

# BECKLEY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

May 2014



**WVU**LAW  
LAND USE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LAW CLINIC

# Beckley



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Mayor

William A. O'Brien

## Common Council

Tom Sopher, Ward 1

Ann Worley, Ward 2

Chris Hall, Ward 3

Mike Atterson, Ward 4

Ron Booker, Ward 5

Cedric Robertson, At Large

Tim R. Berry, At Large

## Planning Commission

Chuck Turner, President

Mike Akers, Vice President

Ryan Snuffer

Manuelle Cartelle

Robert Cannon

Frank Williams

Ann Worley

Jeff Miller

## Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

Ann Worley, Chairperson

Emmett Pugh, Former Mayor

Charles Turner, Beckley Planning Commission

Chris Hall, Beckley City Council

Dr. Jerry Forster, University of Charleston at Beckley

Ellen Taylor, Chamber of Commerce

Gavin Ward, Beckley Sanitary Board

Rev. James Cox, Raleigh County Branch of the NAACP

Jeff Miller, First Community Bank

Jeremiah Johnson, Beckley Sanitary Board

Jill Moorefield, Beckley Renaissance

## Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (continued)

Kevin Taylor, Director of Emergency Services

Leslie Gray Baker, Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine

Linda Sumner, WV House of Delegates

Margaret Ann O'Neal, United Way

Robert Cannon, Beckley Code Enforcement

Tom Hughes, HSC Industrial

Tom Sopher, Beckley City Council

Susan Landis, Beckley Area Foundation

Rachel Hopkins, Lewis Automotive

Elder Carlos Smith, Ministerial Association

Colleen McCulloch, Attorney

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The citizens of the City of Beckley and Raleigh County who gave their time, expertise, and opinions to help make this Comprehensive Plan a realistic vision for the next ten years.

## Consulting Team

Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc

Land Design Studio, PLLC

Land Use | USA

West Virginia University, Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic

FIRST READING

4-22-14

SECOND READING

5-27-14AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING THE CITY OF BECKLEY'S  
2014 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to West Virginia Code, Chapter 8A, Article 3, the City of Beckley, through its Planning Commission and with citizen participation, has developed a Comprehensive Plan to guide the City in the development of land within its jurisdiction taking into consideration its present and future needs and resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the Planning Commission has submitted the City of Beckley's 2014 Comprehensive Plan to the Common Council of the City of Beckley for its consideration and adoption.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BECKLEY** that the City of Beckley's 2014 Comprehensive Plan be adopted and incorporated by reference in this Ordinance, and that the full text of the said Comprehensive Plan be filed with the Clerk of the Raleigh County Commission.

Any Ordinance or Ordinances heretofore passed by the Common Council of the City of Beckley which are in conflict with this Ordinance are hereby repealed.

This Ordinance shall become effective upon passage.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Development of this Comprehensive Plan is one effort  
in a series of planning initiatives taken the last 50 years  
to help define a desired future for Beckley”





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is the City of Beckley's Comprehensive Plan. It was developed by a Steering Committee appointed by the Mayor. This Committee met several times in 2013 and 2014 and worked with a team of consultants. The process followed to produce this Comprehensive Plan is described in Chapter 3 and it placed a heavy emphasis on citizen involvement and participation. As also described in Chapter 3, the development of this Comprehensive Plan is one effort in a series of planning initiatives taken the last 50 years to help define a desired future for Beckley.

The form and content of this Comprehensive Plan reflects West Virginia Statutes. These Statutes (Section 8A-3-4) are very specific and define the various planning objectives. As a foundation, Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the City and the region, while Chapter 5 describes trends that are at work shaping City form and character. Another foundational element of this Comprehensive Plan was the production of a market study to objectively consider supply and demand forces that are now impacting development activity (or lack thereof). Material from the study is available from the City and is referred to throughout this Plan.

Land use issues are important elements of this Comprehensive Plan. While the City of Beckley is not expected to grow or decline significantly in population in the foreseeable future, it is likely that demand for specific real estate types will expand and contract. This is particularly true in terms of housing and commercial land uses. Additionally, a review of existing zoning requirements revealed the need for adjustments to align existing land use patterns with requirements for new development.

Transportation issues have long been significant in Beckley. The completion of the East Beckley Bypass can now be seen on the horizon and the completion of the BIG project downtown provides needed parking along with new opportunity for transit in the heart of Beckley. Non-motorized transportation similarly is poised to gain significance in Beckley as the rail trail becomes more of a viable transportation option.



Building on the essential elements of the land use component, the preferred development area component of the Comprehensive Plan considers special areas in the City where development and new investment are particularly important. Four such areas are identified and they include; Pikeview Drive, New River Drive Corridor, the East Beckley Bypass area and downtown. Pikeview Drive and New River Drive are similar areas that provide development opportunity on the west side of town. In both cases, development opportunities and challenges are defined and they relate to a desire to attract visitors traveling along the interstate into Beckley. The East Beckley Bypass area material describes the importance of this area as an accessible and highly desirable place for development that creates employment and draws investment. Downtown Beckley is where historic roots are deepest and the City remains focused on steps to enhance public spaces and to encourage appropriate private development. More downtown planning is called for, but conceptual drawings are provided to help define opportunities and forward steps.

The development of recreational assets in Beckley is also a significant issue. Chapter 12 provides considerable detail with respect to future improvements to New River Park. New River Park is both a local recreation facility and a substantial draw for tourists who are interested in seeing the exhibition coal mine and related attractions. While many agree that existing features are significant tourist draws, there is also agreement that more can be done to reach new levels of visitation and interest. Several

ideas are presented and explored. Similarly, the opportunity to develop a new Park in the southeast corner of the city is explored. This natural area holds promise to be a unique natural space that help preserve a sense of history as it relates to the earliest beginnings of the City.

Chapter 19 discussed implementation of this Comprehensive Plan. It summarizes steps to be taken and divides strategies into general priorities. Subsequent and more focused planning initiatives are called for in this Comprehensive Plan. These planning initiatives include the need to develop a more complete plan for downtown improvements and a more detailed vision for New River Drive. In cases such as these, more focused planning should involve participation from key stakeholders and other interested or involved parties.

The most significant goals and strategies include the steps to establish a Planning and Community Development Department (or enhance the existing Office of Housing and Community Development) to aggressively address key projects. It is also noted that the City of Beckley will soon become an "Entitlement City" under the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) and this designation will open a flow of annual funding to the City for various community development projects. Similarly, the Beckley area was recently included in the designation of a local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). This designation will provide for greater opportunities to set local priorities for future transportation investments.



# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OBJECTIVES

2



# OBJECTIVES

In Accordance with West Virginia Statutes (§8A-3-4), Beckley's Comprehensive Plan was prepared to meet seven objectives.

2



Objectives

“If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time”.

—Attributed to Zig Ziglar

# 2.1

## OBJECTIVES

West Virginia law contains specific objectives for comprehensive plans. These objectives are provided in this chapter to help frame the general intent and purpose of various parts of this planning document.

1	GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT
2	TIMELINE FOR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
3	ACTION PLAN SETTING FOR IMPLEMENTATION
4	FINANCIAL PROGRAM FOR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
5	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT
6	COORDINATION WITH OTHER GOVERNING BODIES
7	DESCRIPTIVE MATERIAL REGARDING PRESENT/FUTURE USES

## Comprehensive Plan Objectives & Local Responses

	Objective	Response
1	A statement of goals and objectives for a governing body, concerning its present and future land development;	Chapter 19 defines Beckley's goals and objectives and the steps necessary to achieve them. These goals and objectives are also tied to the long-term vision for the City of Beckley that was developed as part of this plan. This long-term vision speaks in more abstract terms about the type of community Beckley hopes to become in the future. The supporting goals and objectives are much less abstract, and break this vision down into component parts that are more tactical and strategic.
2	A time line on how to meet short- and long-range goals and objectives;	Chapter 19 also divides goals and objectives into time frames. No community can afford to pursue all implementation steps simultaneously, and some implementation measures relate to private sector development activities which are driven by market forces. Further, placing goals and objectives in the context of time frames underscores the fact that some community-building steps are very long-term propositions, while others can be very short-term. For example, building a new road to improve circulation and traffic flow can take years to plan, fund, design and construct (sometimes decades). The impacts of such decisions are more or less permanent. Conversely, decisions to update zoning regulations, create development incentives, or to establish strategic partnerships can be very short-term endeavors with near-term results and impact.
3	An action plan setting forth implementation strategies;	Implementation strategies are defined and discussed in detail in respective Chapters of this Comprehensive Plan. Some implementation strategies are regulatory in nature, while others relate to planned investments in infrastructure or programs. A short-term action plan is also provided to highlight more immediate and near-term steps that must be taken to move forward toward achieving community goals.
4	A financial program for goals and objectives that need public financing;	Chapter 17 provides a financing component related to more capital improvement-related implementation measures. Large-scale capital improvements can involve long-term municipal debt, bonds, grants and intergovernmental actions and coordination.

## Comprehensive Plan Objectives & Local Responses

Objective	Response
<p><b>5</b> A statement of recommendations concerning future land use and development policies that are consistent with the goals and objectives set forth in the Comprehensive Plan;</p>	<p>Proposed land use and development policies are articulated throughout this Comprehensive Plan as they relate to many dimensions of Beckley's physical form. To highlight these recommendations, they are summarized in Chapter 19 and related to specific goals and objectives.</p>
<p><b>6</b> A program to encourage regional planning, coordination and cooperation with other governing bodies, units of government and planning commissions; and</p>	<p>Encouraging cooperation and coordination with other governing bodies is considered to be an over arching and essential element of Comprehensive Plan implementation. Where specific examples of needed cooperation and coordination can be related to a specific goal or objective, they are described in Chapter 19.</p>
<p><b>7</b> Maps, plats, charts and/or descriptive material presenting basic information on the land included in the comprehensive plan, including present and future uses.</p>	<p>Maps and charts depicting information are provided throughout this Comprehensive Plan to draw attention to physical and spatial relationships.</p>





# BECKLEY CITY PLANNING— PAST & PRESENT

3



## Beckley City Planning—Past And Present

Beckley’s 2014 Comprehensive Plan is not the first time City leaders have come together to plan for the future. Beckley has planning traditions that go back many decades. For the first time however, changes to West Virginia statutes made in 2004 now require that local comprehensive plans be updated every ten years.

“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.”

Peter Drucker (1909 - 2005)

## 3.1

## INTRODUCTION

Most professional city planners think about community planning as being an ongoing process that identifies a long-term community vision and related implementation steps. This process is typically punctuated with the development of a Comprehensive Plan every 5-10 or 15 years, and focused planning efforts oriented toward a particular issue or geographic area. At long-term intervals (5-15 years or more) formal and involved Comprehensive Plans are often produced to articulate city-wide public policies relevant to many community dimensions (transportation, utilities, land use, recreation, housing, etc.). As the name implies, comprehensive plans consider the city as a whole and look at interrelationships among land use, transportation and public facilities. They define a long-term vision and articulate local desires for community development and redevelopment.

