



# DO CITIES PLAN FOR COMMUNITIES?

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## **Do Cities Plan for Communities?**

Cities plan and undertake projects. The results of these efforts can be seen in the built environment. What is far less apparent is whether these intentional actions build community.

This study seeks to determine what community development impact of the planning process and the proposed projects from those plans. It looked at the 10 largest cities in West Virginia, those that ranged between 15,000 and 50,000 residents in the 2020 Census. It reviewed the most recently completely comprehensive plans. This examination looked at the plan's development, structure, and content. As part of this, a determination was made to whether the plan strived to "create community" at its core or just sought to meet legal requirements to control/encourage development. It then examines whether any characteristics about the places or the plans could explain the resultant differences in the focus of the resultant documents.

(The original intent was to include all 13 Class II cities in this study. However, the three smallest cities, each with population of between 10,000 and 15,000 residents, were dropped. All are secondary cities in their area and their plans were not readily available for review on-line.).

The paper has starts with a brief discussion of planning requirements in West Virginia. It then looks at the 10 cities and their plan. Finally, the search for common factors to explain the differences in the focus of the plans is discussed.

### **Planning in West Virginia**

The comprehensive plans all start with the same purpose – to meet the requirements set forth in state planning enabling law adopted in 2004 (*WVC Chapter 8A*). Based on this plan, the city may enact a subdivision and land development ordinance; require plans and plats for land development (*SALDO*); issue improvement location permits for construction; and enact a zoning ordinance (*WVC §8A-1-1(b)(8)*).

The current planning enabling laws requires a place to have a plan before it can have a zoning ordinance (*WVC §8A-7-1(a)(1)*). This requirement was buttressed by the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals when it invalidated the zoning ordinance for the Town of Paw Paw because it did not have a plan (*Largent v. Zoning Board*, 2008). Similarly, a place must either have a plan in place to enact a *SALDO* or adopt one within three years (*WVC §8A-4-1-(a)*).

The state code also details the comprehensive plan. There are 13 mandatory components (*WVC §8A-3-4(c)*): land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, public services, rural, recreation, economic development, community design, preferred development areas, renewal and/or redevelopment, financing, and historic preservation. The plan may also include any other component with the code listing history, environmental, tourism, conservation, safety, and natural resources use as possible options (*WVC §8A-5*).

The state code also has requirements for public participation (*WVC §8A-3-6*), required updates (*WVC §8A-3-11*), and intergovernmental cooperation (*WVC §8A-3-13*). With respect to municipalities, it notes that the planning commission only has authority for the land under its jurisdiction (*WVC §8A-3-3-(a)* and *WVC §8A-3-14*). Also, unlike counties, municipalities are not granted the option of planning for the locality (*WVC §8A-3-3(d)*).

## **Cities and Their Plans**

The plans examined were developed between 2010 and 2018. The plans were found on the city websites and the WVU Law School's Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic. All these plans conformed to the current state planning enabling law (and in eight of the cities it was the first plan developed under these rules.). In several cities, there are on-going efforts to update the plans (as is required every 10 years by state law). However, such activities were not considered as part of this analysis.

### ***Beckley***

Beckley was originally chartered in Virginia in 1838. It was formally incorporated by an act of the Legislature in 1927. It is the county seat of Raleigh County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Beckley is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. The city's website touts its location as a business destination, as a gateway to national parks, and as a transportation hub ([beckley.org](http://beckley.org)). The West Virginia Turnpike (Interstates 64 and 77) pass through the northwest corner of the Beckley. Interstate 64 joins the turnpike just south while Appalachian Corridor L (US Route 19) ends at the turnpike just north of the city. It is currently home to WVU Tech, which moved from Montgomery to the former campus of Mountain State University in 2018. It also is served by the New River Community and Technical College in neighboring Beaver. The city has three hospitals – Beckley ARH (Appalachian Regional Healthcare) Hospital, the Raleigh General Hospital, and the Beckley VA Medical Center (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (33.6 percent); Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (13.0 percent); and Retail trade (12.5 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 17,276 residents, which is 14.4 percent below its 1970 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city's 2014 plan is 235 pages long. It replaced a 2001 plan. The planning process had a 22-person steering committee and multiple consultants, including the WVU Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic. It took about 15 months to develop. It included general public and student-focused engagement sessions. The plan's tag line was "Our Beckley." Its discussion of trends looked at issues related to livability, such as aging in place, "new economy" opportunities, placemaking, multi-modal transportation, health, and "smart growth." However, the main part of the plan is organized into traditional categories, most of which represent the 13 mandatory components of a comprehensive plan in West Virginia. It has nine goals with 37 actions – the majority of which deal with transportation, infrastructure, and development matters. Overall, the plan is more place-based than people-focused.

