

Residential neighborhood in Elkins

Background Information

This chapter will examine land use characteristics in the City of Elkins. The chapter will include an analysis of existing land use patterns and land use ordinances, housing characteristics, historical resources, and beautification efforts.

Land Use

Existing Land Use

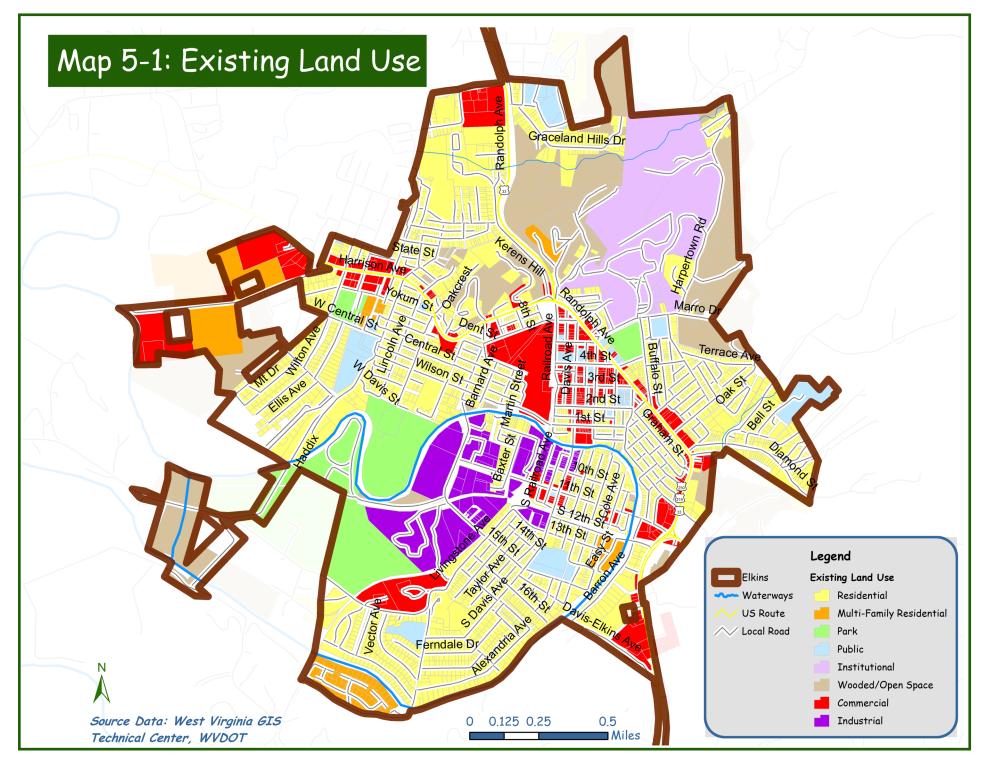
The City of Elkins is mainly a residential community made up of various neighborhoods as illustrated on *Map 5-1: Existing Land Use*, which shows the current actual uses of parcels of land throughout the city, and which should not be confused with a zoning map. Residential uses are primarily single-family, with small pockets of multi-family uses. Commercial uses are located in the downtown business district, Randolph Avenue, Rail Yard, and US 250. As Elkins is the County seat, there are also many public uses located in the downtown business district (Court House, County Office Buildings, etc.). Industrial uses are primarily located in the Elkins Industrial Park. Institutional uses include Davis & Elkins College.

