



RECREATION

12



RECREATION

Consistent with the land use component, this chapter addresses the recreational needs of Beckley. It describes how key facilities can be further developed to support the needs of residents. It also addresses related tourism issues, which are also touched on in the Economic Development Component.

“People who cannot find time for recreation are obliged sooner or later to find time for illness.”

- John Wanamaker

12.1

EXISTING PARK FACILITIES

The Beckley Parks and Recreation Department maintains many parks and facilities and is responsible for the implementation of beautification programs. The following descriptions of each City park include a list of maintenance activities prescribed by the Parks Department:

Barber Avenue Park – Located across from the Piney Oaks School, Barber Ave. Park primarily serves the children living in the housing projects surrounding the playground. The park is .22 acres in size and includes a picnic table, grill, and playground equipment.

The Glenn Avenue Park – The Glenn Avenue Park offers a basketball court, playground equipment, and picnic table on .36 acres.

Harry Levin Park (Freedom Park) – Harry Levin Park is 9.5 acres in size located near Pinecrest Hospital on Eisenhower Drive. It features a covered shelter area, public restrooms, playground equipment, basketball court, picnic tables, and grills.

Maxwell Hill Park – Maxwell Hill Park is located in the northwestern portion of the City on Maxwell Hill Road.

Mool Avenue Land – Mool Avenue Land was purchased in 1995 and remains undeveloped.

The New River Park – The New River Park (Ward 3) is located in the central area of the City next to the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine and is approximately 27.5 acres in size.

The Ridge Avenue Park – The Ridge Avenue Park (Ward 2) is located off City Avenue in the southwest portion of the City and is .23 acres in size. This park is mainly a neighborhood park with a basketball court and playground equipment.

Thornhill Courts – Thornhill Courts is a relatively new park that was upgraded in 2008. It was the site of the old Raleigh vocational school and it now it serves as a neighborhood park with a fountain, basketball court and playground equipment.

Scott Avenue Park – Scott Avenue Park is .26 acres in size. There is a basketball court and an abandoned restroom facility located at the park.

The Stansbury Tennis Center and Ewart Avenue Playground – The Stansbury Tennis Center and Ewart Avenue Playground are located on Ewart Avenue and jointly operated by the Beckley Tennis Club and the Parks Department. This park is located on 2.05 acres.

Simpkins Street Park – Simpkins Street Park is located off Fayette Street. A leased facility, the park includes a basketball court and picnic tables.

