



**COUNTY FINANCES  
Most Conservative  
in the Region  
See page 3**

**Rural Myths Rural Facts  
See page 4**



An independent newspaper published by the Shenandoah Forum.

**FREE**

# The Shenandoah County Sentinel

Established 2010

September 2015

## Much Progress Made on County Vision in 10 Years

As Shenandoah County this summer passed the 10 year mark since the Board of Supervisors adopted a broadly-shared vision and plan for our future, Shenandoah Forum decided to take a look back to see how far the County has come in realizing our goals.

We analyzed decisions, policies and programs over the past decade with the outcomes contained in the County 2025 Vision Statement (see box below) and the 2005 Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

We found much to celebrate. County leadership made good progress toward the eight goals in the statement, particularly in support for the farm community, cooperation with the six towns and expansion of economic opportunity in proven sectors. In turn, conservative budgeting throughout a worldwide economic downturn kept our taxes the lowest in the region and our public debt burden relatively flat, while still meeting community needs.

Shenandoah Forum offers this short summary of the County's progress toward the vision. More details are available on our website, [www.ShenandoahForum.org](http://www.ShenandoahForum.org). We hope you take a moment to learn more about how these decisions have been key to sustaining the shared goals of the community for our abundant agriculture, rural heritage, historic towns and vibrant communities.

### Rural Heritage

Shenandoah County supervisors balanced private property rights with concern for the tax burden from unplanned growth in a wide array of land use decisions made over the past 10 years. New planning tools, zoning limits and land use programs helped retain the County's rural character, preserve natural and historic resources, and allow for compatible residential and business growth and development.

- The 2010 rural areas plan directed most new residential growth to the area around the existing towns, where the cost of providing public services is more efficient, while also promoting agricultural vitality and farmland preservation.
- Supervisors approved a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) ordinance and created the Conservation Easement Authority, which has protected two farms totaling 494 acres of working lands. The County's modest \$100,000 investment in 2011 secured more than \$1.5 million in conservation value in three years. Supervisors last year approved future PDR funding of up to \$50,000 per year, sensibly drawn from the rollback taxes collected when farm and forest land is converted to development.
- Supervisors approved cooperative land use plans with the Towns of New Market, Strasburg and Toms Brook to coordinate growth and public services, at a tremendous savings to the county budget and taxpayers.
- Supervisors made numerous zoning decisions that preserved land on the County's four nationally-recognized Civil War Battlefields, as well as prime farm and forest land, from incompatible residential and other development.

### Fiscal Responsibility

Shenandoah County supervisors exercised much fiscal caution over the past 10 years, providing needed public services while keeping county spending, taxes and debt service among the very lowest rates in the region. Despite the national economic recession's im-



pact on local tax revenues, Supervisors managed to hold off a tax increase for six years.

- The County's real property tax rate of 57 cents on \$100 assessed value is the second lowest in a region of 7 localities, just one penny more than that in Frederick County.
- Shenandoah County's operating costs for general government administration, \$52.09 per capita per year, is the lowest among the seven localities in the Shenandoah Valley and less than half of the statewide average of \$119.68 per capita.
- Capital outlays and debt service for public service projects, like the county library and the Mt. Jackson wastewater plant represent just 13 percent of the County budget. Conservative planning resulted in debt service levels dropping nine years out of 11 from 2003 through 2014, even as needed new facilities like the Health & Human Services building were constructed.

### Shared Prosperity

County supervisors paid close attention to the 2025 vision statement in their work to expand economic opportunity, particularly in traditional rural sectors like farming and tourism, promote compatible energy and other industrial development, and plan for roads and other infrastructure.

- A new strategic plan for economic development, adopted in 2013, reaffirms the importance of agriculture and tourism, and focuses on ways to grow the County's existing businesses and employers.

