

2010 Mineral County Comprehensive Plan

Public Input Appendix

Introduction

Public input for the Mineral County Plan has taken many forms over the time that the plan has been under development. From mid-2006 to the end of 2007, there were three major activities which provided opportunities for comment and critique about the county and its future. These were a strategic planning stakeholder meeting in June 2006, the topical stakeholder briefings in May 2007, and the public input sessions in November and December 2007. The results of those activities are summarized below.

Strategic Planning Meeting

The public input process for the Mineral County Plan began even before what eventually became the comprehensive planning process was initiated. It began with a stakeholder meeting attended by about 50 people on June 17, 2006 in Keyser. The meeting focused on what was then a strategic planning process. The West Virginia University Extension Service was asked to assist at the meetings and six faculty members served as facilitators:

- Steve Bonanno, Program Leader, Community, Economic, & Workforce Development
- Michael Dougherty, Extension Specialist, Community, Economic, & Workforce Development
- Carl Marcum, Extension Agent, Wayne County
- Rick Moorefield, Extension Agent, Summers County
- Norm Schwertfeger, Extension Agent, Brooke County
- Sarah Stevenson, Extension Specialist, Institute for Labor Studies and Research

The attendees were divided into four groups and asked to list the strengths and weaknesses of the county as well as the opportunities and threats facing the county. The full listing from each group was reported out to all attendees. It was later compiled by WVU Extension Agent Rick Moorefield.

A total of 160 strengths were listed by stakeholders. Common themes included the county's location, facilities (of all types), organizations, and people. Meanwhile, 127 were listed during the session. Many of these focused on economic or job opportunities, transportation (roads), and

infrastructure (water and sewer). Interestingly, many of the positives and negatives were the same situation examined from different perspectives.

Meanwhile, there were 89 opportunities and 65 threats were identified by the group. These two future-oriented topics received additional attention as well. The responses were combined (where two groups said the same things) and grouped (where two groups said very similar things) to create a master list for each. Then participants prioritized the topics using a weighted voting methodology. WVU Extension Specialist Sarah Stevenson tallied the scores and reported them to the County Commission.

The top five opportunities were (1) land use planning/zoning; (2) improve infrastructure; (3) tourism; (4) communications infrastructure; and (5) business/industry recruitment (Table A.1).

Table A.1: Opportunities Tallies from June 2006 Stakeholder Retreat

Opportunities	Pts.	Topical area
Land use planning/Zoning	63	Infrastructure
Improve infrastructure	51	Infrastructure
Tourism	35	Increased funding
Communication infrastructure	24	Infrastructure
Business/industry recruitment	20	Business growth
Optimism	16	Attitudes
Expand educational institutions	15	Education & training
Keyser bypass/corridor	15	Infrastructure
Protect quality of life	14	Attitudes
Business incentives/tax parity	13	Business growth
Expand existing industry	13	Business growth
Alternate energy production	12	Energy
Assisted living	8	Health
New hospital	7	Health
Regional decision making	7	Government
Airport	6	Infrastructure
Congressional delegation	5	Government
Workforce training	5	Education & training
Homeland Security funding	4	Increased funding
Healthy community	2	Health
Casino gambling	1	Increased funding
Capitalize on diverse community	0	No votes
Entertainment	0	No votes
Establish landfill	0	No votes
Industrial park	0	No votes
Main Street	0	No votes

Meanwhile, the top five threats were (1) unplanned growth; (2) lack of money, local resources; (3) inadequate water management; (4) lack of road improvements/maintenance; and (5) lack of strategic plan with teeth (Table A.2). These topics point to the need to examine the county infrastructure, to improve the economic base to improve the (financial) resource base; and to plan for the future. They were the only topics to score more than 20 points in the voting. There were a total of 336 points assigned to opportunities and 310 points assigned to threats (not everyone cast all their votes).

