

Creating Greenbrier

Planning & Government

I. Executive Summary

Planning and Land Use focuses on planning and governance policies for Greenbrier County, including:

- Encouraging active public participation in the government and in the county and communities;
- Adopting "open government" approaches to the provision of public information;
- Providing an effective, efficient, responsible, ethical, and open approach to governance; and
- Developing a inter-jurisdictional approach, where possible, to the provision of public services to improve efficiency and minimize costs.

II. Planning and Government Policies, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

(Policy) Open Government. Greenbrier County will follow an "open" participatory government approach to governance, including:

- Emphasis on active public outreach and public input to increase citizen participation in planning and government processes;
- Effective representation of all citizens and regions in Greenbrier County, including citizens living in the rural areas as well as those who reside in the County's cities, towns, villages, and rural communities;
- Transparency in the decision making process;
- Accountability on the part of elected and appointed officials and

- on government staff;
- Open access to public documents, background and educational materials, press releases, and other outreach materials;
- Provide training for citizens appointed to Boards and Commissions to prepare them for their official duties.

(Policy) Inter- and Intra-governmental cooperation. Greenbrier County, where and when possible, will seek cost effective, multi-jurisdictional approaches to the provision of public programs, services, and facilities.

(Policy) Effective and Efficient Government. Greenbrier County actively supports the effective, efficient, and open provision of public services to County residents and visitors.

(Policy) Government and Ethics. Members of public boards and commissions shall conduct themselves in their official capacity in accordance with State Ethics Laws and shall, in cases of conflict of interest, recuse themselves from influencing or voting on the issue.

PNG 1.0 Open Government. Actively support "open government" initiatives, including effective public outreach programs, public input initiatives, and other programs and policies which encourage full citizen participation in local government, increase transparency and accountability, and improve service, accessibility, and representation.

Notes

See 1.2.2 [c] for general discussion of CAC. Open Government is addressed in §6-9A-1 et al. of the W VA Code.

PNG 1.1 Open Government Task Force. Appoint a citizen task force, representative of the county, to study how Greenbrier County government, including elected and appointed officials and staff, currently handle both public outreach, public information, and citizen input and recommend methods for improving government/citizen communications, government transparency and accountability, and public relations.

PNG 1.2 Citizen Participation. Increase and maintain high levels of citizen participation in local government, in communities, and in the County by actively reaching out and involving citizens in the local government activities and community and county-based initiatives, including establishing citizen task forces and citizen action/advisory committees to address current and future issues and develop citizen-oriented programs and events.

Notes

See State Code Provisions for Open Government (Â§6-9A-1 et al.), Freedom of Information Act (Â§29-B-1-1 et al.), and the Local Government Flexibility Act (23-7-23 et al.)

PNG 1.2.1 Citizen Participation and Volunteerism. Actively support and promote citizen participation in local government, in communities, and in the county.

Implementation

- Providing access to volunteer activities through a calendar of events on the County's webpage;
- Develop a retired senior volunteer program (rsvp) in partnership with Greenbrier County Committee on Aging;
- Develop a biannual "Greenbrier Cares" Program;
- Develop a "service learning" program, in partnership with community organizations, through the NRTCC and the Greenbrier County Public Schools.

Notes

Counties with larger than average retirement populations have a wealth of untapped resources. Often new or seasonal residents, especially in counties and communities which are "retirement destinations," are unaware of volunteer programs and activities. Volunteer programs are a reasonably effective way of tapping into both the energy and the knowledge of the population, while helping to integrate new residents into the fabric of Greenbrier County and building bridges between different generations and different groups.

The least costly method of creating an updatable online calendar of events and activities is through Google tools. The calendar is fairly simple to develop, covers multiple months, and can be easily updated by one or more volunteers. It can also be linked to a google email account so the County would not need to provide direct access to the County's website.

Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP): Generally, RSVP programs are supported either through government agencies (local government, the national Senior Corps program, and

the Corporation for National and Community Service) or non-governmental agencies like the United Way. RSVP promotes volunteerism and provides programs and opportunities for citizens 55 and older. Activities include emergency preparedness and response, tutoring and foster grandparenting, environmental monitoring, park construction and maintenance, annual book bag and supply drives, and a whole host of other community-based activities. In short, RSVP is one of the single most effective community volunteer programs available. Currently, the closest RSVP program is located in Summersville. Other regionally close programs are available in Mercer County, West Virginia and Giles County, Virginia. Primary information on establishing an RSVP program is available through the Corporation for National and Community Service: Senior Corps.

