



**HUNTINGTON**  
**WEST VIRGINIA**  
*Planning & Development*



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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Smart Growth America

**FROM:** Breanna Shell, Planner  
Sherry Wilkins, Stormwater Director

**DATE:** April 24, 2015

**RE: Smart Growth America TA: Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health – Six-Month Progress Report**

The City of Huntington would like to thank Chris Zimmerman, John Robert Smith and Smart Growth America for the valuable guidance provided during the Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health Technical Assistance (TA) visit in August 2014. The visit built off the success that the city has seen in recently adopting our revised Comprehensive Plan update: Plan2025 and in reforming our stormwater management system.

During the TA visit we focused our discussion on three targeted economic development zones around the Old Main Corridor downtown, 14<sup>th</sup> Street West commercial center in West Huntington, and the Hal Greer Corridor in the Fairfield neighborhood.

After successful discussion sessions were held with visitors from Smart Growth America over August 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> we drafted a nine (9) point “Next Steps” memo that has been guiding our actions as we move our various initiatives forward. The following is a status update on our progress to date:

Stormwater and Land Use Regulations:

- The Stormwater Utility continues to review and approve stormwater management plans for new and re-development projects. The Utility offers incentives for smart growth development. If a proposed project meets the criteria for re-development, brownfield re-development, located near transit, and is high density, then the requirements to manage stormwater on site are slightly relaxed. This has benefited the City by allowing new developments and controlling stormwater runoff into the combined sewer system and local streams.
  - o The Utility is always seeking better ways to manage stormwater and streamline the permit process in conjunction with all the other permitting, especially with zoning and land use regulations. After training at the American Planning Association's National Conference in April 2015, we have learned some best practices in better incorporating stormwater management into our land use regulations.

- In addition, in the Southside neighborhood area along 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue we have engaged a stakeholder group in doing an audit of the existing conditions and the potential for creating new development standards to encourage a vibrant neighborhood commercial district. This audit also entailed a detailed study of an important connector street between the neighborhood and downtown, the group identified a collection of improvements to better the pedestrian experience and will be hosting a “Critical Mass Walk.”
- Across all of the targeted areas for development we are working with our Legal office to create development zones that would require an extra level of review to ensure development is in line with our comprehensive plan update, Plan2025, while we are determining the new zoning ordinance regulations.
- The City of Huntington planning office has continued to conduct an existing land use survey that will identify the land use, vacancy, condition, and parking estimates of properties across the city, through prioritizing the survey data in our targeted economic development areas, we have completed the downtown section and are starting to analyze the data. Next we will be focusing our efforts in West Huntington prioritizing the area around 14<sup>th</sup> Street West.

Focused interventions:

- The City of Huntington police department was granted a \$100,000 Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) grant to develop a community oriented plan to fight crime in the downtown. Some of the key research questions include investigating the correlation between types of businesses and business appearance in the rates of crime. This planning grant will also provide an opportunity to further engage the downtown business and citizenry on improvements that could be made along the Old Main Corridor.
  - o Since November we have continued our stakeholder engagement with the collaboration of the BCJI Cross-Sector Partnership and are planning a larger community engagement and “Build a Better Block” event to gather input and showcase the types of changes we would like to see in the downtown Old Main Corridor. The event will include the intervention of one block on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue to showcase the types of changes we hope to see in the downtown in a focused effort. This follows from the SGA memo to focus our efforts within our target areas and to use events to showcase changes. During the event we will be filling in vacant storefronts with “pop-up” retail and services, bringing in vendors and music entertainment on an empty parking lot, and building a temporary park in the middle of the block. These efforts will strive to showcase a continuous street frontage and the reduction of surface parking lots.
  - o In addition to the showcase of concentrated activity on one block of our targeted area a primary focus of the BCJI partnership is to survey residents, business owners, and community stakeholders to develop the proper research to identify crime drivers and lay the groundwork for a comprehensive strategy for the downtown.
- The collaboration of economic development assistance organizations launched the “Huntington: Be small. Live large.” initiative in May 2014 to help create a team to support existing businesses, promote local business and inspire entrepreneurs. Since the Smart Growth America visit this group has been sharing information about individual events that support the business community and has nominated select small business

owners to be recognized individually during Small Business month in May 2015. This group has also partnered with the BCJI downtown partnership to do a survey of the downtown business community to see what regulations they feel are necessary to promote a vibrant downtown and reduce crime.

- The City of Huntington met with Strong Towns ([www.strongtowns.org](http://www.strongtowns.org)) to do a follow up visit to assist in implementation of our next steps memo and further changes to our zoning ordinance in strategic locations. Our assistance visit from them entailed:
  - o Further targeting changes to the specific commercial centers we identified in the Smart Growth America memo and Plan2025 by detailing study boundaries and doing research in these areas including: a building typology survey, streets/transportation analysis, and figure ground maps.
  - o During the visit, Jim Kumon led our community members in several discussions providing an outside perspective on tactics to capture some of the changes we hope to see with short-term interventions.
- In the 14<sup>th</sup> Street West targeted area the River to Rail committee completed a Liveable Communities project with the American Institute of Architects to assist in creating targeted zoning and design guidelines and create connections to sections of the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health and the downtown. To celebrate these efforts and build momentum for the next steps the River to Rail Committee had an Earth Day celebration on April 22nd at the 14<sup>th</sup> Street West gazebo engaging in education activities, music, and celebration of 3 new pieces of art along the commercial district.

Again, we thank Smart Growth America for their Technical Assistance guidance as we embark on transforming our targeted economic development areas. We feel we are making significant progress towards our next steps and look forward to providing you with a 1-year update.