then 5 employees would be considered *direct* travel employment and the entire staff of 10 employees would be travel-related employment.

Table 21  
Travel Impacts, 1990-1998

| Year                          | 1990        | 1992        | 1994        | 1996        | 1998        |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Traveler Spending             | \$3,990,000 | \$3,400,000 | \$3,720,000 | \$2,680,000 | \$3,220,000 |
| Percent Change                |             | -14.8%      | 9.4%        | -28%        | 20.1%       |
| Total Travel Payroll          | \$790,000   | \$610,000   | \$660,000   | \$470,000   | \$510,000   |
| Travel Employment             | 80          | 50          | 60          | 40          | 40          |
| State Travel Taxes            | \$200,000   | \$170,000   | \$180,000   | \$140,000   | \$180,000   |
| Local Travel Taxes            | \$100,000   | \$70,000    | \$80,000    | \$70,000    | \$70,000    |
| Travel-Related Establishments | 88          | 79          | 77          | 75          | 81          |
| Travel-Related Employment     | 911         | 883         | 907         | 900         | 1,043       |

Note: The 1998 figures are preliminary estimates.  
Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation

This table shows that travel spending varies greatly in Covington, with large decreases between the years 1990 and 1992 and again from 1994 to 1996. An increase of 9.4% occurred between 1992 and 1994, with a much larger increase (20.1%) from 1996 to 1998. This trend does not follow the travel spending trends in adjacent Alleghany County or the State of Virginia as a whole. Statistics on travel spending in Alleghany County show increases of over 20% every two years from 1990 to 1998, while Virginia's travel spending went up by approximately 10% every two years.

City officials are working to increase the number of facilities and amenities within the City that will attract travelers. Examples of facilities that are expected to increase travel revenues in Covington are the proposed Jackson River Recreation Park and two historic train depots that are to be restored. Current tourist attractions include:

#### Attractions in Covington

Covington City Parks  
Jackson River  
Downtown Historic District  
Lumberjacks Baseball  
Jackson River Sports and Recreational Complex

#### Attractions near Covington

The Homestead, Hot Springs  
The Greenbrier Hotel, White Sulphur Springs, WV  
Lake Moomaw and Gathright Dam, Alleghany County  
Douthat State Park, Alleghany and Bath Counties  
Humpback Bridge, Alleghany County  
Falling Spring Falls, Alleghany County

Based on feedback and input received, agreement exist among stakeholders that increasing tourism to existing and future attractions holds potential as an economic development tool, enabling Covington to capture tourist dollars and tax revenue. Considerable interest also exists among stakeholders in working together to promote existing attractions and to develop and promote new attractions to increase tourism to the city. Currently several organizations are working to promote, improve and increase the number of attractions available to visitors to the area, as well as the local population, including the Chamber of Commerce, Olde Town Covington Inc., The Alleghany Arts Council, the Covington Parks and Recreation Department, among others.

The Jackson River Sports and Recreational Complex and the AET ballparks, once completed, are valuable resources to market. The Recreational Complex and the AET ballparks can accommodate large numbers of participants and spectators from outside the area to various sports league competitions. Golf courses in the area offer additional recreational opportunities.

In addition to cultural attractions, numerous outdoor recreation opportunities also exist in or near Covington and the Alleghany Highlands. The rugged terrain and proximity to the Jackson River offer a scenic setting to enjoy mountain biking, canoeing, fishing, kayaking and other outdoor recreation such as bird watching and hiking. Improvements to facilities and amenities geared toward outdoor recreation will enhance the recreating experience and provide additional recreating opportunities. Improved access to the Jackson River, more multi-use trails for biking, hiking and horse riding, and additional services are examples of potential areas of improvement.

By effectively marketing the areas natural and cultural resources, tourism may foster economic growth, through job creation, increased tax revenue and associated tertiary economic activities. The combination of Covington's geographic location, scenic beauty, and improved cultural and recreational attractions and opportunities will offer travelers a reason to visit Covington, stay for longer periods of time, and spend more money while visiting.

## Taxable Sales

Table 22 shows taxable sales data from the Virginia Department of Taxation for the years 1990 and 1999 by business classification, and Table 23 shows annual data for the years 1990 to 1999. The former shows both increases and decreases in sales by classification between 1990 and 1999, and the totals reveal a significant increase of 29% (\$22,927,194) in those nine years. The largest categories in both 1990 and 1999 were food; general merchandise; lumber, building materials and supplies; and other miscellaneous.

The totals for the years 1990 through 1999 (Table 23) show annual fluctuations, with the highest taxable sales occurring in 1999. There was a decrease of 6.1% between 1993 and 1994 and an increase of 16% between 1998 and 1999.

Table 22  
Taxable Sales by Classification  
1990-1999

| Classification                      | 1990                | 1999                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Apparel                             | \$1,135,020         | \$779,905            |
| Automotive                          | \$5,120,099         | \$6,159,167          |
| Food                                | \$8,487,523         | \$10,877,451         |
| Furniture, Home Furnishing & Equip. | \$3,141,615         | \$4,316,079          |
| General Merchandise                 | \$9,711,944         | \$26,611,814         |
| Lumber, Building Materials & Supply | \$8,939,316         | \$14,708,652         |
| Fuel                                | \$610,661           | Included in Other    |
| Machinery, Equipment & Supplies     | \$677,421           | \$1,931,706          |
| Miscellaneous                       | \$3,339,835         | \$7,793,923          |
| Hotels, Motels & Tourist Camps      | \$392,791           | \$153,892            |
| Alcoholic Beverage                  | See Note*           | \$579,297            |
| Other Misc. & Unidentifiable        | \$37,539,662        | \$28,111,195         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                        | <b>\$79,095,887</b> | <b>\$102,023,081</b> |

Note: Alcohol sold at ABC stores was not taxed before 7-1-92. Alcohol purchased at restaurants, grocery stores, etc., is included in the Food category.

Source: Virginia Department of Taxation

Table 23  
Annual Taxable Sales, 1990-1999

| Year | Total Amount  | Change From Previous Year |
|------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1990 | \$79,095,887  | 8.2%                      |
| 1991 | \$78,019,587  | -1.4%                     |
| 1992 | \$81,671,894  | 4.7%                      |
| 1993 | \$84,341,844  | 3.3%                      |
| 1994 | \$79,188,455  | -6.1%                     |
| 1995 | \$77,156,960  | -2.7%                     |
| 1996 | \$80,247,211  | 4.0%                      |
| 1997 | \$79,783,457  | -0.6%                     |
| 1998 | \$87,955,087  | 10.2%                     |
| 1999 | \$102,023,081 | 16.0%                     |

Source: Virginia Department of Taxation

## **Revenues and Appropriations**

Covington's revenues and appropriations for fiscal year 2000-2001 are shown in the following four tables. Non-revenue receipts, property taxes, state government payments, and local taxes provide a significant amount of General Fund Revenues for the City. Appropriations are spread among nine uses, with education receiving the highest amount. Other departments requiring large appropriations are public works and public safety.

Table 24  
General Fund Revenues  
Fiscal Year 2000-2001

| Type of Revenue                        | Amount       |
|--|--------------|
| Property Taxes                         | \$6,610,840  |
| Local Taxes                            | \$2,839,200  |
| Permits and Private Fees               | \$19,260     |
| Fines and Forfeitures                  | \$13,500     |
| Use of Money and Property              | \$191,400    |
| Charges for Services                   | \$767,625    |
| Miscellaneous                          | \$600        |
| Recovered Costs                        | \$25,000     |
| Commonwealth                           | \$3,285,923  |
| Federal Government Non-Categorical Aid | \$18,000     |
| Non-Revenue Receipts                   | \$6,803,596  |
| TOTAL                                  | \$20,574,944 |

Source: City of Covington

The majority of water and sewer fund revenues (Table 26) are generated by charges for services. The largest water fund appropriation (Table 27) is for water filtration, followed by the appropriation for water distribution. Sewage disposal receives the highest appropriation among the sewer funds.

Table 25  
General Fund Appropriations  
Fiscal Year 2000-2001

| Type of Appropriation             | Amount              |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| General Government Administration | \$1,129,437         |
| Judicial Administration           | \$92,076            |
| Public Safety                     | \$1,950,329         |
| Public Works                      | \$6,084,494         |
| Health and Welfare                | \$1,248,541         |
| Education                         | \$8,621,574         |
| Parks, Recreation, and Cultural   | \$862,124           |
| Community Development             | \$120,041           |
| Non-Departmental                  | \$466,328           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                      | <b>\$20,574,944</b> |

Source: City of Covington

Table 26  
Water and Sewer Fund Revenues  
Fiscal Year 2000-2001

| Type of Revenue      | Water Fund         | Sewer Fund         |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Charges for Services | \$1,189,100        | \$1,020,000        |
| Non-Revenue Receipts | \$240,946          | \$76,857           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>         | <b>\$1,430,046</b> | <b>\$1,096,857</b> |

Source: City of Covington

Table 27  
Water and Sewer Fund Appropriations  
Fiscal Year 2000-2001

| Type of Appropriation | Water Fund         | Type of Appropriation     | Sewer Fund         |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Water Filtration      | \$842,309          | Sewage Collection/Removal | \$118,301          |
| Water Distribution    | \$450,137          | Sewage Disposal           | \$965,056          |
| Transfers/Reserves    | \$137,600          | Transfers/Reserves        | \$13,500           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>\$1,430,046</b> | <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>\$1,096,857</b> |

Source: City of Covington

### **III. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Natural Physical Environment**

The existing landscape of Covington was created by complex geologic forces and gradually altered by actions of wind, water and man. Some knowledge of the dynamic and variable forces of nature that are at work and how they relate to human occupancy is necessary to fully understand the regional landscape. Zoning, subdivision regulations, and future land use decisions should be made with a working concept of the effects that different uses of the land will have on the natural physical environment and how aspects of that environment will or can affect development.

This section of the Plan will examine those features of the physical environment that are pertinent to local planning in Covington. Elements of physiography, soil, and climate will be studied as they relate to proper land use development.

#### **Physiography**

Covington lies within the river valley of the Jackson River within the Valley and Ridge physiographic province of Virginia. The following map shows Covington in relation to surrounding Alleghany County and nearby Clifton Forge. Alleghany County's highest point, Big Knob on Warm Spring Mountain (4,702 feet), lies to the northeast of the City.

Inside the City limits, the lowest elevations range from 1,250 feet where the Jackson River enters Covington in the north to 1,175 feet at its point of departure from the corporate limits. High points include 1,608 feet at High Acres Mobile Home Park, 1,655 feet on Sunset Hill, and 1,670 feet on Payne's Ridge. Generally, the City is marked by flat river bottom and sloping terrain upwards from the Jackson River. This configuration makes drainage and slope considerations important planning factors in Covington.

#### **Geology**

Geology is the prime factor affecting formation of the landscape, and topography is the result of these forces. Generally, the rock strata underlying Covington are of either the Silurian or Devonian age. Limestone, shale, and sandstone deposits prevail in various degrees of depth and thickness.

No major identifiable problems with these formations have been observed. The porous limestone, though, is not the best foundation material for large urban structures or development. This fact compounded by soil and slope conditions could be costly to human life and property. Therefore, it would be unwise to disregard these natural conditions if problems could result. The general status of the geologic information available, and the instability of nature itself, must warrant specific detailed geologic study if major changes in the landscape are proposed.

LINK TO ALLEGHANY HIGHLANDS MAP – [ALLEGHANY HIGHLANDS](#)

## **Slope and Topography**

The influence of the topography, especially the slope of the landscape, is generally recognized as an important limitation in land use decisions. Level ground (0-8% slope) is suitable for sites of intensive land use activity; gentle slopes (8-16%) are limited to more dispersed activities or to means of transportation; and steep slopes (over 16%) are difficult to use for highly productive purposes and restrict many types of land usage.

In Covington, where the majority of level land has been utilized already, possibilities for further utilization of steeper slopes exist. If these steep areas are to be utilized, then one must acknowledge the constraints associated with hillside development.

