

SUSSEX COUNTY, VIRGINIA
SMALL AREA PLANS

RURAL AREA



**PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT
AUGUST 2021**



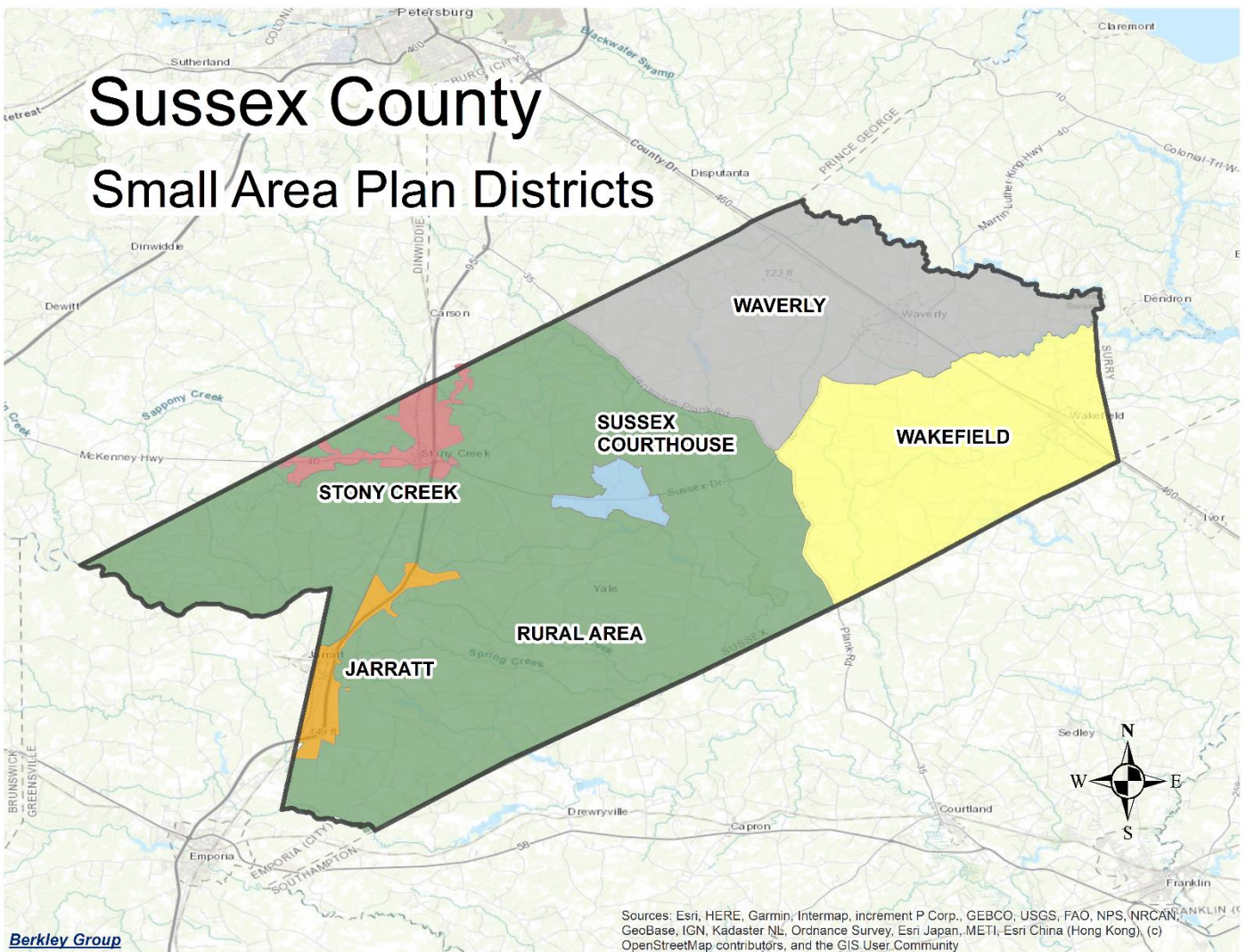
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Preface

Sussex County is a rural yet diverse County that contains individual development areas separated by rural landscape, farms, forests, and a diverse network of waterways. Due to this disparate pattern of development, Sussex County has chosen to utilize a planning strategy that includes individualized area plans for six areas, including the rural area that lies between each of the developed areas.

Each of the geographic regions of Sussex County has a prevalent strength that is specific to the unique conditions of that area. By identifying, focusing on, and nurturing these individual strengths, the County can develop a balance of overall growth and conservation that builds a healthy ecosystem for future development. The goal is to support beneficial growth in each of the focus areas that promotes the success of the County as a whole, while protecting the elements that are important to the people, the economy, and the culture.



Six Planning Areas

The six individual areas that create the backbone of this interdependent County planning strategy are as follows:

Sussex Courthouse / State Route 40 Planning Area – Civic Core

This Planning Area contains a large government complex and new consolidated school facility. The area is of historical importance and is surrounded by large pristine farms that are important to the local agricultural heritage. It is also served by State Route 40 which is a significant local transportation route within the County.

Jarratt Planning Area – Interstate Services

Located along Interstate 95 (I-95) with relatively little floodplain area and sufficient public services, this Planning Area can support higher intensity development that is reliant upon easy access to I-95. The area offers a good industrial alternative to the Waverly area due to transportation access.

Rural Planning Area – Conservation

Agriculture is an important economic and cultural driver in Sussex County. Planning in this area should ensure protection of prime farmland, forests, and the hydrological network that supports the farm economy, rural heritage, tourism, and environmental diversity.

This plan will focus on the Rural Area – The Conservation Lands for Sussex County. This includes the County’s vast landscape of undeveloped agricultural and forested lands that are a critical component of Sussex’s rural character. This Small Area Plan is a component of the larger Sussex County Comprehensive Plan examining features, challenges, and opportunities in the County outside of the five other identified Planning Areas.