While we can't hope to capture all of Beckley's past planning milestones in a few pages, some larger context can be gained from looking at past planning efforts.

Of course, if one goes back to the deepest roots of local city planning history, we find Alfred Beckley arriving in the area in the 1830's and we see his efforts to create a city in a remote area that has now become the State of West Virginia. This happened a little more than 50 years after the Declaration of Independence



was signed. Alfred Beckley had an engineering background and understood how the terrain shaped the new urban form. Most importantly, he saw opportunity to create a commercial center to serve the larger region.

In the following years, the industrial revolution created unprecedented demand for the abundant supplies of coal and forest products in the area, and an emerging railroad system began to connect Beckley with a growing nation. Forests were timbered and the coalfields boomed as workers were drawn to the area for jobs. Much of Beckley's growth, development and planning occurred in the first half of the last century while the market for coal remained strong and before mechanization led to the loss of thousands of jobs in the coal industry.

### Historical Images of City Building Efforts From the Early 1900's



4





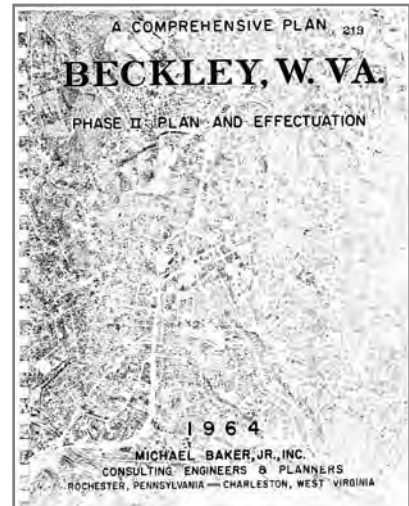
## Modern Planning Efforts

In more recent times, Beckley’s planning efforts are marked with the development of two comprehensive plans in the last 50 years.

### 1964 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The mid-1960’s was a curious time of civil rights issues, a war in Vietnam, a cold war with Russia, early manned space travel, and new music from the Beatles and Rolling Stones. It was also a time when the federal government saw the need to help local governments fund planning activities, as American cities and suburban areas experienced unprecedented growth in the post World War II era. Beckley’s 1964 Comprehensive Plan was funded in part by the federal government under the Urban Planning Assistance Program. This program was authorized by Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954, and for this reason, these planning documents were often called “701 plans.” These plans commonly followed a predictable structure as defined by the federal government (and necessary in order to be funded).

The 1964 Comprehensive Plan was published a year after the completion of a “Phase 1 Basic Research and Surveys Report.” A review of this document reveals both interesting findings and conclusions that drove recommended goals and implementation steps at that time. Interestingly, some planning issues raised 50 years ago are still relevant. To summarize this document, the following table of key findings and considerations is presented along with a description of its current relevance and meaning.



### Key Findings, Considerations and Relevance of the 1964 Comprehensive Plan

Findings / Considerations	Relevance / Meaning
<b>GENERAL</b>	
“There is an increasingly larger percentage of senior citizens in Beckley.” (Page 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The trend of a growing senior population was noticed in the 1960’s. Since then, growth in the senior population has greatly accelerated, and the issue of an aging population is perhaps even more important today. Post World War II baby-boomers, who were born between 1946 and 1964, are now reaching retirement age.</li> </ul>
“Further development of the tourist industry, fast becoming an important segment of Beckley’s economy, hinges on the City improving its transient services.” (Page 3).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 50 years ago, tourism was identified as being important to Beckley’s future. Today, with places such as Tamarack, the new Boy Scouts Facility to the north, and various local events, tourism continues to gain traction as an economic development driver.</li> </ul>
“Out-migration is an alarming problem especially in the young adult and labor force cohorts.” (Page 3).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fifty years ago, outmigration of young adults was identified as an issue. Today, this same issue is perhaps even more important given the association between young adults and entrepreneurial culture and activity.</li> </ul>

<p>“A 22 percent population increase (25,392 to 30,984) is projected for the urbanizing area including Beckley...” (Page 3).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The boundaries of the “urbanizing area” are not clear, but the City of Beckley’s population has actually changed little in the past 50 years. Such optimistic population projections were common in 1960’s-era comprehensive plans, since they were completed when birth rates were comparatively high (as a result of the post war baby boom). The high birth rates observed during the 1950’s and 1960’s were not sustained in the 1970’s and beyond for many reasons.</li> </ul>
<p>“Land development within the City’s limits has been geared to residential and commercial uses. The number of acres devoted to industry is well below the average of 20 West Virginia cities pointing to one of Beckley’s major economic problems.” (Page 3).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The lack of industrial sites in Beckley available for industrial development was identified as a problem in the 1960’s. This was considered to be important in light of the need to transition away from a few dominant industries (centered on coal production and other natural resources) and toward a more diverse local economy.</li> </ul>
<p>“Central Business District: Additional municipal parking lots to accommodate increased traffic; enlarged bus terminal facilities; civic center; open space for convenience, beauty and comfort, realized through plaza and mall development; and public housing facilities for senior citizens.” Page (4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clearly, this statement has a modern day relationship with the recently completed Beckley Intermodal Gateway (BIG) project.</li> </ul>
<p>“Removal of dilapidated vacant buildings is necessary. Rehabilitation measures must be taken so that every structure in Beckley conforms to the standards of a much-needed Housing Code.” (Page 5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Housing maintenance continues to be a struggle, and perhaps even more so today as housing units age.</li> </ul>
<p>“Proximity of the West Virginia Turnpike has encouraged and will influence future development to the north and west of Beckley.” (Page 6)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The West Virginia Turnpike has had a profound impact on land use patterns west of the City.</li> </ul>
<p>“Several key improvements to New River Park should firmly establish the facility as an outstanding tourist attraction.” (Page 7)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The New River Park area has expanded considerably in recent years and is now an outstanding tourist attraction.</li> </ul>
<p>“Beckley’s sphere of influence will extend throughout southeastern West Virginia. The Cities of Bluefield and Charleston detract somewhat from this emphasis, but by virtue of its more centralized location, Beckley will rise in prominence as a regional trade center. (Page 10)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This statement has proven to be very true.</li> </ul>
<p>“Out-migration rates of young adults will level off from its current peak due to better job opportunities. By 1980, Beckley will have a more “normal” age structure, with the heavy concentration of school children and senior citizens realizing better balance.” (Page 10)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Beckley area has lost significantly more young adults than anticipated and now has less of a “normal” age structure than the rest of the nation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>LAND USE</b></p>	
<p>The 1964 Plan looked at neighborhoods as a basic building block for community planning. (Page 12)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Beckley has neighborhoods with distinct character. The 2001 Plan (and this update) similarly look at neighborhoods as planning units.</li> </ul>
<p>“Beckley’s Central Business District must be viewed as the economic, political, cultural and social center of the planning area. Every available method of enhancing the CBD must be investigated and considered.” (Page 13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The importance of downtown was recognized in 1964, and a call to action that involves taking steps to enhance it were included in the 2001 plan.</li> </ul>

The residential development pattern has been planned to produce high residential densities in close proximity to the CBD. Densities generally fall off as distances from the CBD increase, a very desirable land use concept. Low densities are prevalent on the outer limits of the City and extend into the urbanizing area. This pattern accommodates the majority of the population whose desire it may be to live near the core of the City. (Page 17)

- This residential development pattern is largely evident in Beckley.

“The Ultimate Land Use Plan anticipates that 3.7 percent of the developed land in Beckley should be used for commercial purposes. This is higher than the average of 3.1 percent for the 28 cities surveyed. The difference is accountable in part to the fact that Beckley generally serves a much larger trade area than the other cities compared.” (Page 20)

- It was anticipated that Beckley would grow to become a regional hub of commercial activity. This growth was underestimated however, as suburban commercial development took hold—especially in the northern parts of the City. In the mid-60’s, enclosed regional malls were just beginning to make their debut in American cities (the Raleigh Mall was built in the early 1970’s). Similarly, “big box retail” and “strip shopping centers” started to become popular in the 1970’s and 1980’s, with increased mobility and suburban development patterns.

“Beckley’s ultimate land use plan shows a considerably higher proportion of land proposed for industrial use. The concept developed here was to avail large suitable land areas for industrial development in an attempt to expand and diversify the economy. As elaborated previously, the Comprehensive Plan must be viewed as a flexible instrument that requires frequent review, consideration and updating. The amount of land intended for industrial use may have to be altered to suit the changing times.” (Page 21)

- The 1964 Comprehensive Plan connected the need to diversify the economy with the need to set aside space for this to occur. In the 1960’s, “industrial parks” were coming on the scene and have since become important employment centers in many communities. Pre-1960’s, industrial development often was associated with large factories that produced noise and pollution, and usually involved outside storage of materials. Today, industrial parks typically involved “cleaner” industries with fewer impacts on surrounding areas.

## TRANSPORTATION

“The Major Thoroughfare Plan illustrates the street classification system, locations with respect to surrounding land uses and proposed street improvements. The One-way Street System Plan within the Central Business District demonstrates possible solutions designed to relieve serious congestion and circulation problems associated with interior traffic movements. The proposed street and road classifications have been coordinated with State Road Commission terms for ease of program interpretation, coordination and eventual implementation.” (Page 44)

- Common planning practice in the 1960’s was to think about roadways only in the context of efficient traffic movement. Little if any consideration was given to the public right-of-way as a space that provides social interaction, pedestrian movement, or opportunities for bike travel. For the most part, one-way streets are discouraged today in downtown areas. After many years of experience and opportunities to see the impacts of past policies, most contemporary urban planning methods have moved toward “complete streets” design principles that place an emphasis on transportation choices and reductions in vehicle miles traveled.

## RECREATION

“One of the goals of this study is to demonstrate to City officials that the number and character of a community’s recreational facilities are an important aspect in determining the overall desirability of a City. The adequacy of recreational facilities may determine an industrial firm’s willingness to locate in the Beckley area.” (Page 66)

- Recreational opportunities were recognized as being important to community livability 50 years ago. There was considerable emphasis placed on expanding school-related facilities. However, New River Park was specifically called out as a place for expansion and more recreational activities (specific activities such as a zoo, pavilions, hiking trails, open play areas, landscaped areas and other associated park activities) were identified.



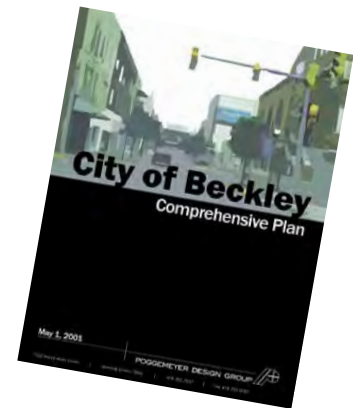
**NEIGHBORHOODS**

“The purpose of the General Neighborhood Improvement Plan is to identify blighted areas within the study boundaries, propose programs for improvement of each area, and plan the future land usage for land earmarked for redevelopment. The planning processes involved in rehabilitation and redevelopment of land areas will be introduced, and the steps that Beckley must follow in order to participate in Federal Urban Renewal Programs will be explained in detail.” (Page 89)

- In 1964, Urban Renewal programs were common, and conventional wisdom suggested that blighted areas should be demolished, to make way for new development. Federal money and broad eminent domain powers supported and encouraged this approach – resulting in both successes and failures. In Beckley, it was proposed that a “Redevelopment Authority” be created. Urban Renewal programs ultimately ended in the early 1970’s, as national urban policy turned toward redevelopment of existing neighborhoods and properties, rather than widespread demolition of economically depressed areas.