Development of hillsides affects the equilibrium of vegetation, geology, slope, soil, and precipitation to one degree or another, and the public objectives can be defined in terms of that disturbance:

1. Disturbance of hillsides can result in the loss of slope and soil stability, as well as increased erosion. The removal of vegetation from hillsides deprives the soil of the stabilizing function of roots, as well as the moderating effects on wind and water erosion of leaves and branches. Loss of soil stability increases erosion and thus lowers downstream water quality as a result of siltation. Downstream wetlands can be injured in this way. Spring thaws or strong rains on unstable slopes can produce mass movements, such as landslides, slumps, and flaws, particularly in steeply sloping areas.
2. Disturbance of hillsides can increase runoff. Development may alter the natural drainage pattern of a hillside, producing increased runoff and erosion. Removal of vegetative cover decreases percolation of precipitation into the soil, thereby reducing the amount of groundwater recharge and adding water to runoff that would ordinarily be transpired by trees and shrubs. Construction of impervious surfaces, such as roads and buildings, decreases the amount of groundwater percolation and thus increases the amount of runoff. Increased runoff, in addition to producing intensified erosion, also creates downstream flood hazards.
3. Disturbance of hillsides can destroy a community's aesthetic resources. A range of hills frequently marks a community's boundaries and provides an attractive setting for homes and buildings. Degradation of hillsides as a result of erosion, mass movement, loss of vegetation, and damage to downstream areas deprives a community of its attractive and distinctive setting and decreases real estate values.

Therefore, in the formation of a Comprehensive Plan for the City of Covington, serious consideration should be taken to ensure that hillside development is compatible with the natural physical environment.

## **Soils**

Study and evaluation of the types of soils located in an area are necessary and important factors used by planners to help citizens determine the direction of future growth patterns.

The kinds of soils which are found in an area are determined by parent material, climate, land forms, vegetation, biological organisms and time. Influencing factors which determine suitable land uses include the presence of gullies which erode the surfaces, the location of existing highways, floodplains, mudflows, and colluvium soil material that has been moved down slope by mass wasting and lack of stratification. Colluvial soil is unstable and not recommended for extensive building uses. The removal of vegetation from clayey soil exposes its moisture content and makes it subject to slide. Some terrain characteristics that might limit extensive development should be considered before any recommendations are made. The existence of sharp breaking lines at a scarp indicates ground movement. A hummocky ground surface below a cliff is indicative of a previous slide. Undrained depressions along a hillside result from seepage, accumulations of debris in valleys and streams. Moisture in subsoils changes the tone of soils located along the upper areas of cliffs or embankments.

Coloration is another method used to analyze the soil suitability for development. Light colors in arid climates indicate the presence of salts; dark colors, such as blacks and browns, denote a high content of organic matter. Dark grey and black soils have poor internal drainage. The water table is usually near the surface. One might infer poor drainage from a dull grey-colored soil. Reds, yellows, and browns indicate degrees of hydration and concentration of iron and aluminum oxides. Good aeration, a factor in causing iron oxidation, is indicated by a strong red color. It is usually present in well-drained upland soils. Yellow soils, however, indicate conditions of poor drainage. White soils are usually coarse, dry sand, or gravel.

In order to place soils in units that can be used for planning, they are classified into soil association series, types, and phases. This information is recorded on soil survey maps for purposes of city, county-wide or large overall planning and soil associations. Textural fractions, the three size ranges of soil particles usually referred to as clay, sand, or silt, are the traditional method of characterizing soil particles. Soil structure is of three types: single grained, massive, and aggregate. Formulation and stability of soil aggregates depend largely on the quantity and state of clay and presence of various forms of organic matter. Soil typing indicates the surface structure. Individual areas of soil types, called phases, are three dimensional. They have breadth, length, and depth. A single body of soil type is seldom large. Most are only a few acres in size. Every soil type has neighbors and never occurs by itself. A few other soil types usually are associated with it to form a characteristic pattern. Clay content and organic matter show differences in critical moisture percentages and maximum bulk density. Soils high in organic matter are less susceptible to compaction. Tillage on such soil is less likely to result in excessive compaction, even when performed over a wide range of moisture content. The downward movement of substance in solutions is known as leaching. The washing out of mineral and organic matter in suspension is called eluviation. The reverse of leaching is depositing. These conditions impose limitations on suitable land uses. A limitation for industrial-commercial and residential use is the presence of humus soil, a mixture of substances similar in chemical composition to wood, and formed by the decay of fresh plants or animal residue. Soil crusting is a type of consolidation formed by desiccation of a thin layer of surface soil which varies in thickness.

The Covington area consists of four different soil associations which are groups of defined and named soil units that are geographically associated in a defined proportional pattern. The first soil type in Covington consists mainly of Holston, Waynesboro, Monongahela, Sequatchie, Frederick, Bolton, Lodi, Allen, Jefferson, and Hayter soils. This association includes some of the best soils for urban use in Covington. These soils have formed on high lying terrace lands, with slopes ranging between 2 and 15 percent. The soils in this association occupy positions approximately 50 feet above the present floodplains. Favorable slopes and deep, well-drained soil conditions make this one of the best associations for urban development. Some of Covington's prime residential and industrial areas are found there.

The second soil type indicates an association consisting mainly of Tyler, Monongahela, Sequatchie, Purdy, Montevallo, Leadvale, Allen and Jefferson soils. These are adequate for urban uses but septic tanks should be excluded. This represents the largest developed soil type in Covington, supporting a wide mix of land uses.

Another association, the third soil type noted, includes mainly Jefferson, Allen, Gilpin, Montevallo, and Muskingum soils. The soils in this association occur on slopes ranging from 5 to 25 percent with most of the area not excluding a 15 percent slope. Because of the extreme stoniness of this association, it is poorly suited to most urban uses. Loose stone makes most types of construction very difficult. The area covered by this association would probably be best utilized for parks or other recreational facilities. Certain urban uses could be located in these areas if the soil is not wholly disturbed or moved. This represents the smallest of the four soil types in Covington. Most of it is found at the City's northern tip.

The fourth soil type indicates an association consisting mainly of Pope, Philo, Atkins, Montevallo, Muskingum, Jefferson, Dandridge, Lodi, Rockland, Bolton, Decatur, Mixed Alluvial, and Made Land Soils. The soils in this association are mostly very poor and stony, and are within the floodplain area. The best use for land within this association is for recreational areas, and parks, and limited development. Soil surveys are recommended for any intensive land use planned for this area. Much of the City's vacant land falls in this category.

Generally, when it comes to basic engineering properties which relate to construction of buildings, the following three categories of limitation apply.

*Description of Slight, Moderate, and Severe Limitations:*

**SLIGHT:** Soil and Site characteristics are such that there are essentially no limitations to use.

**MODERATE:** Soil and/or site characteristics are such that they impose limitations to use that should be recognized and evaluated prior to use. Such limitations can generally be corrected or modified by design or through installation of practices designed to overcome the limitations.

SEVERE: Soil and/or site characteristics present limitations to use that are generally difficult and expensive to overcome. A severe rating indicates that other sites, if available, should be considered for use.

General planning decisions can be made based on this information, but due to the unfavorable soil conditions that are present in the area, specific soils information should be used in order to make positive decisions. For instance, subdivision locations and resulting septic tank systems should be located in areas where the soil will handle the waste material. If not, then groundwater contamination, surface pollution, and septic tank malfunctioning will occur.

### **Hydrology**

Hydrology is the science dealing with the properties, distribution and circulation of water on the surface of the land, in the soil, underlying rocks and in the atmosphere. Land use both affects, and is affected by, hydrologic conditions and Covington is not excluded from this relationship. Pertinent information explaining these relationships follows in the remaining subsections.

### **Climate**

Climate as an element of the hydrologic cycle cannot be overlooked in any analysis of Covington. It can be said that the climate of Covington is not one of extremes because "the Allegheny Mountain Ranges protect the area from atmosphere disturbances that use the immense basin of the Mississippi as a playground" (Morton, Oren F., A Centennial History of Alleghany County, Virginia, page 3).

Storm systems, however, sometimes affect the area such as extra tropical lows, hurricanes or tropical storms, and thunder storms or unusual cloudbursts. These three types can cause extensive rainfall as was experienced in the Covington area in August, 1969 and in November, 1985. The annual average rainfall is 36 inches, most of which falls during the Springtime. The record winter snowfall occurred during the blizzard of 1994.

Covington's annual average temperature is 56 degrees Fahrenheit. The average January low temperature is 28 degrees Fahrenheit and the average July high is 86.9 degrees Fahrenheit.

The prevailing wind in Covington is from the southwest. Available information on winds indicates an average wind velocity of 8 to 10 miles per hour. However, windstorms and tornadoes have occurred in the area with recorded velocities in excess of 80 miles per hour.

Man plays an important role in affecting the climate. Changes to the natural conditions of the land by forest clearance, agriculture, and drainage pattern alteration over an extensive area are elements that cause climatic variations. In urban areas such as Covington, the local climate is influenced by such factors as the extent of paved surfaces, building density, heat production, and air quality and composition.

Paved areas cause rapid runoff with a loss of local humidity and cooling and loss of water to the soil. The hydrologic cycle is interrupted as the water that normally would have seeped into the

soil and returned to the atmosphere by evapotranspiration is now directly discharged into surface water bodies. This causes a rise in the local temperature above what would normally occur if the water gradually evaporated into the atmosphere.

Higher local temperatures are also attributable to paved areas because of the thermal conductivity of concrete and asphalt. Heat flows into these areas during the day and is stored until night when it is slowly released causing higher temperatures.

Other heat sources come from heat loss due to poor home insulations and the automobile engine combustion process. Industrial processes also are major heat contributors.

Smoke, dust, and other particles in the air contribute to air turbidity. This affects solar radiation and causes fog conditions and reduced visibility.

Presently, Covington's problems with local climate are small, but increased construction, industrial relocations, and alterations in the natural landscape can affect this situation. There must be an acknowledgment of the relationships between urban areas and local climate.

Parks and open areas, use of shrubbery and trees as buffers, planting of specific tree types, traffic sanitation and use of climatic data in site selections all contribute to a moderation of the effects of heat and air turbidity.

### **Surface Water**

As discussed previously, Covington lies within the watershed of the Jackson River, which in turn is part of the James River Basin. Approximately 440 square miles of land are drained by the Jackson River before it reaches the Covington corporate limits. Additionally, two major streams, Dunlap Creek and Potts Creek drain 166 and 157 square miles respectively. As many of the tributaries of these major streams are swift flowing and rise on the mountain and hillsides, heavy rains lead to quick runoff and flooding. The streets, roof tops, and building density of Covington contribute to runoff as the water is quickly channeled to the Jackson River by storm drains. Therefore, one of the major problems that Covington has encountered is flooding. Flooding, water quality, and water resources development will be examined in the following sections.

### **Stream Flow**

Stream flow is classified as either high or low and is measured in cubic feet per second (cfs). In order to be able to plan for optimum water use the flow characteristics of streams must be known. Detailed statistical and mathematical methods are used to measure the frequency of low flow on streams. Climatic data such as precipitation is an important factor in this analysis.

High flow relates to flooding frequency and the delineation of those areas adjacent to the stream or river that will be subject to inundation. Generally, areas subject to periodic flooding are known as floodplains, which can be broken down into various flood hazard areas. The exact designations of these areas are difficult. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have both strived to produce accurate maps

depicting the limits of these flood categories (Federal Emergency Management Agency, City of Covington, Map 510040 0001 B, 1979).

Basically, the floodway is the path of the major current of the stream during flooding. Any obstruction causes water to back up and results in further flooding and damage upstream. Therefore, caution should be exercised prior to constructing buildings in the floodway area. The floodway fringe is defined as the limits of the major current of the stream during flooding.

The term 100-year floodplain and regulatory flood limit are the same. In Virginia, the Statewide Building Code regulates structures being built within the 100-year floodplain and requires flood proofing. This 100-year floodplain is an average frequency determination. It is possible to have several 100-year floods within the one-hundred year period. The floods in 1877, 1913, 1936, 1942, 1950, 1967, 1972, 1973 of the Jackson River could be considered 100-year floods. The largest flood on recent record was in 1985; it was generally considered to be a 330 year flood.

The determination of these flood areas in Covington is an important factor affecting land use. Some criticism has been leveled at the continued reuse of floodplain areas by citizens after flooding. Federal flood insurance provisions, the State Building Code and the Covington Floodplain Ordinance outline the desired steps to be followed locally in minimizing flood hazards. Some communities in the United States have chosen to adopt floodplain regulations that are more strict than the minimum Federal Emergency Management Agency regulations.

