IEDC Economic Development Assistance Visits

Report of Findings

West Virginia Innovation Acceleration Strategy (IAS) Communities

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International Economic Development Council

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IEDC greatly appreciates input and assistance received from its members and staff that participated on this project, and would like to acknowledge and thank the project’s advisory team (listed below) for its time and contributions.

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Introduction

Project Overview

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) partnered with the West Virginia Community Development Hub (WV Hub), under a technical assistance grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to support the Hub’s Innovation Acceleration Strategy (IAS) program that serves five communities in the southern coalfields of West Virginia. These five communities are located in Boone, Greenbrier, Lincoln, McDowell and Wyoming counties. During 2016, WV Hub engaged citizen-driven teams from each of these communities, developing projects for economic diversification. In October, 2016, WV Hub contracted with the IEDC to bring the economic development expertise necessary to further the effective development of the diversification strategies.

Project Background

The Hub was one of four West Virginia-based POWER Initiative project award recipients in 2015. In October 2015, the U.S. Economic Development Administration awarded the Hub a federal planning grant to conduct a one-year economic diversification strategy planning process in five (5) southern WV coalfield communities. This program, titled the “Innovation Acceleration Strategy”, began in June 2016 and is slated to continue through May 2017.

The program serves the communities of Hamlin (Lincoln County), Madison (Boone County), Alderson (Greenbrier County), Pineville (Wyoming County), and McDowell County. Collectively, these communities have an average population of 1,567 people, a median income of $37,540 and a poverty rate of 23.4%, with a high poverty rate of 34.2% in Alderson and a low of 14-17% in Pineville and Madison.

In the most recent, dramatic downturn in the coal industry, Boone County lost 2,700 coal mining jobs from 2011-2015, nearly 40% of the total mining jobs lost in the state in that period. And in just the first 25 days of 2016, an additional 1,892 miners were laid off across the state.

The five IAS communities are at the epicenter of the national coal downturn and the economic challenges it has brought to bear most dramatically in West Virginia. These are communities that have been traditionally built around the single major industry of coal mining and are struggling to identify what a diversified economy could look like in the future. The IAS program brought together diverse community leaders to identify those areas of potential economic growth and planning for the long-term development of these sectors in their local communities.

Scope of Technical Assistance

The consultancy contract between the Hub and IEDC for the Innovation Acceleration Strategy (IAS) program has consisted of the following activities:
A kick-off meeting in which a representative from IEDC met with the leadership of the West Virginia Community Development Hub during a site visit on October 28, 2016. The kick-off meetings aligned IEDC’s assistance with immediate priorities and activities within the region, and engaged local community leaders with access to IEDC support.

While not part of the ARC-funded project, IEDC staff experts attended WV Hub’s fall conference, “Growing Economic Diversification in Southern West Virginia,” to connect West Virginia communities with IEDC economic development resources for their targeted growth economies. The conference took place on December 1, 2016.

IEDC brought several Economic Development Technical Assistance Team visits to the region in January and March 2017. The process is based on a successful model of an expert panel advisory process intended to deliver advice to disaster-impacted communities. The team consisted of two to three IEDC member experts and two IEDC staff members for each visit. The member experts had all worked extensively in other rural communities developing the economic sectors identified as targeted by the IAS communities. The technical assistance visits consisted of four steps:

- Background economic and demographic research by IEDC using internet searches, review of documents, and donated economics software
- Recruitment of member experts and site visit preparation
- Site visit with interviews and facilitated focus groups
- Final report

Bi-weekly mentoring and coaching for IAS community teams from IEDC member experts and staff were offered as the teams continued to refine and further their sector strategies and pursue implementation funding.

Webinars and online resources provided by IEDC and regional economic development experts also supported economic leadership and sector development for the IAS communities. Following the December 1, 2017 event, IEDC staff made up a list of potential topics and created an online survey. Community members and the Hub selected six topics, which were then organized into webinars and scheduled by IEDC. The highly popular series grew by the end of the program to more than 200 registrants per webinar.

**Background to Southern WV Coalfield Region**

The loss of the coal economy has been dramatic for the southern coalfields and the five communities in the Innovation Acceleration Strategy Program. According to data from the West Virginia Office of Miners’ Safety and Training, all five counties (Boone, Greenbrier, Lincoln, McDowell, and Wyoming) have lost a significant number of jobs in recent years due to the decline of the coal industry and its impact on direct coal operations and indirect businesses that were supported through the local coal economy. Between 2011 and 2015, Boone County lost 65.5 percent of its coal production jobs, Greenbrier County lost 39 percent of its coal production jobs, Lincoln County lost 50 percent of its coal jobs, McDowell County lost 36 percent of its coal jobs, and Wyoming County lost 19.6 percent of its coal jobs. These statistics do not take into account the 1,982 miners that were laid off across the state of West Virginia in the first 25 days of 2016. This rash of
layoffs has had dramatic impacts on local communities – particularly communities in the southern coalfields that have been suffering increasing employment decline in the coalfields over the past five years.

**IAS Community Project Development, Dec 2016**

Each of the five communities targeted by the Innovation Acceleration Strategy formed sector teams for their identified diversification strategies. This work provided the foundation for the WV Hub to move forward into partnership with the IEDC. The themes and sectors revealed in these projects informed the agendas and discussions for the expert team visits to the IAS communities.

**McDowell County**

Technology: This team is developing a [McDowell Matters](#) website to showcase various IAS projects and promote local events. The technology team has also discussed the idea of having some sort of computer training class, potentially a partnership with Girls Who Code or Mined Mines.

Local Food and Agriculture: This team is working to create a locally sourced grocery store through the school system, and potentially seeking POWER funds.

Arts and Culture: This team is looking at creating an open mic event and space for local musicians, and eventually a permanent venue space in Welch, West Virginia. They might also work on an arts and cultural festival for the county, and a mural project for downtown Welch.

Tourism and Recreation: This team is working to create a motorcycle route as a tourist destination, as well as a possible store and museum downtown via a building rehab project.

**City of Pineville, Wyoming County:**

Recreation and Tourism: This team is working to create a track for RC Cars in order to hold competitions and attract this niche demographic to the area. They are looking to work with an RC car store in Beckley for recruitment and support.

Arts and Culture: They are currently working to hold a Fall Arts Festival. They are also collaborating with the Transportation team to host an Arts Showcase at their Triathlon.

Manufacturing: This team is focusing on creating a network of local artisans and developing ways to make it easier for them to sell their crafts at local festivals and other venues across the county.

Transportation: They are working to develop a Rail Trail that runs through Mullens, West Virginia along the Guyandotte River.

**City of Madison, Boone County**

Arts and Culture: This team is focusing on creating spin-off organizations that can focus on different aspects of the arts. They would also like to hold crowd-funded dinners, similar to Show of Hands or Square Meals, to fund the projects of local artists. Additionally, they would like to hold an end of year Arts Festival.
Tourism and Recreation: They are working to develop a cross country track in order to increase the hike-ability of Madison and hold meets for regional schools. They are also working to place signage and develop more accommodations along the Little Coal River to alert kayakers of access points.

Manufacturing: They are focusing on attracting large companies to the area, as well as performing site surveys and determining available land.

Small Business: Their primary project is developing a Restaurant Incubator as a way to provide low-risk opportunities to potential food service business owners.

**Lincoln County:**
Arts and Culture: They are focusing on reopening the Hamlin Arts Center, a building that previously served as an Art Museum and a hub for artistic events.

Local Agriculture and Food: They are working to open a permanent Farmer’s Market that can develop into a butcher shop. They would also like to encourage the harvesting of Maple Syrup, the development of an agriculture trail, and the creation of a map of the county.

Manufacturing: They are working to develop a letter template the county could send to potential companies requesting they open a location in Lincoln County. They would also like to encourage retail and small businesses.

Tourism and Recreation: They would like to develop a visitor’s Center and a central Lincoln County website to promote their assets, as well as the projects each team is working on. They are also interested in better access and signage for the Guyandotte River and more hiking/biking trails.

**Town of Alderson, Greenbrier County:**
Arts and Culture: This team is looking to improve the community center space in Alderson to enable it for usage for theater and music productions. They would also like to make the Depot downtown into an event space via some HVAC upgrades.

Local Food: The Local Food Team has been put into contact and is working with Dan Conant at Solar Holler to do a potential energy efficiency upgrade and solar project to save money on utility bills for the Food Hub, thus making them more sustainable and freeing up money to enable future expansion.

Community Beautification: Their goals consist of painting a Mural in town, trail clean up, and maintenance at the riverfront, as well as improvements to the town’s mini park.

Small Business: They want to focus on increasing small business in downtown Alderson, fixing up buildings and attaching new businesses. They are also looking at uses for a newly renovated train depot location downtown.

Recreation and Quality of Life: This team is mostly looking at projects centered about access to the Greenbrier River and riverfront projects.
Activities & Outcomes

IEDC Support for WV Hub’s Fall Conference, “Growing Economic Diversification in Southern West Virginia”

IEDC’s first community interaction with the IAS members was at the December 1, 2017 conference. At the event IEDC staff was able to see the IAS teams in action. WV Hub awarded small grants from between $1000 and $2500 for the projects developed over the past year by the community groups. In turn, IEDC’s Vice President of Knowledge, Management & Development gave a keynote speech.

In dialogue with the nearly 70 participants at the conference, IEDC identified a strong desire for technical coaching on specific topics, and that this assistance could be provided through targeted webinars. IEDC, WV Hub, and IAS members developed a list of potential topics.

