



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Botetourt County  
Program Title: What's Going on in BOCO  
Program Category: Community Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Gary Larrowe  
Title: County Administrator  
Signature:



## What's Going on in BOCO Community Development Planning Webpage

### **Executive Summary:**

Botetourt County is a rural county located in southwestern Virginia. The county is 548 square miles and is home to approximately 33,500 residents. In Botetourt County, we believe that development doesn't have to be a mystery. Whether it's a new business going up, a subdivision being approved, or a public infrastructure project kicking off our residents deserve to know what's happening in their own backyard.

That's why the Botetourt County Community Development Department launched "What's Going On in BOCO", a dynamic, user-friendly webpage that gives residents a bird's-eye view (literally!) of development and construction activity across the county. With an interactive map, project descriptions, and regular updates, the site brings clarity to what can often feel like confusing or opaque processes.

The project is a product of cross-departmental teamwork and a direct response to the public's desire for more accessible, transparent information. It's another building block in our broader communications strategy, one that puts residents first by making local government more open and responsive.



## The Problem We Wanted to Solve

Local development can spark a lot of questions:

- "Why are they clearing trees over there?"
- "What's being built by that intersection?"
- "Was that project ever approved?"

We heard those questions and we understood the frustration. For many residents, getting accurate answers meant combing through agendas, deciphering planning language, or waiting until something was already built. That's when our Planning Team started thinking...we needed a better way to:

- Provide clear, consistent updates on development activity
- Show both pending and approved projects in one place
- Cut through the confusion and misinformation often found on social media
- Empower residents to be informed, not just reactive

## The Approach – Smart, Simple, and Visual

Our Planning Team got to work and designed a tool that was clean, interactive, and easy to use — no jargon, no guesswork.

Here's what they built:

- A [webpage](#) featuring an interactive map with pins marking each active or approved project
- Clickable details for each pin, including project descriptions and current status
- Monthly updates to reflect progress and new activity



- Clear visuals and short explanations designed for the average resident, not just planning experts

The webpage is also linked directly from our homepage and promoted via newsletters, social media, and in-person events. We used ArcGIS Online and existing county tools to build the story map meaning no extra costs or third-party vendors.

### **Persons and Organizations Involved:**

This initiative came to life thanks to the collaboration of several county departments:

- Community Development (Planning & Zoning) – Developed the content and built the map
- GIS and Technology Services – Helped integrate the map into the county website
- Communications Team – Crafted messaging and promoted the launch across channels
- Board of Supervisors – Provided support and feedback during development

It was a true team effort rooted in a shared goal: making local government more transparent and approachable.

### **Beneficiaries of the Program:**

This project is all about access and it benefits everyone:

- Residents now have a go-to place to learn what's going on in their neighborhood — no more wondering or relying on rumors.
- Developers and business owners can see how projects are progressing around them.



- County staff and leaders get fewer misdirected calls and more informed conversations with the public.
- Newcomers and prospective residents get a clearer picture of what growth looks like in Botetourt.
- An easy way to let members of the media know what's going on as far as development in the county

Plus, by providing consistent updates and explanations, we're building trust and civic engagement, two things we can never have too much of.

### **What Makes It Special**

"What's Going On in BOCO" isn't just a map. It's a tool that:

- Demystifies development for everyday people
- Combines planning data with simple storytelling
- Uses visuals to drive engagement
- Is updated monthly, ensuring residents always have the latest info
- Can be replicated by any locality with a good planning team and a desire to communicate better

We're especially proud that Botetourt is one of the only localities in Virginia offering a resource like this. It's innovative, scalable, and built entirely in-house.



## Results – What We've Seen So Far

The map launched in Spring 2024 and was met with immediate interest.

- Since launch, the site has seen hundreds of unique visits monthly, with the average user clicking through multiple project details.
- Residents have commented that it's "about time we had something like this" and that "the map helped me understand what's happening across the county."
- Our Planning Office has reported a decrease in calls asking 'what's being built here?' — freeing up time for higher-value work.

Even more exciting, other departments are considering similar tools to highlight infrastructure, public works, or long-term planning, including our Parks & Rec team that launched "[Let's Go BOCO](#)" highlighting recreational opportunities in the county – same framework as "What's Going on in BOCO" but with a rec and adventure feel.

## Replication:

If your county has a GIS team, a website, and a passion for transparency, you can build your own version of this map. We're happy to share lessons learned, our map framework, and our outreach strategies. Whether you're a large urban center or a rural county like Botetourt, this kind of tool helps bring residents closer to their government in a way that's friendly, clear, and tech-smart.

## Conclusion:

"What's Going On in BOCO" is a natural extension of Botetourt County's ongoing work to engage,

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inform, and empower our community. It goes hand in hand with ["Getting to Know BOCO"](#), in lifting the curtain on what's happening behind the scenes and giving residents, businesses and visitors a more transparent look at what's happening in our community. By giving residents a front-row seat to local development and updating them regularly, we're not just sharing information; we're building relationships. We're making local government visible, accountable, and real.

In a time when rumors travel fast and trust is earned slowly, we're proud to be leading the way — one map pin at a time. Find out more at [www.botetourtva.gov/whatsgoingoninboco](http://www.botetourtva.gov/whatsgoingoninboco)