

# Chapter 13

## Renewal/Redevelopment

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### A. OVERVIEW

In large part, most cities were “built out” by the 1960’s, that is to say that most of the large tracts of land had already been developed and the boundaries of the city were fixed, leaving only the vacant land on the edge of the city for future development. As land development was pushed outward and “fringe” areas were developed as discussed in the Annexation Chapter of this Comprehensive Plan, declining, depopulated, poor and deteriorated center cities emerged.

The future of most cities, including Fairmont’s is dependant on continued and increased investment in its physical redevelopment. For if investment is not made to maintain, improve, or rebuild the city and investment is withheld, physical deterioration and economic obsolescence will accelerate.

Cities today face serious social, economic, and physical problems. The list of urban problems is well known. After sustained population and boundary growth the availability of land within the city was dwindling and the transportation revolution turned vacant farmland into prime development land. Post-World War II economic and demographic expansion fueled the demand for housing. A nation of urban renters would quickly become a nation of suburban homeowners.

The densely developed working-class cottages of the central city were the legacy of massive immigrations from Europe and from America's farms. They represented the old life of struggle and sacrifice. The suburbs represented the new life of economic security, progress, leisure, and consumption.

The erosion of the city’s primary strength--industry, soon accompanied loss of population and trade. Changes in technology and the emergence of a world economy weakened the competitive position of the city's industrial infrastructure and its unionized labor force.

Depleted of its resources, disadvantaged by aged and obsolete infrastructure, strapped with an increasingly dependent population, the central city faces an unprecedented crisis. Reinvestment and redevelopment are essential. Hotels, offices, and commercial buildings are seen as evidence of a city's economic vitality. Nonetheless, the city is mainly a place of residence. Hence a city's demographic vitality is part and parcel of its economic vitality. Population is the base. Unless cities maintain or replenish their populations, housing, retail, commercial, industrial and entertainment markets decline, and tax base erodes.

The City of Fairmont’s physical decline can be traced back to a point in time during the late 1970’s through the mid 80’s when economically the city lost a great deal of the mining and manufacturing employment base. The loss of revenue from these economic engines combined with a loss in jobs started a depopulation of the city. The city continued to lose population with the development of “fringe” areas as new residential subdivisions were created. The end of Federal Revenue Sharing and the development of the Middletown Mall outside of the corporate limits of Fairmont added to the City’s lack of investment power as streets went unpaved, infrastructure aged, businesses moved out of the city to fringe areas and private investment followed.

This Chapter will examine the issues surrounding the renewal, redevelopment and revitalization of the City of Fairmont taking a look at the history of the city marking its decline, the need for renewal/redevelopment strategies and finally an examination of some of the strategies that have been put in place to foster renewal and redevelopment in the City of Fairmont.



## B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

The goals and actions of this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan have been developed to promote the renewal/redevelopment of the City of Fairmont; its economy, markets and population.

### *Goal:*

*The City of Fairmont should undertake renewal/redevelopment strategies that reverse the declining economic and social characteristics of the city by strengthening the housing, retail, commercial, industrial and entertainment markets*

### **Actions:**

- Implement current strategies aimed at strengthening the markets of Fairmont.
- Continue support of the non-profit partners performing renewal/redevelopment work in the community.
- Encourage private investment in the renewal/redevelopment process.
- Develop sound renewal/redevelopment strategies rooted in economics.

