

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan**

The general purpose of the Morgan County Comprehensive Plan is to guide the governing body to accomplish a coordinated and compatible development of land and improvements within its territorial jurisdiction, in accordance with present and future needs and resources.

A comprehensive plan is a process through which citizen participation and thorough analysis are used to develop a set of strategies that establish as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning commission. A comprehensive plan aids the planning commission in designing and recommending to the governing body ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture in that community and in adapting to future changes of use of an economic, physical, or social nature. A comprehensive plan guides the planning commission in the performance of its duties to help achieve sound planning.

A comprehensive plan must promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development.

The purpose of the comprehensive plan is to:

- 1) Set goals and objectives for land development, uses and suitability for a governing body so a governing body can make informed decisions
- 2) Ensure that elements in the comprehensive plan are consistent
- 3) Coordinate all governing bodies, units of government and other planning commissions to ensure that all comprehensive plans and future development are compatible
- 4) Create conditions favorable to health, safety, mobility, transportation, prosperity, civic activities, recreational, educational, cultural opportunities and historic resources
- 5) Reduce the wastes of physical, financial, natural, or human resources which result from haphazard development, congestion, or scattering of population
- 6) Reduce the destruction or demolition of historic sites and other resources by reusing land and buildings and revitalizing areas
- 7) Promote a sense of community, character, and identity
- 8) Promote the efficient utilization of natural resources, rural land, agricultural land, and scenic areas

9) Focus development in existing developed areas and fill in vacant or underused land near existing developed areas to create well designed and coordinated communities

10) Promote cost-effective development of community facilities and services

A comprehensive plan may provide for innovative land use management techniques, including:

- 1) Density bonuses and/or density transfer
- 2) Clustering
- 3) Design guidelines, including planned unit developments
- 4) Conservation easements
- 5) Infill development
- 6) Consolidation of services
- 7) Any other innovative land use technique that will promote the governing body's development plans

When preparing or amending a comprehensive plan, a planning commission shall make comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and services and probable future changes of such conditions and services within the territory under its jurisdiction.

The comprehensive surveys and studies may cover such factors as population density, health, general welfare, historic sites, mobility, transportation, food supply, education, water and sanitation requirements, public services, accessibility for the disabled and future potential for residential, commercial, industrial, or public use.

The major objective of the planning process is providing information to and coordination among divergent elements in the municipality or county. The elements in the comprehensive plan shall be consistent and governing bodies, units of government and planning commissions must work together to ensure that comprehensive plans and future developments are compatible.

A planning commission shall prepare a comprehensive plan for the development of land within its jurisdiction. A planning commission shall then recommend the comprehensive plan to the appropriate governing body for adoption.

A county, multi-county, regional, or joint comprehensive plan may include the planning of towns, villages or municipalities to the extent to which, in the planning commission's judgment, they are related to the planning of the unincorporated territory of the county as a whole: Provided that the comprehensive plan shall not be considered a comprehensive plan for any town, village, or municipality without the consent of the planning commission and/or the governing body of the town, village, or municipality.

A comprehensive plan should be coordinated with the plans of the department of transportation in so far as it relates to highways, thoroughfares, trails and pedestrian ways under the jurisdiction of the planning commission.

A county planning commission may prepare a comprehensive plan for either the entire county or a part of the county.

A multi-county, regional, or joint planning commission may prepare a comprehensive plan for land within its jurisdiction.

A comprehensive plan, by State law, requires that the following minimum components be included in the Plan:

- Delineation of Land Use Designations
- Development of Housing Projections and Programs
- Outline of Transportation Networks and Needs
- Measurement of Infrastructure Capabilities
- Extension of Public Services
- Protection of Rural Areas
- Identification of Recreation & Tourism Goals
- Establishment of Economic Development Guidelines
- Promotion of Consistent Community Design
- Incentives for Preferred Development Areas
- Renewal and/or Redevelopment Initiatives
- Creation of Short and Long-term Financing Goals
- Historic Preservation Areas

The Comprehensive Plan may have, but is not limited to the following components:

- History of the area
- Environmental protection programs
- Promotion of tourism
- Conservation programs
- Public safety programs
- Natural resource areas

Prior to adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, public hearings must be held to include public participation and input from affected governing bodies and agencies. This process includes submission of the draft for review by the public for comment to the planning commission prior to making a recommendation to the County Commissioners. Subsequent to this process the Commissioners must also hold public hearings for additional public input before final adoption of the plan by ordinance.