The West Virginia Webinar Series

In the week following the conference, IEDC surveyed the conference attendees. With immediate response from over 30 of the attendees, IEDC felt the urgency of the communities. IEDC moved forward with the top five selected topics, plus one topic – Business Retention and Expansion - which, while it did not make the top five, IEDC felt was too essential to be overlooked for economic development within the region.

Over the following two months, IEDC produced six webinars featuring presentations on these economic development topics that were targeted specifically to small, rural, coal-impacted communities. IEDC recruited sixteen expert members from across the country to volunteer their time to speak on these six webinars to help these communities. These were the selected topics and speakers for the six webinars.

2017 West Virginia Webinar Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Webinar Topic</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Speaker Title and Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26-Jan</td>
<td><strong>Business Retention &amp; Expansion</strong>&lt;br&gt;Programs for Existing Businesses</td>
<td>Penny Lewandowski&lt;br&gt;Hrishue Mahalaha&lt;br&gt;David Myers</td>
<td>VP Entrepreneurship, Edward Lowe Foundation, MI&lt;br&gt;Senior Partner, JumpStart Inc., Cleveland OH&lt;br&gt;Executive Director, Ponca City Economic Development, OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Feb</td>
<td><strong>Marketing for Small and Rural Communities</strong></td>
<td>Jane Jenkins&lt;br&gt;Ben Wright&lt;br&gt;Rachel DeLoffre</td>
<td>President and CEO, Downtown Oklahoma City Inc.&lt;br&gt;Atlas Advertising, Denver CO&lt;br&gt;Development Counsellors International (DCI), NY</td>
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IEDC had a total of 944 registrations for the six webinars, averaging over 150 persons per webinar. After each webinar, participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the webinar, and to make comment and suggestions for additional topics. Each webinar received over 4 out of 5 on a five point scale. Full comments and suggestions for additional topics are included as Appendix A in this report.

IEDC provided all participants a link to both the video and audio recording of the webinar and to the PowerPoint presentations used by the speakers. These are now posted as well on IEDC’s website for disaster recovery: [www.restoreyoureconomy.org](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org). Links to each of these webinars and to the presentations are also provided here in this report, in the table above.

### Technical Assistance Team Visits

IEDC teams of expert member volunteers and staff support visited each of the five IAS communities during the six month partnership with the WV Hub. During these visits, the teams and the WV Hub staff met with community members on topics of economic development interest to the community. Coaching and training takes place during these small group meetings. This report captures these conversations through the impressions and reflections of the experts and staff who participated. Recommendations are provided on the basis of what was discussed and the expertise that these visitors bring through their many years of economic development work.

A fundamental understanding that underpins the economic situation throughout is that the coal industry has been nearly the sole base industry in this region. The closest competitor is government services, consisting
of transfer payments in the social sector. Without the infusion of capital from the base industries, the internal trade and service sectors have correspondingly contracted. For the region to recover, it must attract capital from outside the region – i.e. grow its economic base.

Economic development opportunity sectors in base industries discussed during the technical assistance fall into the following categories:

- Small Business & Entrepreneurship
- Tourism, including Arts, Culture, and Heritage
- Agriculture

Key endeavors that support the growth of the base sectors are:

- Housing and Community Improvement
- Leadership & organizational capacity

The recommendations from the technical assistance visits are presented for each county individually, but IEDC believes each IAS community will learn from the others as well as from their own targeted report.

The community reports are followed by supplemental sections on Building Capacity for Economic Development, and on Lodging.
Town of Madison, Boone County

Background

The town of Madison is located in Boone County, which is located in the southern coalfield region of West Virginia. As of 2016, the population of Boone County was 23,198, a decrease of 5.1 percent over the last five years. The number of jobs existing in the county in 2016 was 7,032, and the labor force was fairly evenly divided between genders, with 43.7 percent of jobs occupied by women and 56.3 percent of jobs occupied by men. There were 702 unemployed people in Boone County in 2016.

Of the 7,032 jobs existing in Boone County, the four largest employment sectors and their corresponding average earnings in 2016 were:

- **Government** (1,703 jobs with average earnings of $51,432)
- **Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction** (1,199 jobs with average earnings of $85,943)
- **Retail Trade** (855 jobs with average earnings of $26,949)
- **Healthcare and Social Assistance** (755 jobs with average earnings of $25,828)

Over the course of the last 10 years, the growing and declining industries of Lincoln County were as follows:¹

- **Home Healthcare Services** + 272
- **Administrative Management and General Management Consulting** + 178
- **Security Guards and Patrol Services** + 75
- **Elementary and Secondary Schools** - 122
- **Bituminous Coal and Lignite Surface Mining** - 219
- **Bituminous Coal Underground Mining** - 2,552

Additional data and information pertaining to Hamlin and Lincoln County may be obtained through the Boone County [Background Report](#).

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¹ Emsi Q4 2016 Data Set – Industry NAICS codes
Observations
Madison is a small city in Boone County that benefits from a group of citizens that are deeply rooted in their community and are interested in seeing a positive change for economic development. As with any small town, there is a sense that everyone knows everyone, which can be both an advantage and disadvantage as we came to understand. Overall, the community benefits from its proximity to Charleston, the state capital, as well as a scenic location in the valley of hills and mountains. Many people commute to Charleston for work and as a result, the city has a suburban atmosphere with a number of attractive neighborhoods and well kept homes in the hills around the downtown area.

Another attractive feature Madison has is a new hospital facility which has brought in many new medical staff. These new community members have good paying jobs with disposable income; however, this income will stay in the community only if there are suitable places – such as stores, restaurants and other amenities where they can spend their money.

Over the years, significant retail and entertainment opportunities have been built between Madison and Charleston, which has unfortunately drawn business away from this small city. The downtown area in particular suffers from many vacant buildings and unkempt yards which have visible debris and trash scattered around the properties. When this issue was raised in the presence of the Mayor and other town council members, IEDC staff and experts were told that there was a desire for the government to remain “hands off” and not to interfere in people’s lives. Town officials are more comfortable with trying to negotiate with property owners/renters about yard clean up rather than alienating them with fines due to violations of the law.

REV UP Madison is capable of giving grants for façade improvement but many of the building owners do not want to improve the look of their property. However, there the IEDC team was told that some are suspicious of this fund because the owners are afraid that their property taxes will be increased as a result. It should also be noted that many of the building owners are elderly or live out of town or out of state.

In terms of economic diversification, the town council is said to have become more proactive in the last couple of years. However, in the past there was some complacency because residents assumed coal revenues would be around forever. Diversification is also a problem for Madison due to lack of flat land.

There is a desire to create a large industrial park a short drive outside the town. The industrial park, to be called Rock Creek Development Park, is slated to take place in the redevelopment site of the former Hobet Mine. The access road to the industrial park is estimated to cost $54 million, however, and funding has yet to be identified. There was no mention of whether a feasibility study had been made to determine that there was a market for the project and how long it would take to construct and make ready for business occupancy.
For dining and retail, most of Madison’s residents either travel to neighboring Danville (5 minute drive) or to South Charlestown (30 minute drive), both of which have a plentiful selection of chain restaurants and retail shops. Madison only has one restaurant and no retail. At various times in the past, they have had antique shops in the downtown area but those were forced to close when they could no longer afford the continuously rising rent.

During IEDC’s site visit, the team met with a number of citizens that were interested in the economic development of their community. The first meeting was for those interested in the arts and cultural offerings of the community. Unfortunately, no one from the community attended this inaugural meeting. The Coal Heritage Museum was invited to attend the session, but also did not attend. While the museum contains a number of interesting artifacts, it is not open during regular business hours as it is run by a volunteer staff.

IEDC then met with city and county officials. The team learned from Mayor H.H. Howel and other city council members that they consider Madison to be “doing as good or better compared to similar communities in the area.” The idea of combining Madison and Danville was discussed. Apparently the idea was proposed some time ago but neither city is interested in combining into one due to a sense of community pride. It was noted that they do share some public services such as police and ambulance and EMT services.

The team also met with the technology sector representatives. There was a lively discussion around the use of technology in schools. Thanks to very dedicated teachers, schools in the county are exposing students to innovative technology from a young age, including drones. The schools in the county have excellent internet connections, but it was noted that most homes in rural parts of the county are not connected to the internet.

Another meeting took place with recreation and tourism sector representatives. Based on what was learned, there appears to be a great potential for recreation-based tourism in Madison. Madison will benefit from being on the Hatfield-McCoy ATV Trail. It is estimated that riders from the trail will bring in about $2 million of tourism revenue every year. Madison already has approved plans in place to upgrade their tourism facilities in order to handle the increased tourism.

A public pool that has been out of commission for several years will be upgraded to an amenities facility that will cater to the RV Park immediately adjacent. Hatfield-McCoy Executive Director Jeffrey Lusk reported that 75% of people that open businesses on the trail have never owned a business before. Madison also benefits from being on the Coal River/Walhonde Water Trail. The water trail stretches for 88 miles, has 17 small boat launches. The organization has recently launched a mobile app with the option of promoting businesses along the water trail. Business opportunities around the water trail include bait shops, kayak/boat shop, and an angler outfitter. There is also a need for fishing and river guides. While the popularity of the river trail is
great for tourism, there is a recognized need for cities along the river to be prepared to respond in case of emergencies. There are many places along the river that are not accessible by road.

