

Comprehensive Plan for the City of Wheeling 1997 Update

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Vision Statement

In the twenty-first century, Wheeling will have a positive quality of life based on a **diverse economy** driven primarily by the service, technology, manufacturing and tourism industries occurring in a safe, traditional small town setting with **strong neighborhoods** and an **efficient supporting infrastructure** that will maintain the existing level of service.

Vision Statement developed by the Wheeling Comprehensive Plan Update Steering Committee and adopted by the Wheeling City Planning Commission and the Wheeling City Council in June 1996

Executive Summary

This is an update of the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Wheeling, West Virginia, which was last updated on a city wide basis in 1964. In the period since the last Plan Update, Wheeling has experienced a significant decline in population and employment, a trend that has continued at a steady pace since 1940. At the same time, the remaining population has become markedly older, as the out-migration occurred primarily among younger people.

Despite the population decline, some positive trends have emerged. Population projections (prepared as part of this Plan Update) suggest that for the Wheeling metropolitan area as a whole, the decline appears to be leveling off. A modest increase in the population is expected to occur in the Wheeling metropolitan area over the next twenty-five year period. What portion, if any, of this modest increase will occur in the City of Wheeling itself is difficult to forecast and will depend on the City's willingness to aggressively capture new growth.

This Plan is a call to action to reverse negative trends, to reinforce positive trends, and to encourage population and economic growth within the City's boundaries. In order to accomplish these goals, this Plan recommends that the City improve its competitive position as a place to live and work. **The City cannot afford to simply accept the prevailing trends, but rather must take assertive and proactive action to determine its own future.**

This Plan, if implemented, will put the City of Wheeling on track for a prosperous and productive 21st century, a future that fulfills the promise of the City's proud heritage.

Key recommendations of the plan include:

- C Extension of a relocated and improved W.V. Route 2—through Stackyard Hollow and north along the ridge tops through the Richland Magisterial District to the vicinity of the Wheeling/Ohio County Airport—to gain access to more than 4,000 acres of developable land.
- C Aggressive action by the City to bring about redevelopment in nine special planning areas as defined by this plan. These areas include the riverfront in North Wheeling, a shopping area located at the intersection of I-470 and W.V. Route 2, and light industrial redevelopment in the southern portion of East Wheeling.

- C The development of a regional economic adjustment strategy to position the region to participate more fully in an economy based on information technology. This strategy should involve a regional collaboration of government, business, and educational institutions throughout the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia.
- C Consolidation of the City's housing policy coordination under a single umbrella entity derived from the existing Wheeling Housing Authority. This effort should be directed toward increasing home ownership and property maintenance in the City's older neighborhoods, and the development of new middle-income housing to attract new residents into the City.
- C Institution of a viable historic conservation strategy to preserve the essence of the City's historic heritage (as described and adopted in the Wheeling National Heritage Area Plan). This strategy should include expanded use of historic zoning districts that include measures to regulate building renovation and demolition as well as the design characteristics of new development.
- C Revision of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to bring them into conformance with contemporary practice and with the Federal Fair Housing Act, and to provide protection to the City's older residential neighborhoods from the practice of subdividing single family homes into multiple apartments or commercial establishments.
- C Strengthened enforcement of the City's codes relating to building condition, as well as improvements in the permitting process to encourage new development in the City.

This Plan Update incorporates viable suggestions made in past plans with new ideas for the future. Immediate action is imperative. City leaders are encouraged to examine what measures will be necessary to remove past obstacles and forge strong alliances in order to ensure implementation of this Plan's recommendations. Multiple courses of action are indicated.

Wheeling W.V. Experiences Rebirth

City Finds New Life in Old Clothes

By CALEB A. FAUX

WHEELING, Aug. 14 - Thirty years ago, Wheeling, West Virginia was a classic example of what had become known as the Rust Belt. Once a thriving industrial center, the city had suffered a prolonged period of decline beginning not long after the end of World War II and lasting into the 1990s.

Today, the City of Wheeling has been transformed into a regional entertainment center, a conference destination and a stable community offering a quality of life envied by civic leaders across the Midwest.

The most visible symbols of change in Wheeling are the well known riverfront, the bustling hotel and convention center located just south of downtown at the junction of the Ohio River and Wheeling Creek, the prominent CitiCorp offices seen by millions of travelers passing through Wheeling on Interstate 70, and the North Wheeling historic area.

But behind these symbols is a more fundamental change in the basic economy of the Wheeling area. The key to changing Wheeling's fortunes lay in developing a strategy to bring a new economic base to the area. The story behind this transition is one of civic faith and determination.