### ***Charleston***

Charleston is the capital of West Virginia. It was chartered in 1794. It is the county seat of Kanawha County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Charleston is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. It is the largest city in the state and its cultural center. The city elects its mayor directly. The city's website describes it as "business friendly" and "exciting and fun" ([charlestonwv.gov](http://charlestonwv.gov)). The Kanawha River divides Charleston. The city is the northern terminus of the West Virginia Turnpike, contains the split of Interstate 64 from Interstate 77. Interstate 79 starts just north of the city while ARC Corridor G (US 119) begins just south of the city. The city is known for the Charleston Area Medical Center, the Clay Center, the Charleston Coliseum & Convention Center, and the Capitol Complex. The city also has the University of Charleston and is served by BridgeValley Community and Technical College

in neighboring South Charleston (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (28.8 percent); Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (12.0 percent); Retail trade (11.1 percent); and Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services (10.5 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 48,018 residents, which is 44.0 percent below its 1960 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city's 2013 plan is 94 pages long. It replaced a 1996 plan. The planning process used a six-person executive committee oversaw its development. There were five technical committee and with a combined membership of about 70 people. (The plan notes there was an 80-member advisory committee.) There were six consulting firms involved. It took 12 to 18 months to develop. Public involvement included the work of the technical committees, social media outreach, one-on-one community meetings in the community, two large open houses, and a design charette. The plan's tagline is "imagine Charleston: your dream. our future." Its approach is thematic, looking at neighborhoods and land use, transportation, quality of life, and the downtown (which is an executive summary of a separate plan). It categorized recommendations as regulatory actions (26), capital improvements (34), and programmatic/policy/partnership activities (48). With a topical focus and wide-ranging public involvement, it is apparent the intent of the plan was to build community, not just build-up the city.

### ***Clarksburg***

Originally chartered in 1785, its current charter was adopted by special election in 1957. It is the county seat of Harrison County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Clarksburg is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor from council. The city's website lists seven major annual events occurring in the city and highlights the city's flag ([cityofclarksburgwv.com](http://cityofclarksburgwv.com)). The West Fork River flows through the city. Its main highway connection is (Appalachian Corridor D (US Route 50) and it is adjacent to Interstate 79 (Google Maps). It is the location of the Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center as well as some sleep and rehabilitation clinics for the United Hospital Center (which moved into a new facility adjacent to the city along Interstate 79 in 2010). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (27.7 percent); Retail trade (14.3 percent); and Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (12.4 0 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 15,784, residents, which is less than half of its 1950 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city's 2010 plan is only 66 pages (including maps but not the appendix with planned unit development rules from another locality). It replaced a 1997 plan. The process used a plan committee included 11 city officials as well as a pair of community members and the consultant. There was no indication of how long it took to develop and no discussion of the public engagement process. The plan's tag line was "Proud Past ... Unlimited Future." The plan had three sections – the first introduced planning and the city; the second discussed goals and objectives; and the brief third outlined implementation. The four main goals sounded thought-provoking and included plenty of examples. However, the goals focused on development and infrastructure matters. As a result, this plan met the state requirements as it looked at the conditions in the built environment but did little more.

## ***Fairmont***

Fairmont was established in 1820 as Middletown, then chartered by the Virginia General Assembly in 1843 under its current name. It is the county seat of Marion County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Fairmont is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor from council. The city's website lists its current charter as dating from 1899 and includes a photo album highlights places and events in the city ([fairmontwv.gov](http://fairmontwv.gov)). The Tygart Valley River flows through the city. It is adjacent to Interstate 79. The city has Fairmont State University and Pierpont Community and Technical College. It is served by WVU Medicine (Fairmont Medical Center) and Mon Health (Marion Neighborhood Hospital) which moved into the city after Fairmont Regional Medical Center closed (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (31.5 percent); Retail trade (13.0 percent); and Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (10.4 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 18,201 residents, which is 38.0 percent below its 1950 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city's 2018 plan is 178 pages long. It was the second plan adopted by city under the current planning enabling law, replacing a 2005 plan. The current plan was developed by a team of consultants working with city officials, including a lead agency, other entities, and the WVU Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic. It took about over two years to develop. It featured meetings in each of the city's 10 council districts (drawing about 50 people) as well as four general public meetings with the planning commission and a 19-question public survey. There was no formal tagline, though the emergent theme was described as "Fairmont refreshed." The plan included an introduction, a review of the current situation, a future vision, the implementation plan, and a financing plan. The goals revolved around attraction, prosperity, vitality, neighborhoods, connectivity, and sustainability. Each goal had three objectives and there was a total of 64 proposed actions. This structure made the plan very different than what might have been expected based upon the chapter headings. It had a focus on livability, a neighborhood emphasis, and a thematic approach that made the plan about community building rather than city building.

