CHAPTER 5 – REGIONAL ECONOMY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will share trends and factors, both qualitative and quantitative, related to the regional economy, economic development, and tourism, relative to Bowling Green, based on information from the U.S. Census, the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, and state-specific economic development efforts from the Virginia Department of Community Development and Housing. All these factors weave into one of the most important aspects of the town's comprehensive plan.

This chapter will present data on state, regional, and local taxes, employment, and other pertinent economic data to the Town of Bowling Green. In 2025, the George Washington Regional Commission adopted the first Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for our region, which includes Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and the City of Fredericksburg; where appropriate, this chapter includes charts directly from the report, as it most accurately captures the regional information for this chapter. This chapter presents data on cases where Bowling Green data was unavailable; information for the County, the GWRC area, and the State has also been presented. In cases where data for Bowling Green were not available, information for the County, the GWRC area, and the State has been presented.

REGIONAL ECONOMY

Labor Force Growth

Caroline County's labor force grew by 739 persons (or 4.5%) between the 2016–2020 and 2020–2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, reaching approximately 17,340 persons. Over the same period, the labor force in the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) region — comprising Fredericksburg city and Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford Counties — increased by over 15,400 persons, or nearly 7.8%, reaching approximately 213,565 persons. Growth was concentrated in Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties (each up roughly 9–10%), while Fredericksburg city's labor force declined slightly (−1.3%) and Caroline County grew more modestly than the regional average.

Table 5-2: Labor Force Growth by Jurisdiction, ACS 5-Year Estimates

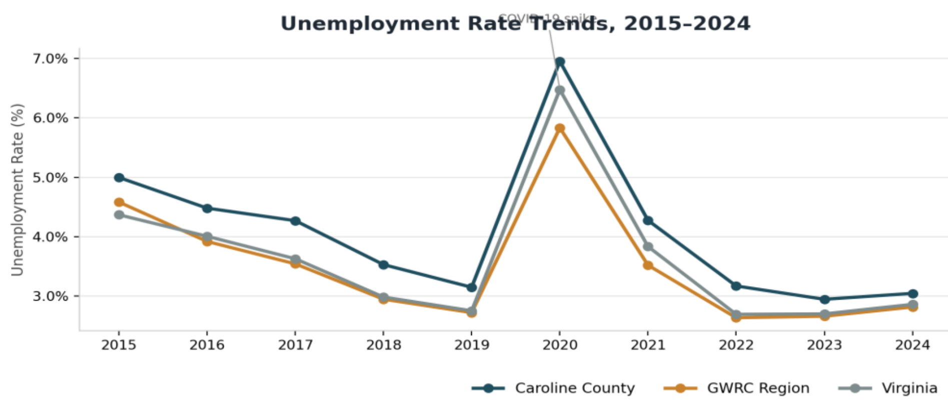
Jurisdiction	2016–2020	2020–2024	Change	% Change
Caroline County	16,601	17,340	+739	+4.5%
King George County	14,149	14,651	+502	+3.5%
Spotsylvania County	71,156	78,130	+6,974	+9.8%
Stafford County	79,867	87,270	+7,403	+9.3%
Fredericksburg city	16,393	16,174	−219	−1.3%
GWRC Region Total	**198,166**	**213,565**	**+15,399**	**+7.8%**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Table DP03, Selected Economic Characteristics — 2016–2020 5-Year Estimates and 2020–2024 5-Year Estimates. "In labor force" (population 16 years and over).

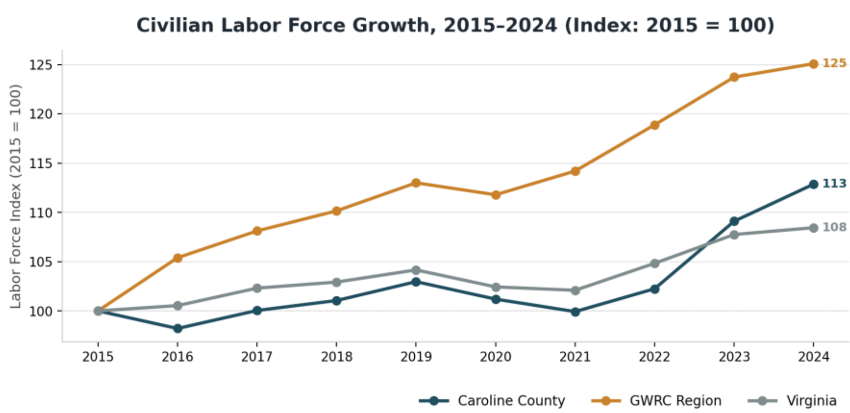
Note on scope: These two ACS 5-year releases provide a start-and-end comparison only; annual or intra-period detail (e.g., which years within each window drove the change) is not available at this geography and survey

Historical Labor Force and Unemployment Trends

This section updates Table 5-2 (originally reporting 1992–2001 trends) with annual average data for 2015–2024, sourced exclusively from the Virginia Employment Commission's Virginia Works Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program. Caroline County's labor force grew from 14,772 in 2015 to 16,672 in 2024 (+12.9%), tracking below the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) region's growth of 25.1% (171,077 to 213,995) and roughly in line with Virginia's statewide growth of 8.4% (4,228,925 to 4,585,889). All three geographies show the same pattern: a sharp unemployment spike in 2020 tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a steady recovery to historically low unemployment rates (2.8–3.0%) by 2023–2024.