**THE 2001 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

More than 35 years after Beckley’s first Comprehensive Plan, the 2001 Comprehensive Plan was completed. The early part of the 2000’s was an interesting time for many communities. At the turn of the last century, we witnessed the growing presence of the internet, mobile phones and globalization. Suburban sprawl was in high gear in many communities with discussion about green infrastructure, transportation choice, and sustainable development entering local planning conversations and planning documents. Unlike the previous planning effort, the 2001 Comprehensive Plan was a not a product of the federal “701” program and local leaders were freer to structure the planning process around more locally-driven issues and concerns. The planning process began in 1999, and was guided by a large Steering Committee of community leaders.



8

**Key Findings, Considerations and Relevance of the 2001 Comprehensive Plan**

Findings / Considerations	Relevance / Meaning
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**GENERAL**

<p>“Over the next twenty years, the Institute projects an initial decline followed by a stable population period, and then moderate increases at an overall rate of 2.5 % per year through the period. This provides one estimate that the City of Beckley will add approximately 12,463 new residents during the next 20 years (2000-2020).” (Page 55)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As before, population projections (in this case done by the Regional Research Institute at West Virginia University) expected more growth. Just 7 years away from 2020, it is highly unlikely that Beckley will add more than 12,000 people between 2000 and 2020. Of course, annexation activity could change this and become a factor that is difficult to account for, since annexation is largely a political decision and not a matter of new growth.</li> </ul>
<p>“Further development of the tourist industry, fast becoming an important segment of Beckley’s economy, hinges on the City improving its transient services.” (Page 3).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 50 years ago, tourism was identified as being important to Beckley’s future. Today, with places such as Tamarack and the new Boy Scouts Facility to the north, and various local events, tourism continues to gain traction as an economic development driver.</li> </ul>
<p>“The population of individuals over age 65 was 11,757 in 1990 and is expected to remain flat until 2010, when the age group will increase by 2,671 persons.” (Page 56)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The expectation of an increasing senior population was anticipated in 2001. This is largely because such projections are simply a matter of witnessing existing residents in the “baby boomer” age bracket, who get older and become “empty nesters” (45-65) and ultimately seniors (65+). The seniors in future decades are simply existing residents getting older.</li> </ul>

## LAND USE

“Commercial activities occupy less than 1% of the developed land in Raleigh County and approximately 16% of the land use in the Beckley area, confirming the City’s role as the retail and service center for the region. In Beckley, most of the commercial land use is evident in the central business district, Harper Road/I-77 Exit 44 area, and shopping centers of the North Plaza Mall area.” (Page 63)

- Beckley’s emergence as a regional center of commerce was highly evident by 2001. By that time, the Raleigh Mall was well established and nearby “big box retail” and “strip shopping centers” had helped this area become a commercial hub. In the years that followed, more commercial development “filled in” out lots and other underutilized spaces with more commercial uses.

“Most industry is now concentrated in the Ragland Road Industrial Park and the Pinecrest Business and Technology Park. Both industrial areas have the potential to expand in former mining lands.” (Page 63)

“The most appropriate land use for the Grey Flats Road and Ragland Road areas is high technology/ office/light industrial. These areas should be viewed as significant centers of employment for the Beckley area in the future. Specifically, a combination of light manufacturing, light warehousing, offices, and institutional uses are envisioned to compliment the technical and office uses at Pine Crest Business & Technology Park.” (Page 74)

- The City of Beckley was successful in developing industrial parks as called for in the 1964 Plan. The completion of the East Beckley Bypass opens up more opportunities for industrial park development.

Outside the City, long-term key growth areas include the East Beckley Bypass area, which includes the Grey Flats/Sparks Drive area and the area to the north of Ragland Road, as well as the Harper Road area west of I-77. The most appropriate uses for these areas is industrial; however, the Grey Flats/Sparks Drive area should be used for a mix of high technology/ light industrial, mixed-use commercial and high-end residential. (Page 75)

## TRANSPORTATION

“The primary recommendations of the Multi-Modal Transportation Plan (1998) for major transportation improvements are indicated in the preceding “Future Transportation Network ...” (Page 86)

- A separate multi-modal transportation plan was completed a few years before the 2001 Comprehensive Plan, and it was incorporated into planning at that time. Most notably, the East Beckley Bypass was partially constructed in subsequent years, along with the Cross-Town connector.

“The West Virginia Department of Transportation designated the Coalfields Expressway as US 121 in May 1998. The 61-mile Expressway is planned to be a four-lane partially-controlled access highway with at-grade intersections. Presently, construction is anticipated to begin in Spring 2000, taking approximately ten years to complete.” (Page 87)

- The Coalfields Expressway will link I-64/77 in Beckley, West Virginia with US 23 in Pound, Virginia. This route will generally follow West Virginia Route 16 through Raleigh and Wyoming counties and West Virginia Route 83 in McDowell County.
- Construction activity has been slower than expected – but in June, 2013, the West Virginia Division of Highways awarded a \$20 million contract for a two-mile section of the Coalfields Expressway.

“The Bicycle Plan proposes development of a trail along a 6.4 mile length of CSX rail line where service will soon be abandoned. This line begins in the Mabscott area south of Beckley and will proceed through the central portion of the City, serving the Downtown area. The trail will then move eastward to the Eisenhower Avenue/shopping center area, turning north and then northwestwardly to the Cranberry and Prosperity areas.” (Page 89)

- This bike trail now exists, but it is not completed. As it exists now, it provides a non-motorized transportation “spine” that can link residential areas and key community facilities.

“The Beckley Transit Feasibility Study Update (1995) was commissioned by the State of West Virginia Public Transportation Division and the City of Beckley. The Study identified three transit needs for the City, which include: • Service development for disadvantaged citizens. • Congestion management for Beckley and Raleigh County. • Services which support economic development goals of the community. The estimated transit demand for Raleigh County was approximately 741,584 trips per year. Of this total, the transit need for Beckley was approximately 202,750 trips.” (Page 89)

- The need for a more robust public transportation system is still an issue in Beckley. This is perhaps an even more significant issue as time goes on, since older residents and those with mobility impairments can be the most frequent users of transit.

**NEIGHBORHOODS**

“As part of the Comprehensive Planning process, residents were invited to attend special planning meetings on September 21, 1999 to discuss issues and concerns in neighborhoods in their ward. The discussions included a review of demographic data for the ward, a discussion of neighborhood problems, and the prioritization of issues of concern.” (Page 117)

- A substantial list of issues and concerns were identified that drove plan recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

“Divide the Uptown conceptually into three districts for marketing, planning, recruitment, and development efforts. The three districts recommended are as follows: The University District, The Government/Service/Retail District, The Cultural/Entertainment District.” (Page 146)

- Recommendations concerning each district were provided and this perspective of downtown (as a place with three districts) has largely stuck as a means to organize space and activity.

“Develop the administrative capacity to implement this plan.” (Page 178)

- The City of Beckley has not been able to develop a substantial amount of local administrative capacity in terms of local planning.

“Create a GIS system. Beckley’s current mapping capacity is inadequate and a quality GIS mapping system should be built.” (Page 178)

- The Beckley Sanitary Board has created a solid and substantial GIS system for the City. Digital air photos from 2008 and 2011 are available and can be overlaid with parcel data, utility information and a growing list of other data sets.

“Create a nonprofit development corporation.” (page 179)

- A non-profit development corporation is still absent in Beckley.

<p>“Carefully Monitor and Limit the Addition of Commercial Space in Light of Increasingly Popular Nontraditional Shopping. New types of shopping (such as internet sales, catalog sales, and home shopping networks), which are cutting into traditional retail store shopping patterns may result in more and more store closures. Beckley has a tremendous amount of retail space, and limiting future commercial zoning approvals in favor of redeveloping existing underutilized commercial space may become a logical approach in the future.” (Page 180)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It was recommended that more market research be done to help define retail space demands. In the early 2000’s, internet sales activities were just beginning to gain momentum with unknown consequences to the health of traditional “brick and mortar” stores. This current Comprehensive Plan Update now includes a market study to address issues of oversupply of retail space.</li> </ul>
<p>“Develop a system of bicycle and walking trails that provide residents an alternative source of transportation and recreation. (medium to long-term)” (Page 183)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The 6.4 mile rail trail on the abandoned CSX rail line is partially built and provides a “spine” that can ultimately serve as a more complete non-motorized transportation system.</li> </ul>
<p>“Develop attractive entrances to the community to help improve perceptions of Beckley. Existing and possible entrances are shown on attached drawings.” (Page 184)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The City moved forward with a more complete signage system.</li> </ul>
<p>“Seize Development Opportunities Associated with the Proposed East Beckley Bypass in the Grey Flats Industrial Area and the Ragland Road Industrial Area.” (Page 187)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The City has moved forward with encouraging industrial development activity in these areas.</li> </ul>
<p>“The City should encourage a mixture of housing types in this area in order to satisfy growing demand for condominiums and lower maintenance housing units demanded by the growing empty-nesters and seniors.” (Page 188)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementation of this policy continues to be highly relevant today.</li> </ul>
<p>“Update the City Zoning Code in a manner consistent with the recommendation of this plan.” (Page 194)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some basic zoning updates were prepared after the 2001 Plan was completed. Considerably more updates are needed.</li> </ul>

# 3.2

## CURRENT PLANNING

In a general sense, community planning efforts today benefit greatly from advances in technology. Unlike in the past, community leaders are now able to use various tools to assemble information and engage residents like never before. Data that includes digital air photos and robust GIS (Geographic Information Systems), place huge volumes of information about communities in our hands instantly. Land use patterns, transportation and utility information can be shown on up-to-date air photos (along with other data) to reveal issues. Social media, web sites and on-line tools can raise citizen engagement to new levels and provide deeper insights into community development needs and desires. Further, there is a growing list of best practices and success stories that can be used to show what is possible when a community collectively identifies problems and issues, builds consensus, sets goals, and works to achieve them.

# 6 Planning Phases

enabling legislation. This newer legislation helps define a common structure and framework for comprehensive plans among local governments in West Virginia. Although not substantially different than past planning efforts, this Comprehensive Plan closely tracks with the requirements of the new West Virginia Statutes in terms of content and subject matter.