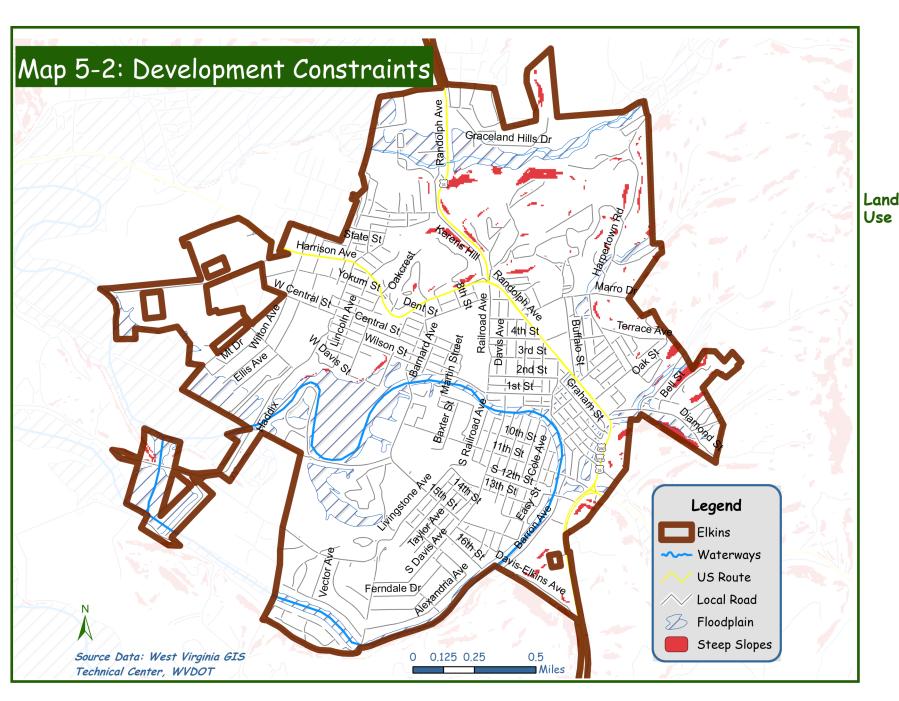


Recreation uses include Bluegrass Park, Davis Street Park, Elkins City Park, Glendale Park, and Riverbend Park.

- Bluegrass Park-baseball field, small pavilion, playground area, and basketball courts
- Davis Street Park- small playground, playground, basketball court
- Elkins City Park- three pavilions, nine picnic sites, basketball court, eight horseshoe pits, large playground area
- Glendale Park- walking trail, skateboard area, football practice field, soccer fields, four picnic sites, small pavilion, and large, flat open space for practices
- Riverbend Park- walking trail, lighted soccer field, three small soccer fields, three lighted Little League baseball fields, playground area, two volleyball courts, two pavilions, three picnic sites







City of Elkins Comprehensive Plan 5-4

Regulations

The City of Elkins has enacted several land use regulations to protect the character of the City. Land use regulations include zoning, building code, floodplain ordinance, rental registration program, and vacant structure ordinance.

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Zoning

City of Elkins has enacted a zoning ordinance to regulate the use of land within municipal limits. The zoning ordinance consists of four zoning districts:

- Residential, restricted
- Residential, unrestricted
- Commercial
- Industrial

The ordinance also establishes regulations for non-conforming uses, setbacks, height of buildings and parking.

Building Code

The City also requires building permits when erecting, constructing, installing, repairing, altering, or enlarging any building or structure or any electrical wiring, gas system, or plumbing system.

Floodplain Ordinance

The City has enacted a floodplain ordinance. The ordinance establishes a floodplain district, which includes all land within the 100 year floodplain. The ordinance establishes regulations regarding development in the floodplain, as well as design and construction standards.

In the floodway no development shall be permitted which would result in any increase in the base flood elevation during the occurrence of the base flood discharge.

Rental Registration Program

In 2013, the City enacted a rental registration program. The purpose of the program is to promote health and safety standards for rental housing. Rentals are inspected by the City in regards to condition and maintenance. Inspections include the following:

- Exterior Structure
- Interior Structure
- Light, ventilation, and occupancy limitations
- Plumbing facilities

- Mechanical requirements
- Electrical requirements
- Alarm requirements
- Fire safety requirements

Vacant Structure Ordinance

The City also requires that vacant buildings be registered by the owner. A fee is assessed each year the building stands vacant. It is the hope of the City that the ordinance will encourage land owners to either rent their building or sell it instead of letting it sit vacant and possibly become dilapidated.