Once the plan or any amendment thereto is adopted by the Commissioners, a certified copy shall be held on record in the office of the county clerk. However, if the plan is rejected it must be sent back to the planning commission with the reasons for rejection, for further review and recommendation as outlined in State law.

After the adoption of the comprehensive plan by the governing body, the planning commission shall follow the comprehensive plan, and review the plan and make updates at least every ten years. This update, whether it is in part or comprehensive shall follow the process as outlined in State law.

### **Role of the Comprehensive Plan**

In order to carry out the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan as outlined in West Virginia State Code 8A, there are numerous supporting documents that serve to guide and direct the general components that make up the Plan.

The role of the Plan includes, but is not limited to the following characteristics:

- Focus on current trends and issues to develop appropriate solutions
- Review current growth patterns to develop strategies for a sustainable future
- Direct future change through a vision of community potential
- Establish consistency between land use policy and regulatory measures
- Assist County officials in the decision making process

The Comprehensive Plan is a broad policy document that provides guidance for future decision making. The Plan should provide consistency with other plans that have been developed in the community. Some of those plans considered for this update include:

- Morgan County Schools- Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan
- WV Department of Transportation- 6 Year Highway Improvement Program
- Morgan County Solid Waste Authority- Litter & Solid Waste Control Plan
- Morgan County Commercial Solid Waste Facility Siting Plan
- Morgan County Water Resource Study
- West Virginia 9 Corridor Selection Report
- US Rt. 522 Improvements Report
- North South Appalachia Corridor Feasibility Study
- Berkeley County Comprehensive Plan

Other reports of civic organizations considered in development of this Plan include:

- Homegrown Vision and Recommendations Report
- Morgan County Trails Report
- Cultural Arts and Recreation Plan
- Travel Berkeley Springs Report
- North South Appalachia Feasibility Study
- Sleepy Creek Watershed Association Report

In addition to the above plans and reports, many other reports, recommendations, and responses from key agencies and organizations were used to develop the Plan. Data was also collected from

a variety of sources and several public meetings were held to provide additional public input in the process. This included a public survey that was conducted to identify important community issues outlined in the Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is an ever-evolving document that should be reviewed and modified regularly to ensure that it provides adequate guidance regarding future growth in the County. This regular review will also ensure that as a guiding document it will remain viable in providing accurate supporting information and strategies for implementation of the above plans. Thus it is important for this Plan to include a brief outline of the strategies within other plans to serve as a record of major activities undertaken and accomplished. This review will provide regular opportunity to identify new issues that may impact the County, and the appropriate course of action to address them in the future.

### **Morgan County Description**

Morgan County is the smallest of the three Eastern Panhandle counties of West Virginia. It is located less than 100 miles from the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, which has stretched further west over the past several decades placing increased growth pressures on many once secluded rural counties. It is surrounded to the north by Washington and Allegany counties in Maryland, to the south by Frederick County, Virginia and by fellow West Virginia counties of Berkeley and Hampshire on the east and west respectively.

The County has an area of about 230 square miles or roughly 148,000 acres, which is divided into 6 tax districts that include; Allen, Bath, Cacapon, Rock Gap, Sleepy Creek, and Timber Ridge. It also includes the Town of Bath located along US Rt. 522 surrounded by a larger area better known as Berkeley Springs, and the Town of Paw Paw located in the southwest area below Cacapon along WV Rt. 9. For planning purposes the County is divided into 3 planning regions that encompass the 6 districts. The Cacapon and Sleepy Creek districts comprise their own planning areas while the remaining districts combine to form the Central Valley region.

Although the County appears to be flush with natural waterways, rivers and streams make up less than 1% of the total County land mass. These water sources include Cacapon River, Cherry Run, Sir Johns Run, Warm Springs Run, and Sleepy Creek. All systems flow northeast into the Potomac River, which is primarily located in Maryland.

The County is flanked on both the west and east side by mountainous ridges that run north south. The higher mountain ridge of Cacapon separates Morgan and Hampshire counties on the west, while the lower Sleepy Creek ridge forms the boundary between Morgan and Berkeley counties to the east.