Table A.2: Threats Tallies from June 2006 Stakeholder Retreat

Threats	Pts.	Topical area
Unplanned growth	82	Planning
Lack of money, local resources	41	Infrastructure
Inadequate water management	31	Infrastructure
Lack of road improvements/ maintenance	24	Infrastructure
Lack of strategic plan with teeth!	22	Economic development
Inability to compete in economic development	17	Economic development
Zoning	16	Planning
Lack of affordable housing	14	Infrastructure
Apathy/behavior/attitudes/ newcomer expectations	11	Economic development
Outside pressure on infrastructure, services, natural resources	11	Economic development
Geopolitical conditions	10	Economic development
Absentee landowners	7	Economic development
Outmigration of youth	6	Economic development
Insufficient communication infrastructure	5	Infrastructure
Increased crime	4	Miscellaneous
Landfill	4	Planning
Growth of low-wage jobs	2	Economic development
Casinos	1	Miscellaneous
Health care costs	1	Miscellaneous
NIMBYism	1	Planning
Inconsistent ordinances, regulations	0	No votes
Limited emergency communication	0	No votes
State government bureaucracy	0	No votes
Threats to paper industry	0	No votes
TIF districts	0	No votes
Trucking regulation/highway restrictions	0	No votes

Topical Meetings

A series of topical meetings took place on May 9-10, 2007 in Keyser to begin the formal input process for the comprehensive plan. These meetings involved invited stakeholders in five subject areas – land use, infrastructure, safety, economic development, and quality of life.

To prepare for these meetings, the Planning Commission made an initial list of 147 groups, agencies, organizations, and individuals to provide input on the plan, using the required and optional plan elements listed in the *West Virginia Code* (§8A-3-4(c) and §8A-3-5) as a guide. It then reviewed, revised, and grouped the list with the updated list of 146 entities divided into five categories for the meeting plus a sixth category for local governments – and initiations with comment sheets were mailed to each. There were 19 invitees in land use, 15 invitees in infrastructure, 23 invitees in safety, 20 invitees in economic development, and 58 invitees in quality of life. There were also 11 local governmental invitees.

A total of 51 unique participants attended the meetings and four additional comment sheets were received. There were 10 persons and the land use meeting (and one sheet received); 9 people at the infrastructure meeting (and one sheet received); 12 people at the quality of life meeting (and one external comment received); 8 people at the safety meeting (and one comment sheet received); and 12 people at the economic development meeting (and no comment sheets received). WVU Extension Specialist Michael Dougherty facilitated the meetings.

The meetings featured general questions common to all sessions that focused on the county as a whole as well as topic specific questions based upon the theme of the meeting. The common questions asked attendees to rank the county as well as to detail the positives of the county and pressing problems facing it. The topical questions asked attendees to discuss the current situation with regard to that topic and how it could be improved or bettered.

Attendees generally ranked the county highly. It was described as “upper third” and “very well” and “favorably.” The lowest rankings of the county put it “in the middle.” Problems commonly cited included the lack of economic opportunity, the expansion of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area into (or near to) the Potomac Highlands, and the potential for increasing crime in the county. Positives described included quality of life, educational offerings, environment and setting, and the people and organizations.

The land use meeting identified questions and concerns over property rights, the need to protect the rural environment, and the benefits of a proactive and holistic approach. The need for senior-related development and the importance of water availability to any development were also discussed. Ideas suggested ranged from watershed planning and water resources studies to

increased fees (including impact fees) to additional regulation in the form of zoning, building codes, and environmental rules, to greater involvement by citizens and the state.

The infrastructure meeting focused on water/sewer, transportation, and telecommunications issues. A major obstacle in achieving improvements in these areas is that a myriad of different organizations, governmental entities, and service providers operating in the county and the region. The most pressing needs identified included additional water sources, expansion of water/sewer services, small bridges, road quality, cellular coverage, and high speed internet access.

The quality of life meeting determined that the county needed the mechanisms and facilities to get more people involved and to serve residents. These ranged from a better library, to a recreation center, to a senior/assisted living facility. Improving the quality of life could be done by building on existing assets, reinvigorating programs that have faltered, promoting local uniqueness, and seeking cooperative agreements with other localities.

The safety meeting identified the increased demand for services and the decline in volunteerism as issues that must be addressed. These are offset by the strength of law enforcement, emergency response, and state regulators that serve the county. Sufficient resources, increased public involvement, and trying to address the cause of criminal activity (i.e., through increased drug treatment) were all suggested as potential solutions.