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## Planning Process

Against this backdrop of past planning efforts and emerging technology, efforts to develop a new 2014 Comprehensive Plan were launched. Like the last City planning effort, the 2014 Comprehensive Plan was funded locally. However, this new Comprehensive Plan was completed in conformance with new West Virginia Statutes governing comprehensive planning at the local level. In 2004, the West Virginia Legislature passed Senate Bill 454 and updated the 1957 State planning

The planning process formally began in early 2013 with the selection of a team of consultants led by Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc. and the formation of a Steering Committee to guide this effort. This Steering Committee included members of the Beckley Planning Commission, along with other key community leaders. This Steering Committee held its first official meeting on April 11, 2013. Among its first order of business was to agree on a planning process that included the following six planning phases:



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## Phase I Kick-Off Meeting

The kick-off meeting (held April 11, 2013) set the stage for the planning process and dealt with multiple organizational items. These included the development of a tentative schedule, development of a project logo, and a wide variety of other related organizational items. Shortly after, the Beckley Planning Commission formally adopted “Comprehensive Plan Public Input Procedures” and a formal Memorandum of Understanding was entered into between the City of Beckley, the lead planning consultant and the Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic at the West Virginia University College of Law.



April 11, 2013 Kick Off Meeting

## Phase II Analysis

The Steering Committee met again on June 6, 2013 to gather and review selective relevant information. Accomplishments at this meeting included a review of some working documents, results from a survey conducted at the Business Expo, refinement of the project logo, and a review of a real estate and market assessment performed by Land Use | USA.



June 6, 2013 Steering Committee Meeting



### Phase III General Public Engagement

To introduce the opportunity for public engagement early in the planning process, a public visioning event was held in September 2013. This event was geared to provide an opportunity for residents, businesses, and community stakeholders to shape the direction and focus of the planning process. It was recognized that early and significant citizen input would help frame and identify significant planning issues. This event was well advertised and promoted.







It goes without saying that we have all lived very different lives but for one reason or another, we have chosen to make Beckley our home, and I guarantee that we will not be the last people to make that choice - and with good reason! Unless you have been living under a rock for the past few years, you know that our City is growing and changing very quickly, and unlike many other places, we are headed in a great direction. For me, as I'm sure it has been for many of you, Beckley has been the setting for working hard, raising children, finding love, enduring many hardships, learning a lot and striving for a better tomorrow both for current citizens and future ones. Some of these future citizens have yet to move to our fine City and others have not even been born.

This meeting, this comprehensive plan is a chance for everyone to be heard and to contribute to Beckley's future. This is a golden opportunity that I have been looking forward to for a long time. Let's put our individual lives and experiences to work for the common goal of a great future. Every person in this room and every citizen of Beckley is different, and that gives us strength. Let's work together, appreciate our differences, and lay the blueprints to an excellent future for everyone who does, and ever will, call Beckley "home."

- Remarks made by Ann Worley, Comprehensive Plan Chairperson, at the beginning of the Public Visioning Session

### Phase III General Public Engagement



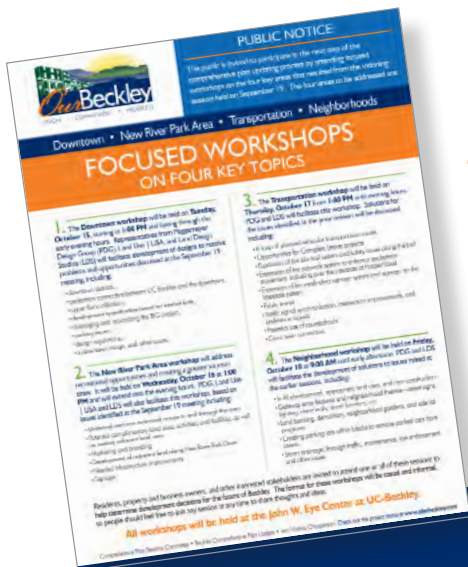
Notes taken during the public visioning session are provided in the Appendix

### Students Visioning Session

Along with the general public engagement efforts, the Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic at the WVU College of Law, conducted a workshop with local high school students.







## Phase IV Focused Visioning & Scenario Phase

Building upon the information gathered to date, the Steering Committee took steps to have more in-depth discussions of key planning subjects. This was a more intensive and focused step within the planning process, as it afforded the opportunity for comprehensive attention and deliberation on the major issues facing Beckley.



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## Phase V Draft Plan Preparation and Outreach

A draft Comprehensive Plan was prepared that built on prior work steps and collaboration. This draft plan was reviewed by the Steering Committee and was subsequently edited and updated based on comments and suggestions from Steering Committee members. Following the meeting, an updated draft was made available for public review and comment.



December 18, 2013 Steering Committee Meeting

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December 18, 2013 Steering Committee Meeting - Priority Voting

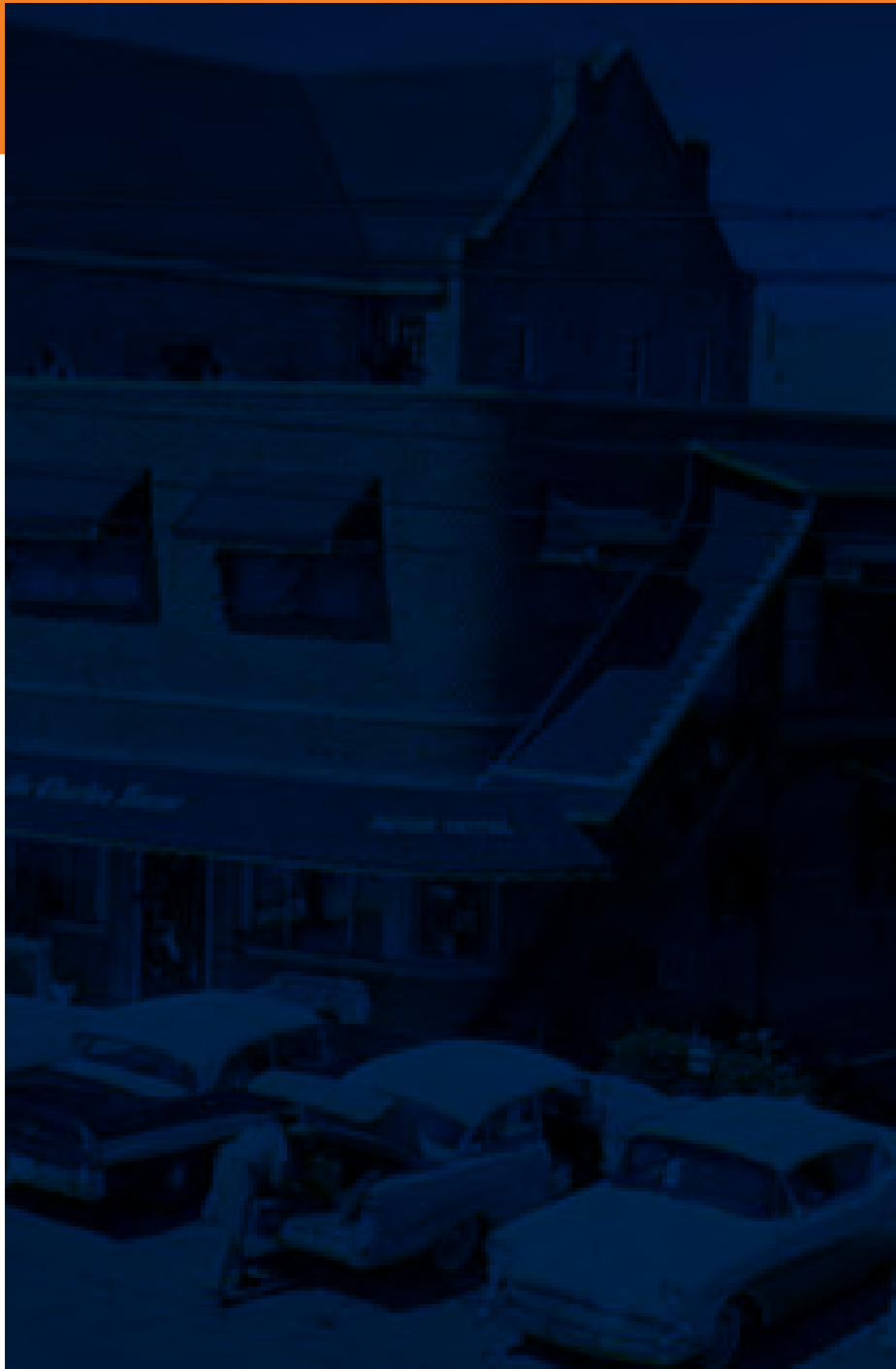
## Phase VI Final Plan and Retreat with the Steering Committee/Planning Commission/City Council

With comments and edits made, and a formal public review process completed, a final document was prepared, and steps were taken to build local ownership of the plan.



# CITY OVERVIEW

4



## CITY OVERVIEW

Describing a city is a huge task. Cities are a complex accumulation of people, buildings, public infrastructure and natural systems, set into motion by economic and social forces. They are also places of emotional connections, pride and challenge.

2 Some say cities are the greatest human invention.

**“A city is not an accident but the result of coherent visions and aims.”**

—Leon Krier, *The Architecture of Community*

# 4.1

## INTRODUCTION

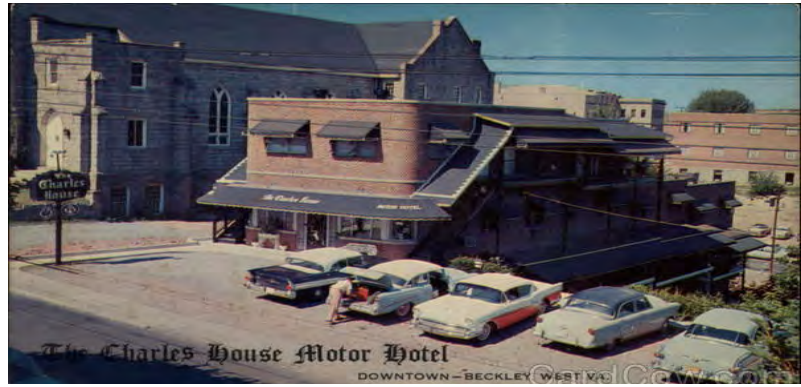
At its core, city planning is about defining what is and striving for what can be. This starts with revealing the fundamental characteristics of the City of Beckley, and that is the focus of this Chapter.

The West Virginia Code (Section 8A-3-2) provides some directives with respect to how planning commissions should consider local characteristics. It submits that 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. It indicates that these surveys and studies should 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. It also advises that the major objective of the planning process is providing information to and coordination among divergent elements in the municipality.

This Chapter provides a general introduction to the City of Beckley. It offers basic insights to serve as a foundation of general understanding. Specific and more detailed characteristics about topics such as land use, transportation, infrastructure, etc., are found in respective chapters.