- Supervisors embraced new marketing efforts for agriculture and tourism in 2011, including the Fields of Gold regional agritourism program and the Shenandoah Artisan Trail. In 2013, visitor spending totaled \$192M, up 3.5%, ranking Shenandoah County 23rd for visitor spending as compared to 134 other Virginia counties.
- Elected officials endorsed a resolution in 2011 opposed to any shale gas fracking in the George Washington National Forest, to protect water resources and public lands from industrial energy development, and adopted a wind power ordinance in 2010 to regulate industrial energy facilities, with an eye to serving local needs with minimal impact.
- Supervisors adopted "Reasonable Solutions for the Future of I-81" in 2006 to address safety and congestion problems without major highway widening financed by tolls. These solutions are now well underway, with spot safety projects, enforcement of speed limits and increased interstate freight diversion from trucks to rail.
- Supervisors made smart public safety investments that decreased EMS response times to less than five minutes for 67 percent of emergency calls in 2014.
- The County opened a new Health and Human Services Building with all offices under one roof, and a new District Court building with improved judicial facilities, and joined a Regional Jail Authority to save more than 25 percent annually on criminal justice costs.

## Shenandoah County Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement



**In the year 2025, Shenandoah County will still be a primarily rural community that:**

- Protects its natural resources.
- Directs its growth to the towns ensuring its open, agricultural character.
- Provides a variety of jobs in business, light industry, tourism, and sustainable agriculture.
- Maintains moderate growth of a demographically varied population.
- Supports safe and efficient interstate transportation and maintains the rural character of its primary and secondary roads.
- Affords its students excellent and appropriate education.
- Serves its citizens with public facilities and services that enhance their quality of life.
- Ensures preservation of its natural beauty and unique, historical character by strictly adhering to the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive plan.

Adopted June 2005 and reaffirmed December 2010, Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors.



**CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF PROGRESS TOWARD OUR COMMUNITY'S VISION**

# WHAT OUR READERS SAY

# Opinion

**BEVERLY BUTTERFIELD**  
Former Educator VA  
Cooperative Extension  
New Market



Our country has been going through some tough economic times recently. Through the foresight in planning and involvement of a broad spectrum of the community in developing a plan for our rural areas, Shenandoah County has fared relatively well. It is my hope our local leaders over the next 10 years will continue the steady and conservative approach to economic development that has characterized the past 10 years -- investing in the county's existing economic sectors like farming and tourism. We can prosper and at the same time maintain the quality of life we all value. I love our community for its rural nature, cohesive communities, and rich cultural heritage. I want this to be a place my children and my grandchildren will live, prosper and thrive in for many years to come.

**STEVEN SHAFFER**  
Former Chairman of the  
School Board & Community  
Business Leader  
Woodstock



Despite the constraints of tightening budgets in recent years, our schools, teachers and students continue to be recognized for the highest level of achievement. Local students have excelled both nationally and at the state level in the subjects of agriculture, consumer science and vocational skills, and continue to make academic gains on the Standards of Learning tests. In the past year we had two Middle School teachers earn top state awards; the Virginia Teacher of the Year from Strasburg and the Virginia Agriscience Teacher of the Year from Woodstock. Education spending is a community investing in itself and I feel it is important we strive even harder to support and fund our schools, thus giving our children the education success they deserve for a growing and thriving community.

**CAROLYN LONG**  
Appointee of 2005  
Citizens Advisory  
Committee  
New Market



I feel very fortunate to have been one of the citizens who worked on the Comp Plan and Vision Statement in 2004 and 2005. Unlike a majority of counties, which hired professionals to write the Plan for them, our Comp Plan was created by Shenandoah County citizens. We were a diverse group, with sometimes differing views, but we all shared the belief that Shenandoah County ought to remain the rural, agricultural community that it is, with our small towns and historic landscapes. I am proud of the work the Comp Plan committee did 10 years ago, and I applaud our leaders for implementing the citizens' shared vision. With the alarming speed that farmland is disappearing across our state and country, the continuing work we do to preserve it seems more important than ever.

**GLENN KELLER**  
Livestock & Grain Producer  
Toms Brook



Critics of the County's efforts to protect farmland are not taking a long-term view of the situation. Ag land brings in tax dollars to the county without costing much in services, especially compared to development. I supported the dedication of the rollback tax, paid when a property comes out of land use to be development, as a good way to fund our local conservation easement program, which has already permanently protected almost 500 acres. The County is on the right track when it comes to preserving farms and farming.