Greenbrier Cares: A "volunteer activity" day, sponsored and promoted by Greenbrier County twice per year. Activities may include cleaning up a local park, building a playground, picking up trash along the roads, helping with home repair for seniors, planting gardens, building a walking trail, and so forth.

Service Learning Programs are programs and activities which encourage volunteerism in and provide educational opportunities for youth (K through college). They are particularly effective in building connections between students and the communities in which they live. A good example of a local service learning program is through the Meadow River Watershed Committee, which is working with students to monitor water quality in the Meadow River.

PNG 1.2.2 Citizen Action Committees, Citizen/Community Organizations, and Citizen Task Forces. Actively utilize and support formal and informal Citizen Action/ Advisory Committees, Citizen/ Community Organizations, and Citizen Task Forces to address the challenges and opportunities in Greenbrier County.

Implementation

- Establish a policy governing the use of formal Citizen Action / Advisory Committees, and Citizen Task Forces.
- Appoint CAC/CTFs, when possible, to help develop County policies and programs, including developing a trail plan, a flexible land use ordinance, an open government program, and other activities.

Notes

Citizen Task Force (CTF) / Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) are one of the most effective tools to garnering citizen input and involvement, while providing an effective mechanism for developing and maintaining comprehensive plans, implementation programs, or researching and developing other policy-based initiatives. Most often CAC's/CTF's can provide the additional manpower required to study specific issues, make recommendations, and provide citizen-based guidance to elected and appointed officials and are especially useful in small jurisdictions with limited staff resources. They also help "bridge a gap" between the elected body and the broader population. There are two forms of CAC's: formal and informal. A formal CAC is one directly appointed by the governing board to address a specific issue or range of issues, with names drawn from applicants to the CAC. An informal CAC is one developed by citizens who come together to study a specific issue and present their findings to the governing board. Both forms of CAC's have value, although informal CAC's often look at issues beyond the parameters established by the governing board. A policy concerning CAC's should address both types of CACs.

PNG 1.2.3 Greenbrier County Blog. Establish a Greenbrier County blog on the County web page to encourage citizens to become active participants in the process of governance.

Notes

Comprehensive Plan blog already exists and will be transferred to the County at time of delivery of final plan. It can either be maintained as a government blog or can be maintained by a citizen volunteer.

A blog allows citizens to have a direct say on issues and hold an "open conversation" with other citizens at a minimal cost to the government. While it does require some staff time to maintain, it could also be maintained by a citizen volunteer. Staff or volunteer time is necessary, but shouldn't take more than 15 minutes per day to screen responses and post press releases. The blog site can be used to garner citizen comments by posting press releases or other materials that might, more commonly be integrated into a newsletter. A blog site for the comprehensive plan has already been established and will be transferred to Greenbrier County at the end of the planning process (at the time of delivery of the final plan).

PNG 1.3 Public Outreach and Open Government. Improve public outreach and education programs that provide citizens with timely, relevant, and appropriate information.

Implementation

- Establish a clearly defined public information and FOIA policy for Greenbrier County.
- Expand use of the Greenbrier County website to provide access to public documents, including studies and reports, agendas, minutes, budget documents, and other relevant materials.

Notes

Justice Black, in Barr vs. Matteo, wrote that:

The effective functioning of a free government like ours depends largely on the force of an informed public opinion. This calls for the widest possible understanding of the quality of government service rendered by all elective or appointed public officials or employees. (360 US (564)(1959).

Open government emphasizes active citizen participation and relies on the free flow of public information and on the openness of the government to citizens through the active application of transparency to all government actions, with the exception of those specified under the original Freedom of Information Act and the Open Government Act of 2007.

The authors of the original Freedom of Information Act (1966) incorporated Justice Black's statement and wrote that "our constitutional democracy, our system of self-government, and our commitment to popular sovereignty depends upon the consent of the governed [and] such consent is not meaningful unless it is informed consent." (s-2468[2][1][A-B]).