## ***Huntington***

Huntington was incorporated in 1871 – after the founding of West Virginia. It is the county seat of Cabell County, though part of the city is also located in Wayne County. (WV Blue Book, 2016). Huntington is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. The city's website calls Huntington "A vibrant energetic city where heritage comes alive." It also includes rotating testimonials from residents and officials as well as numerous community-centric links ([cityofhuntington.com](http://cityofhuntington.com)). The city is located along the Ohio River. Ohio is on the other side of the river and Kentucky is close to the city's western edge. Interstate 64 is along its southern edge. It is home to Marshall University, the second-largest higher education institution in the state, and Mountwest Community and Technical College. It has Cabell Huntington Hospital and St. Mary's Medical Center (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (33.2 percent); Retail trade (13.6 percent); and Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (12.5 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 46,645 residents, which is 46.7 percent below its 1950 Census peak, when Huntington was the most populous city in the state (Census Bureau).

The city's 2014 plan is 159 pages long, including maps in the appendix. It replaced a 1996 plan. The planning process focused in-house. It was primarily by the city planning department with a small, five-

person steering committee. It supplemented this by working with the Neighborhood Institute and Marshall University student interns to facilitate public input and involvement over a two-year period. Overall, there were about 20 public events, including 13 neighborhood meetings, involving more than 500 people. The plan took about 2½ years to develop. *The tag line for Plan2025 was “The Future of Huntington – many voices, one vision.”* The plan included an introduction, neighborhood plans, a quality of life section, future land use, implementation, and the appendices. The state requirements for a comprehensive plan were divided into how the city looks, grows, and connects. The plan structure set upended the standard planning paradigm as there were more neighborhood plans (10) than pages devoted to a traditional discussion of land use (8). Also, quality of life discussed issues such as sustainability, transportation, low-impact development, quality housing, and the city as an arts destination. As a result, the plan looked at the places and discussed how they impact people and how people impact them.

### ***Martinsburg***

Martinsburg was originally chartered in 1778. It was formally incorporated by an act of the Legislature in 1868. It is the county seat of Berkeley County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Martinsburg is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. The city’s website notes the city is recognized as the “fastest growing in the State.” Located in the middle of the state’s Eastern Panhandle, the city is known as the “Gateway to the Shenandoah Valley” ([cityofmartinsburg.org](http://cityofmartinsburg.org)). Interstate 81 passes through the western side of the city. It is in a border county with Maryland to the east. The city is home to Berkeley Medical Center, part of WVU Medicine. Blue Ridge Community and Technical College is based in the city as well (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (19.5 percent); Retail trade (14.9 percent); and Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (12.5 percent). The city’s estimated population in 2021 was 18,835, which is the highest it has ever been (its highest census decennial population was 18,773 in 2020) (Census Bureau).

The city’s 2018 plan is 120 pages long, including the implementation matrix. It was the second plan adopted by city under the current planning enabling law, replacing a 2007 plan. The current plan was developed. The planning process used a consulting firm and city staff. It took about two years to complete the plan. Public input included two city-wide workshops and a public survey. The plan had no tag line but rather a vision statement developed by the city’s citizens during the workshops. Its goal areas were demographics, land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and community facilities and services. There are 28 objectives across these goals. Overall, the plan meets all the legal requirements and standards. But it is nothing extraordinary, just a standard land-use focused plan.

### ***Morgantown***

Morgantown was settled in 1758, founded in 1766, and chartered in 1785. It the county seat for Monongalia County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Morgantown is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor from council. The city’s website welcomes everyone, highlighting the city’s desire to be an inclusive community. It also notes that there it has “something for everyone” ([morgantownwv.gov](http://morgantownwv.gov)). It is just northwest of the junction of Interstate 79 (west of the city) and Interstate 68 (south of the city – briefly passing through its edge), the latter of which was originally built as Appalachian Corridor Highway E (then US Route 48). The Monongahela River forms much of the city’s western boundary. Morgantown is also the location of West Virginia University, the state’s 1862 land

grant university. It has two hospitals: WVU Medicine and Mon Health Medical Center (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (37.4 percent); Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (19.2 percent); Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services (12.5 percent); and Retail trade (11.2 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 29,219 residents, marginally below its 1970 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city's 2013 plan is 125 pages, not including the appendices that featured the resource documents, public involvement reports, and existing conditions descriptions. It replaced a 2001 plan. The planning process took about 18 months and used a nine-person steering committee in addition to the nine-member planning commission. A trio of consulting firms were also involved. The project had plan partners in the project – the Morgantown-Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Town of Star City – that shared the common theme of “Crossroads: It’s time to chart our future.” The plan at seven goal areas – land management, transportation, environment, neighborhoods and housing, community facilities and services, economic development, and implementation. These 48 objectives and 201 strategies. The plan featured 11 guiding principles that focused on the quality of places as they developed – infill development, contiguous urban expansion, downtown revitalization, maintaining/enhancing neighborhoods, quality design, mixed use development, connecting places, housing variation, complete neighborhoods, park/open space/recreation inclusion, and environmental sensitivity. It included examples and illustrations. It discussed governmental collaboration (and had some regional partners in the process). An appendix called for additional studies. Also, neighborhood-level planning is implied, though not as directly expressed as in other plans.