### **Problems Associated with Surface Water**

Surface water serves man both as a source of water for daily drinking and cooking needs and as a discharge place for industrial and human wastes. The types of discharges which affect surface water quality originate from various development sources. These include:

1. Surface water runoff from impervious streets and built-up areas (which increases stream flow and diminishes groundwater sources),
2. Sedimentation carried from areas denuded from vegetation (which affects stream design and flow),
3. Contamination from:
  - a. Organic wastes from agricultural, industrial, and domestic sources (which remove oxygen from the water),
  - b. Biological nutrients, such as phosphates in detergents and human excreta (which accelerate the growth of aquatic plant life, thus increasing the oxygen demand on waterways),
  - c. Disease-bearing organisms from domestic, agricultural, and industrial sources,

- d. Temperature increases from cooling water used in power plants and industrial operations. Waste heat (thermal pollution) can injure plants and fish directly and can reduce the oxygen content of the water,
- e. Synthetic chemicals, both organic and inorganic (found in pesticides, plastics, and detergents, etc.),
- f. Mine runoff, such as acids and minerals, and
- g. Radioactivity from fallout, nuclear power generation, reprocessing nuclear fuel, etc. These pollutants may be toxic, carcinogenic (cancer producing), or mutagenic (causing birth defects) to all forms of animal life, including ours.

Discharges that are controlled to some degree are those which are treated as they pass through municipal or industrial waste treatment systems. These are typically called point source discharges.

In addition to known point source discharges from municipalities and industries, there are non-point sources. In the Alleghany Highlands, these potential pollution sources include farmland, pastures, forestry uses, new subdivisions, landfills, and mining operations. However, in the absence of any conclusive local studies on the matter of non-point sources, individual local sources cannot be identified.

A serious type of non-point water pollution is that of erosion and sedimentation. Erosion is defined as the "disintegration or wearing away of the land surface by running water, wind, and other geologic agents" (Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook, 1974, pages 1-5).

In Virginia, water action is the chief cause of erosion. Sediment is the end product of erosion. Environmentally speaking, sediment loss means the depletion of the land as a resource for productive use and the lowering of water quality in the water body in which it is carried and deposited. "Sediment becomes a pollutant when it settles on productive land, destroys wildlife habitat, occupies water storage reservoirs, fills lakes and ponds, clogs stream channels, creates turbidity that detracts from recreational use of water and affects aquatic life, increases water treatment cost, damages water distribution systems or degrades water for human consumption or other uses" (Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook, 1974, pages 1-5).

Soil and Erosion Control ordinances (which follow State guidelines) can help diminish non-point pollution problems due to erosion. Covington possesses such an ordinance and it is utilized on occasions where proposed construction could cause erosion and sedimentation problems. This document is applicable to non-agricultural lands and especially to subdivisions and other developments with intensive land-disturbing activities.

In summation, the quality of the surface water in Covington is related to the uses of the land surrounding these water resources. The point sources that have been identified in Covington and discharge into the Jackson River are regulated by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Non-point pollution sources should be identified and mitigated. In the future, the wise

use of the surface water resources will depend on local governments cooperating with industries and other water users to maintain high standards to ensure good water quality.

### **Water Resource Development**

The Gathright Dam on the Jackson River in northern Alleghany County has regional as well as local impacts. The main objectives of this project are to provide flood protection downstream, low flow regulation for water quality control, and recreation possibilities. Lake Moomaw, covering 2,530 acres, was created when the dam was built.

There is much potential for further utilization of the water resources in the Alleghany County area. The factors of demand for this resource, costs as opposed to benefits, and federal water quality standards must be taken into account in any decision involving the construction of new dams and impoundments. Water resource development is an important factor affecting land use and development. Serious study of all factors should be accomplished before implementing any large-scale water source plans.

### **Groundwater Sources**

Groundwater in Covington could be a more important water resource in the future in areas where it is uneconomical to provide public water services. The underlying geology is an important factor contributing to the occurrence of the groundwater, but other factors such as topography, slope, precipitation, soil conditions, vegetation, and temperature also affect its availability.

Groundwater is found in fractures between rock layers under the surface of the earth or in water-bearing rock layers (aquifers). Certain types of rock, such as limestone, dolomite, sandstone, and unconsolidated sand and gravels, exhibit qualities which make them conducive as groundwater sources. These qualities include porosity (the property of a rock containing void spaces), and permeability (the property of a rock having connecting voids which permit movement of water through a formation).

There is a direct relationship between surface water and groundwater. In some instances where there is no precipitation nor surface runoff into streams, the base flow originates from groundwater storage. In the Valley and Ridge Physiographic Province of Virginia, in which Covington lies, surface water and groundwater inter-relationships are so close that water withdrawal or replenishment from either will affect both. However, measurements of this occurrence are incomplete and require further study and analysis.

Another problem with population concentration and the use of groundwater is that individual septic systems located in concentrated areas can contaminate groundwater sources. Soil conditions, geology, topography and slope contribute to the percolation rate involved in septic system functions.

When a highly concentrated population exclusively relies upon groundwater as a water supply, there is a possibility that the hydrologic cycle will be affected. This means that the natural

recharge of the aquifers and other groundwater areas will be incomplete, resulting in a low water table.

Future planning studies and investigations by the City of Covington, Department of Environmental Quality, and Soil and Water Conservation District may be needed. However, the present information, which includes various engineering reports, well drilling information, and geologic data, will still be of use in the type of studies that should be conducted prior to any extensive development relying on groundwater and septic systems.

### **Water Quality Initiatives**

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation published the 303(D) Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Priority List and Report in June 1998. These agencies define a TMDL as “the amount of pollutant which a water body can assimilate without causing violations of a numeric water quality standard.” TMDLs might also be expressed as “the amount of reduction in pollutants needed to attain or maintain Virginia’s water quality standards.” The second definition is used when it is said that the State of Virginia is required to develop TMDLs for the most polluted river or stream segments in Virginia.

The first section of the 303(D) report pertains to impaired waters, or those that do not meet specific water quality standards. In addition, impaired waters do not support, or only partially support, one of EPA’s five designated uses (aquatic life, fish consumption, shellfishing, swimming, and drinking water).

Part of the Jackson River in the Alleghany County, Covington, and Clifton Forge area is on the “medium priority” list of impaired waters, and TMDLs need to be developed for the segments by 2010. The State reports that problems in the Jackson River are from fecal coliform bacteria, benthic disruptions, and dissolved oxygen. The Dissolved Oxygen problem occurs in late summer and early fall and is believed to be due to high levels of Total Phosphorus. The source of this and the other two types of impairment are believed to be urban non-point sources and industrial point sources. This part of the river does not fully meet EPA’s goals for aquatic life or swimmable use.

The impaired part of the Jackson River begins at the MeadWestvaco discharge and extends downstream to the point where it joins the Cowpasture River to form the James. From this point, the James River is considered to be impaired downstream to Catawba Creek (Botetourt County).

Rivers or streams that are threatened but still fully support EPA’s five designated uses are listed also. TMDLs will not be prepared for this type of river or stream, but DEQ will monitor them closely. In the Alleghany Highlands, this includes other parts of the Jackson River, Smith Creek, and Falling Spring Creek. The first two have problems with metals in the sediment and Falling Spring Creek has temperature problems.

The Initial James River Basin Tributary Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Strategy (often called the Tributary Strategy) was completed in July 1998 by several Virginia governmental agencies.

It describes actions that have been taken to date, and actions that will be taken, to help restore the water quality and living resources of the James River.

Citing 1996 data, the Tributary Strategy reports that 19% of the controllable phosphorus load and 4% of the contrrollable nitrogen load found in the river where it enters the Chesapeake Bay is generated within the Upper James River Region (which extends from Alleghany County to Lexington). The majority of that nitrogen and phosphorus comes from agricultural land uses. Sediment is a larger problem in the Upper James River Region. The region contributes 30% of the controllable sediment load in the river, partially due to erosion from steep slopes. In this context, the term “controllable” nitrogen, phosphorus, or sediment excludes the amount that would enter the river even if the land remained undisturbed by humans or farm animals.

The Tributary Strategy notes that increased use of agricultural conservation plans, agricultural best management practices, and forest harvesting best management practices can reduce these pollutants. The 1999 report, Goals for Nutrient and Sediment Reduction in the James River, recommends that the region strive for a 9% reduction in sediment by increasing these practices. More funding for agencies such as the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) would be needed before this goal could be reached.

The SWCDs in the James River Basin have established the James River Watershed Roundtable using seed money from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The Roundtable includes representatives from organizations and communities in the watershed (including Covington). The issues addressed by the Roundtable include the upcoming TMDLs and the Tributary Strategy, along with water quality strategies generated within the region itself.

### **Air Quality**

The 1990 Clean Air Act identified six major air pollution parameters that should be measured in communities. These are ozone levels, lead contaminants, particulates, carbon monoxide emissions, nitrogen dioxide pollution, and sulfur dioxide pollution. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) collects the air quality data and assists the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in determining if an area is within environmental attainment (i.e., meets the standards).

Currently, all communities in the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Region have met EPA attainment standards. The Roanoke Valley, however, is on the verge of being declared nonattainment (i.e., in violation of the standard) for ozone. This evaluation is based on the ozone monitor in the Roanoke Valley, which is the only ozone monitor in the area. Ozone is a serious health hazard, especially for the elderly and people with chronic lung disease.

A monitor on the old Rivermont School Building in Covington measured PM10 (particles small enough to be inhaled), TSP (total suspended particles), and P4 (phosphate ion). Between 1990 and 1994, the annual average PM10 decreased by over 18%, the TSP increased by over 15%, and the P4 decreased by approximately 50% in Covington.

## The Physical Structure of Covington

### Existing Land Use

Any analysis of existing land use must recognize the urban character of the City and its complexities and variations of uses. The accompanying map shows the location of the land uses described below.

#### Residential

The predominate type of housing in Covington is single family. This is consistent with 1990 Census data, which shows single family homes as comprising 78.7% of the housing stock. A new residential area has been developed south of Michigan Avenue in the southeastern section of Covington on land gained by the City in a 1991 boundary adjustment.

Multi-Family homes (15.7% of the housing stock, as noted in the 1990 Census) can be found scattered throughout the City. An example of the City's multi-family units is the Parklin Terrace Apartment Complex on West Riverside Drive near the I-64 interchange. According to the 1990 Census, mobile homes comprised 6% of the City's housing units. The majority of these mobile homes are located in High Acres Village, a mobile home park in northeastern Covington.

#### Commercial

As can be seen by the land use map, commercial development is found at various locations throughout the City. Virginia Taxable Sales reports for Alleghany County, Clifton Forge, and Covington indicate that Covington is the major commercial center of the Highlands.

Many of the commercial enterprises are located in the west central section of the City. This includes the central business district around West Main Street, a primary commercial district along Monroe Avenue, and shopping centers near Covington High School.

A large new commercial area, the Riverbend Shopping Center, opened beside the Jamison Commerce Center south of I-64. It consists of a variety of stores along with the anchor tenant, the Wal-Mart Supercenter. Space remains in the Shopping Center for one or more additional commercial tenants. City officials hope to see a restaurant locate there in the future.

#### Industrial

Industries are scattered throughout the western half of the City. Prime industrial sites lie on the flatter parcels near the Jackson River and along railroad tracks. The Jamison Commerce Center benefits from its location at the I-64 interchange. Covington's major industries are MeadWestvaco, at the northern point of the City, Lear Operations in the Jamison Commerce Center, and AET Inc. to the south, among others.

LINK TO EXISTING LAND USE MAP – [EXISTING LAND USE](#)

## Major Public/Recreation

The City's major public land uses include schools, government offices, and water and sewage treatment plants, among others. A large number of the public land uses are located in or near the central business district for citizens' convenience. This includes the City Hall, Charles P. Jones Library, U.S. Post Office, and Alleghany County Courthouse.

The schools, which are distributed throughout the City, have adjacent recreational areas. The largest of these is Casey Field behind Covington High School. Currently, the City's major summer recreational area is the municipal swimming pool, located on a parcel along the west central border of the City.

The Parks and Recreation section of this plan (in the Community Facility chapter) describes the major new outdoor recreation/sports complex under construction by the City. Located on approximately 50 acres adjacent to the AET ballfields on Edgemont Drive, the facility will have amenities such as fields for a variety of sports, a nature trail along the Jackson River, an outdoor fitness area, river access, and picnic areas.