Housing Characteristics

Demographics

As mentioned earlier, Elkins is comprised mainly of single family homes. Data from the 2010 US Census reveals that approximately 68 percent of the homes in Elkins

are classified as single family units, as shown on *Chart 1: Units in Structure*. Of the occupied housing units in Elkins, approximately 59 percent are owner occupied and 41 percent are renter occupied. The percentage of renter-occupied units in the City exceeds the percentage in the County (27 percent). Home-owners tend to take better care of their home whereas renters may not stay in the community as long, or have a stake in the appearance and quality of the home.

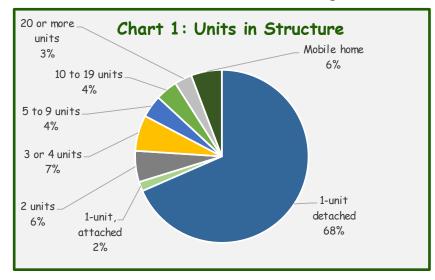
Of the total housing units in Elkins, approximately 12 percent are classified as vacant. This is considered a high

vacancy rate, however it is not as high as Randolph County's vacancy rate of approximately 18 percent. Vacancies can negatively affect residential neighborhoods. The high vacancy rate indicates that economic circumstances and housing type and condition are such that many people choose not to live within the municipal boundaries or move elsewhere.

Rentals comprise the highest level of vacancies. Many factors contribute to vacant rental properties. Too many rental units may exist, the cost of rentals may be too high, or the poor condition of rental units may cause a high vacancy rate.

The second highest level of vacancies are classified as "other vacant" by the US Census. This means that the units are held vacant for personal reasons by the owner. Common reasons





include:

- No one lives in the unit and the owner is making repairs
- Owner does not want to rent or sell
- Owner is using the home for storage
- Owner is elderly and living in nursing home or elsewhere

Elkins' housing stock is also considerably older, with over 30 percent built in 1939 or earlier. Very few homes have been built in the last ten years, as shown on *Chart 2: Age of Housing*. This is a concern as older homes tend to have issues and continuously need to be maintained.

Housing values were also examined in Elkins to provide further insight on the housing market and vacancy rates. The median housing value in Elkins is \$97,500. This value is slightly higher than the \$96,500 value for West Virginia and the \$94,300 value for Randolph County. *Chart 3: Housing Value* illustrates that the majority of homes are valued between \$50,000-\$99,999. The age of the homes in Elkins could contribute to the lower housing value.

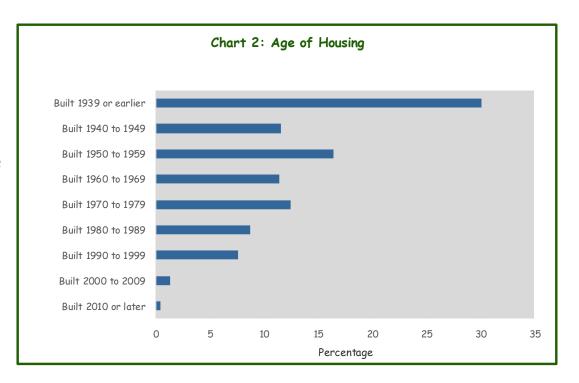


Randolph County Housing Authority

The Randolph County Housing Authority works to secure safe, decent, and afford housing for residents in Randolph, Tucker, Upshur, Lewis, Barbour, and Pendleton counties. The RCHA mission includes:

- Making good rental housing affordable
- Promoting home ownership
- Constructing well built, affordable homes
- Developing the leadership and job skills of youth
- Participate in community development efforts

The RCHA offers homes for sale, as well as low-income rentals through Section 8 programs. The RCHA also recently developed the First Ward Apartments for low-income seniors. The First Ward School Apartments are located in the converted First Ward School. The Authority also



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assists homeowners with making improvements to their homes. The authority has a total of 39 rental units within the City of Elkins.

Highland Community Builder's Inc

Highland Community Builder's (HCB) primary mission is to "develop, construct, manage and finance any and all types of real estate properties and to provide education, social service, and community development services to low and moderate income persons." HCB also serves to support the mission of Randolph County Housing Authority.

HCB is the owner/developer of Highland Meadows, a 40+ lot mixed-income subdivision that was annexed into the City in 2006. HCB is also the General Partner/Owner of the First Ward School Apartments.



