



RURAL COMPONENT



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This chapter represents the voice of rural development issues in Beckley. Although Beckley is an urban area, some rural development issues are present in the City and there are areas in the City that are not intended for urban growth. This component also addresses the need to protect wildlife, natural habitats, sensitive natural areas, green spaces and natural resource use in the urban area.

Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees, then names the streets after them.

–Bill Vaughn



INTRODUCTION

The City of Beckley is largely built-out and lacks significant areas that can be considered “rural.” The one area that does offer some rural aspects is the New River Drive Corridor that travels east to west from Robert C. Bryd Drive toward I-77. Other rural areas are primarily located outside of the current corporate limits of Beckley.

RURAL AND URBAN DATA

The City of Beckley includes 13.3 square miles, which is just 2.2% of the total 605.3 square miles contained within Raleigh County. The City’s population is almost entirely located in urban areas and only 0.6% (less than one percent) lives in rural areas. In comparison, 39.5% of the Raleigh County’s population lives in rural areas.

	City of Beckley	Raleigh County
Land Area (Sq. Mi.)	13.3	605.3
2012 Population	17,580	79,121
Rural	0.6%	39.5%
Urban	99.4%	60.5%

Source: Synergos Technologies, DemographicsNow, and PopStats demographic vendor providers; analysis by LandUse | USA.



11.2

REGIONAL RURAL ISSUES

Beckley is surrounded by rural areas and rugged terrain. East of Beckley, there are very steep slopes associated with Piney Creek. These slopes are visible to those traveling over the William C. Brown Bridge just north of the I-64 interchange with the East Beckley Bypass. To some degree, these steep slopes help form a natural growth boundary for Beckley to the east.

Some regional rural and environmental issues are also highlighted in the Piney Creek

Watershed Plan, which was prepared in 2012. The Piney Creek Watershed encompasses all of the City of Beckley, and the purpose of the plan is to help manage water quality issues. It seeks to reduce the concentrations of pollutants throughout the watershed to meet the applicable state water quality standards that help protect human health and the environment. It contains a list of recommended projects intended to reduce erosion, manage storm water and improve sanitary sewer systems.

11.3

RURAL ISSUES INSIDE THE CITY OF BECKLEY

As stated, the dominant rural area inside the City of Beckley is along New River Drive. This corridor is significant because it offers both development opportunity and a rural atmosphere that contrasts with the more typical urban development patterns throughout most of the City. New River Drive itself follows a natural valley as it tracks along Little Whitestick Creek, which flows west to east toward Piney Creek. Local floodplain maps do not show a regulatory 100-year flood plain associated with Whitestick Creek, so development opportunities are not limited by that consideration. However, while New River Drive itself (and some areas immediately adjacent) is flat, slopes on either side New River Drive can be significant. Elevation changes on both sides of New River Drive can increase by 100 or 150 feet within 1000 feet of New River Drive. In a few select areas, the terrain slopes significantly and can even reach slopes of 40-50%.

Despite some physical constraints, development of the New River Drive Corridor is generally considered to be possible if carried out in a manner that is sensitive to steep slope protection and the need to retain natural vegetation to prevent erosion. In so doing, some rural elements can be preserved. This corridor can be a place where the City of

Beckley can express some degree of rural character defined by open space, while also demonstrating how creative land planning can preserve environmental features while allowing development activity to produce quality places.

General development issues associated with this corridor are explored more fully in Chapter 15, as this corridor is considered to be a “preferred development area.” The 2001 Comprehensive Plan discussed the need for more creative development approaches and the need to adopt more innovative zoning tools to provide a regulatory mechanism that would allow for more flexibility in places such as this. This issue was also addressed in Chapter 6 in the context of needed zoning code updates. Commonly, regulatory mechanisms utilized in master plan communities and larger-scale developments include planned unit developments (PUD’s). PUD’s can be created in multiple ways – but they often allow residential types and densities to be blended in a creative way. This allows flexibility to preserve wetlands, steep slopes and other significant natural features, since the number of residential units permitted per acre can be “clustered” to allow space for common areas. Often PUD’s also permit mixed uses and require an internal network of open spaces and pedestrian/bike connections.