Source: Virginia Employment Commission / Virginia Works, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Annual Averages, 2015–2024.



Source: Virginia Employment Commission / Virginia Works, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Annual Averages, 2015–2024.

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Table 5-2: Labor Force and Unemployment Trends, 2015–2024

GWRC Region = Fredericksburg City and Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford Counties, summed.

Civilian Labor Force, 2015–2024			
Year	Caroline County	GWRC Region	Virginia
2015	14,772	171,077	4,228,925
2016	14,508	180,307	4,251,547
2017	14,778	184,955	4,326,572
2018	14,927	188,440	4,352,476
2019	15,210	193,309	4,404,770
2020	14,948	191,234	4,331,863
2021	14,761	195,360	4,317,236
2022	15,104	203,388	4,433,157
2023	16,116	211,663	4,556,792
2024	16,672	213,995	4,585,889

Employment, 2015–2024			
Year	Caroline County	GWRC Region	Virginia
2015	14,034	163,238	4,044,182
2016	13,858	173,239	4,081,193
2017	14,147	178,402	4,169,566
2018	14,400	182,884	4,222,550
2019	14,731	188,046	4,283,479
2020	13,909	180,081	4,051,412
2021	14,130	188,482	4,151,669
2022	14,625	198,025	4,313,707
2023	15,641	206,028	4,433,694
2024	16,164	207,965	4,454,619

Unemployment Rate, 2015–2024			
Year	Caroline County	GWRC Region	Virginia
2015	5.0%	4.6%	4.4%

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2016	4.5%	3.9%	4.0%
2017	4.3%	3.5%	3.6%
2018	3.5%	2.9%	3.0%
2019	3.1%	2.7%	2.8%
2020	7.0%	5.8%	6.5%
2021	4.3%	3.5%	3.8%
2022	3.2%	2.6%	2.7%
2023	2.9%	2.7%	2.7%
2024	3.0%	2.8%	2.9%

Source: Virginia Employment Commission / Virginia Works, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Annual Averages (Period M13), 2015–2024.

Unemployment rates in Caroline County throughout the period from 2015-2024 have exceeded those of both the GWRC region and the State each year. While unemployment has ranged from a low of 2.9% (in 2023) to a high of 7% (in 2020) in Caroline, the highest rate in the GWRC region over this period was 7.0% in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment rates in Virginia did fluctuate to a similar degree, ranging from a high of 6.54% in 2020 to a low of 2.7

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Employment

The following table presents employment by type in Bowling Green, Caroline County, and the State of Virginia according to the most recent Census. The largest employment category in Bowling Green and Virginia was management, professional, and related, while the largest category for Caroline was sales and office occupations.

Employment by Occupation Type

This section updates Table 5-3 from the 2000 U.S. Census with the most recent comparable American Community Survey (ACS) estimates for Bowling Green, Caroline County, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Table 5-3: Employment by Occupation Type, ACS 2019–2023 5-Year Estimates

	Bowling Green		Caroline County		Virginia	
Occupation	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Management, business, science & arts	194	34.2%	6,091	38.3%	2,031,791	48.3%
Service	159	28.0%	2,213	13.9%	646,999	15.4%
Sales & office	96	16.9%	3,511	22.1%	768,138	18.3%
Natural resources, construction & maintenance	80	14.1%	2,007	12.6%	315,036	7.5%
Production, transportation & material moving	39	6.9%	2,086	13.1%	444,458	10.6%
Total civilian employed (16+)	**568**	**100%**	**15,908**	**100%**	**4,206,422**	**100%**

Sources: Bowling Green town — U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2019–2023 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03. Caroline County — U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2020–2024 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03. Virginia — ACS-based statewide totals.

Note on category changes: The Census Bureau retired the six-category occupation scheme used in 2000 in favor of a five-category ACS scheme. "Farming, fishing, and forestry" is now folded into "Natural resources, construction, and maintenance" rather than reported separately, so 2000 and current figures are not perfectly comparable row-for-row.

Note on vintage: Bowling Green and Caroline County figures are drawn from different (though overlapping) 5-year ACS windows — 2019–2023 and 2020–2024, respectively — because that was the most recent Table DP03 release available for each geography at the time of pull.

Caroline County's labor force grew by 739 persons (or 4.5%) between the 2016–2020 and 2020–2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, reaching approximately 17,340 persons. Over the same period, the labor force in the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) region — comprising the City of Fredericksburg and Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford Counties — increased by more than 15,400 persons, or nearly 7.8%, to approximately 213,565 persons. Growth was concentrated in Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties (each up roughly 9–10%), while the labor force in Fredericksburg declined slightly (−1.3%) and Caroline County grew more modestly than the regional average.

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Household Income and Poverty Status

The median household income in Bowling Green, according to the most recent U.S. Census data, was lower than that of each jurisdiction in the GWRC region and the State overall. The proximity of several jurisdictions to major employment centers, as well as the number of persons of retirement age in Bowling Green, undoubtedly play a role in the disparity in income levels.