### ***Parkersburg***

Parkersburg was originally chartered in 1820, a decade after the name was changed from Newport. It was incorporated by an act of the Legislature in 1911. It is the county seat for Wood County (WV Blue Book, 2016). Parkersburg is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. The city's website describes Parkersburg as a thriving and growing river town steeped in history and poised for tremendous growth ([parkersburgvity.com/pc](http://parkersburgvity.com/pc)). Interstate 77 passes to the east of Parkersburg and through southeast corner of the city. Meanwhile, Appalachian Corridor D (US Route 50) flows through the city. The Little Kanawha River separates the northern and southern parts of the Parkersburg as it flows into the Oho River which separates the city's western edge from Ohio. The city is home to WVU Parkersburg, the only community college in the state that grants four-year degrees. Its hospital is the Camden Clark Medical Center. (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (27.3 percent); Retail trade (16.7 percent); Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (12.8 percent); and Manufacturing (10.2 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 29,403 residents, which is 34.3 percent below its 1960 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city's 2013 plan is 116 pages, not including the appendices that featured the background profile, survey report, maps, and improvement renderings. The process used a plan committee included 16 stakeholders. It is listed as being developed by the 14-person planning commission with the assistance of a consulting firm. It replaced a 2001 plan. It is unclear how long the process took and the only mention of general engagement noted that scenarios were prepared and presented at a public meeting. The theme for the plan was “Embracing a Sustainable Future – Respecting the Past.” The plan had seven goal areas, each listed as a separate “plan”: land use, economic development, housing, transportation,

infrastructure, community facilities and services, and historical and cultural resources. Combined there were 37 recommendations across these goal areas. The plan also included a future city vision for 2020 where the city has distinguished itself as a progressive, “green” city that encourages healthy, active lifestyles, neighborhood vitality, and sustainable community and economic development. It also lists seven and community development goals to be met in the same time frame. Overall, the plan has some interesting ideas as it discusses concepts such as Smart Growth, green infrastructure, and riverfront redevelopment. However, despite this nod to innovative planning, it is still a very standard plan at its core.

### ***Weirton***

The current city of Weirton was incorporated in 1947 by circuit court, representing the consolidation of the towns of Hollidays Cove, Weirton Heights, Marland Heights, and Weirton. It is split between Brooke and Hancock County but is not the county seat for either (WV Blue Book, 2016). Weirton is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. The city’s website provides information on the city’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It also features a video tour which highlights its recreation and open/natural spaces, education and culture, and public safety ([cityofweirton.com](http://cityofweirton.com)). Its eastern border is Pennsylvania, its western border is Ohio and the Ohio River. It is along the US Route 22 corridor. The city has a campus of Northern West Virginia Community College and the Weirton Medical Center (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social services (24.3 percent); Manufacturing (15.1 percent); and Retail trade (13.95 percent). The city’s estimated population in 2021 was 18,813 residents, which is 33.3 percent below its 1960 Census peak (Census Bureau).

The city’s 2018 plan is 142 pages. It was done by a consultant with help from another firm. There is no indication of any steering committee outside of the Planning Commission. It took just under two years to complete. It involved focus group and stakeholder sessions, three public meetings, and a survey. The process developed the vision that in 2030, Weirton would be a city featuring economic and cultural centers and safe and vibrant neighborhoods that attract young families to live and work there. The plan revolved around five goals – downtown revitalization, center for commerce and employment, complete neighborhoods, improved connectivity, and a sustainable future. It features 15 total objectives – two to four per goal – and 49 proposed actions. Generally, the plan was focused on design and development; even the discussion of neighborhoods emphasized physical aspects and attributes. Some cultural-focused ideas for improving the downtown are included, but these were the exception.