Woodlands Development Group

The Woodlands Development Group (WDG) is a non-profit and certified Community Housing Development Organization. The group builds homes for low and moderate income families, develops rental housing, and assists communities with redevelopment. The group also started a new organization, Woodlands Community Lenders, to provide financing to small businesses.

WDG has partnered with Highland Community Builders to build housing in the City of Elkins. WDG has a total

of 20 rental units within the City of Elkins. The Woodland Development Group developed the Porter Apartments, located across from the railyard. The apartments were designed to fit in with the neighborhood and the railyard area. The building was also a platinum LEED certified building, the first multi-family building with such a certification in West Virginia.

Elkins Housing Authority

The Elkins Housing Authority (EHA) serves the housing needs of low-income, very low-income and extremely low-income families in Elkins through the operation of 78 public housing units in a complex called Gateway Apartments.

Historical Resources



First Ward Schoo

The City of Elkins is rich in history. The town was developed by Senators Henry Davis and Stephen Elkins. The senators established the WV Central and Pittsburgh Railway through Elkins to haul timber and coal. Both men built homes in Elkins, known as Halliehurst and Graceland, which are now part of Davis & Elkins College. Due to the presence of the railroad, the City boomed and numerous people made their home in Elkins.

As such, there are many historical resources to be found throughout the City limits. The Elkins Historic Landmarks Commission is charged with providing planning and technical assistances for the preservation of Elkins' historic sites. The Commission consists of five volunteer members. The

EHLC has helped list several properties on the National Register of Historic Places, developed the Wees Historic District Neighborhood Plan, and helped with the placement of historical plaques on several buildings.



The National Register of Historic Places is a national program that aims to protect historic resources throughout the United States. Listing in the Register is a voluntary process. be listed in the Register an applicant must submit a nomination to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), which, along with the state's National Register Review Board, reviews the nomination. Several incentives are offered to properties listed in the Register, such as federal preservation grants, federal investment tax credits, preservation easements for nonprofits, International Building

preservation easements for nonprofits, International Building Code fire and life safety code alternatives, state tax benefits and state grant opportunities. Listing also entitles the district to assistance from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation when a federal project may affect the district. Use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property is not affected by listing.

The City of Elkins is home to four historic districts. Downtown Elkins is classified as a historic district and includes 64 contributing structures. The Wees Historic District includes 286 contributing structures and the Davis and Elkins Historic District includes six contributing structures. Scott Hill is also classified as a historic district and includes eight structures on the property.

Individual properties listed on the National Register are:

- Graceland Mansion
- Halliehurst Mansion
- Liberal Arts Hall
- Albert Hall
- Davis Memorial Presbyterian Church
- The Warfield-Dye House

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Highland Meadows

- Randolph County Courthouse
- Pinecrest
- Governor H.G. Kump House
- Baldwin-Chandlee Supply Company
- Riverside School
- Dr. John C. Irons House
- Taylor-Condrey House
- West Virginia Children's Home
- Elkins Milling Company
- First Ward School

Beautification Efforts

The City of Elkins ON TRAC Program is currently working on several projects to beautify the downtown. As discussed in **Chapter 4**:

Economic Development, the Design Committee is working on beautification projects, such as planting flowers, holiday lighting and decorations, and placement of benches. The Committee is also working on gateway design at three intersections leading into the downtown.



Halliehurst Mansion

Needs Assessment

Several land issues were brought to light during the planning process. Issues include recreation, correcting historical lack of enforcement of land use regulations, dilapidated housing, lack of preservation of historical resources, and beautification of the downtown.

Recreation

The city operates and maintains several beautiful parks, which are true assets to the community. The city is also home to a YMCA that provides recreational facilities and programs. There is a need to continue to expand Glendale Park with additional playground equipment. The feasibility of developing a splash pad and ice-skating rink should also be explored.