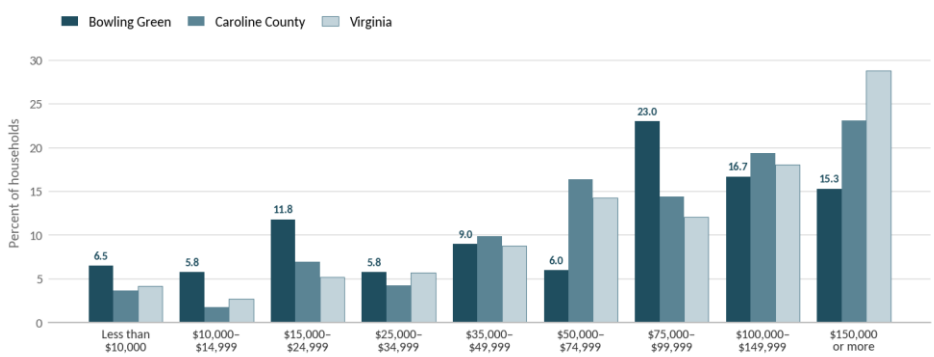
Table 5-4: Median Household Income, 2024

Locality	Median Household Income
Bowling Green	$62,000
Caroline	$78,000
King George	$98,000
Spotsylvania	$95,000
Stafford	$112,000
Fredericksburg	$68,000
Virginia	$89,500

Source: 2024 U.S. Census

Exhibit 5-5: Household Income by Income Range, 2020–2024

Distribution of households by income range — percent of all households



Income Range	Bowling Green HHs	Bowling Green %	Caroline County HHs	Caroline County %	Virginia HHs	Virginia %
Less than $10,000	38	**6.5%**	444	3.7%	141,361	4.2%
$10,000 to $14,999	34	**5.8%**	216	1.8%	90,875	2.7%
$15,000 to $24,999	69	**11.8%**	839	7.0%	175,018	5.2%
$25,000 to $34,999	34	**5.8%**	515	4.3%	191,847	5.7%
$35,000 to $49,999	53	**9.0%**	1,187	9.9%	296,184	8.8%
$50,000 to $74,999	35	**6.0%**	1,966	16.4%	481,300	14.3%
$75,000 to $99,999	135	**23.0%**	1,726	14.4%	407,254	12.1%
$100,000 to $149,999	98	**16.7%**	2,326	19.4%	609,197	18.1%
$150,000 or more	90	**15.3%**	2,769	23.1%	969,331	28.8%
Total households	**586**	**100%**	**11,988**	**100%**	**3,365,732**	**100%**

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Median household income	**$82,500**	**$87,407**	**$93,170**

Trend Analysis

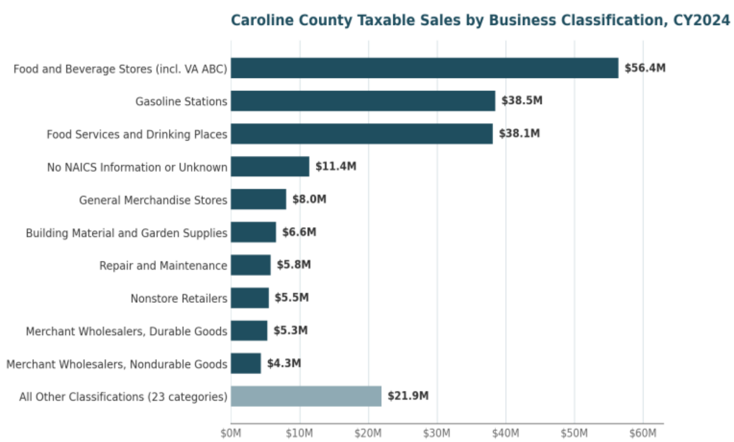
The Town's income profile has shifted markedly upward since the 2000 Census (Table 5-54). In 2000, 39.9 percent of Bowling Green households earned less than $25,000 and only 10.0 percent earned $100,000 or more; in the 2020–2024 period, those shares are 24.1 percent and 32.0 percent, respectively, and the median household income has risen from $32,250 to $82,500. Even so, the Town's median continues to trail Caroline County ($87,407) and Virginia ($93,170), and the local distribution remains wider at both ends than the County's: nearly one in four Town households (24.1%) earns under $25,000 — roughly double the County share (12.5%) — while the Town's largest single cohort, 23.0 percent of households, falls in the $75,000–$99,999 range. The Town also lags in the top bracket, with 15.3 percent of households at $150,000 or more versus 23.1 percent countywide and 28.8 percent statewide, consistent with the Town's role as a modestly priced county seat within a higher-earning commuter region.

Because the Town sample covers only 586 households, small-area estimates carry wide margins of error (±$20,288 on the Town median) and individual ranges should be read as indicative rather than precise. Dollar figures are expressed in 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars; the 2000 median of $32,250 equates to roughly $59,000 in 2024 dollars, indicating real — not merely nominal — income growth.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1901 (Income in the Past 12 Months, in 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars). Household counts derived from published percentage distributions and rounded; the $150,000-or-more range combines the ACS $150,000–$199,999 and $200,000-or-more categories for comparability with Table 5-54. Comparative 2000 figures: 2000 U.S. Census.