Stony Creek Planning Area – Commercial Center

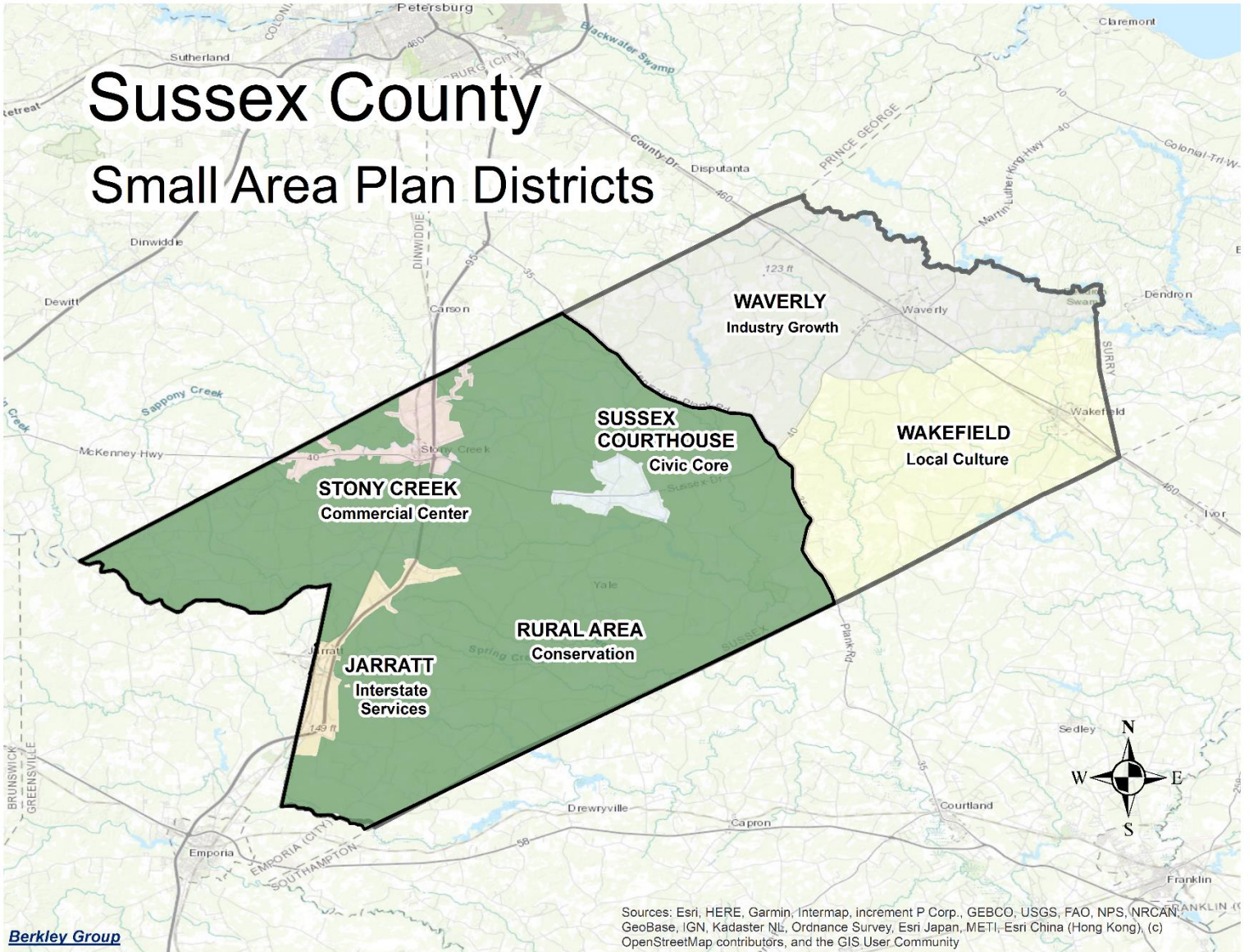
Fed by I-95 and accessible to other areas in the County, the Stony Creek area can accommodate commercial development that is missing in the rural area between Petersburg and Emporia. The large floodplain/wetland areas of this district restrict the amount of development and make it more suitable to commercial than industrial development.

Wakefield / Homeville / U.S. 460 Planning Area – Local Culture

This Planning Area contains tourism, agritourism, and recreational opportunities that can be nurtured and developed. With the U.S. Route 460 access and existing tourism, Wakefield can take advantage of the passing traffic and popularity of nostalgic and rural tourism.

Waverly / Blackwater / U.S. 460 Planning Area – Industry Growth

Waverly is the center for current and future industrial development. With U.S. Route 460 access and room for rural/urban expansion, Waverly is a prime location for expanded urban development patterns.

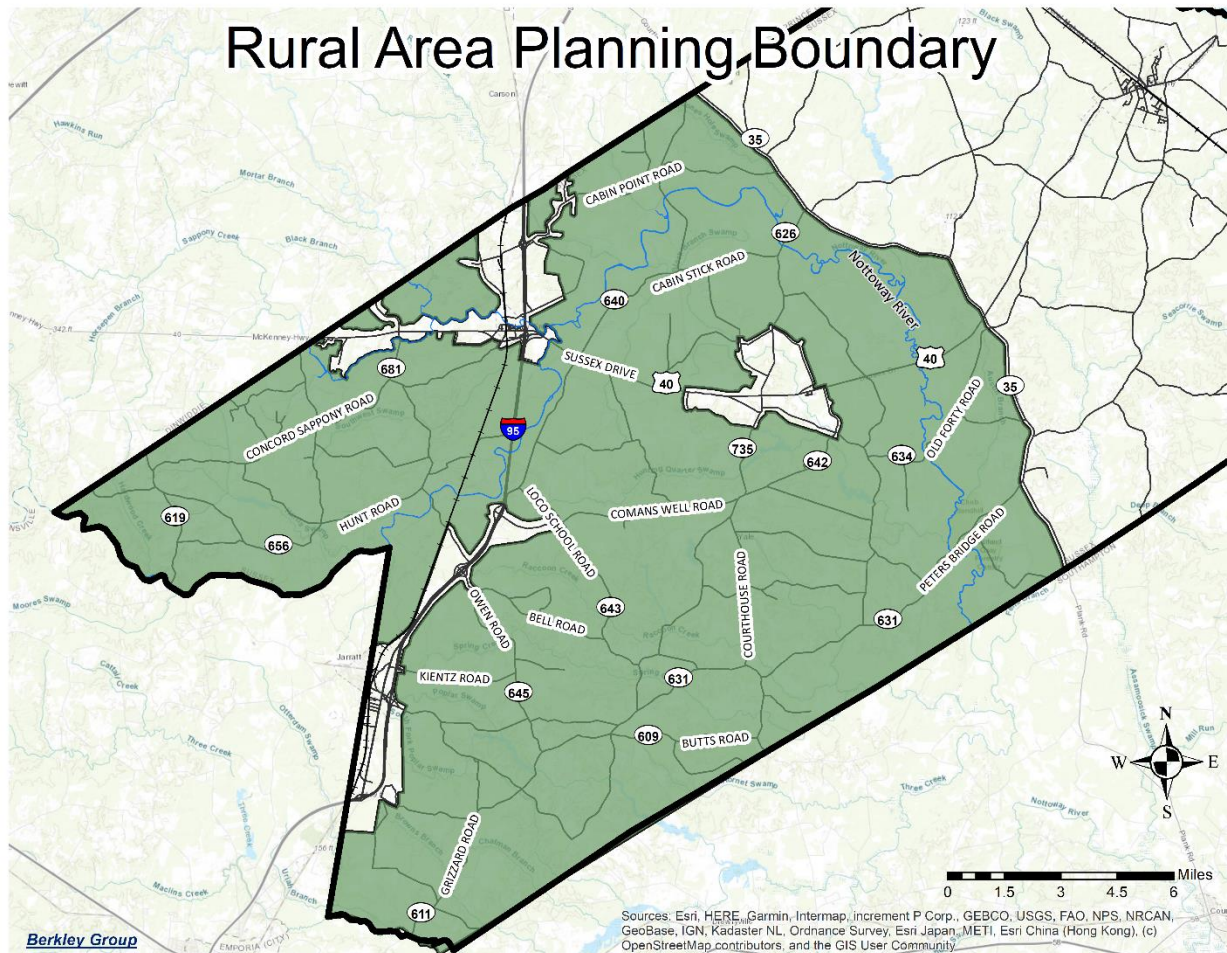


Rural Planning Area

The boundaries of the Rural Planning Area comprise all of western Sussex County west of the Waverly and Wakefield Planning Areas, excluding the Stony Creek, Jarratt, and Sussex Courthouse Planning Areas. This is the largest Planning Area in the County (282 square miles) accounting for about 57% of the total area of the County. The area includes many large undeveloped tracts of land primarily reserved for agricultural and forested uses.

With the exception of I-95 and U.S. 301, transportation routes through the area primarily support light residential development and some incidental commercial development serving those residential uses. Interstate 95 and U.S. 301 run parallel north and south through the Rural Planning Area but have few

intersections with local roads. State Route 40 runs east to west through the County and connects to other more developed areas. Jerusalem Plank Road (State Route 35) forms the eastern border of the Rural Planning Area. Many other small local routes extend throughout the area. Based on 2010 Census Block data, the population for the Planning Area was approximately 2,989 people with 1,273 households.¹ The population density for the Rural Area is 10.6 people per square mile. By comparison, the 2010 Census estimated that the total population for the County was 12,087 people. American Community Survey estimates for 2019 show the population as having declined to about 11,237 individuals (-6.9%).