### ***Wheeling***

Wheeling was settled in 1769, platted in 1793, and incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly in 1806. It served as the initial West Virginia capital from 1863 to 1870 and again from 1875 to 1880. It is in both Ohio and Marshall counties and is the county seat for the former (WV Blue Book, 2016). Wheeling is a home rule city (WV Department of Revenue) and elects its mayor directly. The city’s website provides information on the city’s history and its varied arts and cultural opportunities ([wheelingwv.gov](http://wheelingwv.gov)). Interstate 70 passes through the middle of Wheeling while its bypass, Interstate 470, loops through and around the city’s southern edge. The Ohio River is the city’s western edge – and the border with Ohio. The city is the home to Wheeling University (formerly Wheeling Jesuit University), the initial campus of West Virginia Northern Community College, and Wheeling Hospital (Google Maps). The largest sectors of the local economy in 2020 were Educational services, and health care and social



services (28.0 percent); Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation (14.4 percent); Retail trade (11.9 percent); and Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services (10.1 percent). The city's estimated population in 2021 was 26,568 residents, which is less than half of its 1930 Census peak.

The city's 2014 plan is 95 pages long, without the appendices on compliance with State Code, public participation details, and additional community data. The process was overseen by an eight-person steering committee (four planning commission members and four citizens), with the assistant director for economic and community development serving as the project manager for the city and three consulting firms also working on the plan. It took at least one year to complete the plan (there is not specific details in the plan beyond that). Public involvement included two introductory meetings (which reached over 100 people), 16 stakeholder interviews that involved 150 people, and on-line engagement. The plan's theme was "EW: Envision Wheeling." Its resultant vision was that the city will be a forward-thinking, modern, and sustainable community with a diverse economy, support for local entrepreneurs, strong community partnerships, robust neighborhood and infrastructure investments, and an emphasis on embracing the area's unique heritage, culture, and recreational opportunities. The plan had six initiative areas; modern and sustainable, diverse economy, community partnerships, neighborhoods, infrastructure, and quality of life. There were a combined 20 actions with 67 total strategies. Working groups to aid with implementation focused on downtown, sustainability, neighborhoods, population retention, economic development, infrastructure, and culture and arts (with about one-fifth of all strategies not assigned to a working group). The initiatives and working groups were very community-focused. The strategies were "mixed" in their specific approaches. Nevertheless, the plan certainly gives far more attention (especially thematically) to what it takes to build a place than to "build-up" a place.

## **Discussion**

The review showed that these cities have many similarities. The cities examined are all Class II West Virginia municipalities. Nine of the cities also served as county seats. Nine have a current population that is lower than its peak population. Eight of the cities were founded before the Civil War (before West Virginia became a separate state). Nine of the cities contain or have close access to the Interstate Highway System. Eight of the cities had a river flowing through or bordering the city (while the other two had rivers nearby).

All the cities have at least one hospital. They have similar economic compositions as the super sectors of Educational services, and health care and social services and Retail trade are prominent parts of the local economy in every city examined while the super sector of Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodations is prominent in all but one of the cities ("prominent" is defined as having at least 10 percent of workforce in that super sector).

All the cities used a private consultant to help with the planning process. At least nine of the cities had extensive public engagement during plan development (while the other city did not include information on that process in its plan). Eight of the plans had "tag lines" to describe and direct the process. And for eight cities, this was the first plan each had done since the passage of the new state enabling laws for planning (Chapter 8A of the *West Virginia Code*).

Nevertheless, with all these commonalities, the plans from the places varied. They ranged in length (for the main body of the plan) between 66 and 235 pages. They took between 12 and 30 months to

complete. Some had special committees (of various sizes) overseeing the process while others did not. The cities had different levels of internal involvement, with different combinations of the planning commission, planning staff, development agencies, and other city departments.

More importantly for this discussion, the plans also varied in scope and scale, even with they all followed the same template from the state code. Five cities had very standard plans with an emphasis on land use – Beckley, Clarksburg, Martinsburg, Parkersburg, and Weirton. Meanwhile, the other five cities – Charleston, Fairmont, Huntington, Morgantown, and Wheeling -- had plans that did more than meet the state requirements; they sought to shape and strengthen their communities.

Thus, the answer to the question raised in the title of this paper is a qualified yes. In other words, some cities do plan for communities. But that answer raises another question – what differentiates these places and which planning approach they take.

Before discussing these findings, it should be noted that these results are based solely on observations, with the data being treated as nominal or ordinal, even if numerical data is available. As a result, no statistical testing has been done to confirm these relationships.

The most striking shared characteristic among those cities that have that with a community-building focus is that all have four-year colleges or universities. Meanwhile, only one of those communities with a standard plan (Beckley) has a four-year higher education institution – but it did not have it when plan was finished (Mountain State University closed in 2013, the plan was approved in 2014, and WVU Tech relocated there in 2016). The most likely explanation is that places with colleges draw individuals (faculty and students) who have a broader view regarding the possibilities of their community. Related to this, those places could also have a higher level of educational attainment, resulting in residents wanting more than a standard plan when considering the future of their community. (It should be noted that there was no discernable relationship with respect to the focus of the plan and the presence of or nearby access to a two-year community and technical college campus.)

