



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Plan

2021-2025



Prepared by:



Center for Business and
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Mason County, West Virginia

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| County Profile | 1 |
| Key Assets and Recent Developments | 1 |
| Production Industries | 1 |
| Infrastructure | 2 |
| Development Sites | 2 |
| Historical Sites | 3 |
| Museums | 3 |
| Recreation Assets | 4 |
| Map of Mason County | 5 |
| Population Characteristics | 5 |
| Strategic Planning | 7 |
| SCORE Analysis | 7 |
| The SCORE Process | 7 |
| Strategic Initiatives | 10 |
| 1. Workforce and Education | 10 |
| 2. Infrastructure and Site Readiness | 10 |
| 3. Public Health | 11 |
| 4. Tourism | 11 |
| 5. Cross-Cutting | 11 |
| Strengths & Challenges | 12 |
| Opportunities | 17 |
| Desired Responses | 22 |
| Action Items | 24 |
| Effectiveness | 30 |
| Priority Action Items | 33 |
| Strategic Initiative 1: Workforce & Education | 33 |
| SI 1.1 - Increase Establishment of Businesses | 33 |
| SI 1.2 - Bolster Vocational Instruction | 33 |
| SI 1.3 - Increase Workforce Participation | 33 |
| Strategic Initiative 2: Infrastructure & Site Readiness | 34 |
| SI 2.1 - Expand Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure | 34 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| SI 2.2 - Improve and Leverage Key Roads to Attract Economic Growth | 34 |
| SI 2.3 - Improve Readiness of Development Sites | 34 |
| Strategic Initiative 3: Public Health | 35 |
| SI 3.1- Reduce the Impact of Addiction | 35 |
| SI 3.2 - Bolster Local Healthcare Assets | 35 |
| Strategic Initiative 4: Tourism | 36 |
| SI 4.1 - Increase Entertainment and Recreation Options | 36 |
| SI 4.2 - Increase Lodging Options for Visitors | 36 |
| SI 4.2 – Leverage Assets to Bolster the Tourism Industry | 36 |
| Strategic Initiative 5: Cross-Cutting | 37 |
| SI 5.1 - Improve the Visual Appeal of the Area | 37 |
| SI 5.2 – Collaborate with Local and Regional Economic Development Efforts | 37 |
| SI 5.3 – Promote Civic Engagement | 37 |
| Integrated Economic Development | 38 |
| Other Mason County Economic Development Studies | 39 |
| Measuring Success | 40 |
| Employment | 40 |
| Labor Force Participation | 41 |
| Wages | 42 |
| Health | 42 |
| Education | 44 |
| Summary | 45 |
| Appendix A - Priority Action Items -Average Score by Aspects of Effectiveness | 47 |
| Appendix B – Apple Grove and North Point Pleasant Development Site Maps | 49 |
| Apple Grove Development Site | 49 |
| North Point Pleasant Development Site | 50 |
| References | 51 |

Figures & Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Population Trends..... | 6 |
| Figure 2: Age and Workforce Trends | 6 |
| Figure 3: Strategic Initiatives | 10 |
| Figure 4: Integrated Economic Development Benefits..... | 38 |
| Figure 5: Integrated Economic Development Detriments..... | 38 |
| Figure 6: Average Wages for Mason and Area Counties (2010 through 2020) | 42 |
| | |
| Table 1: Top 10 Ranked Desired Responses from Survey Respondents | 23 |
| Table 2: Overall Top 12 Action Items | 24 |
| Table 3: Total Employment in Mason County - 2010 to 2020..... | 40 |
| Table 4: Employment by Major Industry in 2018..... | 40 |
| Table 5: Key Agricultural Data for Mason County..... | 41 |
| Table 6: 2019 Labor Force Breakdown | 41 |
| Table 7: General Health Outcomes | 42 |
| Table 8: Mortality Statistics..... | 42 |
| Table 9: Lifestyle and Diabetes Statistics | 43 |
| Table 10: Behavioral Health (2019) | 43 |
| Table 11: Child Health (2019)..... | 43 |
| Table 12: Clinical Care (2019)..... | 43 |
| Table 13: Social and Economic Factors (2019)..... | 44 |
| Table 14: Mason County School Enrollment..... | 44 |
| Table 15: Mason County Education Proficiency Rate by Subject..... | 44 |

INTRODUCTION

The Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) was tasked by the U.S. Economic Development Administration to conduct research for and produce this strategic economic development plan for Mason County, West Virginia. This plan was produced in partnership with the Mason County Development Authority (MCDA).

The purpose of this strategic plan is to assist Mason County and the MCDA by providing a guide for pursuit of economic development within the county. The planning process included the analysis of demographic trends, examination of existing studies and reports, interviews with key stakeholders, public engagement via an online survey, and follow up with MCDA Board members regarding perceived effectiveness of proposed action items. This work has resulted in the identification of priority planning issues and the development of goals and action items to attain them in the short, mid, and long-term.

COUNTY PROFILE

Key Assets and Recent Developments

Production Industries

In terms of growth-inducing economic activity, Mason County's most important industries are those that produce products for export (domestic or foreign). These are primarily goods-producing industries in manufacturing and power generation, both of which have reduced output in recent years. Agriculture is also a very important industry.

Agriculture: A large portion of Mason County is designated as farmland. While not all farms produce products for export, farms are a significant source of income and expertise for the county. In spite of shrinkage of the number of farms and principal operators, and the loss of what was once a substantial dairy industry, commodity sales increased by 94% for the county between 2007 and 2017, and crop sales grew by 155%.¹

Between 2007 and 2017 the number of principal farm operators declined. However, between 2012 and 2017 there was growth in: 1) the # of operators with farming as both primary and secondary occupation, 2) the # of younger farmers (age <65), and 3) the # of small farms (< 50 acres). There was also a small increase in the number very large farms (1,000+ acres) representing consolidation in line with trends for Appalachia.²

Power Generation: Mason County is a coal-impacted community due to the 2015 closure of Appalachian Power's 1.1-gigawatt Philip Sporn power plant. The plant represented an older generation of generators, its first unit having begun operation in 1950. The plant employed 120 when it retired. Some workers were able to get jobs at Mountaineer, the other and more modern coal-fired plant in the county, which began operating in 1980.

Manufacturing: The county's manufacturing base of chemicals and metals production has also contracted. In 2017, M&G Polymers closed, affecting about 275 workers.³ The facility restarted under the name APG Polytech and now employs about 150.⁴ Some of those losses were countered by the 2017 restart of Felman Industries, a producer of ferro-silicomanganese that began operating in 1952. Felman currently employs about 100, although it once employed 256. Felman's output fluctuates due to volatility in the steel industry and its need to compete on a global basis. In 2014, the facility negotiated a special electricity rate with Appalachian Power to enable continued operations.⁵

ICL-IP, a manufacturer of industrial chemicals and flame retardants, also maintains a facility in the county. The plant employs around 100 full-time people.

Mason County is also home to several sawmills and related wood products producers, but at least one of those has closed in recent years.

There is deep interest in attracting a new manufacturing facility that can take advantage of the county's proximity to regional final goods producers. A key example of this is the set of intermediate goods that form the supply chain for the polymer industry.

Horticulture: Horticulture is a bright spot in the county's goods-producing sector. This production is concentrated in the town of Mason. Bob's Market & Greenhouses is the largest establishment and produces a wide variety of flowers and vegetable seedlings for wholesale markets in the eastern U.S. This industry has seen growth in recent years.

In 2021, the Clements State Tree Nursery, a division of the West Virginia Division of Forestry ceased operating in Mason County. While the facility only employed three full-time equivalents, the site produced seedling trees in the county for 60 years.⁶ Some would like to see this property, or part of the nearby McClintic WMA, converted to a State Park with rental cabins to support the tourism industry.

Infrastructure

U.S. Route 35: U.S. 35 is a key road bisecting Mason County along the Kanawha River. The road is currently under construction to be converted from 2-lanes to 4-lanes, with announced completion in August 2021.⁷ The new 4-lane will replace the current 2-lane Kanawha Valley Road, which will tremendously reduce traffic on Kanawha Valley Road, the location of several historic properties and farms. The new road will also allow faster travel through Mason County and provides higher elevation views of the county.

U.S. 35 begins in Indiana and enters West Virginia from Ohio at the town of Henderson, just across the Kanawha River from Point Pleasant. The road will provide new opportunities to market Mason County's tourism and real estate assets. Henderson is an excellent location for a future West Virginia Welcome Center.

Development Sites

Mason County has designated two large properties as key development sites in hopes of attracting a new, modern manufacturing facility or outdoor recreation facility to bring jobs and investment to the area.

Apple Grove: Apple Grove is a 1,370-acre (400 acres contiguous) greenfield property owned by Appalachian Power and is a prime development site due to its size and location on a rail line and the Ohio River. Critical remaining needs at the site are high-speed broadband, sewer service, and improved road access.

North Point Pleasant: The North Point Pleasant site includes property occupied by the county's airport. It includes up to 1,300 acres (844 contiguous), all utilities, and is located on a rail line and the Ohio River.

Historical Sites

Mason County was the home of several Native American communities, including the Fort Ancients and Adena cultures. The third largest Adena burial mound found in West Virginia, the May Moore Mound, is located near the Ohio River between Apple Grove and Gallipolis Ferry and may have been built as early as 500 B.C.⁸ Later, members of the Shawnee tribe lived in the area.⁹

Mason County was also the site of some of the earliest military activity in the history of the United States. The 1774 **Battle of Point Pleasant** was fought between Virginia militiamen, led by Colonel Andrew Lewis (1720–1781), and an Algonquin confederation of Shawnee and Mingo warriors led by Shawnee Chief Cornstalk (ca. 1720–1777).¹⁰ A mural at Point Pleasant's Riverfront Park depicts the events of the battle. **Fort Randolph** is the preserved location of critical events around the conflict, including the murder of the captive Chief Cornstalk in 1777.¹¹



One of the longest-living Confederate Generals, Gen. John McCausland, lived and owned property in Mason County. Some of his houses and farm buildings still stand and are on the National Register of Historic Places, although there has been little preservation. These properties include Smithland Farm, Maplewood, and Grape Hill. Maplewood includes several Native American mounds and a slave cemetery.^{12 13}

Museums

The Mothman Museum – A museum devoted to the legend of Mothman, a cryptid first sighted in 1966 in Point Pleasant. The museum contains original newspaper coverage of the sightings and related media productions. Mothman maintains a devoted fan base, as evidenced by a plethora of merchandise, activity on Wikipedia, and growing attendance at the annual September Mothman Festival.



The State Farm Museum – A museum devoted to preservation of farm life and equipment. It includes an extensive taxidermy collection with the world's largest stuffed horse. Festivals held at the

museum include a gas and steam engine show, an antique tractor pull, a fall festival, and hayrides during the Mothman Festival.

The River Museum – A museum devoted to river life and commercial enterprise on the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers. The museum is currently being rebuilt, with plans to reopen in fall of 2021. The facility will host the Lakin Ray Cook Learning Center, a training center with riverboat simulators for inland waterway navigation.¹⁴

Planned **War Museum** focusing on the early American Indian Wars, including The Battle of Point Pleasant, as well as The Revolutionary War and The Civil War.

Recreation Assets

Riverfront Park – A park with murals depicting the events of the 1774 Battle of Point Pleasant between Virginia militiamen and Shawnee and Mingo warriors.

Tu-Endie-Wei Park – A park in Point Pleasant, at the confluence of the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers, honoring the resting place of Chief Cornstalk of the Shawnee.

Krodel Park – A community park in Point Pleasant with a fishing pond and camping. It is adjacent to the grounds of Fort Randolph.

Chief Cornstalk Wildlife Management Area (WMA) – This WMA is known for deer and turkey hunting.

McClintic WMA – This WMA is known for fishing and duck hunting. It borders the “TNT Area”, a WW II-era ordnance site where Mothman was originally reported to have been sighted, and which still contains concrete igloos used to store TNT in the 1940s.

McCausland WMA – This WMA was gifted to the State of WV in 2017 and is known for deer and turkey hunting.¹⁵

Letart Nature Park – A community park with courts, walking trails, ponds, and a pollinator station.

Quillen Park – A small community park in New Haven with a sweeping view of the Ohio River.