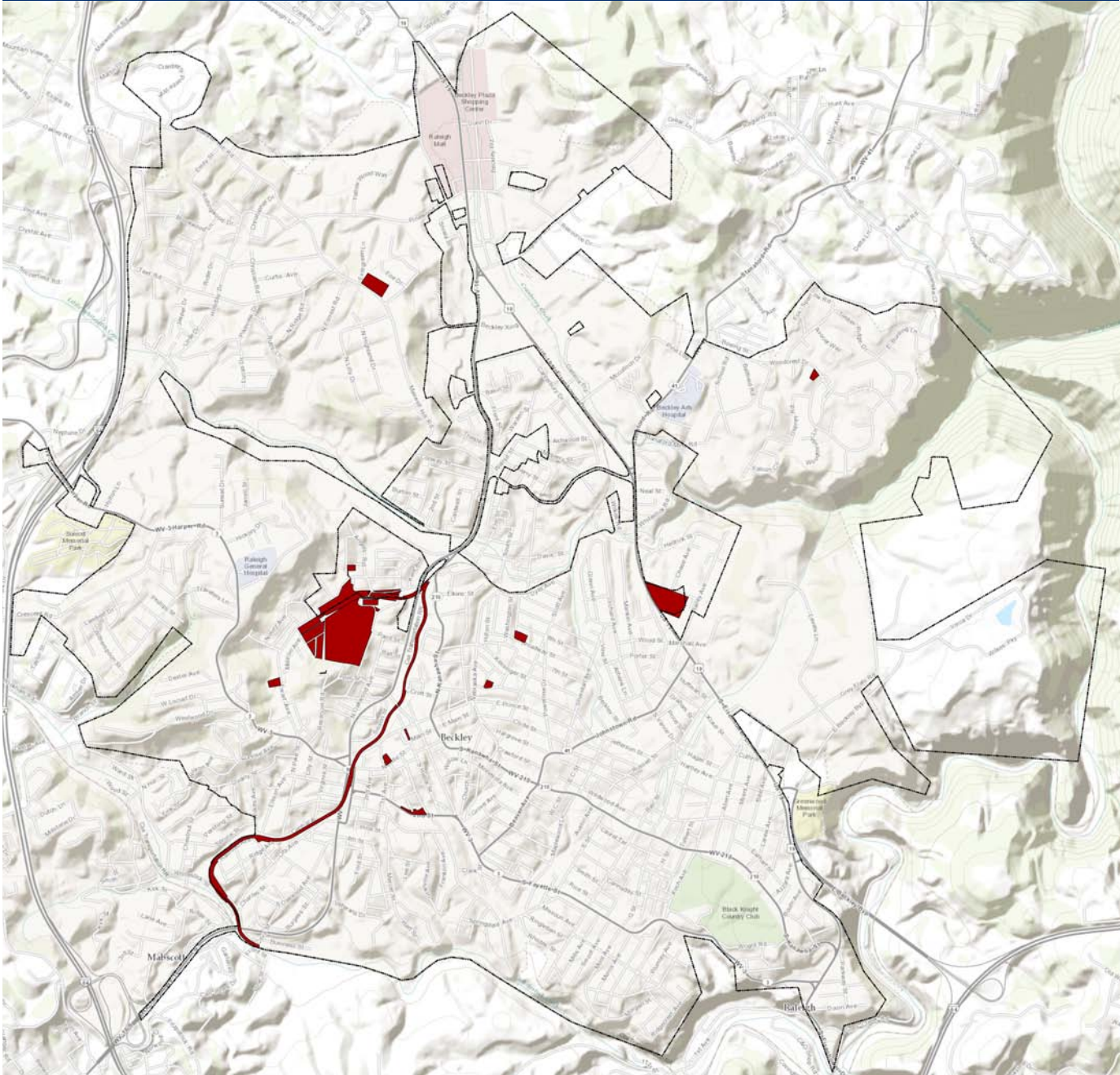
Temple Street Park – Temple Street Park is a small (.2 acres) neighborhood park that is also used by the First Christian Early Childhood Preschool and the Children's House students.

Some private recreation facilities in Beckley include the Black Knight Country Club, which is a nine hole, private golf course in southeast Beckley, and the YMCA Soccer Complex on the east side of Beckley near the Bypass.

East Park Pool Complex - The East Pool Complex is a splash park with a basketball court and picnic facilities.

Word Park and Shoemaker Square - Word Park and Shoemaker Square are downtown parks. These facilities have special significance to downtown and are discussed in some detail in Chapter 15.

Map 12-1 Locations of Parks in Beckley





12.2

NEW RIVER PARK – EXISTING

New River Park is the largest and most significant park in Beckley. Built on land donated by the New River Coal Company, New River Park is a significant attraction for area residents and tourists. The park itself includes the following:

- Three Picnic Shelters (rented by the hour or day). Shelters are fenced in and include tables, restrooms, parking, electric and water. The group size limits range from 55 to 120 per shelter.
- Olympic-sized Swimming Pool
- Water Slide
- Horseshoe Pits
- Playgrounds and Equipment throughout
- Little League/Softball Field
- Basketball Court
- Eight Tennis Courts
- Fitness Trail
- Campground (17 sites)

Next to these park facilities is the Exhibition Coal Mine which includes

- A 14,000 sq. ft. building that includes the Mine museum, gift shop, ticketing area, restrooms and vending machines.
- Amphitheater next to a Youth Museum
- A “mountain homestead” recreated settlement
- A miner’s house
- Church
- Shanty
- Entrance to the exhibition coal mine

- Superintendents house
- School House

The Youth Museum present on the site has a gallery, restrooms, and a planetarium. This site also includes a collection of early settlement log structures that create a “mountain homestead” and recreated settlement on the Appalachian frontier. Trained interpreters explain the importance of each of the eight reconstructed historical buildings associated with the late 19th century.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, New River Park recently became the home to the October Sky Rocket Boys Festival. This Festival recently moved from Coalwood,5West Virginia to New River Park and has enjoyed two years of growing success. The Festival includes exhibits, authors, music, food, vendors, rocket launches, essays, songwriter contests, planetarium presentations and underground mine tours.