Taxable Sales

Exhibit 5-6: Caroline County Taxable Sales by Business Classification, Calendar Year 2024



Business Classification	NAICS	Dealers	Taxable Sales ($)	Share
Food and Beverage Stores (incl. VA ABC)	445	24	56,444,721	28.0%
Gasoline Stations	447	9	38,508,587	19.1%
Food Services and Drinking Places	722	70	38,127,722	18.9%
No NAICS Information or Unknown	000	48	11,395,880	5.6%
General Merchandise Stores	452	8	8,029,647	4.0%

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Business Classification	NAICS	Dealers	Taxable Sales ($)	Share
Building Material and Garden Supplies	444	7	6,576,559	3.3%
Repair and Maintenance	811	28	5,762,111	2.9%
Non-store Retailers	454	42	5,477,706	2.7%
Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	423	34	5,307,245	2.6%
Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	424	22	4,328,476	2.1%
All Other Classifications (23 categories)	—	283	21,920,924	10.9%
Caroline County Classified Total		**575**	**201,879,578**	**100%**

Source: Virginia Department of Taxation, Taxable Sales by Business Classification (NAICS), Caroline County, CY2024, per sales tax deposits made February 1, 2024–January 31, 2025. Ten largest classifications shown individually; the remaining 23 are aggregated. Shares reflect the classified county total of $201,879,577.53.

Taxable sales in Caroline County totaled $201.9 million across 575 classified dealers in calendar year 2024, with an additional $18.2 million in miscellaneous and unidentifiable sales bringing the countywide total to $220.1 million among 655 dealers. The sales tax base is heavily concentrated in everyday consumption and highway-oriented commerce: Food and Beverage Stores ($56.4 million), Gasoline Stations ($38.5 million), and Food Services and Drinking Places ($38.1 million) together generate $133.1 million, or roughly two-thirds of all classified taxable sales in the county.

This composition carries two implications for the Town. First, the county's taxable sales base aligns closely with the categories from which Bowling Green draws its own meals, sales, and lodging tax revenues, tying the Town's revenue outlook to the same consumption and travel-oriented spending along the U.S. Route 301 and Interstate 95 corridors. Second, Food Services and Drinking Places counts 70 dealers — the largest of any classification — underscoring dining as both a fiscal anchor and an economic development opportunity for the Town's downtown.

Although taxable sales information is not available for businesses located only in Bowling Green, historic data for Caroline County is helpful when reviewing economic trends in the immediate area.

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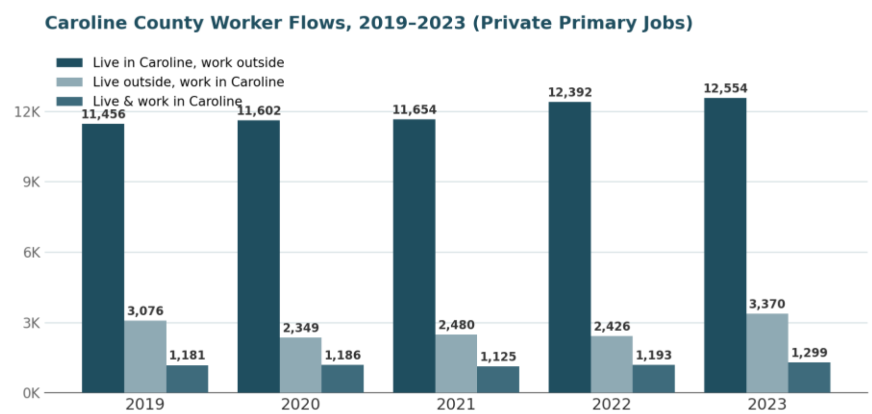
Commuting Patterns

Although commuting patterns are not provided for the town itself, Caroline County's commuting patterns can be used to gauge overall trends in the local area.

Exhibit 5-7: Caroline County Commuting Patterns, 2019–2023



Year	Resident Workers	Commute Out of County	% Commuting Out	Jobs in County	Filled by In-Commuters	Live & Work in County
2019	12,637	11,456	90.7%	4,257	3,076	1,181
2020	12,788	11,602	90.7%	3,535	2,349	1,186
2021	12,779	11,654	91.2%	3,605	2,480	1,125
2022	13,585	12,392	91.2%	3,619	2,426	1,193
2023	13,853	12,554	90.6%	4,669	3,370	1,299

Commuting Pattern Analysis

Caroline County is a pronounced net exporter of workers, and that pattern has been remarkably stable across the five-year period. In each year from 2019 through 2023, roughly 91 percent of the county's employed residents commuted to private-sector jobs outside the county, while only about 1,100 to 1,300 residents both lived and worked within Caroline. The county's resident workforce grew 9.6 percent over the period, from 12,637 to 13,853, confirming the county's role — identified in the GWRC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy — as the region's affordability-driven growth locality: new households are arriving faster than new local jobs, and the daily out-commute grew by nearly 1,100 workers over five years. Caroline's out-commute share is far more pronounced than the 57.6 percent regional rate reported in the CEDS for Planning District 16 as a whole.