**MIKE DIRTING**  
Sixth Generation Farmer  
Edinburg



As a member of the County's Ag Task Force, I am pleased with how closely decisions made in the County have followed the vision and intent of the Comp Plan, particularly regarding agriculture. Decisions to amend the rural zoning, consider how development might impact agriculture, establish a farmland protection program, develop the County Farm as an agricultural demonstration area and support a strong Ag and Forestal District Program are some of the most important county actions we've seen over the past 10 years and follow closely the template set 10 years ago.

**DEE HOCKMAN**  
Cattle Farmer  
Fishers Hill

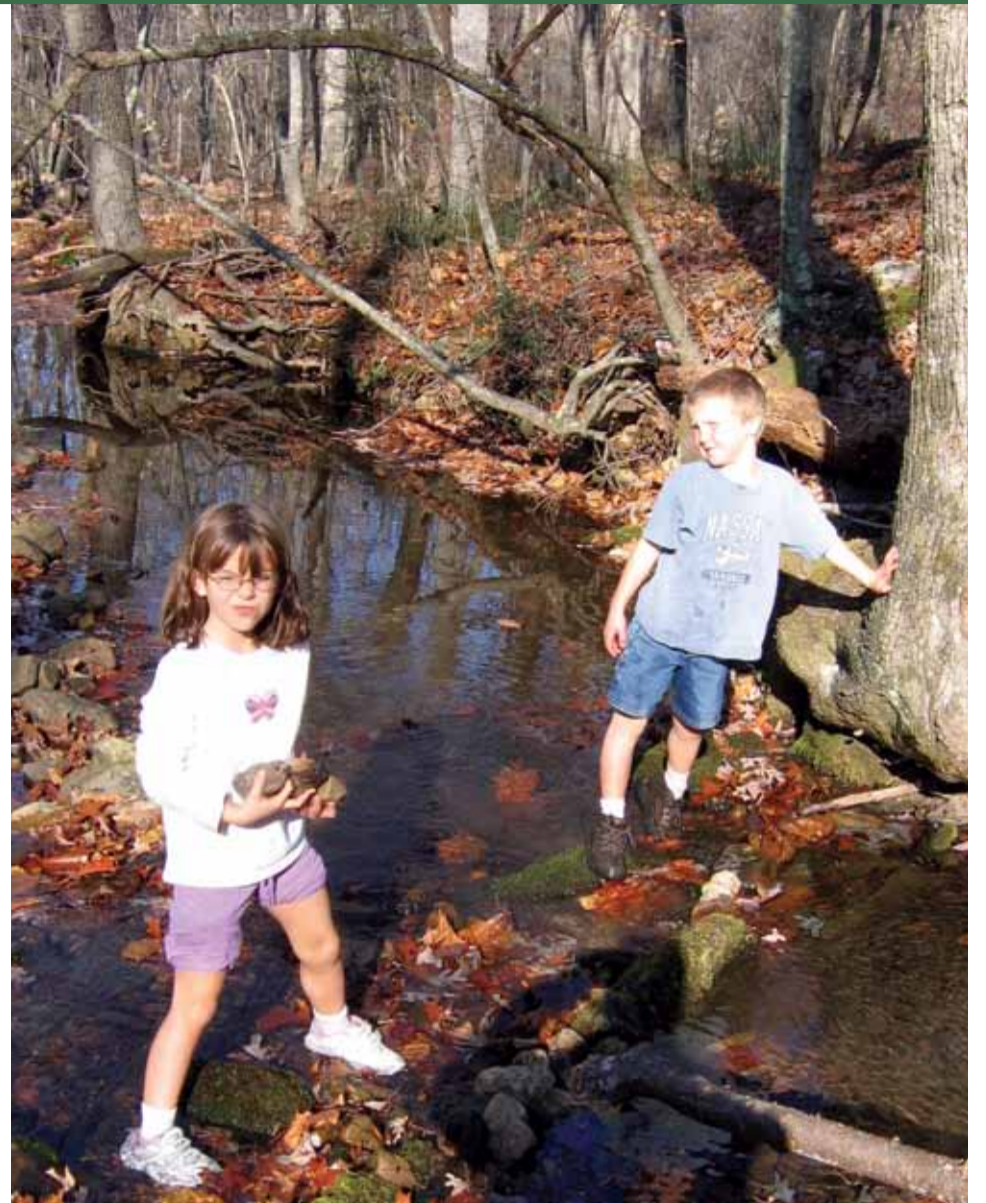


I got involved with the Shenandoah Forum in 2003 because I believed County residents needed to come together to make sure that farm and forest lands and the future of our county are protected. Agriculture is the number one economic sector. It always has been and I feel it should remain. It truly is the heart of this county. I felt if people didn't get involved and speak up, it could slowly disappear. The County Comp Plan clearly set out a path to make sure this doesn't happen. For the past 10 years our leadership has done a good job sticking to that plan.