Along with the Rocket Boys Festival, Mine and the Youth Museum also host the annual Beckley Kids Classic Festival in September. It attracts hundreds of participants and activities include musical performances, karaoke for the children, reduced prices for tours and often an outdoor movie.

Like many park facilities, an ongoing challenge is to make all facilities at New River Park ADA accessible. New construction activity must meet ADA regulations, but some existing older facilities fall short of ADA standards.

12.3

NEW RIVER PARK – FUTURE

New River Park is regarded as place that can continue on its trajectory toward becoming a significant place of local recreation, tourism and a showcase for local culture. It was for this reason that it was chosen to be the topic of one of four planning workshops conducted in mid-October. Many believe that it can become an even stronger reason to draw tourists traveling along I-77 into town to experience Beckley. However, future growth and development is hindered by several considerations. These are:

- 1.** Access to New River Park is challenging – especially for visitors who are unfamiliar with Beckley.
- 2.** Physical expansion, reorganization of existing activities, new and/or greatly upgraded facilities are necessary to create a more significant attraction. reorganization of existing activities, and new facilities are necessary to help create a more significant attraction.
- 3.** Further development of a “brand” for New River Park is desired to help define an “image” for this facility so that it can be more effectively marketed and promoted.
- 4.** The existing condition of some surrounding homes and 6.5 acre heavy industrial business of Southern WV Asphalt Company detracts from the desired image of the park and its surroundings.

- 5.** Areas next to New River Park are not in the City of Beckley. This area is often referred to as the donut hole.

Access to New River Park.

A common way that visitors travel to New River Park is via a congested Harper Road. From I-77, visitors travel east along Harper Road, and then turn left at Ewart Ave. Once on Ewart Ave., they travel along a narrow residential street for more than ½ mile. The feeling that many first-time visitors get while traveling along Ewart Ave. is that they may have made a wrong turn and somehow have become lost in a residential neighborhood.

To the north and west, Ewart Ave. provides access to New River Park from Robert C. Bryd Dr. Here access is much better, as Robert C. Bryd Drive has the capacity to carry high volumes of traffic. Further, the connection between Ewart Ave. and Robert C. Byrd Dr. includes a southbound deceleration lane, and the distance to New River Park is much shorter. On the negative side however, industrial buildings owned by the Public Works Department and outside storage of equipment in this area diminish this area as an attractive gateway to New River Park.

Going forward, recommendations to address the access issue include the following:

Key



Exhibition Coal Mine/
New River Park



Local Road Access Point



Interstate Exit



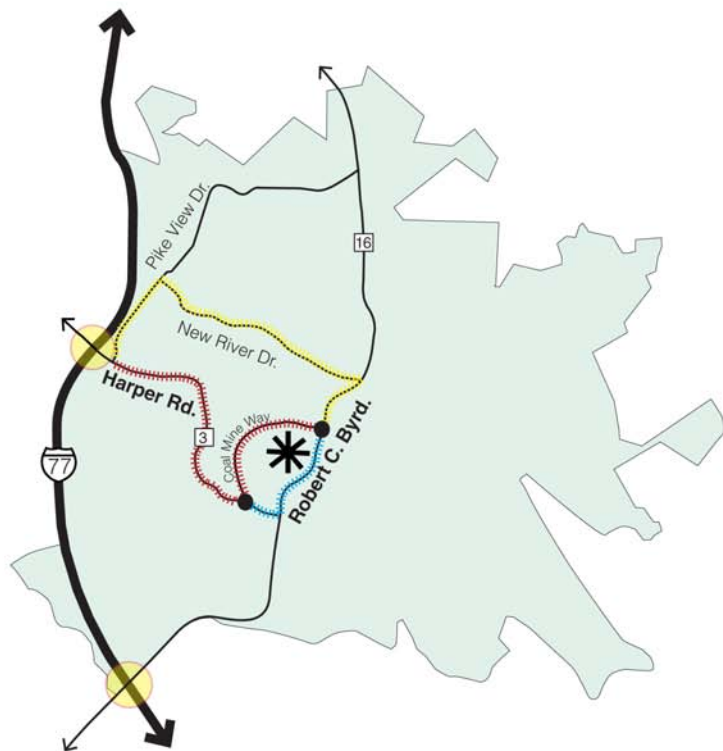
Route 1
Harper Rd. to Coal Mine Way South