Meanwhile, the population and population change of a place appears to be connected to the type of plan that was developed. The larger cities and the cities that had seen the greatest proportionate population loss tended to have plans with a community focus. Four of the five largest cities in the state had broad plans. (Parkersburg was the city that did not have such a plan; Fairmont was the city with a community-focused plan that was not among the five largest). Likewise, four of the five cities in the study that had seen the largest population decline (in percentage terms) from their respective peaks had broader plans. (Clarksburg had a large proportionate population loss without such a plan; Morgantown was the only city with such a plan that did not experience a large proportionate population loss).

These two findings appear to be related as size and decline can both lead to places focusing on quality of life issues with the result being plans that have a broader focus. Current practice often sees larger places divide themselves up into smaller subsets for planning purposes. This allows greater detail at the neighborhood (or community) level with common themes being applied across the entire city. Meanwhile, cities with large population loss are looking at how to improve. They often have excess space and infrastructure capacity. They are looking at how to best use those resources to be more attractive to retain those remaining residents and attractive new people. As a result, the focus often becomes making the city a better place through community-building rather than regulating land use.

Another common characteristic is that those cities that did had greater public engagement seemed to have community-focused plans. Only one of the six cities with four or more total input activities (forums, meetings, surveys, stakeholder meetings, etc.) had a traditional plan (Weirton) while the other five had community-focused plans. This may be a self-fulfilling prophecy as those places that seek more input may be more likely to think more expansively about the future of the community – and the result is that such places have plans that have a broader focus than just land use.

There were also several other process characteristics that may also have explanatory power, but the meaning of the associations is not as clear. The cities that used at least three consultants tended to have plans that looked at issues from numerous perspectives, including quality of life and services for residents. This could be because each consultant brought a different perspective to the process and the combination led to a more all-encompassing plan. Likewise, those cities where the department most involved in the planning process had development in its name tended to have more community-focused plans. This may be the result of these entities having a broader vision than might otherwise be present in a planning, public works, or code enforcement department. However, that cannot be said with certainty without looking at the responsibilities for each of the departments.

Additionally, those cities that had a longer time period between plans tended to develop more community-focused plans. This may be the result greater need had emerged over time in these places or may just be coincidental. (Also remember that there was no discernable pattern associated with the length of time to complete the plan development. Thus, it is doubtful this represented a situation where the scope of work broadened as the planning project evolved.)

Finally, some characteristics showed correlation. But these appear more likely to represent correlation than causation. Both cities that did not have direct river access had standard plans. Also, both cities where the Manufacturing super sector played a prominent role in the local economy had plans with a traditional (land use-dominated) focus.

Conversely, there are many characteristics where no pattern emerges and thus do not appear to have any influence over the focus of the plan. From a structural standpoint, the form of government a city had (strong mayor or weak mayor), its location in a border county, or if the city is in two counties did not appear to impact the planning outcome. Likewise, from a process perspective, the length of time it took to develop the plan, the size of the plan document, and the use and size of any special committee to oversee plan development, did not appear to make any difference in the focus of the plan.

Overall, there seems to be some differences in those cities which create went beyond the legal requirements of planning and sought to make it serve a grander purpose – creating communities – compared to those places that did not. The situation in which the city finds itself appears to have a meaningful influence on how that city looks toward the future. In other words, just as “form follows function,” so too did the purpose of the plan follow the direction of the planning process which was defined by the characteristics of the city.

The next step in the research is to confirm this assertion. That would be done through statistical analysis of the numerical variables already collected and using secondary data to provide indicators as proxies for the descriptive and ordinal variables to permit statistical analysis. This will enable more definitive statements regarding the strength of the relationships and hopefully answer questions regarding causation (versus correlation).



## DO CITIES PLAN FOR COMMUNITIES?

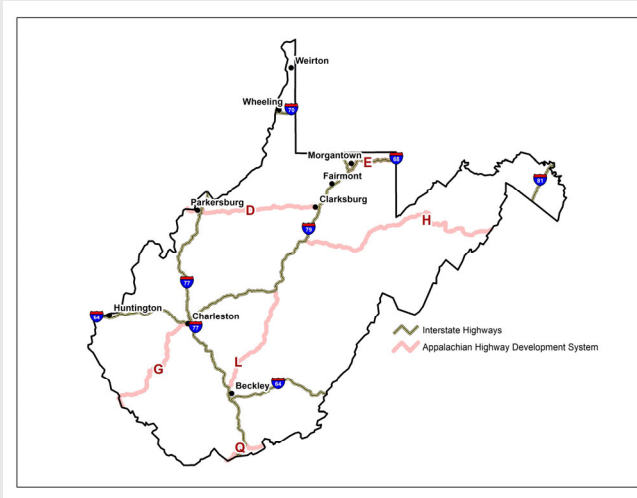
Michael Dougherty  
WVU Extension  
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### Study Background



