

1. Introduction

It has been over ten years since the City of Morgantown updated its Comprehensive Plan. Adopted in January 1999, that Plan successfully guided the City on a variety of physical and quality of life issues. However, soon after the Plan’s adoption, the city and surrounding areas began experiencing unforeseen growth, driven largely by expansion of West Virginia University and other large employers. Since that time, much of the area’s character, economic conditions, and demographics have changed. With a strong, diverse economy, the region is poised for continued growth, adding pressure to existing infrastructure and development challenges. To address these changes, plan for growth, and comply with new State requirements, the City’s leadership initiated a process to update the Comprehensive Plan.

Thinking both locally and regionally, the City reached out to surrounding jurisdictions and government entities to pursue a combined planning effort. They undertook a collaborative process with the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) and Town of Star City to develop a unified Regional Vision that would help to coordinate land use and transportation planning. From the Regional Vision, the Comprehensive Plan was developed using public input and technical analysis specific to Morgantown. A Steering Committee made up of a variety of residents was created to help integrate the public input and technical work and to deliberate on appropriate recommendations for the future. This Plan represents their best effort to do so while balancing competing interests and complex issues. It suggests a number of strategies to guide the City in creating new programs and policies, and build upon existing resources to sustain a high quality of life.

A. What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a community’s “blueprint” for the future. It is the vision of what a community wants to become and the steps needed to realize that vision. Comprised of policy statements, principles, goals, objectives, strategies and maps, it is the broadest policy document a community can have to guide decision-making on long-term physical, social and economic development of the municipality and its environs. This includes both private and public development. The Plan is implemented over time through many distinct decisions including annual budgeting, departmental work programs, rezoning and subdivision of land.

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In late 2011 and early 2012, the City of Morgantown, Town of Star City, and the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) embarked in an unprecedented collaborative effort to develop a shared vision for the future of the region. The process, called “Crossroads — It’s Time to Chart Our Future,” engaged a diverse group of stakeholders, citizens and community leaders in identifying needs, aspirations and the preferred direction of future growth for Monongalia County. The vision serves as a foundation for three plans: the City of Morgantown’s Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Star City’s Comprehensive Plan, and the regional Long Range Transportation Plan for the MMMPO.

The West Virginia State Code says that the purpose of a comprehensive plan is to:

- (1) Set goals and objectives for land development, uses and suitability for a governing body, so a governing body can make an informed decision;*
- (2) Ensure that the elements in the comprehensive plan are consistent;*
- (3) Coordinate all governing bodies, units of government and other planning commissions to ensure that all comprehensive plans and future development are compatible;*
- (4) Create conditions favorable to health, safety, mobility, transportation, prosperity, civic activities, recreational, educational, cultural opportunities and historic resources;*
- (5) Reduce the wastes of physical, financial, natural or human resources which result from haphazard development, congestion or scattering of population;*
- (6) Reduce the destruction or demolition of historic sites and other resources by reusing land and buildings and revitalizing areas;*
- (7) Promote a sense of community, character and identity;*
- (8) Promote the efficient utilization of natural resources, rural land, agricultural land and scenic areas;*
- (9) Focus development in existing developed areas and fill in vacant or underused land near existing developed areas to create well designed and coordinated communities; and*
- (10) Promote cost-effective development of community facilities and services.*

Section 8A-3-4 of the State Code requires that the following thirteen components be included in a Comprehensive Plan:

- Land use
- Housing
- Transportation
- Infrastructure
- Public services
- Rural
- Recreation
- Economic development
- Community design
- Preferred development areas
- (and/or) redevelopment
- Financing
- Historic preservation

There are also six optional components:

- History
- Environmental
- Tourism
- Conservation
- Safety
- Natural resources

B. Why Update the Comprehensive Plan?

The comprehensive plan is a critical tool that serves many purposes. To be effective, it must be periodically updated to account for current conditions, data and new technologies. Also, West Virginia State Code, Chapter 8A (revised in 2004) requires municipalities to update their comprehensive plans by June 2014 and then at least once every ten years.

The City reached out to surrounding jurisdictions and government entities to pursue a combined planning effort. They undertook a collaborative process with the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) and Town of Star City to develop a unified Regional Vision that would help to coordinate land use and transportation planning

C. Plan Organization

The Comprehensive Plan is organized into eight chapters and is supported by three appendices. The chapters listed in bold are the plan's core elements, which each include a goal, followed by a set of objectives and strategies.

1. *Introduction*
2. *Regional Vision*
3. **Land Management**
4. **Transportation**
5. **Environment**
6. **Neighborhoods and Housing**
7. **Community Facilities and Services**
8. **Economic Development**
9. *Implementation*

Appendix A – Resource Documents

Appendix B – Vision Public Involvement

Appendix C – Existing Conditions and Trends

The Implementation chapter describes how to use the plan and summarizes all the policy statements into a concise table that assigns recommended timing and primary responsibility to each strategy. The Implementation Chapter is designed as a quick reference guide to be used on a regular basis.

