

Hampshire County Draft Comprehensive Plan, March 2018

Suggested problems and changes

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For Hampshire County, the projections showed a slow decline over the period. The county is expected to see its population decline between 600 and 1,000 residents for each five year period. By 2030, the projected population of the county will be under 21,000. That is slightly above where it stood in 2000 but substantially above the county's population from 1950 to 1990.

The current population estimates for 2015 show that this decline appears to be occurring, though the estimates show a population loss (2.5 percent) this is not quite as steep as projected (2.7 percent). One factor that may alter the future population on the county is the development of second homes being built or purchased by people from nearby metropolitan areas (such as Washington, D.C.). If they decide to retire to Hampshire County, there could be a population increase that the current models may not have considered.

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Education

Education plays a critical role in the economic viability of a community. Business and industry analyze regional demographics when searching for new locations and plant expansions. They scrutinize the level of high school and college graduates, the quality of local schools and the availability of worker-readiness programs.

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Associated with this, Hampshire County had the highest poverty rate in the area examined in 2014 (20.8 percent, Table 6a). Every other county had a poverty rate that was at least two percentage points lower. This was also the only time period studied where the county had a higher poverty rate than West Virginia as a whole.

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The average commuting time for a county worker was over 38 minutes and almost 44 percent of the labor force traveled outside the immediate region for employment. This high degree of commuting over long distances for lengthy periods contributes to traffic congestion, higher incidences of vehicular accidents, and less time for family and community activities, among other things. It also demonstrates that higher tax-generating commercial and industrial properties are not located in Hampshire County.

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Hampshire County is a place where the rural lifestyle and characteristics of a rural locale is preserved – Country Living by Choice. Future growth and development is directed to existing communities **served by adequate infrastructure systems**. The result of this “protect and promote” approach is a diversified regional economy for a thriving population that enjoys a high quality of life within a sustainable environment for current and future residents.

1. Is our infrastructure really adequate?
2. If existing communities were not created with any planning, but developed by the chance and whim of developers, is it wise to assume that expanding them is the best way to develop our county?

Page 34 Land Use & Housing: Goals, Objectives, & Strategies

page 35 Land Use & Housing: Strategies

Add sections for:

1. Develop **restrictions on outdoor lighting which will preserve the dark night sky** and retain an environment which fosters healthy wildlife and human enjoyment.
2. Develop **restrictions on noise** which will preserve a quiet, rural environment. (reduce noise pollution)

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Given its rural setting and its reliance on undivided roadways, it is not surprising that Hampshire County sees more automobile fatalities than would be expected, based upon its population. From 2012 to 2016, approximately 1.3 percent of the state’s population has lived in the county. However, in no year during that span did it have less than 1.8 percent of the state’s fatal vehicular accidents (Table 9). It also had more fatalities per 100,000 in population than the state average or national average.

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While the Hampshire County school system has had impressive results in the past, recent trends in show there are some troubling trends with respect to the schools that must be addressed.

Hampshire County’s four-year cohort high school graduation rate for the 2015-16 school year was 75.96 percent. This marked the fourth straight year-to-year decline and was the lowest rate since 2009-10. It was also 14 percentage points below the state graduation rate (89.81%).

Related to this, the college going-rate for the county fell to 37.38 percent for those entering higher education at the Fall 2016 semester. This was the lowest rate in at

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Related to this, the college going-rate for the county fell to 37.38 percent for those entering higher education at the Fall 2016 semester. This was the lowest rate in at least a decade and substantially below the state rate (55.57%). Of the high school graduates, the largest group who continued their studies enrolled in in-state, four-year public colleges and universities (27.1% of graduates). Others enrolled in in-state two-year public institutions (4.7% of graduates), in-state independent colleges and universities (2.8% of graduates), proprietary institutions (estimated 0.5% of graduates), and out-of-state institutions of higher education (estimates 2.3 percent of graduates).

Not surprisingly, the dropout rate has increased over the same four-year period. It was 2.35 percent in 2015-16, more than twice the state dropout rate (1.10%).

System wide, 88.44 percent of classes were taught by "highly qualified teachers," according to data from the West Virginia Department of Education. This varied widely across the school district. The main areas of deficiency were math, science, geography, and history.

The high school only had 75.33 percent of classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

Actively support and advocate for the planning and construction of a new high school in the eastern end of the county within ten years, utilizing state and local monies. (Medium term)

Why do this if the population is expected to decrease particularly in the family rearing age group?

Attract and retain sustainable, well-paying jobs to Hampshire that capitalize on the highly educated workforce and outstanding quality of life afforded by the area.

Is this in keeping with the education and population statistics shown above? See pages 47 for how uneducated our work force is. How can we expect high tech companies when our own statistics show the poor education level of our citizens? Rethink the kind of industries which

will fit our situation. Tourism does not require as highly educated a work force as the industries the Plan seeks to invite to the county. Stress Heritage and Recreational Tourism.

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Tourism can be one of the cleanest industries and has a multiplier effect on a community's economy. West Virginia tourism remains a growing industry and continues to be a top income producer for the economy. Tourism can also take many forms such as bed and breakfast inns, arts and crafts shows/festivals, sports events, and museum attractions.

Hampshire County can offer visitors historic attractions through tours as well as important buildings and locations. It offers natural beauty at the state wildlife management areas and throughout the county.

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For Hampshire County, total travel spending each year ranged between \$35 million and \$38 million between 2010 and 2014. In 2014, there was \$35.8 million in direct spending, resulting in 370 jobs, \$6.6 million in business earnings, and \$127,000 in local tax revenue.

This result was not surprising. Previous studies in 2005 and 2001 had shown the importance and value of tourism to the Hampshire County economy. This data demonstrates the continued a healthy market for tourism and tourism-related activities in the county.

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2. Coordinate between the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the County and Romney Historic Landmarks Commissions and private organizations to develop a marketing strategy for Heritage tourism in the County. [Page 57 last objective]
3. Develop a county wide plan for advertising general tourism and recreation opportunities in the County.

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Fiscal Considerations

- Use existing revenue streams.

Existing revenue streams will not be sufficient to advertise our county particularly in the competitive tourism market. General funds need to supplement the hotel-motel tax since many sectors of our county gain economic benefits from Tourism.

Page 61 Natural Resources, Goals and Objectives

Add: Increase availability of wildlife areas for summer use by tourists who do not pay a license fee to hunt. Our natural resources are available year around and should be utilized by categories of people other than hunters and fishermen.