The History

In 1940, Wheeling had a population of 60,000. By 1990, that number had fallen to less

than 35,000. What had been the mainstays of the local economy, mining and manufacturing, had suffered a combined loss of more than 14,000 jobs in the three county Wheeling Metropolitan area during a twenty five year period beginning in 1965.

Moreover, the remaining population was becoming markedly older than the rest of the nation. In 1995, only Arizona, Florida and Arkansas had a higher percentage of population above age 65 than West Virginia.

Ohio County, where Wheeling is located, led the state at 19.8% in contrast to the national average of 12.5%.

Downtown Wheeling had declined due to competition from malls located in Ohio across the Ohio River in Belmont County. While the population had declined, and retailers had left town, the City of Wheeling was burdened with the task of maintaining an aging infrastructure built to support its earlier population.

City leaders realized that aggressive action was necessary to counteract the prevailing trends buffeting Wheeling. Led by then Mayor John W. Lipphardt, the City charted a new course that sought to market the City's best attributes as a lure to attract new business and residents.

In doing so, the City became part of a national trend towards growth in small and medium sized towns and cities that offer a quality of life featuring low crime rates, good schools, scenic surroundings and recreational amenities.

The Heritage Plan

The City's turn towards recovery began in the early 1990's with the development of a Plan that led to the revitalization the City's riverfront area. With the assistance of former Senator Robert C. Byrd, the City of Wheeling was designated a "National Heritage Area". The development of the water front port area and the popular riverfront restaurants can all be traced to the Heritage Plan.

The development of the convention center on the banks of the Ohio River at the mouth of Wheeling Creek was also envisioned in the Heritage Plan. The convention center brought with it the development of a new Hotel and the renovation of several older buildings in its immediate neighborhood into first class office space.

The Heritage Plan was the embodiment of a concept first proposed by Harry Hamm, the former editor of the Wheeling News-Register. Late in his career, while confined to bed by illness, Hamm wrote Wheeling 2000, a personal vision statement regarding the future of Wheeling. Hamm proposed a strategy of building Wheeling into a retirement and tourist destination, seeking to capitalize on the low crime rate, excellent parks, central location good schools and scenic environment as the major drawing cards.

The City Wide Plan

Building on the concepts incorporated into the Heritage Plan, in 1997 the City completed

an update to its Comprehensive Plan. The 1997 Plan combined recognition of the attractive but largely unrecognized assets the City already had to offer with a strategy designed to maximize the use of under utilized opportunities.

To be Continued ???

Why Have a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is two things: it is a statement of a vision for the future of the City articulated by its citizens and a road map for policy implementation that will allow the vision to become reality. When adopted by City Council, the Plan becomes a statement of the City's intentions regarding future development. As such, it becomes an important piece of the legal foundation upon which the justification for future policy decisions by the City Administration, Board of Zoning Appeals, City Planning Commission, and City Council will rest.

The Comprehensive Plan should be regarded as the guiding reference document when making decisions about zoning, investment in public infrastructure, public facilities, and general public policy regarding growth and development of the City. When the City's intentions in this regard change, it is appropriate to amend the Plan to reflect the change. Use of the Comprehensive Plan in this way will help ensure that such decisions are made in a coordinated way and support the shared vision that the Plan represents.

While a comprehensive plan is primarily concerned with the physical environment, it incorporates decisions which, if implemented, will have broad consequences that can influence the quality of life for the citizens of Wheeling in many ways. Of these, perhaps the most important are those that will influence the health of the City's economic base. Due to constraints imposed by topography, which result in a severe shortage of developable sites, these decisions may be more critical in Wheeling than they are in other locations.

The first Comprehensive Plan for the City of Wheeling was completed and adopted in 1964. In 1983, the City undertook an update of the Plan which was to have included detailed plans for each neighborhood in the City. The 1983 Update was never completed due to a lack of funds, however, detailed plans were finished for North Wheeling, South Wheeling, East Wheeling, Center Wheeling, Fulton/Glenwood,

Warwood, and Elm Grove. Thus, this 1996 Plan Update is the first complete city wide update to occur in more than thirty years.

This Plan Update is intended to cover the period from 1997-2020. A plan update is, as the name implies, a review of the existing plan for the purpose of making additions and/or changes where appropriate to reflect changed circumstances and concerns. It is not, and should not be, a complete reinvention of the wheel. As such the Plan Update builds upon plans that have gone before as the basis for a new plan. Simply because the ideas embodied in previous plans may not have been accomplished does not by definition show those concepts to be flawed.