¹ Due to the small size of the Planning Area, Census Block data must be used to estimate population. Data on the Block level is only available every ten years following the Decennial Census.



Existing Features & Uses

The Rural Planning Area has numerous natural features that are central to the unique rural character of Sussex County. As a result, the area does not have any significant concentrations of development or physical structures. Low density residential development exists throughout the area either in the form of strip development along local roads or on larger properties associated with farm operations. There are unincorporated communities, or census designated populated places, with a slightly higher density of development such as Gray, Henry, Grizzard, Little Mill, and Yale, as well as other named and unnamed locations.

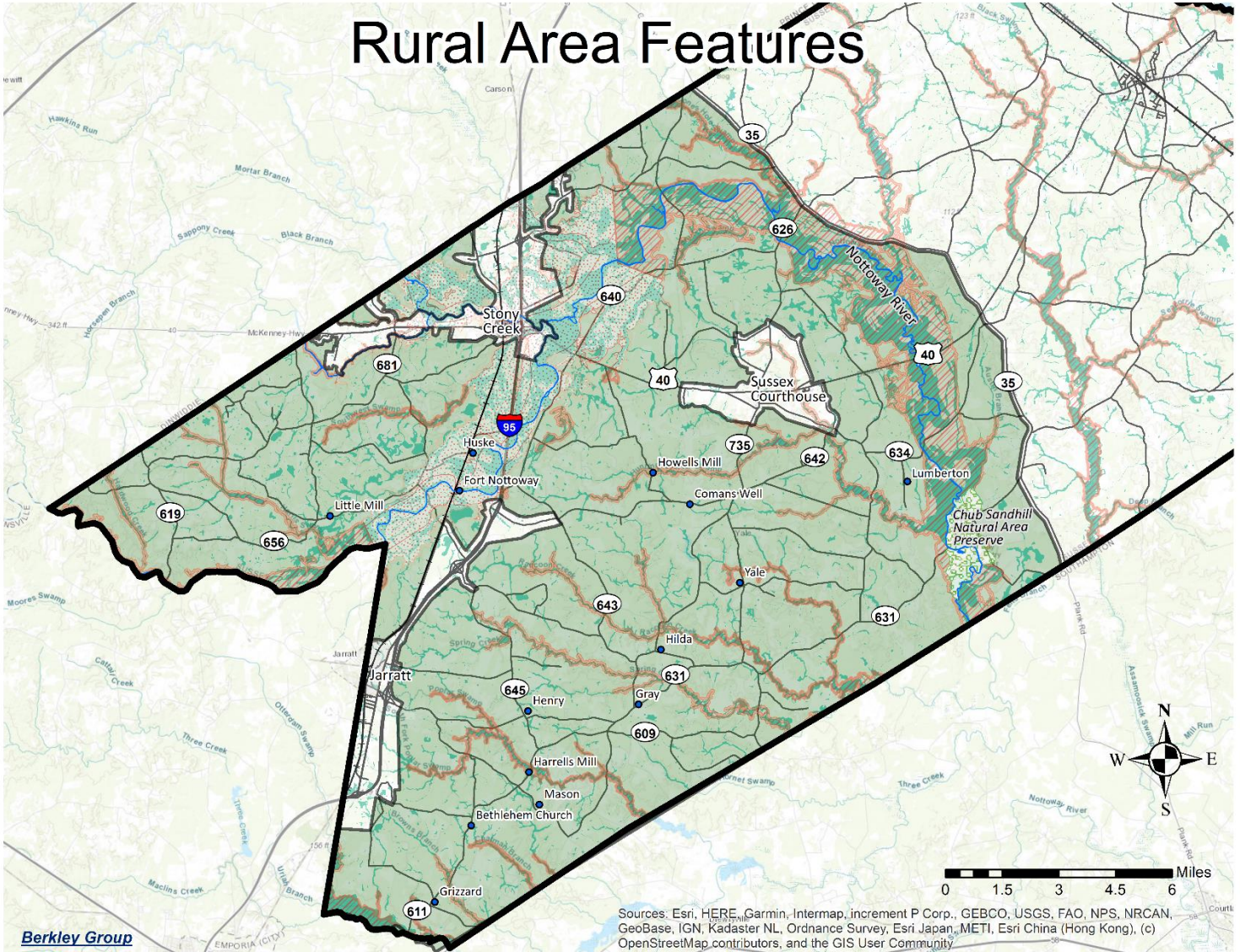
Public utilities have not been expanded into the rural areas nor are they recommended in the future. Residential developments rely on wells and septic systems for water and wastewater needs. Electricity service is primarily provided by Dominion Energy with some locations receiving electricity from either Prince George Electric Cooperative or Southside Electric Cooperative. High-speed fiber internet is available in some of the Planning Area through RuralBand from Prince George Electric Cooperative. However, many

residents in the Planning Area still remain unserved or underserved by internet service.

Most undeveloped land is dedicated to agricultural uses or forestry, however there are some properties dedicated to surface mining, landfills, electric transmission lines, rights-of-way, and renewable energy generation. Additionally, there is some rural commercial activity scattered throughout the County serving the needs of agricultural community, passing travelers, and residents.

Notable natural features in the area are the Nottoway River and its many tributaries, such as Raccoon Creek, Spring Creek, Poplar Swamp, Southeast Swamp, Hunting Quarter Swamp, and Mayes Branch. The Nottoway River supports many rich riparian areas and pristine wetlands. As a result of the river and its tributaries, a sizable amount of land in the Planning Area is designated FEMA Flood Zone A. There is also a significant amount of land held in conservation easements, and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) manages the Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve.

