

## GENERAL

'The Thriving Population open house will focus on population trends, housing, and facilities & services, and give the public an opportunity to share in the planning process and the way you see the county growing. The information that the County gathers through this meeting will be influential in development of the comprehensive plan.'

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Aligning 'The Thriving Population' focus with the Core Visions, see the County - Vision Packet. Please find an alignment with specific Vision Indices, specified benchmarks;

### Excerpts-

\* Vision One:

\* The citizens of Garrett County... will serve as an example of responsible and sustainable use of land and natural resources

\* With a focus upon, sustainability and stewardship, the citizens will create a climate which promotes

\* Economic diversity

\* Emphasizes education

\* Celebrates heritage: agricultural character, eco-systems (outdoor lifestyle) and scenic beauty

\* Vision Two

\* Where we are, where we plan to be, and how we plan to get there; 'learning from the past and planning for the future,' with core drivers:

\* Natural Resources management

\* Economic Development

\* Tourism ('vibrant;' no measure or constraints identified).

Supporting growth and development where the citizens "THRIVE" and therefore must do, stretch to achieve, and as the Vision Packet asserts, to reach 'higher education and economic goals.'

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## Enhancing the QUALITY OF LIFE in Garrett County

To THRIVE, a derivative of thrifa which is a reflex, an action where one must grasp, to take hold of, as in 'cotton to' as accepting and utilizing resources, reflective of those resources which are needed to prosper. Thriving is a means of thrifting, culling assets and resources for vigorous growth; a picture of vine-dressing, the knowing husbandman who seeds, nourishes, and grows vibrant plants. To develop abilities that are impressed, grooved, becoming commonplace, to flourish- economically, socially, and physically.

Have we, in fact, learned from the past? It would be a good start to review the 2008CompPlan and track the progress as reported in the subsequent Annual Reports and also look at various data-pools in order to best understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to become more SMART, LEAN, and progressive (I will leave as much business jargon and nomenclature from these comments as possible).

True smart growth, not speaking of the government program, builds assets, protects open spaces, and protects air and water quality.

## POPULATION TRENDS

Rural communities across America have generally lost population- had out migration. People, mostly younger people- 20-35 years of age- have left their home community to acquire upward mobility, higher wages, and enjoy diversity. And, even where there were those who desired to remain, on the family farm, they have felt the necessity to leave, because reportedly the farming industry sends a clear message to 'grow bigger or get

out.' (Sidenote: please see the recent MDapp for the AgTrust).

Where agriculture and natural resources (lumber, mining, fishing) are not, where finite can never be infinite, the be-all industry sustaining the entire population, and where manufacturing relies upon global markets, work in small towns and rural areas has become stagnant. This is especially true where adequate planning and strategy implementation have lagged; a vacuum, a wide dark space, is created. And, data, show that rural-to-urban migration tends to be selective, with the most educated, the most talented likely to leave, a significant local loss in overall human capital.

The cycle for community human capital assets, unfortunately, has moved downward.

So, we know the data and we know the anecdotal trip wires, what are we doing about them? What constructive measure are taking place to remove obstacles - even move mountains- creating sustainability in Garrett County?

There are several- we see a growing coalescing of like-minded activism, we see more avenues for sharing information, increased use of social media for setting facts straight, and we see growing participation.

We certainly see a resilient and robust building of local institutional infrastructure - in higher education, in public schools, in health care and in community resources; and more bridging with NPO's and community Churches. And more cooperation among services and overall network assets- I purposely write cooperation, not collaboration, because the network, the facade in our safety net, remains marred by poor access, divots, where the swing may be a hit, or it may be a miss— the kinetic, the 'fitly joined' as would be expected in a well exercised network — one that protects and produces synergistic sparks, hand to mouth, eye to foot, and mind to heart— simply isn't currently available. Many people are still marginalized and disenfranchised.

What are our competitive advantages?

Garrett County has leveraged and sustained opportunities in successful joint ventures, in regionalism; partnering with contiguous counties and States, integrating and thereby creating economies of scale, lowering costs, and increasing potential for new sources of revenue — expanding the horizon.

County leaders have successfully marketed 'amenity-based development,' showcasing our rich attributes - beauty, heritage, market capacity, and overall green-fields. Most of the citizens agree that the natural amenities- the great landscapes, the ridge lines, the living waters in rivers and streams, the natural habitat in wetlands have much greater generational value as amenities than they ever would as quick-fix commodities extracted for external markets (Deller, Role of Amenities).

So, what to do about unemployment, underemployment, and low-wage, seasonal work - tourism related wages- a recent post on jobs referred to these as J.O.B. (Just Over Broke)- How can the County do better with encouraging provisions for gainful employment and the living wage?

