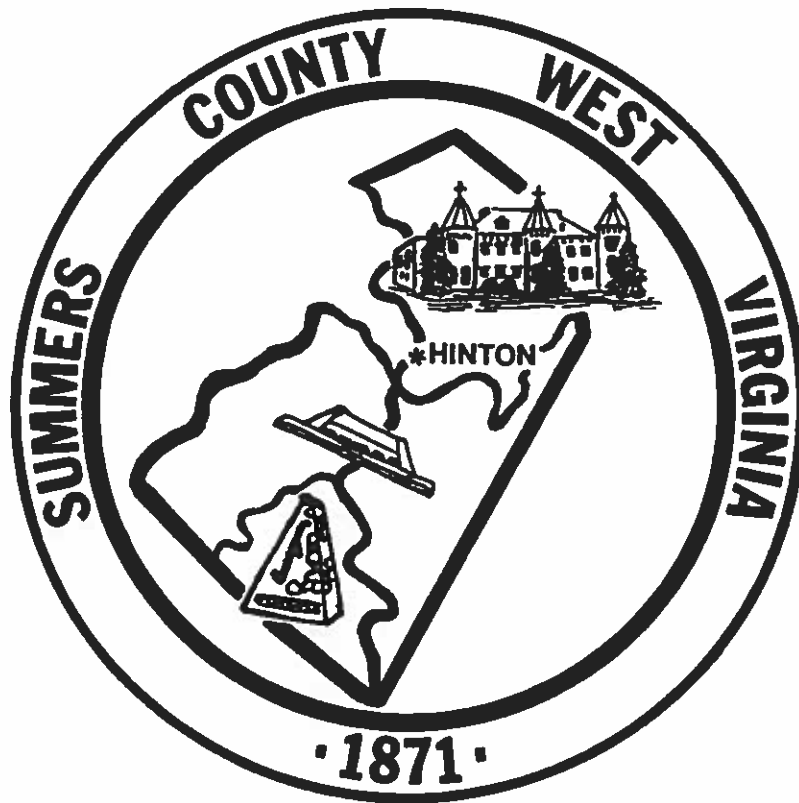


# Comprehensive Plan



Adopted by the Summers County Commission:

January 11, 2017

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Plan Adoption Information (this information may be limited to only County Commission copy or other official copies and may not be included in all copies of the plan)

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Overview

Summers County, West Virginia has had many plans in the past, though it has never developed one all-encompassing comprehensive plan. This plan was drafted based on the input of many different people and with the assistance of several volunteers and organizations.



*Photo credit: V. E. Lilly*

This Comprehensive Plan describes how, and at what pace, Summers County desires to develop physically, economically, and socially. It is an important tool that local elected officials will use to:

- guide future growth and development
- manage natural resources
- preserve prime agricultural land
- protect historic resources
- strengthen the economic base
- provide efficient public services
- improve the quality of the housing stock
- preserve the quality of life

The Comprehensive Plan is the only public document that describes the whole community, accounting for its complex and interdependent networks. The Comprehensive Plan is considered the official statement for how the future of the County should be developed and shall guide all future planning and zoning regulations. The Summers County Comprehensive Plan was prepared in accordance with West Virginia Code, Chapter 8A (2004), as amended.

In short, the Summers County Comprehensive Plan is:

- A general guideline for future development that will promote the public health, safety, and general welfare of all residents
- A promotion of the public interest of all residents
- A public policy guide to decision-making regarding development in the County
- A collection of strategies for future land use, housing, economic development, natural, cultural, and historic features, transportation, community facilities and services, parks and recreation, and open space
- A current statement of the past and present conditions of the county
- A description of how, and at what pace, the county desires to develop physically, economically and socially
- An expression of the county's "vision" for the most desirable pattern of future development
- A public document adopted by the County Commissioners on the recommendation of the County Planning Commission.

### **Goals and Objectives**

As a result of public meetings and the analysis of the data collected from public comments, several structural themes began to appear. Analysis of the data led to the discovery of other issues not addressed during the initial public meetings. These new topics have been examined during the course of some 50 committee and subcommittee meetings and in innumerable informal conversations between members of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and other members of the community. In working together, the community identified several principles to guide the development of the Comprehensive Plan. These principles guide not only the Comprehensive Plan but *every function of every governing body in the county.*

**The overarching goal and objective identified by the community is the need to promote growth that is economically sound, environmentally friendly, and consistent with community livability and enhancement of quality of life.**

Based on community input, the success of the Plan appears to be dependent on several inter-related themes. For some residents, one issue stands out above all others. For some, this may be employment. For others, it is continued protection of the environment, farming, forestry, or any combination of all three. Yet for others, education should take priority as the foundation for achieving all other long-term goals. This diversity of priorities and community values makes Summers County a vital, complex community with unique character.



### **Quality of Life**

In most respects, defining “quality of life” is extremely subjective—the criteria can be so different between individuals or groups as to be mutually exclusive. In spite of this diversity of opinion, there are broad areas of agreement among the residents of Summers County. The following elements represent some components of a good quality of life identified by community members:

- A friendly community where people are welcoming and caring
- A community that functions like a “neighborhood watch”
- A community with low crime rates, especially violent and home invasion crimes
- Clean air and water
- The natural beauty of our mountains, streams, and rivers
- Abundant outdoor recreational activities
- Affordable housing
- A rural community
- A peaceful and laid back lifestyle
- A solid religious community

### **Historic Preservation**

Summers County is rich in history and, due to the relatively slow pace of development in the region, is fortunate to have much of its long history still intact. As was noted in several of the public meetings, those who call Summers County “home” are often proud of their heritage and have identified many physical and social attributes of their communities worth preserving. The following elements were identified as prime examples of the historical attributes of the county:

- Nationally identified Hinton Historic District
- History of the rail system
- The legend of John Henry and the railroad workers
- History of waterway travel
- The historic Graham House
- Several individual structures on the National Historic Registry

### **Environmental Integrity and Conservation**

Summers County has unique environmental qualities. Community members have identified environmental qualities worthy of recognition or protection. Examples include:

- Water quality of the County’s rivers and streams
- Clean air
- Beautiful scenery
- Minimal sprawl and undesirable development
- Undeveloped “wild and wonderful” areas
- Abundant wildlife and good hunting and fishing opportunities
- Lots of open space

## **Economic Development**

Summers County has seen prosperous times, however, the current economic conditions in the county are often considered less-than-favorable. Historically, the railroad created a boom in the Summers County economy and many residents of the county still remember that era. Though the railroad continues to be a driving force in the local economy, the more modern modes of transportation and technology have greatly reduced the economic effect the rail currently has on the local economy. Other driving economic factors have been slow to move to Summers County but are beginning to make an appearance. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in tourism, technology-related industries, and retirees re-locating to the area. Citizens have identified a few areas worthy of preservation and growth as economic forces in Summers County, including:

- Technology based businesses
- Tourism industry
- Service industry, particularly catering to retirees and tourists
- Relatively low cost of living
- Local businesses
- Family oriented businesses

## **Creating the Comprehensive Plan**

### **Summers County Planning Commission**

The Summers County Planning Commission was created on November 12, 2003 by the Summers County Commission pursuant to West Virginia Code § 8A-24-1.

### **The Planning Process**

The Summers County Planning Commission worked in collaboration with several other organizations in a series of public meetings to update the “Summers County 2020: A Community Vision Shared” plan. That plan, developed in 2003, specifically addressed the need to create a framework for future development and growth and for a Comprehensive Plan in Summers County. In approximately the same time frame, the West Virginia Legislature adopted Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code, authorizing county governments to adopt comprehensive plans, zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and other land use tools. To create this plan, the County Commission formed the County Planning Commission which solicited information from Summers County citizens through a variety of venues.

The comprehensive planning process began in 2007 in earnest, when the Planning Commission employed outside assistance for the creation and drafting of this document. Several meetings were held throughout the county, a steering committee was appointed, several articles were published in the local paper, and a blog was created to engage the public in the development of this plan.

### **Notice and Public Participation**

In the Fall of 2007 and the Winter of 2008, several community meetings were held to solicit community input regarding the county comprehensive plan. These meetings were advertised in the local newspaper and via email for those community members who had

previously provided an email address. Meetings were held on December 10, 2007 at Talcott Elementary School; December 13, 2007 at Forest Hill Fire Department; January 3, 2008 at Meadow Bridge Community Center; January 8, 2008 at Sandstone Fire Department; January 10, 2008 at Jumping Branch Elementary; January 14, 2008 at Pipestem Ruritan Club; and January 31, 2008 in the Summers County Memorial Building. The format of these meetings generally started with an overview of the planning process and defined or explained comprehensive plans, in general. Input was solicited from the community using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. At the end of each meeting, community members were given contact information for the drafters of the plan and encouraged to send or communicate additional thoughts on the plan and to share the information with their friends and neighbors.

Based on the input and interest expressed from the community meetings, the Planning Commission convened a special meeting to identify possible interested community members to serve on the steering committee. To ensure the entire community was represented, the county was divided into smaller geographic areas and residents in those areas were identified as possible representatives. A letter and response form requesting participation on the steering committee was sent to these community members. Those who expressed interest in participating were named as members of the steering committee. This steering committee subsequently divided into several sub-committees, each focusing on a substantive section of this document, allowing committee members to bring their own unique experiences and community concerns to the process.

Steering committee meetings were held several times in 2008 and 2009. In addition, the Planning Commission submitted for publication several articles in the local newspaper soliciting public input. Newspaper articles or advertisements updating the public about the status of the comprehensive plan were submitted and/or ran on July 17, 20, and 21; August 7; November 17; December 29; all of 2009 and May 23 of 2010.

To solicit specific input regarding scenic vistas in the County, the Planning Commission sponsored a photography contest from July 9 to September 15, 2009. Seventy photos were submitted representing several areas throughout the county. The photos were evaluated by an independent panel of judges, and the top ten photos were placed on public display. The public was asked to vote for their favorite, and the winning photo was purchased by the Planning Commission.

In June 2010, a blog was created and updated weekly to keep the public informed about the current status of the plan as well as to solicit input on the current plan draft. Additionally, a Quick Response, or “QR,” code was created for future high tech linking to the blog via smart phones and other QR-compatible devices.

In the spring of 2011, the Planning Commission held a second series of meetings in Summers County to get feedback from the citizens on the provisions of the plan which had been prepared and drafted at that point. These chapters included Introduction, County Overview, Housing and Residential, Transportation, Current Land Use, and Planned Development Patterns. Input from these meetings was then incorporated into the draft chapters and used to facilitate the development of the remaining chapters.

## **Jurisdiction**

The Summers County Comprehensive Plan addresses issues throughout Summers County and on a countywide spectrum. In addition to Summers County as a whole, this plan also speaks to issues specific to the City of Hinton. On November 18, 2008 the Hinton City Council enacted a resolution agreeing to participate in the planning process with the

intention of reviewing and considering for adoption the Summers County Comprehensive Plan. However, as of the date of adoption of this plan, the City of Hinton has not yet adopted it. Therefore, this plan applies only to Summers County, exclusive of the City of Hinton, unless and until the City of Hinton adopts this plan.

The County Commission and Planning Commission, along with the City Council of Hinton, acknowledge that there are areas in neighboring counties, communities and states which directly affect the goals identified in this plan. As such, the Planning Commission's goal is to promote the orderly development of land and reduce duplication of effort by working with other governmental and quasi-governmental entities in the planning and development process to the extent that the plans and ordinances are consistent with the Summers County Comprehensive Plan and subsequent land use regulations.

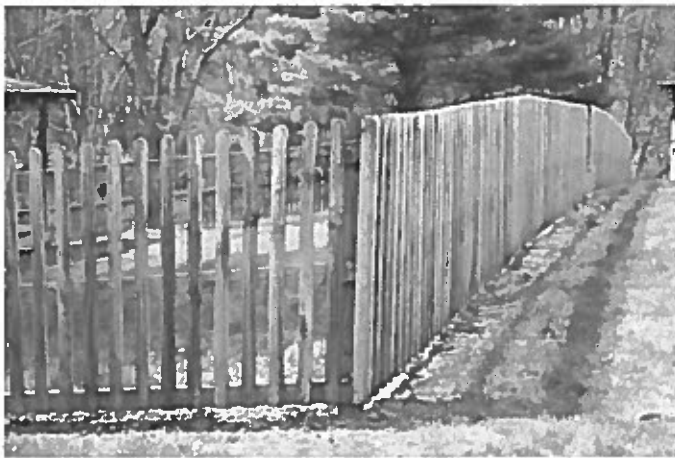
## Chapter II: County Overview

### Brief History of Summers County

Summers County, West Virginia is steeped in history. A complete and comprehensive history of the county could fill volumes. Instead, this chapter represents only a brief historical overview of the social, historical and geological history of the county—a history deeply rooted and a source of pride for the county.

#### **Human History**

Humans have roamed the area now called Summers County for at least 15,000 years. Clovis Points and Cumberland-fluted lanceolot points of the Late Wisconsin glaciation have



*Photo credit: Kathy Fleshman*

been discovered at Richmond Bottoms and Meadow Creek Bottoms, attesting to the County's prehistoric inhabitants. Hunters likely roamed the New River valley, following large game animals like mammoth, mastodon, giant beaver, giant sloth, and caribou. They also foraged wild plant foods available seasonally. Archeological evidence suggests that throughout its history, Summers County was also host to permanent or semi-permanent settlements. However, these hunter-gatherers would

move on when game was scarce. Even when game was plentiful, the dangers of intertribal warfare were imminent.

Early man's behavior was strongly influenced by the physical environment. Summers County hosts rugged, steep walled ridges and canyons overlaid by the New River watershed. Centuries of sculpting by nature produced a sense of grandeur, complimented by the varied surviving species that comprise today's biome. The New River and its great gorge dominate the scene, in stark contrast to the rolling upland plateau areas where the skyline is relatively level, a vestige of the ancient peneplain. This restrictive topography has historically acted as a barrier to movement and communication, thus fostering isolation.

Prehistoric inhabitants usually settled along streams, providing fishing and fertile bottom land on which to grow maize, squash, and other vegetables. In the report of surveys made by the Smithsonian Institution (1948) states that there were eleven prehistoric village sites in what is now Bluestone Lake. There is also a prehistoric village site near Brooks, as well as several burial mounds near Brooks, on Madams Creek, and in the Pipestem district. The villages were usually located near, but not directly on, trails—the highways of prehistoric Appalachia. Some of the major East-West trails crossed Summers County. One of these trails later became the great James River and Kanawha Turnpike, which transects Summers County.

Centuries later, the Six Nations of the Iroquois claimed jurisdiction over all of West Virginia north of the New River, and the Cherokee Nation claimed lands south of the New

River. Both Nations considered the region immediately surrounding the New River a buffer zone. As such, it was used sparingly by these Nations, though other tribes friendly to the Six Nations were permitted to live there. The first of these tribes was the Delaware who had been driven from their home, and the Shawnee followed thereafter. These tribes lived here until encroaching European settlement forced them west of the Ohio River, but not without conflict; historical accounts speak of Shawnee warriors raiding early European settlements in the area.

White settlers began filtering in during the late 1600s or early 1700s. In 1749, group of prominent Virginians, among them John Lewis and his sons Thomas and Andrew, organized the Greenbrier Land Company. This company was given a grant of one hundred thousand acres of the choice land located in what are now Pocahontas, Greenbrier, and Monroe counties and extending to Wolf Creek in what is now Summers County. Other land companies followed, increasing the number of white settlers in the region. The settlers generally took to the bottom lands along the rivers and the mountain valleys where the native trails were located. Conflicts arose along these trails, and forts were erected in different parts of the country. These fort sites are well noted in the region.

In 1770, James Graham founded Lowell, the first European settlement in now-Summers County, and soon thereafter Robert Lilly and his sons settled on Little Bluestone. The historic Graham House in Lowell, a hewn log home still on its original site, survived several Native American attacks and still hosts several special events each year. The attack in 1778 on Fort Donnally in Greenbrier County brought to an end the major attacks on the settlements in this area.

During the era of peace which followed, small settlements began to flourish. One post office sprung up in Lewisburg (now Greenbrier County) in the late 1790s that served the whole region. Roads were constructed, first the James River and Kanawha Turnpike, followed by the Blue Sulphur, Giles, Fayette, and Kanawha Turnpikes. Regional population continued to grow at a slow, but steady pace over the next few decades.

Though the Civil War was an important factor in the history of Summers County's political origins, that War had an otherwise minimal impact on the residents of the region. This mountainous terrain deterred marching armies, and engagements within its borders were rare. One notable exception was the razing of Jumping Branch by retreating Union soldiers, who hoped to keep the village from falling into the hands of Confederates. Interestingly enough, Jumping Branch later hosted the first post office in the region, with the Rollynsburg/Talcott and Sandstone post offices following on its heels.

Following the Civil War, railroad builder Collis P. Huntington partnered with General William C. Wickham and others to acquire the Virginia Central Railway. The group acquired a charter from the West Virginia Legislature, and the railroad was renamed the Chesapeake and Ohio, or "C&O" Railroad. Plans were made to extend the line to the Ohio River where Huntington, West Virginia is now located. By 1868, the line had been extended from Richmond to White Sulphur Springs under the direction of Colonel T.M.R. Talcott. Further westward expansion required the construction of the Great Bend Tunnel in Talcott (named for Col. Talcott). William R. Johnson, a contractor from Staunton, Virginia, was commissioned to direct its construction.

This tunnel is best remembered as the setting for the legendary showdown between former-slave and steel-driver John Henry and a steam-powered drill. While many places claim to be the site of the legendary battle, Summers County boasts the strongest claim. Local



*Photo credit: Anna R. Ziegler*

historians cite testimony confirming the event by Great Bend Tunnel workers Sylvester Adams and Banks Terry. Terry, who spent the remainder of his life in Talcott, often spoke of the battle between man and machine.

The management of the C&O Railroad wanted to create a re-fueling stop and repair shop at the confluence of the Greenbrier and New Rivers. Seeking to exert further control over the local politics of the area, the C&O leadership petitioned the State Legislature for the creation of a new county. On February 27, 1871 the Legislature of West Virginia enacted the bill creating Summers County from parts of Greenbrier, Fayette, Mercer, and Monroe counties. The county was named for George W. Summers (1807-1868), a noted jurist and legislator. The C&O Railroad agreed to donate the lot on which the present Courthouse stands in Hinton in

1876.

Hinton, the only presently incorporated municipality in Summers County, grew around the railroad infrastructure. The town thrived on the business brought by the railroaders, many of whom settled in the county. The city's National Historic District (established in 1984) centers on the old business district, an area whose existence is linked with the arrival of the railroad in 1873. The next 55 years represent a period of great prosperity for Hinton.

Hinton was incorporated in 1880, and W.R. Benedict served three consecutive terms as its inaugural mayor. In its first few years as a city, Hinton saw the development of a city hall, a jail, and a municipal water system. The C&O Railroad shops were completed in August of 1892 and consisted of a roundhouse with 17 engine stalls and a car repair shop capable of holding 40 cars. The roundhouse employed 370 men and the car shop 170. Salaries paid to these workers contributed \$84,000.00 annually to the local economy, a significant amount of money in 1892.

The C&O also established one of the first YMCAs in Hinton for the railroad men in 1891. Three theatres operated in Hinton in those years, providing live entertainment and early movies. Many architecturally significant buildings were constructed in Hinton during

this growth period, exhibiting Victorian, Queen Anne, Gothic, Classical, Greek, American Four Square and Second Empire architectural styles. This building boom lasted until 1930.

Just as Summers County's growth centered on the railroad, its history over the past half-century is tied to the railroad's decline. Starting with the introduction of the diesel engine in the early 1950s, the railroad moved from coal fired engines to diesel power. There was no longer a need to stop and refuel in Hinton, and the town spiraled into decline. The railroad closed its repair shops and eliminated or transferred numerous administrative and dispatching jobs to new regional centers. Retail establishments, who once catered to railroad workers, lost their clientele. The loss of commercial and retail jobs was further accelerated by the opening of several large box-stores in neighboring counties in the 1990s. The declining population led to the closure or consolidation of several Summers County schools.

Today, however, there is reason to be optimistic, as Summers County has many attractive qualities to the modern knowledge economy. The Hinton Technology Center, which opened in 2005, is the focus of this transition and serves as the headquarters for technology-based firms which can provide well-paying jobs in the community. Today, Hinton is a picturesque railroad town located on the New River in Summers County. Though its many historic buildings evoke Hinton's heyday, the local economy has found new footing in technology, tourism and retiree services.

### **Historic Land Use of Summers County**

European land use in Summers County began with fur trapping in the 1750s. More permanent settlements begin to appear with the founding of the Greenbrier Land Company. During this early phase of European settlement, survival was contingent on hunting-gathering and subsistence agriculture. By the time of the Revolutionary War in the 1770s, small farms had emerged with an ever increasing focus on agricultural and animal husbandry. Even then, however, the region was only sparsely populated.

