



Fairmont Southside Neighborhood Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012

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I. Statement of Purpose

This Strategic Plan seeks to provide direction to the Blueprint Communities Panel Members as well as the residents and property owners within the Fairmont Southside Neighborhood. The Plan provides achievable objectives for the neighborhood's revitalization efforts over the next five years, focusing on community outreach programs, infrastructure development, private investment, construction activity and entrepreneurialism; it aims to become a "Blueprint" for the successful transformation of the neighborhood.

II. Mission

To facilitate and foster the redevelopment and renewal of the Southside Neighborhood through collaborative partnerships with its residents and property owners that will create economic opportunities and attract additional public and private investment.

III. Background of Fairmont Southside

In the early months of 2006, Vera Sansalone, Project Coordinator for Main Street Fairmont and Bob Gribben of the Fairmont Community Development Partnership met with Jay Rogers, Director of Planning and Development for the City of Fairmont to discuss the possibilities of extending the streetscape of the City Center south towards 4th Street along Fairmont Avenue. The issue was not whether or not it should be extended, but rather how the improvements would be paid for. Traditionally, the City of Fairmont had utilized the Transportation Enhancement Grant Program to fund streetscape activities, but recently had placed an emphasis on utilizing these funds to complete the Pedestrian Rail Trail through the City. The group discussed alternative methods of funding the improvements and decided that organizing a meeting of residents, businesses and property owners along the corridor would be a logical first step.

In March of 2006, Vera Sansalone, invited residents, property owners, business owners, and other stakeholders to further discuss the idea of extending the downtown streetscape along the Fairmont Avenue Corridor up to 4th Street. The meeting was held at First Exchange Bank, which is located along the corridor and approximately fifteen individuals were present.

A second meeting was held in July of 2006 to continue the dialogue of extending the streetscape along the Fairmont Avenue Corridor and it appeared that some real momentum was occurring from those present and that there was some real enthusiasm for the project. Several members of the group then went to Morgantown to view a streetscape project that was under construction in August of 2006.

Around the same time period, Jay Rogers was approached by a local architect that as a member of the WV Society of the American Institute of Architects was interested in doing a project that tied in with the City of Fairmont's initiative to amend the zoning code and introduce elements of New Urbanism to increase pedestrianism activities in the community and give focus to design and style.

In September 2006, the WV Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) began working on a 'Livable Community' design that focused on the Fairmont Avenue Corridor from 1st Street to 4th Street and included the surrounding neighborhood. About a dozen architects from around the state met with a group of interested citizens one Saturday. The first half of the day, we walked the neighborhood, discussing what we saw. The second half of the day, we spent documenting what we saw and putting ideas on paper for how things could be improved.

In October 2006, the AIA brought back a preliminary design for the group to review and comment on. Some changes were discussed. It was exciting to see something tangible coming out of our efforts. It was also decided that more people should be informed and encouraged to participate in this process and so a public meeting was planned.

In December 2006, Bob Gribben, who had participated since the conception of the change to come - learned of a training grant opportunity called 'Blueprint Communities' that was sponsored by the Federal Home Loan Bank in Pittsburgh (FHLB). The focus of the Blueprint Community program is on community revitalization and development done in a holistic, team approach. We thought this was a good fit for our neighborhood and applied for the grant. The name Fairmont Southside was chosen by the group to be put on the grant application and a nine member team was assembled to represent our neighborhood.

On January 27th, 2007, a public meeting was held in the Neighborhood to unveil the AIA Livable Community design, to invite comment from the public and to encourage more participation in the process.

Momentum for change really began to occur on March 12th, 2007, when Fairmont Southside was named one of ten Blueprint Communities (out of 26 applications) in a ceremony hosted by the Governor's office in the state capital.

On April 2-4, 2007, the first Blueprint Communities training session was held at the Tamarack. The Fairmont Southside Panel members participated in the two day training session that covered topics including: Leadership, Community Development, Strategic Planning, Civic Engagement, Asset Mapping, Marketing and Communications.

On April 23, 2007, a public meeting was held at the Fairmont Women's Club in the neighborhood to discuss the Blueprint Communities program and to engage additional people in the neighborhood revitalization process and the formation of a Strategic Plan for the neighborhood.

IV. Community Profile

Fairmont is the county seat of Marion County, West Virginia, with a recorded population of 19,097 at the 2000 census. Established in 1820 as Middletown, then in Monongalia County, it was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly in 1843 as Fairmont, a contraction of "Fair Mountain". Fairmont is nicknamed "The Friendly City" and is also touted as "The Home of the Original Pepperoni Roll". Fairmont is located in the North-Central region of the state, along West Virginia's I-79 High Tech Corridor, about 18 miles southwest of Morgantown, and about 23 miles northeast of Clarksburg.

Fairmont's economic history is rooted in the manufacturing and mineral extraction industries as the city was once known as "the Coal City" due to the large production from the Fairmont Field and the number of coal barons in the city such as James Watson – the "father of West Virginia coal industry.

Today, thanks to the vision and leadership of federal, state and local officials the economy has diversified and is now not only enjoying the resurgence of the coal industry, but also is a leader in the high technology movement in WV with the continued development of the I-79 Technology Park.