During the site visit, entrepreneurs in the community provided their personal experiences. A mother and daughter spoke about their process from finding a suitable building to open a restaurant. Unable to find anything up to code, they put their own money into renovations for a building they rented. The restaurant is expected to open this year. It will be a family-oriented restaurant and they hope to capitalize on their proximity to the court house for lunch customers. There are also two large rooms to host large gatherings and events. Various residents told IEDC that they were very much in need of a family style restaurant and they enjoy patronizing stores and businesses that retain their staff for several years since they enjoy building relationships with them.

The team also heard from another former business owner that ran a coffee shop with a business partner. Based on her experience, she stated that there was little local support for her business even though residents frequently said that they would like a coffee shop. She also said that people did not want to park and walk to the coffee shop but they wanted a drive-through. There were also comments that professional workers that live in Madison do not support local businesses because they have the resources to travel outside the town to spend their money. They also have the money to pay for entertainment instead of attending local, free or cheap community events.

IEDC also heard that there was not an entrepreneurial risk-taking culture in Boone County. People were very comfortable working for someone else, such as the coal mining company. There is also a tendency for coal miners not to want to travel or relocate for work, citing a strong connection to their community. It is the case that several generations will have worked in the coal mines and there needs to be a shift in mindset that those jobs are now gone. There is also a problem with potential business owners feeling confident in opening a business when they see vacant properties and buildings for sale.

**Recommendations**

The IEDC team emphasized that the appearance of the community can leave a lasting impression on potential businesses or citizens looking to move to the area. Therefore, it was very important to focus on clean up and beautification efforts, and to work to eliminate vacancy and blighted building problems that scare people away from the downtown. It was recommended that the city adopt more strict ordinances to deal with the issue.

In order to handle the anticipated increase in tourism, the city desperately needs additional lodging and accommodations. There is also a need for additional restaurants. One thing to consider is the extent to which resistance to serving alcohol in bars and restaurants will impact the experience for tourists.

**1. Expand tourism revenue capture with more accommodations**

Madison stands to benefit from being part of the Hatfield-McCoy ATV Trail with a new trail head and on the Walhonde Water Trail. However, the lack of overnight accommodations and restaurants currently impacts the town’s ability to capture tourism dollars from visitors. There are several vacant buildings and at least one Victorian architecture building that could be converted to more accommodations.
It was stated during one of the meetings that there was an ideal campground location that was surplus property of the local utility company. The county economic development organization should make this site a priority for business attraction.

The city has plans to remove a dilapidated community center and swimming pool to create a boat ramp and camping area with shower facilities to cater to tourists that use the river for recreation. This plan should be expedited in order to meet the opportunity in the summer months. Similarly, the city should prioritize ways to attract businesses to key locations around the new Hatfield-McCoy trail head that is planned in this community. Without these types of accommodations, it is likely that the revenue will go to other communities.

A two-story office building is also scheduled to be renovated to create a small hotel, targeting the ATV market. Recognizing that tourism is highly seasonal, the city should work with the owner of the project to offer support and ensure the property is ready and scheduled to capture summer 2017 business from the Hatfield-McCoy trail.

During the site visit, IEDC also heard that there was a kayak rental company that wanted to open in a park site. The city or county EDO should work with the owner to help this business realize their expansion plans for 2017’s tourism season.

While many visitors may not think of Madison as a tourist destination, there is also a city/region branding opportunity. Resident Bill Currey provided examples of murals of kayaking and rivers that could be painted on buildings to demonstrate to tourists and passersby that Madison is a river community to be enjoyed. This can also be reinforced through social media, such as a Facebook page and blog posts about kayaking conditions on the river, as well as other things to do and local businesses to patronize in Madison.

2. Promote a More Supportive Ecosystem for Entrepreneurship

In Madison and other locations in Boone County, there are opportunities to launch businesses to cater to the incoming tourism. The struggle will be balancing the needs and wants of tourists with the desires of the locals.

It was stated by local businesspeople that there appears to be a problem with suitable space for businesses, particularly food service as the available retail space is not up to code or the rent is too high for the area. Business opportunities include a rental ATV shop. This could also provide additional jobs for people skilled at ATV maintenance. There is currently an ATV educational program at the vocational school but lack of funding threatens the program.

There is an opportunity to build on the technology skills of students by having them provide services to local businesses. For example, with the school drones, students can film promotional videos for local businesses. Testing business ideas while still in school gives students time to refine their ideas and hopefully they will be ready to launch a successful business after graduating.

For those that do want to start businesses, the lack of technical assistance and capital has been cited as a problem. A possible solution would be to create a revolving loan fund, i.e. pool money to help make loans to local businesses that could be recycled. Given the difficulty of starting and sustaining a business in Madison,
a suggestion from the IEDC team is a business emergency number. The idea would be that any business that is thinking of closing its doors should call this number before doing so. This way the resources and mentoring could be provided to the business.
The city of Madison should initiate a “buy local” campaign to help ensure there is adequate support for new businesses.

3. Make Downtown Recovery and Redevelopment a Priority

The current state of downtown Madison is approximately 80% vacant and there is suspected drug activity in two of the buildings. Until these problems are addressed, the vacancy will spread; property values will continue to decline and this will make it very hard for new businesses to succeed.

Ultimately, the local government should take a “tough love” approach and deal with vacancy and blight, as well as the reputation of some drug crime in certain buildings. This will mean adopting and enforcing local ordinances that will require owners to take care of their buildings. One building at a time should be dealt with successfully until momentum is built for a downtown revitalization.

Another suggestion is to create a beautification committee of citizens and to have the town’s churches or citizen groups organize a town clean-up. This would accomplish the goal of improving the appearance of the city without the city government extending their reach. For more information about West Virginia state programs that can help with vacant buildings, please see Appendix B.

- REV UP Madison is currently a volunteer organization that has expressed a need for a fulltime Main Street manager, but they currently do not have the financial resources to hire one. It is the recommendation of IEDC that the city make this a priority, work more closely with the county economic development organization, and seek an exemption from the state to participate in the State’s Main Street program.

- In the absence of tenants for the downtown, it is recommended that REV UP Madison and the City focus on creating special events that will help draw people into the downtown area. For example, the city’s main street can be blocked off temporarily for a walking area for an art show or a sporting or musical event.

- It is further recommended that the city work with the county’s economic development office to make the downtown a priority for both business retention and attraction efforts, perhaps putting in place some type of incentive or a pop-up promotion to encourage temporary businesses that could try out sites at least on a temporary basis during tourism season.
Town of Hamlin, Lincoln County

Background

The town of Hamlin, West Virginia is the county seat of Lincoln County, which is located in the southern coalfield region of the state. As of November 2016, the population of Lincoln County was 21,401, a decrease of one percent over the last five years. The number of jobs existing in the county in 2016 was 4,081. There were 550 unemployed people in 2016.

Of the 4,081 jobs existing in Lincoln County, the four largest employment sectors and their corresponding average earnings in 2016 were:

- Government (1,020 jobs with average earnings of $45,517)
- Healthcare and Social Assistance (601 jobs with average earnings of $32,004)
- Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (558 jobs with average earnings of $47,684)
- Retail Trade (446 jobs with average earnings of $23,362)

Over the course of the last 10 years, the growing and declining industries of Lincoln County were as follows:

- Crude Petroleum and Natural Gas Extraction + 364
- Crop Production + 114
- Child and Youth Services + 73
- Site Preparation Contractors - 157
- Support Activities for Coal Mining - 189
- Animal Production and Aquaculture - 191

Like so many other communities in southern West Virginia, Lincoln County has suffered from significant declines in the coal mining industry in recent years. From 2011 to 2016, Lincoln County lost 207 coal jobs, representing an industry employment decline of 27 percent. Despite recent employment gains from the natural gas industry, the Lincoln County labor force participation rate remains significantly lower than the U.S. average. At the end of 2016, the national labor force participation rate was 62.7 percent; comparatively, the Lincoln County labor force participation rate at the end of 2016 was 47 percent.

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2 Emsi Q4 2016 Data Set – Industry NAICS codes

3 The Labor Force Participation Rate is defined by the American Community Survey as “the proportion of the population that is 16 years or older and in the labor force, which means they are either employed or unemployed but looking for work.”

4 http://www.tradingeconomics.com/united-states/labor-force-participation-rate

5 http://www.towncharts.com/West-Virginia/Economy/Lincoln-County-WV-Economy-data.html
Additional data and information pertaining to Hamlin and Lincoln County may be obtained through the Lincoln County Background Report.

Overview
Hamlin is a town of 1,140 persons located in Lincoln County, West Virginia. Situated equidistant from the more populous cities of Charleston and Huntington, West Virginia, Hamlin is within a 45 minute drive of both cities. Hamlin’s main access roads, West Virginia Route 3 and West Virginia Route 10, provide convenient two-lane access to Charleston and Huntington, respectively. The town does not have direct access to the federal highway system.

Hamlin and Lincoln County benefit from a picturesque location, situated among densely wooded mountains interspersed with flat valleys that are well-suited for agriculture. The county has its economic history tied to the oil and gas industry and has historically been less dependent upon the coal industry than other parts of southern West Virginia. However, volatility in the oil and gas industry has not spared Lincoln County from the same volume of layoffs witnessed in neighboring coal-producing counties.

Downtown Revitalization
Observations:
Downtown Hamlin has a variety of commercial buildings along West Virginia Route 3 that contribute to an attractive built environment. Despite recent increases in commercial vacancy in the downtown, the building stock is well-positioned to host future new businesses. In the heart of downtown Hamlin, West Virginia Route 3 makes two 90-degree turns, forcing automobile traffic to slow significantly when passing through town. This condition is generally observed as a benefit to the downtown as it helps with the visibility of local businesses among passersby. Nonetheless, the building stock within downtown Hamlin suffers from high vacancy and underinvestment.

