



# 1.0 Introduction and Project Overview

## Downtown Strategic Plan

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## 1.1 Downtown Morgantown

Morgantown has been defined over the years by the diversity of cultures and the opportunities in business, employment, industry, retail trade, education, research, medical care, and tourism. Appendix A of this report provides a brief history of the settlement and growth of Morgantown.

Downtown Morgantown was built from the industrious efforts of these diverse cultures that established a vibrant central business district and the adjacent neighborhoods with great pride, resulting in a strong hometown sentiment. The architectural heritage reflects this diversity and is instrumental to the character that has created downtown Morgantown.

Downtown Morgantown has a powerful and compelling physical presence – a large collection of historic buildings, major cultural and educational institutions, and a strong commercial backbone. It is nestled between a vibrant university campus and historic neighborhoods and framed by two powerful natural amenities – Deckers Creek and the Monongahela River, both of which provide tremendous recreational opportunities. Several arterial roadways serving the community and region converge in the heart of downtown, which results in very high traffic volumes.

These seven major assets – cultural, environmental, historic, educational, economic, recreational, and transportation – are the catalysts that will solidify and expand downtown Morgantown’s position as the civic, commercial, and cultural center of a thriving region.

The strategic location of downtown creates four distinct areas which are shaped and separated by the cultural, environmental, natural, and physical features that exist within and near Morgantown’s central business district.



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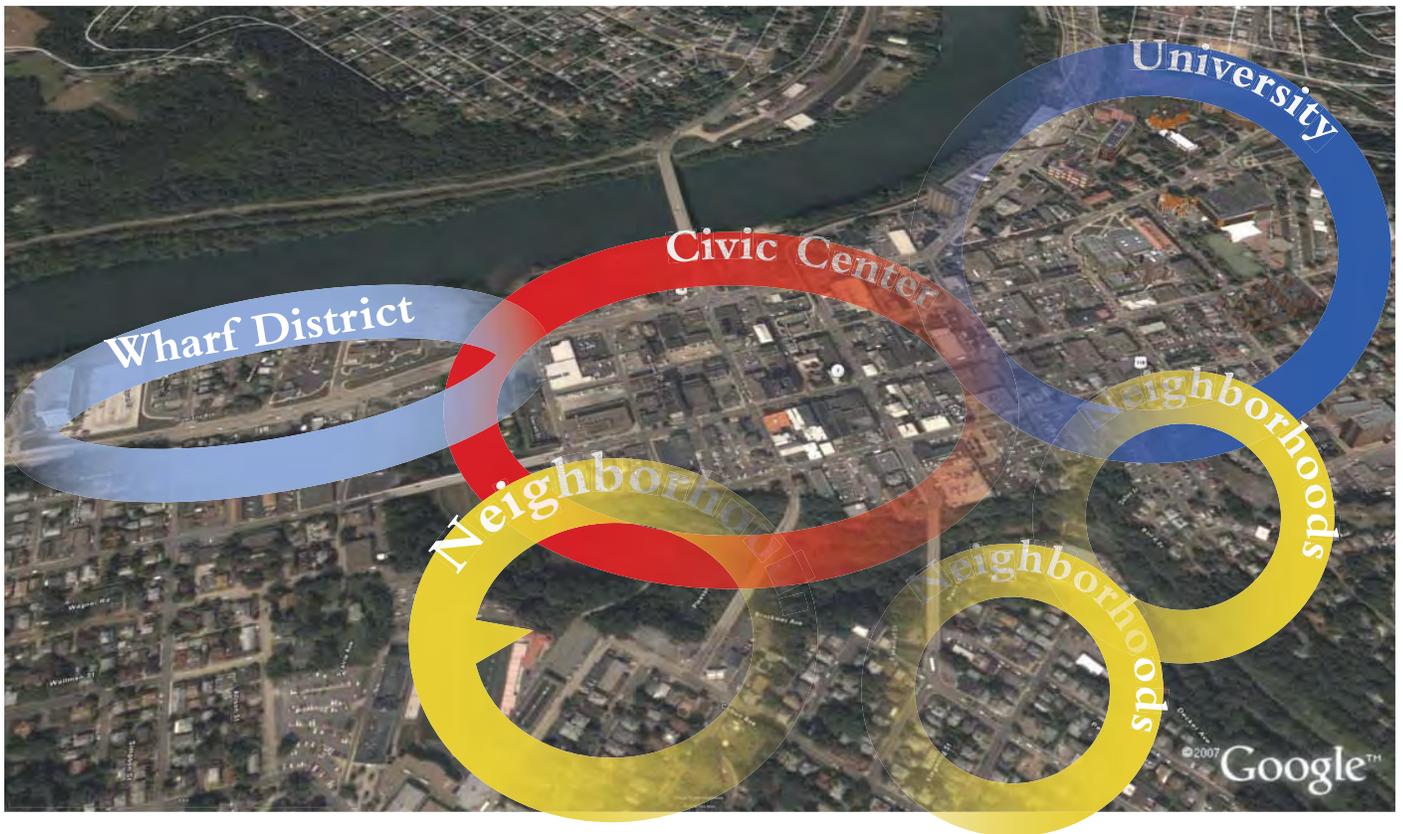