Rural Area Features

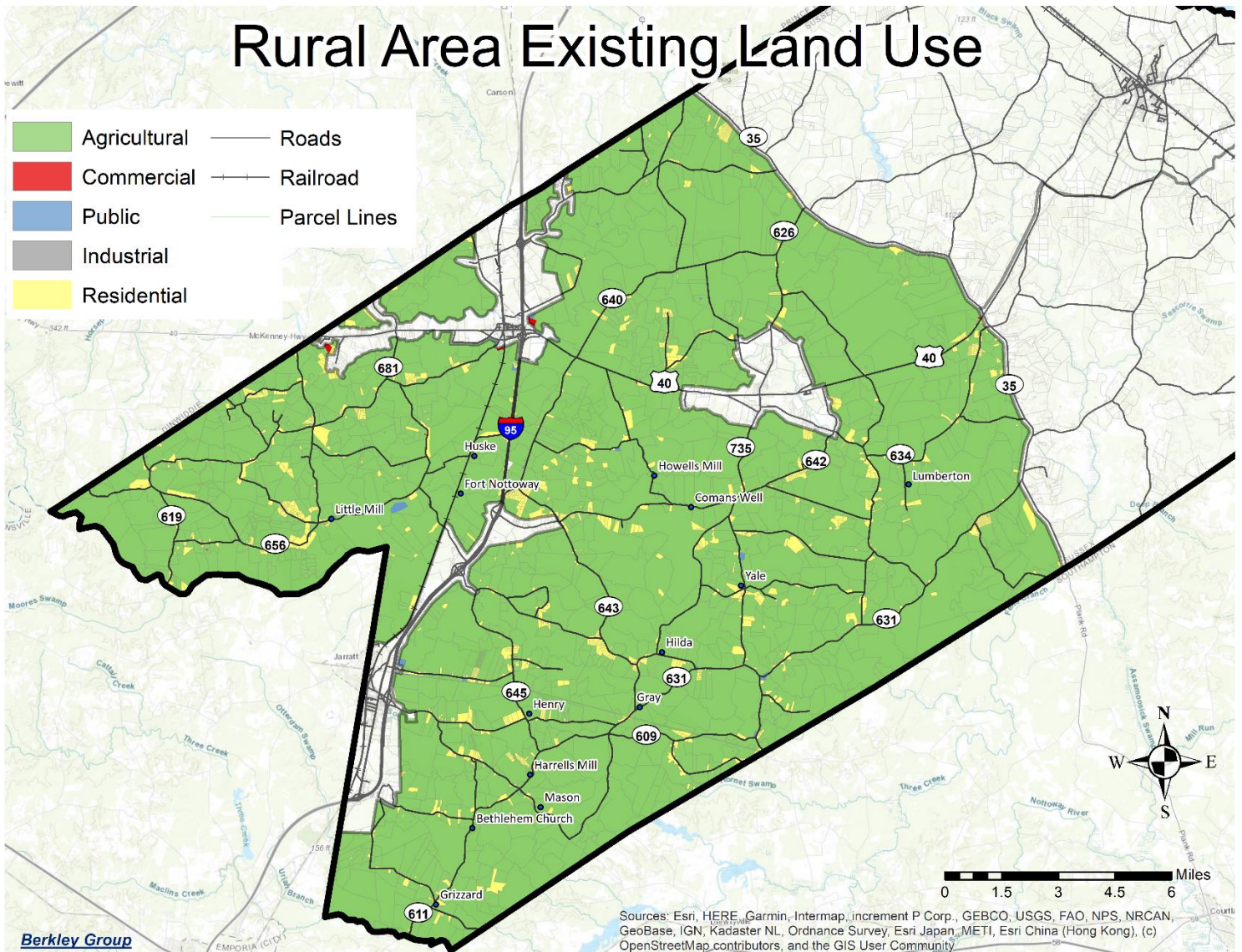


Existing Land Use

Most of the land use in the County’s rural area is forested, agricultural, or open space. Single-family dwellings are also scattered throughout the rural area. There is no major commercial, industrial, or multi-family residential development. Some public and institutional uses are present, which includes religious assembly uses as well as various sites owned and operated by the state of Virginia.

Much of the development in the area has occurred along existing public roads. Most of the large tracts of land between public roads have therefore remained largely

undeveloped. While I-95, U.S. 301, State Route 40, and the CSX Railroad pass through the rural area, these transportation corridors do not currently support any major developments like they do in the other Planning Areas in Sussex County. The map below and the pie chart on the next page show the quantity and location of various land use types in the Planning Area. These graphics are also complemented by descriptions of each land use type on the following pages.



Agricultural/Forested/Open Space

As with much of Sussex County, this Planning Area is mostly comprised of agricultural, open space, or forested land uses. On the existing land use map, these areas are labeled simply as agricultural. Agricultural uses include land that is actively being used for the harvesting of crops or grazing land for livestock. Much of the land is designated as Prime or Statewide Important Soil, indicating it is suitable for cultivating agriculture.

In addition to these agricultural uses, much of the land in the rural area consists of large tracts of forested lands. Many of these sites have been, or are being, harvested and help to support a silviculture industry that is an integral part of the local economy.



Also included in this land use category are many wetlands, riparian areas, swamps, and flood zones that are unfit for development. Specifically, the Nottoway River weaves its way in the northeast direction through much of the County's Rural Area between the Jarratt and Stony Creek Planning Areas before turning southward near Jerusalem Plank Road. The river is flanked by several miles of wetlands and swamps along its roughly 40-mile stretch through Sussex County. This includes a large amount of land designated as FEMA flood zones. The Nottoway River has access points at the Purdy Boat Ramp near Walkers Mill Road (State Route 619), the Jarratt Boat Ramp on Little Mill Road (State Route 630) and the Peters Bridge Boat Ramp on (Peters Bridge Road (State Route 631). Additionally, the section of the

Nottoway River east of Stony Creek is designated as a State Scenic River which recognizes the natural, historic, and recreational values of the river. The rest of the Nottoway River in Sussex County west of Stony Creek also qualifies but has not yet received the same designation. The designation serves as a meaningful partnership between the local citizens, the County government, and the Commonwealth of Virginia to ensure the river is properly protected and maintained.

Additionally, a number of private and public lands within this category have been designated for conservation or preservation. The Rural Area has numerous parcels with conservation easements that restrict future development. These locations are mapped on the *Rural Area Land Use Features* map in the next section. Nevertheless, only a few parcels of land directly adjacent to the Nottoway River currently have conservation easements. Given the importance of the Nottoway River as a State Scenic River, there is the potential for additional conservation easements in these areas.

The Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve is also an important conservation land with public access. The preserve is 1,066 acres with important protected wetlands and sandhills along the Nottoway River. The area supports a variety of rare bird species and vegetation that is visible through public trails and wildlife observation platforms. In the future, the Preserve will be an important contributor to habitat restoration, tourism, and preservation in the County.



Residential

Most of the residential development occurring in the County's rural areas is situated along public roads. Residential development primarily consists of low-density detached dwellings. This includes manufactured (mobile) homes, historic farm dwellings, and traditional single-family homes. Many of these housing structures are located on lots greater than two acres in size, but there are some residential uses on smaller lots, mostly along highways and near unincorporated communities and intersections throughout the Planning Area. These include Yale, the intersection of Concord Sappony Road and Little Mill Road, the intersection of Big Woods Road and Peters Bridge Road, along Gray Road, and around Dillard Road near I-95.

Commercial

Commercial presence is very limited in the County's Rural Area, with only a few small convenience stores and businesses associated with rural tourism and agriculture. Along Courthouse Road in the community of Yale, there is a small gasoline station and convenience store as well as a post office. There are a number of wedding and event venues, as well as hunting clubs that are commercial uses integrated with the rural surroundings.

Industrial

No major industrial land use currently exists in the Planning Area or is anticipated to be developed. There are several active and inactive resource extraction sites and capped landfills that are discussed later in this plan. These uses are secondary to the predominant land use in the area and are designated as Agricultural on the existing land use map.