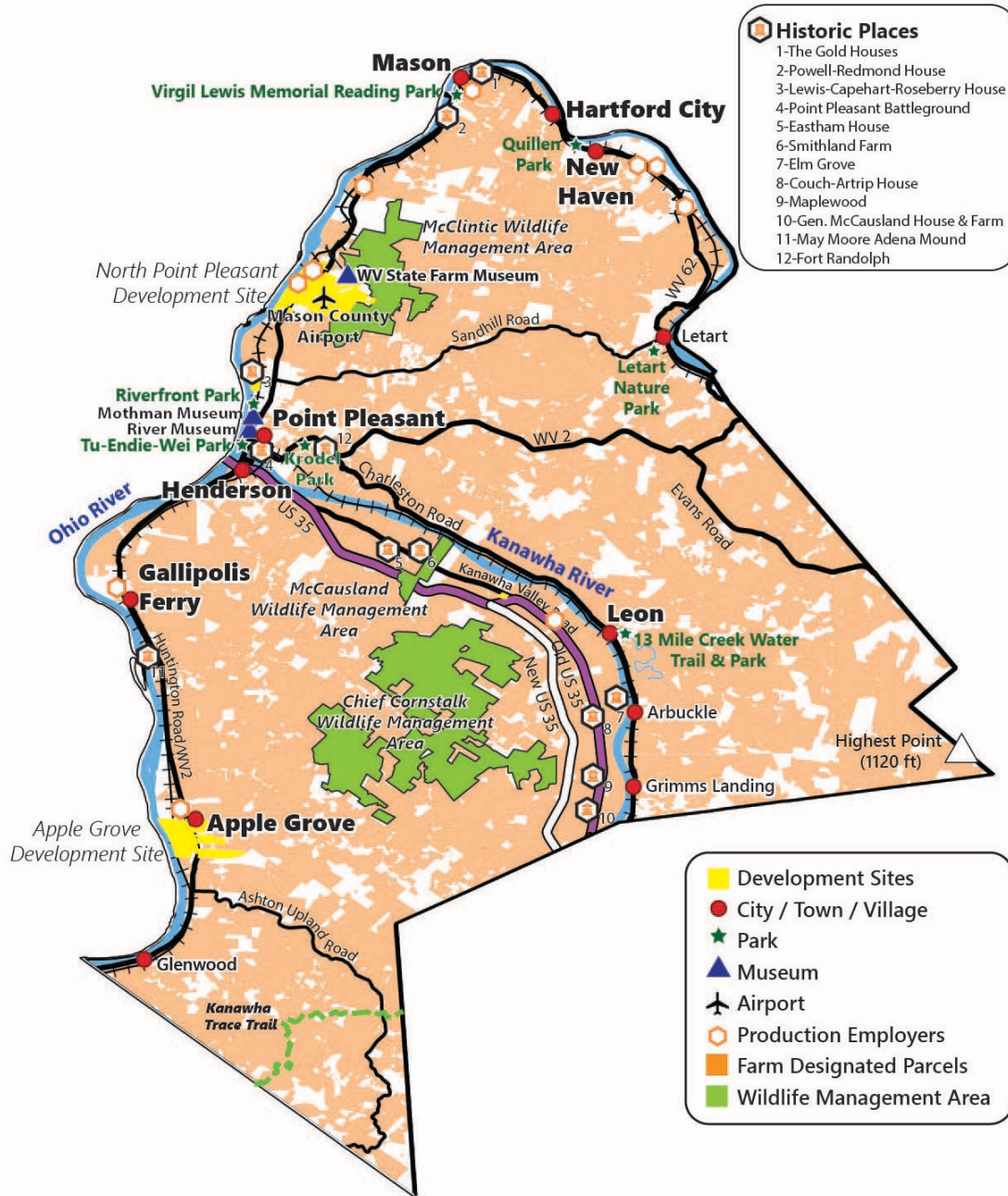
13-Mile Creek Water Trail & Park – A small park in Leon with water access for kayakers. 13-Mile Creek feeds into the Kanawha River at Leon.

Virgil Lewis Memorial Reading Park – A small sitting park in Mason dedicated to a West Virginia historian.

Kanawha Trace Trail – A challenging 31-mile hiking and running trail created in 1962 by connecting former bison and Native American trails.¹⁶ The trail begins in Cabell County, crosses into Mason County, and ends in Putnam County. It is maintained by Friends of the Kanawha Trace, which hosts the annual Kanawha Trace 50k/25k/10k race.



Map of Mason County



Population Characteristics

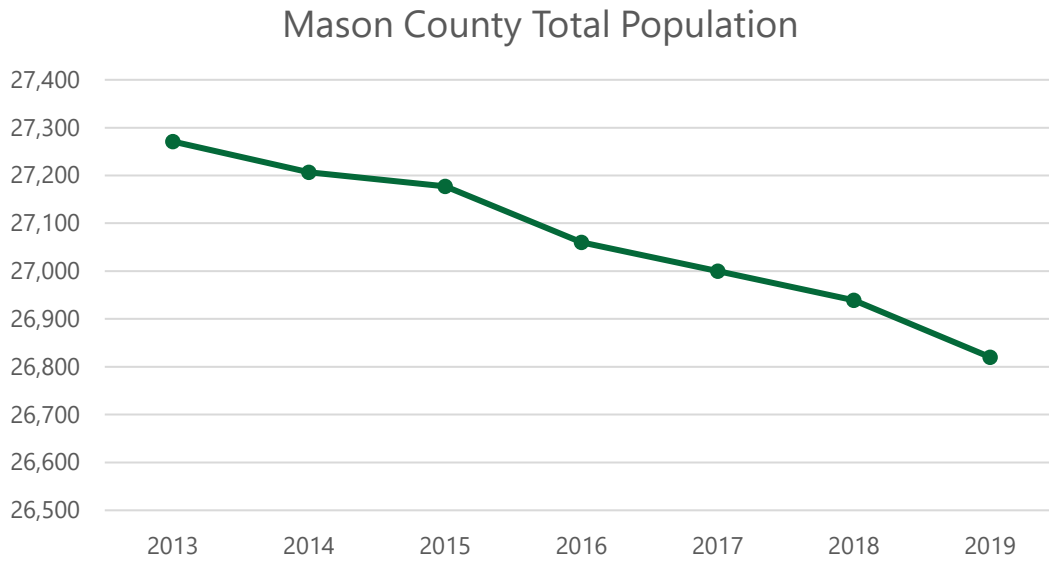
Key Population Centers

2019 population estimates for towns and cities with more than 500 people:

- City of Point Pleasant – population of 4,062 (peak of 6,100 in early 1970s)
- Town of New Haven – population of 1,464 (peak of around 1,700 in late 1970s)
- Town of Mason – population of 936 (peak of 1,400 around 1980)
- Town of Hartford City – population of 594 (peak of 900+ in 1870s)

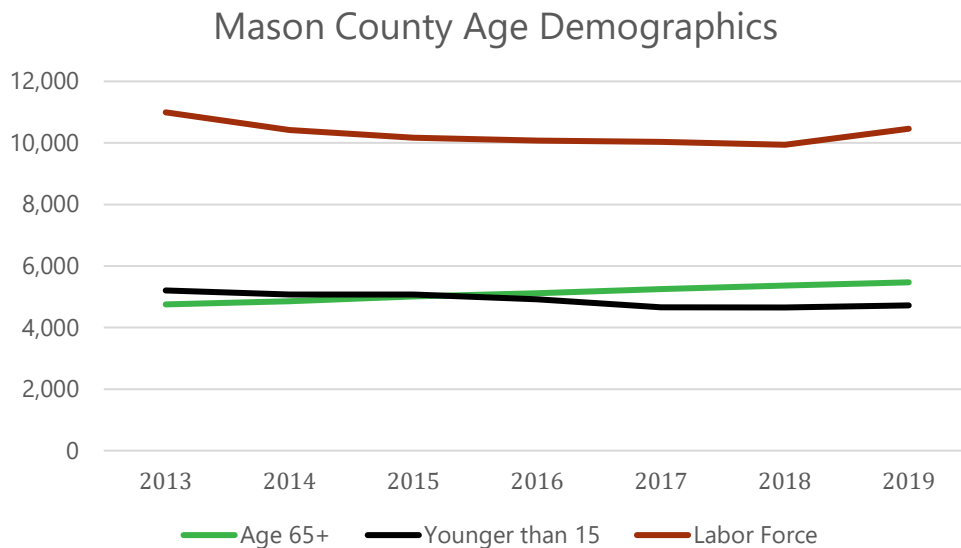
The 2019 population of Mason County was 26,820. Between 2013 and 2019 the county's population declined by about 450, or 1.7%. It is hoped that these proposed development efforts will increase the number of people living and working in Mason County. An impact of COVID-19 was a decline in the labor force in 2020.

Figure 1: Population Trends



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

Figure 2: Age and Workforce Trends



STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Strategic Planning process was conducted to document the priorities of Mason County with respect to economic development efforts. These efforts seek to improve work prospects and quality of life for its residents. The plan highlights and identifies ways to build on the existing assets of the county to address barriers to growth and reverse the economic contraction experienced over the last decade.

SCORE Analysis

The strategic planning approach for Mason County was based on a SCORE (Strengths, Challenges, Options, Responses, and Effectiveness) process. The SCORE process lays out these elements and prioritizes where resources should be directed by emphasizing areas with the most need and the most ability to be impactful. This plan:

- Addresses the top issues and desired outcomes for the county.
- Is relevant to short, mid-, and long-term timeframes.
- Contains realistic recommendations and action items.
- Contains metrics for measuring success.
- Will be as a guide for integrated economic development efforts for several years.

The SCORE Process

Concurrent Economic Development Efforts

Significant economic development work was underway in Mason County prior to development of this plan. The participants in that work are strengths for the county and the intention of this strategic plan is to build on those efforts. These primary organizations and some of their efforts are:

- **Mason County Development Authority (MCDA)** - Designating, preparing, and marketing large acreage sites as development properties, and providing connections and meetings regarding multiple economic development topics.
- **Point Pleasant Main Street** – Marketing and rebranding of Point Pleasant, the county’s primary town center and location of the annual Mothman Festival.
- **Mason County Chamber of Commerce** – A key entity devoted to supporting and connecting businesses that operate in the county.
- **Mason County Convention and Visitors Bureau** – Maintains an online visitor guide and is a link between local business and visitors.
- **Appalachian Power** – A major employer that supports existing businesses and owns and markets development sites.
- **Pleasant Valley Hospital** – A major employer that also offers public health and wellness-related initiatives and recruits medical professionals.
- **Mason County Health Department** – Provides community health services including personal health monitoring, immunizations, and overall health promotion.
- **Mason County Board of Education** – Prepares students to participate in the workforce and trains workers to meet the needs of industry at its Career Center.

- **Marshall University's Pleasant Valley Campus** – Prepares future workers to meet the needs of industry, with emphasis on careers in Nursing and Social Work.
- **Robert C. Byrd Institute (RCBI) at Marshall University** – A designated EDA University Center that assists small manufacturers and agricultural producers with tooling, training, apprenticeships, and start-up business assistance.
- **Region 2 Planning and Development Council** – A lead organization involved in infrastructure grant applications for Mason and other counties in the region.

Meetings with the Mason County Development Authority

CBER staff attended a series of meetings with the MCDA Director, staff, and Board members for the purpose of validating the SCORE process and to create a preliminary list of SCORE elements.

One-on-One Interviews with MCDA Board Members

CBER conducted 20 interviews with members of the MCDA Board. The objective of these interviews was to understand the key strengths and challenges of Mason County, to learn about ongoing development efforts and to get ideas for next steps. The results were used to refine the preliminary proposed strategic initiatives and to further develop the list of potential action items.

Individuals interviewed represented a diverse array of establishments within the Mason County economy. These included leaders in economic development, manufacturing, banking, insurance, the public school system, healthcare, as well as current and former elected officials. The strategic initiatives were selected and ranked based on this feedback and used to create a public survey.

List of Interviewees

- John Musgrave – *Director, Mason County Development Authority*
- Brian Billings – *Mayor of Point Pleasant, WV*
- Bruce Riffle – *Mayor of Leon, WV*
- Bryan F. Stepp – *Exec. VP, The Ohio Valley Bank Company*
- Cheryl Moore – *Director, Mason County Career Center*
- Dennis Brumfield – *Certified Public Accountant*
- Eddie Lanham – *Sr. VP, Farmers Bank*
- Homer Preece – *Director, Marshall University Mid-Ohio Valley Campus*
- Jack Cullen – *Superintendent, Mason County Schools*
- Jack Rossi – *Retired accountant*
- Jeff Noblin – *CEO, Pleasant Valley Hospital*
- Lanny Williamson – *Retired, dairy and lumber industries*
- Leigh Ann Shepard – *First VP/Ohio Valley Region Manager, City Bank*
- Mario Liberatore – *President, Ohio Valley Bank WV*
- Robert "Bob" McMillon – *Owner, Mid-Atlantic Construction*
- Rocky Sturgeon – *Plant Manager, M&G APG Polytech*
- Roger Steele – *Plant Manager, ICL-IP*

- Scott Barnitz - *VP, Bob's Market & Greenhouses*
- Scott Brewer - *Retired Carpenter, former candidate for House of Delegates*
- Steve Cavender - *Retired banker*
- Ty Somerville - *Insurance Agent, State Farm*

Online Surveys

The public survey was available from May 1 to May 31, 2021, and was distributed by partners at the MCDA, the Mason County Board of Education, Pleasant Valley Hospital, and Marshall University's Pleasant Valley campus. 109 individuals participated.

The survey instructed participants to, 1) rank the 5 Strategic Initiatives in terms of importance to Mason County, 2) rank the desired responses for each initiative, and 3) mark the top 3 action items that would be most effective in creating the response. Full results are presented in Appendix A.