Following the Revolutionary War, many settlers, moved to the region because the newly formed federal government often paid soldiers in land grants in lieu of currency for their services in the war. Farms were hacked out of the wilderness, especially along fertile food-plains. Settlers also found that riparian plant and animal life in the river valleys provided additional sustenance. When the railroad pushed through, farmers could transport their agricultural and animal products to distant markets, enabling commercial agriculture.

While many farms continued as small subsistence operations, two larger plantation-style farms operated on either side of New River. One, the Billy Crump Plantation, utilized approximately 133 slaves, and was located on west side of the New River in what is now Raleigh County. The other plantation was located on the east side of New River near the mouth of Indian Creek and was owned by a Dr. Fowler. These two plantations dwarfed the small land holdings in the county. Following World War II, many farmers sold or abandoned their farms. Agriculture was less profitable, and many able-bodied farmhands left to join the military. Many ex-farmers found employment on the railroad or left for urban job markets. However, some maintained their farms as a secondary source of income and as a means of preserving their heritage. Once prosperous dairies, on the other hand, were almost universally abandoned; the advent of "Milk Producer Laws & Regulations" drove smaller operations from the market.



Aided by the railroad, timbering also became a prime source of revenue for many people. The railroad allowed landowners and timber-brokers to transport timber, lumber, tanning bark, cross-ties, and other wood products to distant markets. Though nestled in the heart of Appalachia, Summers County did not experience extensive coal mining.



Photo credit: Kathy Elshman

A few small mines operated in northern Summers County during the early to mid-1950s. However, these mines eventually proved unprofitable and closed.

For many years, farming, lumber and the railroad were the dominant features on the landscape of Summers County. Many communities and towns sprung up to accommodate the necessary commerce associated with each of these industries. As the agriculture and timbering commodities slowed and the railroad no longer needed Hinton as a re-fueling stop, many of the towns began to dwindle. However, the essence of these communities remains as a feature on the landscape of Summers County.

### Natural History

Summers County is blessed with outstanding natural resources including clean, fresh water and a pristine natural environment. Summers County is wholly within that province of the Appalachian Mountains known as the Allegheny Plateau. The Allegheny Plateau region consists of at least two ancient peneplains sloping gently northwestward. The strata of the peneplains are gently warped, and their surface has now been cut into innumerable valleys by the erosion of streams. This has left sharp or comparatively narrow ridges as remnants of the former peneplains. During the Cenozoic times, two erosion terraces developed. The younger surface, the Allegheny Peneplain, occurs at an elevation of 792.48 feet above sea

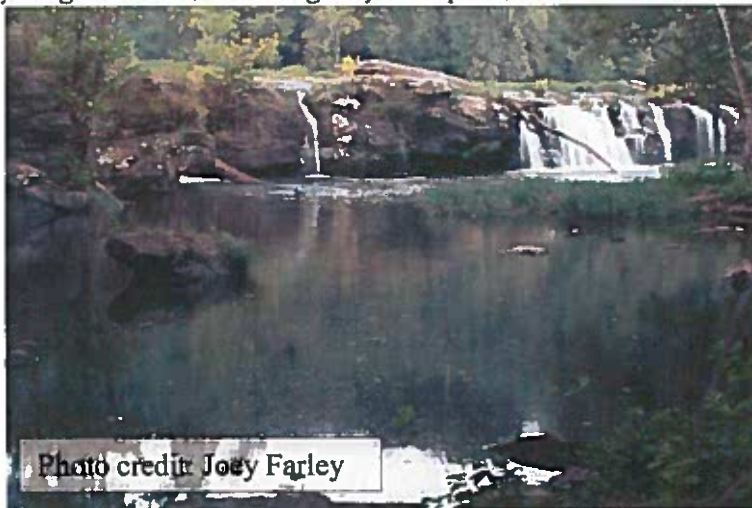


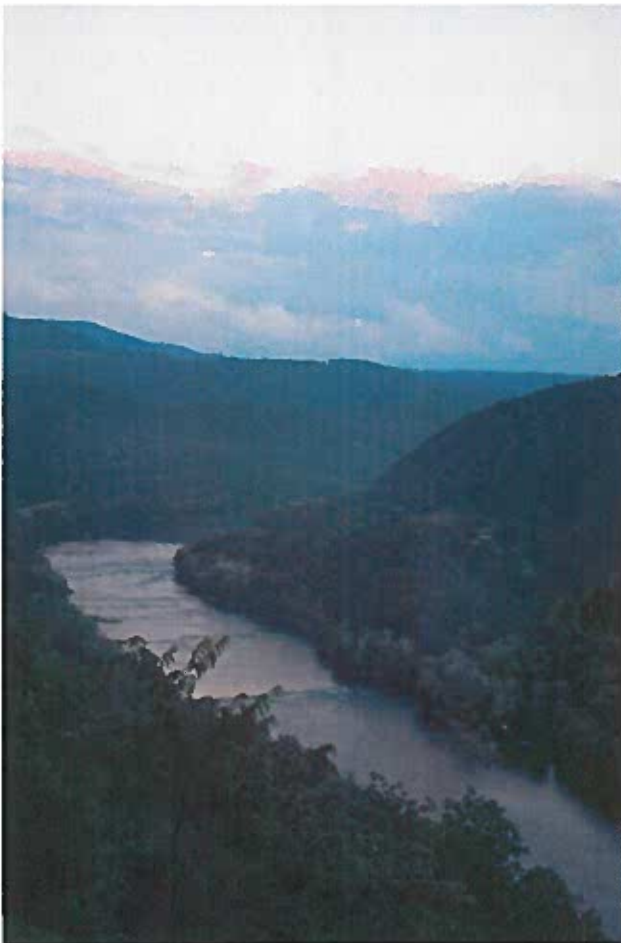
Photo credit: Joey Farley

level near Hinton, West Virginia.

The New River is the defining natural feature of the Hinton and Summers County area. The New River is one of the world's oldest rivers and is a remnant of the ancient Teays River System. From its quiet beginnings in North Carolina, the New River travels through Virginia before its tumbling

waters cut through the steep mountains of southern West Virginia. Recognizing its uniqueness and beauty, the federal government designated a 52-mile stretch from Hinton to Fayette Station in Fayette County as the New River Gorge National River in 1978. Similarly, the Bluestone River as it flows into Summers County has been dedicated as a National Scenic River. These divisions of the National Park Service have become a major economic assets in the area. Hinton is the southern gateway community for these National Park Service areas.<sup>1</sup>

The Bluestone Reservoir Project was authorized for construction as a flood control and hydroelectric power project in September 1935. Construction did not begin until January 1942 and was suspended briefly by World War II before resuming in January 1946. The Bluestone Dam became operational in January 1949. The Bluestone Lake created by the dam fluctuates between 1,800 acres of surface area in winter to 1,970 acres during the summer and fall. Though the hydroelectric portion of the dam was not completed during its initial construction, efforts to complete it continue. The dam is currently managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The undeveloped area above the dam is recognized for its majestic views and outstanding recreational opportunities. This area, known as Bluestone Wildlife Management Area, consists of nearly 17,000 acres and, though managed by West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, is owned by the Army Corp of Engineers.



*Photo credit: Kathy Fleshman*

Summers County also hosts a third riparian feature, the last several miles of the Greenbrier River. The Greenbrier enters the eastern part of the county in Alderson and flows through Pence Springs and Talcott before its confluence with the New River near the communities of Bellepoint and Avis in Hinton. Though the Greenbrier River has not received a specific federal or state designation, it is one of the longest, free-flowing rivers in the eastern United States. Locally, it is recognized for its beauty, recreational value, and its environmental and geo-physical features. However, without proper management, the Greenbrier is at risk for pollution from sewage, improper development, and inadequate land management techniques.

Summers County boasts the presence of two state parks. Bluestone State Park was created in 1955 when the West Virginia State Conservation Commission, now the

<sup>1</sup> Lively, Lester. History of Summers County. (In the past 10 years, many local citizens and both the Summers County Commission and the City Council of Hinton, have requested that the federal government expand the boundaries of the New River Gorge National River to include Hinton's Historic District, Bateau Beach (aka Hinton Landing), Avis Overhead Bridge, and the point where the New and Greenbrier Rivers meet.)

Department of Natural Resources, leased 4,500 acres from the Army Corps of Engineers in the Bluestone Reservoir area for the park. Similarly, Pipestem State Park was created in 1963 and officially opened in 1970 as a result of the federal government's financial assistance to West Virginia to promote economic development in depressed regions.<sup>2</sup> Supposedly, President Kennedy was so grateful for the overwhelming support of West Virginia voters that he personally saw to it that Pipestem State Park received appropriate funding. Together, these parks take advantage of the priceless beauty of the Bluestone Gorge area, offering scenic vistas and recreational opportunities for tourists and providing a significant economic benefit to Summers County.

The New River Parkway, a government initiative which started in the 1980s, was touted as a project to improve a current road, known locally as River Road, by building a scenic highway running from I-64 near Sandstone, West Virginia to Hinton, West Virginia along the western bank of the New River.<sup>3</sup> The New River Parkway will provide a direct link between Interstates 64 and 77 in Princeton and will allow visitors easy access to the magnificent Sandstone Falls. Eight miles of the parkway will pass through the New River Gorge National River. This parkway will tie together many outstanding resources of Raleigh, Summers, and Mercer Counties. With the completion of the Parkway, Hinton's role as a gateway community to the New River will be enhanced. Amtrak also provides an important transportation link to Summers County. Amtrak's Cardinal from New York to Chicago stops three times per week to pick up and discharge passengers at Hinton's historic Rail Depot.

Scenic and natural resources, such as the Bluestone, Greenbrier, and New Rivers and Bluestone Dam and Lake, along with their respective supporting agencies—namely the National Park Service, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, and West Virginia State Park systems—are no doubt outstanding resources and visitor attractions. They provide significant potential for additional economic development in Hinton and Summers County. Hinton, with its central location, complements these park areas by providing a number of restaurants, hotels, and shopping opportunities along with medical facilities and other public services.

Taking advantage of Summers County's assets requires that its existing historical, cultural, and natural resources be viewed as opportunities. Entrepreneurial activity can flourish to complement these assets in a manner that is sensitive to the County's resources. Revitalization requires the concerted, imaginative efforts of the public and private sectors alike.

## **Statistics**

### **Population and Demographics**

According to the 2010 census, Summers County, West Virginia has a population of 13,737. Between the 2000 census and the 2010 census, Summers County's population decreased by 652 people. Summers County has historically experienced cycles of boom and bust. For example, in 1950, Summers County saw its largest population of 19,183. However by 1970, the population had contracted to 13,213, largely due to dramatic changes in the railroad industry and in coal mining practices. Specifically, increased mechanization and the advent of turbo diesel coal trucks allowed for more efficient extraction and transportation of coal, and this, in turn, lessened the demand for workers in the mineral and railroad industries. Currently, the projected population growth is small considering the age demographics of the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wvcommerce.org/travel/thingstodo/history/stateparklodges/default.aspx>, 1:30 p.m. on 02/19/10.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.newriverfriends.org/>, 1:45 p.m. on 02/19/10.

County.

The population is predominantly Caucasian, although there is some racial diversity within the county. In this regard, residents self-identify as follows:

- 12,753 (92.1%) Caucasians/Whites; WV average is 94%
- 643 (4.6%) African Americans/Blacks; WV average is 3.2%
- No reported American Indians or Alaska Natives; WV average is 0.2%
- 86 (0.1%) Asians; WV average is 0.6%
- 149 (1.1%) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders; WV average is less than 0.1%
- 198 (1.4%) 2+ Races/Mixed Race; WV average is 1.7%

**Age.** Most Summers County residents are over the age of 40. The average age of Summers County residents is 44.9 years, while the West Virginia average is 41.1 years. Summers County has an older population, contributing to the slight decline in population over the last decade.

**Population Density.** The population density of Summers County is 38.6 people per square mile. Considering the national average is 87.4, this figure illustrates the rural nature of the County. The average household size in Summers County is 2.0.<sup>4</sup>

**Income.** The median annual income per household of Summers County is \$32,194, compared to the West Virginia average of \$39,550. According to the census, more than 24% of households make less than \$25,000 per year. However, 14% of Summers County residents make more than \$75,000 per year. The remaining 62% make between \$25,000 and \$75,000, suggesting wealth is more evenly distributed throughout the majority of the population. The mean retirement income is approximately \$12,850, and those drawing on retirement income reaches upwards of 27.7% of the population. This data indicates that Summers County is economically depressed.

**Employment Statistics.** Less than 43% of the population of Summers County was employed in 2010, while the unemployment rate was 2.5%. Approximately 27.7% of the population received a retirement income. It may be assumed that the large discrepancy between the total population of the county, the percentage employed, those receiving a retirement income, and those unemployed is a result of either (a) a high rate of retired persons without an income, or (b) a larger percentage of the population that is unemployed but not applying for unemployment benefits.

The 2010 census occupational data, categorized by industry, is as follows:

- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining: 246 Residents (5.3%)
- Construction: 281 Residents (6.1%)
- Manufacturing: 93 Residents (5.4%)
- Wholesale trade: 78 Residents (3.2%)
- Retail trade: 531 Residents (11.5%)
- Transportation, warehousing, and utilities: 212 Residents (4.6%)
- Information: 7 Residents (0.2%)
- Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing: 121 Residents (2.6%)

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.city-data.com/county/Summers\\_County-WV.html](http://www.city-data.com/county/Summers_County-WV.html)

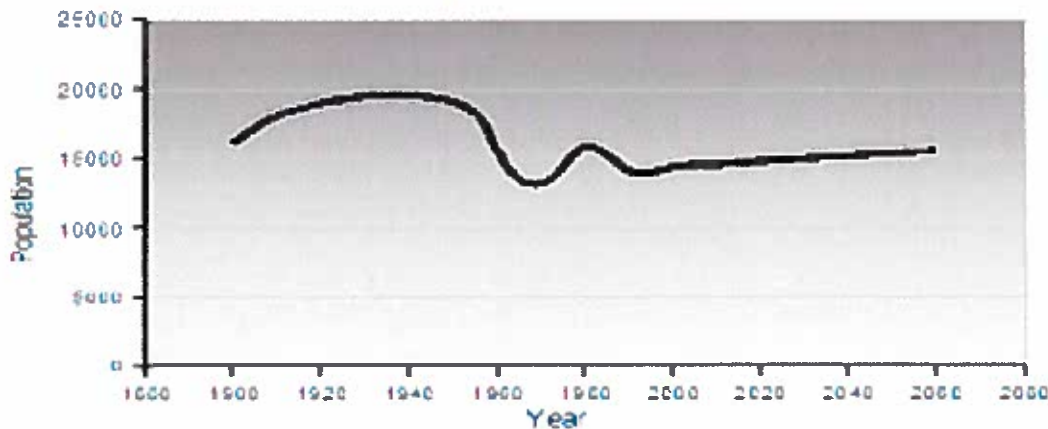
- Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services: 495 Residents (10.7%)
- Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services: 361 Residents (7.8%)
- Other services (except public administration): 427 Residents (9.2%)
- Public Administration: 285 Residents (6.2%)

**Schools.** Nearly 20% of Summers County households have children. The number of children over the age of 3 enrolled in Summers County schools is 2,719, a slight increase compared to the 2000 figure of 2,513. Three public elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school serve the county. The specific enrollment rates are as follows:

- Preschool: 123 Students (4.5%)
- Kindergarten: 117 Students (4.3%)
- Elementary and Middle School: 1,141 Students (42%)
- High School: 672 Students (24.7%)
- College/Graduate School: 666 Students (24.5%)

**Current and Projected Population.** The 2010 census reports the population of Summers County as 13,737, a marked decline from the 2000 census' figure of 14,389. Furthermore, between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2012, the population declined an additional 1.4%. If the population continues to decline at this rate, the population in 2020 will be approximately 13,545.

**Summers County, WV Population Trends  
1900-2000**



### **Growth/Decline Management**

By most standards, Summers County is not a populated county, and the projected growth rate is expected to be slow. The small population growth rate is due to the older demographic having a higher-than-average mortality rate, a low percentage of people moving to the county, and a high percentage of young adults leaving Summers County—a phenomenon often referred to as “brain drain.” The older population of Summers County creates a demand for specific services, such as nursing, medical, and long-term care. Recently, there has been a slight increase in the younger, more educated demographic, and Summers County is now struggling to create services for this demographic group.

Ideally, the population of the county will grow at a steady rate. To increase the predicted growth rate, many governmental and non-governmental organizations have identified additional services, employment, industry, and recreational opportunities that will ideally have the effect of attracting younger professional people to the county. Simultaneously, Summers County continues to provide a number of services for its current aging population and hopes that these services may attract retirees who are looking for a quality of life offered by this area with the amenities needed for an older population.

Though a consistent growth greater than predicted is desired, a very rapid or sudden growth explosion could present challenges to the infrastructure or have negative effects on the overall quality of life. For the foreseeable future, it seems unlikely that this will be an issue. However, this comprehensive plan and subsequent enforcement strategies are intended to address issues which might arise from a population explosion. Issues such as whether the school system can absorb additional students or the law enforcement personnel can adequately cover a greater population have not specifically been considered, though a larger population will increase the tax bases and will, theoretically, provide the funding necessary to address insufficient infrastructure or services.<sup>5</sup>

### **Prior Land Use or Comprehensive Plans**

Summers County has never adopted a plan as depicted in Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code. Previous plans exist that guide the county on a number of issues, and ideas from those plans were considered and sometimes implemented into this Comprehensive Plan. Many of the themes in previous plans mirror the issues found in this Plan and each of these earlier or other plans should be consulted as part of the process for growth and development in Summers County and Hinton. The following is a brief description of previous plans affecting Summers County:

#### **Hinton Historic & Architectural Survey, 1983, by Paul D. Marshall & Associates, Inc.**

This plan provides an outstanding historical account of Hinton's development, a description of architecture, and an inventory of primary structures in the community. It is only a resource and does not include any recommendations. However, it should be considered as a guiding document when adopting land use regulations, such as zoning ordinances, designed to preserve and enhance the historic characteristics.

#### **Market Feasibility Analysis: Hinton, West Virginia, 1985, by Melaniphy & Associates, Inc.**

This is an extremely comprehensive evaluation of the then-current and potential market role of downtown Hinton's commercial area. Regarding the decline in Hinton's economy, this study frequently references the belief of the researchers that, "the greatest impact has been the relocation of Kroger and Murphy's Mart just outside the downtown area." The study suggests three alternative courses of action:

- Do nothing—resulting in continued decline and disinvestment
- Local Development Corporation—calling for the funding of the Local Development

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<sup>5</sup> Note: All statistical data, subject criteria, and gross figures, as well as incomes associated and contained within this document were directly obtained from the [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) website via the American Fact Finder System. All historical information was derived from multiple texts and sources available on general coal mining history.

Corporation (LDC) in the business district under the 502 Program of the Small Business Administration (SBA). Under this program, the community economic growth is encouraged by the SBA making available low-interest loans to the LDC for the purchase of land; the construction, the expansion, or remodeling of buildings; and the purchase of operating machinery and equipment for use therein by small businesses.

- The Tourist/Recreational Model—this approach is based on the premise that a market does not exist to recreate “conventional” retailing in downtown Hinton, but “that there is a place for downtown Hinton with considerable growth potential.” Noting the growth in the tourism/recreation market, the study suggests that downtown Hinton's future lies in cultivating these visitors and developing a focus of attention on downtown Hinton. There is a strong emphasis on leadership, promotion, image, and identity.

The study concludes with the researchers saying, “We have the opinion, based upon our evaluation here, there this is not a strong market for large retail facilities within the downtown historic area. However, we are of the opinion that there is a market for additional general merchandise type stores, apparel and accessories stores, eating and drinking places, and miscellaneous retail facilities.” The concepts set forth in this report support the community’s vision as expressed in community meetings and details from this report should be considered as Hinton and Summers County look toward growth and investment opportunities.

#### **Hinton: Ready for the Future, 1989, U.S. Department of the Interior**

The purpose of this document was to “guide community efforts toward historic preservation, economic revitalization, improved civic pride, and a wider appreciation of Southern West Virginia's natural and recreational resources. The report focuses on numerous proposed actions which have been developed by representatives of the community; many of these actions are already underway.”

#### **Cantrell's Island Recreational Facility Economic Impact Study, 1990, ZT Consultants, Inc.**

“The purpose of this study is to explore the feasibility of developing a recreational facility on Cantrell's Island in Hinton. Since it will be necessary to build an access road and to provide public water and sewage to the Island before development of such a facility can take place, it is also the purpose of this study to determine whether said facility would benefit from the city/county/state sufficiently to justify the expense of providing these services.” The plan offers several conclusions related primarily to an expectation that tourist visitation in the area will continue to grow over the next 20 years (1989-2009). However, it does not give any clear “yes/no” recommendation as to whether or not the project should be initiated.