Public

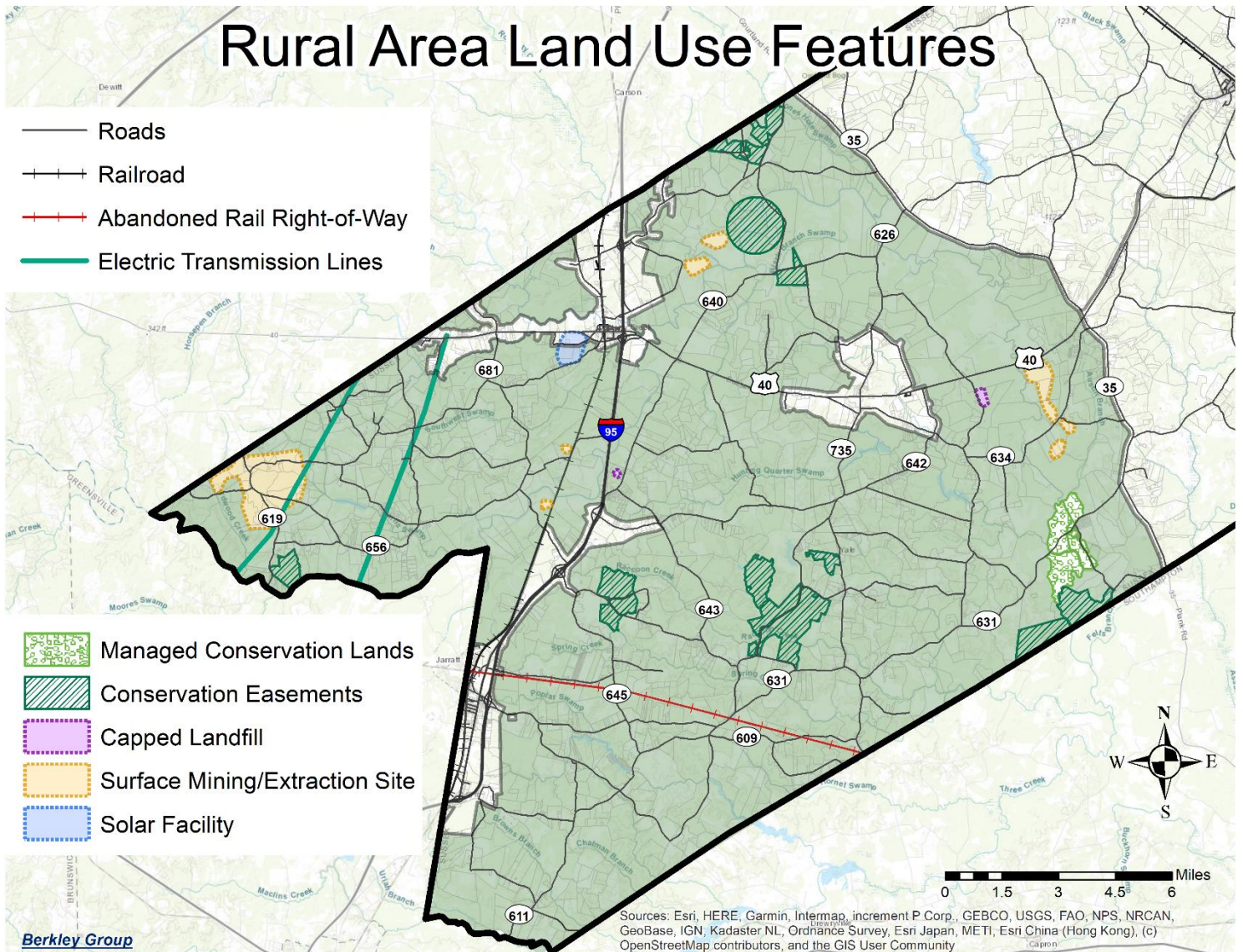
The public, governmental, or institutional land use makes up a small portion of the overall land use in the rural area. Most notably, there are numerous churches along rural roads throughout the County. Many of these religious assembly uses have been in operation for generations and remain an important part of the active and neighborly culture present in Sussex County's rural communities. Also, Camp Rudolph is a religious camp and retreat center located south of the community of Yale on Courthouse Road. The camp attracts hundreds of families and children each year to enjoy the rural character of Sussex County.

Active government uses in the Rural Area include the Garland Gray Forestry Center and Yarden Farms. The Garland Gray Forestry Center, operated by the Virginia Department of Forestry, is located next to the Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve near the Nottoway River and Peters Bridge Road. The center operates as a nursery growing millions of seedlings of loblolly and longleaf pines to help restore Virginia's forestland. Yarden Farms is located on Huske Road and is operated by the Virginia Department of Corrections. The 160-acre farm employs inmates to supply the surrounding correctional facilities with fresh produce and dairy products.

Additional Land Use Features

The County's rural areas also include a few special uses and designations occurring in the agricultural and open space land use classification. This includes surface mining sites, utility-scale solar facilities, capped landfills, and reserved rights-of-way as well as managed conservation lands and easements. These sites are exceptions to the standard forested and agricultural uses found throughout the Rural Area and provide economic opportunities and adaptive reuse potential. They also present limitations and potential negative impacts to the rural character of the County if not properly managed.

Inventoring these specific existing uses helps to identify locations in the County where new mining sites, solar facilities, or other potential uses may be located in the Rural Area. The location of conservation land should serve as a guide for where these types of uses should not occur in the future. Details about each use shown on the map below are discussed on the next page.



Surface Mining

Sussex County has a few active surface mining sites in addition to inactive sites that are currently being remediated. These activities are occurring on private property with the expectation that the sites will eventually return to a more natural land coverage once mining operations are completed. The largest site is the Concord heavy mineral sands mine operated by Iluka Resources in the northwestern corner of the County. This mine is no longer active but was used to extract titanium and zirconium rich mineral sands. Remediation of the site is currently in progress and is expected to continue until 2023. Other mines in the County are currently being used by sand and gravel suppliers primarily for paving purposes. This includes the Titan Mid-Atlantic Aggregate Site on Sussex Drive, the Branscome Site on Setzer Road, and the GreenRock Site on Chambliss Road. Two smaller mining projects were started near the Nottoway River on Green Church Road and Huske Road.

Resource extraction sites present major changes to land coverage and impacts to the natural environment. Future management and permitting of these projects should be closely monitored. Additionally, residential development should continue to be adequately buffered from these sites to avoid the particulate matter that is generated. In the future, these disturbed sites may present opportunities for reclamation and the siting of other active uses like solar facilities without needing to disturb additional land in the County's rural areas.

Solar Facilities

Sussex County's only active utility-scale solar facility is on approximately 200 acres of land that is partially in the Stony Creek and Rural Planning Areas. The solar project generates 20 megawatts (MW) of electricity. This project is a significant change from the previous land use of agriculture and received a special use permit from the County to operate. The County has also received interest from multiple developers to build additional utility-scale solar facilities throughout the County. Sussex County also recently addressed solar facilities in the comprehensive plan that is particularly relevant to the Rural Area. That guidance is provided in the future land use section of this plan.

Landfills

The Gin Hill and Robinson Road landfills are two smaller capped landfills in the County's rural areas. The Gin Hill site is located near I-95 on Dillard Road. The other site is on Robinson Road to the west of the Sussex County School Complex south of Sussex Drive. Post-closure care has been terminated at both sites and the County has explored leasing both properties for reuse.

Rail Right-of-Way

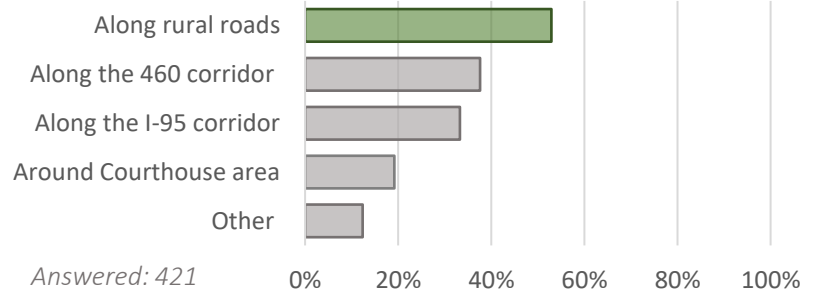
The abandoned Norfolk & Western railroad right-of-way goes from the Town of Jarratt southeast to the County's southern border with Southampton County. The Virginia Beach Lake Gaston Water Pipeline is also buried along this right-of-way. The corridor is currently maintained by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) plans to include the extension of the Tobacco Heritage Trail into Sussex County as part of the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail. This project would develop this corridor (in red in the land use feature map above) into a shared use path as part of the statewide trail. As a result, the County should continue to promote this corridor for future use to expand eco-tourism and economic development opportunities.