Incorporation of Stakeholder Feedback

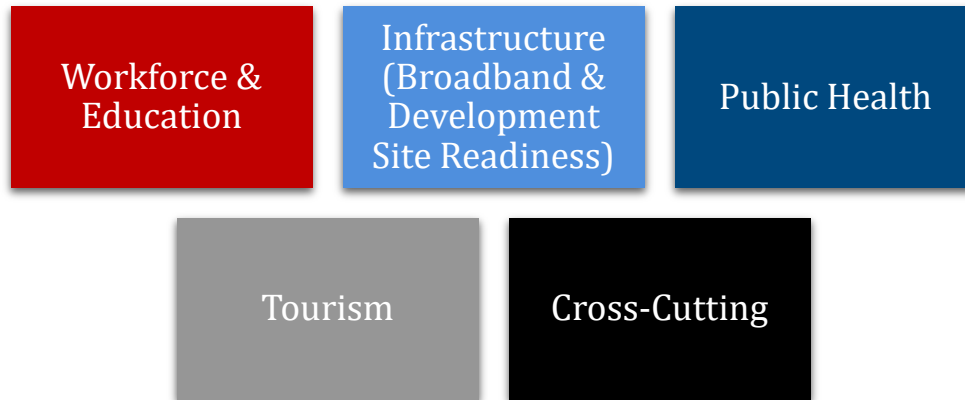
The results of the public survey were used to create the Strategic Plan by tallying the choices of the survey takers. This plan identifies and prioritize economic development needs in Mason County under 5 Strategic Initiatives representing 5 areas of interconnected need and opportunity.

A recurring theme of the feedback received is the understanding and observation that the initiatives are intertwined and must be pursued simultaneously.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The following strategic initiatives are the product of the community and stakeholder engagement described above and are listed in order of importance to the County.

Figure 3: Strategic Initiatives



1. Workforce and Education

Employment options are the heart of economic development. Successful economic development means growth in the number of jobs in an economy, especially high-paying jobs in the modern economy (technology and advanced manufacturing) and strong workforce participation. The rank of 1st for this strategic initiative reflects awareness of the connections between employment options, the presence of a healthy labor pool for employers, and a desire to play a larger role in the regional economy.

3 of the Top 10 desired responses are workforce solutions tied to increasing the level of engagement between employers, vocational educators, and future employees, and placing more workers at area firms.

In Mason County there is concern about academic performance in middle school and high school, insufficient focus on non-college careers, and low workforce participation, as well as overall lack of employment options. Top solutions are to elevate the importance of occupations in skilled trades and expand youth employment options, with a goal to improve the ease of hiring and to reduce turnover for key employers. Growing news business through entrepreneurship is also considered very important.

2. Infrastructure and Site Readiness

While this initiative is ranked 2nd, one of the desired responses - Improving Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure - is the highest ranked desired response of the entire strategic planning exercise. Connectivity, via faster and more accessible broadband infrastructure, is seen as a vital component of multiple aspects of the economy including education, healthcare, and tourism, as well as the ability to recruit remote workers to live in the county.

Improving Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure is the #1 ranked desired response of the entire strategic planning exercise.

Other focus is on ensuring key development sites have adequate infrastructure to attract investment: roads, water, and sewer. Upgrading Rt 2 to 4-lane to enable more industrial use is one long-term goal, as are rural road improvements. Many would like a Welcome Center on Rt 35 near Henderson to take advantage of the new 4-lane US-35 and to promote the State and Mason County. Development of water and sewer infrastructure along Rt 35 has also been proposed.

3. Public Health

Priorities are to preserve the county's critical healthcare assets, namely its hospital and physicians, to regain healthcare services lost (ex: birthing), and to increase the behavioral and mental health services available to individuals with substance use disorder (SUD).

Another area of focus is to improve citizen health by increasing access to hiking and biking trails, and to farmer's markets and healthy eating resources like gardening and cooking skills.

4. Tourism

A rank of 4th reveals the county's practical sense of high-value economic development being tied to larger-scale economic activity like manufacturing, in contrast to typically lower paid work in tourism. However, there is great pride in the county's agricultural, historical, and cultural assets, and a strong interest in growing the economic value enabled by these assets. The county wants to leverage the success of The Mothman Festival in September and extend visitor stays. A top identified need is for more lodging options, with cabins the top choice. A marina is another long-standing recreational need.

The tourism industry can be bolstered by capitalizing on the new US-35 and agritourism. Existing tourism assets like the Fairgrounds, the Ohio River and community parks can be used to strengthen connection between the assets and provide visitors with more destinations.

5. Cross-Cutting

The cross-cutting strategic initiative is based on broad strengths and challenges that do not fit the targeted strategic initiatives but represent bigger picture ideals. Some actions are more community development, rather than economic development, but reflect a thought that enhanced community pride would help position the county to attract more outside investment. These responses regard collaboration with other counties in the region, promoting civic engagement, and improving the visual appeal of the county.

Reducing the Impact of Addiction is the #3 ranked desired response for the entire strategic plan.



Improving the Visual Appeal of the County is the #2 ranked desired response for the entire strategic plan.

Strengths & Challenges

Workforce & Education

| Strengths | Corresponding Challenges |
|---|---|
| <p>Existing industries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional industries of power generation, manufacturing, agriculture, barging/towing, hunting • Horticulture industry is growing • Tourism industry is growing | <p>Economic options are limited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several traditional industries are in decline (ex: power generation, manufacturing, sawmills, dairy farming). • Difficult to start own business venture • COVID-19 impacts |
| <p>Existing educational and career training facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated teachers in public education • Simulated workforce program in high school career & technical education (CTE) classes • EDGE dual college credit program for high school students • Free 13th year of school option at the career center • Adult access to CTE programs (EX: healthcare professions) | <p>Poor Education Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low math and reading scores on standardized tests • Declining population and school enrollment • Hard to find and hire vocational instructors • Not enough support for vocational careers in high schools <p>Workforce issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard for industry to fill manufacturing positions • Workforce training programs provide very few candidates • Work ethic of new/younger workers • High employee turnover |
| <p>Many regional resources available to assist startups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF)/ Partner Community Capital • Country Roads Angel Network • First Microloan of WV – for physical assets • BlueTree Allied Angels • Mountain State Capital • iCenter at Marshall • Robert C. Byrd Institute's startup services for entrepreneurs | <p>Barriers to Starting Businesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to access resources to start a business • Time required to operate a business • Having enough working capital to maintain a business • Financial risk |

Infrastructure & Site Readiness

| Strengths | Corresponding Challenges |
|---|--|
| <p>Several sites available for industrial development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apple Grove (1,370 acres, greenfield, riverfront, rail) • North Point Pleasant (up to 1,300 acres, riverfront, rail line, air strip, all utilities) • Pleasant Point – 13 acres • Appalachian Industrial Park – 84 acres, rail line • Mason County Industrial Park – 170 acres, rail line • Phil Sporn – former power plant, waterfront • Environmental site assessments underway via grant funds. | <p>Status of industrial properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not many "shovel-ready" sites for large-scale development. • Dilapidated /abandoned industrial properties. • Inadequate broadband infrastructure. • Not enough access to the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers. • Inadequate road access for some properties. |
| <p>Key infrastructure assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mason County Airport – 224 acres, 4,000-ft runway • Dark broadband fiber in place in several locations • 2020 Mason County Broadband Assessment report <p>Drive Forward WV road upgrade projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reroute of Rt 35 as 4-lane – expected completion in 2021 • Calispell Ridge Road Bridge - planned completion in 2021 • Tribble Road/Capehart Bridge - planned completion in 2021 <p>Other planned infrastructure upgrades:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apple Grove Sewer – in the design phase • Apple Grove Broadband – planning study complete in 2020 • New Haven sewer upgrade – engineering plan funded • Mason sewer upgrade – funding application submitted • County water extension on old Rt 35 to Putnam County line, + provision for as-needed extensions on new Rt 35 • Sand Hill Road sewer – construction scheduled for 2024 • County water extensions on Flatfoot and Duncan Creek • J2Y35 Water Association upgrade - Spring of 2022 | <p>Needed infrastructure improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor cellphone service in many areas. • Sewer system renovation needed in some towns (ex: Mason and New Haven). • Several degraded back roads. • No broadband services in some areas. |

Public Health

| Strengths | Corresponding Challenges |
|---|--|
| <p>Existing healthcare facilities and professional programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasant Valley Hospital (PVH), its assets (staff and equipment), wellness programs and school-based clinics • Valley Health offices in Point Pleasant and Gallipolis Ferry • Pleasant Valley Nursing & Rehabilitation Center • Facilities nearby (Holzer Clinic, Cabell Huntington Hospital) • Medical technical training program at the career center • Nursing program at MU Ohio Valley campus • Ohio Valley Bank's medical school loan forgiveness program | <p>Shrinking/at-risk healthcare assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PVH has had to reduce services to remain solvent. • Attracting/retaining healthcare professionals is an issue. • Local use of PVH lags size of population in county. |
| <p>Existing organizations devoted to public health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mason County Health Department • Pretera Center in Point Pleasant • Recovery houses • Housing and food services for the homeless • Statewide efforts (Ex: Stigma Free WV, Help & Hope in WV) | <p>Poor health outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addiction • Smoking • Mental health-related/anxiety • Chronic disease – diabetes is especially prevalent |
| <p>Existing assets/efforts to improve fitness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PVH's school-based athletic training programs (Get Up & Go, Outdoor Youth Expo) and Wellness Center • Community centers in Mason, New Haven, Henderson, Letart, Baden, Southside, Pt Pleasant (newly funded) • Rivers to Ridges Heritage Trail bike routes and races | <p>Inadequate access to recreation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unimproved outdoor recreation areas • Lack of public parks in many parts of the county • Lack of hiking/walking trails |
| <p>Nutrition efforts and expertise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area food banks • Agricultural industry and farming community • Farmers markets in Point Pleasant and New Haven • Small, nearly full-service grocers | <p>Nutrition-related health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh food not accessible for many, especially seniors. • Obesity and diabetes are prevalent and increasing. • The southern, central, and eastern parts of the county do not have a full-service grocery store. |

Tourism

| Strengths | Corresponding Challenges |
|--|--|
| <p>History and Legends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native American history • Battle of Point Pleasant • Civil War history • WW II WV Ordnance Works site • Mothman legend <p>Many types of tourist assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverfront (Ohio and Kanawha Rivers) • Pastoral/farmland with some agritourism (ex: u-pick) • West Virginia State Farm Museum • Hilltops with river views • Historic downtown Point Pleasant with retail and dining • Mothman Museum • Point Pleasant River Museum – currently under renovation. • Planned War Museum (pre-Revolutionary through Civil) • Rivers to Ridges Heritage Trail bike routes and races (with Putnam County) | <p>Inadequate infrastructure to serve visitors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband is limited. • Cellphone service not uniformly available. • Rural roads unimproved in some areas. <p>Not enough lodging options in the county:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 1 hotel in the county (no chain hotels). • No Airbnb or Vrbo establishments. • RV campgrounds are near capacity. • Several hotels and B&Bs just over the river in Ohio. <p>General barriers to expansion of tourism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilapidated industrial, commercial, and residential properties. • Not enough restaurants or grocery stores. • Perception that there are not enough options for multi-day visits. |
| <p>Existing recreation areas and parks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Cornstalk WMA (Southside) • McClintic WMA (Point Pleasant) • Tu-Endie-Wei Park (Point Pleasant) • Krodel Park (Point Pleasant) • Riverfront Park (Point Pleasant) • Letart Nature Park (Letart) • Quillen Park (New Haven) • Virgil Lewis Memorial Reading Park (Mason) • Kanawha Trace Trail | <p>Undeveloped or poorly maintained recreation areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads to Chief Cornstock are not paved. • McClintic is connected to WV Ordnance Works, a NPL Superfund site that is only partially reclaimed. • Some communities need more public spaces/parks. • Some community parks need upgraded. • Commercial barge activity conflicts with recreational boating. |

Cross-Cutting

These broader strengths and challenges do not fit neatly into targeted strategic initiatives but represent bigger picture aspects that are worthy of action. Some are more community development, rather than economic development, but reflect a common thought that enhanced civic engagement/community pride would help position the county to attract more outside investment.

| Strengths | Corresponding Challenges |
|---|--|
| <p>Many local organizations are already working on key economic development issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mason County Development Authority • Main Street Point Pleasant • Chamber of Commerce • Mason County Convention & Visitor’s Bureau • Appalachian Power | <p>Resources are strained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a border county, easy to lose economic activity to Ohio. • Competing development organizations. • Need more grant writers/ grant writing assistance. • Tracking and utilizing existing economic development initiatives already underway. • Shrinking/aging population. |
| <p>Positive Quality of Life factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low rates of property and violent crime. • Low property costs compared to urban areas. • Real estate sales currently strong. • Potential for relocation destination due to anti-congestion trends prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. | <p>Negative Quality of Life factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of dilapidated industrial, commercial, and residential properties. • Presence of trash along roadways and creeks. • Lack of new housing, particularly rental housing, and retirement housing. |

Opportunities

The strategy of creating projects to spur economic development is well established. By understanding the assets of Mason County and its barriers to economic growth, this plan positions the county to build on those assets as the path toward economic expansion. Opportunities are available to acquire federal funding to move these ideas forward, and to match those funds with State and private resources.