# 4.2

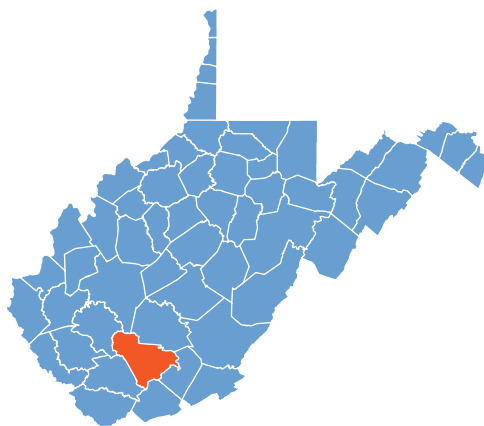
## HISTORIC ROOTS

History is a logical place to begin describing Beckley. The earliest recorded European exploration of what is now West Virginia was in 1742 by John Peter Salley. The first explorations of Raleigh County occurred in 1750 by Dr. Thomas Walker, and in 1751 by Christopher Gist of the Ohio Company (a land investment company). The first known map of the Raleigh County area was published in London in 1755, based on these explorations. Two years later, John James Beckley was born in England. In 1795, he obtained a grant of 170,038 acres of land in the Raleigh County area, and, in 1802, he was appointed the first Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives by President Thomas Jefferson. In 1836, his son, General

Alfred Beckley, a West Point graduate, moved to the area to develop the land left to him by his father. In 1838, the Virginia General Assembly officially established the settlement of Beckley, named in honor of the General's father, as the first settlement in the portion of Fayette County, Virginia, which is now Raleigh County, West Virginia.

In 1872, an act of the West Virginia Legislature incorporated the Town of Beckley, and John Beckley, the grandson of the town's namesake, was elected as its first Mayor. In 1908, the Legislature passed a new charter for Beckley, changing it from a town to a city. General Beckley drafted a resolution in 1850, and the General Assembly of Virginia enacted legislation forming Raleigh County from Fayette County and, thus, County government was organized. The County was named for Sir Walter Raleigh at the suggestion of General Beckley, and Beckley became the County Seat.

As a Virginia county, Raleigh County tended to politically vote Republican. During the Virginia Secession Convention, at the outset of the Civil War, Raleigh County was included in the new State of West Virginia. As the only instance in West Virginia history for the territory of a county to be enlarged after its formation, the West Virginia Legislature approved a political deal to annex the 168-square mile Slab Fork District and the rich coal fields of Winding Gulf from Wyoming County into southwest Raleigh County. At the time, this provided a Democrat majority in Raleigh County and a Republican majority in Wyoming County.



Raleigh County

After the construction of the County Court House in 1852, some records, including those of the Census Bureau, began to refer to the town as Raleigh Court House. It is interesting to note that in 1875, the land book refers to the town as Beckleyville, but the first issue of the Raleigh County Index in 1880, which later became the Raleigh Register, refers to the town as Raleigh Court House. By 1897, the name of the town reverted to Beckley in all records. As the nation pushed west in the 1800's, Beckley became a noted stop, but without industry, it remained a farm community.

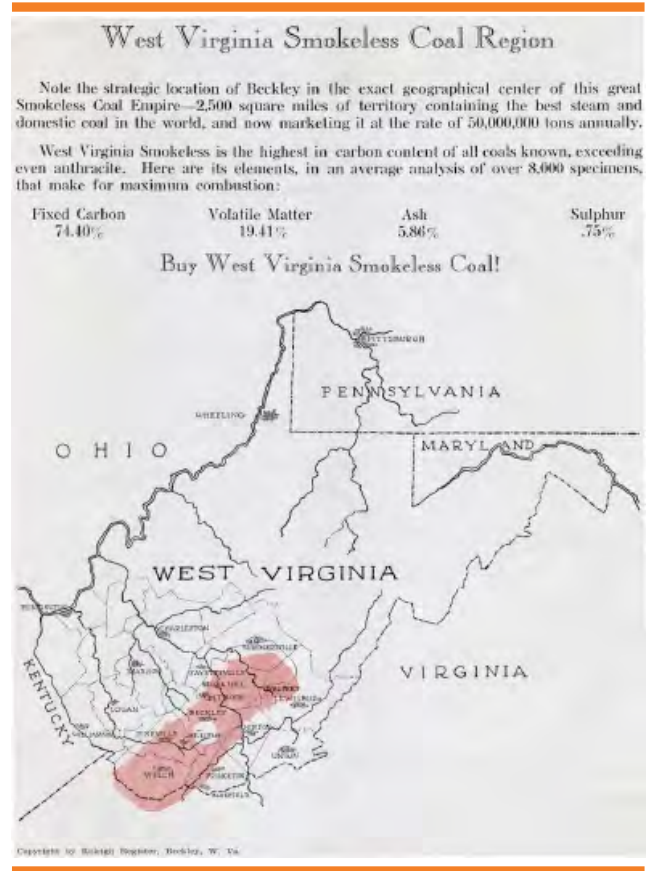
wilderness. By 1900, the region's coalfields were surpassing every other state in coal production, with its highest production in 1924 when 17.5 million tons of coal were produced from Raleigh County mines. In 1901, the C&O Railroad constructed a branch line along the Piney River into Beckley, and the Virginian Railroad completed construction of a railroad through Beckley to the Winding Gulf Mine in 1908. Though few mines were located in the rolling farmland near Beckley, the town became an important transportation, banking, and trade center for the County due to its central location and accessibility.

**In 1838**, the Virginia General Assembly officially established the settlement of Beckley

The population of Beckley in 1860 was 160, and the town's fifteen buildings were clustered around the courthouse square on what is now Main Street and North and South Kanawha Streets. Shops, stables, taverns, and churches were intermixed with private dwellings along these two roads. The population swelled to close to 50 families and a population of more than 300. During the Civil War, the City was occupied by both Union and Confederate troops (Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley were both stationed in the town). By the 1890 Census, the population had dropped to 158, but the town now had two stores, a 13-room hotel, and 16 houses. By the turn of the century, the corners of Heber, Neville, and Main Streets became the core of the commercial district.

During much of the 20th century, the coal industry supplied the City's economic stability and growth. After the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway completed its line from the Eastern seaboard to within eleven miles of Beckley in the late 1870's, forests were quickly timbered, and coal mines began to open everywhere. In 1890, the Royal Coal and Coke Company opened a drift mine in Royal (a town on the New River, six miles northeast of Beckley), which was the first coal mine in Raleigh County. The County boomed as workers moved into its

As the mechanization of coal mining displaced thousands of workers in the 1980's, many people migrated from outlying towns to Beckley, making it the largest of the four surrounding county seats and a central location for many private, public, and government activities. In 1962, the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, owned by the City and operated by the City's Parks and Recreation Department, officially opened to visitors and continues to provide a historical and entertaining ride through an actual coal mine.

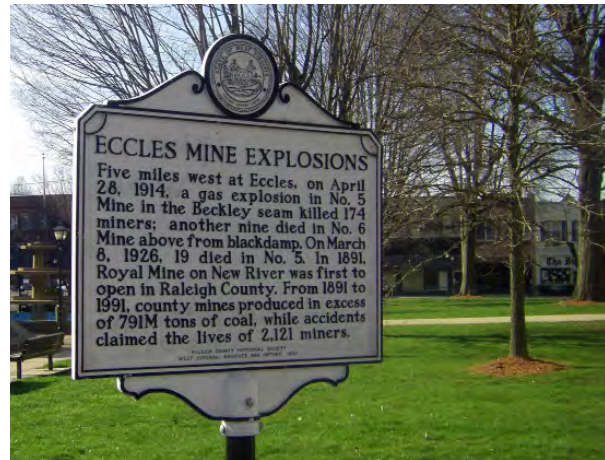


Source: "Illustrated Beckley West Virginia"

The story of the **Coal Industry in West Virginia** is part of a national narrative of industrial growth and technological advancement that began with the industrial revolution. For many decades, coal provided economical energy necessary to fuel blast furnaces, steam engines, electric generators and to heat homes and businesses. Coal production also played a critical role in supporting American industry during wartime. West Virginia coal offered a growing nation some of the highest quality coal needed to support the growing industrial complex. Beckley was at the heart of it all - located in the center of West Virginia's Smokeless Coal region. Smokeless coal (bituminous) is regarded as being higher quality and produces less smoke when burned.

Active coal mines are present in the area, but coal mining employment has dropped significantly in the latter half of the last century. Today the National Coal Heritage Area exists to recognize how this region made a significant contribution to the national story of industrialization. This area was designated by Congress in 1996. Today, evidence of the coal boom exists in many forms such as coal miners' homes, company stores, company offices, railroad yards and other structures that defined life in the "smokeless coal fields".

In 1841, the second building built in Beckley was a small log school house, and in 1869, the State Legislature incorporated the Raleigh High School. In 1900, the Beckley Seminary (later the Beckley Institute) opened as a private school with classes for both grade school and high school students. Beckley's first black school opened in 1907, near the border of Beckley





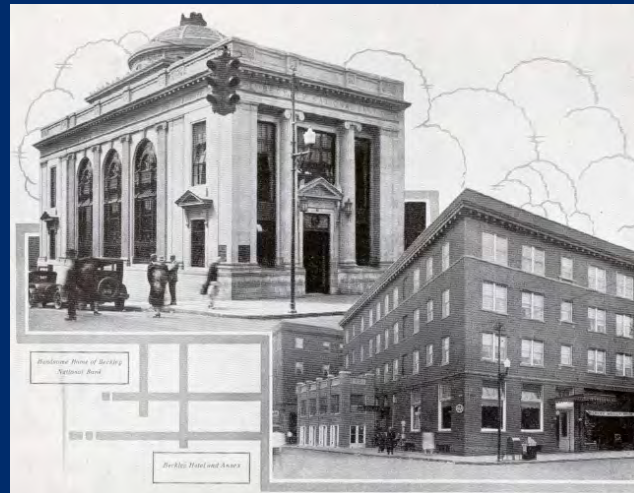
and the suburb of Mabscott. In 1912, Odd Elementary School was built, and as of 1980, was the oldest school building still in use in Raleigh County. The Stratton School was erected in 1913.

Upon completion of the Virginian Railroad in 1909, Mark Twain spoke at the dedication ceremony from the platform of a train carrying railroad officials. In honor of that event, the Mark Twain High School opened in 1922 and graduated classes until 1965. In 1933, Beckley College was established, and in 1967, Woodrow Wilson High School was built at its location on Stanaford Road. The Beckley Junior High School moved to a new site in 1998 at Gray Flats near downtown Beckley and was renamed Beckley-Stratton Junior High School.

Beckley has been a center for health care for many years. Campbell Hospital was opened in 1906 as the first hospital in Beckley, followed by the opening of the Beckley Hospital in 1913. In 1922, King's Daughter's Hospital (later the Raleigh General Hospital) opened. Rutherford Sanitarium was formally opened in 1930, but the legislature changed its name to Pinecrest Sanitarium in 1934. Major construction was completed on the Veterans Hospital in 1950. In 1956, Miners Memorial Hospital (later Beckley Appalachian Regional Hospital) opened. The Raleigh General Hospital opened its new facility on Harper Road in 1973.

Beckley constructed a water works in 1907 that piped water to all parts of town. Upon completion of the water system in 1908, the Beckley City Council formed a Volunteer Fire Department which, in 1916, became a City Fire Department. The commercial center of Beckley burned to the ground in 1912, with over thirty shops and residences destroyed. A fire again threatened to destroy the entire Downtown in 1919.