### **History of Morgan County**

Morgan County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1820. It was formed from parts of both Berkeley and Hampshire counties, and named in honor of the revolutionary

war general, Daniel Morgan. The first settlers to this area are believed to be squatters who arrived in the 1730s, with the first known cabin being built in 1745. Due to the areas popular warm springs, Lord Thomas Fairfax had the area surveyed in 1748. George Washington, at the age of 16, was part of that survey party, and returned many times with his half-brother, Laurence, believing the rumored medicinal benefits of the warm springs would aid in improving his brothers health.

### Town of Bath

As news of the warm springs grew, the area of Berkeley Springs became a popular destination with vacation homes and private baths for the social elite. In 1776, the Virginia Assembly formally recognized the area as the Town of Bath, in honor of England's spa city called Bath. The main north-south street was named Washington and east-west street was named Fairfax. Seven acres were set aside for "suffering humanity", which later became West Virginia's (the nations) first state park. Bath later became known as Berkeley Springs, primarily because the Town's post office took that name to avoid confusion with another post office in southern Virginia, which was also called Bath.

### Town of Paw Paw

The Town of Paw Paw was created in 1891, named after the paw paw, which is a wild fruit that once grew in abundance in this area of the County. It is best known for the nearby Paw Paw tunnel. It is also stated that George Washington passed through the area on his many trips west, using the Winchester-Cumberland road.

### **Historic Population**

In its first census year of 1820 the County recorded a population of just 2,500, which was mostly located within the Berkeley Springs area or spread in remote southern portions of the County.

By 1900 the population had more than doubled to 7,294, with development continuing to occur around the Berkeley Springs area. Also, at this time population growth was increasing around the newly formed Town of Paw Paw in the southwestern part of the County, as well as along the major County thoroughfares.

Due to limited growth of its public infrastructure and the scenic charm of its rural seclusion, the County experienced increasing growth along its rivers and streams into the mid 1900s, with a population of 8,276 by 1950. The County again nearly doubled in size with an estimated 2000 population of 14,943, much of that growth occurring in the last two decades.

**Table I-1      Historic Population Growth**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
1820	2,500	-
1830	2,694	8%
1840	4,253	58%
1850	3,557	-16%
1860	3,372	-5%
1870	4,315	28%
1880	5,777	34%
1890	6,744	17%
1900	7,294	8%
1910	7,848	8%
1920	8,357	6%
1930	8,406	1%
1940	8,743	5%
1950	8,276	-5%
1960	8,376	1%
1970	8,547	2%
1980	10,696	25%
1990	12,128	13%
2000	14,943	23%

Source: US Census Reports

### **Comprehensive Policies**

In order to maintain a consistent direction in accomplishing the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, as well as consider appropriate updates to such goals over time, each chapter must provide policy that directs the governing bodies in implementing initiatives to achieve the desired outcome. These policies can be found in each chapter, and are requisite to the following planning principles:

- Land Use should provide a flexible approach toward guiding the overall development of the County during the Plan period. As the principles by which this is accomplished over time continue to evolve, the objectives must be fluid in allowing conceptual guidance for the County to implement the Plan.
- Population and Housing will continue to be driven primarily by the role Morgan County plays within the region. As population increases and housing needs change, the demographic make up will continue to be affected. These indirect effects will require continual analysis by the County on the growing population and increased residential areas.