Two trends within the data warrant attention. First, local private employment fell sharply during the pandemic (from 4,257 jobs in 2019 to 3,535 in 2020) and did not recover until 2023, when jobs rebounded to 4,669 — a five-year high — accompanied by a rebound of in-commuters to 3,370, signaling renewed strength in the county's own employment base. Second, the out-commuting workforce is increasingly well-compensated: the share of out-commuters earning more than $3,333 per month rose from 45.7 percent in 2019 to 58.2 percent in 2023. For Bowling Green, these patterns represent both a challenge and an opportunity: a large, rising-income commuter population passes through the U.S. Route 301 corridor daily, supporting the meals, fuel, and convenience retail base documented in this chapter.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES 8.4), Inflow/Outflow Analysis for Caroline County, VA, private primary jobs, 2019–2023 (analysis generated July 2026). Figures exclude federal, state, and local government employment, including Fort Walker and public-sector employers, and therefore understate total local employment. Regional comparison from the GWRC 2026–2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Planning District 16.

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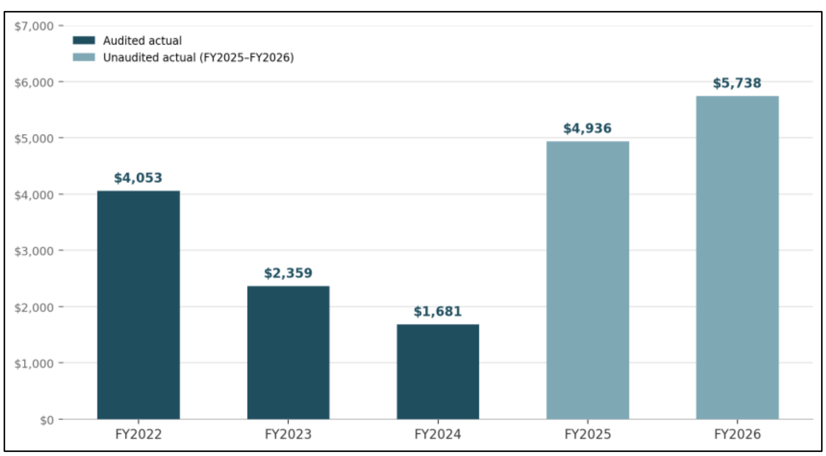
LOCAL ECONOMY

Exhibit 5-8: Local Meals Tax Revenue Trend, FY2021–FY2026

Fiscal Year	Meals Tax Actual	YoY Growth
FY2021	$272,382	+21.5%
FY2022	$311,725	+14.4%
FY2023	$351,328	+12.7%
FY2024	$387,079	+10.2%
FY2025	$377,421	−2.5%
FY2026	$479,234	+27.0%

The last five complete fiscal years (FY21–FY26) range from $311,725 to $479,234 — about 53.7% total growth, or roughly 11.4% compounded annually. On the FY26 number: the headline +27% includes the 6% to 7% rate change. Adjusting to an equivalent 6% basis, FY26 collections work out to be about $410,800 — so underlying gross receipts grew roughly +8.8% over FY2025. This means the FY25 dip was fully reversed on receipts alone, and the rate increase added about $68,400 over the year, representing a strong base for tourism and collections efforts by the town administration.

Exhibit 5-9: Transient Occupancy Tax Revenue Trend, FY2022–FY2026



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Fiscal Year	Adopted Budget	Actual	YoY Growth	Source
FY2022	n/a	$4,053	—	*FY2022 Annual Financial Report*
FY2023	n/a	$2,359	−41.8%	*FY2023 Annual Financial Report*
FY2024	$3,000	$1,681	−28.7%	*FY2027 Adopted Budget*
FY2025	$3,000	$4,936 *	+193.6%	*FY2027 Adopted Budget*
FY2026	$3,000	$5,738 *	+16.2%	*FY2027 Adopted Budget*

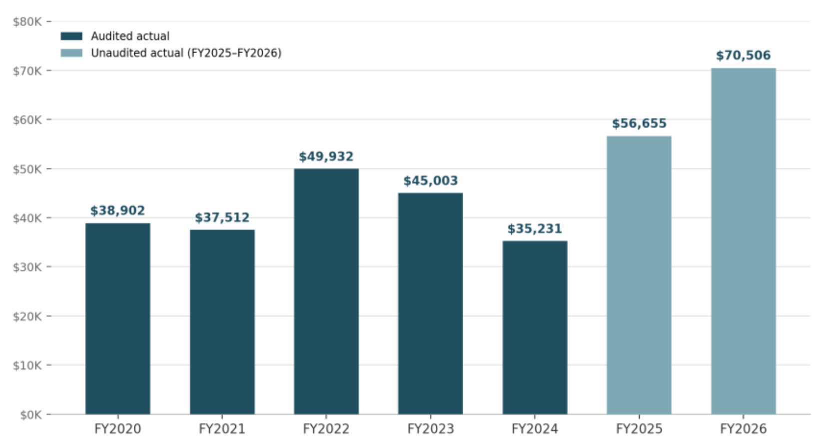
Trend Analysis

Transient occupancy tax collections grew from $4,053 in FY2022 to $5,738 in FY2026 — an increase of 41.6 percent over the five-year period — but the path was far from linear. Collections fell to $2,359 in FY2023 and bottomed out at $1,681 in FY2024 before nearly tripling in FY2025 and continuing upward in FY2026. FY2026 collections finished at nearly double the $3,000 adopted budget, and the FY2027 Adopted Budget anticipates continued growth at $6,000.