Garrett County has recently been rated by the Appalachian Regional Commission as 'transitional,' primed for increased economic activity, with periphery infrastructure readiness, specifically ready to target information technology growth companies.

We also know that advances in information technology have allowed operation across multiple locations which have increased operational efficiencies, lowered costs and speed up production capacity. Values added to production, and according to MIT evolution of value chains this is key to corporate competitiveness. Business is looking at measures of trade in formulas of overall value not just looking at gross figures; economy touch points and triggers that mark important capacity within the productive-supply mechanisms.

This is fundamental to smart-growth as policies must reflect both common action and shared responsibility, to best organize in the economic and socio-political contexts in which they operate. New economics, especially in technology makes rural areas prime real estate for emerging markets. Additionally, trust in values relationships, trust-based 'downhome' P2P customer service- hospitality leadership- leads to empowerment, empowered here to boost the business landscape. Rural sourcing engages points in new anchor building; anchors which build out and then build up. This building positively moves corporate as well as community and national wealth metrics take root in business retention. And, we know the BRE, the bear, or whatever moniker is used, business retention and expansion is teetered between 'business-sector customer based satisfaction' AND 'loyalty applied to economic and workforce development.'

Another strategy used in rural communities is building what are known as 'clusters, enterprise clusters, twinnings.' These are cooperative arrangements which minimize competition where competition has no positive purpose. Examples would include a large industry or an association that attracts and supports suppliers and specialized talent industries that boost one another. These 'twinnings' and clusters are engines which drive strategy inputs and services by building, excelling cross-hybridization, and recognizing complementary assets- marketing uses terms like saturation and cannibalization. All compliant with high standard procurement- they advertise, purchase, and cross-train- and these efforts support business efficiencies and establish career ladders across business domains, building one rung to the next.

Good neighbors and trustworthy leadership is the soul of vibrant communities.

The rural development literature is heavily focused on what they coin the 'the triple bottom line' — social justice, environmental quality and economic development.

Smart Growth in Small Towns and Rural Communities | Smart Growth | US EPA  
<https://www.epa.gov/.../smart-growth-small-towns-and...>

## HOUSING

The cost of living is reportedly lower in rural areas— but this is a bit of a misnomer— the proportion and percentage of actual income used for basic household items - rent, food, healthcare, childcare is much higher. A large percentage- 70% and higher- of rural residents use as much as 30% of their monthly income on housing alone; and this restricts wealth-building and economic success.

We all know that home ownership is the single greatest indicator for diminishing the overall poverty rate.

Affordable housing is becoming scarce. And, the subsidized housing communities - up to 80% by 2025 - will have matured mortgages, making it likely that they will be repriced at market rates.

Many affordable housing projects are being built outside of population hubs, and have poor access to transportation— making it harder for people to find and retain employment.

## FACILITIES AND SERVICES

### Schools

Poverty in rural schools is double than in other districts; and rural schools spend less money per pupil than other more affluent communities. This funding disparity creates inequalities, and reinforces over-reliance on an already stretched County budget— and lately, public ed has had to resort to tapping stretched family budgets.

So, how do we politicize, EXCITE, more people to have a WILL to educate our youth? See local wellness data- where are we and what are the next steps to take? How do we avoid the expense of 'shuttering' our schools-

and take more seriously a mindset that acknowledges a school's critical importance to communities, especially smaller outlying communities. When we close a school building, we are closing much more than a facility, bricks and mortar.

Garrett County citizens and leaders should advocate that Congress and the state legislatures increase funds to rural community schools. The community school, a one-stop-shop, should be in development phases because they push-pull resources as needed making public school a truly, family-centered environment. Education dollars infused in this way level-the grants' funding field - making greater likelihood for competing advantage — skills acquisition.

“U.S. Department of Education defines a full-service community school as an “elementary or secondary school that works with its local educational agency and community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other public or private entities to provide a coordinated and integrated set of comprehensive academic, social, and health services that respond to the needs of its students, students' family members, and community members.” The school's “results-focused partnerships...are based on identified needs and organized around a set of mutually defined results and outcomes.”

Full-service community schools are a viable solution offering both depth and breadth to an existing asset. They build up potential resources, emerge with greater wholesomeness, efficient as a means of services delivery, and offer extended learning including much needed afterschool for all youth and summer (eSY) programs for special needs' students. These boost parent and community involvement; good community engagement is always smoothing out the rough edges, accepting negotiated interests, and moving in a forward trajectory- as coined by Putnam- We are Better Together.

See

BetterTogether was an initiative of the Saguro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America at Harvard University.

Robert Putnam BETTER TOGETHER – Robert D. Putnam

<http://robertdputnam.com/better-together/>

Ascend at Aspen 2Gen Solutions

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