An essay titled “The Logic of Economic Development” identifies the ultimate benchmark of economic development as **improved quality of life**, which it defines as a function of increased community capacity (human and physical assets), private sector capacity (workforce, facilities, and supply chains) including entrepreneurial capacity, and the capacity to be innovative (support new processes and take risks).¹⁷ The article goes on to state that “government is the principal inclusive vehicle for organizing economic, social, and civic life.” It is thus logical that the primary resources to achieve these goals stem from government funding, in the form of grants and regulatory initiatives.

As about two-thirds of Mason County residents live in rural areas, these strategies emphasize these assets and challenges.¹⁸ Three modern determinants of rural development in the U.S. are: 1) the negative externalities of urban congestion; 2) high costs of urban space; and 3) attractive rural amenities.¹⁹ Mason County is well-positioned by these measures due to its **affordable real estate** and **agricultural resources**.

Positioning Mason County to attract people looking to leave urban areas is a high level but indirect objective of this plan. This positioning will also improve quality of life for residents. Other more conventional economic development objectives i.e., recruiting a new manufacturing facility, are also desired by the county but are not the sole focus of this plan.

Trends and Synergies

The action items identified in this plan are in sync with national and regional economic development efforts.

The State of West Virginia acknowledges that **broadband** is a necessary element of economic growth. The WV Broadband Enhancement Council is focused on expanding internet service in unserved and underserved areas of West Virginia. To enable this, the West Virginia Legislature passed HB 2002, which established the WV Office of Broadband, with a primary duty to “Explore any and all ways to expand access to broadband services, including, but not limited to, middle mile, last mile, and wireless applications.” The bill also gives counties and municipalities control over how broadband is developed and operated, by allowing flexibility in partnerships to install necessary infrastructure.²⁰

An AEP pilot project in Mingo and Logan Counties to build and expand the broadband distribution network is a potential model for county-wide implementation. This project is an innovative regulatory initiative that takes advantage of the distribution assets of the electric utility that are already in place.

Mason County has also taken some steps by commissioning a Broadband Assessment report by the Blue Ridge Advisory Group in 2020.²¹ That report found that 24% of households in the county are underserved compared to six percent nationally.

Workforce is at the top of the list of Mason County's economic development priorities. In education, there is a need to **elevate non-college skills and occupations**. The county is likely part of a pattern within many rural communities in which educational systems emphasize skills that are bound for out-migration. This is understandable as communities want their youth to have more opportunities than what is available locally, but it results in loss of talent and population.²² In addition, because most local employers do not require a college degree, this focus may reduce **labor force participation**, as non-college bound graduates feel disenfranchised. The Mason County Development Authority has already held a series of meetings with the Board of Education and major employers to discuss these issues. Continuing these talks is a next step for the process.

Expansion of business and **entrepreneurship** is seen as an important correlate to economic development. According to some, the best role for local government (and development groups) may be to take actions to improve the business environment, like expansion of broadband and improve quality of life aspects. Other roles could be to facilitate events that bring entrepreneurs and investors together, rather than creating formal alliances with entrepreneurship organizations,²³ to help align diverse interests such as corporate, philanthropic, nonprofit, and educational resources,²⁴ or to provide support to would-be business operators on how to start a business.

There are many resources to assist entrepreneurs. Locally, the **Mason County Chamber of Commerce**, with a mission "to aggressively promote, support and retain business in the county," is the most knowledgeable regarding business activity in the area.²⁵ In nearby Huntington, resources include the iCenter at the MU Lewis College of Business, Generation West Virginia's NewForce program, RCBI's business services, Unlimited Futures, Mountwest CTC's Entrepreneur Certificate program, and CoWorks.

Mason County has worked hard to set aside property for large-scale industrial development. Its **development site readiness** goals are to ensure that broadband services, sewer service, and road access are suitable to attract investment to its prime sites. Amenities and incentives are often not enough to bring businesses to an area without shovel-ready land. However, because even shovel-ready land does not guarantee new employment, this is one of several priorities for the county.

Regarding public health, it is noted that **health is a major factor in economic growth**. "Health affects GDP directly through productivity gains and indirectly through educational gains."²⁶ The prevalence of **substance use disorder (SUD)** is seen as the key public health issue for Mason County and a primary reason for low workforce participation in the county.

Many resources are devoted to SUD and efforts are underway in Mason County. However, additional work is needed to help more individuals with SUD realize their

potential. The “Rural Community Action Guide” by the Office of National Drug Control Policy has several recommendations. These are to: 1) build a continuum of outpatient and inpatient services with medication-assisted treatment, psychosocial treatment, mental health, and other services, 2) expand access to telemedicine, 3) invest in alternative treatment delivery like mobile clinics and home visits, 4) increase the number of professionals practicing in rural areas, and 5) encourage peer-to-peer programs.²⁷

The closure of many **rural hospitals** in the last few years has been very distressing for those communities, including several in West Virginia. These closures are tied to local population decline and competition from regional hospitals. While Pleasant Valley Hospital (PVH) is thriving, losing the hospital would be detrimental to the economy. Nationwide, health insurance is the largest component of nonwage compensation (26 percent), and health care is one of the largest categories of consumer spending (eight percent).²⁸ Growing the value of the healthcare sector is integrated development goal.

Although agriculture has been in decline, **Mason County is a farming county**. For some analysts, linking rural economic development to agriculture no longer makes sense because most small farms are financially viable only by access to non-farm income.²⁹ However, the county does want to bolster its farming roots, grow **agritourism**, and use farmers markets to create more local food connection to residents and visitors. Some research is quite positive about the value of agritourism as an entrepreneurial activity and its ability support economic development, particularly for “production methods that are conducive to human interactions.”³⁰

In 2019, the USDA conducted a county level study of agritourism in the U.S. which found that agritourism revenue more than tripled between 2002 and 2017. The study described agritourism “hot spots” as largely being located close to urban areas. The study found that female operators, older operators, and large ranches with cattle or horses are most likely to have agritourism income. It also found that being located near natural amenities or in close proximity to other outdoor activities had a positive impact.³¹

Marshall University offers a bachelor’s degree program in Specialty Agriculture that includes course in agritourism. The program focuses on sustainable, high-yield agriculture in mountainous regions and small land areas, with attention to technological advances improving yield, and business practices to support small farmers.³²

Sources of Funding

Rural areas like Mason County that are experiencing job loss and population decline often do not have the perceived return on investment to attract enough private money to cover planned projects. This is especially true for large infrastructure projects.

Several federal agencies are devoted to economic development in rural places like Mason County. The foremost of these are the **Appalachian Regional Commission** (ARC) and the **Economic Development Administration** (EDA) within the U.S. Department of Commerce. Special funds have been set aside for economic development in coal-

impacted communities like Mason. The **US Department of Agriculture** (USDA) also maintains several grant opportunities.

Federal funding is available for economic development projects of all sizes and smaller grants are available from non-profits like **Benedum Foundation**. Large projects will be public-private-partnerships, particularly infrastructure projects involving water/sewer, road building and utilities. **Appalachian Power** is a key private sector partner.

For broadband, a variety of funding opportunities like E-Rate, USDA, the **Rural Digital Opportunity Fund**, the CARES Act, **the American Rescue Plan** and other COVID relief funds allow innovative approaches. The WV Broadband Enhancement Council is responsible for distributing \$138 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to expand broadband in the State.³³

Funding to expand the county's career center programs may be available via **the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act**, established for States to award in development and implementation of CTE programs.³⁴

Funding for start-ups is available via several organizations including RCBI, Natural Capital Investment Fund, Country Roads Angel Network, First Microloan of WV, BlueTree Allied Angels, and Mountain State Capital. Some of these entities are willing to assist businesses that are not able to procure capital through traditional lenders. Locally, the Peoples Federal Credit Union provides **SBA 504 Loans**,³⁵ which are long-term, fixed rate loans available from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for existing buildings or land, new facilities, long-term machinery and equipment, or the improvement or modernization of land, streets, utilities, parking lots and landscaping.³⁶

The **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has Community Mental Health Services and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant programs for states to implement activities to prevent and treat substance use disorder.³⁷ The **Marshall University Center of Excellence in Recovery** provides training, technical assistance, and support services to regional initiatives.³⁸

The USDA's **Agricultural Marketing Service** supports a variety of initiatives like local food promotion and regional food systems.³⁹ The WV Department of Agriculture has an **Ag Business** program that markets West Virginia grown and made products.⁴⁰ The **WV Farmers Market Association** has funds to support ecommerce platforms, to do a Rapid Market Assessment and to support sanitation stations at markets. RCBI's **Agricultural Innovations** is an initiative to improve opportunities for the agricultural economy.⁴¹

The **Tamarack Foundation for the Arts** is a local organization with interest in funding local artists.⁴²

Project Partners

This strategic plan identifies the county's priority areas for direction of development project efforts. Sources of grant funding are available that match these needs.

A critical component of economic development is having the resources to organize and apply for grant-funded projects. It may be beneficial for several of Mason County's economic development entities to partner on a project that reflects a unified vision and set of objectives. In addition to the MCDA, these entities include **Point Pleasant Main Street**, the **Mason County Chamber of Commerce**, and Mason County's public service organizations including the Health Department, the Board of Education, and the Convention & Visitor's Bureau. The support of Appalachian Power, Pleasant Valley Hospital, and other employers has been very important for current development projects would continue to be going forward. When federal funding is needed to pursue a project, it is crucial to have the optimal lead organization and evidence of broad support across many stakeholder groups.

Another important project partner already working with Mason County is the **Region 2 Planning and Development Council**, which is involved with infrastructure projects. They are expected to maintain a key role in these ongoing efforts. Other State agencies, like the WV Department of Education and the WV Broadband Enhancement Council, will also play important roles.

Once these partnerships have been created, and projects identified, CBER can be available to provide additional assistance with development of projects and application for grant funding.

Desired Responses

The planning process began with a set of 18 desired responses within the Strategic Initiatives that reflect changes the County would like to see. Per the survey responses, these were narrowed to 15 responses, listed in the order of importance for each initiative.

Workforce and Education

1. **Increase establishment of local business** – Entrepreneurship is a foundation for a robust economy, including agripreneurship (value-added forest, fishing, hunting, and farm products like tours, brewery, farm-to-table dinners, slaughterhouse, prepared foods, and crafts). A recurring topic of discussion is realization of opportunities to attract new manufacturers that are suppliers of intermediate goods to existing industries in the area, namely the polymer industry. **(#6 priority)**
2. **Bolster vocational instruction** – Many industries report a shortage of workers, particularly in the skilled trades, and a willingness by younger workers to remain with a firm. Tailoring student training to the needs of area producers (horticulture, utilities, and manufacturing) can help employers fill jobs. **(#7 priority)**
3. **Increase workforce participation** – High workforce participation is tied to stable employment options as well as health and educational outcomes. **(#10 priority)**

Infrastructure and Site Readiness

1. **Expand broadband and cellular infrastructure** – High-speed internet is a foundation of healthcare, education, commerce, remote work, and quality of life and will be even more important in economy of the future. **(#1 priority)**
2. **Improve and leverage key roads to attract economic growth** - The new U.S. 35 may increase traffic counts near Chief Cornstalk WMA and other destinations. Other road improvements are needed to enable access to development sites. **(#5 priority)**
3. **Improve readiness of development sites** - Mason County has some of the most ideal greenfield development properties in West Virginia but several lack key utilities and accessibility.

Public Health

1. **Reduce Impact of Addiction** – The prevalence of substance use disorder (SUD) is suppressing economic growth. More mental and behavioral health resources should be devoted to treat and support individuals with SUD. **(#3 priority)**
2. **Bolster Local Healthcare Assets** – Preservation of local healthcare knowledge and skills is important to the county and supports economic options. The recent cut of birthing services at the hospital was cited as a big loss to the community.
3. **Improve Health Outcomes** – Healthy people are healthy workers, who are vitally important to existing business and business recruitment. Proposed actions items relate to physical activity, lifestyle, and nutrition.

Tourism

1. **Increase entertainment and recreation options** – Increasing the diversity of destinations and options for multi-day visits will give tourists more reasons to stay in the county and improve quality of life for residents. **(#4 priority)**
2. **Increase lodging options for visitors** – The county has very few options for lodging. There is only one hotel and no offerings on Airbnb or Vrbo. **(#8 priority)**
3. **Leverage Assets to bolster the tourism industry** – Adding places and destination events can leverage existing tourism assets and help expand the industry.

Cross-Cutting

1. **Improve the visual appeal of the area** – Eyesores in the form of trash and dilapidated property are barriers to tourism and reduce quality of life. Public art can enhance tourist assets. **(#2 priority)**
2. **Collaborate with local and regional economic development efforts** – Identifying partners to help attract investment will leverage additional resources and may help move the county forward more quickly. **(#9 priority)**
3. **Promote civic engagement** – Acting on the mindset to “leave things better than you found them” will help the county thrive.