Figure 1: This diagram depicts the City's four distinct planning areas within the study site.



Figure 2: This diagram was created by the City to illustrate the project boundary site of the downtown district.



**Downtown Civic Core:**

The downtown's civic core contains the majority of the community's governmental, cultural, public services, and related offices. High Street has the highest concentration of retail uses and of dining and entertainment options in the downtown. This core area is ideally positioned, both geographically and visually, to significantly expand the cultural and economic offerings it provides to the community.

**University Transition Area:**

The downtown's university core functions as a de facto extension of the West Virginia University campus, with restaurants, taverns, dance clubs, sandwich shops, retail, and housing that caters to students. There is opportunity within this transition area to leverage the civic core's energy, attract new development, and build the market strength of the civic core.

**Neighborhood Edge Areas:**

The South Park, Greenmont, and Chancery Hill neighborhoods adjacent to the civic core are separated from the downtown by topography, water, and roads. These neighborhoods contain both student housing and traditional single-family owner- and renter-occupied homes. There is opportunity and need to protect and improve connections to these neighborhoods by enhancing the mix of land uses and creating smooth transitions.

**Wharf District Area:**

This former industrial area is in the process of significant revitalization with numerous vacant lots and dilapidated buildings that offer great potential for businesses and housing development along the Monongahela River. New mixed-use waterfront development, master-planned to ensure strong physical and economic connections to downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, will be critical in realizing the area's full potential.

Within these four distinct areas, there are ten "Character Areas" that require unique policy, programming, and development strategies, which are discussed in Chapter 6.0 "Downtown Strategies".

As the downtown's population, commerce, and services continue to evolve, it is important to have a clear vision of the future that is supported by the community as whole. This Strategic Plan update and its recommendations are intended to ensure that future development follows this path of excellence and builds on the unique character that has shaped downtown Morgantown.



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## 1.2 Purpose of the Strategic Plan Update

Morgantown's last downtown Strategic Plan was completed in 1994, at a time when the district was grappling with some of the economic challenges that many of the nation's historic university downtowns faced in recent decades. These challenges included the loss of community-serving retail businesses to new suburban shopping areas; consequential shifts toward higher percentages of non-retail uses; and, transitioning housing, retail, and entertainment demands resulting from increased student population needs.

Many of the 1994 Strategic Plan recommendations have been implemented over the intervening years, and downtown Morgantown today is a safer, more vibrant, and more economically diverse district than it was previously. But, with these advancements, the district and the community are faced with new challenges and opportunities.

This strategic planning process and document is an update to the community's 1994 work by looking out over the next twenty years. This update has been developed to provide focus and guidance to the many public- and private-sector collaborative entities that will turn the following vision into reality.

## 1.3 Vision

"Downtown Morgantown is a safe, vibrant, 24/7, four season destination that honors and promotes its history, character, and position along the Monongahela River. It is attractive for permanent residents, visitors, and students and provides a hub for the region, where all ages can live, shop, walk, work, and enjoy cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities."

## 1.4 Mission

The mission of this Strategic Plan update is to provide a tool for the community that:

- Articulates a shared community vision, based on commonly held values, for the physical, built, and economic environments of downtown Morgantown;
- Defines the characteristics and patterns of downtown development;
- Defines the growth patterns the community wishes to enable and perpetuate;
- Provides clear guiding concepts for future downtown development and growth; and,
- Promotes positive and enriching new development that respects the historic and existing character of the district and surrounding neighborhoods.



