



**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:** November 24, 2014

**RE:** **Smart Growth America TA: Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health – One-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.

The City of Huntington has been plagued with flooding and stormwater problems for decades. In 2012 and 2013 the City had a small stormwater division housed in the Department of Public Works. On June 23, 2014, City Council passed an Ordinance that created the Huntington Water Quality Board, and the Huntington Stormwater Utility. The former stormwater division of the Public Works Department were now under the authority of the newly formed Water Quality Board. The same enabling Ordinance also created a mechanism for a revenue stream to pay for the Stormwater Utility activities and programs. It is anticipated that once the full revenue stream is realized, the Stormwater Utility can construct more stormwater features in public spaces to create and add to green space.

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 very successful discussion sessions 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:

- The Stormwater Utility currently reviews and approves 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 benefitted the City by allowing new

developments and controlling stormwater runoff into the combined sewer system and local streams.

- 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.
- The City of Huntington police department was granted a \$100,000 Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation 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.
- The City of Huntington has been in communication with the Strong Towns organization ([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 from them will include:
  - Providing direction on how to test zoning code changes with all invested members of the community
  - Streamlining the administrative process to encourage the development type we would like to see
  - Targeting changes to the specific commercial centers we identified in the Smart Growth America memo and Plan2025
  - Better utilizing public space to create value on the properties that surround them
- The City of Huntington planning office has also been conducting an existing land use survey that will identify the land use, vacancy, condition, and parking estimates of properties across the city, but prioritizing the survey data in our targeted economic development areas, starting with 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 is planning an award banquet in May 2015 to recognize our small business community during Small Business month. This group has also investigated doing a survey of the downtown businesses to see what regulations they feel are necessary to promote a vibrant downtown.
- The City of Huntington is also in the process of narrowing our focus within each of the targeted areas that were discussed to be able to start to implement short-term solutions such as an event based celebration like a “Build a Better Block” event.

Again, we thank Smart Growth America for their Technical Assistance guidance as we embark on transforming our targeted economic development areas. We look forward to providing you with a 6-month and 1-year update.