Mayor David Adkins, in his first term, has passed a vacant buildings ordinance designed to reign in property blight and neglect. The town reports that it is enforcing the ordinance by placing liens on long-vacant and blighted properties. He and his administration have developed an inventory of properties in need of repair. A group of community volunteers are supporting these efforts with a hometown beautification project to improve the physical appearance of downtown Hamlin.

In West Hamlin, Mayor Farris Burton, Jr., has overseen a clean up to the trailer park, a partnership with Coalfield Development for rehabilitation of the former bus station into 40 affordable apartments, as well as upgraded water treatment and a new municipal building.
The Lincoln County EDA owns the North Lincoln Business Park, located approximately two miles away from downtown Hamlin, housing four tenants: the Tri-River Transit Authority, the Lincoln County 911 Center, Performance Fiberglass, and HealthNet. The EDA has its sights on two potential drivers of economic activity: gas extraction from the Rogersville Shale and the Rock Creek Development Park, the former Hobet Mine site. If natural gas companies decide to move forward with gas extraction in Lincoln County, the EDA estimates that between 1,000 to 2,000 jobs will be created in Lincoln County. The 2.6 mile road to Rock Creek Development Park is slated for completion in November, 2021.6

In the context of the uncertainty and timelines for these developments, Lincoln County and the towns of Hamlin and West Hamlin may take control of the more immediate future by working on additional economic diversification pursuits.

Recommendations:
1. Conduct an inventory of downtown buildings. Take the zoning parcels map for downtown, and identify challenges and opportunities for each building in the desired revitalization area. Put the inventory and the map together. Get feedback from residents. Modify as necessary. Have the town adopt a “Downtown Revitalization Plan.”
   - A plan will empower potential redevelopment partners and willing owners with the town’s support as they line up funding and make plans.
   - The town itself is more likely to access grant funds – to remove underminded or flood-prone buildings for example – if it can show the project is part of a cohesive revitalization effort.

2. Keep objectives narrow and focused. Community leaders, organizations and volunteers cannot fix every challenge at once. Decide to address a few pressing issues at a time. Determine what should be done (output) and what effect it will have (outcomes). Understanding the likelihood that an activity will produce a desired outcome helps determine whether the activity is a priority. Whether or not outputs result in desired outcomes should be monitored and adjusted as needed.

   One example of an output metric might be staffing a Visitor Center, while the outcome measurement would be that visitors spend more time and money in Hamlin, or return to invest in real estate or a business interest in the Town.

3. Ensure the town’s downtown revitalization and other economic diversification efforts are included in the Comprehensive Plan currently under development by the Lincoln County EDA. The Comprehensive Plan as well should track metrics both to provide clarity on expected outcomes, and to allow modification if desired outcomes are not achieved.

4. Do more, meet less. Community and committee meetings are most effective when clear, actionable items are identified and assigned to attendees for implementation. Only meet if the meeting is warranted. Volunteer engagement and retention remains higher if meetings are necessary and result in actionable and achievable tasks.

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Small Business & Entrepreneurship

Observations:
Several developments in the region are opening up huge opportunities for new small businesses and entrepreneurs. First, the Hatfield and McCoy Trail System is currently issuing 40,000 annual permits for ATV use. The system needs lodging and recreation-rental business infrastructure. Secondly, nonprofit organizations promoting the revival of local agriculture have succeeded in seeding significant high tunnel infrastructure to support the growing community. While recommendations for building the agriculture sector are given below in a separate section, its development adds to towns’ opportunity to market itself as a place to start or grow a business. Even shabby downtown buildings can attract new small business if they are made available at a favorable price, or the town offers incentives and an explicit welcome. The small business might well not be retail, but a small professional firm that sells its services remotely and chooses this town for quality of life.

Recommendations:
Community leaders and volunteers are exploring ways they can increase the town’s population by attracting and supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs. The IEDC team offers these recommendations in support of their efforts.

1. Develop an “Opportunities Brochure” to market to people who may be considering starting new businesses. Highlight the types of businesses that Lincoln County needs to support emerging market demands. The brochure should not only market business opportunities, but highlight quality of life, average housing prices, and recreational options for residents, such as river kayaking. The town can pursue low-cost avenues to distribute this marketing: on-line website, in the visitor’s center, on Facebook, or by email to graduates of WV colleges. Note that rivers are West Virginia’s fastest growing tourism attraction, averaging seven percent growth annually.

   New business opportunities that are tied to explicit needs in the region:
   - Lodging
   - Agriculture – high tunnel farming
   - Recreational services (kayak rentals for example)
   - Web Design
   - Rehab of designated vacant/blighted buildings

2. The Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) has a $10M loan fund, a small business coach, the resources from Southern WV Community College, and $500k available for tech coaching. This is the kind of help that the towns and the county can bring to attract new and support existing businesses.

3. Communicate the benefits of the sharing economy to local residents who might be interested in using it to start a side business. A sharing economy is defined as an economic model in which individuals are able to borrow or rent assets owned by someone else. Given the annual volume of people riding the Hatfield McCoy Trails, residents of Lincoln County could benefit from renting their house(s) through AirBnb, VRBO, HomeAway, etc.

   \[\text{http://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/sharing-economy.asp}\]
4. The majority of a community’s growth is the product of existing business expansions. Lincoln County should actively support these companies with a Business Support Specialist. The person responsible should have a list of all traded sector companies. They should research these companies, become familiar with business resources in the area, and then make time to visit the businesses acting as a liaison from the town.

Business owners are very busy, and the endeavor can’t appear to be a “learning experience” but rather a genuine offer of support and assistance. The effectiveness of this outreach can be measured by the amount of concrete help -- whether that be workforce assistance, loan resources, permitting solutions, or new growth partners -- brought to the business by the outreach person. For example, at the IEDC Team meeting with a local, thriving yet struggling manufacturing business, the team heard the owner’s challenges with recruiting qualified help. At the meeting, the Family Resource Network was able to offer a connection for this owner to a resource organization that will pay the full cost for a new employee the first eight weeks. Before leaving, the business owner asked for FRN’s business card to pursue this help.

This person should become very familiar with the concepts and best practices of BRE (see BRE webinar). The Business Support Specialist’s role is to find ways to help local businesses grow. The focus should be on developing relationships and bringing support to the “traded sector” companies. Measure success by how many connections the BSS was able to make between these Hamlin businesses and regional resource agencies. Develop other measures of success as the program evolves.

5. Due to the strength of broadband service in Lincoln County, the community may have growth potential for in-home businesses. Endeavor to find out how many in-home businesses are in the town. A simple survey could be included sent out with local property tax bills. A small completion reward of $5 off the property tax bill -- or a free ice cream at a town event -- could be provided as an incentive.

6. Get partners to help solve the problem with lack of cell phone service. The town has a cellular tower built, but no receiving wings on the tower. The IEDC team heard that a contract with the owner of a previous tower is preventing use of the new tower. The cell phone service is poor, yet the tower is already built that could support a solution.

7. Continue to partner with organizations like Entre-Ed, which works with local area elementary schools to teach entrepreneurship. Instilling entrepreneurial concepts into all levels of education will help empower local student to become future business owners.
Tourism

Observations:

Lincoln County benefits from being included in the Hatfield McCoy Trails, a network of over 600 miles of ATV trails crossing nine counties in southern West Virginia. Now in its 17th year of operation, the Hatfield McCoy Trails organization has grown to become a major driver of economic activity in the region. Revenue from the nearly 40,000 permits issues annually, as well as state funding, support the Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization’s operating budget. In 2014, an economic impact analysis of the Hatfield McCoy Trails revealed that it was responsible for a direct economic impact of over $14 million per year. Stakeholders in Lincoln County understand and value the significance the Hatfield McCoy Trails organization has on the local economy; they also realize that much more needs to be done to capitalize on this asset.

Building on the success of the Hatfield McCoy Trails, Lincoln County residents have expressed interest in developing a visitor’s center in downtown Hamlin, a comprehensive website for the County, and additional recreational opportunities along the Guyandotte River. In December 2016, the Lincoln County IAS team was awarded a $2,000 grant from the WV Community Development Hub to improve the river experience along the Guyandotte River. The river is a natural community asset that is currently underutilized as a tourist draw and economic driver. Using the grant, the Lincoln County IAS group plans to develop ‘put-in locations’ to improve access to the river; additionally, they plan to install signage and wayfinding elements to improve the visitor experience along the river.

Recommendations:

1. During discussions of visitor amenities and attractions, the Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization made offers of technical assistance, use of labor and equipment, and actual grant funding for local initiatives. This seems to be a perfect fit for the community. The following are ways these offers could be used:
   a. A local Hamlin team is putting in access points and signage on the Guyandotte River and going to host a kayak day with functioning kayak business from Madison bringing their kayaks up for the day with the grant from WV Community Hub. Request the offered matching grant funding from the Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization. This additional funding can be used for printing brochures, creating river signage, and constructing more easily accessible river ‘put-ins.’
   b. The Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization offered the use of their earth-moving equipment to create parking for the put-in sites. The town will need to identify such sites and coordinate this effort.

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c. The team at the recreational trails meeting heard participants discuss trail development in West Hamlin for non-motorized traffic. The Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization offered to assist with grant writing for this initiative. The team recommends that the community pursue this opportunity. If the grant is awarded, the Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization offered to help implement this initiative.

