MMMPO
morgantown monongalia
metropolitan planning organization

CHAPTER 2 – REGIONAL VISION

CROSSROADS
It's time to chart our future.

In late 2011 and early 2012, the City of Morgantown, Town of Star City, and the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) embarked on an unprecedented collaborative effort to develop a shared vision for the future of the region. The process, called **"Crossroads — It's time to chart our future,"** engaged a diverse group of stakeholders, citizens, and community leaders. The group identified needs, aspirations, and the preferred direction of future growth for Monongalia County — with the intent of working toward that end. The Vision serves as a foundation for three plans: the City of Morgantown's Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Star City's Comprehensive Plan, and the regional Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the MMMPO.

2.1 Motivation for the Vision

Since the year 2000, Monongalia County has experienced rapid growth in both population and land development. This growth has significantly altered the area's physical, demographic, and economic landscape and overwhelmed efforts to meet the increased demand for transportation infrastructure and other urban services. Though existing long-range plans were individually well-conceived, they were not coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries or integrated with a regional multi-modal transportation plan. This led to varying expectations among area residents and inadequate support for action.

The City of Morgantown, Town of Star City, and MMMPO recognized that continued prosperity in Monongalia County depends on proactively and cooperatively addressing regional challenges, and sought a unifying vision upon which to base their plans.
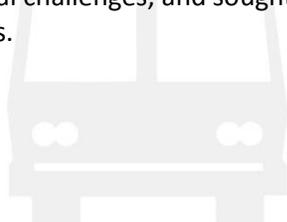
2.2 Intent and Structure

The Vision describes citizen's aspirations for the future of Monongalia County. It consists of five aspirational statements, ten principles for development in the region, and a conceptual framework map that indicates where growth should and should not be encouraged. The Vision is the foundation of the strategies and policy recommendations of the LRTP.

2.3 The Vision Process

An effective vision process requires the participation of a broad cross section of a community. To achieve that end, a citizen committee, known as the Regional Vision Group, was formed to help guide the process. This diverse group met periodically to coordinate public meetings, review ideas generated through the public process, and draft the preliminary vision statements.

The Crossroads vision process included four rounds of public involvement opportunities:

1. Stakeholder Interviews
2. Idea Gathering Workshops
3. Understanding Future Growth Workshop
4. Community Choices Workshop

Everyone with an interest in the future of Greater Morgantown was invited to attend the public workshops. Appendix A contains detailed summaries of the public workshops and a complete record of public comments.

Stakeholder Interviews

Between December 7, 2011 and February 1, 2012, the planning team interviewed approximately 100 stakeholders in 12 small group sessions. The stakeholders represented West Virginia University (WVU), local realtors, the Board of Education, neighborhood organizations, economic development entities, businesses, developers, transportation professionals, and persons with disabilities. Various special interest groups such as advocates for environmental causes, biking, and historic preservation (among others) also were represented. The interviews were designed to identify regional strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, and gain insight on local knowledge.
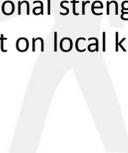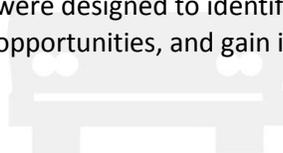
Outreach

Competing interests, busy lifestyles, the long-term focus of comprehensive transportation planning, and the complexity of issues make enticing people to attend planning meetings very challenging.

To inform the public about the importance of the Vision and Plans, and the participatory nature of the workshops, a publicity and outreach effort was undertaken that included:

- Distributing flyers and posters
- Newspaper columns
- Radio interviews
- Promotions on City, Town and MPO websites
- Social media and a project website
- Email blasts
- Word of mouth

Participation

Participants represented many segments of the community, though representation was not proportional to the region's demographics. Participants represented all ages, races, levels of education and incomes, but there was proportionally greater representation from older people and those with higher levels of education and income. Below are the approximate number of participants who attended each phase of the public process:

- Stakeholder Interviews: 100
- Idea Gathering Meetings: 100
- Understanding Future Growth: 50
- Community Choices: 40
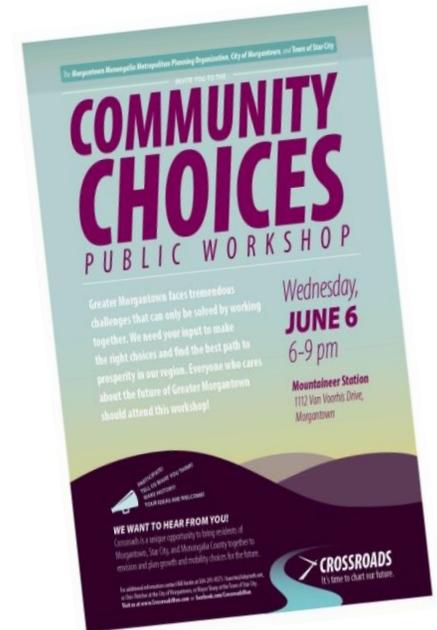
Idea Gathering Meetings

On January 25 and 26, 2012 at South Middle School and North Elementary School respectively, two Idea Gathering Meetings were conducted to collect ideas from citizens about the future of the region. These ideas are the foundation on which the Regional Vision is based.

Format

Participants worked in small groups led by trained volunteer facilitators. They brainstormed responses to the question, "What should be done to make Morgantown, Star City and Monongalia County the best they can be in the coming years?" Participants also engaged in a map-based activity where they identified and described strong and weak places in the community. Strong places are those that are appealing and reflect well on the community and that the community values. Weak places are those that represent conditions that should be improved or that do not reflect well on the community.

Outcomes

The meetings yielded 269 ideas for the future, which were entered verbatim into a database and sorted based upon recurring themes. Over half of the ideas related to transportation (traffic, roads, public transportation, biking and walking), while about a quarter of the ideas pertained to development, growth, land use or community collaboration. The remaining ideas related to quality of life topics (schools, amenities, parks, housing, and neighborhoods). These ideas and input from the stakeholder interviews were reviewed by the Regional Vision Group during a meeting in February 2012, which led to a set of preliminary vision statements for the region. The mapping exercise identified specific places within the community and their descriptive characteristics. These descriptions were used to develop ten principles for future growth and development.

Understanding Future Growth

On March 28, 2012 at University High School, the Understanding Future Growth workshop engaged the public in thinking about where growth should occur in the region. This was an analytical workshop that brought preliminary technical analysis and the draft vision statements together for participants to consider.

Format

Like the Idea Gathering Meetings, participants worked in small groups led by trained volunteer facilitators. Through a map-based activity, groups allocated the total amount of land needed to accommodate the County's projected 2040 population assuming recent land consumption trends continued. Groups were given a total of 220 ¾-inch adhesive chips (each representing 40 acres, for a total of 8,800 acres) and asked to place them on a table-size map of the Greater Morgantown Area that showed developed land, undeveloped land, protected land, and natural features. Participants could place their chips anywhere they felt growth should occur, while considering the draft vision statements. Each group was required to place all of their chips on the map.

Community members participate in identifying where future growth should occur in the region.

Outcomes

Several patterns emerged from the workshop's mapping activity and group discussions. These patterns and comments formed the basis for the Principles and Conceptual Map:

- **Redevelopment at higher intensities.** All of the groups placed at least half of their chips on areas with existing development, indicating a clear preference for redevelopment over growth in currently undeveloped areas.
- **Infill development.** Most of the groups placed large amounts of growth in undeveloped areas near existing development. This infill pattern would plug holes in the urban fabric, develop areas already served by existing infrastructure, and allow the urban area to expand in a contiguous pattern.
- **Greenfield development is limited and clustered.** Groups generally indicated that any growth in rural areas should be both near existing development and/or clustered to "minimize sprawl" and "preserve open space."
- **Very limited development within the outlying areas.** Groups allocated very limited growth for areas in the far south and western portions of the county.

Groups of community members engage in discussion about the implications of various growth patterns.

Community Choices

On June 6, 2012, at Mountaineer Station on WVU's campus, the Community Choices workshop invited the public to evaluate the draft vision and provide input on growth scenarios. The input helped to refine the Vision and provide direction for the comprehensive plans and transportation plan.