#### **Resource Team Assessment Report and Action Schedule, 1992, The Southeast West Virginia Heritage Project, WV Governor's Partnership for Progress, National Trust for Historic Preservation**

The Southeast West Virginia Heritage Project focused on the four-county New River Gorge Region plus the neighboring counties of Greenbrier, Mercer, and Monroe as a demonstration project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation intended to “develop the tools that will effectively promote economic development through heritage tourism on a regional basis.” Its recommendations are based on strengthening the regional market and building a tourism base.

**First Impressions: A Program for Community Improvement in Hinton, WV, 1999, WVU Extension Service, Center for Community, Economic, and Workforce Development**

As is typically the case for this program, the report contained some discussion of visitors' perceptions of the community before their visits, offered comments from their visits, and finished with recommendations for improvements. Visitors' comments were generally favorable toward the community, but repeatedly pointed out the need for eliminating conditions of blight and neglect where they occur.

**Welcome to Historic Hinton: "On the Rivers & On the Rise", 1999, Community Design Team, WVU Extension Service**

"This report describes the recommendations that the WVU Community Design Team [has] made to assist Hinton and Summers County progress toward the future that it desires." The report is divided into five sections, including: Community and Economic Development; Traffic, Transportation, & Infrastructure; Historic Preservation; Tourism, Recreation, & Natural Resources; and Health Care. The report ends with conclusions and potential timelines.

**Summers County 2020: A Community Vision Shared, 2003**

"The primary purpose of *Summers County 2020: A Community Vision Shared* was to create a working document which would outline the county's strategic roadmap for future success." According to the plan, it was hoped this planning process would result in: (1) Widely shared understanding and support of the plan by its citizens, (2) Increased participation of citizens in the implementation of the plan, and (3) The design of annual implementation plans that address community needs and result in visible successes, enhance economic development efforts, and promote sustainable development. The plan focused on Economic Development, Land Use & Infrastructure, Tourism Development, Community Image, and Education and included implementation plans for years one and two.

**Site Analysis Report for Business/Industrial Park Sites for the Summers County Commission, 2004**

In order to facilitate economic development in Summers County, the County Commission has identified eight potential business/industrial sites in the county. The locations included a rail site in Hinton along with tracts in Hilldale, Pence Springs, Meadow Springs, Green Sulphur Springs, Jumping Branch, and two in the Pipestem Area. Thrasher Engineering was then engaged by the County Commission to develop a mixed-use concept for each property along with a plan for infrastructure and cost estimates for development of each site. Based on their analysis, Thrasher recommended the Knob Ridge site in Pipestem as having the most significant potential.

**Hinton 2010: Planning for the Future, 2005**

This document was developed with the broad goal to create an environment in the City of Hinton in which all aspects of the community would be stimulated and, therefore, improved simultaneously leading to Hinton becoming recognized as a "showplace community." The document was compiled from the work of several task force groups that address various issues under the categories: Arts & Culture, Economic Development, Emergency Services & Healthcare, Government, Infrastructure, and Quality of Life.

**West Virginia Whitewater Industry Strategy, 2007**



The plan focuses on diversification of the whitewater product, both on and off the river, in order to broaden appeal, with hopes of increasing the commitment to providing a quality experience on and off the river, and increasing awareness about the state's outdoor recreation and whitewater offering. The plan provides recommendations centered around product development, marketing and image, funding, organization, and destination building.

#### **Tourism Development Plan for Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh, and Summers Counties, West Virginia, 2007**

This plan intends to “help present the region as a cohesive tourism destination to the market, help develop and strengthen the region's offering of product and accommodations, and to preserve the region's natural beauty, which is so much a part of the draw.” The specific recommendations it suggests include:

- Creating a regional brand
- Designating SWVCVB and 4-C EDA (NRGRDA) as brand managers
- Changing designation of National Park Service Units to a National Park
- Establishing Community Development Guidelines

#### **Summers County 2020: A Community Vision Shared, Update, 2009**

Work progressed on the goals and objectives outlined in the original *Summers County 2020: A Community Vision Shared* from its implementation in 2003 until 2007 when an analysis of progress made on the plan was completed. This document is the culmination of the planning done in July 2008 to update the original plan and was intended to guide community and economic development efforts in Summers County for the next two to three years afterward. The updated version focuses on Economic Development, Tourism Development, Education, Healthcare, Smart Growth and Development, and Quality of Place.

#### **Visioning Summers County's Tourism Future, 2010, Concord University, Institute for Sustainable Tourism and Rural Economic Development**

This document is a result of partnership efforts between the Three Rivers Travel Council, Summers County, the City of Hinton, and Concord University's Institute for Sustainable Tourism and Rural Economic Development. It “presents the findings of the research conducted and offers suggestions about tourism development in the City of Hinton and Summers County over the next five to ten years. This document will serve as a planning tool for the community to move forward with sustainable tourism development. It is not designed to be definitive; rather, it provides data about perceptions stakeholders and visitors have about the region. It will hopefully serve as the foundation for a set of goals and objectives, determined by the community, to be set forth over the next few years.

#### **City of Hinton Strategic Plan, 2014-2018, 2013**

This plan encompasses community input which was elicited using the SWOT analysis technique. It includes several Focus Areas, Goals and specific objectives to enhance economic development in Hinton. The goals in this plan mirror many, if not all, of the goals identified during the comprehensive plan process. The specific objective set forth in the strategic plan may be implemented as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

## Chapter III: Housing and Residential

### Existing Conditions

(See *Summers County Housing* map)

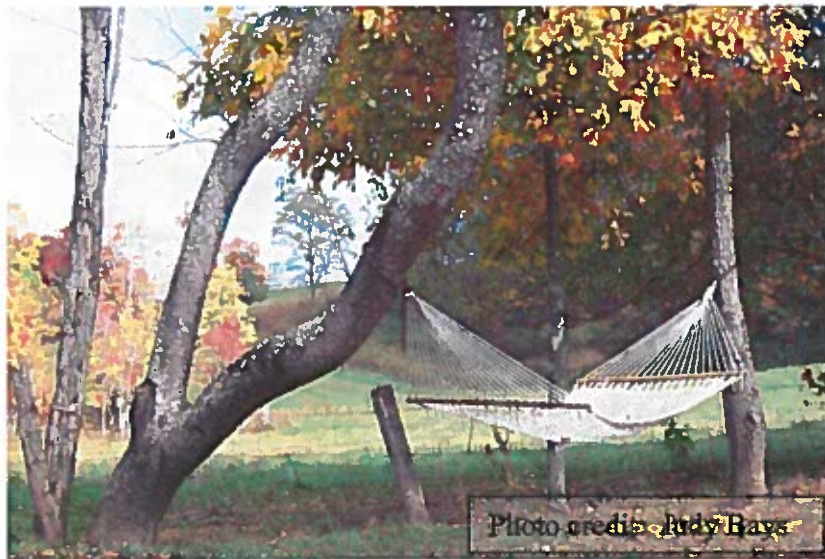
### **Community Input**

The existing housing stock in Summers County varies widely, as in so many other areas of West Virginia: from well-built, high-end homes to mobile homes several decades old, and from older homes some of which have fallen into disrepair) to more recently constructed multi-unit complexes. Housing and residential matters are further complicated by the presence of certain home-based businesses which are a vital part of the Summers County economy. The demographics of the county demonstrate that there is an older-than-average population. In recent years, technology-based businesses and outdoor recreational opportunities have brought a younger, educated work-force to the region. Future housing considerations must be tailored to accommodate both ends of this spectrum.

During the course of community meetings, two over-arching goals emerged regarding housing in the county. First, there is a need for improved housing stock, specifically a need to increase the quality and quantity of houses available for traditionally middle-class

families. Second, there is a strong desire to maintain the character of the community and to restore and improve older or historic structures.

Residents also identified several other community goals for housing in Summers County. Residents appreciate that Summers County



is rural, uncrowded, and undeveloped and expressed a strong desire to preserve this characteristic. However, residents also acknowledge that there are many attributes to rural living which may make appropriate development of rural areas attractive. Residents recognize that many of the existing residential properties in the county are blighted and dilapidated and identified a lack of infrastructure in many areas of the county as challenges to rural development. The low cost of living must be balanced with the noted need to increase the overall tax-base. There is also a strong desire to increase the potential job market so that residents can work closer to home. This is particularly problematic because the high rate of poverty in Summers County often means that low-income-earning citizens who might otherwise work cannot afford vehicles to get to out-of-area jobs.

## Statistics<sup>6</sup>

Summers County has an average of only 38.6 people per square mile, compared to a national average of 87.4 people per square mile, making this area particularly rural. The population of Summers County is growing very slowly, if at all. Based on the 2010 Census, there are approximately 7,698 housing units<sup>7</sup> in Summers County. The Census indicates that 5,572 are occupied as a primary residence and it is presumed that the remaining units are second homes, vacation rentals, for sale, or for rent. At nearly 80%, Summers County has a higher average homeownership rate than the national average, which is 74.3%. Of the 5,572 occupied units, 4,282 (approximately 77%) are owner-occupied and 1,290 are renter-occupied. The average Summers County resident travels 31.8 minutes to work. About 78% of the housing units in Summers County are single unit structures, 15% are mobile homes<sup>8</sup>, and 7% are multi-unit structures. An estimated 44% of the housing units in Summers County were constructed prior to the 1960s. More than 18% of the owner occupied units are considered cost-burdened.<sup>9</sup> Nearly 65% of the housing units in Summers County have a value of less than \$100,000; the median value of owner occupied units in 2010 was \$79,400 while the median value of houses in West Virginia for the same time period was \$96,500. Finally, 58% of the housing units in Summers County are not subject to a mortgage.

## Anticipated Needs

Though the statistics indicate that the rate of population growth is very slow, current events indicate an increase in the number of visitors and new residents to the area. Community leaders anticipate an increase in visitor use in the next few years due to events like the re-location of the National Boy Scout Camp, The Summit, to neighboring Fayette County and the increase in visitor use of the nearby Greenbrier Resort due to the Professional Golf Association Tour's Greenbrier Classic. Though the population itself may not be growing, the demographics seem to be changing. As many residents age and pass away, younger people are moving to the area to work at one of the technology-based businesses and the industries that support them. There is a noticeable increase in the number of vehicles on the roads in Summers County in the past few years as outdoor recreational opportunities become more prevalent. Future area housing development must take these changes into consideration as the county grows and changes.

## Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

The following goals, objectives, and recommendations will enhance the existing housing stock, address blighted or deteriorating homes or neighborhoods, strengthen existing residential neighborhoods, improve the quality of new homes, and maintain the overall quality of life unique to Summers County.

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6 US Census Bureau, *American Fact Finder*, 2010.

7 A housing unit is defined as, "a house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room that is occupied (or if vacant, is intended for occupancy) as separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live and eat separately from any other persons in the building and which have direct access from the outside of the building or through a common hall." [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long\\_HSG010206.htm](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_HSG010206.htm)

8 Based on the Census information, it is not possible to tell whether the percentage of mobile homes are included in the statistic referencing the one unit structures or whether this is a separate calculation.

9 US Department of Housing and Urban Development determines that housing is "cost-burdened" if the household expenses (including utilities) exceeds more than 30% of the household income.

**Goal: Enhance the Existing Housing Stock**

**Objective: Prevent Deterioration and Improve Existing Homes/Structures**

**Recommendations:**

- Local government should encourage the re-use and renovation of older existing homes through financial or tax incentives.
- Local government should adopt and implement land use planning tools, such as zoning ordinances, which would encourage the re-use or renovation of existing homes and structures.
- Local government should adopt and implement land use planning tools that promote the adaptive re-use of existing homes for residential purposes as well as other purposes (i.e., commercial, business, etc.). An emphasis should be placed on re-uses of property that will not have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

**Goal: Address Blighted or Deteriorating Homes or Neighborhoods**

**Objective: Identify Dilapidated Structures**

**Recommendations:**

- Establish and adopt standards, such as a building code or a dilapidated structures ordinance<sup>10</sup>, for determining whether a structure is dilapidated.
- Identify, locate, and map structures in the city and county which are considered dilapidated including the specific condition of the property and the property owner(s).
- Identify and map areas in the city and county that would have high concentrations of dilapidated structures.
- Prioritize these areas or structures.

**Objective: Fund the Repair or Demolition of Dilapidated Structures**

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and solicit funding sources or create funding sources which can fund the implementation of a dilapidated structure ordinances or an employee, such as a building inspector, to oversee this program and for repair of dilapidated buildings or the demolition of buildings found to be too dilapidated to repair.
- Create financial incentives (or disincentives) for property owners of dilapidated structures to bring their property into compliance.

**Objective: Building Codes and Standards Should be Adopted and Enforced in Both the County and the Municipality**

**Recommendations:**

- Local government should adopt, implement and enforce, through ordinances including building code(s), zoning, or

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<sup>10</sup> As of the adoption of this plan, a dilapidated structures ordinance has been adopted, which establishes a dilapidated structures committee. Local Government should continue to support, enhance and enforce this ordinance and committee.

performance standards, and/or financial incentives, a minimum standard for residential structures, especially low-income rental facilities, commercial and non-residential structures.

**Goal: Strengthen Existing Residential Neighborhoods**

**Objective: Promote Desired Qualities of Existing Communities and Mitigate the Undesired Qualities**

**Recommendations:**

- Encourage community-based groups or associations dedicated to community improvement and involvement.
- Encourage and facilitate resident pride and participation in community decisions and planning process, especially participation by residents in the operation and management of public housing.
- Local government should encourage the re-use and renovation of older existing homes and structures through financial or tax incentives and land use planning tools such as zoning ordinances or performance based standards.
- Local government should encourage in-fill development of new homes or desired structures in already developed areas, meaning new residences should be constructed on existing vacant lots in already developed areas. Residences or other structures should be constructed to blend-in and compliment the existing community conditions with regards to historic genre, size, and footprint.

**Objective: Ensure that Decent and Affordable Housing is Available for All Public Housing Tenants**

**Recommendations:**

- The local governments should consider ways to address the management of rental properties throughout the County
- Adopt and enforce building codes.
- Mandate through ordinances or financial incentives, a minimum building standard for low-income rental facilities.
- Hold property managers accountable, through criminal or other mandate, for failure to maintain property in compliance with minimum building standards.
- Encourage and facilitate resident pride and participation in the operation and management of public housing.
- Development of low-income rental units should be encouraged in areas within walking distance of community services such as job opportunities, grocery stores, public transportation, schools, and police and fire departments.
- Businesses should be encouraged in existing population centers to provide local employment for residents of Summers County, which would reduce the average commute time for residents and enable low-income employees the opportunity to work without the financial burden of car

ownership.

- Local government should consider ways to address the management of rental properties throughout the County.

**Objective:** Improve the Quality of Seasonal Homes and Vacation/  
Recreational Rental Units

**Recommendations:**

- A study should be conducted to identify the types of tourists which visit this area, the services requires by the tourists and the economic impact of tourism and identify the area qualities which attract the tourist. The study may identify which aspects of the community attract the most desired type of tourism.
- Local governments and agencies should identify and assess existing seasonal homes, recreational rental units and seasonal communities for compatibility with the surrounding communities, and whether the units or seasonal communities are likely to enhance desired community characteristics.
- Local governments should encourage, through financial incentives and land use planning tools, the type of seasonal or vacation units or communities most likely to attract desired tourism and which most enhance the qualities of the area which attract positive tourism.
- Local governments should also conduct a study to determine if additional seasonal homes or recreational rental units are needed to accommodate the area's current or anticipated tourism industry and consider ways to assist or construct appropriate tourism facilities.
- Local governments should develop, fund (including identification of funding sources, such as fee for camping) and maintain areas appropriate for camping, both rustic (tent) camping and camping areas with more amenities.
- Local governments should consider a program to assist in promoting seasonal rental units. One recommendation would be to fund an advertising campaign designed to attract tourists to the area.
- Local governments should discourage, through ordinances or financial disincentives, long-term temporary housing areas, such as camping trailer parks in which the trailers are never or rarely removed from the site.

**Goal:** Improve the Quality of New Homes

**Objective:** Adopt and Enforce Building Standards

**Recommendations:**

- Local governments should adopt and implement a standard building code.
- Local governments should encourage, through ordinances including building code(s), zoning or performance standards

and/or financial incentives, a minimum standard for residential structures, especially low-income rental facilities.

- The County and City should work with the school system and other educational programs to include vocation programs designed to use existing structures in need of repair as a means of teaching building and construction skills.

**Objective: Encourage New Housing in Various Price Ranges/Communities**

**Recommendations:**

- Local governments should encourage in-fill development of new homes in already developed areas, meaning new residences should be constructed on existing vacant lots in already developed areas. Residences or other structures should be constructed to blend-in and compliment the existing community conditions with regards to historic genre, size, and footprint.
- New homes should be constructed in areas with access to necessary infrastructure, including sewer, water and electrical, in place and ordinances should be adopted to encourage or mandate this.
- Building codes and standards should be adopted and enforced in both the county and the municipality.
- Local governments should encourage, through financial incentives and land use planning tools, the development of high-quality rental properties.
- The construction of new, quality single-family houses, on small lots should be encouraged in appropriate areas for residential development.
- The county and city should work with private or non-profit agencies to produce a quality housing stock in Summers County.

**Goal: Maintain the Overall Quality of Life Unique to Summers County**

**Objective: Identify Areas in the Country Suitable for Residential Development, Mixed Use Development or Non-Residential Development**

**Recommendations:**

- Identify the attributes of the county which make certain areas appealing for residential purposes, such as existing communities, existing infrastructure, access to employment and services.
- The county and city governments should consult with developers and consultants to promote the best areas for future development.
- Criteria to consider when identifying areas for future development should include, but not be limited to, availability of public services such as sewer and water, residential densities, affect of development on existing conditions such as roads, impact on environmentally sensitive areas, natural resources, open space, historic sites, or designated scenic

areas.

**Objective: Attract Residents and Visitors to the Area**

**Recommendations:**

- Summers County and Hinton should solicit and recruit individuals and businesses with the ability to work from any location, including home, and who wish to live in a rural community with ties to historic areas and outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Businesses should be encouraged in existing population centers to provide local employment for residents of Summers County, which would reduce the average commute time for residents and to enable low-income employees the opportunity to work without the financial burden of car ownership.
- To accommodate for the aging population and to attract retirees, the local governments should encourage and support or develop senior living complex(es) and/or assisted living housing with access to local facilities and infrastructure and with amenities such as single and shared (couples) units, gardening, exercise and fitness areas, green space, and entertainment rooms.

**Objective: Encourage Appropriate Development**

**Recommendations:**

- Adopt and enforce land use planning ordinances.
- Developments incorporating mixed-uses (residential, business-professional, commercial such as retail and restaurants, and recreational) should be encouraged through zoning or other land use ordinances and financial incentives.
- A real estate prospectus should be introduced in the form of a brochure to solicit developers' interest in the developable residential areas of the county. The prospectus should be based on the recommendations of this plan.
- Residential growth and housing development should be encouraged around existing population centers (cities, towns, etc.) to avoid encroachment or sprawl on rural, scenic, or outdoor recreational areas and to encourage development in areas with existing infrastructure.
- The county and city should adopt zoning and subdivision regulations designed to promote affordable housing options and orderly development through increased designs and permitting flexibility.
- Development within existing historical areas must blend with the existing historical character.

**Financial Considerations**

Goals and objectives identified in this chapter may be accomplished through one of the following recommendations:

- Meaningful tax incentives for renovation and restoration projects



which may be offset by increased revenue from revitalized buildings.

- Coordinate community based fundraising efforts to improve and revitalize.
- See funding or adopt a taxation rate or fee structure to provide oversight necessary to uphold standards related to the management of rental properties.
- Fund advertising and public relations efforts to highlight attractive housing and residential features aimed at attracting new residents to the City and County.
- Seek coordination of volunteers, including local vocational trade students to participate in the County inspection, renovation and monitoring plans.

## Chapter IV: Transportation

### Overview and Historical Transportation Patterns

(See *Summers County Transportation* map and *Adopt-A-Highway* map)

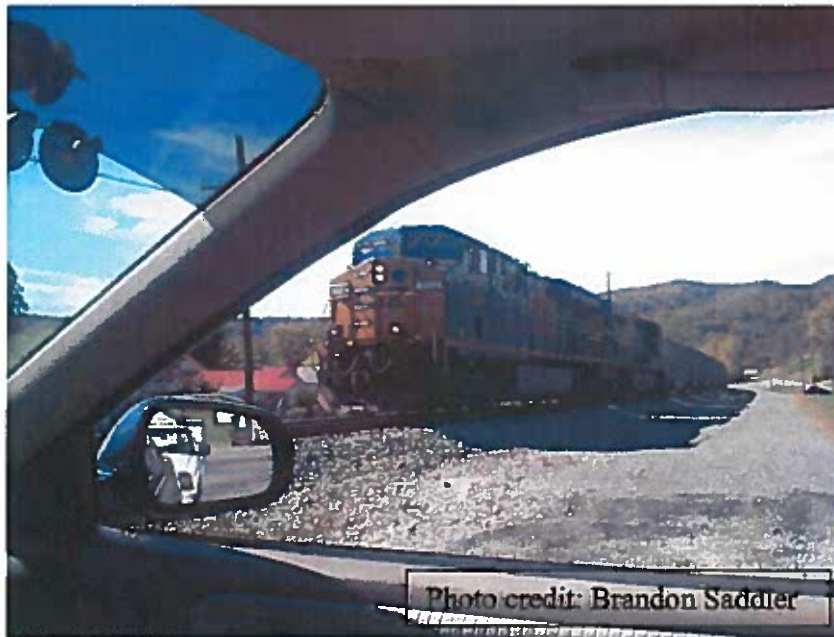
Transportation is the act of moving passengers or goods from one location to another using a transportation system consisting of roads, streets, railroads, aircraft, watercraft, pipes, aqueducts, or nearly any structure that permits either vehicular movement or flow of some commodity.