An effective outreach program has one key components—public education. Most controversies can either be avoided or minimized by improved communication and open government approaches. It is also one of the most effective approaches to addressing public perceptions about “closed governments.” A public information policy must be in line with the FOIA statutes for the State of West Virginia (§29-B-1-1 et al.), both in terms

the letter and the spirit of the law and should cover a variety of materials, including taped (audio and video) public meetings, educational brochures, press releases, public data, and special reports, and should utilize a variety of dissemination methods, including the County's website, news articles and inserts, newsletters, and other print and electronic mediums.

PNG 1.3.1 Public Information and Data Office. Create a Public Information Office that would be charged with collecting, processing, and distributing public information and public data, including:

- (a) Maintain the county website and e-government initiative;
- (b) Maintain the county GIS;
- (c) Create and maintain public documents database, based on County Clerk records, to increase access;
- (d) Create press releases, newsletter, and other print materials, as needed;
- (e) Track media coverage of Greenbrier County;
- (f) Create special studies at the request of the County Commission;
- (g) Develop and maintain a county-wide indicators program , integrated where possible with the County's GIS, that would track specific data (economic, social, housing, education, environmental) and would function as a data and information warehouse for other agencies, for other local jurisdictions, and for non-profit and non-government agencies which provide public services in Greenbrier County.

Implementation

- Work with the six jurisdictions in Greenbrier County to establish an inter-jurisdictional, co-funded office of public information and data.
- Establish a formal Greenbrier County Quality-of-Life Indicators Program to track data and trends and provide public access to the information.

Notes

Quality public information relies on quality data, as does

economic development, housing programs, social service programs, health programs, public education, and a host of others. Each time an organization, a County department, or a neighboring jurisdiction applies for a grant, develops a new comprehensive or strategic plan, or creates a new approach to marketing they use data. Currently, each is reinventing the wheel and wasting resources in the process because each is looking up the same base data. By establishing a county-wide indicator program, the County will save labor costs while guaranteeing the overall quality of the data being used. Indicator programs provide the County and in-County jurisdictions a proactive method of tracking progress from year to year and is an essential element in developing sustainable approaches to growth, economic development, the provision of social services and education, and environmental oversight.

Currently, the seven jurisdictions in Greenbrier County are paying seven different people to look up the same data (census, transportation, environmental, school population, etc.), create similar maps and maintain similar GIS databases, and develop similar public information handouts, press releases, and other materials. A single, co-funded office, will increase the efficacy and efficiency, by eliminating duplication of services, of both the provision of public information and the collection and distribution of the broad range of data required for public decision making, including GIS data. At a minimum, the department should include a public information director, with a specialty in research, FOIA, and public communication, and two GIS/data analysts to maintain county-wide GIS and indicator data, and a web-specialist to maintain the County, Town, and City websites. The department can be broadened to include a grants specialist as well. The Public Information and Data Office should be tasked with the following: a) Development and distribution of public information, including press releases, information brochures, and FOIA requests and responses; b) development and maintenance of combined GIS system; c) development and maintenance of combined indicators program; d) development and maintenance of County, Town, and City web presence; and e) management of Census 2010 process.

While the majority of the cost for the Public Information and Data Office would be borne by Greenbrier County, the cost of developing and maintaining the indicators program could be covered through a "cost sharing" program between the County, the Cities, the Towns, and associated agencies. The cost of the

program would be primarily labor.-related, but they are costs the County and the in-county jurisdictions are already paying. The same is true for the cost of space, equipment, and site licenses for programs, most notably ArcGIS/ESRI. Site license costs could be minimized by switching from Microsoft to Open Office (an free open source program originally developed by Sun Microsystems). Data costs, with the exception of GIS data, are marginal inasmuch as most in now published on the internet. Given that the base costs of establishing an indicators data set is already included in the comprehensive plan, initial start-up time will be relatively short. A portion of the potential personnel costs could be trimmed by establishing an internship program with the technical college and working with the secondary and post-secondary schools to develop portions of the GIS data, most notably with environmental data.

PNG 1.3.2 County Web Presence as a Public Information

Tool. Expand the use of the County's website to provide citizens access to information specified under the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Government Act of 2007, as well as informational studies, background data, application materials, and other documents which are considered public information.

- (a) **E-Government Initiative.** In-order to streamline the delivery of county services, build on the current e-government processes (forms) used by Greenbrier County to allow for online submission of forms, payments, and requests.

