

Stakeholder Assessment of the Morgantown Riverfront: An Online Survey

Compiled by Morgantown Riverfront Revitalization Task Force

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For more information, please contact:

Dr. Steve Selin

Professor Emeritus, West Virginia University

Chair, Morgantown Riverfront Revitalization Task Force

Email: sselin@wvu.edu

Cell: 304-216-6399

Background

- Sponsored by Morgantown Riverfront Revitalization Task Force
- Data collected in Fall 2023
- Strengths, Challenges, Vision, Next Steps, and Comments
- Purpose—to understand stakeholder interests and concerns; to inform development decisions
- Morgantown Riverfront: Property zone between Don Knotts Blvd. and Mon River from MUB Water Plant to MUB Sewage Treatment Plant

Methods

- Started with in-person Riverfront Walkabout held October 26, 2023
- Expanded to online survey format using ARCGIS
- Five open-ended questions
- Survey link shared with community, economic, and riverfront stakeholder groups--ASCEND, MSM, Council, MAP, MRTC--and a City of Morgantown press release:
- Purposeful Sampling Approach
- Data analyzed with NVIVO 12 Qualitative Software into meaningful categories
- 119 Stakeholder Survey Responses

Question 1: Greatest Current Strengths of Morgantown Riverfront?

Riverfront Strengths	Mentions	% of Total (119)
Rail-Trail	63	52.9
Ruby Amphitheater	58	48.7
The River—Views	34	28.6
Restaurants	22	18.5
Many Public Access Spots	13	10.9
Close to Downtown & Neighborhoods	12	10.1
Current Revitalization Efforts	12	10.1
Parks/Greenspace	12	10.1
River Recreation Access	11	9.2
Riverfront Local Businesses	7	5.9
Bike & Kayak Rentals	6	5.0

- “The rail trail is certainly the greatest strength of the Riverfront. It’s connection to Fairmont, Uniontown, and in the future Pittsburgh and DC...the potential of the rail trail cannot be overlooked economically.”
- “The concert venue and programming is the best thing happening in Morgantown in the summer. The amphitheater space is a great start, but the area could be so much more. There could be art installations, more trees, a more consistent use for festivals and events.”
- “I went to San Antonio, TX several years ago and walked along their Riverwalk. Their “river” is literally a narrow, concrete-lined ditch! The water is a few feet deep, allowing very shallow watercraft. We have a REAL river! We need to embrace it, clean it up, develop it appropriately, keep it SAFE, and make it a focal point of our city.”
- “All the upgrades that have been made were necessary, practical, well-implemented and much needed improvements. It’s made a world of difference and should be used as the foundation for improving the area moving forward.”

Question 2: Greatest Current Challenges of Morgantown Riverfront?

Riverfront Challenges	Mentions	% of Total (119)
Unhoused Issue	73	61.3
Trash/Pollution	29	24.4
Need Holistic Approach to RF	23	19.3
Parking Needs	22	18.5
Under-developed Property	18	15.1
Dedicated Funding	17	14.3
Industrial Structures	11	9.2
Lack of Cooperation	10	8.4
Property Control	9	7.6
Sustainable Development	8	6.7
Lighting	5	4.2

- “The greatest challenge facing our riverfront area are the homeless encampments. After running or riding my bike past the groups of people living in the woods right on the edge of the waterfront district, I don’t feel comfortable parking my car and loading my bike in and out of it by myself after dark. As a woman who is hoping to have children soon, I am unsure of whether I would feel safe, parking my car in the waterfront area and loading and unloading my children by myself to take them to the waterfront.”
- “Safety given the homeless population. Pollution in the water. I was recently in San Francisco and it was amazing to go to a city park where everyone was sitting on the beach and swimming in the water. The sign that says something like "beware of sewage run-off" in the Mon is a such a huge turn off.”
- “Thinking about the riverfront in a holistic manner. With the exception of the trail, it can feel disjointed (Sunnyside, WVU, Wharf and underutilized commercial area north of the MUB plant). Uses along the riverfront should complement downtown and vice versa. No one is solely focused on this area or allocating funds to improve it. It's not adequately connected to the downtown and with a few exceptions, a lot of the properties look neglected and unattractive.”

Question 3: Your Long-term Vision for Morgantown Riverfront?

Riverfront Vision (Character)	Mentions	% of Total (119)
Walking Connections to DT & Neighborhoods	29	24.4
River Interaction/Connections	28	23.5
Clean	25	21.0
Safe	23	19.3
Community-based	14	11.8
All Ages/Family-Friendly	12	10.1
Diversity of Uses	12	10.1
Gathering/Hang-out Spot	11	9.2
Sustainability	10	8.4
Hub/Focal Point for City	9	7.6
Natural	8	6.7

- “New infrastructure and amenities would be developed to connect/integrate the riverfront with downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, including WVU, First Ward and Sunnyside. I live in South Park and I walk there either on the Decker's Creek trail or on Walnut St. and neither feels safe at all times. I absolutely hate crossing the street at University and Walnut. The traffic feels very dangerous and crossing at Pleasant St. is even worse.”
- An immersive waterfront. A place to go to enjoy the river, the trail, the beautiful outdoors, and local businesses along both sides of the river. The riverfront vision should be for people of all ages and means, with open space and access as well as activities that are free and low cost. I'd also like to see options to use the river--paddle boarding, canoeing, kayaking, or perhaps river boat tours.
- “It would be nice to have a great boardwalk lined with restaurants, bars, shops and hotels similar to the Wharf in DC.”
- A “third space” where people gather and share emotion and connection, primarily through art, music, interaction, recreation, and play.