The transient occupancy tax is levied directly by the Town on overnight lodging within Town limits, making it — like the meals tax — a direct indicator of local visitor activity rather than a countywide distribution. Given the Town's small lodging base, however, the dollar amounts are modest, and year-to-year percentage swings can reflect the opening, closure, or reporting timing of a single establishment as much as underlying visitation trends. The recent recovery is nonetheless a positive signal for tourism-related activity, consistent with the sustained growth in meals tax collections over the same period and supports continued investment in events and visitor-oriented programming.

** FY2025 and FY2026 actuals unaudited, as reported in the FY2027 Adopted Budget. Sources: Town of Bowling Green Annual Financial Reports, FY2022–FY2023 (Exhibit 2, Lodging Tax); Town of Bowling Green FY2027 Adopted Budget (FY2024–FY2026 actuals and adopted figures). Prepared July 2026.*

Exhibit 5-10: Local Sales & Use Tax Revenue Trend, FY2020–FY2026



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Fiscal Year	Adopted Budget	Actual	YoY Growth	Source
FY2020	$30,000	$38,902	—	*FY2020 Annual Financial Report*
FY2021	n/a	$37,512	−3.6%	*FY2021 Annual Financial Report*
FY2022	n/a	$49,932	+33.1%	*FY2022 Annual Financial Report*
FY2023	n/a	$45,003	−9.9%	*FY2023 Annual Financial Report*
FY2024	$35,000	$35,231	−21.7%	*FY2027 Adopted Budget*
FY2025	$45,000	$56,655 *	+60.8%	*FY2027 Adopted Budget*
FY2026	$52,050	$70,506 *	+24.4%	*FY2027 Adopted Budget*

Trend Analysis

Local sales and use tax receipts grew from $38,902 in FY2020 to $70,506 in FY2026 — an increase of 81.2 percent over the seven-year period, a compound annual growth rate of approximately 10.4 percent. The path has been notably more volatile than meals tax collections: receipts declined in FY2021, FY2023, and sharply in FY2024 (−21.7 percent) before rebounding strongly in FY2025 (+60.8 percent) and FY2026 (+24.4 percent). FY2026 collections exceeded the $52,050 adopted budget by roughly 35 percent, and the FY2027 Adopted Budget anticipates continued growth at $80,000.

Unlike the meals tax, the Town does not levy its own sales tax. The combined rate within Bowling Green is 5.3 percent (4.3 percent state, 1.0 percent local option); the local option share is collected by the Commonwealth, distributed to Caroline County, and apportioned to the Town. Year-to-year swings therefore reflect countywide taxable sales, distribution timing, and the demographic apportionment as well as in-Town retail activity, and this exhibit is best read alongside the meals tax exhibit as a complementary indicator of local commercial vitality.

** FY2025 and FY2026 actuals unaudited, as reported in the FY2027 Adopted Budget. Sources: Town of Bowling Green Annual Financial Reports, FY2020–FY2023 (Exhibit 2 / Schedule 1); Town of Bowling Green FY2027 Adopted Budget (FY2024–FY2026 actuals and adopted figures). Prepared July 2026.*

Exhibit 5-11: Business, Professional & Occupational License (BPOL) Tax Revenue Trend, FY2020–FY2026

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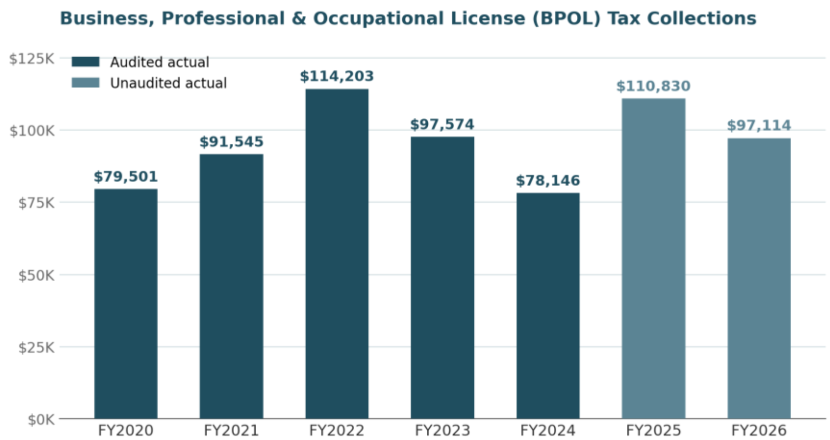

Fiscal Year	BPOL Tax Collections	YoY Change	Source
FY2020	$79,501	—	*FY2020 Annual Financial Report, Schedule 1*
FY2021	$91,545	+15.1%	*FY2021 Annual Financial Report, Exhibit 2*
FY2022	$114,203	+24.7%	*FY2022 Annual Financial Report, Exhibit 2*
FY2023	$97,574	−14.6%	*FY2023 Annual Financial Report, Exhibit 2*
FY2024	$78,146	−19.9%	*FY2024 Annual Financial Report*
FY2025	$110,830	+41.8%	*Unaudited actuals*
FY2026	$97,114	−12.4%	*Unaudited actuals*