**CONNIE FAUBER**  
Retired Educator  
Toms Brook



As a retired educator who has been actively involved in education my entire adult life, I believe the most important element to safeguarding Shenandoah County's rural heritage while preparing its citizens for the future is to provide a strong forward thinking educational system to all. Education is not only the gateway to a strong future for Shenandoah County, it is the protector of what is good within our past and I encourage future leadership to make it a top priority.



## Editorial Good Progress Toward Community's Vision

*"Wherever the people are well informed they can be trusted with their own government,"*  
Thomas Jefferson, 1789.

This thoughtful quotation from our nation's third President came to mind as I reviewed the good news in Shenandoah Forum's analysis of how far Shenandoah County has advanced the community vision in the past 10 years.

Our local government made good progress toward preserving our rural lands and six historic towns, supporting traditional economic sectors like agriculture and tourism, and providing efficient public services at the second lowest tax rate in the region. While some citizens may not be happy with every action or decision by the Board of Supervisors or County staff, the record shows sustained, consistent and successful leadership toward our broadly-shared goals for Shenandoah County.

Engaged and active citizens made this progress possible. Residents contributed time and ideas throughout the creation of the Shenandoah County 2025 Vision Statement and Comprehensive Land Use Plan, adopted in 2005.

Members of a Citizens Advisory Committee met yearly thereafter to track the ways County actions advanced the goals of the vision and plan. Shenandoah Forum members participated in every step of this work, providing well-researched information to residents on the issues we face together.

Thomas Jefferson described an ideal – engaged citizens participating in a responsive government. We are proud that in Shenandoah County, our residents and public servants can clearly see the fruits of their lasting commitment to work together to secure the future for our prosperous rural community.

**Seth Coffman**  
Shenandoah Forum Board Chairman



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**Shenandoah Forum**  
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Shenandoah Forum fosters informed dialogue on issues of growth and development in Shenandoah County through public education and outreach to County residents.

### Shenandoah Forum Board & Staff

Seth Coffman, Edinburg <i>Chairman</i>	Dee Hockman, Fishers Hill	Rosemary Wallinger, Mount Jackson
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Joan Comanor, Woodstock	Randy Phillips, Mount Jackson	
Alan Hawkins, Mount Jackson	Debbie Sinclair, Mount Jackson	