Beckley constructed its first paved street in 1910, and in 1916, Raleigh County held its first levy election for road construction. The first traffic signals were installed in Beckley in 1928. In 1949, the construction of Valley Drive began (later becoming WV 16 - Robert C. Byrd Drive). In 1952, the Raleigh County Memorial Airport was dedicated replacing the much smaller Beckley-Mt. Hope Airport, which was built in 1937. The West Virginia Turnpike (I-77) was officially opened in 1954. The construction of I-64 began in 1974 with the final section being completed in West Virginia in 1988. A new medium security federal penitentiary, located on Airport Road adjacent to I-64, opened in 1993.



Source: "Illustrated Beckley West Virginia"



Source: "Illustrated Beckley West Virginia"



Source: "Illustrated Beckley West Virginia"

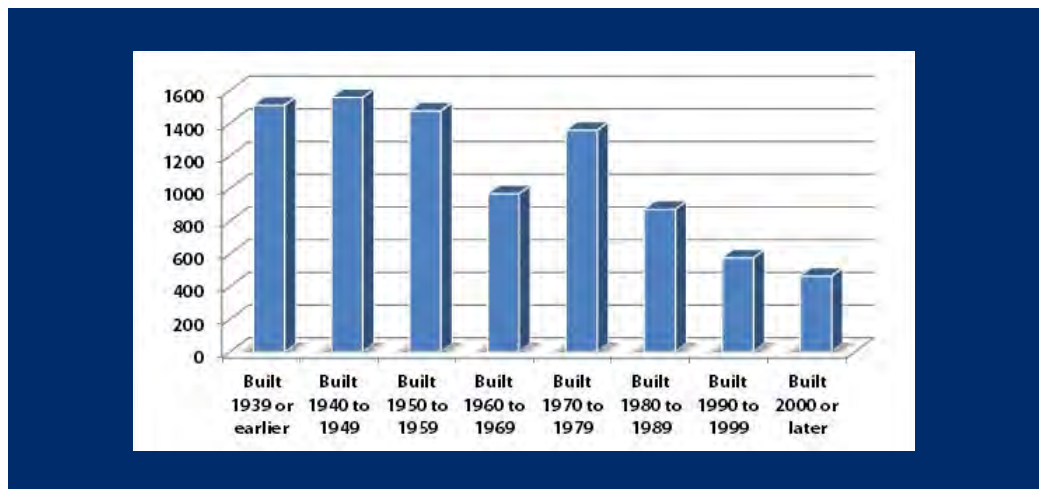
# 4.3

## BECKLEY'S HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS—BUILDING A CITY

One way to gain an understanding of a city's historic development patterns is to consider when homes were built. Nearly every city has undergone periods of growth and stability, and for the most part, evidence of this can be found in the age of the housing stock. Usually, as a result of improving economic opportunities,

occurred on the north side of Beckley. Uptown Beckley is obviously the oldest commercial area in town, and construction activity can be traced back to Beckley's earliest days. Supported by the construction of public buildings, traditional downtown building forms emerged. These multiple story buildings often included retail and service uses on the first

8



people are drawn to an area and there is a corresponding pressure to build housing to accommodate them. Available housing data indicates that Beckley experienced several decades of substantial growth that ended in the late 1970's. From the 1980's onward however, the rate of housing construction fell off sharply. Not surprisingly, some of the oldest housing units are found near Uptown Beckley, while newer housing units are found to the north, and to a lesser extent to the south.

Although data is not available, it is clear that most new commercial development has

floor and residential uses above. Mirroring national trends, and increased mobility of area residents travelling in automobiles, suburban scale commercial development patterns emerged in the 1950's and 1960's and began to dominate the landscape. The north side of Beckley is a prime example of the auto-dominated commercial development pattern that is common in many cities. This development activity has been driven by national franchised restaurants, strip centers, "big box" retail uses and/or department stores.



# 4.4

## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS & COMPARISONS

The City of Beckley is the county seat for Raleigh County. Beckley has had a relatively stable population in recent decades, while Raleigh County has seen more fluctuations. Both Raleigh County and Beckley are actually smaller than they were in the 1950's.

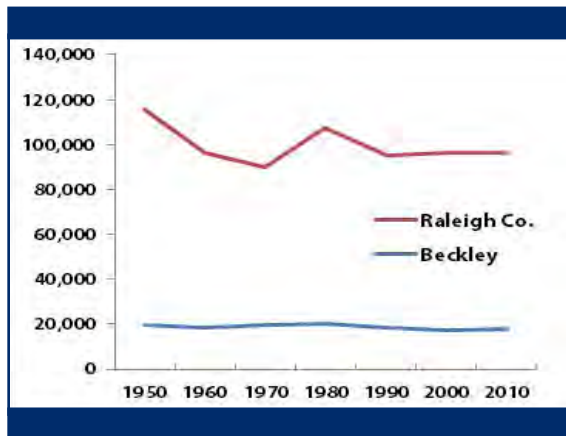


YEAR	BECKLEY	RALEIGH CO.
1950	19,397	96,273
1960	18,642	77,826
1970	19,884	70,080
1980	20,492	86,821
1990	18,274	76,819
2000	17,254	79,220
2010	17,614	78,859

Source: US Census

	BECKLEY	RALEIGH COUNTY
Population, percent change, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2011	0.3%	0.2%
Population, 2011 estimate	17,675	79,021

Source: US Census



**.3%**  
Population estimates suggest .3% growth in Beckley since 2010.

**.1%**  
Population estimates for West Virginia as a whole suggest .1% growth between 2010 and 2011.

**22%**  
In 2010, about 22% of all Raleigh County residents were also Beckley residents.

**By the year 2056, the population 65 and older will outnumber people younger than 18 in the U.S.**

Source: Census Bureau Projections

AGE			
	Beckley	Raleigh County	West Virginia
Persons under 5 years (percent)	6.3%	6.0%	5.6%
Persons under 18 years (percent)	20.2%	20.9%	20.9%
Persons 65 years and over (percent)	17.9%	16.1%	16.0%

The leading edge of the baby boom generation is turning 65, making this age group the fastest growing segment of society. Nationally, seniors account for 13 percent of the total population.

Source: Census Bureau (2010)

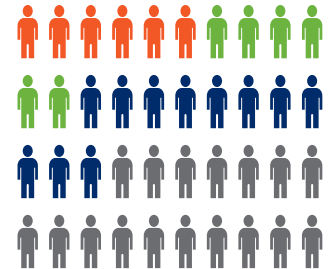
**17.9%**

Almost two in ten residents of Beckley are seniors - more than in Raleigh County, or West Virginia as a whole.

RACE			
	Beckley	Raleigh County	West Virginia
White persons (percent)	72.3%	88.9%	93.9%
Black persons (percent)	21.2%	8.3%	3.4%
Asian persons (percent)	2.4%	0.9%	0.7%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin (percent)	1.5%	1.3%	1.2%

As the U.S. population grows, it is becoming more diverse with shifts in racial and ethnic composition.

Source: Census Bureau (2010)



EDUCATION			
	Beckley	Raleigh County	West Virginia
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+	84.9%	78.9%	82.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+	23.4%	16.3%	17.6%

Source: Census Bureau (2007-2001)

Beckley residents are more highly educated than residents in Raleigh County and the State of West Virginia.

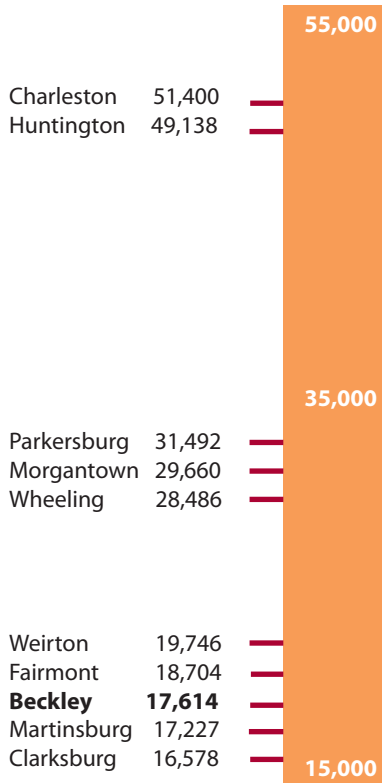
Source: Census Bureau (2010)

**28%**

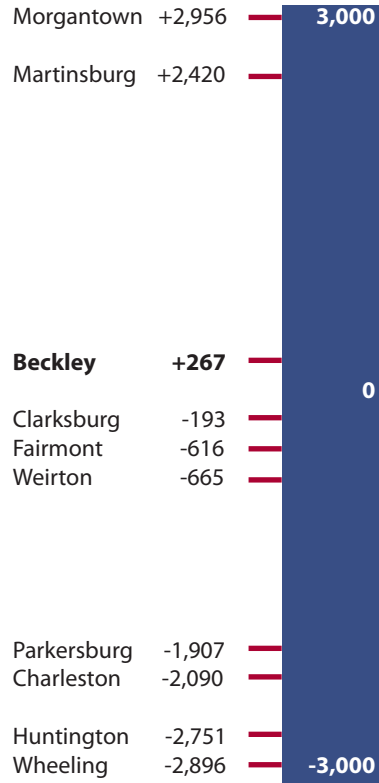
Nationally, about 28 percent of adults age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher.

# CITY COMPARISONS

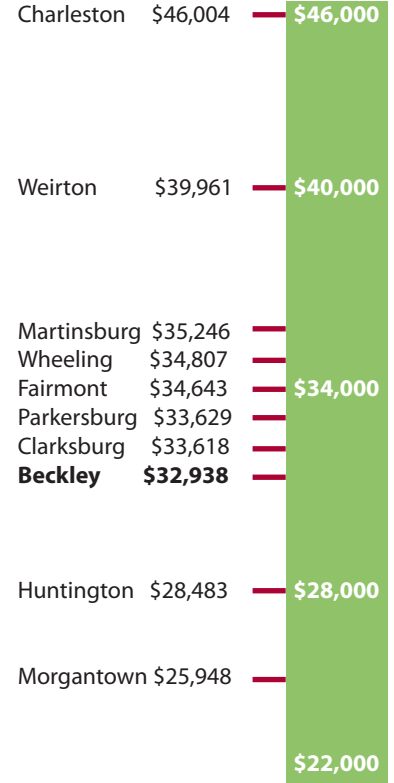
## 2010 Populations of West Virginia Cities



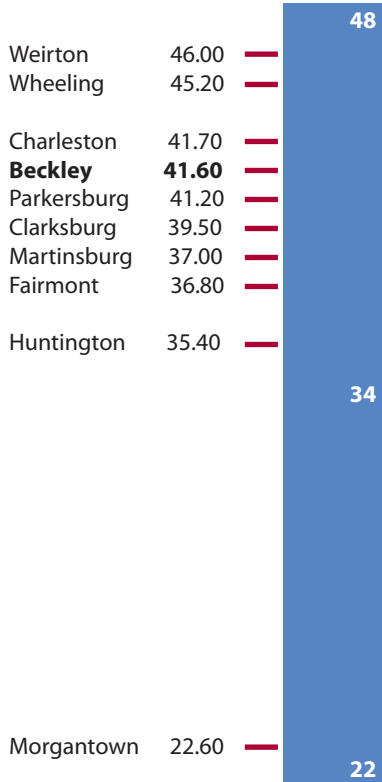
## Growth of West Virginia Cities 2000 to 2010