Beginning with the creation of the West Virginia High Technology Consortium in 1990 as the vehicle to introduce Fairmont and all of West Virginia to the technology revolution the WVHTC was established to

cluster regional technology companies and move the efforts of economic diversification forward. From 1990 to 1993, over 50 new technology companies, both large and small had emerged in north central West Virginia. This growth called for the construction of facilities that would not only adequately house the emerging companies, but could also stand as symbol to all who passed by that something special was taking place in Fairmont. In 1994, development began on what would become the I-79 Technology Park on 120 acres of land situated prominently along Interstate 79. By 1996, the WVHTC Foundation had established permanent headquarters inside the newly constructed Alan B. Mollohan Innovation Center. This facility fulfilled the vision of providing a home for many technology companies in north central West Virginia, but it also signaled the arrival of the region as a player in the “new economy.”

Since the original development began, the I-79 Technology Park has grown to over 500 acres and includes tenants such as NASA, Lockheed Martin, the Internet Fraud Complaint Center, EWA, Galaxy Global, Information Research Corporation and several others. Construction is now complete on a 263,000 square foot research facility for the nation’s top scientists, mathematicians, engineers, physicists and IT specialists. Construction is currently underway on a new 60,000 square foot office building that will house two to three new technology companies and push the total employment of the Park’s companies to over 2,000 persons. With these latest facilities and others proposed under the recently completed Master Plan, the I-79 Technology Park is destined to become one of the premier business technology parks in the country.

Fairmont is also home to Fairmont State University and Pierpont Community and Technical College whose history is part and parcel of the history of public education in West Virginia. Founded in 1865, two years after the state was admitted into the Union, the university was established as the West Virginia Normal School at Fairmont—a private institution dedicated to educating teachers.

In 2004, Fairmont State College’s name changed to Fairmont State University and on July 1, 2006, Fairmont State Community and Technical College became a Division of FSU and was renamed Pierpont Community & Technical College. The name “Pierpont” is historically and symbolically significant. Francis H. Pierpont, a Fairmont native, served as Governor of the Restored State of Virginia during the Civil War and played a key role in the birth of West Virginia. He also serves as an example of a successful “non-traditional” student, working his way through school as a tanner and brick layer. Interestingly, he also served on the Board of the institution that would one day become Fairmont State University.

Today, Fairmont State University and Pierpont Community & Technical College, serve the Upper Monongahela Valley, the state of West Virginia and the larger mid-Atlantic region as a resource for lifelong learning and career enhancement.

As of the 2000 Census, there were 19,097 residents in the city, 8,447 households, and 4,671 families residing in the city. The population density was 2,438.5/mi². There were 9,755 housing units at an average density of 1,245.6/mi². The racial makeup of the city was 90.16% White, 7.26% African American, 0.26% Native American, 0.61% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 0.20% from other races, and 1.49% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 0.82% of the population.

There were 8,447 households out of which 21.4% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 40.2% were married couples living together, 11.7% had a female householder with no husband present, and 44.7% were non-families. 36.4% of all households were made up of individuals and 16.8% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.16 and the average family size was 2.83.

In the city the population was spread out with 18.4% under the age of 18, 14.9% from 18 to 24, 24.1% from 25 to 44, 22.2% from 45 to 64, and 20.4% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 39 years. For every 100 females there were 87.0 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 83.3 males.

The median income for a household in the city was \$25,628, and the median income for a family was \$37,126. Males had a median income of \$27,944 versus \$20,401 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$16,062. About 12.6% of families and 20.1% of the population were below the poverty line, including 22.0% of those under age 18 and 9.7% of those age 65 or over.

V. Neighborhood Profile

The Southside Neighborhood is an area within the corporate limits of the City of Fairmont that has been targeted for study by the Blueprint Communities Panel Members. The Southside Neighborhood is an 18 block area directly adjacent to Downtown, linking the City Center to the Fairmont Avenue Business District and the Gateway Connector and is bounded roughly by First Street to the north, Virginia Avenue to the east, 4th Street to the south, and Albert Court to the west.

VI. Existing Conditions Study

In order to gain a better understanding of the Southside Neighborhood and create support for the revitalization efforts in the target area, an existing conditions study was undertaken. The City of Fairmont arranged to have an intern from the Public Administration Program at West Virginia University conduct the study that was completed over a four month timeframe. Research for the study included four phases: 1. Data Collection; 2. Data Classification; 3. Mapping; 4. Findings

Data Collection

The following methods were utilized to obtain information on the 191 parcels within the Southside neighborhood;

- a. Marion County Tax Maps, almost exclusively 01-02 'Fairmont City', were used as a base for defining the boundaries and dimensions of parcels as well as street and right-of-way locations.
- b. Spec Print publications were used to gather data regarding the size and conditions of structures in the neighborhood.
- c. Deed books were generally used to determine ownership of parcels.
- d. City rental records helped to determine the number of units within a rented residential structure.
- e. Visual, curbside assessments of properties.