Summers County history is steeped in transportation. Arguably, Summers County came into existence as a result of one of the most powerful forms of transportation in history: the railroad. In fact, management of the C&O Railroad is credited with lobbying the West Virginia Legislature to create Summers County in 1871. Prior to the railroad, Summers County served as a cross-roads of sorts for travelers by river and along early trails and roads, including the James and Kanawha Turnpike. The river served as a means of moving people and cargo via bateaus. These features have since become a point of pride for community residents and, in recent years, a point of interest for visiting tourists.

In recent history, the current methods of moving from one point to the next in Summers County are limited and, some would say, stifling. Though the

railroad still has a major stake in the community and transports lots of freight and, a few times each week, passengers, the only other viable form of transportation in Summers County is vehicular. Given the extreme rural nature of the county and the greater-than-average amount of poverty, there are obstacles to vehicular traffic.

A thorough plan for transportation in the county must consider not only the immediate assets, limitations, and needs of the transportation options in the county, but also the historical significance and economic impact of the transportation systems in Summers County.



### Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

During several community meetings, citizens noted many strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats to the overall transportation system in Summers County.

Citizens repeatedly identified proximity to urban areas and higher education via Interstate 64 as assets. However, citizens also appreciate the rural, insularly, uncrowded, and “laid-back” nature of the county as qualities of life worthy of protection. Specifically, citizens commented that there is an appreciation that there are amenities in nearby communities but the same amenities in Summers County might degrade the rural nature. In particular, citizens seem to appreciate the ability to get to big box stores without having these same stores compromise our rural county.

Ironically, the very qualities which were identified by some as assets, others found to be hindrances. Many citizens felt that traveling out the county for basic services and amenities was too difficult. Citizens commented on the lack of public transportation or easy access to amenities, including health care providers. Citizens also identified the long bus rides that many of the students in Summers County face to travel to and from one of the five public schools. Citizens also indicated that a lack of bicycle and pedestrian pathways is very limiting and these forms of transportation should be enhanced.

Based on the community input, the following goals were established to enhance transportation in Summers County:

- **To promote health and safety, access to community facilities and businesses for all, regardless of age, physical capacity, weather conditions, and time of day, and to promote diverse modes of transportation.**
- **To provide residents and visitors with the ability to move safely and efficiently throughout the county, through a variety of means of travel, from automobiles to bicycles to pedestrian traffic.**
- **To promote a wider mix of transportation choices in the community, such as walking, bicycling, car sharing clubs, lift sharing bulletin boards, and public transport.**

### **Vehicular** **Overview**

Motor vehicles are the most used form of human transportation in Summers County. Because so many residents live in rural and remote parts of the county and because even the larger population centers have limited employment opportunities, most residents in Summers County travel to and from work by car. Many workers travel out of Summers County for employment. The mean travel time to work for Summers County residents is about 38 minutes. Unfortunately, vehicular transportation is hindered for many citizens by the high rate of poverty which often leads to an inability to purchase or maintain a vehicle. Over 25% of Summers County residents live below the poverty line. Transportation by automobile is also a problem for many of Summers County’s elderly population which tend to drive less due to health or lack of financial ability to keep a car. Public transportation for Summers County is currently restricted to buses utilized by the Senior Citizen Center, by local Churches, or by the school system. For these reasons, the road system and possible public transportation systems are a cornerstone to transportation in Summers County.

### **Assets**

- Major roadways are Interstate 64, West Virginia State Route 3, West Virginia State Route 12, and West Virginia State Route 20.
- Good roadway infrastructure.
- Summers County is home to some of the West Virginia Byways and Backways.
- The future New River Parkway will allow access to the New River and a scenic drive from Sandstone to Hinton.
- Small community, so many of the residents in the City of Hinton can walk to the local grocery store or other facilities.
- Buses are provided by the Senior Citizen Center, community churches, and the public school system for events planned by them.

### **Liabilities**

- More than 700 miles of roadways need to be maintained.
- Frequent mass wasting, rock slides, and other debris on roadways.
- Low shoulders on most roadways.
- Unstable topography creates subsidence issues under some roadways.
- Lack of public transportation options or taxi service.
- Existing roadways are not designed for multiple uses.
- Bus rides are too long for school children.
- Rural roads are often not maintained.
- Loss of downtown shopping districts or other amenities, such as health care services, necessitates the need to commute greater distances.
- Parking, particularly in downtown Hinton, is limited—especially during major events such as any of the community festivals.
- Parking for larger tour buses is also limited.
- Parking in the rural parts of the county is not easily identified without stumbling upon it by accident.
- No cab or taxi service. For an area with more retirees who may prefer not to drive, they have to depend on family or friends or planned events. One resident says that she feels dependent and would prefer some way to get around when *she* wanted, without having to apologize for taking time to browse in a local store or having to work with a family member's schedule rather than going on her own schedule.
- Local drinking establishments do not provide an alternative for safe rides home for those who have overdone it.

### **Objectives and Recommendations**

**Objective:** Ensure that future road construction promotes orderly traffic flow, allows for multiple uses and compliments the qualities which are valued, such as the rural, pastoral, natural and scenic aspects of the county.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Governing bodies should require a traffic feasibility and impact study for development or subdivision of property which adds more than one single family residence, regardless of type of development. Such a study should address the anticipated increased number of vehicles on the road or street providing direct vehicular access to the proposed development and/or any alteration in traffic flow patterns. The traffic feasibility and impact study should specifically include the

anticipated increase and type of vehicular traffic for any type of vehicle which is of a commercial nature. The traffic feasibility study should also address any increase in reliance on public services, such as whether additional school buses will be required to accommodate for the development.

- The governing body may direct, pursuant to zoning regulations or subdivision ordinances, that developers mitigate adverse modification in traffic flow or type by including in the development plan traffic mitigation techniques, which might include altering the ingress/egress access to the nearest public road, installation of traffic control signals, and include alternative transportation infrastructure. The governing body may, in addition to or in the alternative of, assess an impact fee commiserate with the anticipated impact on transportation services which are a direct result of increase or alteration in traffic patterns.
- Encourage through regulations, ordinances or financial incentives development of roads which allow for multiple uses.
- Mandate that future road development or construction or reconstruction use design techniques which have the least environmental and visual impact and that roads are designed to visually and historically compliment the area.

**Objective:** Reduce the number of vehicles impacting the roads.

**Recommendations:**

- Set up and promote a lift-share area on a website with lifts wanted and lifts offered. Promote the website around town on bulletin boards and other common areas.
- Conduct a survey of residents to determine where they work and how far they travel. Work with the largest group to set up a carpooling scheme.
- Encourage job growth and development and public services in areas with the largest population within walking distance.
- Conduct a traffic survey to determine traffic patterns and the percentage of local, medium, and long distance journeys.

**Objective:** Improve parking and access to points of interest.

**Recommendations:**

- Develop and implement appropriate standards for parking such as determining the appropriate number of parking spaces needed for various types of business, design parking lots and areas to have the least possible impact on valued qualities (historical, neighborhood characteristics) and environmental impacts.
- Identify, mark, develop or improve strategic locations for improved parking, particularly within the city of Hinton.
- Identify, mark and maintain more areas outside of city limits for camps, river access, and other points of interest.

**Objective:** Establish a system of public transportation.

**Recommendations:**

- Establish a shuttle service in and immediately around the city of Hinton, ideally with energy efficient vehicle(s).

- Support a community shuttle for residents outside of the city, who could plan shopping trips, doctor visits, and other trips.
- Solicit private businesses which provide transportation services, such as taxi services and/or car rental services.

## **Railroad**

### **Overview**

The history of the railroad system through Summers County is long and intricate. The rail-line transects Summers County at the very center of the county in an east-westerly line and from Hinton north. It was once the primary means of transportation both within the county and to/from Summers County. At one point in the history of Summers County, there were over 50 passenger trains per day that arrived and departed in Hinton. In addition to transportation, the railroad affects both the historic aspects of the community and the current economy, as CSX is a large employer for the community.

### **Assets**

- Rail lines in Summers County are actively in use to transport goods and people.
- Railroad plays a significant role in the history of the county, including and especially the history of John Henry and the Big Bend Tunnel and historic downtown Hinton.
- Hinton is a stop on the Amtrak line running from Chicago, Illinois to New York, New York.
- The Railroad Depot is an historic feature and has the potential to be a tourist point of interest.
- CSX is a significant employer.

### **Liabilities**

- CSX can be difficult to work with on community projects.
- Dangerous substances are transported through the county via the railroad.
- The railroad limits access near and across the tracks, which affects the community's ability to access some of the more valued resources in the community. For example, there is not access from downtown Hinton into New River Gorge National River because of the railroad.
- Additional work needs to be done on the Railroad Depot and other railroad historical sites to promote it for tourism or otherwise develop it into a useful space.
- Passenger transportation via rail is limited to only a few days each week and four trips during Railroad Days (community festival).

### **Objectives and Recommendations**

**Objective:** Utilize the railroad for the transportation of people, particularly tourists, to and from Summers County.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Government and non-governmental agencies, particularly tourism-based groups, should actively market access to Summers County via rail.
- Government, non-government agencies, perhaps through an appointed board, should assess surrounding communities for amenities or needs which can be served by Summers County and

work with the neighboring communities to establish a regular commuter train to and from Summers County. For instance, The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs was recently awarded a spot on the P.G.A Tour which attracts thousands of tourists to the area. Summers County should actively pursue an arrangement with White Sulphur Springs to run a shuttle train to and from this event. Similarly, the recent arrival of the Boy Scouts in Fayette County could lead to a partnership in which attendees or their families can visit or stay in Summers County and commute to Boy Scout events in Fayette County via train.

- Encourage services in and near the train station in Hinton to accommodate for tourists arriving via rail, such as a shuttle service to and from local boarding and restaurants. A taxi service or rental car business would also be effective.
- Tourism-based businesses that actively promote the use of the rail should be encouraged.
- Additional work needs to be done on the Railroad Depot and other railroad historical sites to promote it for tourism or otherwise develop it into a useful space.

**Objective:** Create access to points of interest that are currently inaccessible due to the rail.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify areas of interest which are currently inaccessible or access is limited due to the railroad. For instance, access to the John Henry Tunnel and the New River National River from Hinton are both limited due to the railroad.
- Partner with CSX and other relevant agencies, such as the National Park Service to locate the most feasible points and means of access across the railroad tracks. If partnership is not forthcoming, consider other options, such as condemnation.
- Develop and construct the proposed access points.
- Provide police and other emergency services to patrol the access points and the areas accessed.

**Objective:** Mitigate damage to the community from a potential rail disaster or accident.

**Recommendations:**

- Actively request information and participation from the railroad regarding disaster preparedness.
- Draft and implement a community-based plan to address matters that may arise as a result of an accident on the railroad.
- Train local emergency personnel in the disaster management plan.
- Solicit funding and/or personnel from CSX for the preparation of the plan and for the training of local personnel.

The Hinton-Alderson Airfield (location identifier WV77) is located three miles southwest of Alderson and one mile east northeast of Pence Springs. No commercial airlines utilize this airport. The airport is for private use and permission is required prior to landing. There is no control tower. The runway is 2700 x 25 feet, with a surface of grass/sod with no special surface treatment.



Outside of Summers County, there are multiple airports within two hours driving distance that are utilized by major airlines:

- Beckley Airport—Beckley, WV
- Greenbrier Airport—Lewisburg, WV
- Yeager Airport—Charleston, WV
- Roanoke Airport—Roanoke, VA

#### Assets

- Summers County currently has only one privately-owned airport.
- Private citizens with small aircraft have easy access to Summers County.

#### Liabilities

- The lack of an airport within the county does contribute to some loss from tourists who may not want to tackle unfamiliar roads (like Sandstone Mountain). For those tourists or visitors who are flying in from around the country, access to Summers County usually requires a minimum of an hour's drive to reach the county from any major airport, which may discourage tourists and visitors.
- There are no local shuttle services to or from any of the nearby commercial airports.

#### Objectives and Recommendations

**Objective:** Increase access to and from Summers County via air transportation.

##### Recommendations:

- Investigate ways to increase access to the county, via airports.
- Establish a shuttle service to and from nearby airports.
- Promote advertising in airports to increase visibility of the county to potential visitors.
- Encourage air businesses which may want to have Summers County as a starting point for "Air Sight-Seeing Tours." Tourists could fly over the dam, the rivers, up to New River Gorge and back, in pilot-



operated small airplanes or hot air balloons.

## **Port/Waterways**

### **Overview**

Because Summers County is the location for three rivers, Bluestone Lake, and multiple ponds and streams, boating is a frequent activity for the community and for visitors. At one point in the history of the area, the New River was a thoroughfare for river traffic via bateaus. However, these waterways are no longer much used for transportation purposes but remain some of the area's most valued qualities. Because the rivers and lake are primarily used for recreation and valued for their environmental qualities, they are discussed in greater detail in other sections of this plan.

### **Assets**

- Summers County hosts many miles of rivers and lakes.

### **Liabilities**

- Due to obstacles, both manmade and natural, the fluctuations in flow of the rivers are not really a viable form of transportation.

### **Objectives and Recommendations**

**Objective:** Promote safe and complementary use of the waterways.

**Recommendations:**

- Consider options for utilizing the waterways as a means of transportation, provided the use does not adversely affect the water quality, scenic attributes, or recreational opportunities.
- Provide water safety courses.

## **Non-motorized Transportation, Including Bike Trails and Pedestrian Paths**

### **Overview**

Though there are sidewalks throughout most of Hinton, there are no paths around Summers County which are specifically designed to allow for non-motorized transportation or commuting. The citizens of Summers County have specifically and emphatically identified the need for additional opportunities to travel by non-motorized transportation. Non-motorized transportation, such as bicycles and pedestrian routes would reduce reliance on motorized vehicles which traditionally contribute to air pollution. Furthermore, an increase in bicycle and pedestrian opportunities will assist in the promotion of a healthier lifestyle for all residents. Therefore, to promote the health, safety, and public welfare, additional bicycle and pedestrian routes and options should be created and included in all future development plans.

### **Assets**

- Sidewalks in the Hinton city limits along most streets.
- Several parks, including city parks with benches.
- Trees lined streets.
- Many streets in Hinton have street lighting.
- Some one-way streets, which are better for non-motorized transportation
- Summers County has 22.1 miles of mountain biking trails in public parks and spaces.

- Remote country roads are nice for walking or riding.

### **Liabilities**

- Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are limited in the county.
- Narrow shoulders and poor sight distances make operating a bicycle or walking along county roads unsafe.
- No designated bike trails or bike sharing on roadways.
- Need to repair and maintain sidewalks.

### **Objectives and Recommendations**

**Objective:** Develop a pedestrian-friendly community that incorporates and supports non-motorized transportation allowing pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists alike to travel safely and harmoniously.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Make the city and surrounding area bicycle friendly by planning and implementing bike paths, producing bike maps of the area, providing bike racks, safety education, and promote the benefits of cycling.
- All future roads constructed in Summers County should be designed to accommodate for non-motorized forms of transportation.
- Collective bike and school runs—bike trains into town, or walking/cycling to school in the morning.
- Help maintain sidewalks in urban areas using WVDOT Transportation Enhancement grants.
- Create a system of non-motorized paths as a means of commuting from one area of the county into a larger system of bicycle and pedestrian systems.
- Implement a “Share the Road” program that places signs throughout the county to remind motorists of bicycle and pedestrian usage.
- Reclaim abandoned rail lines and road beds as potential trail operations for non-motorized usage.
- Develop a mountain biking trail system.
- Use traffic calming and reduction strategies to make the city streets more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- Encourage children to walk to school and solicit volunteer parents to work with groups.
- Begin horse and cart taxi services around the community.
- Governing bodies should require that any future development assess the possibility of improving the bicycle and pedestrian opportunities on the developed property and, if possible, on surrounding properties.

### **Financial Considerations**

- Obtain funding for a traffic feasibility and impact study for development or subdivision of property from the West Virginia Department of Transportation. Projects should coordinate future road improvements with funding to include consideration of

increased personal and commercial uses.

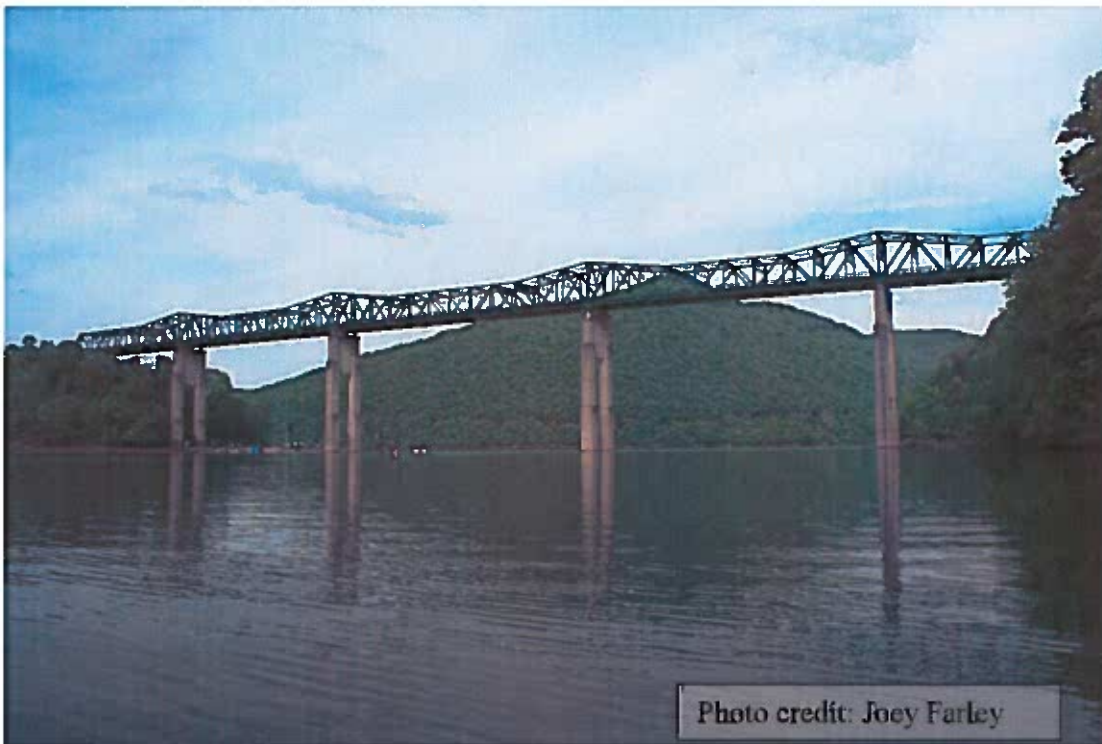
- Identify, solicit or generate funding, either through public or private sources or by adopting a fee structure (such as parking fees or fees for use of public spaces) for the purchase of property to expand and improve parking in the downtown Hinton area and to expand access to the rivers and other public spaces.
- Seek funding from agencies such as the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection for expanded shuttle or mass transportation services, preferably using energy efficient vehicles.
- See funding from government agencies for a community-based plan to address potential rail accidents in the county.
- Implement development fees for traffic impact studies and mitigation techniques for development which are anticipated to increase vehicular traffic.
- Designate or hire a local official or work with non-government agencies to oversee development of transportation projects and enforce standards and regulations for future projects.

## Chapter V: Infrastructure

### Overview

(See *Summers County Infrastructure* map)

Infrastructure is relatively permanent and foundational capital investment, typically of a government body, which underlies and makes possible all economic activity. Generally, this includes administrative, telecommunications, transportation, utilities, and waste removal and processing facilities. Sometimes, it also includes health care, education, research and development, and training. For the purposes of this chapter, information included is that which is generally excluded from other sections of this Plan, including Transportation, Public Services, etc.



One primary goal for the community and county is to maintain and expand infrastructure so as to allow for appropriate growth and success in the future. This chapter includes information regarding sewer, water, roads, and telecommunications not already discussed in other sections of this Plan.

Unfortunately, infrastructure projects such as sewer and water line extension tend to be costly and the mountainous terrain further adds to the expense of infrastructure expansion projects. In areas with greater population density, the cost is more easily defrayed. However, in rural areas of Summers County the cost of the infrastructure is often borne by few people, thus making the cost share per capita greater, though the actual cost of construction may be consistent with similar infrastructure projects in other populous areas. This can have the effect of increasing the overall rates of the users of the infrastructure as the capital expense of installation and maintenance costs divided by the number of system users typically are reflected in the rates. Despite this, many of the existing public service

rates in Summers County are consistent with average rates in West Virginia. However, as systems age or as the need increases, it may be necessary to re-evaluate the service rates for public services.