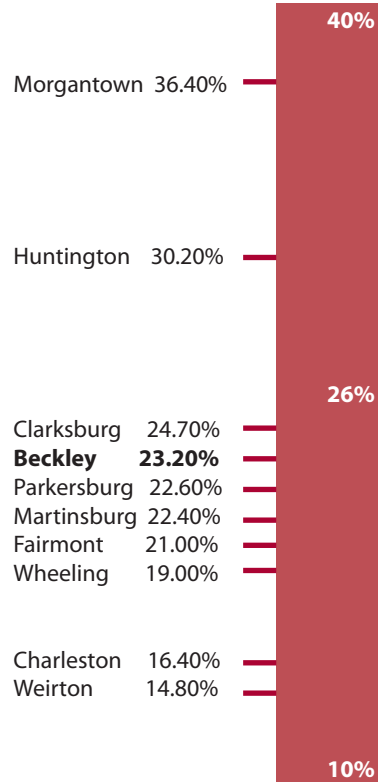
## Median Household Income of West Virginia Cities



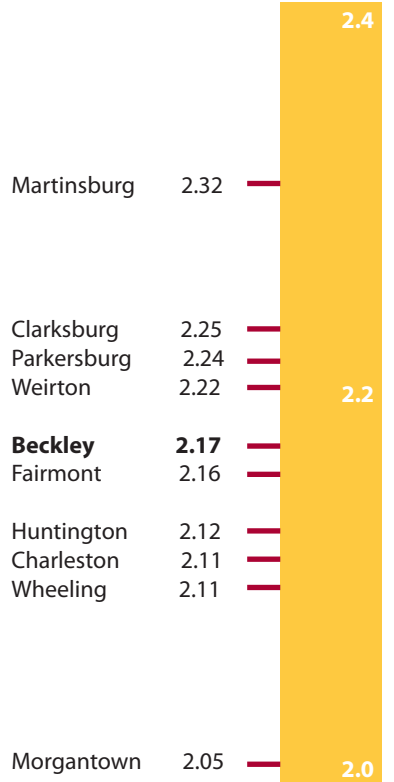
## Median Age of People in West Virginia Cities (2010)



## Individuals below poverty level in West Virginia Cities (2010)



## Average Household Sizes in West Virginia Cities (2010)



## 4.5

## CITY IMAGE AND IDENTITY

City image and identity are developed over a long period of time, often defined by outside perspectives and by major community features that become associated with communities. This is certainly true here, where recent recognitions cast a positive light on this community.

### Beckley among the 20 Best Small Towns in America

In 2012, Smithsonian Magazine ranked small communities across the nation. Unlike other “best places lists,” Smithsonian Magazine focused on culture, and used data provided by ESRI to find places with high concentrations of museums, historic sites, botanical gardens, resident orchestras, art galleries and other cultural assets more common to big cities. The search was limited to towns with populations less than 25,000 across the lower 48 states. The point of this effort was to find high concentrations of cultural features in small-town America. Beckley was listed as number 19 on Smithsonian’s list, and some of the factors that led to its selection included the ability to take a tour of coal seams under the City at the Exhibition Coal Mine. Attention was also drawn to Tamarack as an enormous arts center, market and theatre, and the fact that the Beckley area offers a full schedule of various cultural events. Other nearby cities included on this list were Butler, Pennsylvania and Staunton, Virginia.



### Beckley, West Virginia – CNN/Money Best Places to Live Contender (2007).

Since 2005, CNN/Money Magazine have produced an annual ranking of “Best Places to Live” in the United States. Using many variables, this annual ranking identifies 100 “best places” based on many attributes, including home prices, tax burden, commuting patterns, job growth, weather, education, etc. While Beckley did not make the top 100, it was identified as a “contender” in 2007. This ranking may be somewhat subjective, but it does indicate that Beckley has many attributes that contribute to community livability and attractiveness. Similarly in past years, other West Virginia cities have also made the “contender” lists.



The Tamarack Foundation released a study in 2009 showing that Tamarack contributed \$18.6 million to the West Virginia economy, \$5.9 million in income, and supported 236 jobs during the fiscal year July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008.



In 2000, the Youth Museum was awarded the prestigious Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Museum Service Award. The award was presented in Washington D.C. by President Clinton and Mrs. Clinton in recognition of the Museum's vital community outreach programs.



## The Two Dominant Tourist Attractions - Tamarack and the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine

### Tamarack

Tamarack is a showcase of handcrafts, fine art and regional cuisine.

It includes a retail store, working studios for resident artisans, art gallery, theatre, and food court. The original facility was built in 1994, and in 2003, the Tamarack Conference Center was opened. More than 2,800 artisans from throughout West Virginia have been involved with the Tamarack facility, and in May 2012 Tamarack welcomed its seven millionth guest. Tamarack was created to help celebrate and draw attention to West Virginia's artists, artisans, craftspersons, and food producers. It helps to draw attention to cultural heritage, artisan skills and local traditions, and aims to preserve and strengthen them for future generations.



### Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine

Located in the City's New River Park, the Exhibition Coal Mine and Youth Museum provide a unique tourist draw. At the Exhibition Coal Mine, visitors can ride through the dark passages of a vintage coal mine, while guides (veteran miners) provide firsthand accounts of the daily responsibilities and travail of past and present day miners. The trip into the mine includes general information about the mine and the history of coal mining in the region. Veteran guides give in-depth information on the mining methods and equipment. In addition to the mine, one can tour the period coal camp buildings situated throughout the grounds to gain an understanding of early 20th century coal camp life.

### Potential Expansion of Tamarack

In late 2011, the West Virginia Parkways Authority completed a study to identify potential development and partnering scenarios that would benefit Tamarack. The purpose of the study was to help define an appropriate mix of land uses that support Tamarack's overall goals and financial sustainability. The study focused on the 82 acres of land surrounding Tamarack. The Parkways Authority received several unsolicited proposals for various development scenarios including hotels, retail, RV campground, educational and/or institutional facilities, event and performance venues, and recreational projects. The study concluded that areas around Tamarack are very developable, and that there is market demand that supports lodging, entertainment, institutional, RV camping, dining, recreation, retail and residential uses. Several land development concepts based on the recommended land use types were provided.

Source: Tamarack Land Development Study, West Virginia Parkways Authority, Land Planning & Design Associates, Charlottesville, VA, September 28, 2011.



City Image and Identity are also Formed by a Growing Number of Local Events that Draw People to Beckley from the Larger Region.

Major events are held throughout the year in Beckley and at venues throughout Raleigh County. These events help define Beckley as a place, and provide strong emotional connections. The images below are of recent events. The Beckley-Raleigh County Convention and Visitors Bureau maintains an extensive events calendar and map of area attractions.

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Beckley recently became home to the October Sky Rocket Boys Festival. This festival was moved to Beckley in 2012 from Coalwood, West Virginia and is held at the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine at New River Park. The festival celebrates the film "October Sky" and the book written by Homer Hickman – Rocket Boys. Rocket Boys was New York Times Best-Seller that was made into the movie October Sky. The book and movie are about the life of Homer Hickman who grew up in Coalwood, W.V., and became an author and NASA engineer involved with Spacelab, the Space Shuttle and the International Space Station Program.



# 4.6

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

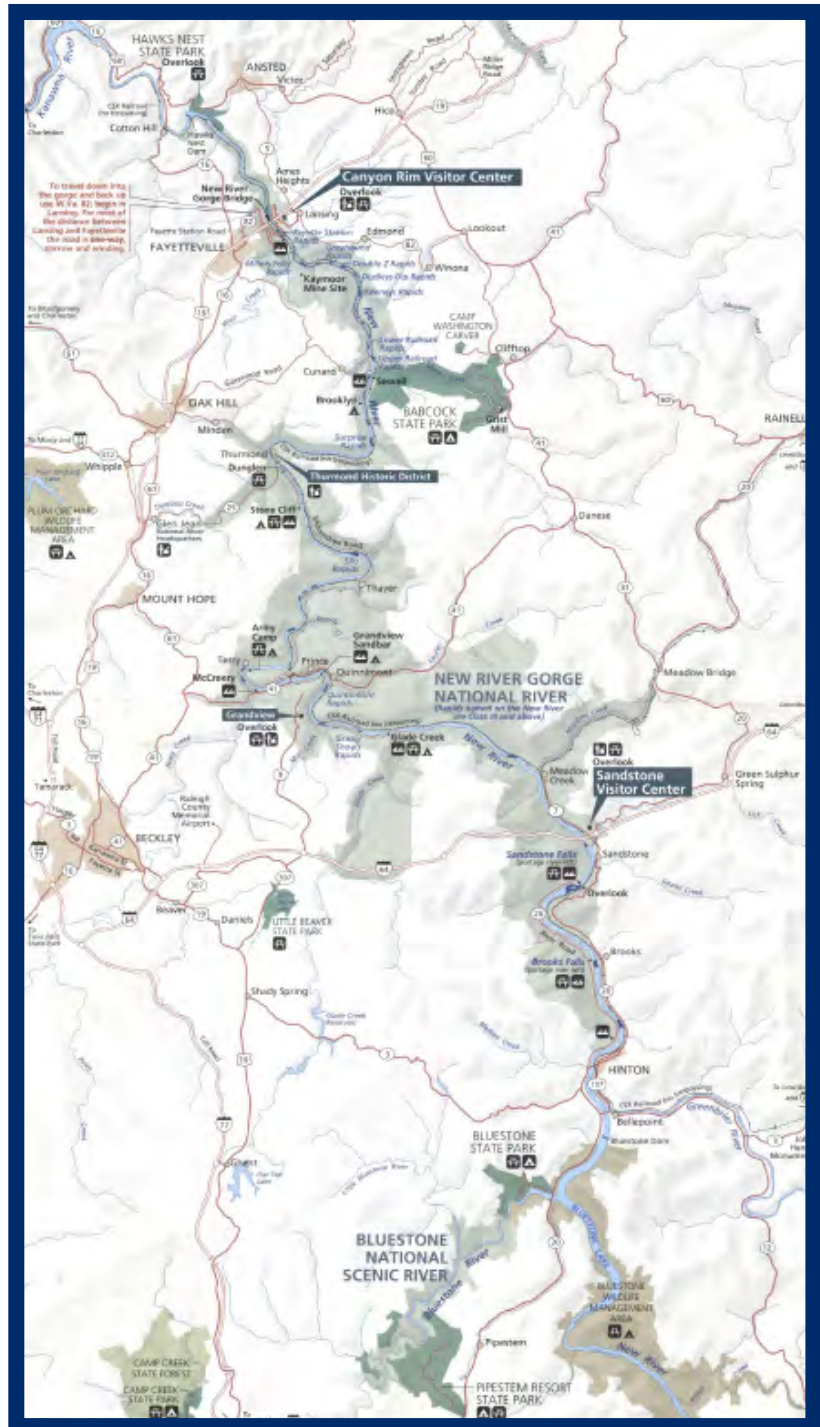
Beckley is located in a larger region with significant attributes that contribute to community character, image and growth. Most significantly, the rugged Appalachian Mountains, rivers and scenery have a dramatic impact on the Beckley community. This is particularly true in terms of the New River Gorge National River, the New River Gorge Bridge and The Summit Bechtel Reserve.