Trend Analysis

Business, Professional & Occupational License (BPOL) tax collections have ranged from $78,146 to $114,203 over the seven-year period, ending FY2026 at an unaudited $97,114 — approximately 22 percent above the pre-pandemic FY2020 base of $79,501. Because BPOL is levied on the prior calendar year's gross receipts, each fiscal year's collections lag underlying business activity: the FY2022 peak reflects the surge in local gross receipts during calendar 2020–2021, the FY2024 trough of $78,146 reflects the post-stimulus normalization in calendar 2022–2023 receipts, and the FY2025 rebound to $110,830 signals renewed growth in the Town's commercial gross-receipts base.

BPOL is the most variable of the Town's major local tax revenues, with year-over-year swings ranging from a 19.9 percent decline (FY2024) to a 41.8 percent gain (FY2025) across this period. This volatility is structural rather than a sign of instability in the business community, and the revenue is best evaluated against its multi-year average of approximately $95,600 rather than any single year. The FY2026 collection of $97,114 sits within two percent of that average, and every year in the series has remained within a band of roughly $78,000 to $114,000, indicating a durable commercial base in the Town's downtown and Route 301 corridor that supports conservative budgeting near the multi-year average.

Sources: Town of Bowling Green Annual Financial Reports, FY2020–FY2024 (Davis & Associates, PC), Statement of Activities (Exhibit 2) and General Fund budget-to-actual schedule (Schedule 1). FY2025 ($110,830) and FY2026 ($97,113.68) figures are unaudited actuals per Town Treasurer's records and are subject to change upon completion of the respective annual audits.

Tourism

In 2024, the Town of Bowling Green was recognized as an exploring Main Street America community and in 2025, recognized as a mobilizing Main Street America community. Over the last two years, the Bowling Green

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Virginia (BGVA Main Street) Main Street nonprofit and the Town of Bowling Green have partnered to focus intentionally on the Main Street America model for revitalization and on tourism in Bowling Green.

As part of these efforts, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development has assisted the town with transformation strategies related to tourism since 2024. Most notably, BGVA Main Street led efforts in 2024 to conduct a community survey based on the best practices of the Main Street America model, in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. Some of the results of the community survey and transformational strategy are included throughout this section.

Exhibit 5-12: Main Street Business District — Community Perspective & Transformation Strategies

Community Perspective

Bowling Green's Main Street planning effort was grounded in an exceptional level of community engagement. A district-wide survey drew **409 participants** — residents, visitors, business owners, and property owners — providing both quantitative data and hundreds of open-ended responses. The results reveal a community deeply embedded and emotionally invested in the district's future: **55%** of respondents have lived in Bowling Green for more than a decade, and **75%** visit Main Street weekly or monthly. With **92%** arriving by car — most within a 5–15-minute drive — the district benefits from a strong, built-in base of local and near-local customers who interact with Main Street as part of daily life.

2026 MAIN STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT COMMUNITY SURVEY — KEY FINDINGS	
409	survey participants — residents, visitors, business & property owners
55%	of respondents have lived in Bowling Green more than 10 years
75%	visit the Main Street district weekly or monthly
92%	arrive by car, most within a 5–15-minute drive
"Quaint" × 56	the most frequent open-ended descriptor of the district

The community's sense of identity emerged with striking consistency. **"Quaint" was the single most common descriptor**, appearing 56 times in open-ended responses, reinforced by themes of friendliness, small-town charm, coziness, and a distinctive local business culture. Residents expressed pride in the district's walkability and heritage character. At the same time, they identified clear gaps: the current business mix does not meet everyday needs, with demand for dining, entertainment, and family-friendly activities far outpacing supply. Limited and inconsistent business hours — particularly evenings and Sundays — were a recurring frustration, alongside parking concerns and a desire for more gathering places such as parks, improved playgrounds, and casual spaces to linger.

Business owners cited challenges with customer attraction, staffing, and parking, and some located just beyond the primary block reported feeling excluded from promotional efforts. Property owners voiced strong collective interest in **façade improvements and upper-floor renovations** to enhance leasing potential while preserving historic character. Across all groups, respondents called for stronger communication about events, opportunities, and the role of the Main Street program.

Transformation Strategies

The survey's quantitative results and open-response feedback provide clear, community-driven direction for the district's emerging Transformation Strategies across the four Main Street points: Organization, Design, Economic Vitality, and Promotion.

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Organization

Successful transformation depends on a collaborative governance model built on public–academic–nonprofit partnership. The Town should strengthen cross-jurisdictional communication — particularly regarding how housing growth affects regional resources — and formalize relationships with strategic regional partners.

Design

The physical environment should bridge Bowling Green's rural heritage with modern connectivity. Priorities include enhancing the town's signature "quaint factor" through consistent façade improvements and walkable streetscapes designed to invite people to linger. Design efforts should knit new housing developments to the historic core so that growth reads as a natural extension of the town's identity rather than a disconnected addition — directly responding to residents' expressed desire for gathering places and preserved character.