Elkins is lucky to have about 3.5 miles of the Tygart Valley River inside its borders, but the city cannot be said to have taken full advantage of its potential as a "river town." Grant funding has been secured to replace the old "Wilson Street swinging bridge" with a modern pedestrian and bike bridge, and the option of securing the adjacent riverfront

for a public greenspace and picnic area is being explored. The city should look for other opportunities to further increase the benefits that the river offers to both residents and visitors, as a location for recreation, tourism, and related activities.





Land Use Regulations

The City's zoning ordinance is in need of a complete overhaul as it has not been updated in several decades. Of the residents that completed the survey, many stated the natural setting and scenery of Elkins and the surrounding area are why they live in Elkins. However, without proper land use regulations in place, the character of the City is in jeopardy. The zoning ordinance lacks landscaping and buffer requirements. Regulations regarding signage are also a concern, as well as setbacks and fence requirements. There is also a potential need for additional commercial districts and overlays to protect historical resources. The Planning Commission would also like to partner with the Elkins Historic Landmark Commission to explore design guidelines for the historic districts.

Lack of enforcement of existing regulations also is a concern. While there are ordinances in place to protect citizens, there has not always been consistent enforcement of those ordinances. Many residents have complained about the lack of enforcement, especially with parking, illegal dumping, and property maintenance.

Dilapidated and Abandoned Buildings

One of the biggest concerns of residents is the rundown and dilapidated homes located throughout the City. Many of the dilapidated housing issues are rental units in the downtown business district. Another concern is the conversion of single-family homes into low-quality multi-family units, which bring down the value of entire neighborhoods and discourage investment in the downtown business district. If the city wants to attract people to relocate to Elkins and encourage current residents and business property owners to invest, the city must enforce ordinances already in place. The City has recently enacted an ordinance requiring all rental properties to be inspected. However, there is just one inspector who also oversees building permits and enforcement of all state building codes.

The West Virginia Code Chapter 8A requires that a comprehensive plan designate preferred development areas and renewal and/or redevelopment areas. Areas are shown on *Map 5-3: Development Areas*.

Preferred development areas include:

- Randolph Avenue
- Railyard
- Wees Historic District (in accordance with the Wees Historic District Plan)
- Highlands Meadows neighborhood
- N. Randolph Avenue (Hanley Street north to the DHHR/DMV property)

Renewal and/or redevelopment areas include:

- Central St. neighborhood, from Martin St. to Robert E. Lee;
- Graham District, including Delaware St., Center St. and Davis St
- Baxter St./Chestnut St. neighborhood
- 2nd Street/River Street neighborhoods, from Kerens Ave. to John Sr.
- Downtown district along Davis Avenue, from Randolph Avenue to 10th Street



Tygart Valley River

In July of 2012 the Randolph County Housing Authority completed a housing and transportation study. The study revealed several issues in regards to housing in the City of Elkins:

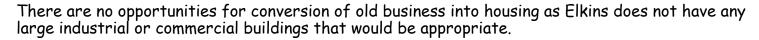
- High vacancy rate compared to the rest of the County, especially for rental units
- Elkins is the primary center for rental housing in the County
- Large number of renters that are 65 years of age or older
- Majority of multi-family units in the County are found in Elkins
- Almost 90 percent of homes are more than 30 years old
- Population in Elkins moves more frequently than the rest of the County
- Many residents lack a car in Elkins

Based on the key findings the study recommends that the Housing Authority focus on Elkins for more affordable housing, specifically for

Glendale Park

an aging population. The Planning Commission agrees that the lack of housing for seniors is a major concern, as well as the lack of family rental housing. There is a shortage of affordable 1 bedroom rental units as well. It is difficult to project the number of homes that would be needed in the future, especially as Elkins is mainly built-out. In order to meet additional housing demands in the future, the City would have to annex or development would have to occur as infill development.

Other housing issues that were revealed during the planning process include vacant upstairs residential space in the downtown, as well as the inspection of rental units.