Within each strategic initiative, survey respondents were asked to rank the importance of each desired response. The ranked orders were weighted by the number of votes for 1st (most important) and 2nd (runner up) to reveal priorities. These are from a total of 109 survey participants.

Table 1: Top 10 Ranked Desired Responses from Survey Respondents

| Rank | Desired Response | # 1st | # 2nd | Strategic Initiative |
|------|--|-------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Expand Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure | 58 | 23 | Infrastructure and Site Readiness |
| 2 | Improve the Visual Appeal of the Area | 50 | 36 | Cross-Cutting |
| 3 | Reduce Impact of Addiction | 49 | 17 | Public Health |
| 4 | Increase Entertainment and Recreation Options | 34 | 32 | Tourism |
| 5 | Improve and Leverage Key Roads to Attract Economic Growth | 27 | 39 | Infrastructure and Site Readiness |
| 6 | Increase Establishment of Businesses | 28 | 27 | Workforce and Education |
| 7 | Bolster Vocational Instruction | 27 | 29 | Workforce and Education |
| 8 | Increase Lodging Options for Visitors | 23 | 35 | Tourism |
| 9 | Collaborate with Local and Regional Economic Development Efforts | 25 | 29 | Cross-Cutting |
| 10 | Increase Workforce Participation | 27 | 19 | Workforce and Education |

Action Items

A total of 115 action items were initially proposed and reduced to 34 based on survey and interview results. Survey respondents were asked to select the Top 3 action items for each Desired Response. Items that received at least 50% of votes were included. 20 items were selected as priority areas ([see page 32](#)), with combined actions to expand broadband and bolster vocational instruction.

Table 2: Overall Top 12 Action Items

| Rank | Action Item | Strategic Initiative | Desired Response | # of Votes |
|------|--|---------------------------------|---|------------|
| 1 | Increase the number of internet service providers (ISPs). | Infrastructure & Site Readiness | Expand Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure | 69 |
| 2 | Create a plan to ensure adequate water and sewer at key development sites. | Infrastructure & Site Readiness | Improve Readiness of Development Sites | 67 |
| 3 | Add new Career Center tracks for unsupported industries. | Workforce & Education | Increase workforce participation | 66 |
| 4 | Advocate for and assess the feasibility of rural road improvements. | Infrastructure & Site Readiness | Improve and Leverage Key Roads | 65 |
| 5 | Create a plan to build rental cabins near recreation and tourist areas. | Tourism | Increase Lodging Options for Visitors | 63 |
| 6 | Support PVH's plan to incentivize physicians to locate to and remain in Mason County. | Public Health | Bolster Local Healthcare Assets | 62 |
| 7 | Partner with civic organizations to identify community service projects & volunteers. | Cross-Cutting | Promote Civic Engagement | 62 |
| 8 | Create a plan to ensure adequate road access at key development sites. | Infrastructure & Site Readiness | Improve Readiness of Development Sites | 61 |
| 9 | Provide more behavioral & mental health services by adding more professionals. | Public Health | Reduce Impact of Addiction | 61 |
| 10 | Identify ways to capitalize on the new Rt 35 (placement of advertising, visitor center, link to Chief Cornstalk area). | Tourism | Leverage Assets to Bolster the Tourism Industry | 59 |
| 11 | Build or mark more hiking trails. | Tourism | Increase Entertainment & Recreation Options | 58 |
| 12 | Support entrepreneurship, including value-added agriculture products. | Workforce & Education | Increase Establishment of Businesses | 57 |

The top 34 action items are listed below. Potential lead organizations are listed for each action along with an estimated timeframe and potential measures to track success. Implementation will be the responsibility of the lead entity, with assistance of partner organizations. **The top 20 priority action items are marked in yellow.**

Workforce & Education Action Items (Priority Items)

| Action Items to Increase Establishment of Businesses | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
|---|------------------------|---|---|
| Explore opportunities to support entrepreneurs, including value-added agriprenueurship products and services. | Short-term | # of businesses # of farms in agritourism | Mason County Tourism Committee, Mason County Chamber of Commerce, Farmers Co-op, State Farm Museum, County Commission, Development groups, Ohio Valley Bank, Peoples Federal Credit Union |
| Create or partner with a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to increase access to capital and reduce risk for entrepreneurs and small businesses. | Mid-term | # of businesses # of farms in agritourism | |
| Conduct a supply chain analysis to identify new suppliers that could thrive in the area focusing on the polymer industry. | mid to long-term | # of jobs | |
| Action Items to Bolster Vocational Instruction | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Create an industry roundtable (comprised of teachers, representatives of the trades, production employers, and area schools) to reorganize school curriculums to include more emphasis on non-college careers, particularly the skilled trades, and to recruit instructors. | Short-term to mid-term | # of vo-tech graduates # of graduates referred | Board of Education (BOE) and its high schools and Career Center, Trade unions, contractors, Mountwest, WV Dept of Education |
| Action Items to Increase Workforce Participation | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Start a youth summer employment program. | Short-term | # employed age 15 to 22 | Chamber of Commerce, Mid-Ohio Valley WIB, Family Resource Network, Generation West Virginia, BOE |
| Add more leadership and life skills events and training in middle and high schools. | Mid-term | # of graduates referred | |
| Expand the career center to offer evening classes for adults and add new tracks for unsupported industries (Ex: engine repair and safety, dental hygiene, cosmetology). | Mid to long-term | # of graduates referred | |

Infrastructure & Site Readiness Action Items (Priority Items)

| Action Items to Expand Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure (3 survey items were merged into 1 priority) | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
|--|--------------------|--|---|
| Create a broadband committee to interface with the WV Office of Broadband, the WV Broadband Enhancement Council, service providers, and other partners, to direct resources to improve and expand access and adoption as soon as possible. | Short to Long-term | # of ISPs, # of subscribed households, Broadband speed | AEP, County Commission, other local elected officials (mayors, delegates), MU CBER, Region 2 Planning and Development Council |
| Action Items to Improve readiness of development sites | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Create a plan to ensure adequate road access and adequate water and sewer infrastructure is available at key development sites. | Long-term | Projects planned & funded | County Commission, AEP, Region 2, Mason County PSD, Region 2 |
| Action Items to Improve and Leverage Key Roads to Attract Economic Growth | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Lobby for rural road improvements. | Long-term | Roads planned & funded | Local elected officials, County Commission, Region 2, WV Department of Highways |
| Assess the ability to upgrade Rt 2 to 4-lane and enable more industrial use. ¹ | Long-term | Roads planned & funded | |
| Lobby for a WV Welcome Center on Rt 35 near Henderson. | Long-term | Roads planned & funded | |

¹ The wording of this action item was changed from "Lobby for" to be a more concrete next step.

Public Health Action Items (Priority Items)

| Action Items to Reduce Impact of Addiction | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Provide more behavioral & mental health services by increasing the number of professionals in these fields. | Short-to mid-term | # of overdoses | Prestera Center, Valley Health, Mason County Health Department, MU Center for Excellence in Recovery |
| Expand access to treatment by spreading the location of facilities more widely throughout the county. | Short-to mid-term | # of overdoses | |
| Action Items to Bolster Local Healthcare Assets | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Support a campaign to promote Pleasant Valley Hospital (PVH) and encourage local residents to utilize local healthcare resources. | Short to mid-term | # of customers | PVH, City of Pt Pleasant, Board of Education (BOE), Mountain Health |
| Work with PVH to support their plan to incentivize physicians to locate to and remain in Mason County. | Mid-term | Turnover among PVH physicians | |
| Evaluate ability to increase services offered by PVH or Valley Health, ex: birthing. | Long-term | # of new services offered | |
| Action Items to Improve Health Outcomes | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Promote healthy eating skills via cooking and gardening demonstrations, and farm-to-table dinners, possibly through the career center's culinary arts program. | Short to mid-term | Health metrics | County Health Department, County Commission, Towns BOE, PVH |
| Increase access to farmers' markets (add a produce market at the hospital for example). | Mid-term | # of farmers markets | |
| Advocate for recreational upgrades at the WMAs. | Long-term | Facilities at the WMAs | |

Tourism Action Items (Priority Items)

| Action Items to Increase Entertainment and Recreation Options | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Identify and mark more hiking trails. | Short-term | # of trails | County Commission, Towns, civic organizations |
| Secure funds to construct a Kanawha River Road bike trail | Mid to long-term | miles planned & funded | |
| Action Items to Increase lodging options for visitors | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Organize training on alternative lodging (the Vrbo or Airbnb models) for interested residents and promote establishment of properties rented under these models. | Short-term | # of properties for rent | EPIC Mission in Huntington, MCDA, Main Street Point Pleasant, Chamber of Commerce, Mason County Convention & Visitor's Bureau |
| Create a plan to build rental cabins near recreation and tourist areas. | Mid to long-term | Employment in lodging industry | |
| Inventory candidate properties for long-term camping to facilitate establishment of a new RV campground. | Mid-term | # candidate properties | |
| Action Items to Leverage Assets to Bolster the Tourism Industry | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Solidify ideas to expand agritourism (farm tours/farm crawl, farm-to-table dinners, winery, brewery) and pursue grant and entrepreneurship opportunities. | Short to mid-term | # farms in agritourism | Farmers/farmers co-op, landowners, small businesses, Farms, Businesses, County Commission, WVU Extension Service |
| Identify ways to capitalize on the new Rt 35 (placement of advertising, visitor center, link to Chief Cornstalk area). | Mid-term | # of new signs/connectors | |
| Organize a music festival at the Fairgrounds. | Long-term | # of new events | |

Cross-Cutting Action Items (Priority Items)

| Action Items to Improve the Visual Appeal of the Area | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
|---|------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Organize community trash cleanups. | Short-term | Public feedback | EDA Board members, civic organizations, County Commission, Towns |
| Raise funds/apply for grants to demolish dilapidated structures. ² | Mid-term | # of properties demolished | |
| Sponsor local artists to produce public art (ex: paintings on the backs of stores, rock carvings in outdoor public places). | Mid-term | # of projects funded | |
| Action Items to Collaborate with Local and Regional Economic Development Efforts | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Collaborate with other organizations to assist with grant-writing and identification of funding opportunities. | Short-term | # grant applications | economic development organizations, Appalachian Power, Marshall University, Ohio River towns |
| Join the Ohio River Recreational Trail (with other WV towns). | Long-term | Joined or not | |
| Action Items to Promote Civic Engagement | Timeframe | Measure | Possible Lead Entities/Partners |
| Partner with organizations who can identify community service projects and coordinate and recruit volunteers (churches, schools, businesses, local government). | Short-term | # of projects undertaken | Economic development groups, towns, churches, Southwestern Community Action Council |

² This action item was not included in the original survey but was added due to the large number of survey comments and is considered to be a priority for the county.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this plan is a function of the action items selected and how they are implemented. Effectiveness was evaluated based on feedback from the MCDA and its Board members. Respondents ranked the top 20 action items from the survey with respect to five measures of effectiveness.

- 1) **Timeframe:** the time required to implement the action.
 - Points received: Short-term=3 Mid-term=2 Long-term=1
- 2) **Complexity:** perception of complexity to implement the action item.
 - Points received: Low=3 Moderate=2 High=1
- 3) **Funds Needed:** the resources required to complete the action.
 - Points received: Low=3 Moderate=2 High=1
- 4) **Local Interest:** rating of potential engagement of local stakeholders.
 - Points received: Robust=3 Modest=2 Poor=1
- 5) **Chance of Success:** the sense that the desired response would be achieved.
 - Points: More likely=3 50/50 Chance=2 Less likely=1

The following table shows these rankings. A higher score indicates that a particular action is seen as more likely to be successfully implemented and thus contribute to the economic development needs of the county. Per the ranking system, the highest possible score for any single action item is 15 and the lowest is 5.

These results are somewhat different than the results of the public survey. Two significant examples are the action items for expansion of broadband and rural road improvements. The broadband expansion action item ranked first in the public survey but is ranked 16th with respect to effectiveness. The action item to lobby for rural road improvements ranked fourth in the public survey but is ranked 17th with respect to effectiveness. These differences may indicate some skepticism that the county's efforts would be effective given the perception that the actions would be complex, high cost, and long-term.

These results are indicators of the MCDA Board members' collective view of the relative effectiveness of the priority action items but are not absolute due to incomplete participation. Decisions on actions should be made with broader input from the Board and other stakeholders.

The full results of the effectiveness exercise are shown in Appendix A.