# MARKING 10 YEARS OF CITIZEN INPUT AND PARTICIPATION

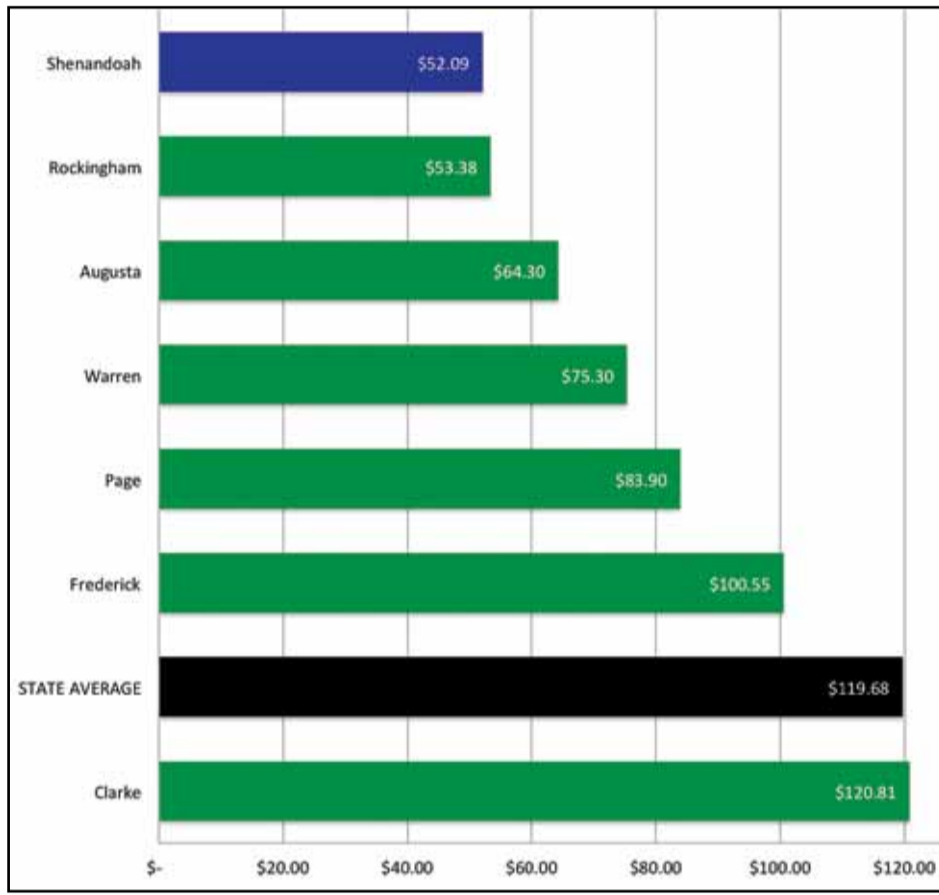
# Impact



## County Finances Most Conservative in the Region

Shenandoah County residents have among the lowest tax burdens and most conservative levels of government spending in the region, according to data provided by 7 local governments.

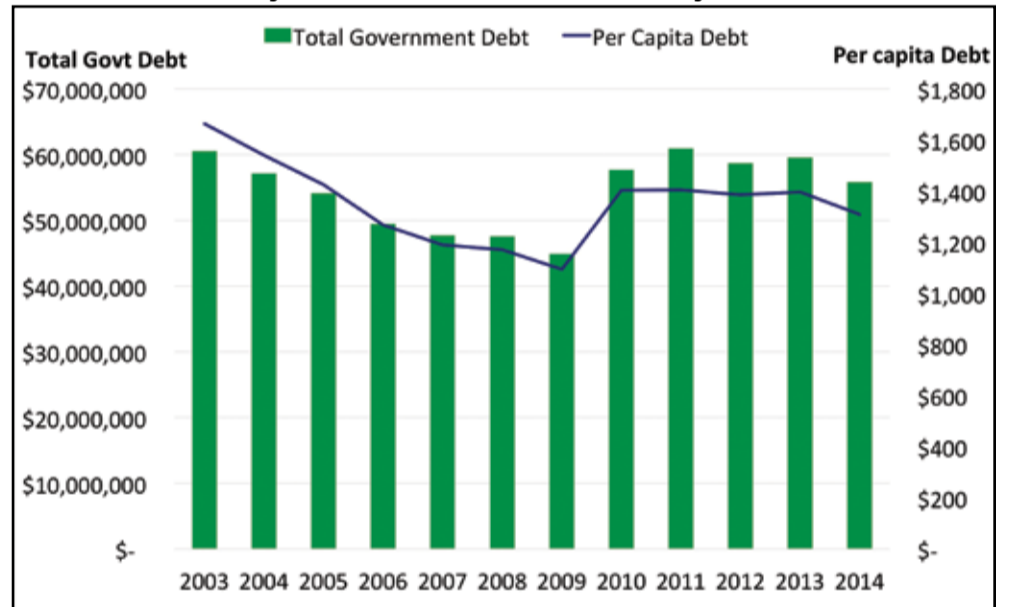
Per Capita Operating Costs - General Government Administration