2. Develop sample travel itineraries that piggy-back on the marketing for regional events. For example, West Virginia Day is May 20th. Can Lincoln County towns develop a simple map of a scenic tour and activities?

3. Improve marketing for the 6,000 acres at the Big Ugly park.

4. To capture spending from tourists, the community needs to keep visitors overnight. Consider creating an on-line reservation system for lodging in Lincoln County – or better yet, someone should take responsibility to make sure all existing accommodations are linked into national websites. This would give local lodgings the required connection for attracting visitors from out of the area. Refer to the Lodging section of this report for more lodging recommendations.

Agriculture

Observations:

Lincoln County benefits from a topography that lends itself well to agriculture. While mountainous like other parts of southern West Virginia, Lincoln County also has many plateaus suitable for raising crops and livestock. Although agriculture was once strong in the county, like most small farming communities, it shrunk with the concentration of the industry in large-scale farming. But also, like many rural areas, the local farm movement is bringing back interest and potential markets for locally-grown and fresh product.

The IEDC team met with many persons dedicated to reviving and strengthening agriculture in Lincoln County. The group has assets with which it is building its capacity:

- The area has invested in a greenhouse system called High Tunnels, which are 30'x96' long hoop houses. The tunnels protect the crops from deer and provide a longer growing season. Each High Tunnel reportedly costs $10,000 to $15,000. The tunnels are distributed to interested property owners. Thirty tunnels are installed and 20 more coming in 2017.
- To restore labor capacity, Coalfields Development created a division called Refresh Appalachia. They are training new farmers at four training sites.
- The group has tried farmers markets, but one of their prime sites is owned by the Lincoln County EDA which is now selling it for a more profitable use. That use was not disclosed. Reportedly, however, the agriculture group had trouble keeping the market open on a regular schedule and stocked with produce. Another venue the group uses is a market at the health clinic on Wednesdays.
- Lincoln County is located between two urban markets – Charleston & Huntington, each about a 30 minutes drive.
- The group reported that they have good support from the farm extension agent, David Robinson.
Recommendations

A core goal of this sector is to eventually grow sufficiently to meet demand from primary market customers. Primary markets are ideally “Whole Foods” type stores in the urban centers who have customers who will pay a premium for fresh, locally-grown West Virginia food. For example, a participant mentioned Healthy Life Grocers. Farmers markets then become a useful secondary market, open when farmers have an abundance of produce. To reach primary markets, the sector needs 12 month per year product and the ability to aggregate, store and distribute that product.

A second goal is to celebrate and continue the agricultural heritage of Lincoln County. This goal has the benefit of making the county a more attractive and healthy place to live, work and visit.

Getting ready to be successful in primary markets:

1. The group would benefit from an organized planning process around making the leap into primary markets. The IEDC Team saw a potential way forward for this group in the information shared by Cathy Elliott, Deputy Director at the Regional Planning & Development Council. The RPDC might have interest in convening a four county working group on agricultural production capacity. One of the organizations at the Lincoln County meeting would need to take on this outreach. The following recommendations could be part of the four-county team work.

2. Research the primary market opportunities. Identify where they are, and what kind of product they are willing to buy and sell.

3. Estimate the production capacity of the high tunnels. Figure out the acreage in the tunnels, the percent active usage, the potential output.

4. An instant freeze facility can support storage necessary to supply product 12 month/year.

5. The farmers will need an aggregation and distribution system. This system must be designed by the farmers to support their profitability and opportunities.

6. Identify and target opportunities for value-added agriculture. There are a number of agricultural products grown in Lincoln County that could benefit from a value-add proposition. “Value added” means adding value to a raw product by taking it to at least the next stage of production. This can be as simple as drying berries after a harvest or joining a cooperative that processes your products. Adding value may be as elaborate as going all the way to the consumer with a “case-ready” food product.9

7. Consider, too, growing ingredients for the craft beer market. Beer requires hops and malted grain. Hops are harvested once per year, requiring long-term storage capacity. Grain needs to go through a malting process. In Loudon County VA, the county has found that the cost is $15,000/acre to plant hops and grain. Farmers need to know they have a market from brewers before they are willing to invest. The county is developing that marketing strategy to enable the growth of this new sector.

8. To attract producers, might need Ag Fact Sheet – including certifications, approving agencies etc. Make going into the food production business more penetrable.

Celebrating and continuing the agricultural heritage of Lincoln County:

9. Develop a narrative around farming for the region. Tell the story of the revival of the farms, the stories of the farms that were, the stories of the foods once common to the region and how to once

9 http://agecoext.tamu.edu/files/2013/10/rm1-8.pdf
again enjoy them. Tell an integrated and proud story through Facebook, Hometown Hamlin, and other social media outlets.

10. Maintain a strong partnership with Refresh Appalachia in order to establish a sustainable training and development program for farmers and ranchers in southern West Virginia. Refresh Appalachia is a social enterprise of the Coalfield Development Corporation, located in Wayne, West Virginia.

11. Work with tourism groups to develop fun events like “Farm Day” tours, or a county-wide “Pick Your Own.” For examples of how to make agritourism work, please see the Shenandoah Valley’s “Fields of Gold” efforts which are detailed online at http://www.fieldsofgold.org/.

12. Create a farmer’s market in the center of Hamlin or West Hamlin that accepts SNAP cards. Centralizing a market will provide greater market exposure to local farmers, while also providing easy access for community residents.
McDowell County, West Virginia

Background

McDowell County is located in the southern coalfield region of West Virginia. As of 2016, the population of McDowell County was 19,408, a decrease of 10.6 percent over the last five years. The number of jobs existing in the county in 2016 was 5,588. There were 637 unemployed people in McDowell County in 2016.

Of the 5,588 jobs existing in McDowell County, the four largest employment sectors and their corresponding average earnings in 2016 were:

- Government - 2,127 jobs, average earnings of $48,191
- Retail Trade - 700 jobs, average earnings of $23,558
- Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction - 688 jobs, average earnings of $82,277
- Healthcare and Social Assistance - 566 jobs, average earnings of $32,388

Over the course of the last 10 years, the growing and declining industries of McDowell County are as follows:

- Personal Care Aides +66
- Security Guards +24
- Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners +23
- Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Drivers -61
- Retail Salespersons -62
- Cashiers -94

Additional data and information pertaining to Welch and McDowell County may be obtained through the McDowell County Background Report.

Observations:

Traveling to Welch is like stepping back into time. Winding mountain roads come to a stop, taking the traveler into a fully built miniature city. Four to six story brick buildings line the main streets. A city park stretches from a striking mural on a gateway building, to a pedestrian bridge over the broad river. The town is terraced up the hill for several streets. Tiny neighborhood lanes stretch up the steep hillside for the homes that can cling to the slope. From the people at McDowell County Farms, tenaciously carving out a new
agricultural toehold in this region, the IEDC team heard a deep appreciation of the surrounding countryside, with reports of carpets of wild herbs and flowers appearing randomly in the hills.

The town is a crucible of opportunity and challenge. Taking charge of the extraordinary disinvestment that has occurred is daunting. The opportunity to reinvest and remake the central town is great, yet to take advantage of it the community must develop leadership and shared vision. Patience and perseverance will also be necessary to turn this town and its surrounding rural county around.

**Leadership and Shared Vision**

Successful economic development initiatives require a lead organization or individual to champion economic development efforts. Ideally, the economic development champion will help to identify and recruit the key players to economic development, organize a strategic planning process, and serve as a facilitator either initially or on an ongoing basis. During the visit to Welch, the IEDC team could not identify an economic development planning lead. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about the lack of leadership and the resulting disjointed approach to community growth initiatives.

The primary EDO in McDowell County is the McDowell County Economic Development Authority. According to the Authority’s website:

*The Mission of the McDowell County Economic Development Authority is to devise and implement a diverse plan that will encourage, assist and promote industrial, economic, commercial, recreational, and educational development both now and for the future of our county.*

As a source of financing and land, the Authority would be considered the best positioned existing organization to lead the economic development efforts of the county. However, the organization has only two full-time staff and does not appear to have the capacity to engage the numerous stakeholders in the community to arrive at a shared positive outcome.

State philanthropists and organizations have formed a nonprofit organization, which is Reconnecting McDowell. At present this organization has focused its efforts on the schools.

**Developing a Future Vision**

A common thread in all of the stakeholder meetings was a desire for a better future for Welch and the county. As such, many residents, social entrepreneurs and community activists have started initiatives in efforts to improve the narrative of key issues within the community. From the 5 Loaves and 2 Fishes food bank to the McDowell Matters Facebook page, residents are actively addressing a range of challenges. It is promising to see community stakeholders engaged and willing to improve their communities. However, there is little collaboration and information sharing among the various groups. The IEDC team could not identify a shared community vision and the associated goals and objectives to meet a central vision.

More specifically, the community does not have a vision for industrial development. There are contrasting perceptions of the role of coal in the economic recovery of the county. Some groups hold that coal is the most important or only industry that can increase economic success. Others contend that there are opportunities to diversify the local economy with more focus on agribusiness, entrepreneurship and
tourism. With so many contradicting perspectives, the community struggles to find a cohesive and sustainable approach to McDowell’s economic development challenges.

Community Image

Every community has its share of strengths and weaknesses. However, the image of Welch and McDowell County is overwhelmingly negative outside of the area. Negative news stories highlight the community’s downsides and are rarely balanced with reaffirming messages that the county is a good place to live and do business. Internet articles that display the community’s challenges (high drug use and unemployment, blight, and poverty) are pervasive and often omit the upsides of the community. The natural beauty of the location, commitment of the residents and rich heritage are often overlooked. These stories are problematic as they shape negative perceptions to prospective businesses, investors, talent, and visitors often before they set foot in the location.