The economic development meeting examined the local economy. At the time, the Mineral County Development Authority was finalizing its own strategic plan. The county has in recent years experienced difficulty because of the decline of traditional industries. Also, some current industries are seen as overly mobile or overly dependent upon federal funding. Ideas to improve the situation ranged from diversification and targeted recruitment, to utilization of existing assets such as wood and (chicken) waste, to improving infrastructure to make the county a better business location.

Public Input Meetings

During November and December 2007, Mineral County residents were invited to comment about they would like the county to be like in the future.

For this third phase of the comprehensive planning process, six meetings were held, in the communities of Keyser, Elk Garden, Wiley Ford, Burlington, Fort Ashby, and Keyser (again). WVU Extension Specialists Michael Dougherty and Trace Gale facilitated the meetings. Dougherty also designed the process while Gale analyzed and summarized the results.

A total of 162 community members attended these meetings. Attendance at these meetings ranged from 18 to 45 attendees with four of the sessions drawing at least 24 people. Discussion focused on understanding local views of the assets and challenges that existed in the county, with an emphasis on land use, infrastructure, quality of life factors, public safety and economic development. A total of 674 public comments were gathered during these forums. These ranged from 64 to 140 comments per session with four sessions generating at least 100 comments.

The analysis of the comments collected during these sessions divided commentary into three distinct categories: *Community Assets*, *Challenges to Overcome*, and *Future Vision*. As should be expected, the majority of input was provided within the areas of “Challenges to Overcome” and “Future Vision.” However, public input identified a number of important Community Assets, which should be protected and leveraged wherever possible, through long-range comprehensive planning and action. Within each category, several distinct themes arose (Table A.3).

Table A.3: Mineral County Public Input – Key Data Categories & Themes

Community Assets	Challenges to Overcome	Future Vision
Social / Cultural Capital	Infrastructure Deficiencies	Liveable Communities
Access / Proximity	Quality of Life Barriers	Planned Growth
Basic Services	Sustainability Threats	Adequate & Sustainable Emergency Services
Leverageable Infrastructure	Economic Vulnerability	Proactive Leadership
	Change / Unknowns	Effective Economic Development that Leverages Community Capitals

Community Assets divided into four distinct areas or themes as a result from the public comments during the input sessions. They were “Social/Cultural Capital,” “Access/Proximity,” “Basic Services,” and “Leverageable Infrastructure.”

“Social/Cultural Capital,” referred to the concept of community capitals, developed by Cornelia Flora at the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. Seven distinct forms of capital critical for the development of healthy, sustainable communities have been identified: financial, built, political, social, human, cultural, and natural. Social and cultural capital dominated the discussions of community assets. Social capital involves the leadership, groups, bridging and bonding networks, trust, and reciprocity that exist in a community. Cultural capital involves the language, rituals, traditions, and common practices of a group, or community. Residents frequently spoke of the social organizations in the county, such as 4-H, the volunteer fire department, Girls Scouts and Boys Scouts, organized sport teams, theatre groups, and churches. When identifying what made their county special, they commonly referred to the nature, traditions, and common practices of the people with descriptors including: friendly, volunteerism, helping hands, family values, trust, respect, involvement, belonging, faith, and being relationship-centered. Additionally, they described the strengths of the leadership in their county and the political voice these leaders carried out into the state and region, on their behalf. They spoke of the tendency of people and organizations in their county to collaborate with each other.

“Access/Proximity” centered on the importance and strength of the counties geographic positioning in the region. This includes the many important resources, identified by residents that exist in or near to the county. Examples of these resources included access to shopping retailers such as Wal-Mart, transportation providers such as the local airport and nearby train station, historical sites and buildings, recreational and athletic resources, cultural resources in nearby towns and colleges, higher education resources, and nearby urban centers.