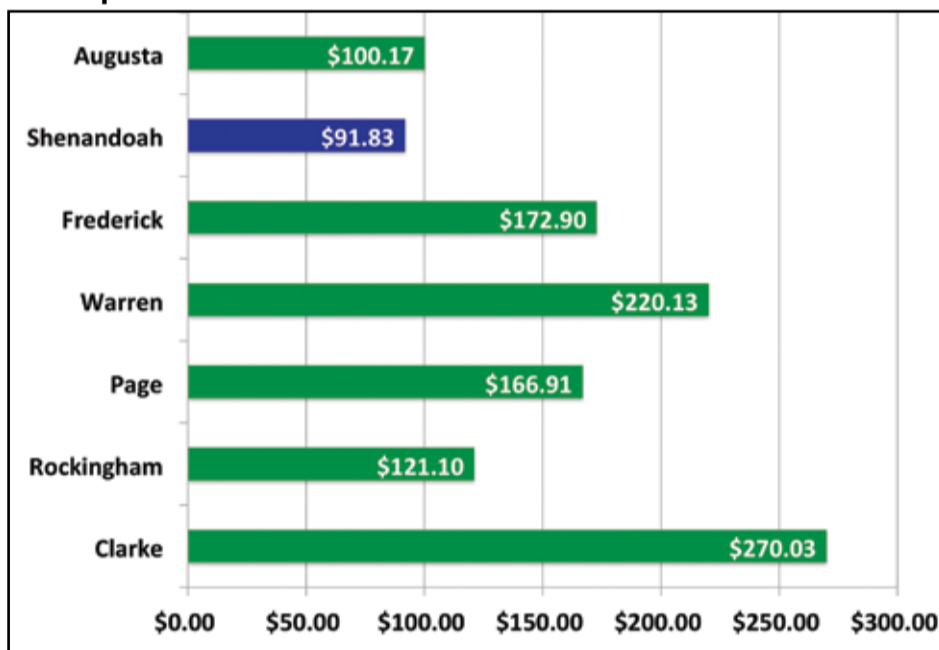
2015 Real Estate Tax Rate



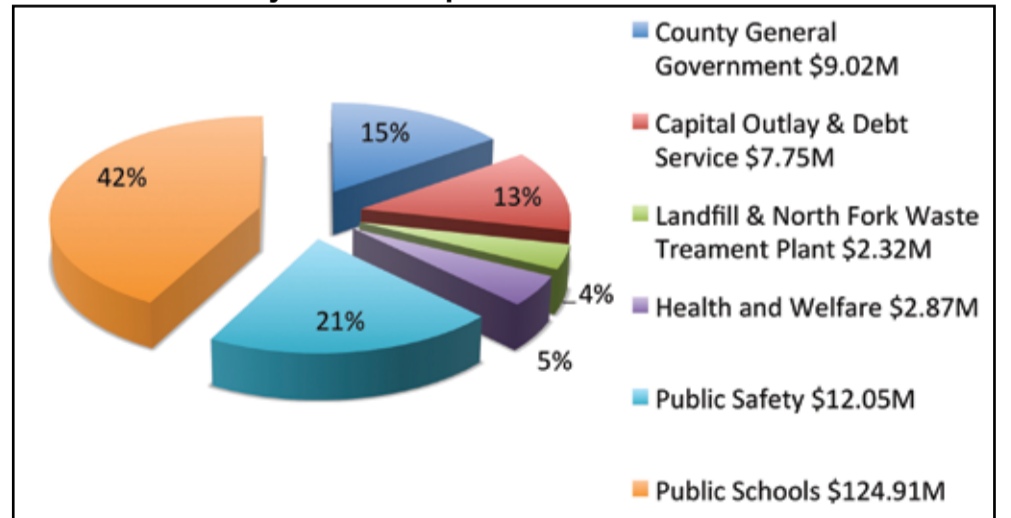
Shenandoah County - 10 Year Debt Service History



Per Capita School Debt Service - FY2014-15



Shenandoah County FY2015 Expenses



**READ MORE:**  
**County Progress Toward Vision & Goals**

Posted Online: [www.ShenandoahForum.org](http://www.ShenandoahForum.org)

Shenandoah Forum has posted a more detailed analysis online about the ways the Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors has made progress toward the community's 2025 vision. Learn more about how specific County actions, funding and policies over the past 10 years helped to realize different aspects of the eight goals outlined in the County Comprehensive Plan.