### **Recent Infrastructure Projects<sup>11</sup>**

In recent years, there have been several infrastructure projects in Summers County. While not a comprehensive list, recent improvements to the infrastructure in Summers County include sewer line extensions, bridge replacement, and dam support. One project recently completed is the City of Hinton's Gold Coast sewer line expansion. This project is described as WV Route 20 in Gold Coast near Hinton, including two motels, five restaurants, two convenience stores. The project was completed in 2014 and serves more than 20 new customers, including several commercial establishments. Also in 2014, the City of Hinton expanded sewer service to the Brooks/Barksdale areas.

The Big Bend Public Service District project is a waterline extension from Talcott to Browning and Wiggins communities east of Summers County Armory has its OverRun/UnderRun approved. The cost was projected at \$2,401,000.00 and will serve 58 new customers.

The Meadow Creek Wastewater Plant Replacement/Line Extension project has its preliminary application approved without IJDC funding. The project constructs wastewater treatment plant improvements and a collection system extension to serve the community of Meadow Creek. Construction began in December 2013, and the project costs were estimated at \$2,348,112.00 and it now serves 24 new customers.

Another project currently in the works is the construction of the Lilly Bridge replacement. The estimated cost is \$13,897,300 and construction is expected to be completed in about 2.5 years. The new bridge will span approximately 1225 feet and traffic will be maintained on the existing bridge during construction. One benefit of this new bridge is that it will not have the same weight and height restrictions that the Lilly Bridge currently has. According to the West Virginia Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, the 2004 Average Daily Traffic is 2,300 vehicles per day and is projected to be 3400 vehicles per day in 2024.<sup>12</sup>

Built in 1950 by the Virginia Bridge Company, the current Lilly Bridge spans Bluestone Lake in Summers County on WV Route 20. The bridge is a 5-span cantilevered thru-truss supported by concrete abutments and 4 concrete piers and is 1163 feet 10 inches long. The Lilly Bridge was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its association with the Virginia Bridge Company and its unique design. According to the West Virginia Department of Transportation there are only 7 remaining cantilever truss bridges in West Virginia.

### **Public Input**

#### **Assets**

- Access to public water in many areas of the county (Comments from Pipestem, Jumping Branch, and Talcott all touted the availability of public water).
- Access to public sewer in Hinton, parts of Sandstone and Meadow Creek.
- Sandstone and Hinton comments mentioned good highway infrastructure

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<sup>11</sup> Information regarding current projects was retrieved from <http://wvinfrastructure.com/projects/projects-summary-list.php?county=summer> and are up-to-date as of August 2013. 08/07/2013. 9:33 a.m.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.transportation.wv.gov/highways/engineering/comment/lillybridge/Pages/default.aspx>

and access to the Interstate from Sandstone.

- Availability of high-speed Internet in some limited areas of the county. High speed internet is generally available in Hinton.

#### **Liabilities**

- Limited access to public sewer infrastructure contributes to compromised water quality and development constraints (Sandstone residents expressed a desire for more commercial development which is unlikely without a public water source).
- Limited availability of high-speed Internet in many areas of the county.
- Too many cell towers which are visually obtuse, yet cell coverage remains spotty throughout the county.
- Inadequate public water availability and unchecked development threatens public water sources.
- Road maintenance is challenging, given the topography and expense.

#### **Water and Sewer<sup>13</sup>**

Summers County receives water from three providers: West Virginia American Water, Jumping Branch/Nimitz Public Service District and, the Big Bend Public Service District.

**West Virginia American Water** serves more than 15 million people in 45 states. 580,000 of those customers are from across West Virginia including some in Summers County. The water source for West Virginia American customers in Summers County is the New River, above the Bluestone Dam.

**Jumping Branch/Nimitz Public Service District** was founded in 1970 and is located in Nimitz, West Virginia. It has one full time employee and generates about \$110,000 in annual revenue. This PSD serves \_\_\_\_\_ customers. The water source is also the Bluestone Lake/New River.

**The Big Bend Public Service District** serves approximately 480 households and small businesses in the Talcott, Hilldale, Pence Springs and Willowood areas. The water intake for Big Bend PSD is the Greenbrier River near Talcott.

In June 2013, the Big Bend Public Service District received a federal grant from the USDA Rural Development program for \$345,000 to complete the Wiggins and Browning Water extension project in Summers County. The total project cost is expected to be \$2.8 million and the project will provide service to approximately 74 additional households along Route 3. Construction will consist of various size waterlines, a new water storage tank and upgrades to the existing water treatment plant.

**The City of Hinton Sanitary Board** provides sewer and wastewater treatment service to most of the City of Hinton and some portions of the county. This facility is designed to serve a population equivalent of approximately 6,250 individuals and currently has approximately 1,300 customers (note, customers are considered households or locations)

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<sup>13</sup> All information regarding the Water and Sewer section was extracted directly from the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit Number WV0024732.

in the City of Hinton and surrounding areas. The facility discharges the treated wastewater through Outlet No. 001 to the New River, approximately 59.7 miles from the mouth of the Kanawha River.

The wastewater treatment plant is located along the Lower New River and processes 0.625 million gallons of water per day through an extended aeration wastewater treatment system infrastructure which includes the following:

- Approximately 33,500 linear feet of six inch diameter gravity sewer line;
- 196,400 linear feet of eight inch diameter gravity sewer line;
- 3,200 linear feet of 10 inch diameter gravity sewer line;
- 5,300 linear feet of 12 inch diameter gravity sewer line;
- 12,100 linear feet of 15 inch diameter gravity sewer line;
- 300 manholes;
- 225 cleanouts;
- 7 lift stations;
- 2,800 linear feet of three inch diameter force main;
- 2,400 linear feet of four inch diameter force main;
- 4,000 linear feet of six inch diameter force main;
- 7,000 linear feet of 12 inch diameter force main; and
- All requisite appurtenances.

The wastewater treatment plant facility is comprised of the following:

- A bar screen, grit chamber;
- two aeration chambers with a volumes of 337,000 gallons each;
- two clarifiers with a volume of 113,300 gallons each;
- ultraviolet disinfection facilities;
- a sludge holding tank with a volume of 71,400 gallons;
- a 0.5 meter sludge dewatering belt pres; and
- all requisite appurtenances.

There are four "Combined Sewer System Overflows" or sewer relief points within this system. Combined sewer overflows (CSOs) are allowed only when flows in the combined sewers exceed the conveyance and/or treatment capacities during wet weather periods. Dry weather overflow events from any CSO are prohibited. :

- Outlet Number C004 - Located in Avis along the New River.
- Outlet Number C006 - Located in Bellepoint along the New River.
- Outlet Number C007 - Located in Bellepoint along the New River.
- Outlet Number C009 - Located between the New River and the CSX Railroad Tracks.

**The Meadow Creek Public Service District** is the only other wastewater treatment facility in Summers County. Meadow Creek PSD has two plants, one at Sandstone and one at Meadow Creek which collectively currently serves 106 customers in the Meadow Creek and Sandstone areas, though the plant capacity is much more than the current service. This facility discharges the treated wastewater into the New River. The Meadow Creek plant is presently slated to be replaced.

Collectively, these two wastewater treatment facilities currently serve approximately 1,400 households and businesses in Summers County. By extrapolation, with an average household size of 2.0 in Summers County, there are approximately 2,500-2,800 residents served by public sewage treatment. This means that there are more than 10,000 residents in the county who rely on an alternate form of sewerage treatment which may include septic tanks, privys, or “straight-piping” a practice in which wastewater is piped directly into the nearest river, stream or creek.

There are two "non-domestic wastewater producers" or Industrial Users approved for acceptance at this facility:

- RT Rogers Oil - permit requires plant to complete an oil/water separator log monthly and to submit that log to the City of Hinton on a quarterly basis.
- Mon Power - permit requires plant to complete an oil/water separator log monthly and to submit that log to the City of Hinton on a quarterly basis.

### Roads

Summers County is part of the West Virginia Department of Transportation District Nine which includes Fayette, Greenbrier, Monroe, Nicholas and Summers Counties.

- Interstate 64 travels for 184 miles within the borders of West Virginia, passing through the major cities of Huntington, Charleston, Beckley, and Lewisburg. It has only two major junctions within the state: Interstate 77 in Charleston and in Beckley. It also crosses the Kanawha River a total of four times in a 20-mile stretch. It crosses the New River in Summers County in Sandstone. Between I-64's two junctions with I-77, I-64 and I-77 overlap and the two Interstates are tolled, forming a part of the West Virginia Turnpike.
- State Route 20  
West Virginia Route 20 is a major north-south state highway in the U.S. state of West Virginia. The southern terminus of the route is at U.S. Route 52 in Bluewell, a small incorporated village near Bluefield. The northern terminus is at West Virginia Route 7 three miles (5 km) east of New Martinsville.
- State Route 12  
Route 12 enters Forest Hill, where it meets West Virginia Route 122. The highway continues north along the Greenbrier River and meets West Virginia Route 3 in Hilldale. Joined, the highways run east across the Greenbrier River to Talcott and then to Lowell before following the river north to Pence Springs. The routes then head northeast along the river through Barnetown before crossing into Greenbrier County. The two routes enter Alderson, where Route 3 leaves Route 12 to the south.
- State Route 3  
West Virginia Route 3 is a state highway in the U.S. state of West Virginia. It runs from West Virginia Route 10 in West Hamlin in a general easterly direction via Beckley to West Virginia Route 311 at Sweet Springs, most of the way across the state. Route 3 crosses a particularly large part of the state's landscape. It goes through many counties including Monroe, Greenbrier, Summers, Raleigh, Boone, and Lincoln. At least two state parks are along the route
- State Route 107  
West Virginia Route 107 is 1.8 miles long and is located entirely within Hinton. The southern end of Route 107 is at West Virginia Route 3 in the Bellepoint neighborhood of southern Hinton. The northern end is at West Virginia Route 20 in near the Summers County Courthouse. WV 107 is a former alignment of WV 20.



### **Telecommunications**

Broadly defined, telecommunication occurs when the exchange of information includes the use of technology. Common forms of telecommunications are telephone, internet, broadcast radio, cable television and satellite services (internet and television).

### **Internet**

According to the West Virginia Department of Commerce Broadband Mapping Project, access to broadband internet is important for the economic development of the state.<sup>14</sup> In 2009, the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey received a grant from the Telecommunications and Information Administration State Broadband Data and Development Program to create a statewide map showing broadband coverage by type and transmission speed.<sup>15</sup> As part of that grant, the Executive Office of the State of West Virginia received \$126,323,296 to build an infrastructure for broadband expansion. According to the Broadband USA Website:

“The West Virginia Statewide Broadband Infrastructure Project plans to bring high-speed Internet access to this vastly underserved region by expanding the state’s existing microwave public safety network and adding about 2,400 miles of fiber. The expanded statewide network expects to directly connect more than 1,000 anchor institutions, including public safety agencies, public libraries, schools, government offices, and other critical community facilities at speeds of up to 45 Mbps. As a result of this project, every K–12 school in the state will have a high-speed Internet connection. In addition, access to healthcare, distance learning opportunities, and broadband and video applications for emergency first responders will be greatly expanded. The project intends to spur affordable broadband service impacting more than 700,000 households, 110,000 businesses, and 1,500 anchor institutions, by allowing local Internet service providers to connect to the project’s open network.”<sup>16</sup>

4G internet service is becoming more common in rural areas like Summers County in recent years due to more customers accessing internet on personal devices such as I-pads, I-phones and other devices. This may impact how broadband development is pursued in this state.

### **Radio**

Summers County is served a local radio station based in Hinton – WMTD-AM 1380. The station was licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to Bluestone Broadcasters, Inc. and was first heard on the air in 1963. In 1985 WMTD-FM was launched and began broadcasting on 102.3. The main studio was located in Avis. In 1993, WMTD-AM went silent until it was sold in 2005. In 2010, MountainPlex Media,

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<sup>14</sup>[http://www.wvcommerce.org/news/story/WEST\\_VIRGINIA\\_BROADBAND\\_MAPPING\\_PROJECT\\_NOW\\_AVAILABLE\\_ONLINE/1746/default.aspx](http://www.wvcommerce.org/news/story/WEST_VIRGINIA_BROADBAND_MAPPING_PROJECT_NOW_AVAILABLE_ONLINE/1746/default.aspx)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.wvgs.wvnet.edu/bb/index.php>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www2.ntia.doc.gov/west-virginia>

LLC resurrected the station which now airs on AM 1380.

### **Cellular Phone Towers**

There are currently 25 cellular phone towers located within the boundary of Summers County and upgrades from 3G to 4G with existing carriers are becoming more common. Many of these towers were constructed between 2005-2010. Though citizens in Summers County applaud and appreciate the increased cellular coverage, there was immediate concern and backlash over the visual intrusion of the cell towers, which tend to stick out considerably on the generally rural and pastoral landscape of the county. As a response to the concerns, Summers County adopted the local “Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Ordinance.” As stated, the purpose of the ordinance is to “ensure the citizens of Summers County, West Virginia have access to wireless technology and to protect the residents of the County from the proliferation of freestanding towers, which detract from the beauty of the County...”

Companies proposing to build a new tower must complete a Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Permit Application and they must demonstrate by substantial evidence that a need exists for the facility and co-location – two or more servers using one tower – does not eliminate the need. Typically, the County Planning Official will review the application within 30 days and make the necessary arrangements for a public hearing if County Commission approval is needed. Once those steps are complete and the fee is paid the application is usually approved. Proposals for the construction of new towers must go before the Planning Commission. The Commission provides approval and the project will move forward.

### **Wireless Telecommunications Ordinance and County-Related Activities**

Summers County enacted a Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Ordinance July 6, 2009 and revised the ordinance effective December 17, 2012. The latest ordinance and application materials are available from the Summers County Clerk or online at the Summers County Website.

The purpose of this ordinance is to ensure the citizens of Summers County have access to wireless technology and to protect the residents of the County from the proliferation of freestanding towers, which detract from the beauty of the County. Specifically, this ordinance provides policy concerning wireless telecommunication sites and services that establishes clear guidelines for carriers and citizens, encourages colocation and the use of existing structures, encourages competition and the implementation of cutting-edge technology, all while minimizing the visual impact, and protecting the scenic and visual character of the community.

Wireless Telecommunications Applications are accepted at the courthouse, and the County Planning Official dispositions the applications according to the timeframe established in the Ordinance. In order to facilitate these activities, a Comprehensive Map of the Towers of Summers County was developed in November 2012 and will be updated semi-annually or more frequently depending on carrier activity in the county and surrounding areas.

## **Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations**

**Objective: Protect and expand water resources for the County**

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and map water resources areas (wells, springs, public water intake and the watersheds which impact them), perhaps in conjunction with an non-governmental organization or state or federal agencies and private landowners.
- Adopt or modify existing ordinances or regulations to protect and enhance the county water resources.
- Modify the building permit ordinance and process to include specific consideration to water source and resources before a building permit can be approved.
- Encourage and promote land conservation projects which may have a direct impact on the water resources, both public and private.

**Objective: Insure proper sewer access to all residents of the county...**

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and map the areas of the county without adequate sewer or wastewater treatment facilities and prioritize these areas based on factors such as the number of households impacted, the impact on water resources, and the environmental impact.
- Solicit funding and support from the appropriate agencies to extend or construct more feasible sewer and wastewater treatment facilities in these areas of the county.
- Modify the building permit ordinance and process to include specific consideration to sewer and wastewater treatment before a building permit can be approved.
- Implement land use planning ordinances which limit growth in areas which do not have adequate sewer or wastewater treatment infrastructure or plans to develop or improve it.
- Limit the development of public water services to areas which do not have adequate sewer and wastewater treatment capabilities.

**Objective: Insure all residents have safe and effective means of travel.**

**Recommendations:**

- Implement land use planning ordinances which promote adequate road infrastructure for the type of development contemplated.
- Assess the current roads in the county for condition and adequacy of traffic.
- Encourage and promote development of roads which facilitate multi-use, such as pedestrian and bike paths.
- Evaluate and assess proposed development for impact on the affected roadways and impact on the ability for the current users to continue to use said roadway. By way of example, limit potentially dangerous land uses in areas in which have high population density or institutions, such as hospitals and nursing homes, may face challenges

if evacuation is necessary.

**Objective:** Develop and expand broadband internet access for Summers County.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify locations within city and town limits which may serve as internet use hubs for local community members.

**Financial Considerations**

There are many traditional methods of funding public infrastructure projects, including, but not limited to bonds and grant programs. These sources of funding are critical to the expansion of infrastructure projects. However, this type of funding is not always guaranteed or may have limitations which prohibit appropriate infrastructure expansion. Other opportunities exist and should be explored with the proposal of each new infrastructure project. For instance, one option would be requiring developers who propose development outside

## Chapter VI: Public Services

### Overview

(See *Summers County Public Services* map)

To a certain extent, public services overlap with infrastructure in the preceding

chapter. The general idea for both is the same: infrastructure and public services are required as foundational elements of a community to promote and allow future growth and success. Public services are those offered to the community through tax dollars. Additionally, this Plan includes information on health care and civic organizations provided to the community. Therefore, this chapter discusses public



safety (police, fire and rescue, EMS), schools, libraries, hospitals, parks and recreation, and civic organizations.



## **Public Safety**

### **Fire and Ambulance**

There are seven fire departments and one emergency Medical Service that serve Summers County:

- Summers County Emergency Medical Services (Pipestem)  
Established in 1995, Summers County EMS is a privately held corporation that provides ambulance services through an agreement with the Summers County Commission.
- Green Sulphur District Volunteer Fire Dept (Sandstone)
- Summers County Volunteer Fire Dept (Hinton)
- Forest Hill Volunteer Fire Dept (Hinton)
- Hinton Volunteer Fire Dept (Hinton)
- Jumping Branch/Nimitz Volunteer Fire Dept (Jumping Branch)
- Pipestem Volunteer Fire Dept (Pipestem)
- Greenbrier Valley Volunteer Fire Dept (Talcott)

### **Police Services**

There is a Hinton City Police Department, a Summers County Sheriff's Department and a State Police Headquarters located in Summers County.

The Hinton Police Department (HPD) currently has six sworn officers and two civilian members which serve approximately 2,574 citizens within the three square mile area considered Hinton City limits.

In addition to the Sheriff, the law enforcement division of the Summers County Sheriff's Office is comprised of a sergeant, a chief deputy, four field deputies and an office deputy. The Sheriff's Tax Office has a staff of three and provided a variety of services including receiving payments for county taxes and providing assistance with some Department of Motor Vehicle renewals.

Troop 6 is the Hinton detachment of the West Virginia State Police. The WV State Police was created in 1919 by Governor John J. Cornwell and is the fourth oldest state police agency in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

### **Schools**

The administration of public schools in Summers County is facilitated by a superintendent under the direction of a five-member Board of Education. In the past, Summers County was served by numerous one-room school houses scattered within walking distance of nearly every community in the County. These smaller schools gradually closed and began consolidating into other or larger schools. Now, Summers County has one public high school, Summers County High School, which serves students in grades 9-12; one middle school, Summers Middle School, which serves students in grades 6-8; and three elementary schools, all of which serve students in grades Pre-K through 5: Hinton Area Elementary School, Jumping Branch Elementary School, and Talcott Elementary School.

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<sup>17</sup> [www.wvsp.gov/about/Pages/History.aspx](http://www.wvsp.gov/about/Pages/History.aspx)

The Summers County Schools School District spends \$10,362 per pupil in current expenditures. The district spends 58% on instruction, 36% on support services, and 6% on other elementary and secondary expenditures. The Summers County Schools School District has a ratio of 14 students for every full-time equivalent teacher, which is consistent with the state average. The District had a dropout rate of 4% in 2009 for grades 9-12. Nationally, the grades 9-12 dropout rate in 2007 was 4.4%. In the Summers County Schools School District, 14% of students have an IEP (Individualized Education Program). An IEP is a written plan for students eligible for special needs services.<sup>18</sup>

#### Elementary Schools

- **Hinton Area Elementary**  
Located in downtown Hinton, Hinton Area Elementary serves grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. There are currently approximately 469 students enrolled.
- **Jumping Branch Elementary**  
Jumping Branch Elementary is located in Jumping Branch and serves grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. There are currently approximately 132 students enrolled.
- **Talcott Elementary**  
Located in Talcott, Talcott Elementary school serves grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and seats approximately 155 students.

#### Middle School

Summers Middle School is located in Hinton and serves students in the fifth through eighth grades. There are approximately 334 students enrolled.

#### High School

Summers County High School is the consolidated high school for the county located outside of Hinton on State Route 20. The school serves students in the ninth through twelfth grades and currently has approximately 458 students enrolled. Summers County High School's curriculum provides general and college preparation programs and several focused Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs aimed at preparing students for entry-level employment in a variety of professions.