FIGURE 1. COMPLIANCE WITH WEST VIRGINIA CODE

PLAN ELEMENTS	West Virginia Code Elements
<i>Land Management</i>	Land Use, Rural, Community Design, Preferred Development Areas, Redevelopment, Historic Preservation
<i>Transportation</i>	Transportation
<i>Environment</i>	Environmental*, Conservation*, Natural Resources*
<i>Neighborhoods and Housing</i>	Housing
<i>Community Facilities and Services</i>	Infrastructure, Public Services, Recreation
<i>Economic Development</i>	Economic Development, Financing, Tourism*
*Optional Component	

Figure 1 illustrates where the elements required by the State code are addressed within this Plan.

D. Plan Process

The Comprehensive Plan process lasted 14 months. It included public involvement and technical research creating a Plan that is both intuitive and informed.

- Part 1. Project Setup* (November 2011)
- Part 2. Regional Vision* (December 2011 – June 2012)
- Part 3. Technical Analysis (January 2011 – June 2012)
- Part 4. Draft Plan (June 2012 – December 2012)
- Part 5. Final Plan / Adoption (December 2012 – April 2013)

**Joint tasks with the Morgantown Metropolitan Planning Organization and Town of Star City.*

Technical Analysis

Prior to developing the Plan, ACP assembled two technical memorandums on the existing conditions and trends in the city and surrounding area. The memorandums established a baseline of facts and analysis to inform the plan. The key topics covered in the memorandums are listed below. The memorandums can be found in Appendix C.

Memorandum 1 – Regional Context, Demographics, Land Use and Development Patterns, Economic Development, and Transportation.

Memorandum 2 – Transportation, Housing, Public Services and Utility Infrastructure, Parks, Recreation, Environment.

In addition to these topics, Randall Gross/Development Economics, a sub-consultant with ACP, prepared an economic baseline report and an opportunities assessment to inform land use and economic development initiatives. In conjunction with the MMMPO's Long Range Transportation Plan, Burgess and Niple prepared a detailed report of transportation conditions in the region. These documents are also included in Appendix C.

Public involvement

Recognizing that public involvement in creating the Plan is vital to its success, the City and planning team organized a robust public participation effort. The process involved a regional vision, which included numerous opportunities between January and June 2012 to provide direction for the plan, as well as an Open House and public comment period to provide feedback on the draft plan. Extensive publicity and outreach ensured that participation was a choice for the city's residents.

Regional Vision. Chapter Two describes the regional vision process, outreach effort, participation, and outcomes.

Open House. The Open House was held on January 14, 2013 to present a draft of the Comprehensive Plan. At the Open House, the goals, objectives and strategies for each element were presented on large displays. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and submit comments for each element of the plan. The plan remained on display at the Morgantown Public Library and on the City’s website and comments were collected through the end of January. Those comments were reviewed by the Steering Committee and incorporated into the draft Plan document. Appendix B provides detailed information on the public input provided at the Open House.

COMMUNITY PRIORITY

Objectives or strategies that were most strongly supported by participants at the Open House are identified as community priorities with the symbol above.

E. Key Directions of the Plan

The following points summarize the key directions that the City should take in order to realize the Regional Vision and Morgantown’s specific aspirations. These points were drawn from public sentiment expressed through the planning process, a review of the Plan’s objectives and strategies, as well as deliberations with the Steering Committee. Although the Comprehensive Plan consists of distinct elements, these key directions represent an integrated approach to achieving the community’s vision for its future.

Addressing transportation challenges. Road congestion in Morgantown and the surrounding urban area is one of the city’s (and the region’s) greatest challenges. While the area’s topography is an obstacle to creating an ideal road network, recent haphazard patterns of growth and underinvestment in infrastructure have led to traffic congestion that undermines the region’s quality of life and economic potential. While road improvements should be part of any transportation plan, the region must also invest in transportation alternatives. The MMMPO’s Long Range Transportation Plan, created in parallel with this Comprehensive Plan Update recommends a range of transportation projects for federal and state funding. The Comprehensive Plan Update recommends strategies that the City can undertake to support efforts to alleviate traffic congestion, promote walking, biking and other transportation alternatives and reduce truck traffic. It also promotes growth patterns that facilitate walking, biking and transit use, potentially reducing the number of automobile trips.

Give priority to infill and redevelopment within the city over unplanned growth in the county. Growing inward was one of the strongest themes from the public and stakeholder input. There was a strong recognition from participants in the Crossroads process that the recent patterns of unpredictable growth in unincorporated areas have created some of the challenges the region now faces. Residents are interested in redeveloping and filling-in areas within the city that are currently vacant, under-utilized, or functionally obsolete. Inward growth was mentioned as a priority over growth in greenfield areas on the edge of the city. While the region's growth patterns are influenced by the policies of Monongalia County and its various municipalities, the City of Morgantown's policies can encourage reinvestment within its urban areas. The Land Management element (Chapter 3) declares this intent and identifies strategies to encourage desirable growth.