Annual Tax Assessment Based on Estimate Home Value(s)

Locality	Rate	\$150,000	\$250,000	\$350,000
Clarke	\$0.66	\$983	\$1,638	\$2,293
Rockingham	\$0.64	\$960	\$1,600	\$2,240
Page	\$0.64	\$960	\$1,600	\$2,240
Warren	\$0.61	\$915	\$1,525	\$2,135
Frederick	\$0.59	\$878	\$1,463	\$2,048
Shenandoah	\$0.57	\$855	\$1,425	\$1,995
Augusta	\$0.56	\$840	\$1,400	\$1,960

Source: Shenandoah County Budgetary Statistics for Fiscal Year 2015, Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ending in June 30, 2014.







# Rural Myths Rural Facts

## Setting the Record Straight in Shenandoah County

Urban myths are notorious for their inexplicable content and the speed by which they spread: alligators in the sewers, Elvis sightings and free airline tickets at the end of a maze of internet links. Conversations that start with "I heard that ..." spread faster than chickenpox used to spread through the third grade.

Shenandoah County currently is experiencing a rural myth outbreak. In statements by political candidates, speeches at civic meetings and personal reports submitted as "data" to county government, incomplete and inconsistent information is being presented as reliable fact.

**Shenandoah Forum aims to set the record straight on some persistent rural myths.**

<p><b>MYTH</b> County spending is out of control.</p>		<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p>Shenandoah County has the <b>lowest rate of growth in government spending</b> in the region and even managed to lower its debt service nearly every year since 2003. For six years through the recession the county did not raise taxes and our operating costs for general government administration are less than half of the statewide average and lowest in the region.</p>
<p><b>MYTH</b> Home and landowners are being taxed off our property.</p>		<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p>Shenandoah County can claim the <b>second lowest tax rate</b> among 7 localities in the region, at 57 cents per \$100 in 2015 and average annual wages are now over \$32K, the highest average annual wage on record.</p>
<p><b>MYTH</b> We can't afford to protect farmland.</p>		<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p>We can't afford not to! According to the Farmland Information Center, <b>working and open land requires far less in public services</b>, just \$0.35 for every \$1 in taxes collected, compared to the \$1.16 per \$1 for the schools, roads, EMS and other services needed to serve residential development. Farmland also contributes to two of the county's largest economic sectors, agriculture and tourism, and is essential to our high quality of life.</p>
<p><b>MYTH</b> Shenandoah County mismanages school funds.</p>		<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p>The vast majority of the <b>school system expenditures go towards instruction</b>. In the 2014-15 budget, 78% of the schools' spending was for instruction. Instruction includes not only the 7 hours a day teachers are in the classroom with our students but classroom materials and time for creating lesson plans, implementing programs and communicating with parents. The school system has received clean financial audits for the past 15 years.</p>
<p><b>MYTH</b> Our local economy is failing.</p>		<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p>Not so! Since the end of the recession, Shenandoah County's <b>unemployment rate has decreased</b> at a faster rate than the state and national averages. Recent expansions at Route 11 Chips, Mercury Paper, Andros Foods and Shenandoah Memorial Hospital reflect much optimism about the county economy bringing more than 250 jobs and almost \$117M of capital investment to the county in the last 2 years.</p>
<p><b>MYTH</b> Participating in the regional jail was unnecessary and a financial boondoggle.</p>		<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p>Keeping the local jail was not a feasible option. It was antiquated, in poor condition and failing current state standards. Because of the <b>significant savings in operating costs</b>, localities across Virginia are opting to participate in regional jail facilities instead of upgrading local jails. Counties in our region that have made this cost-saving decision are Augusta, Clarke, Frederick, Rappahannock, Rockingham and Warren; and Page is currently considering it.</p>



**SUPPORT  
SHENANDOAH  
FORUM!**



Enclosed is my \$35 tax-deductible\* gift to join Shenandoah Forum and support compatible growth and development in Shenandoah County.

Please notify me of important local issues that affect our community.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address/PO Box: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel. (Home/Work) \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to: **Shenandoah Forum, P.O. Box 654, Woodstock, VA 22664** or see our website at **www.ShenandoahForum.org** to donate online.

**Contact us:**  
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\*Shenandoah Forum is recognized by the IRS as a non-profit charitable organization. Gifts are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

**HONORING 10 YEARS OF STEADY LEADERSHIP**