Format

During the workshop, participants heard a brief presentation about the vision process and what had been learned to-date. Then in a worksheet-based activity, they were asked to indicate their level of support for each of five vision statements and provide written comments to refine them.

Next, participants heard brief presentations about the technical work on economics and transportation conditions and were introduced to the draft principles. Through a second worksheet-based activity, participants indicated their level of support for each principle and provided written comments to refine them.

Finally, having considered the previous public input and technical findings, participants worked in small groups to evaluate and prioritize three general growth scenarios

- **Scenario 1:** The majority of future development will be in the form of infill and redevelopment within the primary urban area.
- **Scenario 2:** The majority of future development will be in the form of new development contiguous to the primary urban area.
- **Scenario 3:** The majority of future development will continue the growth patterns of the past 10 years.

Outcomes

Participants strongly supported the vision statements, and provided insightful comments to refine them. Likewise the principle statements received strong support. The scenario activity confirmed previous public input, which suggested that growth should be managed to balance redevelopment within existing areas and development in new areas contiguous to the existing urban area. Overall the Scenarios were ranked with Scenario 1 as most preferred followed by Scenario 2. Scenario 3 was nearly unanimously ranked as least preferred.
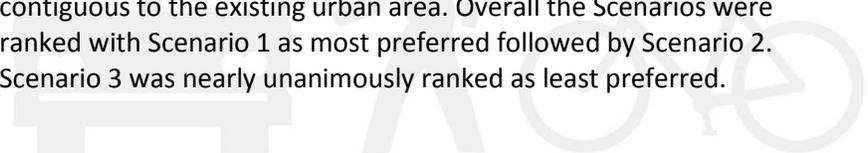
2.4 The Vision

The Vision: Aspirations

Five statements convey the vision for the future of Monongalia County. They reflect the strongest themes from public input and are the broadest expression of the community's aspirations.

The following statements directly reflect public input collected at the Idea Gathering Meetings and subsequent Crossroads workshops. Below each statement is a sample of actual comments that showcase common ideas heard from participants at these meetings. For all comments from the public, see Appendix A.

GROWING...

Managed growth that is efficient, attractive, and well-connected through appropriate infrastructure will balance land consumption with redevelopment while protecting and preserving open space, local agriculture, energy resources and the environment.

"Plan comprehensively, coherent, regulated development."

"Citywide aesthetics/ landscaping plan."

"Promote farmland protection."

"Develop design standards for new construction and enforce them."

"Preserve and expand green space."

"Need Countywide planning."

MOVING...

A balanced, safe, attractive, and accessible transportation system will reduce congestion, improve connectivity and support and direct future growth while integrating private vehicles and expanding public transportation, biking, and walking networks.

"Ensure access regardless of individual or mode of travel (i.e., wheelchairs and bicycles)."

"Implement streets (complete streets) that support all kinds of transportation (bicycles, pedestrians, cars)."

"Promote mix use pedestrian-oriented development that comprises active transport (walking/cycling) – public transportation (de-emphasis on car transportation)."

LIVING...

Job and income growth, improved community services, support for the arts, accessible and connected parks and recreational facilities, good schools, desirable, diverse, and affordable housing, and safe neighborhoods that have access to local shops and markets, will be hallmarks of our region's quality of life.

"Job/Income growth to preserve and improve quality of life."

"Link neighborhoods via biking/walking to community attractions, commercial, and educational venues."

"Affordable housing for all income levels with affordable transportation options for each development. People would like to live closer but can't afford it. Thus having to drive/mixed-use zoning."

COMPETING...

A regional approach to economic development and infrastructure investments that is founded on cooperative relationships will make the region competitive and capable of attracting and supporting existing and new businesses.

"New business while maintaining existing to improve the town's growth."

"Lead the state in the usage of innovative technology products."

"Support strategies that would attract residents so they want to come live here."

COLLABORATING...

An engaged community with leaders that embrace continued citizen engagement and stronger collaboration among municipalities, the County, the State, WVU, neighborhoods and major employers will enable the sharing of resources and lead to successful implementation.

"Consolidate services between cities to leave more money to spend on other things."

"Encourage the region to develop a more balanced product with alternative energy."

"Increase collaboration with other surrounding governments."