Public Input

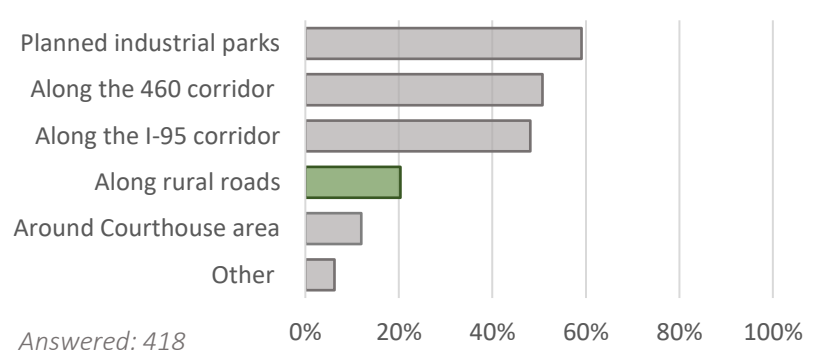
Local stakeholder meetings and County-wide surveys provide a brief understanding of public opinion about the current status and future of the Rural Planning Area. Overall, the input received recognizes the importance of the County's rural areas to the identity of Sussex County. Additionally, there is recognition that the Rural Area has relatively low potential for new commercial and industrial development, but some opportunity for residential development.

The County's rural opportunities and open space was overwhelmingly identified by residents as the best quality of the County. Therefore, rural areas should be protected and maintained for the enjoyment of generations to come. Significant commercial or industrial development should be avoided outside of existing activity centers. However, input also recognized that rural roads were the preferred location for new housing development. While this form of development may be preferable for many County residents, the County should maintain clear guidance and limits on how and where new residential development may occur along rural roads.

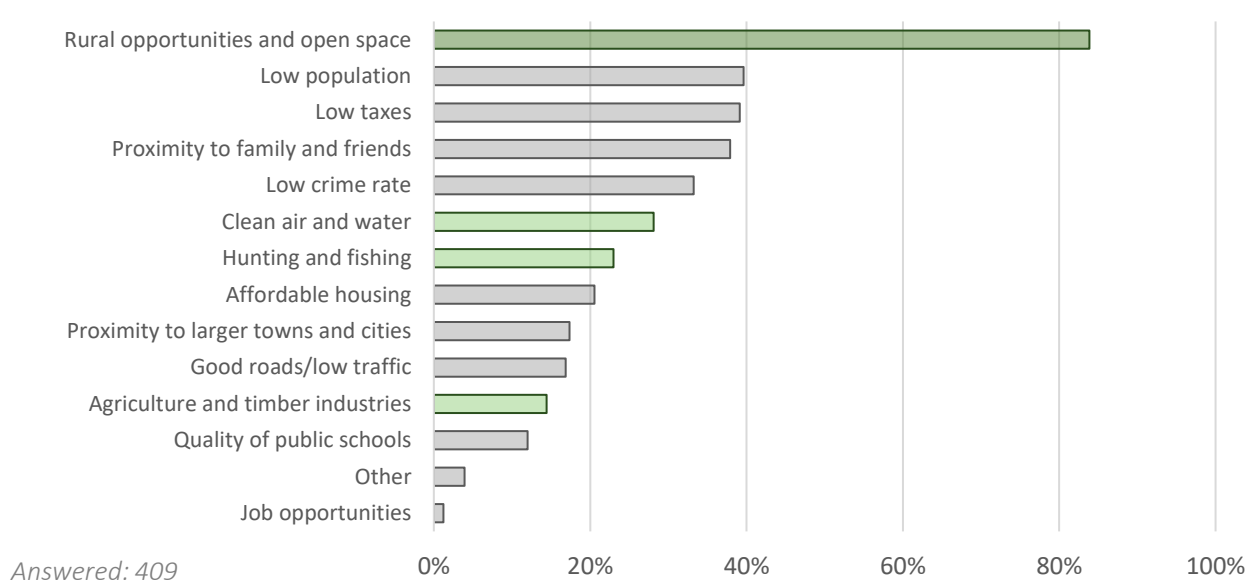
Where in the County should new housing be concentrated?



Where should new (non-farm) industry be generally located?



What are things you like best about living in Sussex County? (Choose top four)



SWOT Analysis

The Rural Planning Area has a host of assets and challenges. The SWOT analysis identifies the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats faced by the Planning Area. These are internal and external factors that help plan the best uses for land and best investments for the community.

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
INTERNAL	<p>Strengths (Positive characteristics of the Planning Area that give it an advantage over others.)</p> <p>Availability and affordability of land to continue to protect rural uses.</p> <p>The quantity and quality of natural resources provide quality of life benefits and can be used to promote eco-tourism.</p> <p>Prime agricultural soils, limited floodplain, and proximity to major roads can offer farmers flexibility in their agricultural commodity production and delivery.</p> <p>Existing low-density residential development promotes the area’s rural character without threatening natural resources.</p> <p>The Nottoway River is a unique recreational amenity with its scenery and natural resources .</p>	<p>Weaknesses (Negative characteristics of the Planning Area that could harm its revitalization.)</p> <p>Accessibility to grocery stores and other major retail is a challenge for residents.</p> <p>Minimal connections to public utilities will limit the ability to support new residential development or connect existing dwellings with failing septic systems.</p> <p>Poor road conditions due to lack of maintenance creates safety hazards.</p> <p>Distance to County facilities contributes to lower emergency response times.</p> <p>Prevalence of flood zones along the Nottoway River may threaten existing development.</p>
EXTERNAL	<p>Opportunities (External influences that can be used to the advantage of the Planning Area.)</p> <p>Farms can take advantage of their proximity to I-95 to supply regional farm markets and provide local agritourism opportunities.</p> <p>Prime soils and active agriculture can qualify owners for farm conservation opportunities that offer monetary benefits as well as land preservation.</p> <p>Affordable land and lower taxes and living costs make the rural lifestyle attractive for the foreseeable future.</p>	<p>Threats (External factors that could prevent improvement of the Planning Area.)</p> <p>Declining crop yields and market values could lead to disinvestment and the conversion of agriculture to other uses.</p> <p>Increased demand to develop utility-scale solar facilities may impact the rural character and natural resources.</p> <p>Impacts from development along the Nottoway River upstream from Sussex County may harm environmentally sensitive areas.</p> <p>Regional demand for more affordable large lot housing in the Richmond region may create development pressure on the rural areas.</p>

Transportation Analysis

Future uses in the Rural Planning Area must be coordinated with transportation routes and other existing assets in the area (See also: Existing Features & Uses). Unlike the County's other planning areas, the Rural Planning Area does not have any major intersections or interchanges along the County's most heavily traveled transportation corridors.

I-95 does pass through the Rural Area, but there is no direct access to the highway. Gee Farm Road (State Route 659) is the only road that crosses I-95 outside of the Stony Creek or Jarratt Planning Areas. Similarly, U.S. 301 runs parallel to I-95 and only has one intersection at Huske Road (State Route 734) along the 4.5 mile stretch in the Rural Area. The CSX railroad also parallels these routes but has no spurs or access points. There are at-grade crossings at Green Church Road, Hardaway Drive, and Huske Road.

The following table shows VDOT average daily traffic (ADT) count estimates in 2019 for the heaviest traveled roads in the Planning Area. Compared to other planning areas, these traffic counts are much lower. While future development may increase traffic volumes, it is anticipated that these roadways are sufficient to accommodate existing and future activity.

Transportation Improvements

Additionally, this analysis incorporates construction priorities, programmed projects, identified deficiencies, and recommendations from existing VDOT publications and plans such as the VTrans Mid-Term Needs, projects listed in the Six-Year Improvement Program, and traffic deficiencies identified in the Crater Planning District Commission Rural Transportation Plan.

Under VDOT's Six-Year Improvement Program, reconstruction and drainage improvements have been approved for Courthouse Road (State Route 735) between Gilliam Road (State Route 660) and Gray Road (State Route 631). VDOT also approved paving Steel Bridge Road (State Route 635) between Mason Road (State Route 610) and Gray Road (State Route 609).