Table 3 Priority Action Items Ranked by Effectiveness

| Rank | Action Item | Desired Response | Average Score |
|-------------|---|---|----------------------|
| 1 | Create an industry roundtable to reorganize school curriculums to focus more on non-college careers, particularly the skilled trades. | Bolster Vocational Instruction | 12.0 |
| 2 | Collaborate with other organizations to assist with grant-writing and funding of priority action items. | Collaborate with Other Development Efforts | 11.9 |
| 3 | Sponsor local artists to produce public art | Improve the Area's Visual Appeal | 11.6 |
| 4 | Actively explore opportunities to support entrepreneurship, including agripreneurship. | Increase Establishment of Businesses | 11.0 |
| 5 | Identify ways to capitalize on the new US 35. | Bolster the Tourism Industry | 11.0 |
| 6 | Raise funds/apply for grants to demolish dilapidated structures | Improve the Area's Visual Appeal | 11.0 |
| 7 | Solidify ideas to expand agritourism and pursue grant opportunities. | Bolster the Tourism Industry | 10.9 |
| 8 | Expand the career center to offer evening classes for adults and add new tracks for unsupported industries | Increase Workforce Participation | 10.7 |
| 9 | Identify and mark more hiking/walking trails. | Increase Entertainment & Recreation Options | 10.6 |
| 10 | Partner with organizations to identify community service projects and volunteers. | Promote Civic Engagement | 10.4 |
| 11 | Start a youth summer employment program. | Increase Workforce Participation | 10.0 |
| 12 | Work with PVH to support their plan to incentivize physicians to remain in the county. | Bolster Local Healthcare Assets | 10.0 |
| 13 | Create a plan to ensure adequate road access and adequate water and sewer infrastructure is available at key development sites. | Improve Readiness of Development Sites | 9.9 |
| 14 | Create a plan to build rental cabins near recreation and tourist areas. | Increase Lodging Options | 9.7 |
| 15 | Evaluate ability to increase services offered by PVH or Valley Health, ex: birthing. | Bolster Local Healthcare Assets | 9.3 |

| Rank | Action Item | Desired Response | Average Score |
|-------------|--|--|----------------------|
| 16 | Create a broadband committee to interface with the WV Office of Broadband, the WV Broadband Enhancement Council, service providers, and other partners, to direct resources to improve and expand access and adoption as soon as possible. | Expand Broadband & Cellular Infrastructure | 9.1 |
| 17 | Lobby for rural road improvements. | Improve and Leverage Key Roads to Attract Growth | 9.0 |
| 18 | Create or partner with a CDFI to increase access to capital and reduce risk for entrepreneurs. | Increase Establishment of Businesses | 8.1 |
| 19 | Provide more behavioral & mental health services by increasing the number of professionals in these fields. | Reduce the Impact of Addiction | 7.7 |
| 20 | Assess the ability to upgrade Rt 2 to 4-lane and enable more industrial use. | Improve and Leverage Key Roads to Attract Growth | 7.0 |

PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS

This section highlights the **top 20** priority areas of Mason County with respect to desired outcomes. These action items are based on the public survey and are organized in priority order, by Strategic Initiative (SI) and by action item. These items are also labelled by rank **Effectiveness** (Table 3). Items 1 to 7 are scored **HIGHEST**, items 8 to 14 **MEDIUM**, and items 15 to 20 **LOWEST**.

Strategic Initiative 1: Workforce & Education

SI 1.1 - Increase Establishment of Businesses

These action items reflect an understanding of the importance of private businesses to the economy. These action items have mixed perception of effectiveness, as ranked by MCDA Board members.

Action Items:

1. **Actively explore opportunities to support entrepreneurship, including agripreneurship.**
2. **Create or partner with a CDFI to increase access to capital and reduce risk for entrepreneurs.**

The term **agripreneurship** describes businesses that add value to agricultural assets. This can include guided hunting excursions, camping, farm tours, farm-to-table dinners, prepared local foods, wineries, farmers markets, and niche farm activities like beekeeping.

SI 1.2 - Bolster Vocational Instruction

Primary goals of this activity are to strengthen communication between production employers and schools with respect to hiring needs and help these employers find and retain workers. Another goal is to elevate awareness of the importance of vocational-technical occupations to reduce the shortage of workers and the stigma associated with these fields. This effort would include teachers, production employers, representatives of the skilled trades, and possibly area community colleges. This action has the highest ranked effectiveness because of the current engagement of stakeholders, modest expected cost, and the perceived chance of success.

Action Item:

1. **Create an industry roundtable to reorganize school curriculums to devote more resources to non-college careers, particularly the skilled trades.**

SI 1.3 - Increase Workforce Participation

These action items reflect a desire for more employment options and a concern that the young workers are driving low workforce participation and increasing employee turnover. Many community stakeholders would also like the career center to offer new tracks. Suggestions include engine repair and safety, dental hygiene, and cosmetology.

Action Items:

1. **Start a youth summer employment program.** The score of medium effectiveness as would be low cost and are many options for projects with existing organizations.
2. **Expand the career center to offer evening classes for adults and add new tracks for unsupported industries.** Medium effectiveness due to time, funds, and effort required although local interest is considered to be high, as is the chance of success.

Strategic Initiative 2: Infrastructure & Site Readiness

SI 2.1 - Expand Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure

Due to the high cost of expanding broadband services, this action will require participation by the State via allocation of funds, and broad involvement of local governments and the private sector. This action item is a combination of 3 overlapping action items from the survey that acknowledge that increased competition in broadband providers is likely to improve services, and that enhanced wireless services may be a good near-term household solution compared to wired broadband. This action was ranked as having the lowest effectiveness because of the complexity of the action, due to implementation being long-term, and due to the high level of funds required.

The 2020 Mason County Broadband Assessment report found that the lack of broadband and cellular service is a hindrance to growth and is causing operational inefficiencies.

Action Items:

1. Create a broadband committee to interface with the WV Office of Broadband, the WV Broadband Enhancement Council, service providers, and other partners, to direct resources to expand access, improve performance, and increase adoption as soon as possible.

SI 2.2 - Improve and Leverage Key Roads to Attract Economic Growth

These action items reflect a desire to improve rural access and quality of life, as well as expansion of roads to enable large-scale economic development. These actions will require collaboration between local and State agencies, primarily with the West Virginia Department of Transportation, to advocate for specific projects. These actions were both ranked as having the lowest effectiveness due to high complexity, high amount of funds required, and a perception that the chance of success would be relatively low.

Action Items:

1. Lobby for rural road improvements.
2. Assess the ability to upgrade Rt 2 to 4-lane and enable more industrial use.

SI 2.3 - Improve Readiness of Development Sites

This action item addresses the county's primary goal to increase jobs and income and recognizes the power of industrial production to do this. This work will require coordination with multiple State and federal agencies to secure the appropriate funding.

Action Items:

1. Create a plan to ensure adequate road access and adequate water and sewer infrastructure is available at key development sites. Effectiveness: medium.

Strategic Initiative 3: Public Health

SI 3.1- Reduce the Impact of Addiction

This effort would require collaboration with an existing healthcare provider to apply for grant funds to support and sustain the action. Valley Health and Pretera Center both currently provide mental health and addiction support services in Mason County and may be interesting in expanding the scope and location of their services. This action was ranked as having relatively low effectiveness as it is perceived to be long-term, to be relatively complex, require high funds, and to have a low chance of success.

Action Items:

- 1. Provide more behavioral & mental health services by increasing the number of professionals in these fields.**

SI 3.2 - Bolster Local Healthcare Assets

These actions would both build on efforts underway by Pleasant Valley Hospital (PVH). The perceived likely effectiveness of these actions is mixed.

Action Items:

- 1. Work with PVH to support their plan to incentivize physicians to locate to and remain in Mason County.**
- 2. Evaluate ability to increase services offered by PVH or Valley Health, ex: birthing.**

Strategic Initiative 4: Tourism

These action items are strategies to draw additional tourists, both local and regional, and extend the economic impact of the popular Mothman Festival in September by creating “shoulder seasons” with more visitor activities before and after the festival, including the Battle Days event in October which commemorates the 1774 Battle of Point Pleasant. These actions are strategies to provide visitors with more options to stay in Mason County.

SI 4.1 - Increase Entertainment and Recreation Options

Building hiking and walking trails received the most votes within the top desired response for the Tourism initiative. This action item also ranked high within the desired response to improve health outcomes. This action is considered to have medium effectiveness because it would require only modest amounts of funding and would have a relatively high chance of success.

Action Item:

- 1. Identify and mark more hiking/walking trails.**

SI 4.2 - Increase Lodging Options for Visitors

The lack of lodging options has been identified as a key weakness in the county’s ability to attract visitors. Currently, most area lodging options are across the river in Ohio. Mason County only has one hotel (the historic Lowe Hotel in Point Pleasant), only a few rental cabins, and no alternative lodging options via Airbnb or Vrbo. This action item is ranked as having medium effectiveness.

Action Item:

- 1. Create a plan to build rental cabins near recreation and tourist areas.**

SI 4.2 – Leverage Assets to Bolster the Tourism Industry

These actions regard development strategies like placement of advertising, creation of a visitor center, and mapping a link from US 35 to the Chief Cornstalk recreation area. Strategies could range from installing signage directing visitors to local destinations to building a new West Virginia Welcome Center. Creation of signage could also be very beneficial to the agritourism industry. These actions are ranked as having high effectiveness because of possible short timeframe, high local interest, and higher perceived chance of success.

Action Item:

- 1. Identify ways to capitalize on the new US 35.**
- 2. Solidify ideas to expand agritourism (farm-to-table dinners, reopening of a winery) and pursue grant and entrepreneurship opportunities.**

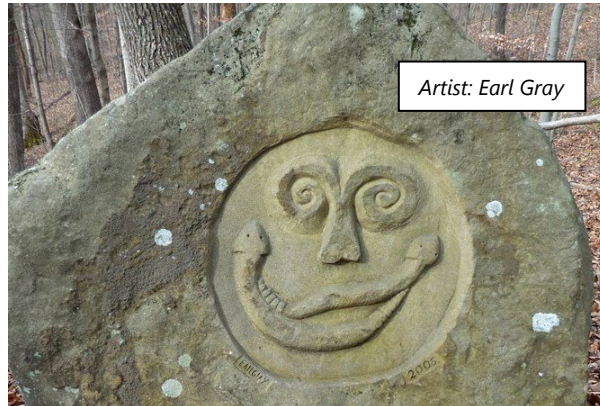
Strategic Initiative 5: Cross-Cutting

SI 5.1 - Improve the Visual Appeal of the Area

Stakeholders identified dilapidated properties as a significant challenge to the county, as part of a broader concern about visuals forming negative first impressions for visitors. This work would complement other efforts such as that by Main Street Point Pleasant to improve the appeal of Point Pleasant and Viand Street, a primary corridor in the town. Both of these actions are considered to have high effectiveness.

Action Items:

1. Raise funds/apply for grants to demolish dilapidated structures.
2. Sponsor local artists to produce public art (ex: paintings on backs of stores, rock carvings in outdoor public places).



SI 5.2 – Collaborate with Local and Regional Economic Development Efforts

This action item is synchronous with other development recommendations to look beyond the borders of Mason County for some actions and the awareness of the coordination required to apply for grants to implement projects. Effectiveness is considered high due to a short timeframe, low level of funds required, high local interest and perceived high chance of success.

Action Item:

1. Collaborate with Marshall University and other organizations to assist with grant-writing and identification of funding opportunities.

SI 5.3 – Promote Civic Engagement

This effort would involve community groups like churches, schools, businesses, and local government. The West Virginia Community Development Hub is one organization currently working to increase volunteer engagement and offers community coaching resources and other tools that can assist this effort.⁴³

Action Item:

1. Partner with organizations who can identify community service projects and coordinate and recruit volunteers. Effectiveness: medium.

INTEGRATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The SCORE analysis made clear that the elements of economic development are highly interconnected. In Mason County there is an overwhelming need for more stable, modern, good-paying jobs to stop and reverse population loss and disinvestment caused by out-migration and downsizing of traditional production industries. The circular effect of beneficial economic activity and, conversely, detrimental job loss are reflected in the health of individuals and the community. Both effects are present in Mason County.