## Housing

Table 28 summarizes some of Covington's significant housing characteristics. The total number of dwelling units in Covington fell between 1960 and 1990. The most significant decrease was between 1980 and 1990, due largely to the demolition of 322 units to allow for an expansion at MeadWestvaco. At the same time, the number of persons per household has decreased each decade since 1960.

Table 28  
Housing Characteristics  
1960-1990

|   | 1960    | 1970     | 1980     | 1990     |
|---|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| Total Dwelling Units (including vacant)   | 3,495   | 3,564    | 3,732    | 3,269    |
| Renter-Occupied Dwelling Units            | 2,015   | 2,153    | 2,371    | 2,075    |
| Owner-Occupied Dwelling Units             | 1,296   | 1,180    | 1,140    | 923      |
| Persons per Household                     | 3.34    | 3.02     | 2.58     | 2.34     |
| Median Value/Owner-Occupied Units         | \$7,200 | \$10,800 | \$27,000 | \$38,700 |
| Median Monthly Rent/Renter-Occupied Units | \$41    | \$54     | \$96     | \$197    |

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and 1989 Covington Comprehensive Plan

Table 29 provides more detail on the changes in Covington's housing stock from 1960 to 1990. In 1970, single-family homes comprised 80.2% of the dwelling units; yet that percentage decreased to 78.7% in 1990. The period from 1980 to 1990 showed decreasing numbers in each

housing type except for mobile homes, which increased by 27 units.

Table 29  
Housing Type  
1960-1990

|                 | 1960<br>Number | 1960<br>Percent | 1970<br>Number | 1970<br>Percent | 1980<br>Number | 1980<br>Percent | 1990<br>Number | 1990<br>Percent |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Single Family   | 3,182          | 91.0%           | 2,858          | 80.2%           | 2,885          | 77.5%           | 2,573          | 78.7%           |
| Multiple Family | 293            | 8.4%            | 640            | 18.0%           | 680            | 18.3%           | 513            | 15.7%           |
| Mobile Home     | 20             | 0.6%            | 67             | 1.8%            | 156            | 4.2%            | 183            | 5.6%            |
| TOTAL           | 3,495          | 100%            | 3,565          | 100%            | 3,721          | 100%            | 3,269          | 100%            |

Note: The 1990 estimate for mobile homes was provided by the City Building Official during the 1995 Comprehensive Plan update.  
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and 1989/1995 Covington Comprehensive Plans

Table 30  
1990 Housing by Year Built

| Year Built      | Number Built |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1939 or earlier | 1,320        |
| 1940-1949       | 583          |
| 1950-1959       | 483          |
| 1960-1969       | 420          |
| 1970-1979       | 281          |
| 1980-1989       | 227          |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As shown in table 30, a significant portion (39.8%) of Covington's housing stock was built in or before the year 1939. Since that time, the rate of construction of new homes has declined during each decade. The median age of housing in Covington was 45 years when the 1990 Census was taken. This table includes all types of housing units, while Table 31 refers only to single-family units.

Table 31 gives 1990 to 1999 information on new single-family homes that were authorized by the Building Official for construction. Units that are authorized for construction are usually, but not always, constructed.

One to six single family homes were authorized each year, with the exception of 1992, when no homes were authorized. The most homes were authorized in the year 1995, and the highest annual combined value of homes (\$424,000) was reached in 1994. A total of 32 units were authorized in 1990-1999.

Table 31  
New Single Family Housing Units Authorized  
1990-1999

| Year  | Number | Total Value |
|-------|--------|-------------|
| 1990  | 2      | \$115,000   |
| 1991  | 1      | \$26,275    |
| 1992  | 0      | \$0         |
| 1993  | 3      | \$420,000   |
| 1994  | 4      | \$424,000   |
| 1995  | 6      | \$367,565   |
| 1996  | 3      | \$318,000   |
| 1997  | 5      | \$397,500   |
| 1998  | 5      | \$385,880   |
| 1999  | 3      | \$250,000   |
| TOTAL | 32     | \$2,704,220 |

Source: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service

The median value of owner-occupied homes in Covington was \$38,700 in 1990, as can be seen in the following table. Median housing values for Block Groups also are shown below. Block Group 2 in Census Tract 601 had the lowest median housing value in the City. Block Group 4 in the same Census Tract had the highest median housing value, followed closely by Block Group 2 in Census Tract 60298. The Census Tract/Block Group Map is shown in the earlier section on Population Characteristics and Trends (in the Demographics chapter).

Table 32

Median Value of Owner-Occupied Units  
1990

| Census Designated Area | Median Value |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Block Group 601-1      | \$32,100     |
| Block Group 601-2      | \$32,000     |
| Block Group 601-3      | \$39,500     |
| Block Group 601-4      | \$51,300     |
| Block Group 60298-1    | \$37,000     |
| Block Group 60298-2    | \$51,000     |
| Block Group 60298-3    | \$40,300     |
| Block Group 60298-4    | \$41,800     |
| City Median            | \$38,700     |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## **Community Facilities**

Community facilities are important elements which are designed to serve the entire community or specific sections thereof. Covington possesses a wide range of such facilities, as described below.

### **Education**

The Covington School Board operates one elementary school (Edgemont Primary), Jeter Watson Intermediate School, and Covington High School. These are distributed around the city and easily accessible. Each school has a recreational area that is used for a variety of student activities.

Secondary students also may attend the Jackson River Technical Center to learn such skills as electronics or secretarial administration. The Technical Center is jointly owned and operated by Covington, Clifton Forge, and Alleghany County.

The School Census conducted from March through June of 1999 showed a total of 936 pupils enrolled in the City's schools. Eighteen of these pupils were in special education. Twelve pupils, or approximately 3%, dropped out of school in 1998-99. Over 56% of the City's students were in grades 6 and below. Of the 62 graduates in the 1998-99 school year, 19 expressed plans to go on to a two-year college and 16 to a four-year college.

### **Parks & Recreation**

The Covington Parks and Recreation Department maintains 65 acres of park and playground areas in the City. This includes nine athletic fields used for Little League Sports and Adult Sports Activities, in addition to City Stadium (Casey Field) which serves as a multi-purpose playing facility for baseball and football. The Parks and Recreation Department also maintains the grounds around five municipal buildings, median strips, entrance signs, and areas of seasonal flowers and landscaping throughout the City. The Parks and Recreation Department staff takes great pride in the safety and aesthetics of their parks system.

#### **Parks:**

##### *Rivermont Park:*

Little League field, basketball court (playground equipment planned for 2001)

##### *Reservoir Park:*

Little League field, basketball court (playground equipment planned for 2001)

##### *Main Street Park:*

Little League field, playground equipment, shelter, restrooms, concessions, basketball court, gazebo, and municipal pool. This park is in the downtown historic district and is located adjacent to the scenic Jackson River. River and boating ramps are accessible for recreational use and the park setting provides a very tranquil environment for walking or relaxation.

*Hytower Park:*

Basketball court, shelter, playground equipment, and restroom facility

*Casey Field/Boodie Albert Stadium:*

Football and baseball field, restrooms, and concessions

*Fort Young Park:*

Two basketball courts, shelter, playground equipment, wildflower garden, tennis courts, restrooms, and softball field for youth and adult play

*Nettleton Park:*

Little League field, shelter, basketball court, playground equipment, restrooms, and concessions. This park is adjacent to National Forest land and provides easy access for hiking and hunting.

*AET Park:*

Currently provides two adult softball fields, concessions, press area, and restrooms. Major expansion of this park is currently underway.

*Skate Park:*

Includes half pipes, fun boxes, quarter pipe, bank ramp, rails, and pyramid, plus other skate equipment

*Edgemont Primary School and Playground:*

Playground equipment, athletic field, and basketball court

*Jeter Watson Middle School:*

Gym, playground area, and playground equipment

*Covington High School:*

Gym, athletic field, and track

*Covington Armory:*

Gym

In the fall of 2000, the City began construction on a major new regional outdoor recreation/sports complex on approximately 50 acres adjacent to the AET ballfields on Edgemont Drive. This new facility, the Jackson River Recreation Park, will include a four leaf clover softball complex for both youth and adults and will be used also for fall youth soccer programs. In addition, this facility will provide recreation opportunities such as tennis, basketball, playground equipment, outdoor fitness area, walking paths, picnic areas, river access points, archery, and a nature trail along the Jackson River.

The Jackson River Recreation Park's nature trail has the potential to connect the recreation complex with other parts of the City via greenway trails and sidewalk. For example, a pedestrian footbridge could be built across the Jackson River connecting the recreation complex to the

Riverbend Shopping Center and Jamison Commerce Center. From this point, one could walk via trail to Fort Young Park, then take sidewalk to Casey Field, then walk along abandoned rail to Main Street Park, and pick up sidewalk at the corner of Riverside Drive and Lexington Avenue, thus enabling one to walk to the northern end of the City limits in the Dry Run section of the City. A trail system such as this will provide easy travel from the north to the south of the City and could link Covington to other proposed regional trails in the Allegheny Highlands.

The Covington Parks and Recreation Department offers the following programs:

*Organized Athletic Leagues (Youth):*

- Little League baseball and softball
- Football
- Cheerleading
- Girls basketball
- Boys basketball
- Girls volleyball
- Soccer

*Organized Athletic Leagues (Adult):*

- Mens/Womens Softball
- Basketball
- Volleyball

*Summer Youth Programs:* There are organized activities at the Covington Armory from June through August. Three site supervisors provide activities such as sports, crafts, field trips, and instructional sessions with fire, first aid and police.

*Municipal Pool:* The pool is open June through August. Activities include swim lessons, private pool parties, and public swim.

*Instructional and Special Events:* This includes line dancing, dog obedience, exercise classes, facility rental (private parties), kids day at Main Street Park, Highlighters Baton Group, and special events such as Labor Day Celebration, Fridays in the Park, and athletic tournaments.

*Covington Senior Center:* The Center is located in the former Rivermont School building on Rockbridge Avenue. Activities include Bridge Club, Diners Club, Meals on Wheels, nutritional bingo, dances, field trips, shopping, and crafts.

### **Downtown Historic District**

Covington's Downtown was placed on the National Register for Historic Places on February 21, 1991. The area is delineated by the Jackson River on the West, CSX Railroad Line on the East, Monroe Avenue on the North, and Maple Avenue on the South. The District includes a total of 109 structures identified as historically significant. The bulk of the buildings were constructed

between 1818 and 1940. The National Register determined the historic significance of Covington's downtown based upon its architecture, commerce, and transportation history.

The City entered the Main Street Program in 2000. Under this program, the City receives technical assistance from the Virginia Main Street Program. The City-funded Main Street Manager for Covington works with merchants on design, marketing, and promotional events to increase downtown trade.

### **Fire and Rescue Services**

The Covington Fire Department is locally funded and has a maximum total membership of 70 volunteers and five paid dispatchers. Fire Station 1 is located at 435 West Hawthorne Street and serves the area north of I-64, while Station 2, located in the 700 block of West Edgemont Drive, serves the area south of I-64. By mutual aid agreement, Alleghany County reimburses the City for fire department services in portions of the County that are adjacent to the City. For example, this would include areas of the County such as Jackson Heights and Cherokee. The department has an ISO rating of 5. The major equipment includes pumpers (1000 gpm, 1250 gpm, and 1500 gpm capacities), mini-pumper, aerial ladder, and haz-mat equipment.

The Fire Department averages 200 to 225 runs per year. It conducts in-house training one to two times a month, participates in the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System through the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, and oversees the operation of a regional fire training facility.

The Covington Rescue Squad is locally funded and has 20 active volunteer members on roll. Calls are dispatched by the paid dispatchers of the Covington Fire Department. The Squad's main station is located at 435 West Hawthorne Street, with a substation on Edgemont Drive. The squad averages 1,100 calls per year in addition to offering mutual aid to surrounding localities. The Rescue Squad mutual aid agreement is similar to the Fire Department mutual aid agreement.

Major rescue equipment includes a crash truck, three advanced life support ambulances, and a ten-man rescue water raft. Of the 20 active members, four are Cardiac Tech certified, one is Shock Trauma Tech certified, and twelve are Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certified.