This focus on negative elements often leads neighborhood developers to assume a defensive posture in their interactions with potential business owners, developers, and investors. They try to offer subsidies or incentives to lure business investment to the area, or appeal to the altruistic tendencies of business leaders. An incentive-based recruitment strategy, however, can prove ineffective if business owners do not feel that a neighborhood can otherwise support the business. Tax breaks and other incentives may reduce costs and expenses, but do nothing to guarantee the future revenue streams upon which successful businesses are built.

- IEDC Neighborhood Development Strategies

Vacancy and Blight Issues

Downtown Welch and surrounding areas in the county have extremely high vacancy rates. During the tour of the county the team noticed numerous vacant storefronts and abandoned homes. Many of the empty buildings in the downtown are used for storage and it is visible from the main street. Several homes
throughout the county have fallen to disrepair and were subject to electrical fires. Some 5000 properties, approximately 80 or 90 percent of which are residential, were identified as demolition properties.

Tackling the county’s blight issues is compounded by several other challenges:

- The scale of property demolition may require new landfills for construction and demolition
- The community has not yet identified a lead, with adequate funding, to spearhead demolition efforts
- Areas in and around Welch are prone to flooding which complicates the land use planning process
- The downtown may be able to benefit from the EPA Brownfields program but there is no organizational capacity to lead such a large effort
- A Comprehensive Land Use Plan is in process (by WVU) however there is little engagement of community members at this time.

The challenge with blight not only thwarts the county business attraction efforts, it also causes a housing shortage. For example, the county needs new teachers but is challenged to attract this group due to a lack of housing. The proposed Renaissance Village seeks to meet this need with 50 housing units in downtown Welch. However, stakeholders have expressed a need for low wealth family and workforce housing. The employees of the Federal Correctional Institution in McDowell were also identified as a potential market for rental housing, as the FCI guards work on a contractual basis.

Support Systems for Entrepreneurship

The team met with several individuals leading entrepreneurial and community development initiatives. Culture and a lack of support systems were identified as the two primary barriers to entrepreneurial development. Some note that the region is lacking an entrepreneurial culture as most people are dependent on employment from coal-industry jobs. However, there is an understanding and desire by stakeholders to instill an entrepreneurial culture through youth programs and broader awareness. Others cite a culture of hard-workers who have the characteristics of an entrepreneur but lack the necessary startup support systems. Current entrepreneurs also note a lack of support for expansion efforts. In particular, these individuals cite limited access to land and capacity-building resources such as training. The local EDA, for example, offers a micro loan program but small business owners have little access to credit counseling. Furthermore, small business owners struggle to legitimize their businesses as worthwhile economic drivers to key decision makers.

Some of the promising small- and micro-business opportunities observed in the meetings include:

- Agribusiness- timber harvesting, herbal and nutritional supplements, and pig farming
- Recreational activities, particularly those related to ATV trails
- Hospitality- support services for tourists especially lodging and food services
  1. Ancillary services for FCI employees
- Leisure and entertainment tied to heritage, local arts and culture
Recommendations:

Although the IEDC Team provides many separate recommendations to address the challenges of disinvestment, negative imaging, and lack of economic diversification, if there were the will and the leadership, the Town of Welch could be the stake in the ground for McDowell County to turn around its economic fortunes.

The very fact that Welch is currently the “poster child for poor Appalachia” (as stated by one resident), gives it the national stage to be the poster child for reinventing itself for 21st century America. The built environment in Welch is compelling. Despite their age, most of the buildings were built to last, with stone and brick construction. If there were leadership to develop and activate a plan to completely restore the town, that undertaking would be national news. Call it a Phoenix Plan. The Plan would have to inventory every property, identify flood zones and steep slope guidelines, and identify every downtown building with a potential re-use, whether that be demolition or redevelopment. The Plan would identify each obstacle to achieving that re-use. Political will would support the Plan in creating the laws or ordinances to overcoming those obstacles. Refer to individual recommendations below for more details. Properties would be made available for reinvestment, for purposes as varied as a hostel for ATV riders or a remote-work professional services location. The key in this brief paragraph is that revitalizing the Town of Welch in a systematic and thorough manner would not only address the blight, but shift the public story about McDowell County, remake its brand, and provide opportunity for enterprising entrepreneurs.

This section highlights key recommendations in three areas to assist with the community’s economic diversification strategy planning process: blighted property redevelopment, marketing and branding, and entrepreneurship. Each section is broken down into three parts: challenge, action item(s), and lead agency. It is worth noting the importance of identifying a lead agency for specific efforts. As mentioned in the observation section above, stakeholders have cited a need for more leadership. Establishing lead agencies allows for greater accountability with regards to the implementation of strategies and coordination of activities.

1. Systematically Address Issues of Blight and Coordinate Development Efforts

Challenge 1

McDowell County cannot let their towns and cities fall into further disuse. Blighted properties, lack of infrastructure, threats of natural disaster and unclear titling on land are contributing to their town centers economic stagnation and decline. Even if mountaintop areas are developed, the towns contain density and historical significance that will be market centers for residents in the broader region. If they fail, they will undermine the success of new development elsewhere. To supplement this section, and access additional ways to implement, listen to the IEDC WV Webinar on Best Practices for Dealing with Dilapidated and Abandoned Properties.

Action Items

  1. County Commission to work with City leadership to identify where sewer and water is needed.
2. Towns and Cities to look at the list of sewer and water projects and prioritize them for completion.

3. County Commission to work with state officials to clear title to blighted properties and utilize eminent domain to repossess them and offer them for redevelopment.

4. Economic Development Agency and CVB to coordinate with state and federal agencies to finance downtown beautification and revitalization projects. To supplement this section, and access additional ways to implement, listen to the IEDC WV Webinar on Maximizing the use of Federal and State Tools for Economic Development

5. County to develop incentive program such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or Enterprise Zone tax credits to spur adaptive re-use and redevelopment of downtown buildings.

**Lead Agency:** Town and City Governments

**Supported by:** Economic development agency and CVB

**Reports to:** County Commission

### Challenge 2
McDowell County, surprisingly to an outsider, struggles with a lack of available land for new development. Most existing development is in river valleys. These areas are subject to flooding, very few have sewer and water service, and parcels are generally small and difficult to build on. At the same time, hillsides and mountaintops are largely owned by land companies for the coal mines, making access for new growth difficult as well.

**Proposed Action Items**

1. County Commission to Complete County land use plan as quickly as possible. Currently slated for two years but that is too long. County Commission must ensure that local participation on land use plan is strong to build support for results.

2. Include in the County Land Use Plan recommendations for locating agriculture and new tourism businesses.

3. Land Use Plan should identify mountaintop areas that are ready for development and what types of land use are appropriate in those locations (currently at least two: mountaintop area with high school and the business park)

4. Land Use Plan should encourage working with land companies to identify additional mountaintop areas for development and what type of development should go on them (housing, recreation, business, etc).

5. County Commission to establish regular (monthly, quarterly, semi-annually) meetings with land companies, CVB, county mayors, and local economic development to ensure collaborative implementation of Land Use Plan.

**Lead Agency:** County Commission, in partnership with town and city leaders in McDowell County
2. Improve Marketing, Branding & Image to Attract Business, Talent & Visitors

Challenge 1
As mentioned above, the message of McDowell County is overwhelmingly negative. People outside the County only hear that McDowell County is incredibly poor, its population is dwindling, it is overwhelmed with drugs and dilapidated housing, and its family structures are fraying.

Counteract this messaging by promoting positive messages from within. Many regions and communities across the U.S. have lost industries and had to diversify their economies. This often means that a community must transform its image and overhaul previously held perceptions to attract new business and people. Focus on identifying then reaffirming that the neighborhood as a place with numerous positive attributes. The message needs to be promoted to residents and businesses to counteract the negative press and shape a positive identity for the area. Specific strategies and approaches are detailed in the IEDC WV Webinar: Marketing Strategies and Tactics for Small and Rural Communities.

A positive step is the area’s newly created Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). The CVB is expected to have 21 board seats with representation from local industry, the public sector, and arts community.

Proposed Action Items

1. McDowell is the only county in Southern West Virginia without a Convention and Visitors Bureau. The sooner the County can establish the CVB running, the sooner it will have a means to promote a positive message.

2. The new CVB must have a strong web presence AND a physical location with regular hours where they can provide maps of things to do and places to see in McDowell County.

3. Help people to connect with the County with photographs, personal narratives from local artists, and testimonials from visitors. Refer to the IEDC WV Webinar on Preserving our Stories - Opportunities for Heritage Tourism.

Lead Agency: Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)
Reports to: County Commission

Challenge 2
Many graduates of McDowell High Schools leave to find better job opportunities. However, people who are from an area are often the easiest to attract back, followed by people who spend a significant portion of their vacation time in an area. The Hatfield-McCoy Trail has garnered national attention and attracts people from all over the United States. Therefore, the focus on talent attraction should be on those two populations: natives to McDowell County and vacationing visitors.

Proposed Action Items
1. Develop an Alumni Program to establish an alumni network with local high schools and engage them through social media, a website, and regular contact. It is recommended that Reconnecting McDowell lead this effort as it has contact with McDowell alumni network through the youth mentoring programs.