“Basic Services” related to the presence and strengths related to services in the county that residents expressed as crucial for their quality of life. These included the quality of schools in the county and innovative programs offered by these schools, the number of higher education options available, associated cultural resources and programs, the quality and volunteer nature of fire and EMS services, the relative safety and low crime of the area, and the access to quality healthcare. County residents expressed pride in these basic services and the belief that their quality represented important assets for Mineral County.

“Leverageable Infrastructure” revolved around forms of infrastructure that were felt to be relevant to future growth in the county, particularly in the area of economic development. Assets identified included the presence of a major employer who is growing, lower property taxes, low levels of unemployment, access to inexpensive land, the presence of an industrial park, access to and quality of public utilities (especially water), and road quality and convenience.

Challenges to Overcome were identified during the public input process. These challenges fell into the thematic areas of: “Infrastructure Deficiencies,” “Quality of Life Barriers,” “Sustainability Threats,” “Economic Vulnerability,” and “Change/Unknowns.”

“Infrastructure Deficiencies,” centered largely on basic infrastructure such as water, sewer, roads, transportation, and county services such as trash pick-up and solid waste. Specific challenges mentioned in this area included lack of infrastructure in the more rural areas of the county, safety, enforcement, condition of infrastructure, missing services such as recycling programs, and reliance on service providers outside the county.

“Quality of Life Barriers” included commentary that identified challenges which, while not basic to life in the county, affected the willingness of residents to stay in the county long-term, or to ability to attract newcomers. These types of “quality of life” amenities or services were felt to be important to the potential for keeping young people engaged and present in the county and toward slowing the tendency for out-migration. Specifics included walkability, bikeable communities, a lack of retail and service variety, lack of rural access to technology such as cellular signals, cable, and WIFI, lack of local healthcare such as dentists or a trauma center, closing of the local high-school, and a general lack of activities and amenities to engage and interest youth and young adults in the county.

“Sustainability Threats” involved critical assets or features of the county which were felt to be at risk in future years, if not addressed. For example, while the strength of the volunteer-based fire and EMS services were repeatedly identified as a core asset of the county, the sustainability of this asset was identified as a critical challenge for the future. Residents felt that changes in liability and risk tolerance, coupled with lower levels of volunteerism amongst younger generations meant that reliance on a purely volunteer model of fire and EMS service might not

remain as a viable solution and that planning must address this core issue. Other examples of this theme included threats to the continued quality of water resources; under-resourced law enforcement; drug problems, pollution, and rapid commercial and residential expansion that did not adequately consider the strains placed on critical infrastructure and resources.

“Economic Vulnerability” referred to challenges identified in the area of economic viability. Specific comments centered on an inability to attract and retain businesses in the county, lack of infrastructure and resources needed for economic development and mounting pressures in the face of globalization and increased regional competition for shrinking resources. This theme also included the expression that achieving effective local government voice in state and regional policy formation around economic outcomes was an ongoing challenge.

“Changes/Unknowns” described those comments that related to macro trends or large-scale projects that were beyond the scope of local control but represented critical planning challenges. Some of the specific areas mentioned included: the concept that Mineral County was a key target for urban evacuation in the event of a terrorist attack, the idea that important security resources existed in the area that could be targeted by terrorists, and the threat of pandemic flu outbreaks. Other examples included MRSA, the impacts of future road construction projects such as Corridor H and a north-south access route, and the changing demographics of the community arising from new prisons in the area and in-migration. All of these macro-level changes represented important unknowns that county residents felt should be included in long-range planning.

Future Vision was the final category of public input and involved commentary that focused on visions of the future for Mineral Country. Key themes in this area included “Liveable Communities,” “Planned Growth,” “Adequate & Sustainable Emergency Services,” “Proactive Leadership,” and “Effective Economic Development that Leverages Community Capitals.”

“Liveable Communities” involved ideas and visions that addressed many of the challenges expressed around the theme of “quality of life.” Community vision expressed through this theme included walkable, bikeable communities with amenities such as wellness centers, modern, accessible libraries with internet access. Residents sought increased recreation programming and

options, improved county-wide communication and web-tools, technology access county-wide. Other expressions of this theme included public transportation access, beautification, the desire to have policies and practices that are more eco-friendly or “green,” downtown revitalization, more retail options, a community center with meeting space and cultural exhibits or features, and life-long learning options.