Route 2
Harper Rd. to Robert C. Byrd
to Coal Mine Way North



Route 3
Pike View to New River Drive
to Robert C. Byrd to Coal Mine Way North



Exhibition Coal Mine Visitor Routes Diagram



New River Park Future Recommendations

1. Re-name Ewart Ave. “Coal Mine Way.” This could be implemented in several ways and is dependent on future study of alternatives and more stakeholder involvement. Obviously, such a change impacts residents who reside on this street significantly and such inconvenience should be carefully considered. One alternative is to simply include a secondary name on the street sign and keep Ewart Ave. as the legal street name.

2. Advertise and promote multiple ways to arrive at New River Park. Access to New River Park from Robert C. Byrd Drive is already defined. This access point can be utilized, along with a route that includes New River Park Drive and Pikeview Drive. Therefore from Exit 44 at Harper Road, a visitor would travel east on Harper Road a short distance, then north on Pikeview Drive to New River Park Drive, then south on Robert C. Byrd Drive to Ewart Ave. (Coal Mine Way).

3. Use the existing railroad bridge over Robert. C. Byrd Drive as an opportunity to advertise the location and proximity of the Exhibition Coal Mine and New River Park. The existing railroad bridge over Robert C. Byrd Drive can provide a “canvas” to advertise the Exhibition Coal Mine, and provide clear directions to it. The following illustration provides one design concept for a mural. Other designs are certainly possible, but it is important that the graphics and images be of high quality and deliberately chosen to promote a brand and image. To support this effort, better landscaping and signage is needed to help complete an attractive entryway, and provide a good first impression.

Existing Conditions



Concept Drawing Showing Potential Improvements to New River Park Entrance From Robert. C. Byrd Dr.





Physical expansion and reorganization of activities and features at New River Park

As mentioned, the significance of New River Park to the City made it a logical topic for one of the four planning workshops conducted in October 2013. Conversations at this workshop led to the development of a new conceptual development plan that addressed long-standing issues related to physical expansion, internal circulation, introduction of new activities and facilities and better linkages to the Rail Trail. Future steps will almost certainly include refinements to this plan, but the following graphics illustrate major long-term development principles and ideas. A new circulation concept is also provided to address existing site challenges and circulation issues. Some of the more significant development concepts illustrated in this plan include the following:

1. Physical expansion of the park when land becomes available at an attractive price.
2. Additional campground facilities for large motor home RV campers.
- 3 Adaptive reuse of existing maintenance building facilities (Parks and Recreation and Community Development offices).

4. Improved storm water management areas.

5. Construction of a new Five Star Play Lab (about 6,400 square of indoor space). This facility would offer specially-designed recreation opportunities for handicapped youth, with indoor/outdoor sensory play facilities.