Economic Vitality

The district's consumer base is shifting, with "Flourishing Families" and "Loyal Locals" driving demand for higher-quality local services. The central economic opportunity is reclaiming retail leakage: residents currently travel outside town for basic needs such as casual dining and specialty retail. Targeted business recruitment that fills "third space" gaps — , family-friendly eateries, and similar establishments — can convert the Town's high-traffic Route 301 location into a sustainable revenue engine serving both residents and regional travelers, while addressing the survey's most-cited unmet demand.

Promotion

Bowling Green's narrative should pivot toward its identity as a "connected haven" for those who value heritage and community. Marketing should leverage the area's high concentration of "Dreamers" — residents emotionally invested in the town's story — and brand the Town as a destination for authentic small-town experiences, positioning local events and boutique offerings to regional audiences seeking an alternative to more commercialized corridors. Promotional efforts should be deliberately inclusive of businesses located just outside the primary district, strengthening relationships and raising the visibility of the Main Street program itself.

Taken together, the community's direction is clear: protect and amplify what residents already treasure — the quaint, welcoming character of Main Street — while filling the gaps in dining, hours, gathering spaces, and communication that currently draw local spending and social life outside the Town.

Market Overview

According to data from 2025, Bowling Green's market profile reveals a strong and growing opportunity for Main Street revitalization, supported by rising household incomes, population increases within the 5-, 15-, and 30-minute trade areas, and a highly family-oriented demographic base. This market environment indicates significant potential for expanded business activity, increased visitor capture, and a more diversified business mix. Furthermore, Bowling Green's location near Route 301 positions the town to capitalize on cross-regional travel, creating a sustainable environment for destination-driven retail, food and beverage establishments, and experience-focused offerings that align with modern spending patterns.

Household Income & Economic Strength

The trade area shows healthy income levels, providing a strong consumer base for district businesses. Median household income rises significantly as the trade radius expands. The 15-minute drive-time market reaches a median household income of $100,150, indicating substantial purchasing power close to Bowling Green's core. The 5-minute radius, while more modest, still presents stable income levels that support local spending. These trends confirm that Bowling Green has the economic foundation to sustain additional dining, entertainment, and shopping options.

Income distribution also reflects notable upper-income representation in the broader market. Within

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the 15-minute trade area, 41.9% of households fall within the $100,000–$200,000 category, while 6.1% exceed $200,000, further strengthening conditions for destination-driven retail, food-and-beverage, and experience-focused offerings.

Population Characteristics

The area surrounding Bowling Green demonstrates stability and modest growth. Recent "population snapshot" data shows increases within the 5-, 15-, and 30-minute radii, indicating ongoing residential draw and reinforcing demand for daily-use retail and services. While precise population counts vary across the drive-time rings, survey respondents and market tables confirm that Bowling Green serves as a local activity center for families and commuters within a reasonable drive downtown.

Age and household composition data further support this pattern. Across the trade area, the dominant household type is family households (67%), with a large share of multi-person and school-aged households attracted to Bowling Green's quiet environment and small-town amenities. This family-oriented market profile directly corresponds with resident survey demand for family entertainment, youth activities, breakfast restaurants, cultural programming, improved playgrounds, and places to gather.

Psychographic & Lifestyle Segments

ESRI Tapestry segmentation data identifies Bowling Green's market as being primarily concentrated within the Loyal Locals, Flourishing Families, and Dreamers/Dream belt segments. These groups areharacterized by a deep-rooted commitment to community, a strong preference for small-town living, and value-conscious spending patterns that prioritize safe, convenient, and family-friendly experiences. Because these residents typically favor local dining, recreation, and daily-use retail—with a marked preference for authenticity—Bowling Green is uniquely positioned to leverage its historic assets to meet these demands. These psychographic insights directly reinforce the viability of the town's dual Transformation Strategies, particularly the long-term initiative to establish 'Experience Bowling Green' as a welcoming, multi-generational destination.

ESRI Tapestry Segments

ESRI Tapestry Segmentation divides U.S. neighborhoods into 67 unique market segments based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, incorporating factors such as income, education, and urbanization. This system uses GIS (Geographic Information Systems) technology to provide a detailed spatial analysis of consumer behaviors at a local level.

ESRI Tapestry Segmentation provides a detailed understanding of the consumer lifestyles, preferences, and behaviors within Bowling Green's primary trade areas. These insights help guide business recruitment, district programming, marketing strategies, and long-term economic development initiatives. The 5-, 15-, and 30-minute trade areas around Bowling Green display a strong presence of family-oriented, community-rooted, and value-driven segments. These groups are highly compatible with the district's desired identity as a welcoming, family-friendly, experience-oriented destination. Bowling Green's dominant tapestry groups show strong affinity for local businesses, authentic experiences, convenience-oriented retail, and traditional community events, while also revealing opportunities for expanded food, entertainment, and creative offerings.

Bowling Green is a community defined by pride, loyalty, and potential. Residents love their small-town character and want more opportunities to enjoy it—more restaurants, more family activities, more consistency, and more connections. Businesses share these sentiments and emphasize the need for stronger communication, better visibility, and support that helps them thrive. Market data confirms that Bowling Green sits within a healthy and growing trade area of families, young professionals, and local loyalists.

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