“Planned Growth” referred to residents expression of the importance of protection and planning around water resources, an interest in zoning, and needed waste management infrastructure and service improvements, such as land-fills and recycling. They also expressed the desire for reuse, revitalization, and redevelopment of existing resources and urban centers. Residents called for road improvements and widening, prior to development. They sought better sewer infrastructure county-wide and the overwhelming desire to balance growth with preservation. Most often, this theme of planned growth was directly connected to the desire to protect rural values and aesthetics, seen as core to the identity of the communities and residents of the county.

“Adequate & Sustainable Emergency Services” focused on the area of fire, emergency medical service (EMS), and police coverage. It also involved the planning for such services as well as the need to find creative and effective solutions for attraction and retention of service providers and adequate coverage throughout the county. Of particular interest to residents was ensuring the viability of the volunteer model for fire and EMS services. Also, there was interest in the need for a comprehensive strategy to address the growing drug problem in the county and region; both through adequate enforcement resources, and through education, prevention, and treatment services.

“Proactive Leadership” expressed in the desire to have improved county-wide communications between public officials and residents that would encourage greater public participation. It was also expressed in the call for increased advocacy capacity and voice. A number of comments focused on the need for a collaborative approach to regional problems and opportunities. Other comments within this theme centered on the need for a visionary outlook on economic and community development, and the “greening” of policies and infrastructure.

“Effective Economic Development that Leverages Community Capitals” was the final theme of this category and was overwhelmingly the most frequently expressed by participants. This theme called for proactive economic development that would deliver good jobs that paid living wages, new factories, and options that would incite youth to return to the community to live, after college. Participants felt that some of the characteristics of an effective strategy in this area would include incentives, empowerment, land-use regulations, incubation, infrastructure, and a focus on emerging technologies. Education was closely tied to this theme with a call for adult training and education options, including workforce training and retraining, and alignment of educational resources with growth patterns and demands. Finally, participants stressed the importance of attracting and retaining businesses and young professionals in the areas, including professionals, health care providers, and entrepreneurs.

Table A.4 Public Meeting Data Breakdown

Meeting	Keyser VFD	Elk Garden	Wiley Ford	Burlington	Fort Ashby	County Courthouse	Totals	Mean	Median	Per Capita
Date	11/7/09	11/14/09	11/15/09	11/26/09	11/29/09	12/11/09				
Facilitator	Both	Dougherty	Gale	Gale	Gale	Dougherty				
Attendance	24	18	45	20	30	25	162	27.0	24.5	n/a
Positives	29	9	21	24	17	18	118	19.7	19.5	0.7
Problems	35	14	23	25	15	24	136	22.7	23.5	0.8
Land Use	15	6	10	12	5	13	61	10.2	11.0	0.4
Infrastructure	11	<i>11</i>	27	12	8	16	85	14.2	11.5	0.5
Quality of Life	15	10	12	19	<i>18</i>	23	97	16.2	16.5	0.6
Public Safety	17	8	16	18	12	14	85	14.2	15.0	0.5
Economic Development	18	6	15	19	15	19	92	15.3	16.5	0.6
Total Positives & Problems	64	23	44	49	32	42	254	42.3	43.0	1.6
Total # of Items	76	41	80	80	58	85	420	70.0	78.0	2.6
Grand Total	140	64	124	129	90	127	674	112.3	125.5	4.2
Average Pos. & Probs.	32.0	11.5	22.0	24.5	16.0	21.0				
Average # of Items	15.2	8.2	16.0	16.0	11.6	17.0				
Overall Average	20.0	9.1	17.7	18.4	12.9	18.1				
Per Person Pos. & Probs.	2.7	1.3	1.0	2.5	1.1	1.7				
Per Person # Items	3.2	2.3	1.8	4.0	1.9	3.4				
Total Per Person	5.8	3.6	2.8	6.5	3.0	5.1				

Notes: **Boldfaced** numbers indicate the highest for that particular grouping at all meetings.
Italicized numbers indicate the topic area which generated the most discussion at a particular meeting.