Data Classification

Utilizing the information collected in the initial phase of the study, each property was then classified into one of the following categories:

- a. Blighted Residential Structure
- b. Blighted Commercial Structure
- c. Habitable Residential Structure
- d. Habitable Commercial Structure
- e. Parking Lot
- f. Vacant Lot
- g. Undevelopable Property

Mapping

Of the 191 parcels contained within the Southside Neighborhood, the majority of the properties were classified as either Habitable Residential or Habitable Commercial. These two categories represent 28% and 23% of the Neighborhood respectively with fifty-five (55) properties found to be Habitable Residential and forty-four (44) properties classified as Habitable Commercial.

Thirty-three (33) properties in the Neighborhood were determined to be Vacant Lots, which represents approximately 17% of the total Southside Neighborhood, while twenty-two (22) properties or 11% of the target area was classified as Parking Lots based on the current utilization of the land.

For the remainder of the Neighborhood, the study found that twenty-nine (29) properties were Blighted Residential, and only six (6) properties were classified as Blighted Commercial. Combined, 18% of the properties were classified as blighted.

Two properties in the Neighborhood were classified as Undevelopable, based upon such factors as size, slope and general topography of the properties.

Existing Conditions Map

Southside Neighborhood

Existing Conditions Map

June 2007



Findings

The findings of the existing conditions study are encouraging for the revitalization and redevelopment of the overall neighborhood. The majority of the properties within the Neighborhood were found to “habitable” by the existing conditions study and the largest percentage of those were residential. These residential properties create opportunities for economic and community development as the residents of the neighborhood will bring about the need for goods and services within the neighborhood, they will create their own market. The existing conditions study found over thirty vacant properties in the neighborhood and the evidence of some blight, however neither dominates the neighborhood. The proximal location to the City Center and the Corridors of Fairmont make the neighborhood attractive for redevelopment. Below average market rates in the neighborhood should be an encouraging factor for developers. By developing a Master Plan for the neighborhood, it can be determined how best to utilize the properties, return them to the tax rolls of Marion County and make them more productive for the neighborhood.

Knowing the inventory of properties and the existing conditions of the neighborhood will allow members of the Southside Neighborhood Blueprint Communities Panel along with residents, business and property owners to develop achievable objectives and action strategies for completing the defined mission of the Panel.

VII. Objectives and Actions

Utilizing the resources gathered from neighborhood meetings, the Existing Conditions Study and in working with the Federal Home Loan Bank's Blueprint Community Team, as well as the Panel's work with the WV Society of the American Institute of Architects the following objectives and actions have been established for the Southside Neighborhood as a method to establish benchmarks for accomplishing the mission of the Panel.

Objective #1: Improve Livability in the Neighborhood

Champions: Bob Gribben and Patrick Roache

Actions:

Encourage sidewalk replacement and upgrades throughout the neighborhood to promote interconnectivity

Promote Pedestrianism

Encourage the use of shared parking

Encourage green space development as "centers" or community gathering locations

Promote neighborhood driven activities

Objective #2: Promote Economic Development

Champions: Jay Rogers and Vera Sansalone

Actions:

Develop a marketing kit for the available properties in the neighborhood

Develop a property inventory list

Hold a workshop for potential developers to highlight the neighborhood

Promote landlord interaction

Spec a cornerstone project

Objective #3: Improve Appearance of the Neighborhood

Champions: Cathy Jasper, Kim Thorne and Fran Warner

Actions:

Develop a streetscape project

Encourage property re-investment

Develop a theme for the corridor

Support the City of Fairmont's Zero Tolerance Policy

Create view sheds in the neighborhood

Objective #4: Promote the Preservation of Historic Properties

Champions: Sandra Scaffidi and Cliff Jackson

Actions:

Encourage re-adaptive use v. demolition when practical

Host a historic preservation workshop

Work with the Fairmont Landmarks Commission to develop a historic booklet about the neighborhood

Develop a resource center in the neighborhood

VIII. Timelines and Evaluation Measures

The Strategic Plan for the Southside Neighborhood has been developed with the goal of achieving the objectives within a five year timeframe. The Plan depends on the Champions of each objective to carry-out the accompanying action strategies. The Panel and other stakeholders of the neighborhood will gather every January to evaluate the progress that has been made in achieving each objective, prioritize or re-prioritize action strategies as well as amend or delete components of the Strategic Plan

IX. Southside After Blueprint

It has been determined that one of the keys to completing the mission of the Panel is to create organizational capacity after the Blueprint Communities training is completed. To that end, members of the Panel are discussing the concept of creating a sub-committee under the Main Street Fairmont Program with members of the Main Street organization. Originally, the sub-committee would be comprised of the nine Blueprint Communities Panel Members and their focus would be to specifically work on the objectives and action strategies of this Strategic Plan and the defined mission of the Southside Neighborhood.

X. Appendix

Information resources for the development of the Fairmont Southside Neighborhood Strategic Plan were obtained from:

1. The City of Fairmont's 2006 Comprehensive Plan
2. The WV Society of Architects "Livable Communities" Project
3. Public Neighborhood Meetings: March, 2006; July, 2006; January, 2007; April, 2007.
4. Existing Conditions Study: June, 2007
5. FHLB Blueprint Communities Trainings, 2007