## C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Fairmont once enjoyed a thriving downtown anchored by a strong retail base and surrounded by densely populated neighborhoods. The commercial and industrial base of the city was strong on the east and west sides of the Monongahela River as the river itself and other key infrastructure provided the means for the exchange and production of goods and services. The downturn of the industries and the period of decline mentioned in previous sections of this chapter led to the realizations that unless the city underwent economic revitalization, its future would remain stagnate. Political and civic leadership along with the general citizenry recognized the need for renewal and redevelopment to occur if the community was going to compete with its sister cities to the north and south. For Fairmont, the creation of a high technology employment sector is often pointed to as the beginning of Fairmont's redevelopment. The redevelopment of Fairmont's economy triggered exploration of other areas for renewal. Infrastructure was once the key to the city's prosperity and leaders once again looked at ways of improving and renewing its key infrastructure components. Chief among the infrastructure components in the city was the Jefferson Street/High Level Bridge. Closed to traffic for several years, political and civic leaders joined with citizens in a fight to fund the restoration of this magnificent structure. The restoration of the Jefferson Street/High Level Bridge (recently renamed the Robert H. Mollohan/Jefferson Street Bridge), signified the first great infrastructure reinvestment in the community in many, many years and formed the first strategy of the City of Fairmont in its efforts to redevelop the City; investment in infrastructure. This single act of renewal served as a catalyst for other efforts including the investment in new streetscape, water and sewer improvement projects, new roadways and parking garages. Although not all measures are complete and not all have been represented in this section, there has conservatively been or will be over \$130 million dollars in public reinvestment in infrastructure components in Fairmont within a ten year time frame.

For renewal and redevelopment to succeed however, all investment cannot come from the public sector. That is why it is paramount that the efforts of private sector investors increase in the redevelopment efforts of Fairmont. Within the last ten years, the redevelopment of the former G.C. Murphy building on Adams Street has been the single greatest investment of private capital in Fairmont. Over 3.5 million

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dollars of private financing was used in a 5.5 million dollar public private partnership that transformed the vacant dilapidated store into 56,000 square feet of class A office space.

In order to ensure that public investments were coordinated to be both the most effective and provide the best environment for private sector investment, City leaders determined that a formal plan needed to be developed that would provide the framework for the continuing revitalization effort.

A two-year planning process was undertaken with a focus on the economic and market issues of the City. In depth analysis was performed on the downtown's retail, office and housing markets, in the context of its current conditions and future potential. The research and analysis provided targeted information to give the City of Fairmont the greatest opportunity for sustainability and economic success. The Downtown Revitalization Plan developed by Thomas Point Associates of Annapolis, MD, creates a vibrant and diverse atmosphere where housing, retail, office, entertainment, recreational and cultural uses co-exist. The Plan proposes \$50 million in development and redevelopment projects that include new housing, restaurants and retail space. Another \$30 million will be spent on public infrastructure improvements including a pedestrian bridge, marina and parking garages.

A key component of the Downtown Revitalization Plan is the Riverfront Master Plan. Encompassing approximately 50 acres on the east side of Fairmont along the Monongahela River, the plan seeks to turn vacant and underutilized industrial property into an area of regional attraction. The Riverfront Master Plan features a private, gated housing community, a marina and amphitheater. Over fifty thousand square feet of retail space has been programmed into an area that also includes hotel sites, public green space and a science and nature center where the technologies of today and the future will entertain and educate the minds of tomorrow. The Fairmont Riverfront Master Plan, developed by Terradon Corporation of Nitro, WV has received design awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects and the West Virginia Society of Consulting Engineers.

The Fairmont Renaissance Corporation was established to be the lead organization in the implementation of the Downtown Revitalization Plan and corresponding Riverfront Master Plan. It is envisioned that FRC will be responsible for packaging real estate and infrastructure projects, soliciting interested developers along with structuring financing plans necessary to accomplish the projects recommended in the Plans.

The City of Fairmont has had many partners join in the mission of revitalizing Fairmont over the years. Their hard work and dedication to the cause has helped bring about positive changes and made the redevelopment constraints much easier to overcome.

The Fairmont Community Development Partnership is currently undertaking a comprehensive plan to assist in the construction and rehabilitation of housing units in the area surrounding the Downtown Central Business District as part of their overall mission of in community and neighborhood revitalization, while the Vandalia Heritage Foundation provides the historic preservation experience essential to authenticate and preserve the culture, appearance and stability of older and historic structures in Fairmont. And Main Street Fairmont continues to promote economic development within the context of historic preservation throughout the Central Business District.