Historical Resources

In 2008, with professional assistance from the Randolph County Development Authority, a neighborhood plan was developed by the residents of the Wees Historic District. The resulting Wees National Historic District Plan included several recommendations:

- Develop a lighting plan concept to incorporate pedestrian-scale fixtures and low impact lamps to add safety, aesthetics, and character to the area
- Elkins City Council and Wees Historic District should explore development of a tailored approach to zoning such as overlay areas
- City Building Inspector and the Zoning Board of Appeals should develop a process for coordination with the Elkins
 Historic Landmarks Commission and the Wees Leadership Group on issues of enforcement, permit review, new
 construction or variance requests
- Coordinate signs for commercial uses along Randolph Avenue in a supplemental ordinance to retain the look and character of already current examples such as Broughtons, Arts Center, Johnson Realty, while also ensuring that oversized and inappropriate signs do not impact the area

A direct outgrowth of the plan is the current transportation enhancement grant streetscape project. The project is funded through a \$160,000 Federal Transportation Enhancement grant, \$20,000 Community Partnership grant, a City match of \$8,000, County match of \$5,000, and private contributions from residents and businesses.

Beautification Efforts

The downtown business district has changed dramatically over the past few years due to several ongoing beautification efforts. However, no comprehensive streetscape plan has been completed. This type of plan would help the City make comprehensive improvements. The plan should address outdated infrastructure, façade improvements, and pedestrian concerns, as well as a funding strategy. The Planning Commission feels that a simple step to beautification of the downtown could begin with a consistent planting plan. Currently there are planters around trees in the downtown and many of them are not maintained. The City should continue to budget for plantings and watering for the summer season, as planting would greatly improve the appearance of the downtown.

Annexation

As identified in *Chapter 4: Economic Development*, annexation is vital to the City's financial future. Most of Elkins is currently built-out and any new development will most likely be re-development. Therefore, the City needs to extend their boundaries to include other areas into the County. Priority annexation areas are shown on *Map 4: Future Land Use*

Action Plan

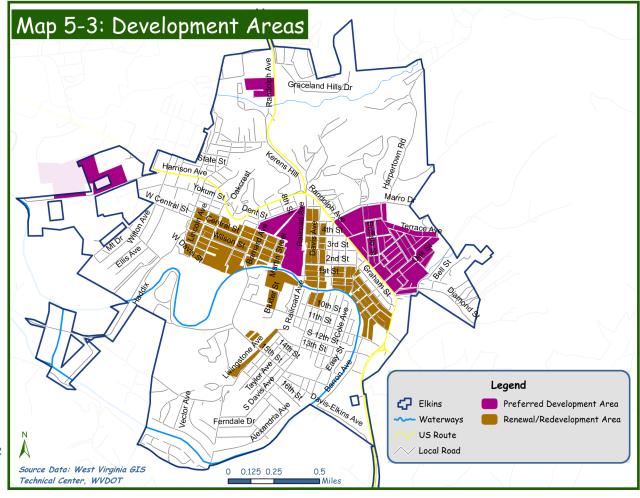
The land use action plan is a vital component of the comprehensive plan. The land use action plan will help the town guide growth and development, as well as preserve the character of the City for years to come. The plan includes action steps to achieve the land use goal stated below, as well as the future land use map. The future land use map is very important as it is a reflection of how the city wants to develop in the future. The map will guide the city in the future on where and when zoning changes should be made.

Objective 1: Protect the natural and historic character of the City through zoning

Action Step 1: Revise the zoning ordinance to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and to help encourage new growth and preserve the historic character of the City

Preferred development areas. -- Consistent with the land use component, identify areas where incentives may be used to encourage development, infill development or redevelopment in order to promote well designed and coordinated communities and prevent sprawl.

Renewal and/or redevelopment. -- Consistent with the land use component, identify slums and other blighted areas and set goals, plans and programs for the elimination of such slums and blighted areas and for community renewal, revitalization and/or redevelopment.