In addition to the two previous Comprehensive Plans, from time to time other land use plans which focused on particular areas have also been prepared by the City. Most notably, these efforts include the recent (1992) *Wheeling National Heritage Area Plan*, a 1990 *Waterfront and Downtown Plan*, a 1990 *Center Wheeling Revitalization and Redevelopment Plan*, a 1988 *East Wheeling Revitalization Plan*, a 1977 *Action Program for Central Business District Rejuvenation*, and a 1974 *Development Analysis of East Wheeling*. Also worth the success of Oglebay Park and the Wheeling Jamboree. In part the *Wheeling 2000 Plan* led to the development of the *Wheeling National Heritage Area Plan*. All of the available planning documents were reviewed in the early stages of this Plan Update and have served as valuable resources in its preparation. To the greatest extent possible, the previous planning efforts have been incorporated into and coordinated with this Plan. A complete bibliography of the planning documents reviewed is contained in the Appendix to this report.

Chapter 1

Study Area Definition and Plan Development

Study Area Definition

At the outset of the planning process, a study area (to be used for analysis in the plan) was defined in cooperation with the City's Department of Development. In general, the detailed data collection and analysis performed was confined to the area within the City limits. However, it must be recognized that Wheeling does not exist in a vacuum and to be seen properly must be viewed in its larger context. For this reason, a larger study area was agreed upon in consultation with the staff of the City's Department of Development.

The study area includes areas that are external to the City because it is clear that the development of these areas will have a significant impact on the future of Wheeling. The Study Area is shown in Map #1. These areas are located primarily to the north of the City in the Richland and Triadelphia magisterial districts, extending to the northern boundary of Ohio County and encompassing the Wheeling-Ohio County Airport.

The inclusion of these areas in this Plan should not be construed as a statement of intent by the City of Wheeling to seek annexation in these areas, although the subject of potential annexation is addressed directly in Chapter 10 of this Plan. As with data collection, the public involvement process associated with the development of this plan was also confined to the City of Wheeling.

Wheeling has been for many years a city of well-defined neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods are directly referred to throughout the text of this Plan, the official boundaries are shown in Map #2 as a point of reference for the reader.

How The Plan Was Developed

In order to develop a plan that will serve as a valued policy guide in future decision making, it is essential that two important elements be in place. These elements include thorough data

collection and citizen involvement. A plan that is not based on these elements will likely not be implemented because it has no basis in reality. The manner in

which these two critical requirements were addressed in this Plan Update is outlined below.

Data Collection

A realistic comprehensive plan must be founded on a complete understanding of the physical, demographic and economic context in which the plan must be implemented. Thus, the first step in any planning process is the collection of data to be used as the basic source of reference while developing the plan. This data must include detailed information about the physical characteristics of the land and how it is being used, information about the extent and condition of the public infrastructure, information about current demographic characteristics of the population as well as historic demographic trends, and information about current and historic economic conditions in the area.

A notable feature of the development of this Plan Update has been the City of Wheeling's first venture into the area of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. In conjunction with this planning process, the City purchased computer hardware and software with the intent of developing an operational GIS system in-house. Essentially, a GIS system connects a digital map with a computerized database. A well developed and maintained GIS system can be an invaluable tool for providing the data required for informed decision making by the City. The initial data source for building the Wheeling GIS system was the property records database maintained by the Ohio County Tax Assessor's office.

In addition to the analysis of the GIS, extensive field investigation both supplemented and verified the data. In particular the field work focused on housing conditions in the City of

Wheeling. The services of the Regional Research Institute located at West Virginia University were retained for the task of analyzing past economic and demographic

trends as well as to prepare projections of future trends.

Map #1 study area map

Map #2 -
Wheeling
Neighborhoods

Citizen Involvement

Citizen involvement is critical in any planning process. This is a Plan for Wheeling, and must, if it is to mean anything, accurately represent the desires and ambitions of the citizens of Wheeling. For this reason, an extensive program to secure citizen involvement has been made part of the process in developing this Plan Update. First, a Plan Update Steering Committee was selected to provide guidance to the consultant and to City staff throughout the plan development process. It includes representatives of the Planning Commission and a broad cross section of interests within Wheeling.