Coinciding with this work, is the redevelopment project at the former Sharon Steel site also known as the Fairmont Coke Works Site. Located on approximately 100 acres of land in the eastern portion of the city, the Fairmont Coke Works Site has undergone significant environmental remediation under the US Environmental Protection Agency's Project XL. Project XL was created by EPA to test innovative



environmental management strategies and, through this process, foster excellence and leadership in environmental protection. Following one year of developing this pilot project, EPA approved ExxonMobil's proposal and this site became the first Superfund site in the country to be approved under Project XL. The City of Fairmont through the Real Property Management Committee has contracted a consulting team comprised of Terradon Corporation, Genseler, Tripp-Umbach and Omni Associates to develop a comprehensive master plan for the sites redevelopment.

Fairmont has completed an economic transformation by shifting its dependency from traditional industries to those of the high technology revolution, while continuing to support traditional manufacturing and mining jobs. A strategy for investing in infrastructure is in place that is sound and provides the network essential for population and market growth.

## **D. BASIC ISSUES**

As Fairmont pushes forward with its plans for revitalizing the City, it does so armed with a series of plans and initiatives that have led to what officials hope to be the final push for substantive redevelopment with the formation of an Urban Renewal Authority. A prime recommendation of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, the URA was formed by the City of Fairmont in May of 2004. Since this time the organization has worked diligently to develop boundaries for area where a renewal plan will be developed. Guided by the principals of urban renewal law and the social ethics surrounding the topic, the Fairmont Urban Renewal Authority seeks to address economic obsolescence, address areas of slum and blight and created a plan that will clearly define the role of both the public and private sector in order to attract significant new investment and development opportunities.

## **E. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Short Range (2005-2008)**

- a. Continue to support the efforts of the Fairmont Community Development Partnership in the Maple/Ogden Gateway Project.
- b. Implement the recommendations of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.
- c. Implement the Fairmont Riverfront Master Plan.
- d. Continue to fund capital improvements to the City's infrastructure system.
- e. Support the efforts of the City of Fairmont Urban Renewal Authority.
- f. Support the efforts of Main Street Fairmont.
- g. Develop and begin implementation of the first Urban Renewal Plan for the city.
- h. Complete the conceptual Master Plan for the redevelopment of the Fairmont Coke Works Site.
- i. Define at least one additional Urban Renewal Area in the city.
- j. Complete the Beltline Redevelopment Plan.
- k. Evaluate and consider current land use and develop incentives for redevelopment projects.

### **2. Medium Range (2008-2011)**

- a. Continue to support the efforts of the Fairmont Community Development Partnership in the Maple/Ogden Gateway Project.
- b. Continue to implement the recommendations of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

- c. Continue to implement the Fairmont Riverfront Master Plan.
- d. Continue to fund capital improvements to the City's infrastructure system.
- e. Continue to implement the recommendations of the first Urban Renewal Plan.
- f. Develop an Urban Renewal Plan for the second Urban Renewal Area.
- g. Create a Master Development Plan for the Fairmont Coke Works Site.
- h. Implement recommendations in the Beltline Redevelopment Plan.

### **3. Long Range (2011-2015)**

- a. Continue to support the efforts of the Fairmont Community Development Partnership in the Maple/Ogden Gateway Project.
- b. Continue to implement the recommendations of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.
- c. Continue to implement the Fairmont Riverfront Master Plan.
- d. Continue to fund capital improvements to the City's infrastructure system.
- e. Continue to implement the recommendations of the first Urban Renewal Plan.
- f. Begin implementation of recommendations for the second Urban Renewal Plan
- g. Implement Master Development Plan for the Fairmont Coke Works Site.
- h. Examine other areas that could be consider for urban renewal.
- i. Continue to implement recommendations in the Beltline Redevelopment Plan.