The Vision: Ten Principles

Ten Principles reflect community values related to the physical environment in the region. They describe the community's intent about "how" (character attributes) and "where" (conceptual location) development should occur. They reflect a variety of land management themes that are mutually reinforcing. They include the quality, appearance, pattern, character, and organization of development, environmental quality, efficient use of infrastructure, and expanded connectivity and mobility choices for residents.

It is our intent that...

1. **Infill development and redevelopment of underutilized and/or deteriorating sites takes priority over development in remote greenfield locations.**
    It is preferable to accommodate growth within the existing urban area in locations that are appropriate for and can support increased development densities. Infill and redevelopment will occur in a strategic manner that considers community needs like access to amenities, transportation service, and the quality and quantity of open space.

2. **Expansion of the urban area will occur in a contiguous pattern that favors areas already served by existing infrastructure.**
    To the extent that outward expansion of the urban area occurs, it should progress in a concentric pattern, emphasizing areas nearest to the urban area's geographic center. Development should promote responsible management of the region's transportation and utility infrastructure, and help to provide services efficiently by preferring sites that are supported by existing capacity.

Sample comments offered by citizens at the public workshops that are reflected in the Principles. For all comments from the public, see Appendix A.

"Implement complete streets that support all kinds of transportation."

"Bring more vertical growth density in already developed areas."

"Consider energy efficiency and sustainability as we upgrade and expand our infrastructure."

Keep and create recreational parks and interconnecting paths for pedestrians and bicycles."

"Plan infrastructure to accommodate future development."

"Preserve and expand green space."

"Develop areas that people do not have to drive to."

3. **Future growth in rural areas will conserve open space, preserve sensitive natural features, and respect significant view sheds.**
To the extent that development occurs in rural areas (away from the urban center) it should be rural in character (as opposed to urban or suburban) and/or occur in a clustered pattern that preserves open space and avoids negative impacts on steep slopes, wetlands, waterways, and scenic quality.

4. **Quality design is emphasized for all uses to create an attractive, distinctive public and private realm, and promote positive perceptions of the region.**
Public areas (streets, sidewalks, parks, street trees, etc.) and private areas (building facades, lawns, landscaping, parking lots, driveways, etc.) are planned and designed to balance function, appearance, and affordability, while allowing for creative differences, innovation, and diversity of design.

5. **Development that integrates mixed-uses (residential, commercial, institutional, civic, etc.) and connects with the existing urban fabric is encouraged.**
Places are created with multiple uses—residential, commercial, and institutional, among others—in proximity to each other, perhaps on the same site and/or in the same structure. Close attention is given to the compatibility of those uses and their surroundings. Uses are arranged in a manner that maximizes pedestrian activity.

6. **Places will be better connected to improve the function of the street network and create more opportunities to walk, bike, and access public transportation throughout the region.**
While the region's topography is a challenge to create an ideal level of street connectivity, opportunities will be sought to improve the street pattern and thereby increase travel options, potentially decrease vehicle miles, reduce congestion, and improve wayfinding. Bicycle and pedestrian paths and supporting amenities will be integrated into new development and areas undergoing redevelopment.

7. **Residential development will support the formation of complete neighborhoods with diverse housing, pedestrian-scale streets, integrated public spaces, connection to adjacent neighborhoods, and access to transportation alternatives and basic retail needs.**
Complete neighborhoods include a variety of land uses (residential, commercial, civic, and recreational areas), building types, and housing types; have an identifiable center that offers basic services
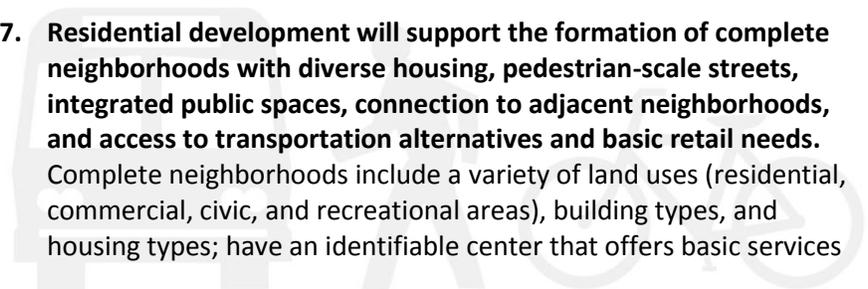
such as grocery stores and specialty shops; support a variety of travel options; are well-connected to adjacent neighborhoods and districts; and seamlessly integrate diverse, multi-generational residents living in proximity to one another.