Other means of soliciting local input were utilized as well. During the early stages of the planning process, personal interviews were conducted with key persons in the City administration and with community representatives to provide historical insight into the issues that are considered important in the City of Wheeling. Similarly a series of six well-publicized public workshops were held in locations throughout the City in the first phase of the planning process to provide interested citizens the opportunity to raise issues of concern and make suggestions regarding the direction the Plan should take. The members of the Steering Committee were active participants in these workshops. To allow for more detailed responses by workshop participants, as well as to accommodate people who were unable to attend a workshop, a survey questionnaire was also widely distributed by publication in the Wheeling News-Register and through the Ohio County School system, providing an additional opportunity for input into the planning process.

Based on the concerns raised through all of these sources, as well as on review of the data being collected by the consultants, the Plan Update Steering Committee met midway through the planning process for a two-day "visioning session." The result was a set of goals and policies to guide the development of the final Plan. These were submitted to the Planning Commission and the Wheeling City Council where they were reviewed and formally

adopted as guiding principles for the development of the Plan. (See Chapter 7.)

As the Plan was being developed, a second round of public Plan Alternative Workshops was conducted in the same neighborhoods in which the first round had occurred. The purpose was to review the data that had been collected and to offer for discussion the preliminary concepts which were being considered for inclusion in the Plan. In a sense, these workshops were intended to verify that the concerns raised in the preliminary workshops had been adequately addressed. Again the members of the Plan Update Steering Committee were active participants in these public workshops. Thus, this Plan Update reflects the participation of a wide cross section of the citizenry of the City of Wheeling.

Identification of Planning Issues

Based on the public workshops, key person interviews, and input from the Steering Committee, a number of issues were identified that are of concern to the citizens of Wheeling. The most commonly repeated concerns are briefly summarized below in no particular order:

- C Citizens perceive that Wheeling's young people are too often forced to leave the area in search of economic opportunity. While there is great pride in the quality of life that can be found in Wheeling, there is frustration centered on the lack of employment opportunity. Thus, the need for economic development is very widely recognized.
- C Civic leaders, and to some extent the public, have also been concerned about a corresponding, though less well-known, issue related to the shortage of suitable sites for economic development projects.
- C Citizens recognize that Downtown Wheeling has for several years been losing its place as the dominant shopping center in the Wheeling metropolitan area. Clearly, competition from malls in eastern Ohio and from smaller retail locations along National Road and in Woodsdale and Elm Grove have contributed to the present situation in

- downtown. However, there is no clear
- C There is general agreement among citizens that Wheeling has an important place in the nation's heritage, and that the City possesses a large stock of historic buildings. While many residents see the historic buildings as one of the City's most precious assets, others see them more as obstacles to the City's progress.
 - C There is general public support for the concept of building the City of Wheeling into a tourist and entertainment destination, in keeping with the direction in which the City has been moving for the last few years.
 - C Citizens perceive that the City has not been aggressive in creating a coordinated effort to promote and market itself to the Pittsburgh metropolitan area as well as other parts of the nation.
 - C Citizens are becoming increasingly aware that the riverfront is an important asset for the City which should be emphasized in redevelopment plans.
 - C Citizens point proudly to the excellent quality of life in Wheeling featuring an excellent school system, a low crime rate, and a fine park system. They feel that more could be done to market the positive features of Wheeling as a place to live.
 - C A much loved aspect of the City of Wheeling is the network of well-defined and unique neighborhoods each demonstrating a strong sense of internal identity.
 - C In several neighborhoods, most especially the Woodsdale/Edgewood area, citizens are concerned about the expansion of commercial uses, particularly where they abut or encroach on residential areas. Spot zoning is cited as a prime cause of this problem.
 - C Citizens are concerned about lack of maintenance in sidewalks and infrastructure in the older sections of the City.
 - C There is a perception that the City needs to be more active in the area of housing development and redevelopment, and that much of the existing housing stock is in serious decline. There is a perceived need for more aggressive enforcement of building code regulations to slow the decline of the
- agreement regarding a solution. building stock, as well as to implement more proactive measures to demolish derelict buildings that compromise values in surrounding properties.
 - C Some citizens perceive that the regulation of development in Wheeling is sometimes inconsistent and haphazard, and that approval of building and development in Wheeling is sometimes difficult to negotiate.
 - C Citizens perceive that the City of Wheeling has been slow to involve itself in a serious way in the facilitation of all types of redevelopment, especially industrial and commercial, through the acquisition of property and assembly of larger sites for development.
 - C Citizens are aware of the fact that the population of Wheeling is aging, and concerned about the long term consequences of this trend.
 - C There is a strong sense of nostalgia among some citizens in Wheeling who remember the City as it was in the 1950s and 1960s. This is often expressed as a desire to return to that time, a desire which is sometimes an obstacle to looking towards the future.