2. Develop messaging, in coordination with CVB, to alumni on positive changes in McDowell County. Examples could include local grocery store that opened last summer, new housing for teachers in Welch, the establishment of a CVB, or other activities that show that opportunity exists for trained professionals to live and work at home.

3. Post professional jobs to alumni networks that are available in McDowell County. The posts could range from agriculture, to businesses for sale, to skilled blue collar work, to nurses and positions with the federal prison.

4. Consider offering an incentive program for alumni who take these positions to move to McDowell County. Examples would include free land to build a house on, or a few thousand dollars of relocation assistance if they move to McDowell County.

5. CVB to work with a tourism consultant to identify the psychographic profile of Hatfield-McCoy trail users.

6. CVB should incorporate findings from psychographic profile to develop a targeted marketing campaign toward those trail users. The marketing campaign would have a tourism component (“stay at ‘x resort’ or ‘x lodge’ in McDowell County”) as well as marketing for land available for housing or businesses.

**Lead Agency:** Reconnecting McDowell for alumni, CVB for tourists

**Report to:** County Commission

### 3. Embrace Entrepreneurship as a means to Economic Diversification

**Challenge 1**

Since the 1890s, McDowell County has been almost exclusively dependent on the coal industry. The coal industry used to do most of the hiring, and built the housing, towns, retail, and entertainment centers for their employees. This created an “industry town” system where there were few opportunities for residents beyond what the coal mines offered.

Over time, coal mines downsized, moved their headquarters, but continued providing the tax base of the county and raised wages for those still working in the mines. This made working outside the mines comparatively unattractive as it was difficult to make as much money in any other profession. Additionally, the significant tax base coming from the mines likely caused local leadership to neglect efforts to plan for business growth outside this primary industry.

While there has been a significant decline in coal mining, there are still conflicting sentiments about the future of coal. Yet regardless of that debate, the community can only benefit from a diversity of economic endeavor. Fortunately, the Hatfield McCoy ATV trail system has come online over the last decade. The trail
system has led to a dramatic increase in recreational visitors to southern West Virginia and prompted many entrepreneurial opportunities. As McDowell County is being integrated into the trail system, the visitors are creating new business opportunities in the tourism service sector. Many of these visitors may also develop interest in moving to the region, which means they could help identify and fill entrepreneurial opportunities for new business growth in the area. For further information, refer to the IEDC WV Webinar: Rivers & Recreational Trails as Attractions for Tourism and Business Development.

Other employers continue to serve the area too, including a federal prison, schools, and health care centers. While these jobs pay well, many of the employees choose to live in other counties. Attracting these employees to live in McDowell County would help retain their wages locally and stimulate more spending in the local economy, further boosting business and employment opportunities here.

**Proposed Action Items**

1. A local economic development agency will create an economic development strategy focused on entrepreneurial opportunities and primary employment. Entrepreneurial opportunities are primarily available to serve the Hatfield McCoy Trail System visitors. These include lodging, restaurants, grocery stores, artisans, and ATV service centers (ATV repair, rental and sales, and retail paraphernalia).

2. Orient local economic development resources locally to support these entrepreneurs and artisans and market these opportunities to Hatfield-McCoy visitors as well.

3. Develop contacts with regional, state, and college resources to bring mentors to new businesses, as well as financial assistance such as credit reserves that local banks can call on (allowing them to provide loans to less qualified entrepreneurs) or a regional angel network of interested investors.

4. Work with West Virginia State Parks to consider building a new hotel and possible small conference center in Panther State Forest. Ensure that Panther State Forest has access to Hatfield-McCoy Trail System.

5. Work with schools, hospitals, coal companies, and federal prison to identify what type of housing their employees want, and work to build that housing in areas that are appropriate per the County Land Use Plan.

6. Utilize the Land Use Plan to help foster additional growth in nascent agricultural sector. This could involve FEMA lands in floodplains or new opportunities in mountaintop areas as well.

7. Work with other counties in southern West Virginia to build a regional angel investor network to support entrepreneurs and start-up businesses.

8. Assist the supply chain businesses that have traditionally served the coal industry in building new customer bases in other areas of the state or country, and in other industries to foster diversification of local primary employers.

9. Consider investigating Marcellus Shale resources for potential natural gas development in McDowell County as an industrial alternative to coal.

**Lead Agency:** Local economic development organization  
**Reports to:** County Commission
Town of Alderson, Greenbrier County

Background

The Town of Alderson is located in Greenbrier County, which is located in the southern coalfield region of West Virginia. The 2016 population of Greenbrier County is 35,522, a decrease of 0.5 percent over the last five years.

Additional data and information pertaining to Alderson and Greenbrier County may be obtained through the Alderson Background Report and the 2016 Alderson Comprehensive Plan.

Observations:

Alderson is a town of 1,180 persons with a distinct downtown geography bisected by the broad Greenbrier River.

Two bridges span the river: one for vehicles, and the other pedestrian. The railroad runs along the river. Alderson is a stop on Amtrak’s scenic Cardinal line. No passenger services are currently offered at the station itself.

The Cardinal operates between New York and Chicago three days a week, offering unforgettable views of the Southeast’s stunning natural beauty. You’ll see gently rolling horse country, the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, the Shenandoah Valley, and the wild white-water rivers of West Virginia as they can only be seen by train. Heading westward, the train rolls along the banks of the mighty Ohio River — from the quaint towns of Ashland and Maysville, to the skyline of Cincinnati. From there, your journey continues to Indianapolis, and then northward to Chicago. https://www.amtrak.com/cardinal-train

Portions of the town are subject to flooding. The town is still recovering from severe flooding that occurred in June, 2016. The most lasting effect may be the town’s awareness that portions of its historic and downtown neighborhood districts may no longer be easily rebuilt. One home was observed rebuilt on
pilings. The team heard frustration on the part of town leadership in that their quick, positive recovery efforts were, in the end, not reimbursable expenses from FEMA as they felt they’d been led to believe. The town says it now must absorb $300,000 in costs expected to be covered by federal funding. One attendee said that if the flood created anything good, it was that the zoning enforcement officer has additional ability to tear down blighted buildings. Once the clean-up started after the flood it created a new cultural norm for enforcement of existing ordinances.

The town of Alderson has significant built assets for such a small town, including three story brick buildings, a pedestrian bridge, park area, and a designated historic district. Several significant recent real estate investments were noted by the team on the visit:

- The Arts Center – originally subsidized, but now reportedly getting by without subsidy.
- The vacant bank building on a prominent downtown corner has been purchased and rehabilitated by Downstream Strategies - an environmental firm – and leasing first floor space to Presidio Studios.
- The warehouse that formerly was a transfer station for food goods coming along the railroad has been purchased by a couple, one of whom is an iron sculptor. The building is used as their mixed-use live/work art space.

Alderson is actively cleaning up the blight challenges relayed to the IEDC technical assistance team and observed on its tour of the town. Mayor Travis Copenhaver has engaged the police force in enforcing the existing code ordinances governing trash, abandoned vehicles, and other issues that have contributed to a negative perception of the town. There was a community-wide clean-up program in the fall of 2016 and afterwards 88 properties were cited for non-conformance with city ordinances. Participants showed the team a corner lot that was formerly full of abandoned cars at a prominent location.

**Recommendations:**

Alderson wants to attract new business and residents to grow its town. As cited above, the town has impressive assets and is taking significant action to remediate blight and set a new standard. Investments are already occurring. Its small staff is aligned in support of its economic development, with leadership from the Mayor, an active planning commission, and police and zoning officer engaged in supporting the community clean-up work.

Community volunteers have been contributing in active ways, including the formation of a nonprofit to keep food and produce locally available, the formation of the arts cooperative, and the development of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan lays out a path forward for the town, with many actions and resources cited for accomplishing the town’s goals. IEDC lays out the following recommendations in support and addition to the Comprehensive Plan.
1. Maintain Community Momentum by expanding leadership
One of the community’s biggest challenges will be to keep up momentum for redevelopment. Recipes for volunteer engagement in today’s busy world include these ingredients:

Do more, meet less. Many people who are not free to get to a meeting, can nonetheless run projects just through email groups. Some citizens are more likely to engage on project-specific tasks rather than a permanent group.

Empower local leadership by letting them be the town “point-person” to regional or state agencies regarding a specific issue. Get someone to take on a task, and let them run with it. Having some agreed upon way to relate back progress will be important to develop a shared confidence in execution.

Do a People Asset map. Match needs to available talent. Let people on your asset map know they’re on it! Always be clear about why the community is undertaking a task. It helps focus the effort.
Set realistic and modest goals. Have time limited goals that are task force oriented.

2. Consider Using Metrics to Focus and Celebrate
One participant stressed the importance of metrics and measurement. Most high-performing economic development organizations are very aware of their goals, and the ways to measure whether they are achieving them. Measure two kinds of effects: output, and outcomes. The outputs are what the organization decides it will do. The outcomes are whether those actions had in fact led to their intended effect. This kind of feedback loop lets the organization understand if its actions are having the desired effect, and to adjust as necessary. It also puts clear value on the activities undertaken, providing the “why” of the activity.

One example of an output metric might be the design and tracking of hits on the city’s website, while the outcome measurement would be the inquiry and subsequent visit by a new business that wanted to.

If the community is lucky enough to have a person interested in creating metrics, this is a great way to focus community development efforts. The interested person would have to draft the metrics, and get approval from the organizations responsible for the activities, as well as the wider community. Town meeting would be a good place to approve and report on metrics. The IEDC research report, “Making it Count: Metrics for High-Performing EDOs” is a good resource for greater understanding of metrics.