VDOT Average Daily Traffic Count Estimates, 2019	
Transportation Corridor	Traffic Count
Sussex Drive (State Route 40) Between I-95 and Courthouse Road Between Courthouse Road and Jerusalem Plank Road	2,400 1,800
Blue Star Highway (U.S. 301) Between Owen Road and Huske Road Between Huske Road and Sussex Drive	630 740
Courthouse Rd. (State Route 735/626) North of Sussex Drive At Gilliam Road	430 660
Cabin Point Road (State Route 602) Between Rowanty Road and Railroad Bed Road Between Railroad Bed Road and Jerusalem Plank Road	390 290

There are no recommendations for the area listed under the VTrans Mid-Term Needs.

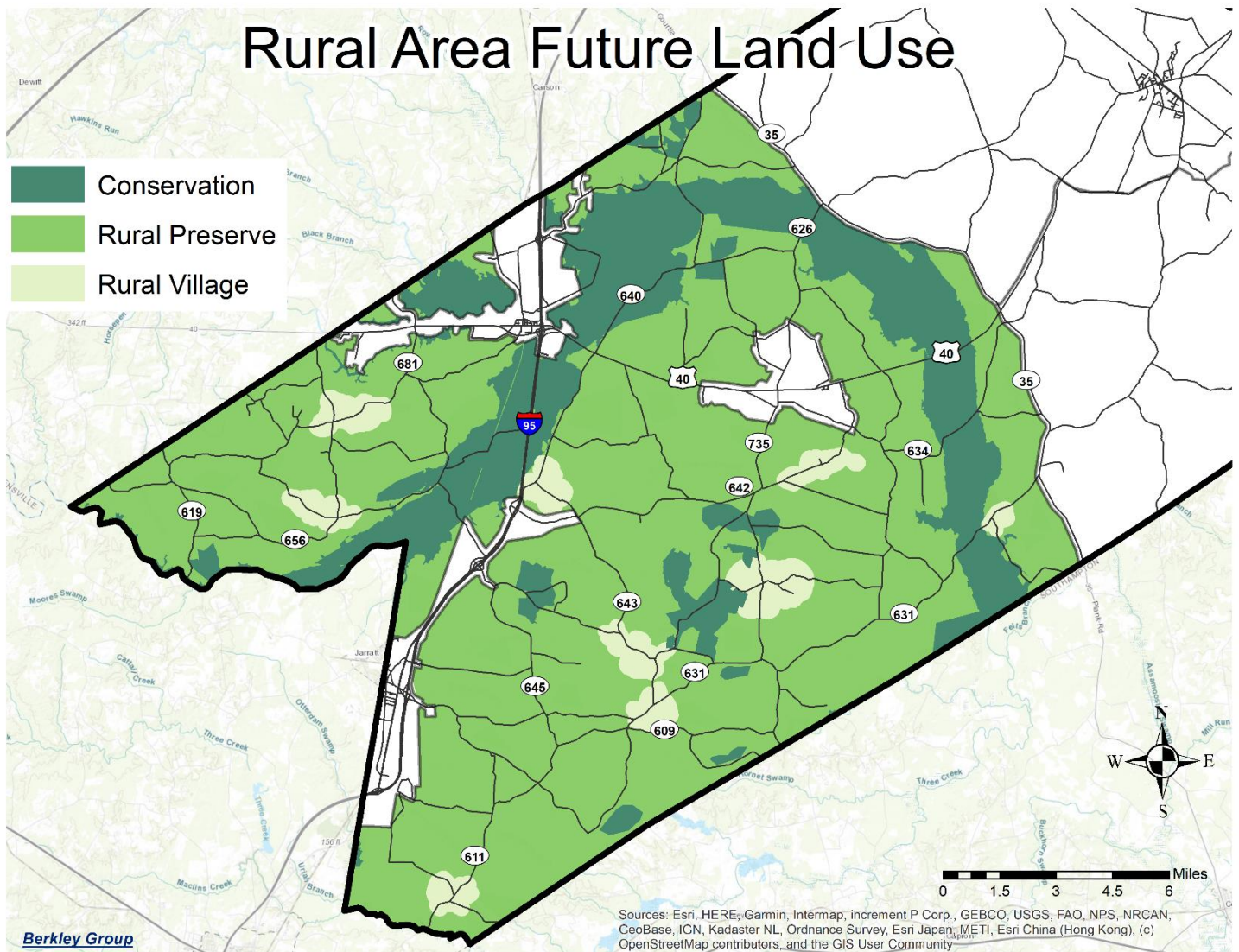
The Crater PDC and VDOT Rural Transportation Plan have a number of road size recommendations. The plan recommends reconstructing portions of State Routes 619, 626, 631, 638, and 645 to address geometric deficiencies and widen lanes to 10 feet. It also recommends widening State Routes 630 and 681 to 11-foot lanes and State Route 657 to 12-foot lanes.

Future Vision & Planning

The Rural Planning Area is the largest planning area in the County and is critical in supporting the unique rural character and natural resources of Sussex County. This means that the Rural Area is the core of intentional and targeted conservation efforts of agricultural, forested, and riparian corridors in the County. As a result, this plan closely directs and guides any new development to ensure that the local natural resources are retained and protected as much as possible. The rural character of Sussex County is an important cultural and economic asset that is worth protecting. Accordingly, productive agriculture and timber lands should be protected and

prioritized over new residential, commercial, or industrial development.

Future uses in the Rural Area should be coordinated with the need and interests of the County's other planning areas. Large developments and activity centers requiring adequate public facilities and transportation access should be directed to planning areas with more compatible uses. Light residential and commercial development that is more complementary of sensitive environmental areas and natural resources may be acceptable in certain portions of the Rural Area.



Future Land Use Analysis

The recommended future uses are based on a variety of factors, such as subdivisions on record, best land use practices, environmental conditions, zoning, conservation easements, and access to public utilities. The recommendations include three different land use categories to provide general guidance for future land use. To prioritize conservation in the Rural Area, these categories are different from the land use categories in the other small area plans. The Conservation category is for future land use areas of environmental sensitivity due to unique land characteristics that include flood zones, wetlands, conservation easements, State preserved lands, and soil types. The Rural Preserve category includes most of the undeveloped, outlying lands that are generally stable and require protection to preserve agricultural, forested, recreational, and remote rural residential uses. Finally, the Rural Village category includes areas where limited development activity has occurred and continues to be appropriate.

Conservation

The Rural Planning Area contains a variety of environmental features, including wetlands, flood zones, and riparian areas that play an important role in plant and animal species diversity as well as natural water system filtering. Much of the most environmentally sensitive lands in the County are located along the Nottoway River and have been designated as Conservation. The Conservation category also includes highly productive agricultural and forested lands, conservation easements, publicly managed conservation lands, and very limited low-density rural residential development. The Conservation category contains locations with unique or irreplaceable natural, agricultural, and cultural resources deserving the highest level of protection. These areas do not have urban services and have limited access on rural improved or unimproved roads.

Currently, there are a number of forest, wetland, and recreational conservation easements on properties in

the area. However, conservation easement programs could be enhanced and expanded to specifically include the protection of active farmland and riparian areas along the Nottoway River.

Unlike other land use designations, the Conservation category does not easily transfer into a corresponding zoning district and should function as an overlay area. Various environmental policies associated with the State Scenic Rivers Program, National Wetlands Inventory, conservation easements, and FEMA flood zones should help to weigh any proposed development and density with resource protections.