6. Creation of a new pavilion / amphitheater to provide a venue for activities such as the Rocket Boys Festival.

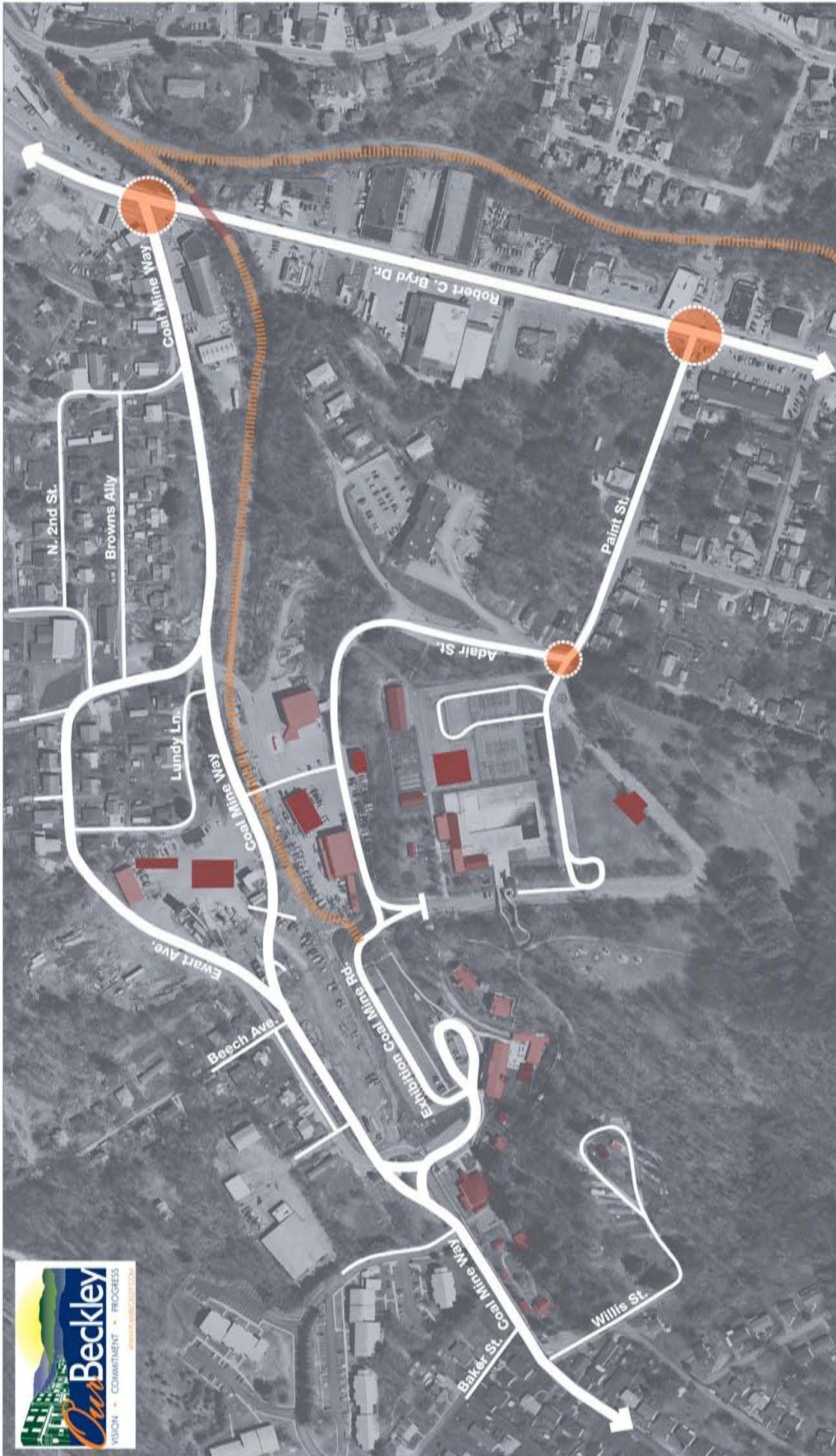
7. Re-organize vehicular circulation and parking areas to accommodate new facilities.

8. Disc golf area.

9. Dog park.

10. Upgraded campground facilities with bath and shower rooms.

Additionally, along with the proposed new improvements, it should be noted that the total renovation of the existing bath house and locker facilities at the New River Pool is needed.