Implementation

- Add an effective 311 (faq) element to the current County website.
 - Expand access to public documents covered by FOIA (W Va Code §29B-1-1 et al.), including plans, public reports, minutes, and other applicable materials.
 - Develop web-GIS system.
 - Add an online payment component to the County website.
- (b) **Documents and Forms.** Adopt standards for online documents to allow full access to government documents regardless of computer platform (example: use of pdf format

rather than .doc format).

Notes

Standardizing forms and documents in a universal format, such as post document file (pdf), increases accessibility, regardless of computer platform. Most publishing programs, including Word, Open Office, Mac Office and others will automatically export to pdf format.

- (c) **Public Library Information Stations.** Work with the public libraries to establish dedicated computer access to public documents and e-government processes in all of the public libraries in Greenbrier County for residents who do not have computer access at home. (See HCE 3.1 and HCE 3.3).

Implementation

- Establish a dedicated computer in each of the six public libraries for public information and government documents (federal, state, and local).

Notes

Cost of hardware may be covered under an USDA grant, but is unlikely. Project could be done using private donations or in partnership with the NRCTC.

PNG 2.0 Effective Governance. Establish and maintain effective, professional approaches to governance and the provision of public services.

Notes

Effective and efficient approaches to government and governance is essential to economic development because it minimizes the impact of politics and creates a predictable and straight forward relationship between government, business, and citizens.

PNG 2.1 County Management. Improve the efficacy and efficiency of County Government.

Notes

See WVA Code §7-1-1a (Requirements for reforming, altering,

or modifying a county commission; alternative forms of county government).

PNG 2.1.1 County Management Task Force. Appoint a task force to examine the current structure and efficacy of Greenbrier County Government, including elected representation, management structure, staffing, and departmental organization, and determine whether the current structure should be maintained or modified as allowed under the West Virginia Code (§7.1.1a)

Implementation

- Establish an “open” task force to examine the efficacy of the current governing structure and make recommendations based on the provisions in West Virginia Code §7.1.1a

Notes

Under West Virginia Law, a county may adopt one of four alternative forms of government: 1)Chief executive-county commission plan, with chief executive and county commissioners elected; 2) County manager-county commission plan, with elected county commission and appointed county manager; 3) County administrator-county commission plan, with elected county commission and appointed county administrator; and 4) Increased size of county commission and no administrator.

The issue of the county's form of government and general dissatisfaction with current government was raised by citizens in all six community meetings, in many of the surveys, and in the workshops. Given residents' views, any task force should be formed such that there is little or no “government” influence. It is recommended that the County Commission appoint a “point person” or chair, but leave the membership of the task force open to any and all who would like to participate. Any recommendations for change or no change must be consistent with the provisions of W VA Code §7-1-1a.

PNG 2.1.2 Consolidated Government Services. Work with the jurisdictions in Greenbrier County to move towards a consolidated form of government, as provided for in §7A-1-1 of the West Virginia Code, or consolidate services, especially where duplication of services increases the cost and decreased the efficacy of those services, most notably in management, utilities, planning, parks and recreation, gis, and information services.

Implementation

- Appoint a joint governmental task force to study 1) government consolidation, or 2) consolidation of services. See PNG 3.1.

Notes

The West Virginia State Legislature found that "the consolidation of local governments was 1) in the public interest; 2) would promote economic growth and development; 3) would help local governments provide more efficient local services and more effective public administration; and 4) would keep local governments viable and provide more governing flexibility." The Legislature based their findings on four key observations: "1) The fiscal viability of municipal and county governments is challenged by changing demographics and tax bases; 2) with many local governments there is a significant duplicity of services; 3) certain local governments are at their taxable limits and yet are facing fee increases to remain financially viable; and 4) local governments should perform at the highest level of efficiency and economy while providing the highest standards of governmental services to their citizens. The West Virginia State Legislature concluded that "in order to attain high standards of efficiency, economy, service and flexibility and to assure the ongoing improvement in the quality of life of all citizens of the state, the Legislature hereby encourages and permits all local governments to consolidate part or all of their governmental and corporate functions.

The inefficiencies and duplication of services in Greenbrier County and the County's Towns and Cities are most notable in four areas: 1) provision of public utilities, most notably public water and sewer; the provision of information, including GIS and data services; economic development; and land use planning. Consolidated departments, in these particular areas, would not only increase the efficacy and efficiency of services, but it would also lead to less conflict and competition between individual jurisdictions.

