

8 February 2011  
When Planning Fails

As we rapidly close in on the two year mark, the Greenbrier Comprehensive Plan has yet to be adopted. When Cambria Planning Group started the plan in the summer of 2008, the County had a pro-planning County Commission. After the election in November, we were facing an anti-planning Commission. What we saw happening in Greenbrier was a precursor to much of the political mood of 2009 and 2010.

Counties in West Virginia are managed by a three-member County Commission. The commissioners have six year terms with the elections staggered every two years. Because of the size of the County Commissions, a single election can have a huge impact. The commissioner up for re-election, a Republican, had pushed for the passage of a subdivision ordinance in the County, which made him less popular despite the majority Republican bent in Greenbrier. His opponent in the election ran on an anti-planning platform...get rid of the subdivision ordinance, the zoning ordinance, and the comprehensive plan (or go back and use the comprehensive plan from 1990). In the run-up to the election, most of the pro-planning citizens gave the opponent little chance of election. Such was not the case.

Despite strong support from the public , significant public input into the process, and a recommendation from the Planning Commission to adopt, the plan was turned down in large part because of a “right to farm” provision suggested by the local Farm Bureau and the folks at the Agricultural Extension office. By the time the plan reached the County Commission, a wide swath of the county believed that the “right to farm” provision was meant to take away farmers' rights rather than protect them from nuisance lawsuits. There were other points of contention as well, points that did not exist until very late in the process. In the final analysis, to use a contemporary phrase, the plan got tea-bagged.

Regardless of the political fate of the plan, the plan was created by the citizens and the small communities in Greenbrier County. The policies, the goals, and the objectives came directly from the citizen workshops during the fall and citizen volunteers spent three daylong meetings in the spring pouring over the drafts to make sure that what they wanted was included. In the end, the plan is a testament to their hard work and their vision of the future. I applaud all of them, as well as the Greenbrier County Planning Commission, and the Greenbrier County Department of Planning and Permits, which no longer exists.

Some Technical Notes about the Greenbrier Comprehensive Plan

One of the concerns of the Planning Commission was that the plan needed to be accessible. As such, it was originally designed as an interactive web document, so much of the background data, the survey results, and the community discussions are not included in the print document.

Originally, the notes included in the policies, goals, and strategies section were part of a separate implementation document. At the request of the Planning Commission, the implementation notes and background information were transferred to the policy document.