



TUCKER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
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June 5, 2020

Subject: Tucker County Planning Commission response to the USDA Report and Suggested Next Steps

To: Smart Growth America
John Robert Smith, Smart Growth America
Deborah Watts, Broadband Catalysts

From: Tucker County Planning Commission

Reference: Cool & Connected Workshop Report and Suggested Next Steps letter dated July 12, 2019

We thank you for allowing us to participate in your RCDI workshop that took place from May 27 through May 29. As with many communities, much has happened in Tucker County since the referenced workshop. Although the Corona virus has had a major effect on the Community, Tucker County continues to move forward and work to become a model community.

Tucker County Status:

In response to the general recommendations and downtown put forth in your referenced letter. Tucker County has achieved some of the most beautiful and vital communities that the country has to offer. In the county, each of the three predominant city centers display a classic form, a civic beauty, and a growing vitality.

The three major metropolitan communities in Tucker County consist of Parsons, Davis, and Thomas are shown on the following page. Each of the three communities is a walking community with riverfront property and a riverfront park. Each community shares scenic views, bicycle paths, shopping centers and open spaces.

Downtown Parsons:



Downtown Thomas:



Downtown Davis:



Although the low population levels within the communities make it uneconomical to support a public transportation network, the county and municipalities compensate by permitting the use of ATVs and UTV on the minor public streets.

In addition to enjoying our delightful communities, the county was fortunate enough to experience a major business revitalization. Within the last year, the county's major ski venue (Timberline Ski Area) has been purchased by Perfect North Slopes and renamed as Timberline Mountain (see

<http://www.dcski.com/articles/1614>). This new ski hill will nicely complement the existing outdoor recreation facilities located within the county. The new ski hill help make Tucker County both a winter and a summer destination for many years to come.

County Needs:

Although Tucker County consists of a beautiful location with many assets, the county also has some needs. Tucker County needs include a need for high speed internet connectivity, reliable telephone connectivity, available workforce housing, local waste disposal upgrades, and economic diversification.

High Speed Internet

As exemplified by the latest COVID pandemic, the county needs reliable high-speed internet, the need for good and reliable high-speed internet is paramount.

The ongoing COVID pandemic provides numerous examples of the need for reliable high-speed internet throughout the county. With the closure of activities and schools, we now see the need to rely on distance meetings for activities and to rely on remote learning at schools. Internet is now required for personal interaction among adults and learning for children. An internet that cannot meet these requirements puts people and local businesses at an extreme disadvantage. A capable high-speed internet is now a requirement for businesses. For example, a business that cannot quickly and reliably process credit card and banking transactions will find a hard time surviving.

As a corollary to the lack of availability of high-speed internet but along the same line of thought, Tucker County also suffers from spotty cellular telephone coverage and lack of maintenance regarding existing land line telephone coverage. The lack of coverage leads to difficulties in contacting emergency services in the event of an accident or emergency. The lack of land line telephone coverage occurs because, as the country slowly abandons land line telephones in favor of cellular service, the customer base for the land line telephones continues to decrease. Those who continue to rely on land line telephones find themselves using a network that is subject to decreasing maintenance funds and a corresponding loss of reliability.

Action:

In your RCDI conference, you at USDA spoke of a provision for funding high-speed internet in locations where National Parks and National Forests make installation of high-speed internet difficult. Tucker County is such a location and would like information on obtaining access to such assistance.

Tucker County exists essentially as an inholding the Monongahela National Forest. Tucker County also hosts a Wildlife Refuge and three facilities set aside by the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources. As a result, over fifty percent of the land within Tucker County is publicly owned. With our extreme topography and our lack of population (approximately ten people per square mile), we are having a difficult time trying to find the means to pay for internet connectivity.

Workforce Housing:

As opposed to many communities, Tucker County has many job opportunities but suffers from a lack of housing to enable people to come to the county to accomplish the needed work. As a result, the county has been working for funding and means to construct housing for teachers, hospitality workers, construction workers, and the other individuals needed to provide the economic basis for the county.

Action:

The county is working with multiple entities to construct workforce housing. Two entities that are assisting with workforce housing are Courtland Acres and the Woodlands Development Corporation. In addition, the Tucker County Planning Commission is studying the construction of workforce housing in the County Property located in Davis adjacent to the boulder park.

County Infrastructure:

Growth and development on the municipalities of Thomas and Davis are currently being impeded by infrastructure constraints. The current major constraint comes as a result of the lack of sewage processing capacity at the two municipalities.

Action:

The county is studying alternatives with the purpose in mind of expanding the two municipal sewage systems.

Economic Diversification within the county:

New Federal Facilities

The Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge is building an updated facility that will increase its operation and bring new professional workers into Tucker County. The new multiuse facility will house offices for the West Virginia Ecological Services and the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition to the offices and multiuse facilities provided, the county will welcome the new professional personnel to occupy these offices.

Action:

Tucker County welcomes the new facility including the new professional level permanent employees that the facility will introduce into the county.

Anticipated Private Sector Construction:

The National Youth Science Foundation purchased and is soliciting funds to the construction of a new National Youth Science Center campus. The campus will be for the purpose of bringing selected high school graduates from all over the country to an intensive camp that will emphasize careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics for the new graduates.

Action:

Tucker County looks forward to working with the National Youth Science Foundation in the development and operation of the new facility.

Form Based Codes for Tucker County

Although the county will not be successful in enacting a Form Based Code for the county, the planning commission drafted and continues to work on a proposed Subdivision regulation for the consideration by the County Commission. Prior to the proposed subdivision regulation being brought forward for consideration. It was met by significant opposition from members of the community.

Action:

As a result of this community opposition, the planning commission plans to revise its focus on such guidelines and work with the County Commission to determine the extent of regulations that may be necessary.

Emergency Actions with Respect to COVID-19 recovery

Tucker County is staging its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic slowly and cautiously. Although Tucker County has survived the corona virus pandemic with minimal effects so far, things may change as the county goes through the process of recovery.

Tucker County gains much of its revenue through tourism and through outdoor activities. Now that the county with its multiple outdoor recreation activities is going through the reopening process, we are seeing an influx of multiple people from locations that are considered corona virus hot spots.

Action:

The county will continue to monitor the reopening process in such a way as to try and ensure that a second wave of infections does not injure the members of the county.

Conclusion:

We wish to thank Smart Growth America for hosting the Rural Community Development Initiative for hosting the RCDI meeting that occurred from May 27 to May 29. We found your presentations to be interesting and informative. We look forward to your assistance in finding ways to improve the lives of the residents within Tucker County.