#### Private Schools

- **Pipestem Christian Academy**  
Located in Pipestem, the Christian Academy is a private school which is part of the West Virginia Christian Education Association. The Academy serves students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. There are around 100 enrolled students.
- **The Greenbrier Academy for Girls**  
Located in Pence Springs, the Greenbrier Academy is a private, family owned therapeutic school for girls and young women focused on creating sound and healthy relationships.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.education.com/schoolfinder/us/west-virginia/district/summers-county-school-district/>

There are also several students who are home schooled in Summers County which serve students outside of the institutional education setting.

Unfortunately, many residents of Summers County have a negative impression of the overall effectiveness of the Summers County school system, as was noted in multiple comments during the public meetings. Furthermore, anecdotally, local businesses report that one of the critical factors in a business's ability to hire and retain a younger workforce is the area's school system and the negative impression that many would-be residents have of the schools. This was cited at public meetings as a liability for the county.

### **Libraries**

Summers County is served by one local public library – Summers County Public Library located on Temple Street in Hinton.<sup>19</sup> With an operating budget of just over \$189,000, the Library employs three full-time and one part-time librarian. The collection holds the following:

- Approximately 22,430 books
- 591 books on tape or cd
- 1,587 videos/DVDs
- 113,079 e and e-audio books
- 15 database subscriptions
- A Bookmobile provides library access around the county.

Between 2012 and 2013 31,367 visits were made to the Library. There are 5,032 card carrying patrons. The Summers County Public Library provides many much-needed services for the citizens of Summers County. For many county residents, it serves as the only connectivity to the internet or availability of computers. Residents rely on these services for everything from communication to job searches and training. It is an integral part of the county and is largely supported by the citizens of Summers County.

### **Hospitals**

One hospital is located in Summers County: Summers County ARH Hospital located on Terrace Street in Hinton. This hospital is part of the Appalachian Regional Healthcare network which serves over 350,000 residents across Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia. In 1956, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) dedicated the miners Memorial Hospital Association's facilities. The hospitals were located in ten counties in Kentucky, West Virginia and Virginia. In the 1960's the Association closed some of the hospitals and a new independent not-for profit health system – Appalachian Regional Hospitals (ARH) - purchased the hospitals. In 1986 the name was changed to Appalachian Regional Healthcare. Today there are ARH hospitals in Harlan, Hazard, Hyden, McDowell, Middlesboro, Morgan County, South Williamson and Whitesburg, Kentucky and Beckley and Hinton, West Virginia.<sup>20</sup>

According to a profile provided by Hospital-Data.com, Summer County ARH is a “Critical Access Hospital” that is a private entity which provides emergency services. There are

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<sup>19</sup> Summers.lib.wv.us

<sup>20</sup> Community Health Needs Assessment, Summers County ARH Hospital. Prepared by the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky at the University of Kentucky, 2013.



approximately 636 yearly admissions to the hospital. There are 64 total beds and 25 total certified beds and a total of 131.05 Full Time Employees – including 40 physicians - providing a range of services.

In addition to the hospital, there are several doctors in private practice in Summers County. The hospital and the private doctors provide a much needed service for this rural population, many of whom lack a reliable form of transportation to travel greater distances to similar facilities outside of the county.

### **Long-term Care Facilities and Nursing Homes**

Summers County is home to several long term care facilities and nursing homes. Summers Nursing and Rehabilitation Center is located in Hilldale and has approximately 120 beds and accepts Medicaid. Main Street Care is a non-profit long-term care facility and is located on the third floor of the Summers County ARH facility, but is not legally part of the hospital. It has 34 beds available and accepts Medicaid. Other private long-term care facilities also exist in Summers County. Given the aging population of many Summers County residents, these facilities provide a much needed service to the community. Other facilities may be necessary as the population continues to age.

The Summers County Council on Aging located at 120 2nd Ave, Hinton, also provides a wide-range of services for county senior citizens including transportation to and from medical facilities and pharmacies.

### **Parks and Recreation**

Summers County is full of opportunities for both active and passive recreational pursuits. The county's abundant natural resources support a wide range of outdoor recreational activities for both residents and visitors alike. In addition to providing beautiful vistas for sightseeing, the county's mountains provide opportunities to observe the plants and wildlife of the area along with camping, hiking, mountain biking, hunting in season, and other activities. Summers County is also blessed to have the Bluestone Dam and Lake formed by the convergence of the Bluestone River with the New River upstream from the dam and the convergence of the Greenbrier and New Rivers just below the dam. These three rivers and the lake provide opportunities for boating, fishing, rafting, swimming, and other family-friendly activities. Summers County residents value these natural resources for both the quality of life these add to the region and for the economic impact of the tourism these features bring. Public comments consistently demonstrated residents' high regard for these natural and public resources and support the protection of these features. Unfortunately, many residents acknowledge some of the public spaces in the area are often littered or poorly maintained.

- New River Gorge National Park<sup>21</sup>

The New River flows 320 miles originating in North Carolina and joins with the Gauley River to form the Kanawha River. Between Hinton and Gauley Bridge the narrow part of the river's path is known as the "New River Gorge." A portion of the river in Summers County is managed by the National Park Service as the New River Gorge National River. Sandstone Falls and Brooks Falls are two of the best known natural attractions on the New River in Summers County.<sup>22</sup> Sandstone Falls is the largest waterfall within the New River Gorge. At that point, the river drips between 10 and 25 feet.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/neri/a-river-runs-through-it.htm>

<sup>22</sup> West Virginia Explorer – Guide to West Virginia and its Cultural and Natural Resources. Wvexplorer.com

<sup>23</sup> New River Gateway Convention and Visitors Bureau. Newrivergatewaywv.com

Established in 1978, the New River Gorge National River encompasses over 70,000 acres of land along 53 miles from the Bluestone Dam near Hinton to Hawk's Nest Lake in Fayette County. This is the deepest and longest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains. The New River Gorge National River is renowned for recreational opportunities including whitewater rafting, canoeing, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, and hunting.

The Sandstone Visitors Center is a part of the New River Gorge National River. This center, located just north of the I-64 and State Route 20 interchange (Exit 139), opened in the fall of 2003. The 9,800 square-foot facility features sustainable design for energy efficiency and resource conservation. In addition to the energy conservation elements, water conserving native plants are used there for landscaping. The Visitors Center has a number of interactive exhibits including a 12-minute video program on the New River.

Sandstone Falls is the largest waterfall on the New River and spans the river where it is 1500 feet wide and the river drops 10 to 25 feet. Sandstone Falls marks the transition from a broad river of large bottomlands, to a narrow mountain river roaring through a deep boulder strewn gorge. The falls mark the starting line for the New Rivers path through the Gorge to its confluence with the Gauley River to form the Kanawha River. Fishing is a popular activity around the falls and there are also hiking trails, picnic tables, and other amenities that make Sandstone Falls a popular recreational site.

Unfortunately, access to the New River Gorge National River is limited within the City limits of Hinton, due, in large part, to the presence of the railroad. There are not currently rights of way from downtown Hinton across the railroad track to access this natural resource. Another liability often cited with regard to the New River Gorge National River is that few people, residents and visitors alike, recognize that the New River Gorge National River is a division of the National Park Service.

- **Pipestem Resort State Park**

Pipestem Park – named for a local plant used to make pipe stems - offers visitors an aerial tram, lodges and two golf courses as well as an amphitheater which hosts a number of events between May and August. Guests may also hike, bike, ride horseback and enjoy cross-country skiing while visiting the park. Accommodations include 26 cabins and a campground with 82 units. Indoor and outdoor pools are also available for visitors.<sup>24</sup>

The Pipestem Resort State Park covers 4,050 acres in the gorge of the Bluestone River. The park features two hotels, one of which may be reached only by an aerial tramway to the bottom of the Bluestone River gorge, an 18-hole golf course and a full-length nine-hole par-3 course, several restaurants, and other recreational activities, including its own stable of horses. The Nature Center is open year-round, native plant and animal displays and includes the Harris Homestead, a reconstructed 1900s (decade) period historic house museum, barn and meat house.<sup>7</sup>

- **Bluestone State Park**

A sister facility to Pipestem Resort State Park, the Bluestone State Park encompasses over 2,100 acres of rugged, heavily forested, mountainous terrain, and provides a variety of activities for guests and residents of southern West Virginia. In the midst of this wilderness park, just five miles south of Hinton, are nestled 26-modern cabins, a campground and fine recreational facilities.

- **The Bluestone Wildlife Management Area**

This publicly owned Area offers visitors a variety of outdoor recreational

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<sup>24</sup> West Virginia Explorer wvexplorer.com

opportunities on 17,632 acres. Being adjacent to Bluestone Lake, the park offers guests boating, canoeing, and fishing opportunities. Hunting is offered due to the wildlife management area status and Bluestone has over 330 primitive campsites and picnic areas. Avid fishermen can enjoy float fishing and stocked trout fishing in Indian Creek. Hiking and Equestrian trails are also available.

- **Bluestone National Scenic River**  
Part of the national park system, this designation protects the gorge of the lower Bluestone River. Bluestone Lake, the second largest lake in West Virginia, marks the convergence of the Bluestone River with the New River.
- **Privately owned facilities, generally available to the public.**  
There are several privately owned museums or public spaces in Summers County. These include, but are not limited to: the Campbell-Flannagan-Murrell museum in downtown Hinton which showcases Hinton's history; the Hinton Railroad Museum also located in Hinton, which has an extensive collection of railroad memorabilia; the Graham House located in Lowell on the Greenbrier River is one of the oldest settlements in Summers County; the Veteran's Museum located in Hinton honors the history of military service in Summers County; and Cooper's Mill, an historic mill on the Little Bluestone River near Jumping Branch.
- **County and City owned parks and public spaces.**  
There are several city and county owned public parks in Summers County. These include, but certainly aren't limited to Bellpoint Park a city day-use park located on the New River and situated just downstream of the Bluestone Dam; John Henry Park located in Talcott, the John Henry Park commemorates the legend of John Henry – a steel driver who is fabled to have beaten a steam hammer in a race during the creation of the Big Bend Tunnel between 1869 and 1871; County-owned Camp Summers sits on over fifty-five acres of beautiful mountain scenery and is available for rent by groups for camps and retreats; City Sidetrack Park offers fun outdoor opportunities for the residents of Hinton, including a pool and water-feature, skate park, basketball court; and a variety of other small local parks throughout the county. Other public spaces include the recently renovated City Rail Depot, the passenger depot, the Railroad Museum.

### **Civic Organizations**

Citizens of the county actively engage in many civic organizations including, but certainly not limited to Elks, Ruritan and Rotary. These organizations and others like them, support the fabric of the quality of life in Summers County.

### **Goals, Objectives, Recommendations**

**Goal: Preserve the public services and spaces which enhance the quality of life unique to Summers County.**

**Objective: Protect and promote, through funding or otherwise, Summers County's valued public services.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide financial support to public services which are dependent on public funding, such as the library and the schools, through the implementation of an appropriate taxation structure, public-private partnerships or otherwise.
- Develop and promote a branding initiative or advertising campaign

which focuses on the public services and public features of Summers County.

- Adopt land use standards, ordinances or regulations which enhance the public enjoyment of the County's public spaces, such as set-backs from park boundaries, sign-ordinances.
- Adopt land use regulations which will encourage or require future developers include provisions for public spaces in certain development.

**Objective:** Enhance the quality of the educational system in Summers County.

**Recommendations:**

- Financially support the school system with public dollars.
- Facilitate after-school programs with access for all students, such as develop a transportation system for after-school activities.

**Objective:** Improve the public spaces

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and inventory public space for which either the county or the city are responsible.
- Develop a parks and recreation board to manage county and/or city public spaces.
- Develop, implement and enforce rules and regulations for the use of public spaces, such as hours of use – whether a daytime facility or camping area and fines for littering or misuse of the facility or space.
- Fund the maintenance of public spaces.
- Put trash receptacles in all public spaces and hire a garbage collection service to regularly empty these
- Train local law enforcement on the appropriate uses for the public spaces and mandate or encourage regular patrols of these areas.

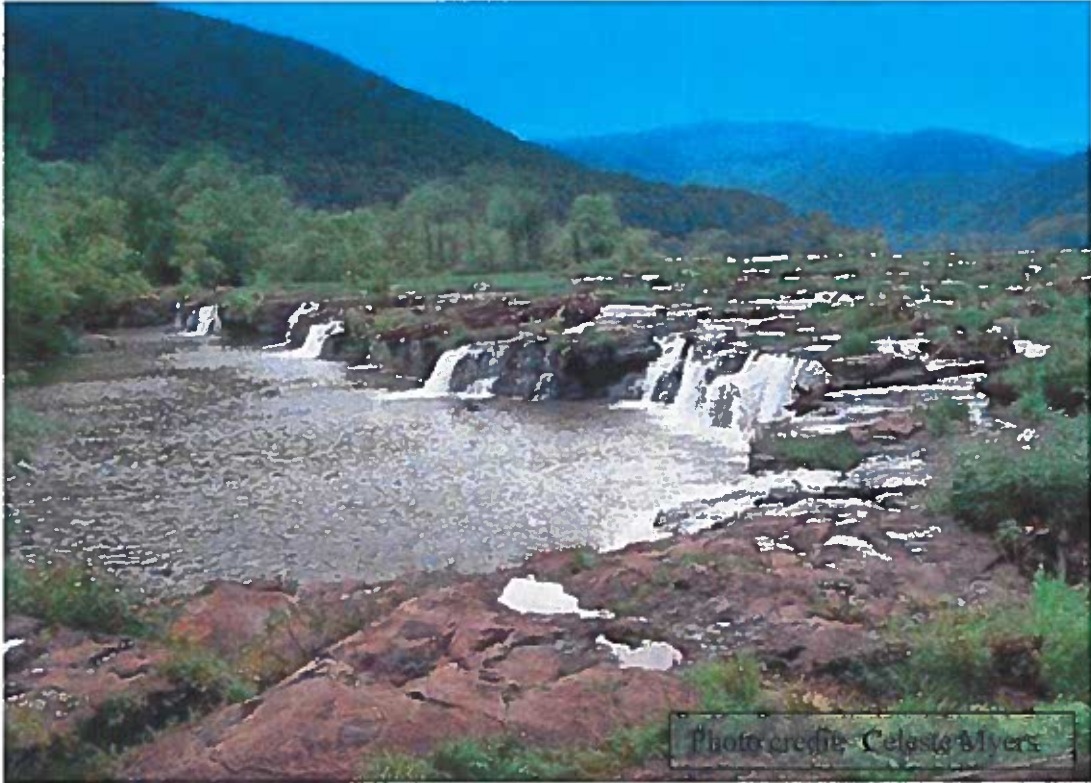
**Financial Considerations**

Many of the public services identified herein are financially supported by public funds and/or public private partnerships. The best mechanism for supporting and enhancing the public services needed in Summers County is through local tax revenue. Real property taxes in Summers County are remarkably low when compared to a national average. Increasing the taxation on real property, though not a popular idea, would greatly expand the coffers of the county to increase and enhance support of the public services offered. Passing a levy would provide much needed financial support for the school system and the libraries. Adopting a fire fee would support the local fire departments in the county.

Local non-profit, governmental and quasi-governmental agencies rely heavily on private funding and grants. A community facilitator, perhaps a local government employee, could provide assistance to these entities for fundraising and grant writing.

Fee-for-use should also be considered when contemplating potential funding mechanisms for public spaces in Summers County and the municipality of Hinton. While the public sentiment is to insure that the public spaces and services remain available to all residents and visitors, the reality is that maintenance of these spaces can generate expense. The expense of the cost of maintaining public spaces could be absorbed or offset by fees-for-use.

## Chapter VII: Current Land Use



### Overview (See *Summers County Current Land Use* map)

Summers County is, without a doubt, a scenic and beautiful landscape. Testament to the natural beauty is the fact that Summers County hosts the gateway to the New River Gorge National River, the Bluestone National Scenic River and is home to two outstanding state parks, Bluestone and Pipestem. At every single public meeting, attendees commented on and complimented the outstanding scenery, rural landscapes, and natural beauty of the county. People in Summers County value this beauty and believe that a significant change to the physical landscape would pose a threat to the overall community.

Similarly, the quality of life was a repeating theme in public meetings. Residents appreciate the friendly and accommodating nature of the area. The rural atmosphere is one of the values which residents treasure most and visitors most appreciate. Terms such as “quiet,” “peaceful,” “laidback,” and “uncrowded” were heard time and again during public meetings.

The aspects most appreciated and valued, however, are the very ones most at risk to be lost. The natural beauty and rural lifestyle attract newcomers and visitors to Summers County. While the newcomers will be greeted with a characteristically warm Summers County welcome, the assets which bring people to the area are the ones most vulnerable to unplanned and sprawling development.

It is imperative that the natural beauty of Summers County is protected for generations to come while, simultaneously, the future must allow for ample room to appropriately grow and accommodate for a new generation of West Virginians. Summers County must plan, develop and build to a level of service that furthers its quality of life.

## Land Uses

### **Natural Extractive Resources**

The Summers County landscape is rural, dominated largely by hardwood forests. The forested land of Summers County tends to be diverse/mesophytic hardwoods and oak dominated. These hardwood forests have historically been an economic driver. Timber is one of the natural resources which has proven to be vital for Summers County. Though most of the county is covered in second, third, or even fourth generation forests, timber remains a viable industry. However, to remain sustainable and avoid irreparable damage to the landscape, timbering operations must adopt and observe best management plans and practices.

Because Summers County does not overlay substantial coal seams, coal mining is not prevalent here. There are, or historically have been, a few mines scattered throughout the county, primarily in the northern part of Summers County. These areas are noted on the attached map and may be considered for future development, either for an expansion of their existing uses or as an adaptive reuse of brownfields area. Similarly, oil, natural gas and other fossil fuels resources are either non-existent or not economically feasible to extract to date. However, as extractive technology changes, so, too, might the extractive industries in Summers County. While the county residents welcome a diverse economy, the resident feel strongly that the county's inherent beauty be protected for generations to come.

### **Agriculture**

Iconic pastoral landscape is indicative of one of the county's primary land uses: agriculture. Farmers of the region have adapted the limited flatland and rolling hillsides for productive use. Though agriculture has declined as a commercial enterprise in the last few decades, there has been a noticeable resurgence of local, sustainable agriculture. Because of



the low population densities and larger-than-average land holdings, many people in Summers County are able to produce enough on their own property for personal consumption.

### **Commercial**

The City of Hinton and some of the smaller towns and communities including Jumping Branch, Pipestem, Talcott, and

Sandstone constitute the primary commercial centers. Each of these areas is serviced by at least one basic infrastructure system, such as sewer or water. Within each of these commercial centers are a variety of land uses. The City of Hinton has many amenities that are non-existent in some of the smaller communities. For instance, Hinton has three of the county's five schools, its only hospital, retail centers, the county library, and employment opportunities. Jumping Branch is also home to an elementary school and some retail and

service centers, though it has increasingly become a bedroom community for the neighboring city of Beckley in Raleigh County. Pipestem is home to Pipestem State Park, retail, and service centers. Pipestem is close to neighboring Athens, home of Concord University, and Princeton. Talcott is the home of the legendary John Henry and is the site of the historic Big Bend Tunnel. Talcott also houses an elementary school and a few locally owned and operated businesses.

Sandstone is considered a gateway community to the New River Gorge National River. Sandstone also services an exit on Interstate 64 and has developed service industries to take advantage of that asset.

### **Population Centers**

The most densely populated residential areas in Summers County correspond with its commercial centers. However, residences can be found throughout the county, concentrating mostly near roads. Residences and residential areas are diverse, ranging from historic older homes in downtown Hinton to farmhouses, and from upscale second homes to seasonal communities dominated by permanently located recreational vehicles.



### **Manufacturing/Industrial**

With the exception of the railroad, Summers County has only a few businesses that might be considered manufacturing or industrial. The existing businesses which fall into this category are primarily manufacturing and are scattered throughout the county. The railroad, including the rail yards and tracks throughout the county also fall into this category of land use.

### **Publicly Owned**

Much of the land in Summers County is considered public domain and is primarily used for recreational purposes. The New River Gorge National River and the Bluestone National Scenic River encompass 7,149 acres in Summers County. The Bluestone Wildlife Management area consists of 17,632 acres upstream of the dam and surrounding the Bluestone Lake. This area is known for its hunting and fishing opportunities and is managed to take maximum advantage of these popular sports. It is managed by the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources but is owned by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The State of West Virginia also owns and manages Bluestone State Park and Pipestem State Park, 2,100 acres and 4,000 acres, respectively. Finally there are a few, smaller county and municipal parks that are cornerstones of the community, including Bellepoint Park, Hinton Landing, and the John Henry Historic Park.