LINK TO POINTS OF INTEREST MAP – [POINTS OF INTEREST](#)

## **Water Supply and Distribution**

The City's Water Filtration Plant is a surface water treatment plant using water from the Jackson River. The plant has a treatment capacity of 6,000,000 gallons of water per day and a storage capacity of 6,800,000 gallons.

## **Wastewater System**

The Covington Wastewater Treatment Plant treats an average of 3,000,000 gallons of wastewater per day. In addition to operations such as wastewater treatment, facility management, and general repairs, the plant operates a laboratory to monitor plant performance.

## **Solid Waste Management**

The Peter's Mountain Landfill is located on Peter's Mountain in the George Washington National Forest. Prior to its establishment, Covington's solid waste was deposited in the City landfill on S. Durant Road bordering the Jackson River.

The landfill accepts nearly 11,000 tons of refuse yearly from City residents and businesses. The recently opened Subtitle D double-lined facility at the landfill is expected to last seven to ten years with further expansion already approved.

The City Refuse Department provides collection service for all City residents and commercial establishments. Residential collection is once a week, and commercial collection is scheduled as needed.

## **Public Utilities**

Public utilities are privately owned businesses that have a direct impact on the public health and welfare. In Covington, such services are offered by Virginia Power, Ntelos, and Columbia Gas. In addition, several cellular phone companies have towers in the Alleghany Highlands.

Virginia Power provides the electric service to Covington. The company maintains a policy of overhead transmission in Covington, unless the customer requires underground lines and absorbs the costs. Joint use of utility rights-of-way is encouraged as is use of existing rights-of-way over alleys and streets.

Ntelos provides modern voice and data communications service to the City of Covington. New service for subdivisions will be placed underground unless economic and environmental conditions prohibit it. Ntelos is also the cable television carrier for the area. A number of fiber optic lines have been developed to improve service from Covington to the surrounding area, including the City of Roanoke. Plans are to replace outdated lines with fiber optic technology on a continual basis, in addition to integration of new advancements in technology to the existing system.

Columbia Gas provides natural gas service to residential, commercial, and industrial customers in the Covington area. Natural gas is available in sufficient quantities to service the existing

customers, as well as potential growth. Extension into new service areas is possible if the economic considerations are favorable.

### **Other Public and Quasi-Public Uses**

The Charles P. Jones Library in Covington provides books not only to the City residents but to Alleghany County as well. This library serves a population of approximately 20,000 and possesses approximately 70,000 books, magazines, videocassettes, and other materials. Its central location downtown gives it accessibility to citizens as they journey to shop and work. A \$3 million expansion is underway.

The new City Hall building (which opened in October 2000) contains the administrative staff of the City and the police department. It is located in downtown Covington and is close to banks, professional offices, public utility offices, and the Alleghany County Courthouse.

Serving the communities of Covington, Clifton Forge, and neighboring counties, the Alleghany Regional Hospital (ARH) in Low Moor is a 196-bed acute care hospital. The hospital's federal designation as a Rural Health Clinic allows it to hire foreign doctors that do not currently have a United States work visa. Often, rural hospitals have difficulty hiring doctors because they cannot offer salaries that are competitive with hospitals in larger cities.

The Alleghany Highlands Community Services Board's Mental Health Clinic is a full-time counseling and psychiatric clinic located in Covington and serving the Alleghany Highlands. Additional health-related services are provided by the Alleghany County Health Department.

## **Transportation**

Transportation is an integral part of the present and future health of a community. A well-planned transportation system allows the private, public and non-profit sectors to deliver goods and services to society as a whole. The demand for transportation is derived from and shapes activity patterns at the local, regional and national levels.

The Transportation Element of the City of Covington Comprehensive Plan is primarily concerned with adequately planning for the future transportation needs of the City of Covington and its role in the Greater Alleghany Highlands region.

The Transportation Element is divided into two main sections. The first of these is entitled Transportation Network, and it reviews the current situation and presents data which describes the current state of affairs. The second (Other Transportation Plans and Programs) describes the importance of consistency between the Comprehensive Plan and other transportation plans and programs which may be applicable to the City of Covington.

### **Transportation Network**

The automobile and truck are the primary mode of transportation utilized in Covington. Access into the city is provided by U.S. Routes 60 and 220, State Route 18, Interstate I-64, and several state secondary routes.

Streets are generally forty to fifty feet in width and adequately maintained. There are some smaller streets ranging from 25 to 32 feet in width. For safety purposes, most speed limits on these smaller roads are set at 25 mph. Less than half the city streets have full curbs and gutters. The areas that do not have curb and gutter are generally newer streets where cost constraints limited the installation of curb and gutter. Street improvements, such as resurfacing, have been identified as a priority by the local government. The City of Covington maintains its own street network with funds passed through from VDOT

Off street parking is augmented by a number of public and private lots in the downtown area. On-street parking is allowed and common due to limited space for driveways on older residential lots. Pedestrian movement is prevalent in the downtown or central business district where there are sidewalks.

The City of Covington has a total of 39.27 classified highway miles divided into 1.40 interstate miles and 37.87 urban miles (1998 totals). In 1997 the City of Covington had 4,792 licensed drivers and had 6,000 total registered vehicles, 5,275 of which were registered as passenger vehicles. Of the 100 Crashes that occurred in Covington in 1997, none were fatal and 40 resulted in injuries. (Virginia Statistical Abstract, 2000 Edition)

### **Commercial Trucking**

The transportation element of both the 1989 and 1995 City of Covington Comprehensive Plan indicated that the interaction of commercial trucks with passenger vehicles, bicycles and

pedestrians on city streets was a major safety, convenience and maintenance issue facing the City and its residents. The proximity of MeadWestvaco's Bleached Board Division to downtown serves as a major origin and destination for both passenger and freight trips that can overwhelm the urban street network. The 1995 Comprehensive Plan cited various alternatives to alleviate the problem including several new terrain roadway locations primarily designed to service commercial trucks. Recently VDOT has approved a new terrain route that would begin at Exit 16 off Interstate 64 in Alleghany County and continue north until it ties in with Magazine Avenue near MeadWestvaco. Magazine Avenue will be appropriately modified to handle the traffic volumes resulting from the new terrain route.

As of early 2001, surveying work had begun on the new route. The funding projections for the route are detailed in Table 33. The project is listed under both the primary and urban system because it affects both the City of Covington and Alleghany County. It is anticipated that this new terrain route will provide commercial trucks with a safe and efficient thoroughfare while improving the climate on other urban routes for passenger vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle use.

### Bus Service

RADAR, which has its headquarters in Roanoke, currently operates the "Mountain Express" bus service between the cities of Covington and Clifton Forge.

### Trails, Pedestrian Paths, Bicycle Paths and Sidewalks

Last year the Community Design Assistance Center at Virginia Tech assisted the City of Covington in the development of the Jackson River Recreational/Sport Complex Plan. This Plan advances the concept of using trails within the park to connect to existing and future sidewalks and facilities in the City. There is potential for connecting the City's pedestrian/bicycle network with trails constructed in the surrounding localities in the future. City council has adopted the Jackson River Recreational/Sport Complex Plan as a conceptual plan.

### Rail and Air Service

The CSX Corporation provides rail service to the area's industries. Travel is restricted to one east-west track with several spur lanes connecting to MeadWestvaco, AET, Inc., and a number of oil and coal companies (at S. Craig and Locust). There are several grade crossings of the spur lines but the main tracks have been raised on viaducts or are spanned by bridges. Several pedestrian tunnels provide underground access between areas where bridges are spaced too far apart.

Passenger service is available from nearby Clifton Forge where Amtrak has a station. The closest airports to Covington are in Roanoke, Virginia and Greenbrier, West Virginia. The small airfield at Covington was closed in 1973 and converted into a mobile home park.

### Other Transportation Plans and Programs

The Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan should be consistent with any duly adopted transportation plans at the regional, state or national level which may be beneficial or applicable to the region. As a small urban area, Covington is not located in a Metropolitan Planning Organization (urban areas with population over 50,000) and is not required to use an urban transportation model to forecast future needs. However, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has recently embarked on a series of “Small Urban Area” transportation studies across the state.

The study concerning the City of Covington should be completed in late 2001 and will evaluate the following roadway segments. The study is briefly described on a VDOT web site at <[www.vdoturbanplans.com/covington.htm](http://www.vdoturbanplans.com/covington.htm)>.

- Route 18 from South Corporate Limit Covington to Route 220
- Monroe Avenue from Jackson River Bridge to West Riverside Road
- Monroe Avenue from West Locust Street to Alley Street
- East Madison Street from South Highland Avenue to East Corporate Limit Covington
- Craig Avenue from Liberty Street to North Lexington Avenue
- East Riverside Drive from Lexington Avenue to Magazine Avenue
- Alleghany Avenue from South Monroe Avenue to North Corporate Limit Covington
- South Durant Road from South Willis Avenue to South of Route 64
- West Edgemont Drive from South Carpenter Drive to Rayon Drive
- Rayon Drive from West Edgemont Drive to West Jackson Street
- North Lexington Avenue from Riverside Drive to Chestnut Street
- South Pitzer Ridge Road from Route 18 to South Corporate Limit Covington
- South Monroe Avenue from Alley Street to Alleghany Avenue
- South Highland Avenue from East Hawthorne Street to Alleghany Avenue
- East Hawthorne Street from Monroe Avenue to South Lawn Avenue
- North Maple Avenue from West Hawthorne Street to West Main Street
- West Main Street from North Lexington Avenue to North Monroe Avenue
- East Chestnut Street from Lexington Avenue to Alleghany Avenue
- North Magazine Avenue from North Alleghany Avenue to Hickory Street
- South Trout Street from Carpenter Drive to East Corporate Limit Covington
- East Mallow Street from South Carpenter Drive to East Corporate Limit Covington
- Route 687 from Route 220 to Jackson River
- Route 648 from Route 647 to I-64
- Route 60/220 from East Corporate Limit Covington to I-64

Table 33  
Planned Transportation Improvements  
Fiscal Years 2000-2001 to 2005-2006  
(dollar amounts shown in thousands)

| Route and Project | Project | Actual Allocation | Projected Allocation |
|-------------------|---------|-------------------|----------------------|
|-------------------|---------|-------------------|----------------------|

| Description  | Cost   | 2000/01             | 2001/02                 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 |
|--|--|---------------------|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Primary System</b>                                      |  |                     |                         |         |         |         |         |
| Rt. 220 Alleghany - Covington Truck Access Rd - 2.2 Miles  | PE<br>\$1,350<br>RW<br>\$3,018<br>CN<br>\$9,499<br>Total<br>\$13,867 | \$1,000             | \$1,000                 | \$1,000 | \$1,850 | \$2,000 | \$6,819 |
| <b>Urban System</b>  |  |                     |                         |         |         |         |         |
| Covington, Hawthorne St. Bridge Rehabilitation             | PE<br>\$100<br>RW<br>0<br>CN<br>\$491<br>Total<br>\$591              | \$18                | 0                       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       |
| Covington Truck Access Road/Rt. 220 Improvements 2.2 Miles | PE<br>\$1,350<br>RW<br>\$3,018<br>CN<br>\$9,499<br>Total<br>\$13,867 | \$491               | \$486                   | \$2,561 | \$606   | \$3,630 | \$2,668 |
| <b>Safety Improvement</b>                                  |  |                     |                         |         |         |         |         |
| S. Rayon Dr. RR Crossing Install Flashing Lights           | PE<br>0<br>RW<br>0<br>CN<br>\$70<br>Total<br>\$70                    | \$63                | 0                       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       |
| <b>Transportation Enhancement</b>                          |  |                     |                         |         |         |         |         |
| Covington CSX Depot  | PE<br>\$50<br>RW   | Previous TE Funding | Addi-tional Needed\$515 |         |         |         |         |

|             |  |       |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------|--|-------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Restoration | \$218<br>CN<br>\$447<br>Total<br>\$715 | \$200 |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------|--|-------|--|--|--|--|--|

Key: PE = Preliminary Engineering; RW = Right of Way Acquisition; CN = Construction  
Notes: Only capital improvement related projects are listed. Financial and debt service devices such as FRANS, which are listed in the Virginia Transportation Development Plan, are not listed in this comprehensive plan. Total project cost may not be allocated over the 6-year time frame.  
Source: Virginia Transportation Development Plan

Future travel demand will be forecasted to the year 2020 in the “Small Urban Area Plan” using straight-line mathematical extrapolation. The report will also investigate accident reports and geometric dimensions of the roadway. The four main purposes of the plan are to identify future transportation needs to the year 2020, to help to prioritize future funding requirements, to coordinate local needs with state highway improvement plans, and to involve the public in the transportation planning process. A predecessor to that plan is VDOT’s Covington Area Year 2010 Transportation Plan, which was prepared in 1990.