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## 1.5 Goals

The goal of this Strategic Plan update is to focus attention on:

- Developing new clusters of twenty-first century businesses and small industries downtown;
- Improving the supply, quality, and choice of downtown housing;
- Enhancing the downtown pedestrian experience by improving public spaces, transportation, and safety;
- Strengthening the district's connection to, and relationship with, Deckers Creek, Monongahela River, and surrounding neighborhoods; and,
- Conserving natural resources by boosting the occupancy of downtown buildings and land.

## 1.6 How to Use This Strategic Plan

This Plan is intended to provide both general guidance on downtown development and also specific solutions to key challenges. It is not intended to stifle economic drivers but rather enhance future downtown growth and development that adds value and lasting quality and character.

Serving as a tool and necessary guide to evaluate policies, community and economic development programming, capital improvement planning, and development plan review within downtown Morgantown, this Strategic Plan will ensure that residents, property owners, business owners, and developers have a clear understanding of the community's vision, expected outcomes, strategies, and implementation processes. This awareness will assure investors and stakeholders that their commitment in downtown Morgantown will be long lasting and prosperous. This assurance will provide the necessary stability that can capture the powerful economic forces that guide growth and development and attract additional capital.

The recommendations provided in this Strategic Plan update are varied – some will be uncomplicated and quick to achieve while others will take longer-term commitment, planning, and diligence. Some of the recommendations apply to the entire district while others apply to specific “Character Areas” that were developed through a series of community meetings. Some recommendations are likely to be implemented primarily by local government while others will require public-private collaboration among private-sector organizations, property owners, business owners, neighborhood associations, West Virginia University, and other entities.



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Because of the variety of users, this Strategic Plan update has been created to be broad enough to provide both detailed and overarching principles as well as providing tools to evaluate capital improvement and development applications on a case-by-case basis. This broad planning approach will achieve a unified result across the downtown district and set the tone for the quality of design.

## 1.7 Process Summary

This Strategic Plan update process reflects one year of interdisciplinary work by Morgantown’s Planning Commission, the Planning Department, and community stakeholder representatives including: residents from neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown, downtown businesses and property owners, developers, social service providers, West Virginia University (WVU), and the community at large. Respected individuals and leaders within these stakeholder groups formed an Ad-Hoc Committee, which provided valuable insight, feedback, and guidance as the project evolved.

The process was assisted by two consulting firms: The Community Land Use and Economics Group, which focused on marketing, economic development, and downtown revitalization strategies; and, Design Workshop, which focused on public facilitation, urban design, land use planning, and landscape architecture.

In order to identify the “DNA” that makes downtown Morgantown unique, the consulting team gathered and conducted detailed analysis through information gathering (see Chapter 2.0 “Previous Planning Studies”), extensive site visits, and interviews with community leaders and stakeholders.

The consulting team used many forms of public input to inform its work, including a series of public meetings, mapping, diagramming, market analysis, and downtown intercept surveys. This extensive public outreach effort ensured that as many voices as possible were included in shaping the Strategic Plan update and that the process and plan reflected a shared vision and direction for downtown Morgantown. Outreach also greatly aided in gathering and measuring the community’s perception of ranging qualities and values for the built, economic, and physical environments.

The consulting team facilitated an interactive working meeting with the Ad-Hoc Committee using a charrette-type process where design ideas were discussed and conceptual designs reviewed. This process was valuable in gathering input concerning community vision and to explain development patterns and reasoning.



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The results of consultant team facilitated stakeholder interviews, public workshops, and Ad-Hoc Committee meetings are provided in Chapter 3.0 “Public Involvement” and Appendices B and C of this report. In Chapters 4.0 “Existing Conditions” and 5.0 “Market Assessment”, the consulting team identified downtown Morgantown’s existing market and built environment conditions and contrasted similar challenges and opportunities of comparable communities that the team had experience with across the nation. From the extensive public input gathered, the consultant team’s comprehensive analysis, and the lessons learned from other communities, Chapter 6.0 “Downtown Strategies” was created.

## 1.8 Strategic Plan Recommendations

The following recommendation summaries, which are more thoroughly presented in Chapters 6.0 “Downtown Strategies” and 7.0 “Implementation”, will provide for a better quality of life, a better visitor experience, a stronger economy, and consistent pattern of growth and development.

