

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Fact Sheet

Summer 2013

Definition

A comprehensive plan is a “plan for physical development, including land use, adopted by a governing body, setting forth guidelines, goals, and objectives for all activities that affect growth and development in the governing body’s jurisdiction.”¹

Purpose

- * Serves as a blueprint for future development in a community
- * Enhances the quality of life of residents by planning for the future
- * Determines an overall vision of the community and what it aspires to be in the future
- * Sets a realistic action plan
- * Protects key assets that are important to the community, such as historic resources, a local landmark or a business that supports the local economy

Additional Information

- * Provides a snapshot of existing conditions
- * Includes mapping of existing and future land uses
- * Reflects community values and input
- * Promotes collaboration of key stakeholders, local citizen groups, and residents in the planning process

Pros

- Prepares a community for the future
- Proactive instead of reactive
- Provides a tool for the enactment of land use regulations
- Promotes coordination between various levels of government
- Helps establish short and long term financial priorities
- May be more successful in obtaining grant money when a project is listed as a high priority in the comprehensive plan

Cons

- A comprehensive plan is only a policy document and therefore cannot be enforced by government
- Without a team to implement the goals of the comprehensive plan, the plan might sit on a shelf and collect dust

¹W. VA. CODE §8A-1-2-(c) (2013).



A comprehensive plan in West Virginia must contain the following components: ⁴

- Land use
- Housing
- Transportation
- Infrastructure
- Public Services
- Rural
- Recreation
- Economic development
- Community design
- Preferred development areas
- Renewal and/or redevelopment
- Financing
- Historic preservation

Optional elements include the historical, environmental and safety issues within a community ⁵

West Virginia Context

Local governments in West Virginia receive the authority to plan from the West Virginia Code, Chapter 8A: Land Use Planning. This chapter gives local governments the authority to develop a comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan is required if governing bodies want to enact a zoning ordinance, subdivision and land development ordinance, require plans and plats for land development, and issue improvement location permits for construction. ² In West Virginia, plans are required to be updated every ten years. ³

Implementation Strategies

To put a comprehensive plan in place, the plan must first be drafted. A comprehensive plan must contain certain components, including a statement of goals and objectives, a timeline, and maps. ⁶ The municipality must provide an opportunity for the public to participate during the planning process. ⁷ The local government must then adopt the plan and file the plan with the county commission. ⁸

The comprehensive plan is implemented by adopting policies or ordinances that further the goals and objectives of the plan. Zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances and conservation easements are examples of tools that implement the comprehensive plan.

² W. VA. CODE §8A-1-1 (2013).

³ W. VA. CODE §8A-1-3-11(a) (2013).

⁴ W. VA. CODE §8A-1-3-4 (2013).

⁵ W. VA. CODE §8A-1-3-5 (2013).

⁶ W. VA. CODE §8A-1-3-4 (b) (2013).

⁷ W. VA. CODE §8A-1-3-6 (2013).

⁸ W. VA. CODE §8A-1-3-9 (2013).

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