VDOT’s Virginia Transportation Development Plan is a programming document that allocates state and federal money for construction and capital outlays in Virginia for a six-year period. Table 33 shows a list of projects programmed for the City of Covington Urban System in the plan.

In January 1994, the staff of the Fifth Planning District Commission (now the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission) completed the Covington Traffic Circulation Study. This study focused on four intersections and produced detailed traffic counts for each of the intersections. The study paid particular attention to truck movements and summarized past truck related research involving the City of Covington.

LINK TO PLANNED TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS MAP – [PLANNED  
TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS](#)

## **IV. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Economic Development**

The 1995 Plan identified downtown as an area in need of economic development assistance. Problems such as closed businesses, vacant and dilapidated store fronts, competition from suburban shopping, and declining downtown investment made this a difficult issue to remedy. In 2001, there have been a number of significant improvements. Covington has helped administer several assistance programs to encourage downtown revitalization.

Covington's Facade Improvement Project (formerly the Business Matching Grant Program) is a 50% matching grant program designed to foster improvements to the business community. The minimum grant amount is \$500 and the maximum is \$7,500. The grants can be used for exterior building facade improvements or exterior signage. Partially due to this program, many downtown buildings have undergone renovations. There has also been an increase in the number of new businesses operating downtown.

The City's enrollment in the Virginia Main Street Program offers an additional way of strengthening downtown. A committee of downtown representatives has been organized and a director has been hired to run this project, which emphasizes design, marketing, and promotional events. With technical assistance provided by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the Main Street Program is designed to bring vitality to downtown.

Another boon to downtown has been its historic district designation in 1991. A total of 109 structures were identified as historically significant. Designation as a historic district is useful in a number of ways. The most important advantage is the increased funding that becomes available to assist in renovation. Strict building standards are also set to insure that, as a structure is renovated, its historic character is not damaged. Maintaining the historic character of the district is important because it makes the area more marketable to potential businesses. Another benefit of a historic district is the willingness of owners to make improvements to buildings not identified as historically significant. This is due largely to the improved perception that the district is economically vital. In the future, Covington should continue its support of the Downtown Historic District, not only because of the available public dollars, but also because of the private investment it can generate.

Regarding industrial development, Covington will continue in its efforts to bring new industries to the City. This will help insure a diversification of employment opportunities. Historically, Covington's economic condition has been tied closely to the performance of a single business (i.e., MeadWestvaco, their principal employer). Any fluctuations in MeadWestvaco have a direct impact on the local economy. By adding a number of new industries, it is hoped that the local economy will be somewhat insulated from this.

Covington, Clifton Forge, and Alleghany County have a state designated Enterprise Zone Program. The purpose of the program is to stimulate business and industrial growth which in turn will result in neighborhood, commercial, and economic revitalization. If the Alleghany Highlands is approved for the program, state and local incentives can be provided to eligible

businesses within the designated Enterprise Zone. The program's economic goals are recruiting new businesses, filling vacant buildings/sites, and expanding existing employment. The incentives offered by the localities to eligible businesses in the Enterprise Zone include waiver of fees for building permits, and the reduction of utility consumer's tax, business license tax, real estate tax, and machinery/tools tax.

In 1997 the Covington Industrial Park was renamed the Jamison Commerce Center and divided into industrial and commercial properties. The largest industry in the Commerce Center is Lear Operations Corporation (over 300 employees), and a new Wal-Mart Supercenter is the anchor tenant in the Riverbend Shopping Center, the commercial section of the site. The Center has an access road onto the site from South Durant Road, a 30-inch sewer main located on the eastern boundary of the site, and an 8-inch water distribution line and several hydrants. Electric power and natural gas are available at the site, which is adjacent to a lead track of CSX Corporation.

As businesses continue to locate in the 59.34 acre Commerce Center, it is important that the city use zoning to help reserve other appropriate sites for future development. Zoning codes should be flexible to take advantage of changing economic conditions and needs.

### **Land Use**

Covington's overall land use goal is to create a balance of land uses to meet the present and future needs of the community. Given the limited amount of developable land available within the city, this could pose a difficult problem. Covington, like most American cities, is interested in creating a diverse economy, but in order to do this it requires an adequate supply of land for industrial expansion, new public facilities, housing, circulation systems, and recreation. This conflict requires basic planning and sound local management in order to be resolved.

In order to guide the physical development of the city, the Plan should periodically be reviewed with input from city officials, governmental agencies, interested citizens, and Planning Commissioners. As the needs of the community change, it may be necessary to revise the implementation methods that are presently used to assist in the realization of the land use goal. Typical land use tools such as subdivision and zoning should remain flexible to help cope with changing needs. There should also be an effort to investigate alternative methods of land use management for their applicability to Covington.

### **Community Zoning Ordinance**

The Planning Commission and City Council should periodically review the Zoning Ordinance and Map to make any updates necessary to bring the zoning codes into conformance with the Plan. An example of a zoning issue that might be considered is the encouragement of an appropriate mixture of commercial and residential land uses on Monroe, Highland, Riverside, Maple, Locust and nearby streets.

### **Energy and Natural Resources**

Covington's energy goal must strive to maximize the efficiency of generation, transmission, use, and conservation of energy within the City by government, industry, and citizens.

Although Covington's energy needs are currently being met by several utilities, there continues to be the potential for future energy crises to develop. At the local level, Covington, like other American cities, will have to become more dependent on local resources. Reuse of waste heat from industrial processes, alternative forms of transportation and individual energy conservation should all be examined for possible adoption now and in the future. As this issue has increased in importance since the 1995 Plan, City officials and local conservation organizations should be aware of and actively seek funding for energy utilization and conservation programs.

The Gathright Dam and Lake Moomaw project, located 19 river miles north of Covington, was completed in 1981 for the purpose of flood control, water quality control, and recreation.

The 1995 Plan addressed the issue of safeguarding Covington's natural resources. Many of the same issues are still relevant in 2001. Covington possesses several natural resources which are of great benefit to the City. Foremost among these is the Jackson River, whose waters are used to meet the daily needs of both the citizens and industry. Covington has made improvements, particularly in sewerage treatment, that have vastly improved the water quality. The City should continue monitoring water quality standards to insure they remain in compliance with applicable State and Federal clean water mandates. This will not only insure an adequate supply of clean drinking water but will make the river desirable for other uses such as recreation.

Another resource that is important to Covington is its air. In 1998, the City's rate of hospital discharges for asthma (a lung disease that is worsened by air pollution) was 31.1% higher than the Virginia average.

The final resource of the City is land. The soil, vegetation, topography, and drainage patterns all operate together in a natural system. Disruption of this system through poor land management results in direct and indirect public costs through erosion and sedimentation, increased water runoff, and the need for complex and expensive public utilities.

### **Transportation**

The Mountain Express Bus Service operates between the cities of Clifton Forge and Covington. Passenger train service is available from the nearest Amtrak station in Clifton Forge.

Covington should strive to provide a safe and adequate circulation system utilizing various modes of transportation. The City is served by an interstate highway and two major primary roads, but its internal circulation among city neighborhoods is limited by natural obstacles, topography and restricted streets.

Alternatives to this situation are desirable, but limited federal and state funding for highway improvements limits new project feasibility. Local priorities need to be determined as a preliminary measure and alternatives devised to alleviate problem areas. Previous Comprehensive Plans for Covington identified the problem of truck traffic in commercial and

residential areas as a significant issue. A new truck route is planned from Exit 16 off Interstate 64, continuing north to tie into Magazine Avenue near MeadWestvaco.

### Future Horizons in Transportation

An old business adage states that “Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.” This wisdom especially rings true for transportation systems, which are both subject to and help shape the external environment. Another incentive for adequately identifying future transportation issues rests in the fact that many state and federal grants require that a new project be consistent with the locality’s Comprehensive Plan. This section will briefly identify several opportunities and threats that may affect transportation in the City of Covington and the Alleghany Highlands during the coming years. These opportunities and threats should be dealt with in a strategic manner to arrive at goals, objectives, and a vision for the future of transportation in the City of Covington.

#### *General Aging of the Population*

As the baby boomer generation approaches retirement over the next 10-15 years, there is a national trend towards aging of the population. By some estimates, the City of Covington and the Alleghany Highlands may participate disproportionately in this trend, leaving an increasing percentage of the local population either in retirement or close to retiring. This eventuality could pose serious challenges to the community in the provision of transportation services to all of its citizens. Impacts on traffic safety due to older drivers, an increasing percentage of non-driving population, and the provision of adequate non-emergency medical transportation could prove significant.

#### *Increased Tourism*

Historically the City of Covington and the Alleghany Highlands have demonstrated enthusiasm towards increasing the region’s share of tourism. Although tourism generally represents an economic boon, the infrastructure to service large volumes of out of town visitors can be costly to maintain.

#### *Increased Governmental Devolution and a Trend Towards Regionalism*

Over the past several decades there has been a general trend towards devolution of responsibilities from the federal to the state and from the state to local levels of government. Historically, large scale transportation decisions have been made at either the state or federal level. However, there has been a recent trend towards the “regionalization” of decision-making even in rural areas. In the future, coordination of transportation decisions between the City of Covington and the surrounding localities may be an economic and a governmental necessity.

#### *Global Economy*

The increasing trend towards the globalization of the economy could impose freight and passenger transportation issues on localities by virtue of their participation in the larger

economy. A well-balanced transportation system could in turn enhance a locality's position in the larger economy by allowing it to attract employers and residents who value short commute times, non-motorized transportation, or access to regional transportation networks.

### *Increased Public Advocacy and Public Participation*

In some ways the public is becoming increasingly organized, political, and cynical about transportation decisions and government decisions in general. Consistent with the Aging Population scenario, retired people are increasingly organized and politically active. On another note, increased emphasis on "Environmental Justice" is flowing down from the federal level. Basically, "Environmental Justice" refers to eliminating unequal burdens on low income or minority residents. For instance, it is alleged that a disproportionately high percentage of toxic waste dumps are located near minority neighborhoods in the South. Since 1994, in order to receive federal funding for projects, environmental justice issues must be addressed.

### **Housing**

Covington's overall housing goal is to provide adequate housing for all of its citizens. Much of the housing in Covington consists of large old structures on small sized lots. Several studies have led to the conclusion that there are a significant number of dwellings that have deteriorated to sub-standard levels. The city and interested civic organizations should periodically reexamine the housing stock and determine a course of action. If homes have become too deteriorated, demolition may be necessary. This, should be avoided if alternatives such as rehabilitation, low interest loans, or assistance for new home construction can be effectively used. Also, because state and federal programs can periodically change, it is important for city officials to be aware of this so they can take advantage of any additional assistance that becomes available.

The 1995 Plan indicated a need to examine the specific housing needs for low-income groups, elderly, handicapped, and minorities. In 2001, this continues to be an issue, particularly with housing for the elderly. Often, programs are in place to assist these individuals, but they may not be aware of them. Effort should be taken to better inform them and, if necessary, assist them in working with the various governmental agencies involved. Also, the city should encourage potential developers to take advantage of the demand for new developments such as apartments for the elderly.

Covington has made substantial effort at improving housing as is evident in its housing rehabilitation grant projects funded partially by the Virginia Community Development Block Grant (VCDBG) Program. For example, the City has recently been awarded \$987,000 in VCDBG funds for housing rehabilitation in the Kline, Hickory, Hemlock, and Fir Streets area of Covington. The previous housing rehabilitation project, in East Covington, had a total cost of \$1.1 million and resulted in thirty-two rehabilitations, four substantial reconstructions, and thirteen demolitions of dilapidated structures. The Covington Redevelopment and Housing Authority administers this program, along with the Indoor Plumbing program and Section 8 rent subsidy program.

Housing tends to reflect socioeconomic conditions which are the root cause of any "housing problem." Positive steps towards improving the housing all point towards improving the general welfare of the citizens of Covington. To accomplish this, Covington should continue pursuing various housing rehabilitation programs and grants. The City should also continue to support

Covington-Alleghany Highlands business development with projects such as the Jamison Commerce Center, which helps to insure the availability of long term, stable employment.