### **Historical**

There are several points of historical interest in Summers County. Notably, most of

downtown Hinton is within the historic district and registered with the National Register of Historic Places. There are several other points of historic interest, including the Graham House in Lowell, east of Talcott; the Great Bend and Big Bend Tunnel in Talcott; Coopers Mill on the Little Bluestone River; and the Hinton Railroad Depot.



Photo credit: Brandon Saddler



## Chapter VIII: Planned Development Patterns

Based on the scoping analysis and community input, there are several factors dictating where and how future growth and development should occur. Additionally, there are certain environmental and cultural factors which may limit future development in some parts of the county. Conversely, there are areas of the county which stand out as preferred areas for future development and growth. Finally, there are factors which must be taken into consideration for all future development projects in Summers County.

It is imperative that the landscape of Summers County is protected while considering future growth anticipated by the community. Summers County must plan, develop and build to a level of service that meets its quality of life characteristics.

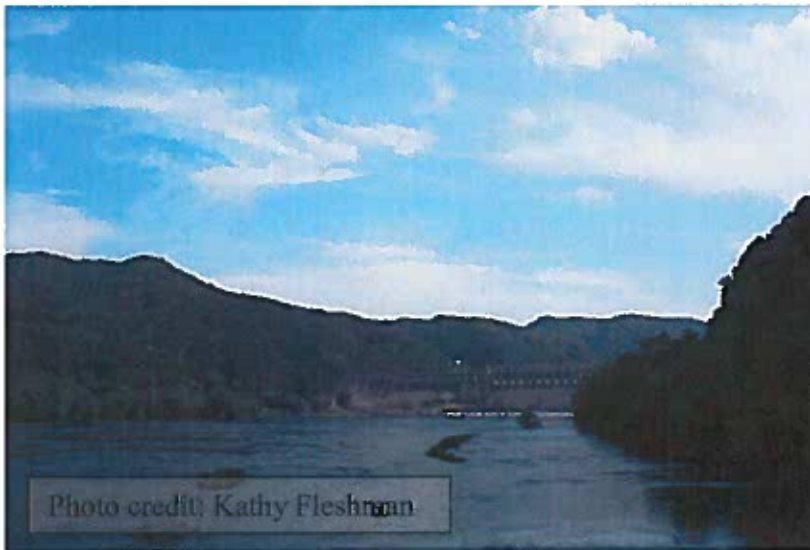
### Environmental Constraints to Future Development

(See *Summers County Environmental Constraints* map)

Summers County is a mountainous region with steep valleys and numerous tributaries to the river systems which meet in Summers County. Developable real estate is limited by the natural topography and other geologic features. Future land management plans, regulations, and ordinances should account for the following environmental constraints to development.

### Floodplains

Citizens of Summers County have always been concerned about damage due to



flooding. The most densely developed areas of Summers County are located in the floodplains along the rivers and streams. There have been several devastating floods in the last few decades in Summers County. The New River is dammed for flood control immediately upstream from Hinton, but the Greenbrier River is

free flowing and has reached the 100-year flood level about once each decade for the last three decades. In addition to the Greenbrier, there are several smaller tributaries which regularly experience flash-flooding events—often many times each year. The concern for flood damage and flood risk management is one of the issues that was repeatedly voiced at several of the community meetings.

Several federal and state agencies map and regulate floodplains, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the United States Army Corp of Engineers.

However, though floodplain maps are created by these agencies, they are not always accurate. Specifically, the maps do not necessarily reflect areas which were historically in the floodplain but which are no longer within a floodplain due to flood management techniques. Conversely, as weather patterns change to include more intense weather events and as development increases runoff in the watershed, areas which may not have traditionally flooded are beginning to show signs of flooding during certain weather events. Though these federal agencies have regulations regarding construction within floodplains and strongly discourage high-risk development within these areas, growth and development continues nonetheless.

Building in floodplains increases the risk of property damage and life threatening situations during flood events. Not only does development of floodplains increase the risk of damage to the property of the landowner, but it can also increase the risk of damage to other members of the community. Development increases the amount of impervious surfaces in an area, which in turn increases water runoff and eliminates the ability of the ground to absorb excess water. These conditions result in floodwaters persisting longer and in decreased water quality from debris and substances flowing into surface waters.

**Goal: Prevent or Mitigate Flood Damage to Property and Person.**

**Objective:** Manage development and construction within floodplains or flood-prone areas of Summers County and the City of Hinton.

**Recommendations:**

- Update floodplain maps to reflect areas in which actual flooding has occurred recently or is likely to occur, taking into consideration existing flood control measures, such as dams.
- Adopt Floodplain Regulations, Impervious Surface Restrictions, Shoreline Vegetation Cover Restrictions, and Building and Septic field setbacks.
- Prohibit construction of buildings and facilities subject to water damage in the 100-year floodplain.
- Require flood-proofing measures on buildings presently in floodplain.
- Remove flood-prone structures from floodway portion of floodplain.
- Establish construction standards for development in the floodplain.
- Adopt provisions to protect natural vegetative cover in floodplains.
- Require tree and shrub planting in floodplains to prevent erosion.
- Restrict dredging, filling, dumping or backfilling of floodplain areas.
- Restrict land divisions within floodplain areas that would create parcels or lots that cannot be used due to the probability of flooding.
- Require that flood insurance be obtained for all facilities in floodplain under the National Flood Insurance program.
- Require that proposed new structures or modifications to existing structures in the floodplain be subject to approval for flood control measures.
- Create an overlay zone within a prescribed setback from the river, stream, or creek that regulates development and use of the floodplain based on the severity of the flooding hazard.
- Identify flood prone property and solicit funding for the purchase in fee of this property.
- Consult standards such as the Uniform Building Code, which may

contain regulations concerning construction in floodplains that may be useful.

- Develop standards for percent impervious surface development and improvements to allow all storm-water on site to gradually percolate.

## Slope

Residents often joke that people from Summers County have one leg shorter than the other because they are always walking on a slope. Summers County is made up of mountains and steep valleys; flatland is a relatively rare commodity. For decades, residents of Summers County have, for the most part, managed to keep structures off of particularly steep slopes. However, as property in the valleys and flatlands is developed, and as people scramble for scenic mountain vistas, Summers County may experience issues with steep slope development. There are two primary concerns when constructing on a steep slope: erosion and stability.



The generally accepted standard is that construction on slope grades of greater than 15% is discouraged in an effort to protect the health, safety, and welfare of a community. Areas that have development on slopes have also run into serious problems with erosion, landslides, and siltation. In some situations, these problems are more than just nuisances but can cause substantial damage to human life and property.

### **Goal: Prevent or Mitigate Damage to Property and Person Due to Steep Slope Construction.**

**Objective:** Manage development and construction on slopes greater than 15% in Summers County and the City of Hinton.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Adopt Slope and Fill Regulations
- Prohibit construction of buildings and facilities on slopes greater than 25%.
- Require siltation-proofing measures on buildings or new constructions on slopes greater than 15%.
- Establish construction standards for development on slopes.
- Adopt provisions to protect natural vegetative cover on slopes.
- Require tree and shrub planting on slopes before, during, and after construction to prevent erosion.
- Avoid land divisions on slopes that would create parcels or lots that cannot be used or that will place structures directly uphill from other structures.
- Require that proposed new structures or modifications to existing

- structures on 15% or greater slopes be subject to approval.
- Create an overlay zone on slopes greater than 15% which regulates development and use.
- Building Officials & Code Administrators, and the Uniform Building Code contain regulations concerning construction on slopes that may be used or adopted.
- Require geotechnical surveys be done for any construction planned within the steep slope overlay.

### **Wetlands**

Wetlands are areas in which the soil is saturated with water either permanently or seasonally. Land is generally considered a wetland if the water table is at or near the surface for most of the year. Wetlands are often called bogs or swamps and are considered the most biologically diverse ecosystems. They are crucial for wildlife habitat and flood mitigation. Summers County does not have a lot of area which would normally be considered wetlands. However, wetlands that are present in the region play a critical role in flood mitigation, water quality, and wildlife habitat and diversity.

**Goal: Preserve Wetlands in an Effort to Protect Water Quality, Assist in Flood Control, and Provide Wildlife Habitat.**

**Objective:** Manage development and construction in and near wetlands.

**Recommendations:**

- Adopt regulations restricting the filling, grading, and placement of buildings and structures in wetlands.

### **Soil Stability**

(See *Summers County Soils* map)

Summers County residents are all too familiar with slumps, low points, and rockslides in and on the roads. These issues are often categorized as soil stability or subsidence issues. In 2005, in downtown Hinton, a creeping landslide destroyed several residences and brought attention to the issue of soil and slope stability.

**Goal: Prevent Damage to Person or Property Due to Unstable Soils and Subsidence.**

**Objective:** Manage development and construction on unstable soil and areas prone to subsidence.

**Recommendations:**

- Determine which soil types are less stable and less suitable for development and create an overlay zone to include these soil types.
- Require geotechnical surveys be done for any construction planned within the unstable soils overlay.
- Adopt regulations limiting, restricting and/or mitigation construction on unstable soils.

### **Cultural Constraints to Development**

(See *Summers County Cultural Constraints* map and *Summers County Recreational Resources* maps)

There are several factors which the citizens of Summers County identified as important issues to consider when planning for future land use. These factors include, but

are not limited to, scenery, historical significance, infrastructure challenges, and property which is publicly owned and used. Public input repeatedly indicated the importance of these issues as critical to the overall quality of life in Summers County. It is imperative that future regulations, ordinances, and plans take the cultural constraints into consideration.

**Goal: Identify and protect culturally significant resources.**

**Objective:** Manage development in and near areas which are culturally significant and/or promote development which showcases and promotes the cultural significance.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and categorize and map areas of cultural significance.
- Conduct studies to determine what, if any, types of development might be most appropriate for each location identified.
- Adopt regulations or restrictions to promote appropriate development in these culturally significant areas.
- Identify and solicit funding or create funding incentives which promote appropriate development in these areas.

**Designated Scenic Resources**



Photo credit: Joey Farley

Appreciation for the scenery and beauty was perhaps the most widely repeated comment when the community was asked to name the strengths of Summers County. Citizens note that scenery is not only valued by the residents but it is often an economic-driver for Summers County. Based on this resounding appreciation for the scenery of Summers County, the Planning Commission initiated a process for determining which specific views, vistas, and scenery hold the most value. Among other things, the Planning Commission held a photography contest in which participants were asked to provide photographs of their favorite public views in Summers County. Based upon the results of this community project and the overall public input, a

Designated Scenic Resources map was generated to delineate the most valued scenic views in Summers County.

**Goal: Preserve the Scenery and the Vistas for all Summers County Residents and Visitors.**

**Objective:** Manage development and construction so as to not depreciate or degrade the scenery, views, and vistas.

**Recommendations:**

- Continue to assess the community designated scenic resource areas.
- Manage the intensity of development and prohibit conflicting land uses and activities to preserve views, vistas, and the overall scenery and landscape of the designated scenic resource areas.
- Utilizing a base or overlay zone for designated scenic resource areas to establish specialized land use regulations that could include requirements or limitations on: height, bulk, and use; setbacks and lot coverage; density; grading; ridgeline development; and landscaping and vegetation cover.
- Require cluster subdivisions or planned unit developments that locate residential lots in areas outside the designated scenic resource areas and away from ridgelines.
- Provide density bonuses to incentivize clustering to avoid negatively impacting designated scenic resource areas.
- Establish design guidelines and a design review process.
- Enact billboard and sign controls or ordinances to protect vistas and views within the county and city(ies).
- Establish subdivision standards regarding the design and placement of public improvements to encourage development outside of designated scenic areas and away from ridgelines.
- Discourage capital improvement and infrastructure development in designated scenic resource areas.
- Partner with neighboring counties, municipalities, and communities to establish consistent design standards and/or land use standards to accommodate for views and designated scenic resources which impact Summers County and the City or Hinton.

**Historically Significant Areas**

Summers County has an abundance of cultural and historic landscapes, districts, and structures primarily because of its long and rich history of railroading and farming. Some of these resources include:

- Several buildings, including houses and the Hinton Railroad Depot, and the Hinton National Historic District (all of downtown Hinton) listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The Great Bend and Big Bend Tunnels, to be showcased by the anticipated John Henry Historical Park.
- The agricultural landscape of parts of the county.
- The railroad, still in use, that passes through the county.

Historic structures, both those listed on the National Register and many that are not, are plentiful in the county, but many are deteriorating from lack of care as a result of a long-depressed local economy. Some structures are preserved and host current uses, where individual owners have the financial resources to do so. However, many are in danger of being lost forever.

Summers County residents value their community's historical significance and have identified the need to preserve and protect this vital aspect. It is important that areas of historical significance be preserved and protected from growth and development that is inconsistent with the historical significance of the area. While inconsistent growth and development in these areas of heightened historical significance is discouraged, re-use of existing historic structures and areas, consistent with the history of the place, is encouraged in many instances.

**Goal: Protect the Historic Character and Landscape of the County that Tells the Story of its Agricultural and Railroad Past.**

**Objectives:**

- Identify landscapes, districts, and structures that demonstrate the county's history, particularly with regard to agriculture and the railroad, and the lifestyles expressed during those eras.
- Preserve the identified landscapes, districts, and structures based on their protection priority and their condition and limit development and prohibit inconsistent development in areas of heightened historic perseverance.

**Recommendations:**

- Explore public, private, and non-profit financing options for preservation of historic structures, especially those in the Hinton National Historic District and those associated with railroad history in the county.
- Protect agricultural landscapes through financing tools, such as conservation easements, and by providing landowners with incentives for preservation.
- Continue to support the development of the John Henry Historical Park, and take advantage of other opportunities to create or support protected spaces of significant historic features on the landscape.
- Establish, enact, and enforce land use ordinances, including zoning ordinances, performance standards, and subdivision regulations which will limit development which is detrimental or inconsistent with historically significant areas.

**Areas with Restricted Infrastructure**

Many areas of Summers County are not served by basic infrastructure, such as sewer and water. Therefore, many residents rely solely on septic systems, septic fields, or even "straight-piping"—the act of piping raw, untreated sewage directly into a nearby waterway—for their sewage. Many residents also use wells, springs, or cisterns for their water supply. Because the county has a small population and because of the relatively low density of population in the county, infrastructure projects can be costly per capita and the expense of such projects is borne by a small number of people. Specifically, for every foot of pipe needed to provide a basic service such as water or sewer, fewer people will be served by the

improvement due to the low density of population. Further, the expense of constructing and maintaining the infrastructure will be greater per person because of the fewer number of people using the system.

Most, though not all, of the residents of the City of Hinton are served by both water and sewer. Additionally, there are other areas of the county which are served by either water or sewer or both.

Concern for the availability of potable water and the desire to protect the overall quality of surface and subsurface water is very real in Summers County. Even in areas that have traditionally had ample water supplies, in recent years during dry summers, some residents are forced to haul water from offsite. This is a particular concern for farmers with livestock which require substantial quantities of water. Though there is considerable speculation about the cause of the of the reduced water volume and/or lower water table, the reasons are likely a combination of over-use due to unplanned or sprawling development into areas not served by infrastructure and citizens generally demand more water per person than our ancestors did just a few decades earlier.

As tourism becomes more of an economic driver in Summers County and because so much of the area tourism is directly related to the rivers, lakes, and streams in the area, degradation of the area's surface water quality is an issue. Practices such as straight-piping, which have historically been acceptable, are now recognized to be harmful to the water quality, negatively impacting the environment and local economy.

In an effort to prevent further degradation of the surface and groundwater, and to preserve and protect the quality and quantity of potable water sources, development and growth should be carefully managed in areas without this basic infrastructure in place. Future water and sewer infrastructure should be carefully planned to accommodate areas suitable or desirable for development.

**Goal: Preserve and Protect Both the Quality and Quantity of Water Resources in the County.**

**Objective:** In an effort to maintain or improve the quality and quantity of water, ground and surface, restrict development to areas which have potable and plentiful water and sewer infrastructure, and discourage development in areas which lack this infrastructure.

**Objective:** In an effort to maintain or improve the quality and quantity of water, ground and surface, restrict or regulate development in areas which may have a negative impact on the water quality, such as flood plains and zones of critical concern.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify areas lacking water and sewer infrastructure and those that are not likely to have such infrastructure constructed based on distance from the existing service, cost to construct, and/or low density populations.
- Identify areas that historically have a high demand for water and/or sewer services, such as agricultural uses, and promote plans or create incentives for better water and wastewater management in those areas.
- Establish, enact, and enforce land use ordinances, including zoning ordinances, performance standards, and subdivision regulations, which will limit development in areas without adequate water and sewer infrastructure.
- Identify areas in the county that directly affect the water quality, such



as areas in a highly used watershed, flood planes, or zones of critical concern, and create specific enforcement or regulations to discourage development in these areas and create incentives to discourage such development.

- Adopt regulations or ordinances which require any increase in runoff due to the construct or to the finished site plans to be mitigated during and post construction.
- Identify and secure funding to construct sewage treatment facilities in underserved areas.

### **Public Lands and Open Space**

(See *Summers County Recreational Resources* map)

Several areas in Summers County encompass publicly owned or managed land. The agencies that own or manage these properties include the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the Department of Natural Resources, the National Park Service, the State Park system, Summers County, and the City of Hinton.

These areas are not only important for the reasons stated in the managing documents of each, but also because they are an economic driver for Summers County. The publicly owned property in Summers County provides habitat and habitat corridors for wildlife, including fish and game and

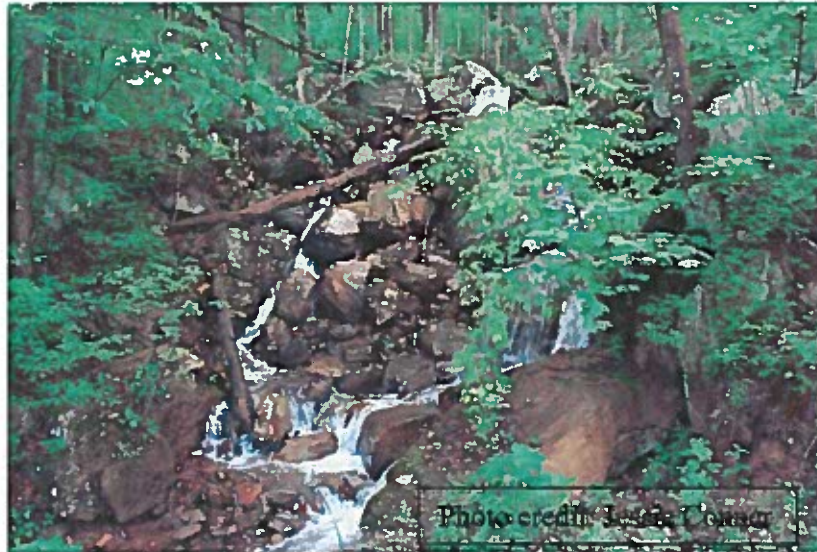


Photo credit: Justin Turner

biodiversity in flora and fauna. This is not only an environmental benefit, but it also attracts a large number of tourists to the region for activities such as hunting, fishing, and bird-watching. Citizens have identified open space and public lands as vital to the overall quality of life unique to Summers County.

Though development in areas which are specifically owned by public agencies is unlikely, especially private development, there are privately-owned areas that are within the boundaries of public lands which could be developed.

**Goal: Preserve and Protect Open Space in the County, Particularly Publicly Owned Lands or Areas Within or Immediately Adjacent to Public Space, by Discouraging Development in Areas that are Within the Boundaries of or Immediately Adjacent to Publicly Owned Property.**

**Objective:** In an effort to preserve open space and publicly owned property for its environmental and economic factors, restrict incompatible use and development of areas within the exterior boundaries of public land or immediately adjacent to publicly owned lands.

### **Recommendations:**

- Identify governmental or public agencies that own property within Summers County and develop land management partnerships with each agency consistent with the best management practices for that particular area.
- Identify land entirely within or immediately adjacent to public property, particularly public property which has value as open space.
- Create incentives for private property owners of property with public boundaries or immediately adjacent thereto to encourage best land management practices consistent with those of the publicly owned property. These may include tax incentives or other financial incentives, such as conservation easements.
- Establish, enact, and enforce land use ordinances, including zoning ordinances, performance standards, and subdivision regulations which will limit development inconsistent with the best land management practices identified in conjunction with the public agency.

### **Preferred Development Areas**

*(See Summers County Preferred Development Areas map)*

Preferred Development Areas refers to those areas in which appropriate development is encouraged. These are generally areas which have appropriate infrastructure, including roads, water, and sewer, or proximity to this infrastructure and in which development will not negatively impact the features of the county that are most valued. In some instances, specific locations were identified as areas that could sustain and welcome growth. For example, residents of Pipestem identified Route 20 from Pipestem to the Mercer County line as an area suited for appropriate development. Likewise, with added infrastructure, Sandstone may be able to sustain additional businesses established to compliment Interstate 64, the New River Gorge National River, and the anticipated New River Parkway. Downtown Hinton, Avis, and Bellepoint are areas suited for re-use and re-development and could tolerate moderate growth complimentary of the historic quality. Talcott residents are proud that their community has small, locally owned businesses and a new elementary school, and would welcome similar growth. Jumping Branch also houses an elementary school and local businesses, and hopes to continue to capitalize on its proximity to the larger city of Beckley in Raleigh County. These are just a few examples of areas in Summers County which are considered Preferred Development Areas. However, it should be noted that not all types development could be tolerated in all Preferred Development Areas and future development should be consistent and considerate of the existing qualities of the area.