While a consolidated government may prove to be impractical, given the size of Greenbrier County, the County, the Towns, and Cities in the County should consider consolidated the following agencies: Public Water and Sewer, Planning, Parks and Recreation, Emergency Management, Public Information and Data, and Economic Development in order to improve the

efficacy and efficiency of services and eliminate duplicity of services. Any consolidation must be in line with the provisions of W VA Code Chapter 7A.

PNG 3.0 Inter- and Intra-Jurisdictional Cooperation. Recognizing that the majority of major issues facing Greenbrier County, the Cities, and the Towns are regional in nature rather than local, develop inter-jurisdictional approaches, where and when appropriate and cost effective, to addressing issues and formulating solutions. Inter-jurisdictional approaches may involve a combination of Greenbrier County, incorporated areas within Greenbrier County, and other jurisdictions bordering Greenbrier County, including Monroe, Summers, Fayette, Nicholas, Webster, and Pocahontas Counties in West Virginia, and Bath and Highland Counties in Virginia. Inter-jurisdictional approaches are most effective in addressing the provision of public water and sewer and other utilities, education, transportation, planning and land use, environmental concerns, social services, housing, and economic development.

Notes

Inter-jurisdictional approaches are included in the majority of the plan's chapters. While single jurisdiction approaches may work in a single jurisdiction, they often cause externalities in neighboring jurisdictions and can unforeseen consequences in future years. Inter-jurisdictional approaches tend to be more cost effective because the cost of the project or program is spread across a larger population. In addition, granting agencies preference projects that involve more than one jurisdiction because the benefits of the project are spread over a larger population. Essentially, they are seen as having "more bang for the buck."

PNG 3.1 Multi-jurisdictional Commission. Establish a multi-jurisdictional commission, made up of one elected representative from each of the seven jurisdictions, that meets once every two months and other times as necessary and is authorized to discuss multi-jurisdictional projects, discuss differences and find common ground, work out project details, and negotiate preliminary agreements.

Implementation:

- Establish a Greenbrier Valley Regional Advisory Commission.

Notes

A multi-jurisdictional commission would provide a transition

step to consolidated government approaches and would function as a review board for consolidation and cooperative agreements. Advisory Commission would be made up of one elected official from each of the seven jurisdictions (Greenbrier County, Alderson, Lewisburg, Rainelle, Ronceverte, Rupert, and White Sulphur Springs). It would have a revolving chair (2 year term—each jurisdiction would have a chance to chair commission) and would be staffed either by the jurisdiction holding the chairmanship or by a joint staff office (probably best handled by a joint public information and data office and funded based on population).

PNG 3.1.1 Cooperation Agreement. Develop a county-wide, multi-jurisdictional cooperation agreement which covers the provision of facilities, programs, and services, and which establishes "ground rules" and "agreements on principal" for future projects.

Implementation

- Work with the six towns/cities in Greenbrier County and with the respective public agencies to develop cooperative co-use agreements for Parks and Recreation and the use of public facilities, including libraries and public schools.

Notes

See PNG 2.1.2 Note

PNG 3.1.2 Combined Services. Examine the services offered by the seven jurisdictions and study whether combined services (industrial/business parks, other economic development initiatives, roads, water, sewer, internet), especially in the four development areas, would be more efficient and cost effective.

Notes

See PNG 2.1.2 Note

PNG 3.1.3 Co-Planning and Seamless Boundaries. Consider creating co-planning opportunities in the four development areas. Co-planning provides the jurisdictions most impacted by higher density development, including industrial, to have an opportunity to discuss development issues and help co-establish development objectives within the framework of the County's land use policies.

Implementation

- **Comment Letter.** Send a request for official comments to jurisdictions neighboring new development or impacted by potential County planning decisions and include response in planning package.
- **Joint Meetings.** Hold an semi-annual “planning conference” or a joint meeting between the seven jurisdictions, to discuss planning efforts in the county, cities, and towns, to establish training opportunities, and to discuss mutual issues. Cross referenced with PNG 2.1.2.
- **Monthly Staff Lunch.** Hold monthly lunch meeting for Planning Staff from the different jurisdictions to discuss planning issues and provide access to training seminars for planning.

Notes

Co-planning is generally accomplished by establishing networking ties and building cross-jurisdictional relationships between planners, planning commissions, and elected officials. Given the complexity of local planning issues, especially in light of sourcewater issues, would best be addressed by establishing a single, multi-jurisdictional planning program at the staff level.