VEHICULAR CIRCULATION CONCEPT

NEW RIVER PARK & EXHIBITION COAL MINE
CITY OF BECKLEY, WEST VIRGINIA

NOVEMBER 2013

KEY

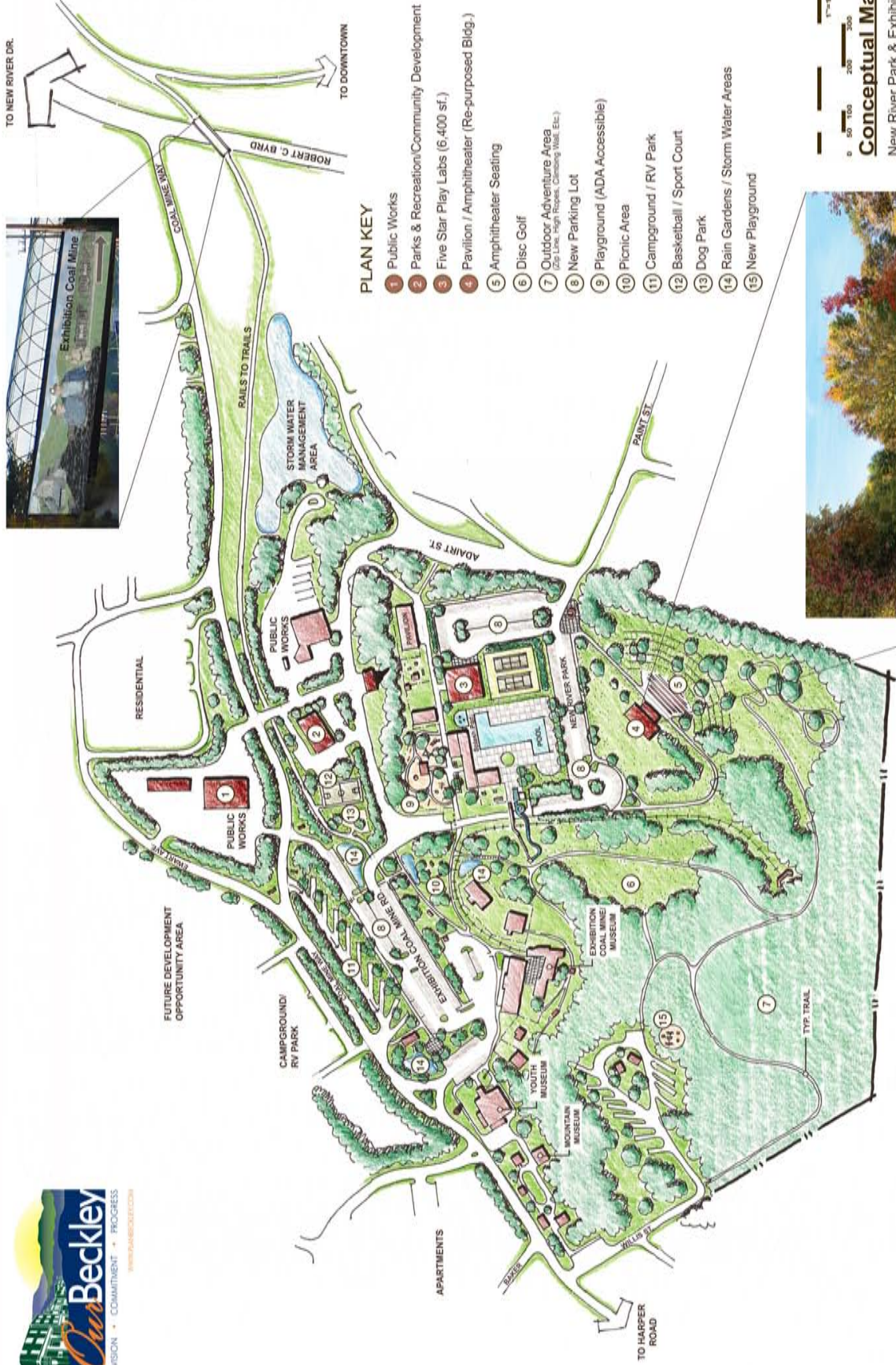
-  Proposed Buildings & Adaptive Reuse
-  Existing Buildings
-  Primary Access Streets
-  Secondary Streets
-  Rails To Trails
-  Entry Points
-  New River Park Entry











PLAN KEY

- 1 Public Works
- 2 Parks & Recreation/Community Development
- 3 Five Star Play Labs (6,400 sf.)
- 4 Pavilion / Amphitheater (Re-purposed Bldg.)
- 5 Amphitheater Seating
- 6 Disc Golf
- 7 Outdoor Adventure Area (Zip Line, High Ropes, Climbing Wall, Etc.)
- 8 New Parking Lot
- 9 Playground (ADA-Accessible)
- 10 Picnic Area
- 11 Campground / RV Park
- 12 Basketball / Sport Court
- 13 Dog Park
- 14 Rain Gardens / Storm Water Areas
- 15 New Playground



Conceptual Master Plan
 New River Park & Exhibition Coal Mine
 "A Tourist Destination & City Park"
 City of Beckley, West Virginia
 November 2013

Future Outdoor Entertainment Venue

One development concept considered as part of the effort to re-imagine New River Park was the concept of creating a new outdoor entertainment venue. Inspired by the potential opportunity to reuse the former Beckley Hardware and Feed structure, the concept of creating low-cost outdoor entertainment venue at New River Park was discussed. This distinctive structure was slated to be removed to make way for a fast food restaurant. Unfortunately, it was subsequently learned that this structure was unavailable. However, the idea of providing a low-cost structure to create a venue has merit and deserves further consideration. An outdoor entertainment venue could provide a place for small concerts and gatherings. It could also be a place to support activities associated with the Rocket Boys Festival. Concept illustrations are provided below.