3. Grow the traded sector - the economic base industries
The IEDC team developed sector-specific economic development recommendations for Alderson in the areas of:

- Small Business & Entrepreneurial development, and
- Tourism development.

3A. Small Business & Entrepreneurship
While Alderson supports attracting visitors to its community, it very much wants to build a stable and prosperous permanent population. While the town can, and should, attract residents who work in the
surrounding areas, growing the small business and entrepreneurial community that works in Alderson is an achievable and highly valuable component of the town’s growth strategy.

3A1) Retain and Grow Existing Businesses

IEDC provided a webinar to the WV Hub IAS communities on Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) in which three IEDC experts shared approaches and case studies of how to support and grow the community’s existing businesses. Existing businesses are assets and resources. Finding ways to add value to what they do, while having them engaged in improving the business climate in the town are sure-fire ways to amplify the growth of the town.

In all work with existing businesses, it is helpful to find ways to highlight them – showcase them in Chamber of Commerce visits, for example. Market local businesses and what they do, whenever the town is marketed.

The town might consider finding a volunteer who would find it interesting to research these companies, become familiar with business resources in the area, and then make time to visit the businesses acting as a liaison from the town. The person could be given the title of Business Support Specialist for the Town of Alderson. This person (or persons, not more than two) could be recruited from the wider area as well, but a town resident would be preferable. It is important that the person is experienced in business. Business owners are very busy, and the endeavor can’t appear to be a “learning experience” but rather a genuine offer of support and assistance. This person should become familiar with the concept and best practices of BRE. (For more information, see IEDC’s BRE webinar.)

The Business Support Specialist’s role would be to find ways to help local businesses grow. The focus should be on developing relationships and bringing support to the “traded sector” companies. Measure success by how many connections the BSS was able to make between these Alderson businesses and regional resource agencies. Develop other measures of success as the program evolves.

Traded Sector companies: Alderson has a mix of small manufacturers and established institutional organizations. Some of these are the following.

- **Manufacturing Industries Inc.** – Contract manufacturer of electronic components
- **Vintage Log and Lumber** – Supplier of salvaged antique lumber
- **Wolf Creek Printery** – Printer of a fine arts calendar
- **Caldwell Manufacturing Company** – Manufacturer of window spring balances
- **Federal Prison Camp, Alderson** – A minimum security prison for 978 inmates, operational since 1927
- **Camp Greenbrier** – A boys camp established in 1898. Named the coolest summer camp in WV by The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Two other economic base businesses in the town came to the attention of the IEDC team during the visit.

- **The Alderson Artisans Gallery** – Retail of locally manufactured art
- **Downstream Strategies** - Environmental consulting
**Resource Agencies:** West Virginia has developed a [Small Business Resource Guide](#). The BSS can use this guide to identify the kinds of help that are available to Alderson businesses. These can range from technical training programs for the business’ employees, to help in writing a business plan to access capital for expansion.

### 3A2) Foster Entrepreneurial Business Growth

The town should find a current or a want-to-be or a once-was entrepreneur who would find it interesting to research the components of an effective entrepreneurial community, reach out through web networks for like-minded people, and seek to develop an Alderson-based conversation around entrepreneurial opportunity. The Entrepreneur Support Specialist should be the Town of Alderson’s link to existing entrepreneurship programs.

Natural partner organizations are located in the region:

- In Lewisburg, Katie Ickes runs Vis Ability LLC, working as a contracted program director for the Mindset of Success – Entrepreneurship Program.
- In Charleston, Dr. Gene Coulson is running the West Virginia work of the EntreEd Program, bringing entrepreneurial coaching to the school systems, endeavoring to develop a mindset for Entrepreneurship. He travels throughout the state.
- The Innova Commercialization Group is a resource for high technology ventures. Find more information on it, and others, in the [WV Small Business Resource Guide](#), under counseling resources pages 13-17.

### 3A3) Support Key Business Incubators

Seek partner organizations and support to ensure the continued success of two important and promising start-ups in the community: the Artisans Gallery and the Green Grocer. Local teams have worked to get these entities off the ground, but the town’s tourism industry is not yet developed sufficiently to fully support the Artisan Gallery. The Green Grocer is also having growing pains as it develops an understanding of its profitable markets and business model. Each of these businesses is an incubator for a traded sector: the Gallery for artists, and the Green Grocer for local agriculture.

For the Artisans Gallery, these activities would contribute to increased sales and possibly a more stable business model. These suggestions are offered with the caveat that the IEDC team did not interview the Gallery in depth, so it may already be taking advantage of these approaches.

Online sales could make the difference in profitability. The American for the Arts recently launched its [National Arts Marketing Project](#) with ways to connect with other professionals and artists marketing the arts. Artists typically dislike the marketing aspect of their work, but perhaps the group could allocate the task of expanding its market on a rotating basis to its membership. If the duty is simply “your four hours this month” in exchange for someone else taking up the work the following month, members might be more willing to devote time to it.
Another potential for increased sales noted by the team is to make the signage for the center more visible from the road. Additionally, a sign a quarter mile down the road letting people know they are approaching the Gallery will increase the likelihood of passersby stopping in. Exhibiting outdoor art is an invaluable marketing tool. Displaying art at the visitor’s center also enhances its reach to potential customers.

For the Green Grocer, a partnership with a farm-to-table program like Refresh Appalachia (run by Coalfield Development) might strengthen this young organization while it’s getting on its feet. For Green Grocer, also review the agricultural economic sector recommendations for the other IAS communities in this report for other potential partners. It is easy for a startup to get isolated. Business coaching can help management step back from the day-to-day pressure, and with perspective make strategic decisions.

3A4) Market Alderson for Residential and Business Development

Alderson should not focus too much on real estate, but rather on attracting people to the quality of the life and place in Alderson. When they want to make Alderson their home, they will look for ways to bring work there. The town will need to put some attention into a marketing campaign for people. What follows here is an outline for a low-cost, achievable approach to attracting people.

3A5) Map the town's commercial assets

Discover strengths that can be used in the marketing campaign. Feature and brag about existing businesses. Compliment them, and encourage others to come.

a. Target strategic, easy to reach, markets

i. Young people from Alderson.

Market to former Alderson youth who may now be looking to settle down. Encourage them to come back to Alderson. Use a variety of personalized techniques.

1. Market at hometown celebrations like the 4th of July.
2. Market through hand written notes, social media, or at school reunions.
4. Create an influencers’ group of young people who already have come back to Alderson.

ii. People who work within commuting distance from Alderson.

Look at a 30 minute commute radius from Alderson, and offer coffee pie, meet and greet to employees of businesses within that radius. Get local residents and businesses to reach out to like-minded businesses. Use your network.

3A6) Get a presence online

Have residents and businesses alike help give Alderson an on-line presence. Make sure the Wikipedia entry for Alderson says interesting things about the town. Get visitors (relatives, anyone) to rate the town on Trip Advisor. Make sure to tag interesting places in town on Google Maps – for example the Artisan Gallery, the train station, the pedestrian bridge. Get reviews on Yelp. Alderson could invite the WV Community.

"I think something like that could succeed here."
Development Hub to hold a workshop in town on how to do these tags. Most of the tagging would get done right at the workshop.

3A7) Leverage regional organizations whose territory includes Alderson

Reach out regionally
Bring focus and resources to Alderson (market awareness.) If a neighboring community like Lewisburg has a regional Chamber of Commerce, ask them to spend more time in Alderson and to host more events like ‘business after hours’ in Alderson. You can offer “showcase events,” like a tour of the former food distribution building, or of the Arts Center. Use regional organizations like the WV Hub to help with the planning and execution.

b. Create a curbside presence
Take advantage of highway 12 traffic to encourage travelers to stop. Use outside displays, food trucks like the Dip and Dots.

c. Create a signature event
In addition to the Fourth of July parade, an event that is particularly Alderson would broaden regional awareness of the town. This would be an event like a regatta or an Alderson Quilt Tour. One of the environmental groups that run the successful river cleanup events might be interested in hosting a regatta for example.

d. Encourage media coverage for Alderson Businesses
Encourage stories that highlight and promote local businesses. For example, let the newspaper know about the purchase of the Grocer Exchange building.

e. Help with business real estate needs
Develop some awareness of available commercial and industrial property, and access to an organization that can help when a property languishes.

   a. Inventory commercial & industrial properties. This will need periodic updating.
   b. Develop a relationship with a Redevelopment Authority. These agencies have capacity to purchase vacant commercial property and hold for marketing and redevelopment.
   c. Ensure any parcel of a significant size that is available is listed with the WV State EDA.

4. Develop Tourism Assets

In the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, Alderson already identified ways to make the community more attractive in ways that will appeal to visitors as well as residents. Suggestion such as murals, downtown planters, the visitor’s center all reinforce an attractive sense of place. The town can also consider additional lighting – especially on the bridge – to make a memorable statement. The town is also leveraging its minimal security prison population, accessing their assistance with town clean-up and beautification. The IEDC team also reinforces the Comprehensive Plan’s recommendations to improve all gateways into the city and ensure signage to Alderson is available from the Interstate.

The IEDC team recommends two important considerations to the ongoing well-directed work:

First, remember to tell the town’s stories at every opportunity and make those stories readily available to visitors. The team heard bits of intriguing town stories. The Alderson prison was the first female prison in the country, for example, and was originally for moonshiners. It has had notable and notorious inmates: Lolita
LeBraun, Machine Gun Kelly, