



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



Huntington City Hall  
800 Fifth Avenue  
P.O. Box 1659  
Huntington, WV 25717

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Smart Growth America

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

**DATE:** October 24, 2015

**RE: Smart Growth America TA: Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health –  
1 year 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: 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 as it relates to our Next Steps memo.

### *Focus your efforts*

1. The City of Huntington police department received 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.
  - a. To aid in the research, the cross-sector partnership interviewed stakeholders (67), conducted community wide resident (2173) and business (178) surveys and conducted street surveys (213).
  - b. In May 2015, with the collaboration of the BCJI, the Cross-Sector Partnership completed a larger community engagement and “Build a Better Block” event to gather input and showcase the types of changes we would like to see along the

downtown Old Main Corridor. The event included the intervention of one block on 4th Avenue to showcase the types of changes we hope to see in the downtown. This corresponds with the SGA memo suggestion to focus our efforts within our target areas and to use events to demonstrate changes. During the event we filled in vacant storefronts with “pop-up” retail and services, brought in vendors and music entertainment on an empty parking lot, and built a temporary park in the middle of the block. These efforts successfully showcased a continuous street frontage and the reduction of surface parking lots with attendance of over 1000 people. Over 200 surveys were completed to aid in our downtown research plan.

- c. This research is being compiled into a multi-disciplinary plan to tackle downtown revitalization and crime reduction focused along the crime target hot-spots. The plan will use place-based, research-backed strategies to tackle the issues of vacancy and abandonment that were found to be a key issue within the research.
  - d. In addition, the plan reiterated the need for better collaboration between existing services and the creation of an organization that targets downtown revitalization, including exploring the initiation of a downtown community development corporation and/or the use of a Business Improvement District as suggested in the next steps memo. We hope to plan a visit to some of the examples that were mentioned in the Next Steps memo to learn more about their structure.
2. In addition, in the Southside neighborhood area along 8th Street and 8th 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 the detailed study of an important connector street between the neighborhoods and downtown. The group identified a collection of improvements to improve the pedestrian experience and hosted a “Critical Mass Walk,” in which a group of people walked from the residential neighborhood to the downtown 1100BAM event to demonstrate the short distance between the neighborhoods and downtown.

#### ***Commission a fiscal study***

3. Since spring of 2015, the Planning office has been working with Urban3 ([www.urban-three.com](http://www.urban-three.com)) to evaluate and display our city and county data to analyze the relative contribution of different development styles within the city and surrounding counties. We hope to be able to utilize this data and analysis technique to be able to make better policy and regulation decisions in the future to maximize a return on investment for our City’s financial sustainability.
4. This information will be presented to the public with the results from our BCJI downtown research plan on November 3<sup>rd</sup> using a currently vacant storefront downtown as a venue. This is another example of the use of events to change the way the downtown is being used and imagined for the future. Local artists will also be displaying and selling art in the storefront, giving a new outlet for art and entrepreneurship in the downtown.

#### ***Make it easier to do what you want done***

5. Using the research and public analysis gained from SGA, Strong Towns, Urban3 and others, we are in the process of designing a Request for Qualifications for a technical writer to develop the language for a new zoning ordinance in our three targeted areas.

With the research gained through these processes, we hope to maximize our limited funding to create form based ordinances that encourage neighborhood centered places and an easy administrative process to facilitate the development we want to see.

***Give attention to the streets***

6. Stormwater Utility has entered into an agreement with KYOVA Interstate Planning Commission to study the traffic impacts of flooding along our primary state routes and railroad underpasses. The majority of funding for this study is coming from the West Virginia Department of Transportation. The Huntington Stormwater Utility will pay a portion. This study will investigate methods of improving drainage in key areas of the City to reduce flooding that hinders or stops the flow of traffic. Methodology to be considered is green infrastructure, separation of combined sewer/storm lines, complete streets with a strong green component and additional pumps where lack of space prohibits green alternatives.
7. Plan2025 identified a priority sidewalk plan, and the COH has partnered with KYOVA Interstate Planning Agency to do a sidewalk inventory, identify wayfinding priorities, and determine funding mechanisms.

***Connect to the waterfront***

8. Continued work on developing the Harris Riverfront Master plan is ongoing.
9. The Environmental Protection Agency announced that the city will receive a \$200,000 planning grant to study 78 acres of flat industrial land in the middle of the city referred to as the Highlawn Brownfield Revitalization Project. This project also engages an underutilized section of the riverfront. Consultants are being interviewed at this time.

Again, we thank Smart Growth America for their Technical Assistance guidance as we embark on transforming our targeted economic development areas. We really appreciate the opportunity to look back over the SGA Next Steps memo and see where we have been over the last year and where we are going. We are making significant progress towards our next steps and look forward to working with you in other capacities.