Question 3: Your Long-term Vision for Morgantown Riverfront?

Riverfront Vision (Experiences)	Mentions	% of Total (119)
River Recreation	28	23.5
Live Entertainment	27	22.7
Shops/Small Business	27	22.7
Dining	26	21.8
Trails	25	21.0
Parks/Green Space	21	17.6
Walking/Biking	21	17.6
Fewer Unhoused	19	16.0
Festivals/Markets/Events	18	15.1
Public Art	11	9.2
Parking	9	7.6
Fishing	8	6.7

- “These amenities would give people more opportunities to interact with the river (i.e. boardwalk, small fishing piers and small gathering spaces).”
- “My vision for the waterfront - A sustainable greenspace that offers high-quality leisure activities including walking, running, cycling, and river recreation (paddling, swimming, fishing, bird-watching, botanizing for native riparian vegetation, and relaxing next to the clean, pure water).”
- “I want a “village/square” along the river with cafes, restaurants, condos/apts, - a place with year-round events for the community to gather (see the “Marketplace square” in Knoxville).”
- “Make it EASIER for local talent to be able to access and use the space. We have such an amazing array of performers here in Morgantown that it is shameful how difficult the facilities are to them. We should have nights DEDICATED to them. That and local talent from around the state/region. Give 'em a night!”

Question 4: Short-term Actions for Morgantown Riverfront?

Riverfront Short-term Actions	Mentions	% of Total (119)
Solve Unhoused Issue	35	29.4
Clean-up Trash/Pollution	23	19.3
Stronger Riverfront Leadership	21	17.6
Police Presence	16	13.4
More Community Events	15	12.6
Walking Connections to DT & Neighborhoods	10	8.4
Lighting	9	7.6
More Diverse Businesses/Attractions	8	6.7
More Parking Options	8	6.7
Clean-up Deckers Creek	8	6.7
More Bike/Kayak Rentals	7	5.9

- “Develop a strategy to cleaning the river, increase programming (events, social services, festivals, concerts, art walks), create a masterplan to connect the riverfront to the downtown.”
- “Planning! With public input. Pursuing property owners for the items listed above. Work with FOD to help solve the remaining runoff issue and do a feasibility study for the water park. Talks with MUB about a future clean-up of industrial infrastructure on the shoreline.”
- “I'd like to see someone engage the trail-side businesses and see if they are interested in working together to do cross-promotions around events like the handmade market and the City's concert series.”
- “The waterfront will be a community-oriented, all-inclusive, diverse and equitable place where everything is sustainable and everyone collaborates in partnership for a sustainable future, while relaxing and sipping an affordable local craft beer next to the restored Monongahela River, watching river otters and great blue herons.”

Survey Conclusions

Respondents generally want:

- To interact more intimately with the river during their visit.
- The community to address the unhoused issue along the Riverfront.
- To feel safe and experience a clean Waterfront area.
- To activate under-utilized or dilapidated space or buildings using appropriate development strategies to achieve long-term goals for the Riverfront.
- More community-based events, festivals, markets, shops, restaurants, and attractions.
- Safe pedestrian access to Riverfront from Downtown and neighborhoods.
- More creative development projects—a sampling....Boardwalk with shops, bars, and restaurants along the river; sink a barge and build shops, bars, restaurants; residential housing along the river; a staffed visitor center; a PRT Station at Waterfront Place; mountain bike features and youth pump track next to the trail; a whitewater park, trail system on both sides of the river; a zipline across the river; a fishing trail along the river.
- Their Waterfront to be a gathering or hang-out place, a proud focal point for the City of Morgantown.
- To have access to more inclusive, family-friendly trail and river-based recreation activities.
- Are generally happy with current Riverfront Revitalization efforts, they love the trail and the amphitheater and concert series, but they see so much more potential for the Morgantown Riverfront that can happen with the proper investments.
- To see a more holistic and strategic approach taken to enhance the Morgantown Riverfront. To see more focus, planning, staffing, organization, investment, marketing, and cooperation brought to bear on this “One” Riverfront zone to achieve long-term vision and goals.

“The Morgantown Riverfront.....“Think of it like a chill place with nature, eco-friendly tech, and cool community spaces. The goal is to make the Morgantown Riverfront awesome for everyone over the next ten years.”

Survey Implications

The following policy implications can be drawn from this report:

- Morgantown Riverfront decision-making is often unplanned or opportunistic, with individual actors or authorities controlling the destiny of specific properties.
- To maximize collective opportunities along the Morgantown Riverfront, it would be prudent to think of the Riverfront as a “holistic” geographic corridor.
- To work towards planning, designing, managing, and marketing according to a “One Waterfront” corridor.
- To work towards aligning Riverfront stakeholders under this “One Riverfront” concept.
- And, most importantly, to begin the process of developing a Riverfront Master Planning process for the “One Riverfront” corridor from the MUB Water Plant to the MUB Sewage Treatment Plant. This Master Planning process should be integrated with the Morgantown Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Plans and include pedestrian and vehicle linkages between Downtown and neighborhoods to the Morgantown Riverfront. This Master Planning process will also include ample opportunity for Morgantown citizens and stakeholders to participate in and help shape plan outcomes.
- An important outcome of this Master Planning effort will be a shared Morgantown vision for the Waterfront with attainable goals that can be achieved through coordinated planning and action.