- Transportation includes coverage of all modes of pedestrian and vehicular movement. Although the County includes a relatively small population, its transportation network is heavily affected by its location within the region as well as its unique tourism industry. During the Plan period the transportation objectives will serve to recognize the volume of pedestrian and vehicular activity, and provide direction for how the County will address the coexistence of the effects from such activity with the added increase in residential and commercial development.
- Public infrastructure, much like public services, serves as the fabric by which growth will occur during the Plan period. It is important to ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place, especially in those areas designated for growth to occur. However, unlike many public services, infrastructure needs are regulated by higher governmental policies and in some cases owned and operated by private entities. As regulations move toward greater governmental efficiency and accountability within these facilities, it is important that the County actively participate in this process.
- The Public Services chapter is best represented by the accuracy and depth of historical data provided. In using this data, as past experience for how efficiently County services were able to serve existing population and business, proper planning based on future projections may be determined. It is important therefore to ensure that proper increases in public services are a reflection of those objectives outlined by the various public service agencies. Many of these entities have developed internal plans that serve to address these needs outlined in objectives that are included in this Plan.
- The natural environment and the physical factors affecting it are important to the local quality of life and the local economy. If new development is most efficiently guided toward existing population centers which provide basic public service and infrastructure, development can occur in the most cost-effective way, while preserving the rural open space, and sensitive areas. Unplanned growth, loss of farmland and open space, and subdivision of rural land, are among the top concerns for Morgan County residents. Since preventive measures to protect the environment are preferable to corrective measures, this Plan should accentuate goals and objectives which will prevent scattered sprawl in the rural areas, loss of open space, and degradation of the environment.
- Parks and recreation activities are an integral part of the overall tourism attractiveness of Morgan County. With a ratio of recreational space well above national standards, and being located in close proximity to urban areas where this positive ratio does not exist, Morgan County should continue to diversify and promote its parks, recreation and tourism related amenities to the local and regional market.
- To attract new industry, priority should be given to promoting the sale and lease of existing available buildings and established business parks near locations that provide adequate existing water and sewer resources as well as necessary public services. Focus should include the long-range diversification of employment opportunities, bridging a strong local economic market with global products and ensuring that production of such goods and services support the quality of life of local residents.



- The preservation of existing communities and other significant community features should be an ongoing process that evolves and changes with the changing of the community outlook. These initiatives are necessary to preserve the historic significance and cultural heritage of the community in order to promote the long-term asset and identity that such features provide. As the community grows to appreciate the importance that this identity offers to the overall design of neighborhoods, recreational amenities, and cultural activities, it may provide a natural pace at which each area wishes to proceed in implementing goals that support this approach.
- As Morgan County continues to grow, it is important to direct growth in a manner that strives to make the most efficient use of public services and infrastructure. Although market demand and availability of land for development will continue to be primary factors driving growth, it is important that the effects of this direction are monitored at all governmental levels to ensure that there is consistency between planning efforts and development pressure.
- Communities may often overlook the value of preservation and improvement of their existing neighborhoods. The impact of this value is difficult to measure, especially in the short term, as these improvements can affect the appeal of a neighborhood, the opportunity to create jobs, or the recognition of cultural heritage. All of these reasons are for the public good, and thus require public participation in the process to ensure there is a collective approach to sustain these efforts.
- It is important for planning purposes to understand the budgetary process in order to most efficiently address the priorities of the legislative body in ensuring that adequate services are provided as growth continues to occur. Through review of the general revenues and expenses experienced by the various local government entities, agencies and organizations, the County is provided the opportunity to address such priorities in a proactive manner, placing appropriate funding mechanisms in areas where services are projected to be needed.
- Historic preservation is an effort that is broadly defined and generally supported by an overwhelming majority of the local population. This is in part because of the value that preservation serves in promoting the cultural heritage of a community. Preservation efforts should serve to enhance the quality of life through the conservation, promotion and interpretation of cultural and historic resources.

## **Goals and Objectives**

For the Comprehensive Plan to function in a successful manner, there must be established goals and objectives in order to achieve the desired outcome. These goals are structured around basic planning principles and incorporated into each chapter to ensure that policies are driven by the approach as outlined in this Plan. Major factors driving the goals and objectives within each chapter are centered on the following primary trends:

Land Use goals focus primarily on new development, including

- Location and density of new development
- Location of new commercial and industrial development
- Location of new community facilities and services

Population demographics focus on impacts to housing demand, including

- Significant population growth and housing starts since 2000
- Aging population with nearly 45% of residents over age 44
- Seasonal housing makes up more than 15% of total housing stock

Transportation network limitations creating inadequate levels of service, including

- Traffic volume and road alignment on US Rt. 522 and WV 9
- Lack of public transportation component for population migration
- Connectivity of alternative pedestrian system for leisure and destination travel

Infrastructure and utility capacities focus on impacts to utility resources, including

- Ground and surface water resource supply capacities
- Location and proliferation of septic fields and extension of public sewer
- Efforts to reduce solid waste through expansion of recycling programs

Public services expanding to provide for a growing population, including

- Placement and staffing of necessary services such as schools and public safety
- Support for cultural amenities, libraries and youth and elderly programs
- Efficiency of general government functions at both a town and County level

Rural land identification and preservation to protect sensitive areas, including

- Location of sensitive area features not conducive to additional development
- Location of rural land types that support productive agricultural uses
- Protection of waterways for recharge and recreational purposes