- Determine whether city planning builds community
- Study examined focus of city planning efforts
  - Review of most recently completed comprehensive plans
- Unit of analysis 10 largest cities in West Virginia
  - Population between 15,000 & 50,000, central cities

## West Virginia's 10 Largest Cities



## Planning in West Virginia



- Current planning laws enacted in 2004 (WVC Chapter 8A)
- Planning optional, only covers municipality, done by PLC
- Plans have 13 mandatory components (as well as others)
  - Land use; Housing; Transportation; Infrastructure; Public services; Rural; Recreation; Economic development; Community design; Preferred development areas; Renewal and/or redevelopment; Financing; and Historic preservation

## West Virginia Cities



- Beckley: "Our Beckley"
  - 17,276 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 19,884 in 1970)
  - Most recent plan May 2014 (replaced 2001 plan)
  - 235 pages and developed in ~15 months (13 to 17 months)
  - Home to WVU Tech (since 2015)
  - Organization basically followed State Code.
  - Result was standard (land-based plan)
- ([beckley.org](http://beckley.org))



## West Virginia Cities



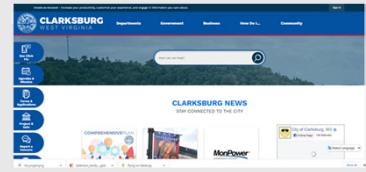
- Charleston: "Imagine Charleston: Your Dream. Our Future"
  - 48,018 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 85,796 in 1960)
  - Most recent plan August 2013 (replaced 1996 plan)
  - 94 pages and developed in ~15 months (12 to 18 months)
  - Home to University of Charleston
  - Thematic organization (Neighborhoods, Transportation, QoL, Downtown).
  - Connected people and places
- ([charlestonwv.gov](http://charlestonwv.gov))



## West Virginia Cities



- Clarksburg: “Proud Past ... Unlimited Future.”
  - 15,784 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 32,014 in 1950)
  - Most recent plan February 2010 (replaced 1997 plan)
  - 66 pages (including maps) with unknown development time
  - No four-year college/university
  - Emphasized goals and objectives
  - Innovative approaches, development focus
- ([cityofclarksburgwv.com](http://cityofclarksburgwv.com))



## West Virginia Cities



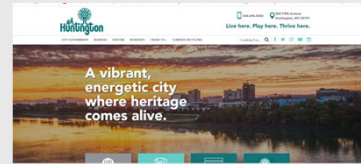
- Fairmont: “Fairmont 2028 → Fairmont Refreshed”
  - 18,209 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 29,346 in 1950)
  - Most recent plan November 2018 (replaced 2005 plan)
  - 178 pages and developed in ~27 months
  - Home to Fairmont State University
  - Main section revolved around six goals
  - Focus is on livability. Neighborhood emphasis
- ([fairmontwv.gov](http://fairmontwv.gov))



## West Virginia Cities



- Huntington: “Plan2025: The Future of Huntington – many voices, one vision”
  - 46,025 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 86,353 in 1950)
  - Most recent plan December 2013 (replaced 1996 plan)
  - 159 pages (including maps) and developed in ~30 months
  - Home to Marshall University
  - Most of plan focused on neighborhoods
  - Looked at how places impact people and how people impact them
  - ([cityofhuntington.com](http://cityofhuntington.com))



## West Virginia Cities



- Martinsburg [No plan tag line]
  - 18,835 residents in 2021 (peak population)
  - Most recent plan December 2018 (replaced 2007 plan)
  - 120 pages (with implementation matrix) and developed in 24+ months
  - No four-year college/university
  - Organized by groupings of mandatory components
  - Very standard plan meeting requirements
  - ([cityofmartinsburg.org](http://cityofmartinsburg.org))





## West Virginia Cities



- Morgantown: “Crossroads: It’s time to chart our future”
  - 29,219 residents in 2021 (near peak population; peak 29,431 in 1970)
  - Most recent plan June 2013 (replaced 1998 plan)
  - 125 pages (not including appendices) and developed in 18+ months
  - Home to West Virginia University
  - Organized by large categories (mix of components, concepts)
  - 11 guiding principles focus on QoL, as part of regional planning effort.