8. **A broad range of housing types, price levels, and occupancy types will provide desirable living options for a diverse population.**
   Housing in the region is diverse in type (single-family and multi-family, detached and attached, etc.) and offers options for both ownership and rental occupancy at a wide range of price levels.

9. **Parks, open spaces, and recreational areas are incorporated as part of future development.**
   Future development will contribute to expanding the quantity, quality, access to, and connections between the region's parks, open space, and recreational amenities.

10. **Environmentally sensitive and sustainable practices will be encouraged in future developments.**
    Development will be designed to reduce potentially negative impacts on environmental features such as steep slopes, stream corridors, wetlands, and significant stands of mature trees. Infill and redevelopment will maintain or enhance the urban tree canopy. Green building practices will be encouraged.

The Vision: Framework Map

The Framework Map (Figure 2-1) illustrates the Principles through seven concepts and shows where these concepts generally apply throughout the Greater Morgantown Area. The Principles and this map form a conceptual framework to serve as a guide to inform the Comprehensive Plans and Long Range Transportation Plan. As a framework, this map is not tied to any regulations, specific policies, or development proposals.

Seven Concepts

The map depicts three areas where development is restricted and four areas where development can occur. The growth areas indicate the degree to which growth should occur, from Priority (most supported) to Limited (least supported).

1. **Preserve Open** – Areas that are permanently protected from development due to public ownership and use as parkland.
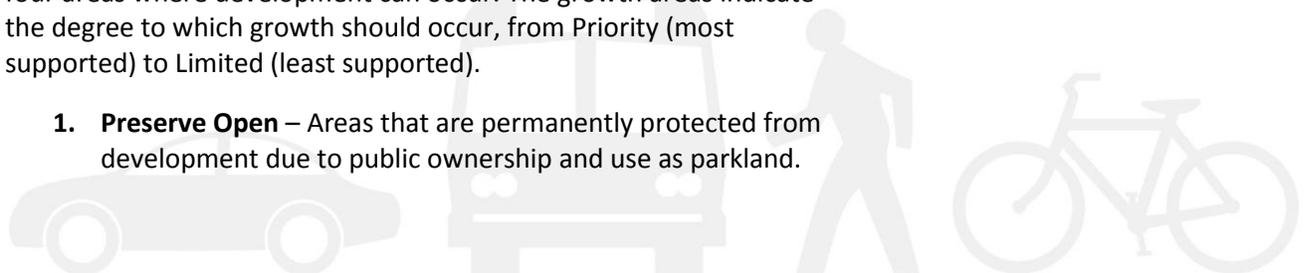
2. **Reserve Open (slopes)** – Areas of steep slopes (generally greater than 40%) that, due to the difficulty of building on such extreme topography, are likely to remain as open space. However, these areas may be subject to development and should be protected.

3. **Restricted (floodplain) –** Areas that are subject to development, but where development is restricted by local and federal regulations due to a high risk of flooding.

4. **Encouraged Growth** – Areas where growth should be strongly encouraged for economic development interests and revitalizing neighborhoods and districts. Such growth includes new development and redevelopment within existing areas.

5. **Infill and Redevelopment Growth –** Existing developed areas where additional growth through infill or redevelopment is appropriate.

6. **Controlled Growth –** Developing areas, or currently undeveloped land, where more growth is likely due to proximity to existing thoroughfares, infrastructure, and adjacency to recent development. Growth in these areas generally expands the footprint of the urban area and should be controlled to footprint minimize negative impacts.

7. **Limited Growth** – All other areas that are subject to development, but where increased intensity is generally not desired. These areas include existing open space, existing development, and all developable land in areas of the County that are not shown.

Figure 2-1. The Framework Map

Conceptual Growth Framework

- Preserved Open Areas
- Reserved Open Areas
- Retricted Areas (Floodplain)
- Encouraged Growth
- **Infill and Redevelopment**
- Controlled Growth
- Limited Growth