Strengthening the city's neighborhoods. Morgantown's diverse neighborhoods are among its most valuable assets. The Plan encourages investment in all neighborhoods but recognizes that the intent varies. For many areas it is continued maintenance and preservation of the existing character, while in other neighborhoods revitalization through redevelopment should be encouraged.

Improving Community Appearance. Public input revealed a strong concern for the city's appearance and how that shapes perceptions about the city both by residents and visitors. Aesthetics pertains to general property upkeep, visibility of utilities, signs, and architectural quality and character of development throughout the city, but particularly at the city's gateways. Appearance is addressed through the land management principles and through several strategies ranging from code enforcement citywide, to design guidelines or enhanced zoning regulations in targeted areas.

Increasing collaboration and cooperation between governments, institutions, and businesses. Throughout the process of preparing this Comprehensive Plan, it was clear that realizing the vision and implementing the Plan would require a high level of collaboration between local governments, major institutions, and businesses. Chapter 9. Implementation contains a section on community relations that describes some of the key issues that were raised during the planning process and includes a list of collaborative strategies contained in the Plan.

F. Policy Foundation

The policy foundation of the Plan was shaped by an extensive community involvement and planning process. The Comprehensive Plan Update has three key layers of policies: goals, objectives and strategies. Goals are the broadest policy statements that state a desired outcome in general terms. Objectives indicate a more specific policy direction and help organize strategies. Strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete an objective – such as a project, program or policy. There are multiple objectives for each goal and multiple strategies for each objective.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

This Plan includes six goals, 43 objectives, and 184 strategies, which are described in detail in the following chapters and summarized in Chapter 9: Implementation. The goals are listed below.

Land Management: Efficient and attractive use of land resources that strengthens the quality, character, and upkeep of the built environment while balancing redevelopment and strategic expansion with open space preservation.

Transportation: A balanced, safe, attractive well-connected transportation system that offers reduced congestion, supports and encourages desirable growth, and integrates private vehicles, public transportation, biking, and walking.

Environment: Protected natural areas, managed energy resources, healthy waterways and clean air.

Neighborhoods and Housing: Attractive, well-maintained neighborhoods that offer a broad mix of desirable housing options and convenient access to services and amenities.

Community Facilities and Services: Highly desirable and competitive community facilities and services that promote the health and wellbeing of all of Morgantown’s residents.

Economic Development: A regional approach to economic development and infrastructure investment that keeps Morgantown competitive and attractive to existing and new businesses, while strengthening the city’s fiscal health.

Policy Hierarchy

The Plan is composed of a series of policy layers. Each of the plan elements include a policy hierarchy of one goal supported by objectives and strategies. The Land Management chapter also includes principles. These policy types are defined as:

Goal: *A desired outcome expressed in simple terms. This is the broadest of the policy statements.*

Objectives: *Themes within the goal statement which help to organize the strategies.*

Strategies: *Action statements designed to achieve the goal; A specific program or project or policy.*

Principles: *Statements of intent that describe “how” (character attributes) and “where” (conceptual location) development should occur. Similar principles appear within the Regional Vision chapter and reflect regional values. The Principles in Land Management apply specifically to Morgantown.*

Principles

The principles are statements of intent that describe the direction of future development and redevelopment in the community. Eleven Principles describe the intent about “how” (character attributes) and “where” (conceptual location) growth and development in Morgantown should occur. They reflect a variety of land management themes that are mutually reinforcing, including the quality, appearance, pattern, character, and organization of development, environmental quality, efficient use of infrastructure, and expanding connectivity and mobility choices for residents. Refer to Chapter 3 for details on each principle.

1. Infill development and redevelopment of underutilized and/or deteriorating sites takes priority over development in greenfield locations at the city’s edge.
2. Expansion of the urban area will occur in a contiguous pattern that favors areas already served by existing infrastructure.
3. Downtown, adjacent neighborhoods and the riverfront will be the primary focus for revitalization efforts.
4. Existing neighborhoods throughout the city will be maintained and/or enhanced.
5. Quality design is emphasized for all uses to create an attractive, distinctive public and private realm and promote positive perceptions of the region.
6. Development that integrates mixed-uses (residential, commercial, institutional, civic etc.) and connects with the existing urban fabric is encouraged.
7. Places will be better connected to improve the function of the street network and create more opportunities to walk, bike and access public transportation throughout the region.
8. A broad range of housing types, price levels and occupancy types will provide desirable living options for a diverse population.
9. Residential development will support the formation of complete neighborhoods with diverse housing, pedestrian-scale streets, integrated public spaces, connection to adjacent neighborhoods, and access to transportation alternatives and basic retail needs.
10. Parks, open space, and recreational areas are incorporated as part of future development.
11. Environmentally sensitive and sustainable practices will be encouraged in future developments.