- ([morgantownwv.gov](http://morgantownwv.gov))



## West Virginia Cities



- Parkersburg: “Embracing a Sustainable Future – Respecting the Past”
  - 29,403 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 47,767 in 1960)
  - Most recent plan March 2011 (replaced 2001 plan)
  - 116 pages (not including appendices) with unknown development time.
  - No four-year college/university
  - Organized by groupings of mandatory components.
  - Had development goals, interesting ideas
    - a standard plan at its core.

- ([parkersburgcity.com/pc](http://parkersburgcity.com/pc))



## West Virginia Cities



- Weirton [No plan tag line]
  - 18,813 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 28,201 in 1960)
  - Most recent plan November 2018 (replaced plan from 2000 or before)
  - 142 pages and developed in ~23 months
  - No four-year college/university
  - Looks at current situation, vision, implementation, goals
  - Focused on design and development. Neighborhood discussion mostly emphasized physical characteristics
- ([cityofweirton.com](http://cityofweirton.com))



## West Virginia Cities



- Wheeling: “EW: Envisioning Wheeling.”
  - 26,568 residents in 2021 (Population peaked at 61,659 in 1930)
  - Most recent plan October 2014 (replaced 1997 plan)
  - 95 pages (not including appendices) and developed in 12+ months
  - Home to Wheeling University (known Wheeling Jesuit Univ. until 2019)
  - Looks at current situation, vision, and goals with six initiatives
  - Initiatives very community focused. Thematic attention to place building
- ([wheelingwv.gov](http://wheelingwv.gov))



## Study Findings



- Review found half of the cities had plans which sought to “create community” (emphasizing people & place)
  - Charleston
  - Fairmont
  - Huntington
  - Morgantown
  - Wheeling
- Other five cities had very standard plans that met state requirements but focused on the place's built-environment

## Overall Study Findings

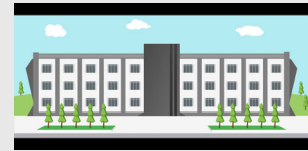


- Several common factors tended to be present in cities with plans that sought to “create community”
  - Four-year colleges/universities
  - Larger population and Declining population
  - Greater/wider public engagement in process
  - More consultants and Longer time period between plans
- Other factors had limited, mixed, or no relationships
- These observational results. Not statistically validated

## Study Findings: Colleges



- All five cities with community-focused plans have four-year colleges or universities
  - Only one of the cities with traditional plans (Beckley) has a four-year institution – and it did not have one when plan was enacted
  - No pattern found with two-year community and technical colleges
  - Explanations include colleges drawing people with broader perspective and higher educational attainment, resulting in “outside of the box” thinking (planning)
- (Photo from Pixabay; Free for commercial use)



## Study Findings: Population



- Four of five largest cities had community-focused plans
  - Parkersburg did not (third largest city) had a traditional plan
  - Fairmont (eighth largest city) had a community-focused plan
  - May indicate need for resources and capacity to create something more than the standard land use-focused plan
- (Photo from Pixabay; Free for commercial use)



## Study Findings: Population



- Four of five cities with largest proportionate population drop from peak had community-focused plans
  - Clarksburg only declining city with a traditional plan
  - Morgantown only non-declining city with a community focused plan
  - May indicate need to think differently in more distressed situations

◦ (Photo from Pixabay; Free for commercial use)



## Study Findings: Engagement



- All five cities with community-focused plans had at least four community input activities (forums, surveys, etc.)
  - Only one of the cities with traditional plans (Weirton) had such an extensive public outreach effort as part of its plan
  - May be a self-fulfilling prophecy as places seeking more input may be thinking broadly about community before receiving any input
  - Result of greater engagement seems to be a plan that examines more than land use, transportation, infrastructure, and development

◦ (Photo from Pixabay; Free for commercial use)



## Study Findings: Planning Process



- Some other process-related characteristics also showed relationships with “community-focused” plans
  - Places that used three or more consultants
  - Places with “development department” participation
  - Places with longer time periods between plans
  - These may be the results of more interaction, broader attention, and greater need. Or it may be coincidence (as relationships not as strong as those associated with other characteristics)
- (Photo from Pixabay; Free for commercial use)



## Summary



- Certain city characteristics seem to shape plan
  - Circumstances (situation) influence planning direction
- “Form Follows Function”
  - Plan purpose follows from direction of planning process
  - Defined by characteristics of the city



## Next Steps

- Add more rigor to the study
  - Standardizing categories, plan evaluations
  - Creating testable hypotheses
  - Add more secondary data (and make more sense of it)
  - Performing statistical analysis on indicators
  
- Consider results of multiple planning iterations
  - Examine how places may change over time
  - Several cities currently updating plans



## Questions

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  - *(Presentation and corresponding paper available upon request.)*

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