### New River Gorge National River

The City of Beckley is located among some of the most beautiful natural landscapes in the United States. This terrain is so unique and attractive that many thousands of acres near Beckley were given protected status within the National Park System. The National Park System includes not only national parks, monuments, historic sites, seashores, and battlefields, but also National Rivers. To the east and northeast of Beckley, the New River Gorge National River covers more than 70,000 acres of land along the New River. The New River Gorge National River was established in 1978 and it is one of five national rivers in the National Park System.

The New River is actually among the oldest rivers on Earth, geologically speaking, and it

carves the deepest and longest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains. The New River falls 750 feet in 50 miles from Bluestone Dam to Gauley Bridge, and it is one of finest whitewater rivers in the eastern United States. The Lower Gorge of the New River offers the most challenging rapids ranging in difficulty from Class III to Class V. Commercial outfitters conduct trips down the river from





April through October. The upper part of the river offers somewhat less challenging Class I to III rapids. It is estimated that the New River Gorge area attracts more than one million visitors per year.

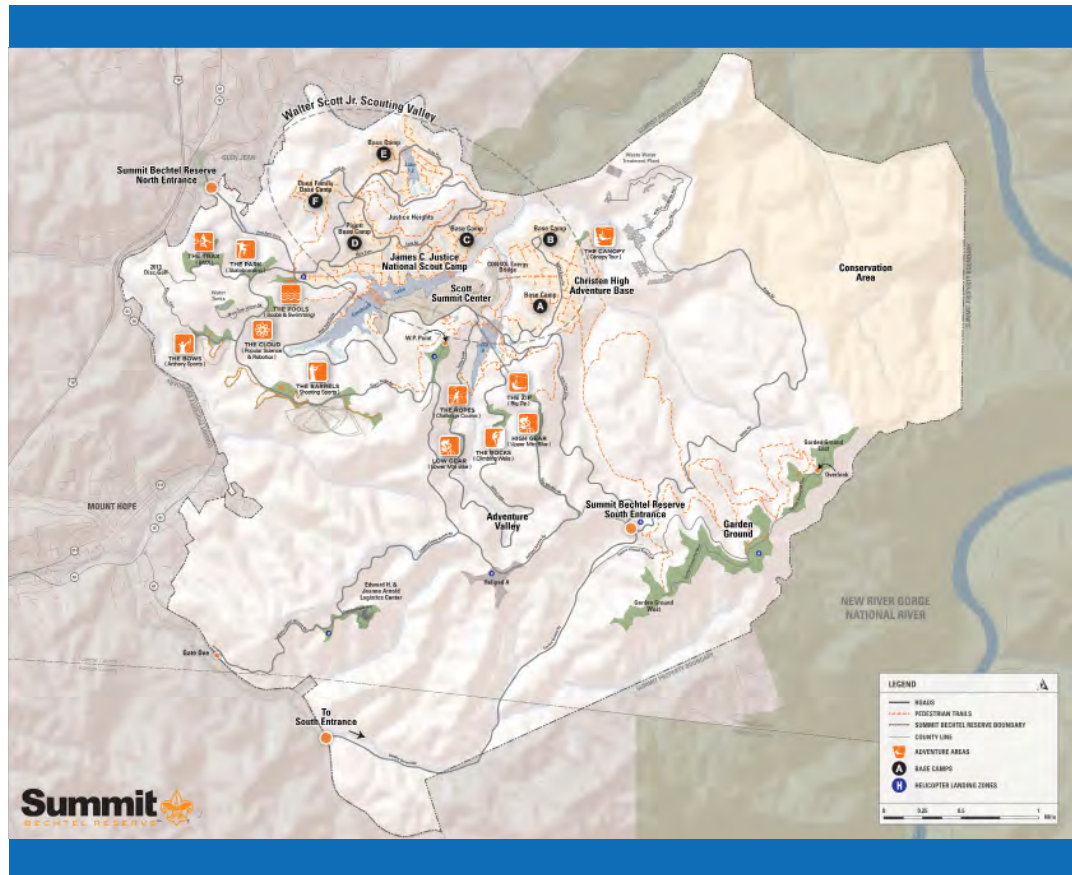


### New River Gorge Bridge

The New River Gorge Bridge is a huge tourist attraction. It is a steel arch bridge that spans more than 3,000 feet over the New River Gorge near Fayetteville (about 25 miles north of Beckley). The New River is nearly 900 feet below the bridge deck, making the bridge one of the highest in the world. Every third Saturday in October, "Bridge Day" is celebrated with a festival that includes demonstrations of rappelling and BASE jumping. This event is stated to be the State of West Virginia's largest single-day event, attracting about 80,000 people from around the world. Vehicular traffic is shut down for a period of time, allowing people to walk across the world's second longest single-arch bridge.

### Summit Bechtel Reserve

The area's stunning natural landscape recently attracted the attention of the Boy Scouts its national organization it searched for a new national facility. Recently, the Boy Scouts embarked on an extensive effort to establish a new high-adventure camp and new home for the National Jamboree. Existing national high-adventure bases are Florida Sea Base in Islamorada, Florida; Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico; and the Northern Tier in Ely, Minnesota. After



reviewing site proposals from 28 states, the Scouts decided on the New River Gorge area near Mount Hope (about 10 miles north of Beckley). The site was chosen because of its access to interstate highways, nearby airports (Charleston and Beckley) and two area Amtrak stations.

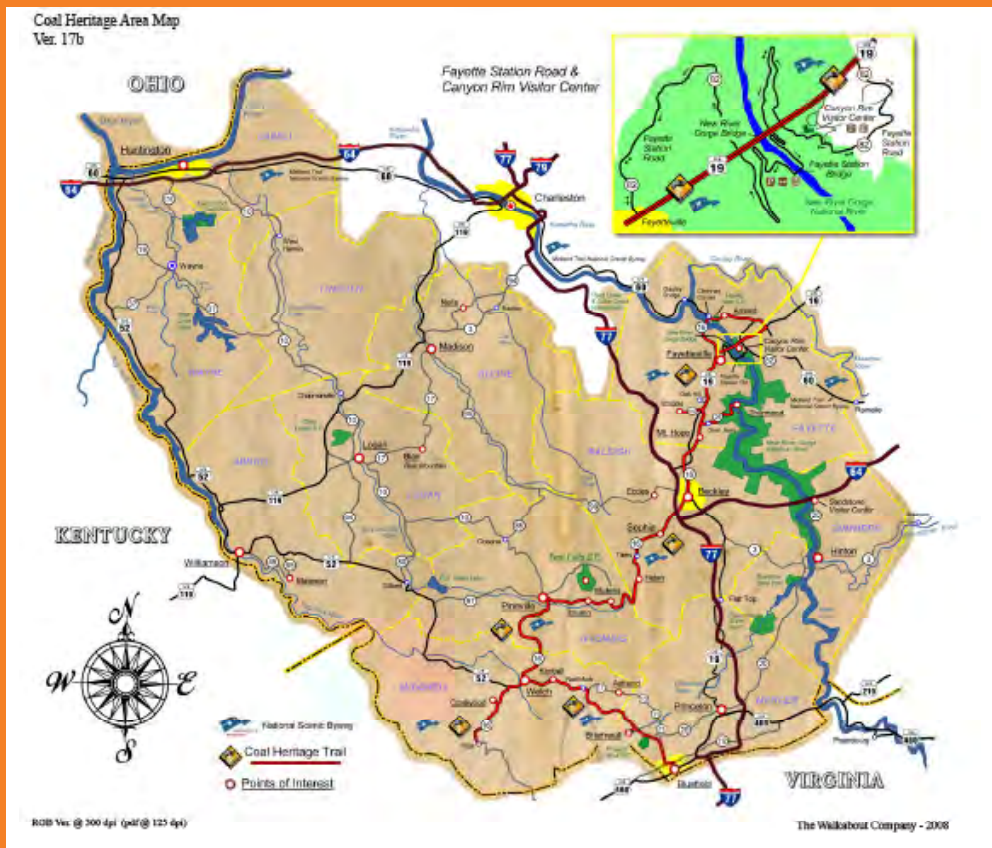
The Summit sits on 10,600 acres of forested mountains just west of the New River Gorge National River area. This facility allows scouts to enjoy more than six miles of zip line challenge courses, 36 miles of mountain bike trails, and 13 acres of shooting sports, as well as kayaking, rock climbing, bouldering, skateboarding, BMX, and various other

activities. The total estimated cost to construct the Summit is projected to be \$450 million.

The Summit will serve as the permanent home for the Boy Scouts of America's National Jamboree, which is a celebration of Scouting held every four years. The summit's first National Jamboree (July 2013) was a 10-day event and drew about 30,000 scouts, along with others from all over the world. It was estimated that once the Summit was up and running during the jamboree, it would be the third-largest city in West Virginia. In 2019, the 24th World Scout Jamboree will be held at the Summit.

**The Boy Scouts** will launch a pioneering community service initiative beginning with the 2013 Jamboree. Scouts will travel to surrounding counties and will work on service projects in local communities. The Citizen Conservation Corps, headquartered in Beckley, is serving as clearinghouse for the community service initiative. Projects will be in five major focus areas: green friendly construction, infrastructure, wellness, arts and education.

Source: Vision 2025 Strategic Plan, New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, July, 2012, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Page 5.



Map Source: Coal Heritage Area

Apart from the huge direct fiscal impact of the Summit (in terms of both initial construction and sustained activity in the coming years), other lasting benefits are also expected. Notably, scouts are likely to give back to the region following their tradition of performing community service projects in partnership with local organizations. This creates a huge opportunity to engage the Boy Scouts in various public projects in Beckley. The City of Beckley may therefore be challenged to define potential projects that may be a fit with the available skills and talents of Boy Scouts.

### National Coal Heritage Area

The National Coal Heritage Area includes 13 counties extending from the Ohio River downward to the State of Virginia. There are about 49 National Heritage Areas in the United States. National Heritage Areas are not technically part of the National Park Service and do not represent federally-owned land. However, National Heritage Areas are created by Congress in recognition of unique scenic, cultural or historic resources that represent an important aspect of American history. Typically they are administered by state governments or non-profit organizations or other private corporations. The National Park Service provides an advisory role and limited technical, planning and financial assistance.

The Coal Heritage Trail is a significant feature within the National Coal Heritage Area. As illustrated on the Coal Heritage Area Map, this trail begins in Bluefield, West Virginia and extends northward through Beckley toward the New River Gorge Bridge Area. In Beckley, the Coal Heritage Trail is the bike path that runs along Robert C. Byrd Drive west of downtown and along Eisenhower Drive on the north side of town.



Bike Trail / Coal Heritage Trail In Beckley, along Eisenhower Drive