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The zoning ordinance should be updated to be consistent with the comprehensive plan and to comply with Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code. The current ordinance was reviewed and the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- Update and/or consolidate definitions
- Include a comprehensive list of uses for each district
- Residential districts should be revised to include more land zoned as single-family residential in order to protect the character of existing neighborhoods. Currently most of the land in Elkins is zoned as Unrestricted Residential which allows multi-family and some limited commercial uses in traditional neighborhoods. However, the ordinance should also include regulations to allow for affordable housing and housing for persons with disabilities.
- All identified historic districts should include additional regulations that protect the character of the historical neighborhoods.
- Consider the development of two different types of commercial districts; one for the downtown that allows for smaller businesses and the other that allows for larger scale businesses along major roadways
- Sign regulations should be incorporated into the zoning ordinance to minimize visual clutter on major thoroughfares in Flkins.
- Landscaping and buffer yards regulations should be added to protect surrounding land uses
- Traffic is a major concern in Elkins, therefore access management provisions should be considered
- Include provisions in the ordinance to limit the conversion of single-family homes in traditional neighborhoods to multi-family units
- The development of telecommunication facilities is important to improve the quality of life, support economic development opportunities, and provide emergency services. However, the need for telecommunication facilities must be balanced with scenic viewsheds and residential development in the city. Careful consideration must take place when siting new facilities; such as collocation, concealment, and landscaping. Most of the city is built-out with compact residential and commercial development. Topography and existing facilities should be considered when determining locations for new telecommunication facilities. Placement of telecommunication facilities in or adjacent to residential areas and downtown should be avoided. If facilities are placed downtown, the facilities should be in industrial zoned areas.

Map 5-4: Future Land Use depicts future land use classifications in the City of Elkins. This map should be used to help guide any updates to the zoning ordinance. The map also details future annexation areas. A zoomed in future land use map (Map 5-4a: Future Land Use) is included at the end of this chapter to better illustrate future land use classifications in the core of the city. Map 5-3: Development Areas illustrates areas that are recommended for development, redevelopment, and/or revitalization in accordance with the West Virginia Code, Chapter 8A: Land Use Planning.

As the City is urban in nature and does not have any lands that are classified as agriculture or conservation, rural lands were not identified on the future land use map. The City plans to continue to grow with possible annexation areas and therefore will continue a more urban, built-out land use pattern.

Future Land Use Classifications

Recreational- areas intended for parks and recreation uses. The proposed Allegheny Highlands Trails is also shown on the map. The current route has not yet been finalized therefore the route is only the approximate location.

Single family residential- intended to provide for low density residential uses.

City Residential- intended to provide for single-family and multi-family residential uses

Institutional-areas owned by Davis & Elkins College

Central Business District- intended to provide for small-scale business uses to serve surrounding

neighborhoods. Residential uses would allow for a mix of single family and multifamily uses, especially in the second story of commercial buildings.

Commercial- intended to provide for businesses that require larger buildings and would have more of an impact of surrounding uses

Industrial- intent of this classification is to accommodate industrial uses

Objective 1: Encourage the beautification of the City to entice visitors

Action Step 1: Complete a streetscape project to improve the aesthetics of the downtown business district

There has never been a comprehensive streetscape plan competed for the downtown business district. The City of Elkins and ON TRAC should partner together to complete a plan so that improvements can be made to the downtown. The plan will establish a vision and include recommendations that will be the basis for phased streetscape improvements. The plan should include recommendations concerning pedestrian facilities, parking, trail facilities, utilities, signage, site furnishings, landscaping, and cost estimates. The development of a streetscape plan should also help the City apply for grants to complete the specified projects in the plan.

Action Step 2: Provide art throughout the downtown

One simple beautification effort that can be made to the downtown is the installation of art. Public art can express the significance of a community and can be destinations onto themselves. This includes murals and community symbols.



A community symbol is an object that represents the community that is then placed in highly visible locations throughout a community.

One possible location for a mural is the telephone building past Walgreens on Randolph Avenue.

Action Step 3: Perform a feasibility study concerning possible improvements and better use of the river and riverfront



A riverfront feasibility study would help the City determine action items that could be taken to capitalize on the Tygart Valley River. Possible topics of investigation include how the city might be able to take advantage of its flood control works to maintain water levels better suited for boating and other water recreation activities, the viability of constructing a riverfront path, and the benefits of river-related activities for tourism-related development in the railyard. Comparison to other cities that have developed riverfronts of similar size would especially be beneficial.