Recreation and tourism focus on increased local and visitor activity, including

- Evaluation of recreational activities distributed among population centers
- Support for civic organizations and commercially driven initiatives
- Cross over of tourism activities to maximize resident and visitor experience

Economic development efforts focus on sustained employment growth, including

- Promotion of available industrial parks and underutilized properties
- Support for tourism and recreational businesses
- Providing necessary commercial services to boost local spending

Community design being consistent with existing characteristics, including

- Compatibility of new development with existing neighborhoods
- Aesthetic appeal of commercial and industrial centers
- Recognizing the social importance of cultural amenities

Preferred development areas locating where services are readily available, including

- Coordination of development efforts around existing towns and communities
- Promotion of mixed uses and creative designs for new developments
- Limiting development in environmentally sensitive areas

Redevelopment and revitalization focused on quality of life issues, including

- Efficiency of location that links existing resources with community needs
- Sustaining long-term viability of important urban centers
- Utilizing creative strategies to ensure proper maintenance of properties

Finance plans should address the short-and long-term budgetary needs, including

- Use of funding plans that address projected capital expenditures
- Provision of funding mechanisms to provide adequate services to new growth
- Improved local economy to support sustainable community affordability

Historic preservation identifies, protects and preserves significant features, including

- Inclusion of historic features in heritage tours
- Support for programs that provide incentives for preservation efforts
- Placement of historic sites and structures on the National Register

### **Implementing the Comprehensive Plan**

The ability to implement the Plan will depend largely on the County to follow through with the policies and goals of the Plan. The County cannot accomplish this alone and will require partnerships with the public and private entities to meet the objectives of the Plan. To achieve these partnerships the County must provide education and outreach to property owners, the general public, and development community to “buy into” the good planning principles of the Plan. Some of this outreach should include:

- Workshops on timely issues and topics
- Involving the public as part of coalition building
- Publicizing current activities and actions
- Ensuring adequate staff to handle planning related duties
- Fostering partnerships between the Planning Commission and other organizations

Timing of the various planning components attempting to be addressed through this outreach effort will be subject primarily to policy and funding. The Plan includes both a practical approach toward developing funding strategies to address the initiatives of this and other plans, as well as recognizing the cautious approach that often precedes such direction with changes in

policy. Understanding the role that each of these factors is bound by, the Plan does provide a 20 year window with the opportunity for update as goals and objectives are accomplished.

As growth and development activity continues to increase over the next 20 years, the County should be prepared to use this Comprehensive Plan and subsequent plans to appropriately guide it in directions that are most beneficial to the long-term goals of the community. The Plan includes numerous tools and strategies to accomplish this task and develop the County's ability to service and absorb the projected level of growth.

As outlined throughout the Plan, these short and long-term goals will be dependent upon numerous factors for achievement and may not occur in any specific order, but are projected to be resolved within the 10-year Plan period.

The short-term goals are those items identified primarily as recommendations for issues that already have an established direction and can be implemented through general planning policy. There are also goals outlined in various chapters that are already tied to specific activities and timeframes within other planning documents such as the Morgan County Board of Education Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan and the Morgan County Solid Waste Management Plan, which this Plan accepts and incorporates through reference.

Long-term goals are typically made up of issues that will require further governmental action or do not process adequate clear direction through public support at this time to be implemented. Goals requiring governmental decisions include issues such as creating a Capital Improvement Program to address the growing needs of services and facilities, which will ultimately rest with the will and decision of the County Commission. Long-term goals that will require further consideration through public deliberation in establishing a clear direction prior to moving forward are more broad reaching issues such as implementation of land-use zoning, creation of impact fees and protection of resources.

Implementation of the Plan as a whole is necessary to accommodate future growth where it is designated and preserve those areas where it should be limited. It is important for the County to guide all parties identified in this Plan to work together with the tools and strategies that these partners will need to organize a collective approach toward the success of plan implementation.

### **Funding the Comprehensive Plan**

Although the Comprehensive Plan update and adoption process is required by West Virginia State law, it is funded primarily by the Morgan County Commission. However, given the cost for this task, due to the time and technical data associated with development of Plan, it is also funded in part by the in kind contribution of various organizations and agencies associated with providing input.

Funding for the update of this Comprehensive Plan was also accomplished through a monetary contribution from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.