### **Recreation**

Covington's recreation goal is to provide diverse recreational opportunities for all citizens. Increasingly, Americans have shown a much greater interest in pursuing recreational activities. Organized programs, such as are provided by the City of Covington, presently strive to meet this demand. Although funds for programs are available, it is evident that the need exists for more facilities. Also, different types of recreational activities might be desirable in the future because of changing land use patterns and technological innovations. The feasibility of future actions in the area of recreation require further analysis and review. Because recreational needs do periodically change, its important to provide local residents an opportunity to have input into the types of programs they want offered.

### **Citizen Participation and Information**

The overall goal of citizen participation is to provide an opportunity for citizens to take an active role in planning the future of their city. To accomplish this, local government must take steps towards providing its citizens with accurate and useful information concerning local issues. This can often be a difficult task given the complex nature of local government. The media (newspapers, television, radio, and the City web site at [www.covington.va.us](http://www.covington.va.us)) provides various levels of exposure to city issues. Local governments have supplemented this information by instituting citizen awareness and communication aimed at informing and involving the citizens in the local governmental process. Involvement can be at a general level, as in the Comprehensive Plan, or more specific if there are concerns about specific issues.

## **V. GENERAL PHYSICAL DESIGN**

This section examines land use characteristics for a number of sites within the City which, when viewed together, will assist in planning for future developments. Specifically, the section will deal with living areas, working areas, community facilities and circulation.

Some elements in this review are short range in nature and can be readily implemented within three to five years. City priorities, funding and citizen involvement will affect the timing and realization of these elements.

Other elements are long range targets which can most probably be achieved after other elements have been realized and evaluated. This process has a probable time frame of ten to twenty-five years.

This Comprehensive Plan is organized such that sections can be added or deleted, future plans incorporated and revisions completed in a clear concise manner.

Information outlined in this section is not a detailed blueprint for the City to build with, but rather a general guide for desirable growth, providing a framework within which detailed public and private plans can be prepared and implemented. Three "catch all" categories have been developed to more clearly indicate the dominant activity occurring in a given area. Thus, residential sites are Living Areas; industrial, commercial, and major institutional areas are Working Areas; and public uses and services are labeled as Community Facilities. Roads and railroad networks are elements of the circulation system.

Together, plans for Living, Working, Community Facilities and Circulation comprise the General Physical Design for the City. Each is examined in greater detail below.

## A Plan for Living Areas

The process of residential development is a combination of actions by parties, the public, and private developers. By its nature, the actual process of new development is determined by the economic forces of the marketplace and is initiated by private enterprises. The public response is one of assistance and review. The extension of public facilities is assisted by the developers on-site preparation for water, sewer, and roads and is reviewed by public agencies and local government.

Renewal or renovation projects for neighborhood improvement, on the other hand, often are initiated by the public. The public seeks to have certain existing neighborhoods or areas restored or renewed to a level comparable with other residential areas in the City. This process involves factors such as removal of buildings, funds for repairs and renovations, mortgage guarantees, and public financing or private construction. Private enterprise acts in response to public actions in this venture.

New development generally involves changes in land use while neighborhood improvement projects concentrate on changes in housing quality. In Covington, both types of development are needed.

Throughout the planning process, various areas of the City have been mentioned as being possible sites for new residential development. Other concentrations of existing residential uses have been identified as being possible areas for neighborhood improvement or renewal efforts. The Plan of Living Areas breaks the issue into four basic questions.

1. How should development occur?
2. Where should development occur?
3. When should development occur?
4. What type of development should occur?

Each of these questions is examined in greater detail below.

### ***1. "How should development occur?"***

The question "How should development occur?" is largely an examination of residential density. The Planning Commission must examine the proposed densities for the various areas and use this as a guide when evaluating future zoning ordinance amendments.

Density refers to the relationship between people or dwellings and a unit of land such as an acre. The City Zoning Ordinance has four residential districts which regulate building lot dimensions for area, frontage, side yards, and rear yards. These factors (as shown in Table 34) account for differences in optimum yield per net and gross acre of land in the City and corresponding categories of density ratings. District R-3 has a high density rating but has a lower yield ratio per gross acre to net acre than the R-2 or R-1 Districts. Two-family and multi-family units which should contribute to a higher density are considered to be low in density because of large lot acre requirements.

Another explanation for the differences between optimum yields per gross acre and the actual yield per net acre lies in the fact that Covington is built upward in steep slopes from the bottom land. Increases in the degree of slope account for decreases in the yield per gross or net acre because of requirements for wider lots, cut and fill work, and different lot arrangements. Factors such as whether lots front on streets parallel or perpendicular to the contours and the degree of slope affect lot yields.

Table 34  
 Lot Regulations, Yields, and Density  
 Ratings for Residential Districts

| Zone | Common Lot Dimensions (in Ft) | Lot Area (in Square Ft) | Yield Per Net Acre | Yield Per Gross Acre | Density Rating |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| R-1  | 75 x 125                      | 9375                    | 4.646              | 2.75                 | Low            |
|      | 75 x 130                      | 9750                    | 4.467              | 2.50                 | Low            |
| R-2  | 50 x 130                      | 6500                    | 6.701              | 3.5                  | Medium         |
|      | 52 x 125                      | 6500                    | 6.701              | 3.5                  | Medium         |
|      | 55 x 125                      | 6875                    | 6.336              | 3.4                  | Medium         |
|      | 50 x 137.5                    | 6875                    | 6.336              | 3.25                 | Medium         |
|      | 50 x 170                      | 8500                    | 5.124              | 2.25                 | Low            |
| R-3  | 40 x 125                      | 5000                    | 8.712              | 4.75                 | High           |
|      | 40 x 130                      | 5200                    | 8.376              | 4.6                  | High           |
|      | 40 x 175                      | 7000                    | 6.222              | 2.6                  | Low            |
| R-4  | 60 x 116.7                    | 7000                    | 6.222              | 2.6                  | Low            |

Net Acre - # of dwelling units per acre devoted to residential buildings and accessory uses with the site, excluding land for public streets, parking, parks, playgrounds & other non-residential uses. Gross Acreage is computed on the basis of land devoted to residential uses including areas devoted to streets & other non-residential uses. This table is not a substitute for the zoning ordinance. See zoning administrator for official zoning information.

## 2. “Where should development occur?”

The question "Where should development occur?" is more resistant to change since most of Covington's residential areas have already been laid out. However, certain areas of conflict are probable and these will be examined as they arise.

Data has been presented in this report which indicates that the City has developable land capable of sustaining growth. However, flood hazards, steep slopes, and soil conditions restrict extensive development on many potential sites. Therefore, the City must review the various residential locations and evaluate the sites on the basis of certain use criteria. These factors, such as availability of sewer and water, accessibility, total acreage, slope, soil conditions, and environmental constraints, must be fully examined before residential development can occur.

This Comprehensive Plan identifies eleven areas in the City where residential development may occur or expand. These residential sites are examined in the following sub-sections and are evaluated in light of the other Living Area Questions.

### (a) Hemlock Street, Kline Street, Hickory Street, and Fir Street Area

The Hemlock Area contains a total of 43 acres and is zoned predominantly R-2 and R-3 Residential. This area is adjacent to the Covington Water Reservoir in the Rivermont Neighborhood and is accessible from High Avenue, from North Alleghany and Pocahontas Road. City services have been extended to the area and include both water and sewer. An environmental review of the area has determined it is suitable for increased development. Because the area contains high concentrations of low income residents, development initiatives have focused on rehabilitation and renovation. A recently awarded Virginia Community Development Block Grant of \$987,000 will be used to rehabilitate eligible houses in this neighborhood.

### (b) High Acres Area

High Acres Area is a 37-acre mobile home park that is zoned R-3 for more intensive residential development. It represents the largest mobile home park in the City. The developer of the park has provided, at his own expense, water and sewer lines that connect to the City system. Access to the park is from North Augusta Avenue. Further expansion might be justified in the future.

### (c) Upper Cherry Street Area

The Upper Cherry Street Area contains 205 acres zoned predominantly R-3 Residential with several smaller portions zoned R-2 Residential and C-1 Commercial. Although water and sewer are available, extension of these services is necessary in order to serve the entire site. Vegetation on the site includes second growth oak and hickory associations. An environmental assessment has indicated that it is capable of supporting development except on several sloped areas of the parcel, where the soil would be poor as an urban use.

Currently most of the area is underdeveloped and marked by low density residential dwellings. Internal circulation is limited by narrow, inadequate streets and external access is confined to

streets abutting on South Alleghany Avenue. More access is needed and street improvements are needed to contribute to the development of this area.

(d) Maple Avenue Area

The Maple Avenue Area is approximately 58 acres and is a predominantly older commercial district. It contains some R-2 and R-3 Residential Zones, but the majority is C-1, C-2, or C-3. It has full access to City water and sewer and it can support increased development. The housing area consists mostly of low income residences. The City has been awarded a Transportation Enhancement Grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation to partially fund restoration of the old CSX Depot as a community center.

(e) McAllister Boundary Adjustment Area

The McAllister Area is approximately 561 acres and is largely undeveloped. It is zoned R-1 and R-2 Residential. Also, the city has designated a new zone within the area as UR Urban Residential. The new zone encourages the construction of new residential neighborhoods, something that Covington has not had in recent years. It is anticipated that this will help to stabilize Covington's declining population by providing residents with an opportunity to purchase quality housing without leaving the area.

Although the UR Zone encourages residential development, a portion of the area will likely remain forested because it is too steep for residential development. This will help that portion of the area maintain its natural character. New land will be opened up for development in this area as a result of the new truck route to be constructed from Exit 16 ( Interstate 64) north to Magazine Avenue near Westvaco at the northern end of the City. The City will need to make a detailed analysis of that land in order to determine if rezoning to higher uses is appropriate.

(f) Sunnymeade Area

Sunnymeade is approximately 17 acres and is zoned M-1 Industrial. There are some existing residences that are in non-conformance with the City Zoning Code because they are not in compliance with the R-3 residential standards. The structural condition of the majority of the housing indicates that corrective action is needed.

(g) Parklin Heights Area

The majority of the 125 acre Parklin Heights Area is zoned R-1 and R-2 Residential with a small portion zoned C-3 Commercial along South Durant Road. City water and sewer services are available throughout the area. An environmental review shows the soil to be capable of supporting development, excluding the southeast corner of the area where it is very stony.

The existing neighborhood is characterized by single family dwellings. Some room for further expansion continues to exist. Generally, had the area been laid out differently, in variation of the "grid iron pattern," the land could have been utilized more efficiently.

(h) Fudge's Hollow (Totten Drive)

Fudge's Hollow (Totten Drive) is a 195 acre parcel zoned mostly R-2 Residential with a few smaller portions zoned R-1 Residential. Currently, the area is largely undeveloped and does not have access to public water or sewer services. The vegetation covering the site is dense and consists of oak, hickory, and shrubs. Because the parcel is underdeveloped, there is room to moderately expand existing housing stocks. The parcel does contain excessive areas of slope and is thus not suitable for intensive development. It is recommended that a detailed site analysis be done as part of any developer's preliminary analysis. Potential developers would also need the City to extend water and sewer lines.

(i) Asbury Park

The Asbury Park Area contains approximately 100 acres of developable land on the top of Payne's Ridge. Asbury Park extends from Hamilton Drive to the Nettleton property line near the VCFE radio tower. Access to the site is from East Hamilton Drive and East Asbury Street.

The site is currently vegetated with grass and shrubs. The soil is considered good for urban use in that it is well drained and moderately sloped. Where the slopes increase as one moves downhill on the site, poorer, stonier and more erodible soil occurs and is less suitable for development.

A major drawback to the development of this area has been the non-availability of public water and sewer. A pumping system and public lines would have to be provided from the nearby water lines, and sewer lines installed if this area were to grow. Currently, the policy of the City as provided in the Subdivision Ordinance is that the developer must provide all improvements such as streets, curbs, lighting, sewer and water lines.

(j) Michigan Street Area

The Michigan Street Area is a 22 acre site zoned for R-1 residential development. There is also a small portion of the tract zoned to accept R-2 development. An environmental assessment shows the area to be partly wooded with oak-hickory associations. Both the soil type and the overall lack of any slopes with steep grades suggest the area is acceptable for urban uses.