- Complete a Wharf District and Riverfront Master Plan that connects this area to downtown through enhanced pedestrian and vehicular linkages. A master plan must identify potential funding sources and provide a thorough implementation schedule.
- Develop and put in place a set of design guidelines to ensure that a well maintained and balanced blend of built, natural, and creative elements are integrated throughout the downtown.
- Safely and strongly link the downtown to surrounding neighborhoods, Deckers Creek, and the Monongahela River.
- Realign downtown Morgantown’s public identity to reflect its expanded market position.
- Make the downtown a stronger residential community by adding more housing, attracting new residents, and offering a full range of amenities to meet downtown residents’ needs.
- Create a subsidiary of Main Street Morgantown to work with the City to stimulate and accelerate downtown property development.
- Boost the downtown’s occupancy rate, particularly by making better use of upper floor spaces for offices and housing.
- Guide and support development of several competitive and strategically placed office, technology, arts, entertainment, and retail clusters.
- Strengthen and enforce regulations to improve the downtown’s safety and attractiveness to workers, residents, students, and visitors at all hours of the day and night.
- Strike a better balance between evening events that cater to WVU students and the Morgantown residents.



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- Improve police deployment and effectiveness.
- Increase the presence and impact of visual, performing and public arts in downtown Morgantown.
- Continue to improve the variety of transportation options available downtown and to strengthen its pedestrian-friendly characteristics.
- Strengthen the collaboration efforts between WVU and the downtown on business development, public events, and other areas of shared interest.
- Continue to stress broad collaboration in all downtown planning activities.

Subsequent chapters will illustrate two recommendation subsets that are integral to this Strategic Plan update: (1) “Character Areas” and (2) collaboration between the City and Main Street Morgantown.

First, the Plan is built around ten “Character Areas” – nodes that, through a series of physical and economic improvements, can become stronger and more effective over time. In an effort to address the lack of cohesive design guidelines for development within the downtown, the consultant team identified general urban design considerations within each character area. These general urban design considerations, adopted by the City, will serve as the foundation for form-based design principles and standards that can encourage and streamline welcomed downtown development.

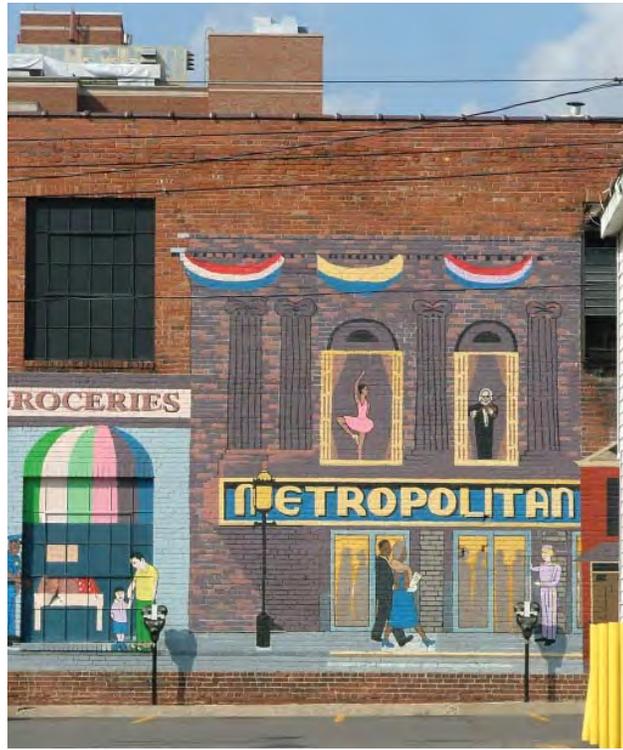
Second, the Plan relies on a close partnership between the City and Main Street Morgantown, the nonprofit organization that has coordinated downtown marketing and development for the past two decades. To that end, some of the recommendations are intended to dovetail into the work plan and committee structure of Main Street Morgantown.



*One plan recommendation is to continue to expand the existing improved streetscape project shown here along High Street in order to strengthen pedestrian friendly characteristics throughout the downtown district.*



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*Another plan recommendation is to increase the presence and impact of visual, performing and public arts in downtown Morgantown, expanding on existing public art like this mural painted on a building wall of the parking lot between Forest Ave and Fayette Street.*



*Another plan recommendation is to complete a Wharf District and Riverfront Master Plan that ties this area into the downtown district both physically and visually, expanding on the existing development shown in the image above.*