Enhance and protect the character of the City through land use planning

Objective 2: Establish policies to protect neighborhoods throughout Elkins

Action Step 1: Increase enforcement of building codes and property maintenance ordinances to improve appearance of the City

Code enforcement officials should canvas the City regularly to search for code violations. The City should also ask residents to report code violations via a public relations campaign. The police department, mayor, and code enforcement officer should meet at least monthly to discuss various complaints. Police officers spend a great deal of time canvassing neighborhoods and may have a better understanding of where specific problems are occurring. All city employees should be on the look-out for overgrown grass, junk, graffiti, and junk vehicles as they are early warning signs that a property owner cannot keep up with property maintenance, which could then lead to a vacant and dilapidated property.

Many residents are unaware of code violations or how to fix them. Therefore, the City should develop a guide for citizens on how they can remedy the violation. The guide should contain listings for lawn and tree companies, towing services, junk removal services. The guide should list all the specific property maintenance codes for the City. The guide should also detail the legal process of what happens when a property owner violates codes. Another option the City could explore is adopting a policy that publicizes the most notorious property violators and repeat offenders. The hope is that it will force the property owner to clean the property up.

Action Step 2: Hire an additional code enforcement officer to help enforce the rental registration and vacant structure ordinances

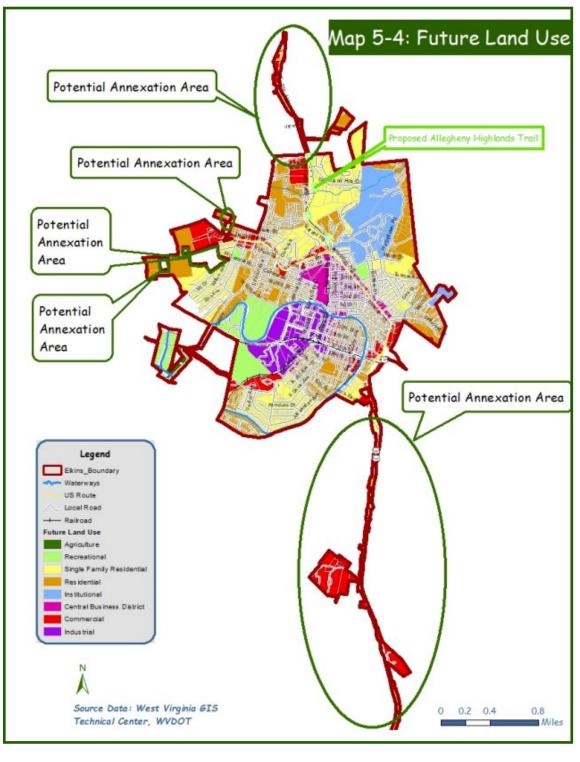
One of the main issues with enforcement is that there is only one code enforcement officer to enforce all the ordinances in Elkins. This is a very time-consuming task for only one person to handle. Therefore, it is recommended that the City hire an additional officer.

Action Step 3: Require an inspection fee for building permit inspections

Currently the City of Elkins does not require an inspection fee for building permits. The City should require a fee for inspections and then could use that money to hire an additional code enforcement officer. Fees can be based on the total value of construction or a flat fee. For instance the fee could be one percent (1%) of the cost of construction.

Action Step 4: Investigate the feasibility of developing a land bank

Municipalities in West Virginia were recently given the authority to develop land banks. A municipality can establish a land bank which would then allow them to accept title to properties to help revitalize vacant and underutilized properties. Elkins should review the legislation and have a discussion with key stakeholders (Housing Authority, Economic Development Authority, etc) in the community to determine if it makes sense for the City to establish a land bank.



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Case Studies

Huntington, WV Urban Renewal Authority (Huntington Land Bank)
The City of Huntington's land bank purchases tax liens at annual tax sales. The city then uses the interest from the liens for clean-up costs. If the original property owner does not redeem property after 18 months the City turns the property over to the land bank. In 2012 the City demolished, with the help of the Department of Highways and National Guard, 54 structures in one month. Demolition fees were paid with land bank proceeds.