The 1995 Plan cited this as an area with potential for growth when City water and sewer become available. Currently, the site does have access to City water/sewer. This site possesses possibilities for further single family development and developers are utilizing its potential.

(k) Nettleton Boundary Adjustment Area

This 220 acre site is located in the southeast portion of Covington. It is zoned predominantly R-1 Residential with a small portion along the Jackson River zoned CN Conservation. The area is generally underdeveloped and can support increased residential development. The City has indicated they will extend, as appropriate, city services such as water and sewer as residential demand increases.

**3. “When should development occur?”**

The question "When should development occur?" is largely determined by the land supply, the perceived demand for a particular site, availability of public services, and access to the site. It is largely a policy issue, determined by actions of the City and one of concern to all citizens.

Information on each of the Residential Planning Areas indicates that they fall into two classes, existing neighborhoods served by public services and vacant areas available for development which lack public services, especially sewer and water. City policy, as described in the subdivision ordinance, requires that subdividers pay for the cost of providing improvements such as streets, water, and sewer in new developments. In established neighborhoods, developer-initiated changes occur sporadically as structures are demolished and similar or new land uses commenced. Here, the developer benefits from the availability of public services.

It is recommended that development occur only when these conditions are satisfied:

- a. The City has adequate additional capacity in sewer and water to be able to serve the proposed development,
- b. The development occurs within the corporate limits of Covington such that "leap frog" development (that utilizes city services and benefits without assuming the bulk of the costs) in Alleghany County is minimized,
- c. The City possesses other adequate public safety services, such as police, fire, and rescue, to serve the proposed development, and
- d. The City School System is prepared to accept additional students from these new developments.

#### ***4. "What type of development should occur?"***

The question "What type of development should occur?" is related to the "how" question but expands on the type of unit desired, the scale of development, the compatible non-residential uses allowed and in the case of neighborhood improvement programs, the proposed method of renewal. This issue is also dependent upon the current economic situation of the local, state, and national economy. During periods of economic downturn the pressure for increased development will be minimal. Recognizing this, it remains important to carefully examine the potential of increased development and explore which areas are likely to be affected by increased development pressure.

The type of dwelling unit found most often in Covington is the single-family home. Most two family dwellings are contained in old large homes that have been converted or in old two-family "flats" built during the 1930s. Aside from the Parklin Terrace Apartments, there are few multi-family units in the City. There is a definite need for expansion of both duplex and multi-family units in Covington. Of the areas under consideration, Asbury Park, Upper Cherry Street, Hunter's Hill, South Maple, South Marion, and Hemlock Street are recommended for two-family or multi-family use. It is expected that developments in these areas will follow existing trends and patterns as much as possible in order to avoid incompatibility with the present residences.

## A Plan for Working Areas

"A Plan for Working Areas" includes plans for all elements that contribute to the economic welfare of the City. These include the commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors of the local economy. The location, scale and characteristics of these uses, their relation to the living areas, and the means of access to and from work require planning in order to ensure economic growth, efficiency, and public convenience.

This "Plan for Working Areas" will approach these economic elements and seek to present a desirable method of development.

### Commercial

Any discussion of commercial uses in Covington must acknowledge the variations of development that exist. Currently, the City has a downtown or central business district area, several areas of strip commercial development along some of the major thoroughfares, the Riverbend Shopping Center, two smaller shopping centers, some neighborhood commercial enterprises, and several specialized commercial activities dependent upon rail transportation. The Highland Avenue area should particularly be recognized as an emerging commercial district. Each of these commercial types are dependent upon the street system for access and limited on-street parking. A significant amount of off-street parking is also required for consumer needs. Whenever feasible, the City should examine and possibly take steps to improve the existing traffic flow patterns within these areas.

The future commercial development areas are shown on the Future Land Use Map. The recommendations for Commercial Development are:

- a. Continue to work toward making downtown the focus for community retail and professional uses.
- b. Allow neighborhood commercial uses in new developments as appropriate.
- c. Enhance commercial development by encouraging the implementation of the transportation plans and programs outlined in the Other Transportation Plans and Programs section of this document.

### Industrial

The industries located in Covington contribute greatly to the economic well-being of the City. Taxes on these industries are a significant percentage of the annual budget, and the employees' income is circulated into the local economy through local purchases of consumer goods and services. Future industrial expansion is seen to be desirable. General areas for expansion are indicated on the Future Land Use Map.

Aside from the Employment Goals listed earlier in the Goals & Objectives section, specific industrial recommendations include:

1. Reserve all prime industrial sites through application of the Zoning Ordinance.
2. Encourage implementation of the transportation plans and programs outlined in the Other Transportation Plans and Programs section of this document.
3. Monitor land use changes in and along England Heights and North Magazine Avenue for possible zoning district changes.

### Institutional

Institutional uses are seen as major public or semi-public employers. Currently, there are few major changes in public institutional uses foreseen in the future for Covington. The locations of City Hall, County Courthouse, Jail, City Garage, sewer and water plants, schools, federal and state offices and separate social and community offices are seen to be adequate for future needs.

Private institutional changes or semi-public use changes might occur. The number of churches, though insignificant from an employment standpoint, are important land and circulation system users. Proper treatment of these uses in the zoning ordinance will ensure sufficient off-street parking, land for expansion, and comfort and ease of the citizens in their use of these facilities.

## A Plan for Community Facilities

### Recreation

Community facilities are public uses that provide or offer essential services to the citizens. In this plan, recreation, and public services/utilities will be addressed in a general manner.

The City of Covington possesses a number of recreation areas that include neighborhood playgrounds, school playgrounds, Fort Young Historic Site, Casey Field, and City Park. In all, there are approximately 65 acres, including school playgrounds, in recreational use in the City. In addition, the City is constructing a new 50-acre Jackson River Recreational/Sports Complex. The City Recreation Department also offers various recreation programs for different age groups during the year. Regional facilities such as the Armory Gymnasium at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College and the Alleghany Highlands YMCA are also available to Covington residents.

In analyzing the available recreation land in the City and its population, a standard from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR) is utilized. This calls for 10 acres of park land per 1,000 population. Covington is well within acceptable limits for this standard. VDCR also has noted that because Covington is in close proximity to the National Forest, there is excellent access to hiking trails, picnic sites, hunting areas, and camp sites.

The April 2001 draft of VDCR's 2001 Virginia Outdoors Plan states that a "Jackson River Greenway should be considered from Covington to Iron Gate." Another recommendation reads as follows: "develop a trail system that ties the Fort Young Park to the Jackson River Park in South Covington and the downtown (Main Street) area of Covington. It could be extended to Warm Springs using the scenic railway." This second recommendation refers to possible future extensions of trails from the Jackson River Recreational/Sports Complex currently under construction.

The Future Land Use Map shows proposed recreation areas. Major new residential developments should have playgrounds integral with them, and mandatory dedication of this land during the subdivision review process is recommended.

What has been lacking in Covington is a linkage system connecting the recreation areas. Access to them is generally provided solely by automobile, although some children walk or utilize bicycles. The development of bicycle routes along access streets and the increased placement of sidewalks might ensure easier access and improve safety for children traveling to recreation areas.

Smaller playgrounds or "tot lots" might be developed in some of the neighborhoods where citizens are not able to travel to an existing recreation area. These areas could be supervised by the users.

Generally, the Plan for Recreation calls for:

- a. New recreation area development.
- b. The development of a linkage system utilizing bicycle and pedestrian paths.
- c. New recreation areas required in new residential developments.
- d. "Tot lots" in some neighborhoods.

All of these recommendations are subject to the review of the City Recreation Director and the Recreation Board. These points may be augmented by other comments to create a feasible City Recreation Plan.

### Schools

No new secondary or specialized schools are anticipated, but elementary school improvements or minimal expansions have been recommended for Covington in the near future. Population projections suggest the population may actually decline slightly over the next 10 years which generally serves to support this recommendation.

The school buildings themselves and future expansions might be utilized differently in the future for other than a single-purpose structure. The schools are distributed throughout the City and could become the neighborhood or community focus of their area. Educational, recreational, cultural, and civic activities for the citizens of each of these areas could be centered in the school. The expanded usage of the school as the "community center" is the keystone of the "Community Education" concept.

It is recommended that serious consideration and evaluation of the merits of "community education" be conducted by the City for future utilization of the school facilities.

### Public Safety

The quality of the City's police, fire, and rescue services is judged to be excellent. No diminishments of these services are foreseen for the future.

Police: The location of the police station in City Hall, number of officers, and equipment (with periodic replacement of obsolete items) seem adequate to meet future needs.

Fire & Rescue: The City water system is adequate to handle most fires that might occur. New equipment might be required in the future to expand capabilities or replace older equipment, and this should be included in the Capital Improvements Plan.  
Fire hydrants are recommended for new subdivisions and the City Subdivision Ordinance should reflect this need.

### Public Utilities

Utilities are both public and private in nature. The placement, design, and operation of these utilities involve engineering questions, but planning for their use involves the local government in policy decisions which guide growth patterns.

Publicly-owned and operated utilities in Covington include the sewer, water, and storm drainage systems. Various plans exist for these major utilities, and they can be considered as supplements to the Comprehensive Plan.

From a general viewpoint, these utilities influence and are influenced by development. The following recommendations for public utilities are presented below.

1. Extend water and sewer to all sections of Covington utilizing the guidelines for services and capacity set forth in the "Plan for Living Areas" section.
2. Improve storm drainage facilities in the City.
3. Consider waste-heat utilization schemes as a cooperative effort between the City, private utilities, and private industry.

#### Solid Waste Disposal

Covington currently uses the Peter's Mountain Regional Landfill. The recently opened Subtitle D double-lined facility at the landfill is expected to last seven to ten years. Further expansion has already been approved. The City periodically reviews alternative methods to handle solid waste.

#### Historic Preservation

Covington should continue to emphasize and support the Downtown Historic District. In the future this will continue to serve as a catalyst to the downtown and help improve its economic vitality. Also, because there are a number of historic structures not within the historic district, the City should pursue having them placed on the National Register for Historic Places. This will further enhance Covington's historic character.

#### Public Library

The City is planning for future library needs, and the library expansion is underway and will be completed within the next five years.

### **Transportation Planning**

Effective transportation planning deals with internal and external movement of people, goods, and services. As shown in the 2010 Statewide Highway Plan, (VDOT, 1989) a number of roads were identified as being in need of improvement (i.e., portions of Alleghany Avenue, Route 154, Carpenter Drive, and Edgemont Drive). There are also two new proposed highway facilities: Craig Avenue Extension and the Durant Road Extension.

Recommendations include:

1. A periodic reexamination of the 2010 Statewide Highway Plan to determine its current relevance and identify any need for revision.
2. Improvements to City sidewalks and bicycle trails (i.e., widening, additions, handicapped access) and requirements for sidewalks in new subdivisions to improve pedestrian circulation. Emphasis should be placed, whenever feasible, on connectivity to encourage the use of bicycle trails and pedestrian sidewalks as an alternative mode of transportation.
3. Improvements to the East Chestnut Underpass, North Monroe Underpass, and Hawthorne Street Bridge to insure their safety and improve their general appearance.
4. A continuation of City efforts to work with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), local industries, and interested citizens in seeking a solution to the City's truck traffic problem.
5. Improvements to local streets serving industrial and commercial operations that are rail dependent for the delivery of goods and services.
6. Monroe Avenue, Madison Avenue, Highland Avenue, South Carpenter Drive, and Edgemont Drive need to be considered for street improvements such as widening, turning lanes, etc.
7. Intermodal transportation (such as rail/truck transport) should be considered by major City employers such as MeadWestvaco.

## **Future Land Use Map**

The Future Land Use Map referred to herein presents the future general physical design for the City of Covington. This map shows the projected approximate boundaries of general land use categories. These broad categories may encompass areas in which other non-related or conflicting land uses are presently operating. The broad land use categories represented on the Future Land Use map include residential, commercial, industrial, recreation, public and vacant. The proposed Covington Truck Bypass listed in the in the City of Covington 2020 Transportation Plan developed by VDOT is also shown on the future land use map. This map is not intended to amortize or remove these legal uses but is meant to provide a general guideline for the City Planning Commission and Council in preparing for the future.

LINK TO FUTURE LAND USE MAP HERE – [FUTURE LAND USE](#)