Existing Area Along Loop Road North of the Swimming Pool



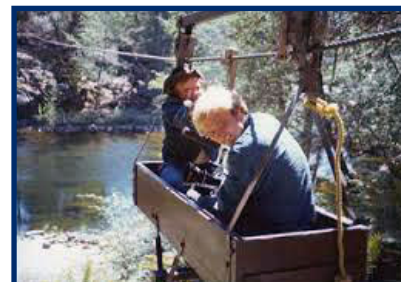
Potential Gathering Event Space

New River Park Brand and Marketing

Because New River Park is both a park and a visitor attraction, issues related to branding and image move forward for consideration as it is promoted as a visitor destination. The City of Beckley has long been associated with its Exhibition Coal Mine, but plans to develop New River Park with more activities and attractions provides opportunity to knit activities together to form a broader experience for visitors.

For example, the fact that the Rocket Boys Festival is now held at this location provides the opportunity to tell the story of humble beginnings and major accomplishments on a year-round basis. This can be done with permanent signage, rocket sculptures, or simply brochures that make people want to return in October for the actual festival. Likewise, a new Five Star Play Lab conveys the notion of overcoming physical challenges. These and other considerations have common themes that support a genuine visitor experience centered on feelings of not only fun and enjoyment – but also achievement, success and empowerment. These are powerful human emotions that can be evoked and combined to contribute to positive experiences.

There is also a parallel theme that blends these ideas with energy and activity. Parks can be lively places with sounds of kids playing, and New River Park can include features such as zip lines, climbing walls and kinetic sculptures. This supports the ideas of achievement, success and empowerment, while also introducing a higher level of activity and vibrancy that is attractive and engaging. As described elsewhere, Beckley is currently “leaking” expenditures in the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry sector, mainly because its residents are patronizing venues that are located in other parts of Raleigh County. Beckley can intercept some “leakage” out of the market by motivating residents to recreate locally. Chapter 15 discusses the role that the Pikeview Drive area can play in helping to address this issue, but it should be noted that future development of New River Park can also include activities that help capture some of this leakage. Some adventure sports could be developed at New River Park and could include canopy adventures (zip-lining, rappelling, obstacle courses), biking and similar activities. An indoor or outdoor rock climbing wall and archery range are also potential fits to supplement existing facilities.