Figure 4: Integrated Economic Development Benefits

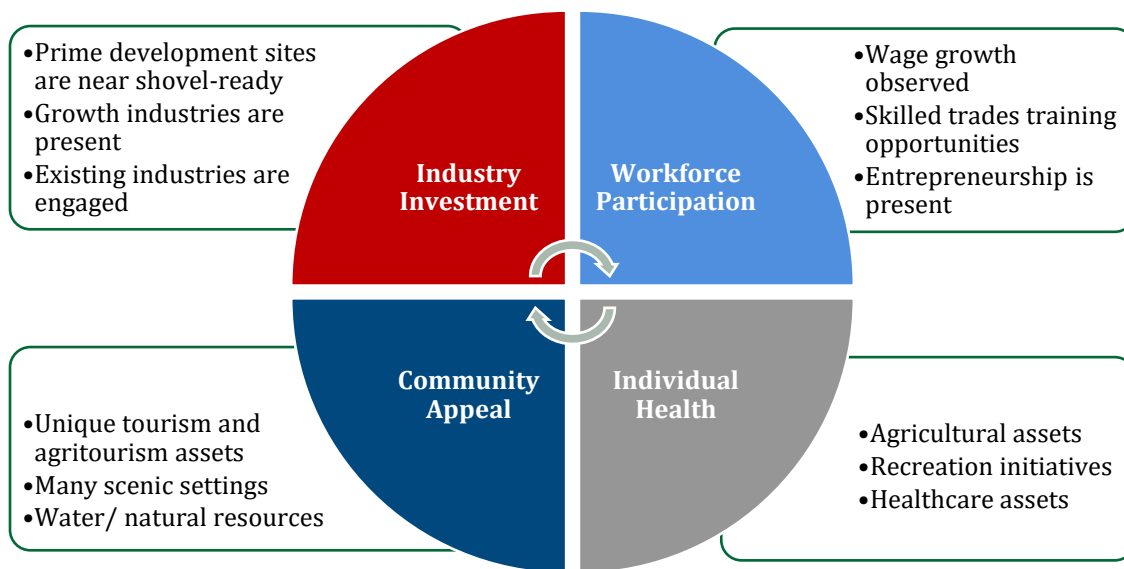
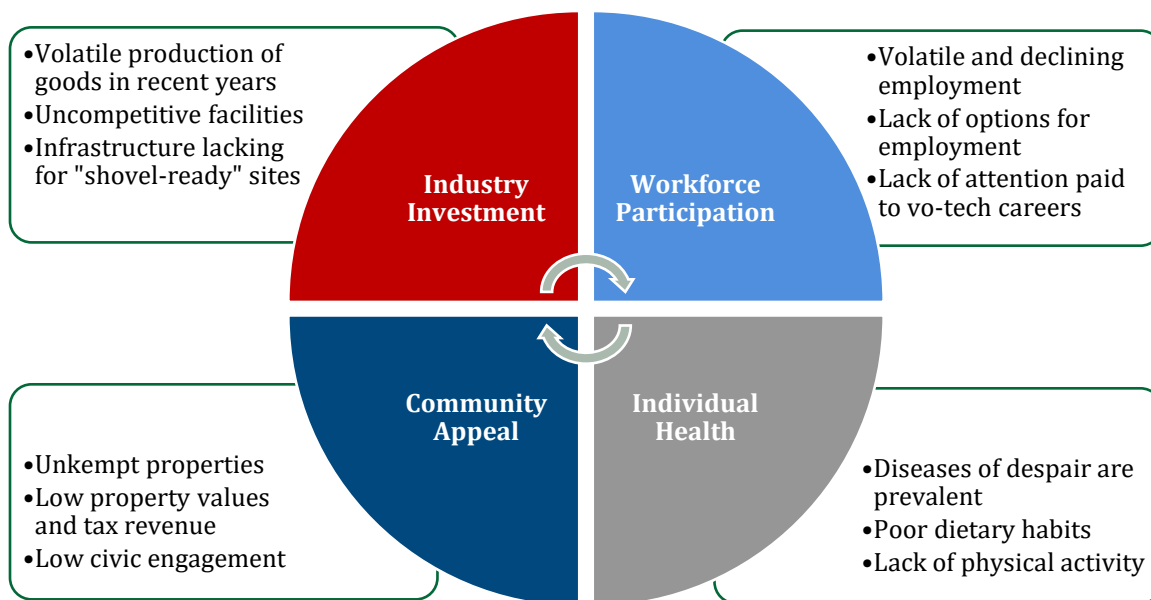


Figure 5: Integrated Economic Development Detriment



OTHER MASON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

This strategic plan is well-aligned with recommendations from other recent economic development studies.

In 2019, the West Virginia University (WVU) Extension Services completed a report on Mason County titled "Report on the County's Economic Structure and Recommendations for Future Community Economic Development Strategies." Recommended strategies regard infrastructure and site readiness, general development enhancement, and workforce. These are:

- Create a planning commission to produce a comprehensive plan to bridge issues of land use, economic development, and quality of life.
- Create a list of development sites and market these via Appalachian Sky.
- Expand broadband connectivity with grants and private sector funds.
- Improve transportation and roads.
- Retain status as a Certified Development Community.
- Support local businesses, especially manufacturing, by creating an inventory of resources for financing, tax credits and business services.
- Recruit new businesses allied with existing ones for horizontal and vertical integration (Ex: health services, value-added agriculture).
- Provide social services and counseling, including addiction treatment.
- Develop training programs and link business and industry to workers.
- Focus on projects that are a win for the region, not just Mason County.
- Do not try to compete with areas with more resources and amenities.

Mason County is currently attempting many of these actions.

The ARC study "Strengthening Economic Resilience in Appalachia" provides an overview of best practices for economic resilience based on an extensive literature review. Some of the key best practices listed are⁴⁴:

- Invest in education, technology, infrastructure, and broadband.
- Engage the community over the long term.
- Create communities where people want to live.
- Grow youth engagement and next-generation leadership.
- Build networks and foster collaboration.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Benchmark data are essential to measuring the success of economic development initiatives. The following data provide reference points for relevant status data in the target areas of employment, income, health, and education.

Employment

In 2019, there were about 5,400 full- and part-time jobs in Mason County, a decline of 17 percent from 2010. Average wages per job were \$59,000 annually (BLS, 2021).

Table 4: Total Employment in Mason County - 2010 to 2020

| 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 6,494 | 6,435 | 6,447 | 6,239 | 5,770 | 5,621 | 5,514 | 5,463 | 5,365 | 5,389 | 5,273 |

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, QCEW. Average of monthly data submitted to Workforce WV by employers.

Table 5: Employment by Major Industry in 2018

| Industry Description | # Jobs in County | % of Jobs in County | % in West Virginia |
|--|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting | 207 | 3.7% | 0.3% |
| Mining and Quarrying | 26 | 0.5% | 3.1% |
| Utilities | 330 | 5.9% | 1.1% |
| Construction | 290 | 5.2% | 5.6% |
| Manufacturing | 355 | 6.3% | 6.9% |
| Wholesale Trade | 74 | 1.3% | 3.0% |
| Retail Trade | 601 | 10.7% | 11.9% |
| Transportation and Warehousing | 456 | 8.1% | 3.3% |
| Information | 25 | 0.4% | 1.4% |
| Finance and Insurance | 103 | 1.8% | 2.7% |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing | 32 | 0.6% | 1.0% |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services | 77 | 1.4% | 3.9% |
| Management of Enterprises | 52 | 0.9% | 1.2% |
| Admin, Waste Mgmt and Remediation Services | 77 | 1.4% | 5.5% |
| Educational Services | 769 | 13.7% | 9.3% |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 1,155 | 20.6% | 20.0% |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 66 | 1.2% | 1.1% |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 287 | 5.1% | 9.6% |
| Other Services (except Public Admin) | 195 | 3.5% | 3.0% |
| Government | 433 | 7.7% | 6.1% |
| Total Jobs | 5,610 | | |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

Table 6: Key Agricultural Data for Mason County

| | 2007 | 2012 | 2017 |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| # of Farms | 946 | 875 | 876 |
| # of Farms <180 acres | 750 | 646 | 692 |
| # Farms 180+ acres | 196 | 229 | 184 |
| # of Farm Operations | 1,321 | 1,247 | 1,402 |
| Average Operator Age | 60 | 58 | 55 |
| Total Farm Income w/Receipts | 596,000 | 564,000 | 1,943,000 |
| Net Income | 1,710,000 | 3,176,000 | 10,411,000 |
| \$ Commodity Sales | 18,765,000 | 34,094,000 | 36,356,000 |
| \$ Crop Sales | 11,543,000 | 25,251,000 | 29,382,000 |
| Acres of Harvested Cropland | 33,241 | 42,154 | 33,405 |

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture.

Labor Force Participation

Mason County's labor force is defined by three key demographic factors that factor into a low participation rate. These are: (1) a growing number and share of individuals who are 65 or older, (2) a declining number of individuals of prime working age (16 to 64), and (3) a declining number of individuals under 15.

As shown in Table 6, only 39% of the county's population is in the labor force compared to 44% at the state level and 50% nationally. Twenty percent of the county's population is comprised of individuals 65+ compared to 16% for the United States.

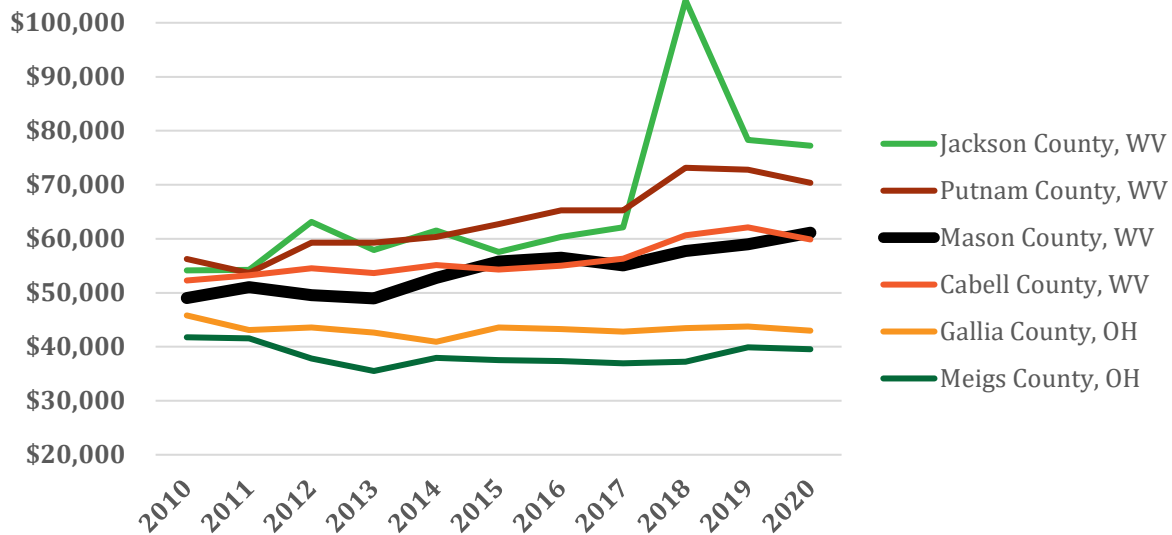
Table 7: 2019 Labor Force Breakdown

| | Mason County | | West Virginia | | United States | |
|--------------------|--------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Total Population | 26,820 | | 1,817,305 | | 328,239,523 | |
| Working Age (15+) | 21,846 | 81% | 1,491,316 | 82% | 259,662,880 | 79% |
| Labor Force | 10,459 | 39% | 794,126 | 44% | 164,629,492 | 50% |
| Employed | 10,057 | 37% | 740,910 | 41% | 154,842,185 | 47% |
| Unemployed | 390 | 1% | 51,910 | 3% | 8,713,400 | 3% |
| Under 15 years Old | 4,723 | 18% | 304,836 | 17% | 60,518,751 | 18% |
| Age 65+ | 5,469 | 20% | 352,114 | 19% | 54,074,028 | 16% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

Wages

Figure 6: Average Wages for Mason and Area Counties (2010 through 2020)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW).

Health

Table 8: General Health Outcomes

| Measure | Mason County | West Virginia |
|--------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Life Expectancy | 73.4 | 74.8 |
| Food Insecurity | 14% | 14% |
| Limited Access to Healthy Food | 8% | 7% |

Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, County Health Rankings (based on CDC data).

Table 9: Mortality Statistics

| Mortality Rates by Cause | Year | Mason County | West Virginia | United States |
|--------------------------------------|------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Heart Disease (per 100,000/ 35+) | 2019 | 195 | 197.4 | 200.8 |
| Stroke (per 100,000/ 35+) | 2019 | 51.4 | 40.2 | 45.7 |
| Drug Overdose (per 100,000/all ages) | 2018 | 38.4 | 51.5 | 20.7 |
| Drug Overdose (per 100,000/all ages) | 2019 | 47 | 52.8 | 21.7 |
| Cancer (per 100,000/all ages) | 2019 | 179.1 | 184.3 | 182.7 |
| Injury (per 100,000/all ages) | 2019 | 120 | 96.9 | 52.7 |
| Diabetes (per 100,000/all ages) | 2019 | 29.1 | 36.2 | 26.7 |

SOURCE: Center for Disease Control (CDC), NCHS, 2019. Age-adjusted, spatially smoothed.

Table 10: Lifestyle and Diabetes Statistics

| LIFESTYLE AND DIABETES | Year | Mason County | West Virginia | United States |
|---|------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Leisure-time Physical Inactivity Prevalence (%) | 2013 | 34.0 | 33.0 | 22.9 |
| | 2019 | 34.0 | 28.0 | 26.4 |
| Obesity Prevalence (%) | 2013 | 37.0 | 33.0 | 30.8 |
| | 2019 | 41.7 | 38.0 | 31.9 |
| Diagnosed Diabetes Prevalence (%) | 2013 | 12.0 | 13.0 | 9.7 |
| | 2019 | 17.5 | 15.0 | 10.8 |
| Mentally Unhealthy Days (%) | 2013 | 4.2 | 4.4 | 3.6 |
| | 2019 | 6.1 | 5.8 | NA |

SOURCE: CDC National Health Interview Survey and County Data Indicators.