Ultimately, the Conservation designation should protect the natural character of the County. Residential development in these areas should be mostly discouraged and average a gross density of not more than one unit per 10 acres. The permitting of more intensive uses, such as utility-scale solar facilities and surface mining sites, should be discouraged in these locations. To preserve the most valuable agricultural and forested lands, the County should consider working with landowners to create Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFDs). Where allowed, the County should also maintain, improve, and promote public access to conservation areas, trails, and boat ramps.



Rural Village

The primary land use within this Planning Area will continue to be rural in nature and include large tracts of agricultural, forest, and open land uses. However, there are a few locations of existing development in rural communities and farming areas where light residential growth and commercial development may be appropriate. These existing clusters of rural development are based on an analysis of population, address, and building footprint information. These areas are primarily located at crossroads in rural areas and include named communities like Gray, Henry, Grizzard, Little Mill, and Yale as well as other unnamed locations. Each of these locations has access to a rural arterial road, is does not have public utility service, is near active agricultural uses, and is in a place where rural residential housing is desirable.

Land uses in the Rural Village may include rural housing with low densities averaging no smaller than one unit per acre. Any new residential development should be built as clustered development. Rural centers of community, such as religious assembly facilities, fire stations, and parks may be appropriate. Limited small scale commercial uses that serve the local community may also be allowed, such as personal services and retail convenience stores. Basic agricultural production and services should also be encouraged in these areas. Finally, forest and wood product services may be allowed such as the operation of timber tract and nurseries, however sawmills and large-scale timber operations are not encouraged.

New development in the Rural Areas should be focused in these designated areas to confine residential development to specific areas rather than allowing it to sprawl into all areas of the County along roadways. Low-impact development strategies and stormwater management improvements should be considered to protect water quality. Moreover, cluster development strategies that emphasize a concentration of dwellings should be utilized when planning for new residential development in the Rural Village areas. Finally, septic

potential and soil quality should be carefully monitored. A substantial increase in the number of septic systems can threaten the groundwater quality, especially in low lying areas where soils may not be suitable for effective septic development. This could endanger both agricultural viability as well as public health.



Rural Preserve

The Rural Preserve classification includes agricultural, forested, and remote rural residential uses. This category is most similar to the Agricultural, Forested, and Open Space classification in other planning areas and considers locations where agricultural zoning is in effect. Agricultural production and services as well as forest and timber land are predominant and are encouraged to expand. Limited, very low density residential and institutional uses are present along rural roads and arterial rural highways.

Agricultural, forestal, recreational, and remote rural residential areas should be protected and preserved. In addition to allowing widespread agriculture production and forested uses, limited rural residential uses may be allowed at a gross density of one unit per five acres. Limited institutional uses such as religious assembly facilities and civic clubs serving the local rural population may also be allowed. Mining and extraction operations that locate according to the availability of natural resources should have strict limitations to avoid harmful

effects on housing, farming, and conservation areas. Similarly, the potential siting of utility-scale solar facilities should follow guidance established in the County Comprehensive Plan that is detailed at the end of this section.



Within these areas, farmers are encouraged to follow best management practices and take advantage of conservation and environmental programs as promoted by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). The main purpose of this land use classification is to facilitate existing and future farming operations, allow for the expansion of farm related activity, reduce the effects of soil erosion, and protect watersheds to promote the continuation of farming as one of the primary sectors of the economy. In planning for active agricultural use of parcels in the Rural Area, the County should consider the full scope of modern farming activities, including agritourism, on-site sales, food preparation, and events, and modify local regulations to more easily permit all activities that can help farmers maintain a profitable enterprise. Such activities have the added benefit of drawing visitors to the rural areas of Sussex County for tourism as well as providing additional income to farming operations. Large parcels will remain necessary for sustainable agricultural enterprises in the Rural Area.

Outside of sensitive environmental areas, it is the vision of Sussex County that rural areas remain rural, and that active agriculture maintains its importance in the community. A central objective of land use planning in Sussex County is to preserve this valuable land from

being developed for residential or other land uses. Once developed, it cannot easily be restored to its original condition. Areas of agricultural conservation should be used for active agricultural and forestry enterprises, and best management practices should be observed relative to land disturbance, support structures, and other facilities that such agricultural/rural operations require.

Guidance on Solar Facilities

Sussex's abundant agricultural land combined with its electrical infrastructure and transportation system are attractive to the solar industry. These facilities are an industrial scale land use that may occupy significant acreage. Many utility-scale solar facilities are located on agricultural or forested land that may have had other future land use potential or land use designations.

The County will consider solar facilities in districts zoned agricultural or industrial with preference for brownfields and County-owned capped landfills. The following site features should be addressed to mitigate the potential negative impacts of utility-scale solar facilities on County land use patterns as part of the evaluation of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application:

- The total size shall be larger than two (2) acres but less than 1,500 contiguous acres with no more than 65% PV panel coverage;
- Located outside planning areas or community hubs;
- Located outside forested areas to preserve forest resources;
- Further than three (3) miles from any village or town boundary;
- Further than two (2) miles from other existing or permitted solar facilities; and
- Proximity to residences; historic, cultural, recreational, or environmentally-sensitive areas; and scenic viewsheds.

Implementation Recommendations

Recommendations for the Rural Planning Area emphasize the importance of maintaining and improving the natural features and rural character of Sussex County. The recommendations focus on identifying opportunities for preserving agricultural, forested, and open space while also accommodating development when appropriate.

Implementation Task	Cost Scale	Time Scale ²	Responsible Party
Maintain the land use taxation program as a key tool to encourage agricultural land and production within the County.	\$	Short-term	County Administration
Expand eco-tourism by promoting access and use of publicly-owned parks, conservation land, boat ramps, and scenic rivers	\$	Short-term	County Administration
Extend the State Scenic River designation to all of the Nottoway River in Sussex County to include the portions of the river east of Stony Creek to maximize natural resource protection.	\$	Short-term	County Administration
Promote County policies and farmer participation in conservation and environmental programs, such as those available through the VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)	\$	Short-term	Cooperative Extension
Continue to work with utility providers, local businesses, and County residents to extend broadband internet service to all unserved and underserved homes and businesses.	\$\$	Short-term	County Administrator
Support public education and awareness of the benefits of erosion and sediment control measures, best management practices, and other nonpoint source pollution controls.	\$	Short-term	Planning and Zoning Department

² Short-term (1-5 years); Medium-term (5-10 years); Long-term (10+ years)

Implementation Task	Cost Scale	Time Scale ²	Responsible Party
Follow established standards for locating alternative energy generating facilities to ensure preservation of environmental, cultural, and scenic resources and maintaining prime agricultural lands for agriculture.	\$	Short-term	Planning and Zoning Department
Work with the Virginia Department of Health to promote environmentally compatible wastewater disposal systems, and where appropriate, communal systems to address failing septic systems.	\$\$	Medium-term	Planning and Zoning Department
Support the work of conservation organizations in establishing and holding conservation easements.	\$	Medium-term	County Administration
Update the County zoning ordinance to encourage cluster development, deter the development of prime farmland and woodlands, and preserve the rural character of the County.	\$\$	Medium-term	Planning and Zoning Department
Work with local landowners to create Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFDs) to encourage the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products.	\$	Medium-term	Planning and Zoning Department
Consider utilizing farmland protection tools available in the VA State Code to promote long term agricultural conservation.	\$	Medium-term	Cooperative Extension/ Planning and Zoning Department
Encourage the reclamation of quarry and landfill sites for other active uses such as renewable-energy generation.	\$\$	Long-term	County Administration
Partner with VDOT and surrounding localities to develop the abandoned rail/water pipeline right of way into a shared use path as a part of the Tobacco Heritage Trail.	\$\$\$	Long-term	County Administration

Rural Area Future Land Use

- Conservation
- Rural Preserve
- Rural Village