<http://beckley-mill.blogspot.com/>

12.4

BECKLEY MILL PARK

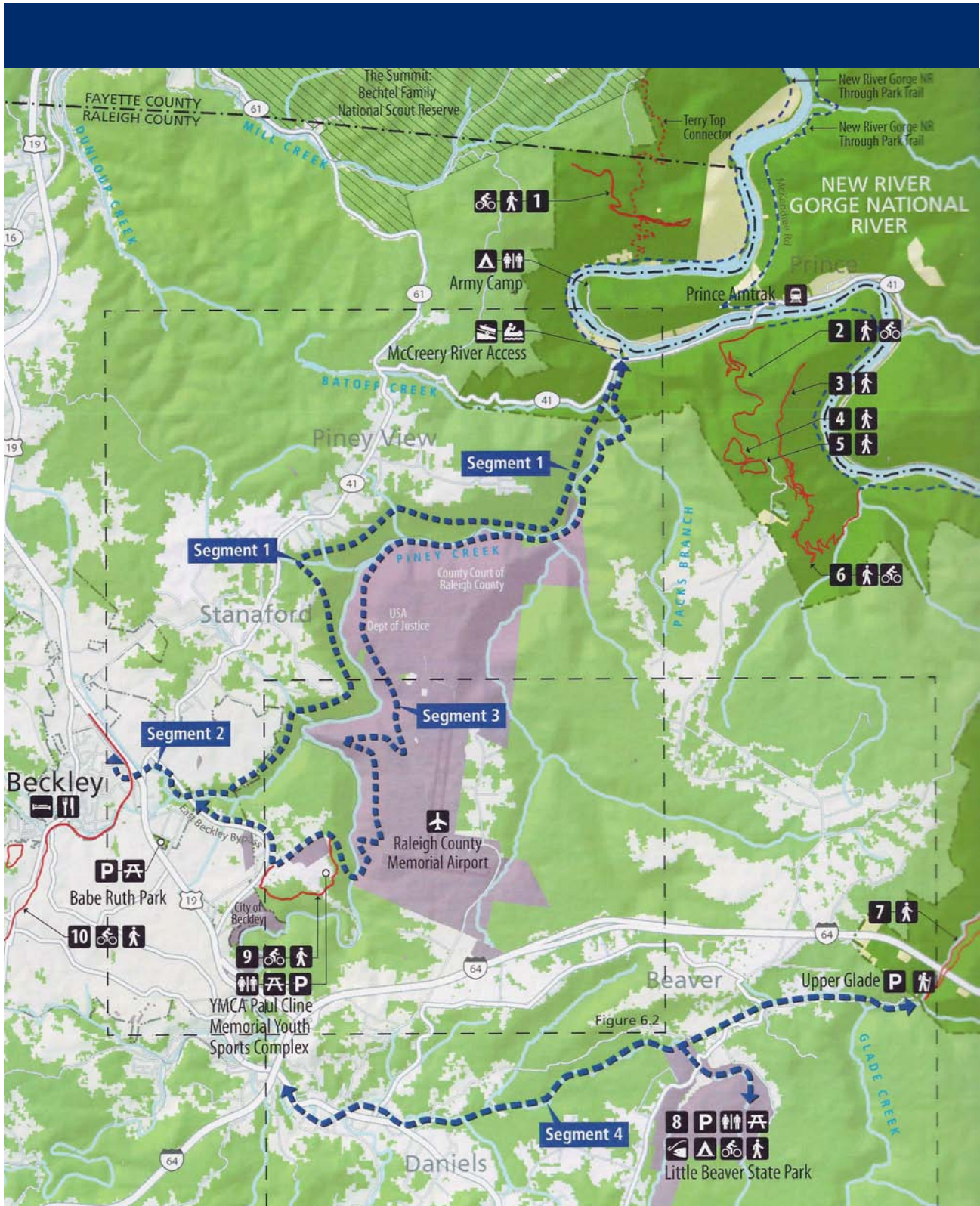
Along the Piney Creek at the southeast edge of the City, the remnants of an old mill are evident. The origins of this mill trace back to early settlements in the Beckley area. In the mid 1830's, early settlers (relatives of Alfred Beckley and his father, John Beckley) established a gristmill just downstream of one of the significant falls on Piney Creek. A reliable mill was important for settlers, and this site offered reliable year-round water flow. John Beckley lived near the mill in a frame cottage, and this mill was actually described by Rutherford B. Hayes who wrote of it following a visit with John Beckley.

According to material published on beckley-mill.blogspot.com, a record flood in the early 1900's destroyed or nearly destroyed much of the mill. Additionally, during this time, the availability of rail transportation meant that flour could be imported and stored on the shelves at local groceries. Gristmills throughout the United States frequently closed during this time.

Interest in creating a new park at the mill site has gained traction in recent years. Various local groups have joined forces to explore steps to protect the mill. Apart from the significant historical elements, this site offers

rare natural beauty. Recently, more than 50 volunteers cleared debris from the area as the goal of establishing a park at the site has received considerable attention. The recently formed Piney Creek Watershed Association has also helped draw attention to the opportunities at this site.

Development of Beckley Mill Park will require deliberate steps to improve access and to develop appropriate improvements that will enable visitors to enjoy this natural and historically significant place. The development of these plans also blend with regional plans to develop trail connections throughout Raleigh, Mercer, Fayette, Nicholas and Summers Counties which provide connections to the New River Gorge National River, Gauley River National Recreation Area and Bluestone National Scenic River Connection. This proposed trail system opens up areas on the east side of Beckley to non-motorized travel and connects with Beckley's Rail Trail on the north side of town. When complete, this system will provide a non-motorized transportation option between Beckley and the New River Gorge National Park.



Source: New River Gorge National River, Gualey River National Recreational Area, Bluestone National Scenic River, Connecting The Parks with Their Gateway Communities – Concept Plan. National Park Service, 2012.