### **Areas with Infrastructure or Planned Infrastructure and Proximity to Public Services**

As noted in other sections of this document and as was repeated by citizens throughout the county, infrastructure is vital to growth and development in Summers County. This is particularly true of water, sewer, and roads. However, other less essential types of infrastructure, such as broadband internet connections, are important, particularly for commercial growth. In addition to traditional infrastructure, areas proposed for development should likewise be assessed for soft-infrastructure, such as distance to and

capacity of the schools or hospital. For instance, a subdivision type of development designed for families should assess the distances to the nearest schools, including bus routes, and the capacity of the school system to accommodate for an influx of additional children. Similarly, a housing development established as a retirement community, should contemplate availability of and proximity to services traditionally used by seniors.

**Goal: Growth and Development Should Occur in Areas with Necessary Infrastructure.**

**Objective:** Encourage growth and development in areas with infrastructure capacity, present or reasonably anticipated, which can support the proposed size and type of development.

**Recommendations:**

- Determine the location, condition, and capacity of the existing infrastructure, including public and private systems and regularly re-assess this information.
- Create a consortium of owners or operators of infrastructure systems in Summers County and utilize this group to assess the existing infrastructure and anticipated infrastructure needs.
- Locate areas that have water, sewer, and roads as well as other types of infrastructure, such as broadband, and solicit commercial development which could most capitalize on these features.
- Locate areas that have water, sewer, and roads as well as proximity or access to other types of infrastructure or public services, such as schools and hospitals, and solicit residential or commercial development which could most capitalize on these features.
- Require that proposed development projects assess both the anticipated demand on the infrastructure and public services, whether the existing infrastructure and public services can sustain the anticipated needs, and, if not, proposals for increased capacity or modifications of the proposed development plans to accommodate.
- Create financial incentives to promote growth in areas with necessary existing infrastructure and public services.
- Establish, enact, and enforce land use ordinances, including zoning ordinances, performance standards, and subdivision regulations that will promote appropriate development in areas that have water and sewer.
- Promote greater densities in areas which have existing sewer and water services.
- Continuously assess the capacities of the existing infrastructure and upgrade when and where necessary to accommodate for additional growth.

**Objective:** Infrastructure projects and funding should focus on areas that would otherwise be suitable for development.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify areas suitable for development, excluding areas that may lack appropriate sewer, water, or road infrastructure; prioritize these areas based on other development considerations addressed herein or in other land management documents.

- Identify and solicit funding for the development of infrastructure in the areas determined to be most suitable for development.
- Identify areas of the county which have either sewer or water but lack the other.
- Focus future infrastructure projects in areas which currently have access to some necessary infrastructure but lack access to other necessary infrastructure.
- Require that all future extensions or improvements to the water infrastructure likewise accommodates for sewerage. In other words, water infrastructure should not be improved without a similar improvement to the sewer infrastructure.

### **Renewal and Redevelopment of Blighted Areas**

The long-depressed local economy and the loss of many county residents have led to the dilapidation of many of the county's historic structures. Blighted properties—business, residential, and industrial—dot the landscape, and new businesses lack viable existing building space. County residents express concern for the number of blighted properties, both within Hinton and in the county. Blight is a generic term used to define property that has fallen into extreme disrepair or structures/objects that can no longer be used for its original intended purpose.

However, the abundance of blighted property in Summers County and Hinton give the area a potential edge for future development. Infill development is typically defined as the recycling of vacant or underutilized land. Re-use can reduce suburban sprawl, the consumption of open land, and support and strengthen existing communities. Blighted properties are frequently concentrated in areas large enough to sustain larger development projects. Often, these areas of concentrated blight have access to necessary existing infrastructure such as sewer and water. The county's historic resources are unique, and if revitalized, could support businesses or residents and serve as a draw for tourism and a source of pride for county residents. They contribute to the local character and sense of place that makes Summers County distinctive and interesting.

### **Goal: Remove or Re-use Blighted Structures in the City and the County and Redevelop the Areas of Blight, Particularly the Areas of Concentrated Blight**

**Objective:** Identify blighted properties. Clean them up, repurpose and reuse them, and develop strategies to prevent blight.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Define blighted properties to include dilapidated and uninhabitable buildings and unsanctioned trash dumping sites.
- Identify and map blighted properties around the county, and prioritize their clean up. High priority should go to areas where many blighted properties are highly concentrated and individual properties that are located in highly visible locations that impact community pride and the experience and impressions of visitors.
- Develop a warning and punishment system, and related enforcement strategy, for owners of blighted properties, such that any fines or fees generated go toward cleaning up and repurposing blighted properties that have fallen into public ownership or serve to assist owners making a concerted effort to clean up blighted properties who are in need of support.

- Provide incentives to property owners to repurpose and redevelop formerly-blighted properties, particularly for purposes consistent with the county’s community design and economic development goals.
- Provide incentives for the renovation and reuse of existing structures, particularly blighted or deteriorating structures, as opposed to new construction.
- Provide incentives for businesses to renovate and reuse existing structures, particularly in centralized business districts in the county’s more densely populated areas and in the municipality.
- Develop land use regulations, ordinances, and plans that promote the demolition, renovation and/or reuse of blighted structures and in-fill development in areas of blighted property.
- Develop public gathering areas—including small parks, plazas and community gardens—in areas where dilapidated buildings have been demolished and no replacement building is planned, so as to avoid blight and illicit use of the property.

**Existing Communities and Population Centers**

Though there is currently only one incorporated municipality in Summers County, the City of Hinton, there are many smaller communities and population centers. Many of these communities encompass commercial and residential uses. Notably, each of these communities has its own unique qualities and characteristics. Residents of the county identified these community characteristics that contribute to and further the overall quality of life within both that community and the county as a whole.

Many of these communities have plenty of room to grow and certain types of appropriate in-fill development should be encouraged within existing communities.

**Goal: Encourage Growth and Development Within Existing Cities, Towns, and Communities Consistent with the Overall Character of the Community.**

**Objective:** Assess and characterize each of the five to ten largest populations centers in Summers County and develop programs to encourage appropriate development within these areas.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and map the five to ten most populated communities in Summers County.
- Encourage and facilitate community-based groups of citizens to create neighborhood or community plans consistent with the unique characteristics of each community and consider amendments or addenda to the comprehensive plan to include these neighborhood or community plans.
- Establish, enact and enforce land use ordinances, including zoning ordinances, performance standards, and subdivision regulations that will promote development consistent with plans established by each community group and the overall comprehensive plan for the county.
- Create other incentives for development consistent with each community plan.

**Brownfields and Industrial Sites**

The term “brownfield” refers to any property, the development or re-development

of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a contaminant, pollutant, or other hazardous substance. These types of sites often include industrial facilities, mining sites, gas stations, and dry cleaners. Other than the railroad, Summers County has not had a lot of this type of use. However, to the extent that there are or may be these sites in Summers County, remediation, redevelopment, and re-use in certain situations is desirable.

**Goal: Encourage Appropriate Remediation, Reuse, Redevelopment, and Infill Development Known or Believed to be Brownfields.**

**Objective:** Identify brownfields and former industrial sites and develop policies to encourage the remediation, re-use, and redevelopment of these areas.

**Recommendations:**

- Define specifically the criteria for brownfields and industrial sites.
- Identify and map brownfields and industrial sites in Summers County.
- Create incentives and/or include a requirement in land use ordinances that developers assess certain developable property for status as a brownfield or former industrial site.
- Develop plans, policies, and financial programs to provide incentives for the remediation, re-use, and redevelopment of these sites.
- Establish, enact, and enforce land use ordinances, including zoning ordinances, performance standards, and subdivision regulations that will promote remediation, re-use, re-development and infill development of these sites.

**Industrial Development**

With a nod to the traditional “smoke stack chasing” model of economic development aimed at attracting new manufacturing jobs, the Summers County Commission hired the firm Thrasher Engineering to analyze potential industrial sites within the county in 2004.<sup>25</sup> The commission's goal for the project was to evaluate, purchase, and develop a business or industrial park site within the county to be utilized to create a high standard of jobs for the residents of the region. The engineers were charged with identifying potential sites and developing a mixed-use concept for each along with designing the supporting infrastructure and estimating the associated development costs. Thrasher Engineering began by overlaying Summers County tax maps on USGS Topographic maps of the area. This was done to show the approximate location of property boundaries, the topography, and the existing roads that are near each potential site. Eight sites were identified and then evaluated on their proximity to existing roads and utilities, overall accessibility, and environmental constraints.

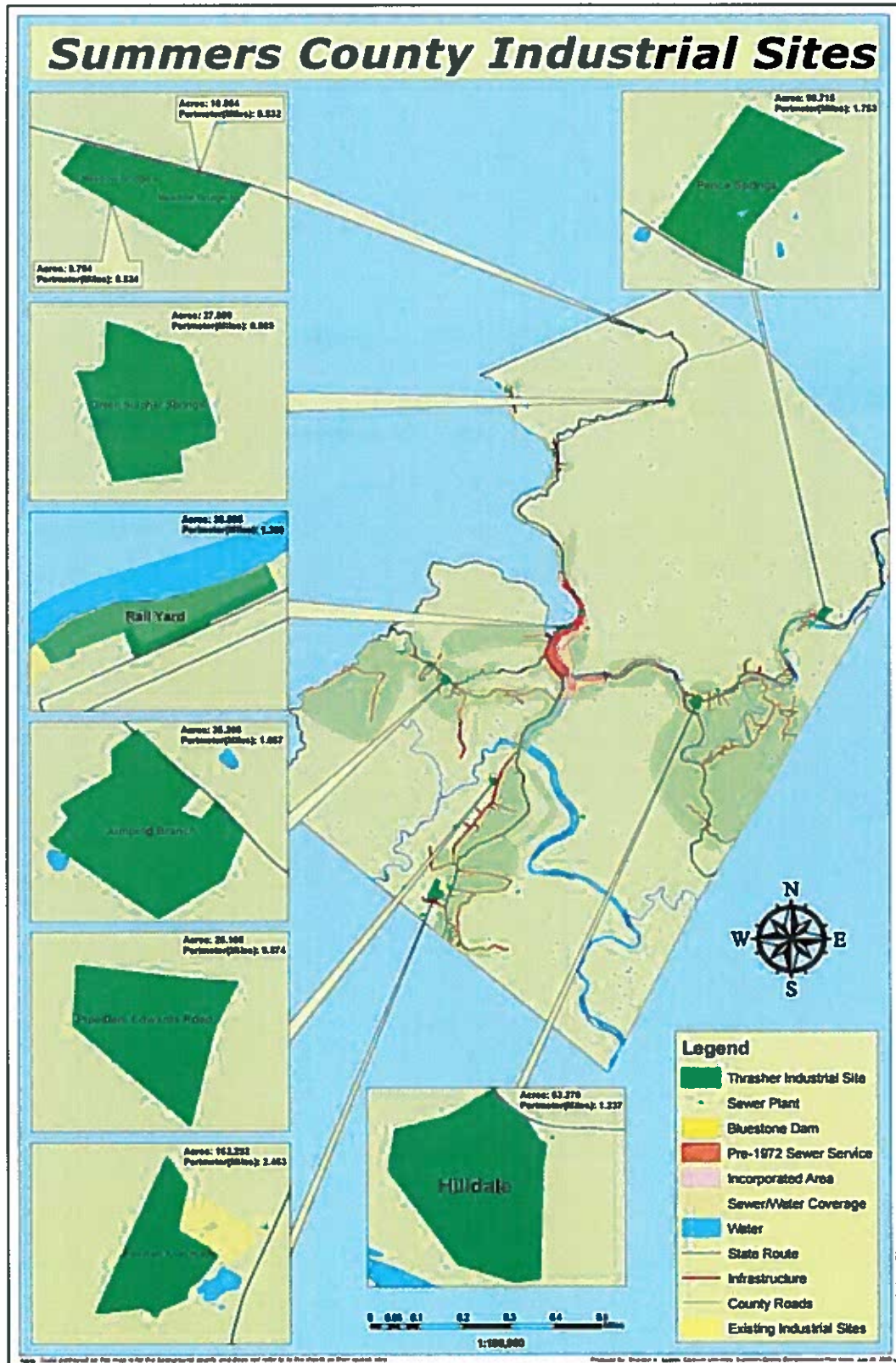
The eight considered sites were identified as: (1) Hilldale site, (2) Pence Springs site, (3) Rail Yard site (Hinton), (4) Meadow Bridge site, (5), Green Sulphur Springs site, (6) Jumping Branch site, (7), Edwards Road site, and (8) Knob Ridge site.

Based on Thrasher's evaluation and cost analysis, the Knob Ridge site was determined to be the best suited for the placement of a business or industrial park. According to Thrasher's report to the Summers County Commission, “The site is situated very well in relation to WV Route 20 and Pipestem State Park.” The total cost estimate for land acquisition and extending infrastructure to the 162 acre site was determined to be \$640,000 or \$3,950 per acre. The development cost per acre of this site was actually the

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25 “Site Analysis Report for Business/Industrial Park Sites for the Summers County Commission.” Thrasher Engineering. 2004.

second lowest compared to the Hinton Rail Yard site at \$2,833 per acre for its 30 acres. The Edwards Road site was the highest at \$52,333 for each of its 30 acres. This project is currently on hold as the Summers County Commission has not been successful in negotiations to acquire any of the eight potential sites. Never-the-less, these eight sites remain the most logical potential business/industrial park development sites in the county. Land use planning may lead to more designated sites. Future development of any of these sites should be consistent with other provisions of this plan and future ordinances.



## Community Design and Development Considerations



Much of the local character of Summers County is built out of the surviving elements of its industrial and agricultural history. Towns feature unique historic buildings surrounded by forested and agricultural lands. Very few chain or box-stores are located in the county, making the area unique and serving as a boon to local business development and tourism potential. Summers County retains its individuality in a country where more and more places are becoming indistinguishable from one another. The county has a quiet, peaceful, friendly, and rural feel that its residents appreciate and its visitors find appealing.

The long-depressed local economy and dilapidation of many of the county's historic structures are both major threats to the persistence of the kind of local character that residents appreciate. Agricultural and forest lands are threatened by the potential for development that would detract from the peaceful, rural feel of the county. Blighted properties—business, residential and industrial—dot the landscape, and new businesses lack viable existing building space. The small amount of new business development that has occurred in recent years has sprawled outside of existing business districts and often taken the form of small chain stores and fast food restaurant franchises. Because the customer base within the county is limited, local businesses have a hard time competing with nationally-supported chain businesses, and customers are pulled away from concentrated downtown business districts where they might support multiple businesses in one trip and spend time together as a community in downtown gathering spaces.

The county's historic resources are unique, and if revitalized, could support businesses or residents and serve as a draw for tourism and a source of pride for county



residents. They contribute to the local character and sense of place that makes Summers County distinctive and interesting. Summers County residents value their historic resources and want them to be preserved, revitalized, and showcased. They are concerned about the continued deterioration of historic structures. They are supportive of the opportunity to develop the John Henry Historical Park and to provide other opportunities for people to learn about and experience the county's history. Significant features that were singled out by the public as those that could be revitalized and showcased include the railroad and the Hinton National Historic District.

Few public places are available to promote regular gathering and relationship-building among community members. Potential community leaders often move away from the area in search of jobs, and it is difficult to attract a creative class of people who are motivated to serve community development goals with the county's limited economic base.

Despite the challenges, opportunities are plentiful for further developing the characteristics of the county that its residents value. Blighted properties could be cleaned up and, in many cases, restored, and historic properties and landscapes can be preserved and used for community and economic development. The county's uniqueness, sense of place, friendly culture, and striking natural resources make it an attractive place for new residents to settle and become involved in the community.

Summers County residents treasure their high quality of life and peaceful, quiet lifestyle in friendly and welcoming communities. The rural, undeveloped nature of the county is valued, particularly because the communities have unique local businesses and are not hosting large, ubiquitous box stores. This community design and character generates the opportunity to attract a creative class of people to visit, live, and work.

County residents are concerned about the number of, and lack of control over, blighted properties in the county, including junkyards, trash dumps, properties with old cars and, vacant and dilapidated buildings. They fear that the county's rural feel and quality of life is threatened by the profligate placement of cellular towers, signs and billboards, as well as dumping, littering, and uncontrolled development.

Specifically, county residents value and express a desire to preserve the following county features and all land management plans or approaches should consider each of these elements:

- Rural/Agricultural/Open Space
- Historic Preservation
- Scenic Resources
- Rivers, Streams, and Riparian Corridors
- Uses Consistent with Community Values

**Goal: Protect and Emphasize Development of Aspects of Community Design that County Residents Value.**

**Objectives:**

- Maintain the rural feel of the county, both visually and socially.
- Maintain the unique character of the county's built environment by discouraging development of national chain or franchise businesses and suburban housing developments that are common to most towns around the country, and by encouraging use of existing and historic properties for businesses and residences.
- Encourage informal, public community gathering areas where people can interact in downtown locations throughout the county.

**Recommendations:**

- Protect forest and agricultural landscapes through preservation and conservation incentives.
- Provide incentives for the renovation and reuse of existing housing stock.
- Create disincentives for construction of suburban-style housing developments, particularly where such developments would alter the rural (agricultural or forested) character of the landscape.
- Where new houses are constructed, provide guidelines for appropriate styles of construction that fit with the rural character of the location if outside of towns and cities, or that fit with the architectural character of the location within towns and cities.
- Provide incentives for businesses to renovate and reuse existing commercial structures, particularly in centralized business districts in the county's downtown areas.
- Create disincentives for franchise and national chain businesses to construct new buildings located outside of centralized downtown business districts.
- Where businesses do construct new buildings, provide guidelines for appropriate building size, style, and architectural elements so that new buildings blend with the rural character of the landscape.
- Continue to encourage a concentration of use and development in downtown areas and business districts where residents have the opportunity to live, work, shop, and socialize without the necessity of driving an automobile.
- Develop public gathering areas—including small parks, plazas and community gardens—in towns and cities where dilapidated buildings have been demolished and no replacement building is planned, so as to avoid blight and illicit use of the property.

**Goal: Remove or Stop Proliferation of Structures in the County that are Inconsistent with the Aspects of Community Design that Residents Value.****Objectives:**

- Identify blighted properties in the county; clean them up, repurpose, and reuse them.
- Develop strategies to prevent blight in the county.
- Identify structures in the county, other than buildings, that detract from the local character. Remove those that can reasonably be removed, and halt or control further construction of these objects.

**Recommendations:**

- Address blighted property matters consistent with other sections of this document.
- Identify structures or areas, other than permanent buildings, that detract from the local character and rural feel of the county, including cellular phone towers, signs, billboards, seasonal R.V. campgrounds, and other similar objects.
- When those objects or areas are not in use, remove them or provide disincentives to owners who would otherwise leave them there.

- When those objects or areas are in use, but the use could be consolidated or abandoned, provide incentives for consolidation or abandonment and disincentives for continued use.
- When those objects or uses are permitted, provide guidelines for where they can be located and their construction style so that they are not uncomplimentary elements of the landscape and local character.
- Discourage, through land use ordinances, regulations, and financial programs, the proliferation of these uses, especially seasonal R.V. campgrounds.
- Develop and support a cell tower ordinance.

**Goal: Combat Illegal Dumping and Littering that Detracts from Local Character and the County's Rural Landscape.**

**Objective:** Clean up illegal dump sites and litter and stop future dumping and littering in the county.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify illegal dumping grounds throughout the county. When it is reasonable and safe, involve the community to clean them up in order to develop a sense of cooperation and community pride.
- Explore available financing tools.
- Establish a punishment system and enforcement strategies for illegal dumping, such that any fines or fees collected are applied to cleaning up illegal dumps.
- Assign clean up of illegal dumps as community service to individuals who have been convicted of minor crimes, particularly those who have contributed to illegal dumps.
- Establish a punishment system and enforcement strategies for incidental littering.
- Engage county residents in volunteer clean up of litter and in reporting those who are littering to authorities.
- Provide disincentives to residents who choose not to use a trash collection. Where trash collection is not available, provide disincentives to residents who might want to dispose of their trash in any manner other than recycling it or transporting it to the local landfill.
- Develop and support a county recycling program or encourage development of a recycling program through a private enterprise.

**Goal: Promote the Valued Rural, Agricultural, Open Space, River-Riparian Corridors, and Scenic Qualities.**

**Objectives:**

- Encourage uses that contribute to the preservation of rural, agricultural, open space, river-riparian corridors, and scenic qualities.
- Emphasize the unique aspects of the county to promote and develop the existing sense of local character that is important to the county's residents and appealing to visitors and future residents.
- Employ existing tools and assess new land use tools that promote these unique qualities.