Table 11: Behavioral Health (2019)

| Benchmark | Mason County | West Virginia | United States |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Depression Prevalence | 20.0% | 28.8% | 19.9% |
| Suicide Mortality | 16.6% | 18.5% | 14.5% |
| Excessive Drinking | 14.0% | 14.0% | 18.6% |

Source: WV Health Statistics Center, Vital Statistics System

Table 12: Child Health (2019)

| Indicator | Mason County | West Virginia | United States |
|--|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Infant Mortality (per 1,000 live births) | 11.3 | 6.3 | 5.7 |
| Low Birth Weight | 10.0% | 9.0% | 8.3% |
| Teen Birth Rate (per 1,000) | 39 | 31 | 16.7 |

Source: U of WI, County Health Rankings

Table 13: Clinical Care (2019)

| Measure | Mason County | West Virginia |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Total Uninsured | 7% | 8% |
| Uninsured Adults | 8% | 9% |
| Uninsured Children | 3% | 3% |
| Primary Care Physicians | 2,230:1 | 1,280:1 |
| Dentists | 3,790:1 | 1,760:1 |
| Mental Health Providers | 4,420:1 | 730:1 |
| Preventable Hospital Stays | 6,595 | 5,748 |

Source: U of WI, County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2019)

Table 14: Social and Economic Factors (2019)

| Factor | Mason County | West Virginia |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| High school completion | 86% | 87% |
| Some college | 51% | 56% |
| Unemployment | 6.0% | 4.9% |
| Children in poverty | 22% | 21% |
| Income inequality. | 4.5 | 5.0 |
| Children in single-parent households | 24% | 25% |
| Violent crime (# reported /100,000) | 120 | 330 |
| Median household income | \$47,800 | \$48,700 |

Source: U of WI, County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2019).

Education

Table 15: Mason County School Enrollment

| School Year | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 14-15 | 15-16 | 16-17 | 17-18 | 18-19 | 19-20 |
| 5,792 | 5,646 | 5,248 | 5,284 | 5,152 | 5,139 |

Source: West Virginia Department of Education.

Table 16: Mason County Education Proficiency Rate by Subject

| School Year | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 14-15 | 15-16 | 16-17 | 17-18 | 18-19 |
| Math | 23.6% | 27.9% | 26.2% | 29.0% | 33.2% |
| Reading | 40.6% | 44.6% | 42.2% | 39.7% | 43.0% |
| Science | - | - | - | 32.2% | 26.4% |

Source: West Virginia Department of Education.

SUMMARY

The priority action items identified in this strategic plan reflect Mason County's desire to: 1) pursue workforce solutions to increase personal income and help its production employers thrive; 2) attract new producers through infrastructure development; 3) improve the health of its residents; 4) leverage its tourism assets to attract more visitors; and 5) improve the visual appeal of the county.

The plan can be separated into short, medium, and long-term actions. It is anticipated that additional short-term and mid-term actions needed to accomplish long-term actions will be identified as projects take shape.

Short-term actions (1 to 2 years) regard workforce preparedness, support for entrepreneurship, substance use disorder, development of walking trails to support tourism, and collaboration to accomplish these actions. These are:

- Create an industry-education roundtable to reorganize school curriculums to include more emphasis on non-college careers, particularly the skilled trades.
- Start a youth summer employment program (short to mid-term).
- Explore opportunities to support entrepreneurship, particularly value-added agriculture products and agritourism.
- Provide more behavioral & mental health services by increasing the number of professionals in these fields (short to mid-term).
- Identify and mark more hiking/walking trails (short to mid-term).
- Identify ways to capitalize on the new US 35.
- Collaborate with Marshall University and other organizations to assist with grant-writing and identification of funding opportunities.
- Partner with organizations who can identify community service projects and coordinate and recruit volunteers.

Mid-term actions (3 to 5 years) regard infrastructure and additional workforce needs, beautification efforts, and expansion of accommodation options for visitors.

- Work to expand broadband and cellular infrastructure.
- Expand the career center to offer evening classes for adults and add new tracks for unsupported industries.
- Work with Pleasant Valley Hospital (PVH) to support their plan to incentivize physicians to locate to and remain in Mason County.
- Create a plan to build rental cabins near recreation and tourist areas.
- Raise funds/apply for grants to demolish dilapidated structures.
- Sponsor local artists to produce public art.

Long-term actions (5+ years) regard infrastructure and services goals that will take longer to achieve.

- Evaluate ability to increase services offered by PVH or Valley Health, ex: birthing.

- Lobby for rural road improvements.
- Assess the ability to upgrade Rt 2 to 4-lane and enable more industrial use.
- Create a plan to ensure adequate road access and adequate water and sewer infrastructure is available at key development sites.

The effectiveness of these actions is a function of 1) the resources required to complete the action; 2) the certainty of achieving the desired response; 3) the implementation timeframe; 4) the complexity of the action; and 5) buy-in from stakeholders. The short-term actions may have higher expected effectiveness than the longer-term actions because they are less expensive and require less time to implement. These actions are opportunities for early successes for this plan. The longer-term actions, while more impactful, require greater resources and more implementation time.

Collaboration is very important for this plan. Fortunately, there are several potential leaders and partners for each of the strategic initiatives, that can build on the already substantial development efforts currently underway in Mason County and West Virginia.

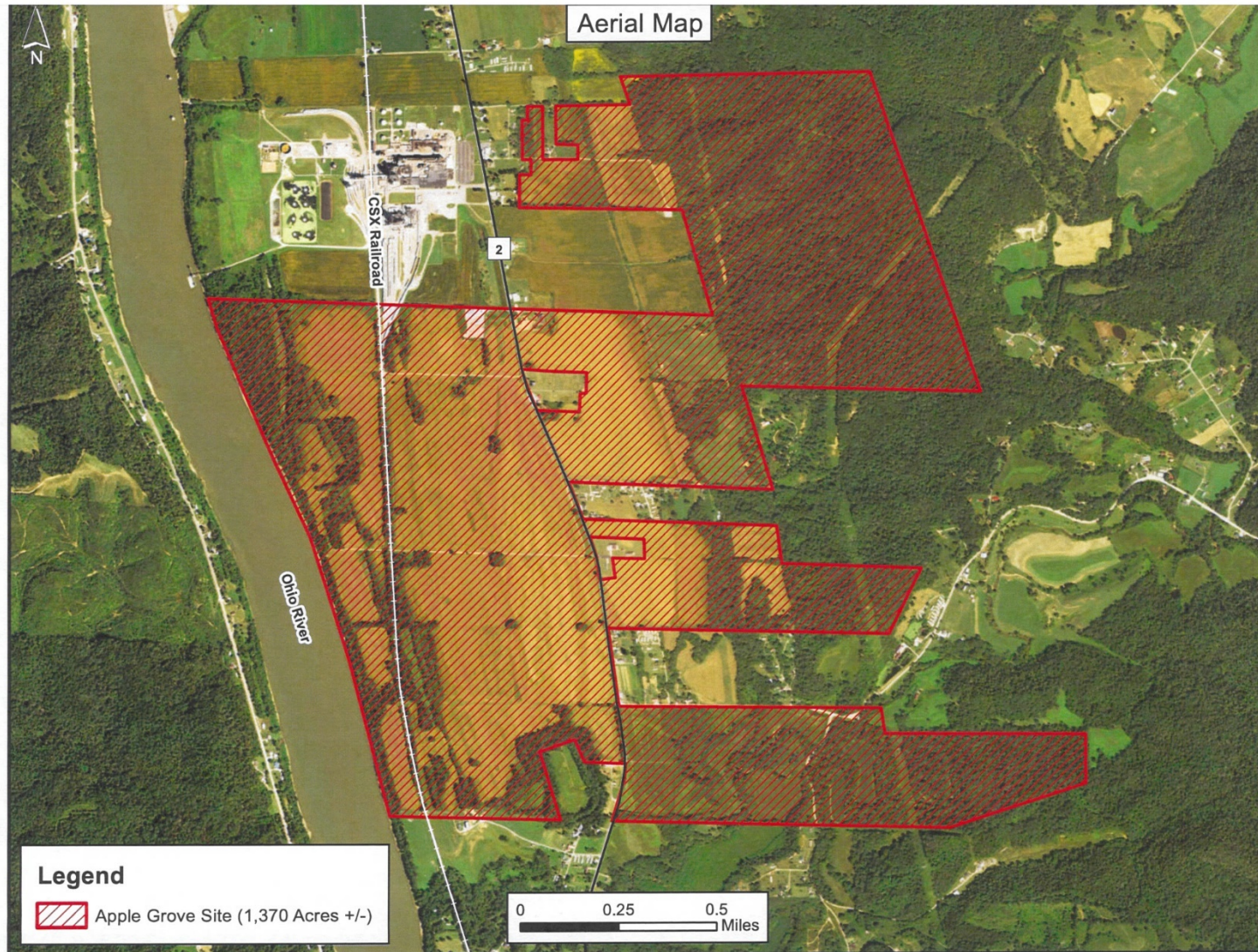
APPENDIX A - PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS -AVERAGE SCORE BY ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVENESS

| Desired Response | Priority Action Item | TIMEFRAME: Short-term=3 Mid-term=2 Long-term=1 | COMPLEXITY: Low=3 Moderate=2 High=1 | FUNDS NEEDED: Low=3 Moderate=2 High=1 | LOCAL INTEREST: Robust=3 Modest=2 Poor=1 | WILL SUCCEED? More likely=3 50/50 Chance=2 Less likely=1 |
|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Increase Establishment of Businesses | Actively explore opportunities to support entrepreneurship, including agripreneurship. | 1.86 | 2.14 | 2.00 | 2.57 | 2.43 |
| | Partner with a CDFI to increase access to capital and reduce business risk. | 1.71 | 1.43 | 1.29 | 1.86 | 1.86 |
| Bolster Vocational Instruction | Create an industry roundtable to reorganize school curriculums to devote more resources to non-college careers, particularly the skilled trades. | 1.86 | 2.00 | 2.43 | 2.86 | 2.86 |
| Increase Workforce Participation | Start a youth summer employment program. | 1.71 | 2.57 | 2.00 | 2.14 | 2.29 |
| | Expand the career center to offer evening classes for adults and add new tracks for unsupported industries | 1.71 | 1.71 | 1.71 | 2.57 | 2.71 |
| Expand Broadband & Cellular Infrastructure | Create a committee to interface with the WV Office of Broadband, the WV Broadband Enhancement Council, and others, to improve access. | 1.71 | 1.14 | 1.00 | 2.57 | 2.43 |
| Improve and Leverage Key Roads | Lobby for rural road improvements. | 1.86 | 1.43 | 1.43 | 2.71 | 1.57 |
| | Assess the ability to upgrade Rt 2 to 4-lane and enable more industrial use. | 1.14 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 2.29 | 1.57 |
| Improve Readiness of Development Sites | Create a plan to ensure adequate road access and adequate water and sewer infrastructure is available at key development sites. | 1.86 | 1.29 | 1.29 | 2.86 | 2.57 |
| Reduce the Impact of Addiction | Provide more behavioral & mental health services by increasing the # of professionals in these fields. | 1.29 | 1.43 | 1.43 | 2.00 | 1.57 |

| Desired Response | Priority Action Item | TIMEFRAME: Short-term=3 Mid-term=2 Long-term=1 | COMPLEXITY: Low=3 Moderate=2 High=1 | FUNDS NEEDED: Low=3 Moderate=2 High=1 | LOCAL INTEREST: Robust=3 Modest=2 Poor=1 | WILL SUCCEED? More likely=3 50/50 Chance=2 Less likely=1 |
|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Bolster Local Healthcare Assets | Work with PVH to support their plan to incentivize physicians to locate to and remain in Mason County. | 2.00 | 1.86 | 1.86 | 2.43 | 1.86 |
| | Evaluate ability to increase services offered by PVH or Valley Health. | 1.57 | 1.86 | 1.86 | 2.00 | 2.00 |
| Increase Recreation Options | Identify and mark more hiking/walking trails. | 1.57 | 2.14 | 2.57 | 2.00 | 2.29 |
| Increase Lodging Options | Create a plan to build rental cabins near recreation and tourist areas. | 1.57 | 2.14 | 1.86 | 2.14 | 2.00 |
| Bolster the Tourism Industry | Identify ways to capitalize on the new US 35. | 2.43 | 1.57 | 1.86 | 2.57 | 2.57 |
| | Solidify ideas to expand agritourism and pursue grant opportunities. | 2.00 | 1.86 | 2.43 | 2.29 | 2.29 |
| Improve the Visual Appeal of the Area | Raise funds/apply for grants to demolish dilapidated structures. | 2.29 | 2.00 | 1.71 | 2.71 | 2.29 |
| | Sponsor local artists to produce public art. | 1.86 | 2.71 | 2.86 | 2.00 | 2.14 |
| Collaborate With Other Development Efforts | Collaborate with Marshall University and other organizations to assist with grant-writing and identification of funding opportunities. | 2.57 | 2.00 | 2.43 | 2.29 | 2.57 |
| Promote Civic Engagement | Partner with organizations who can identify community service projects and coordinate and recruit volunteers. | 2.00 | 2.00 | 2.43 | 2.29 | 1.71 |

APPENDIX B – APPLE GROVE AND NORTH POINT PLEASANT DEVELOPMENT SITE MAPS

Apple Grove Development Site





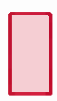
Aerial Map



Legend



North Point Pleasant Site (1,370 +/- Acres)



Sold Parcels, Not Included



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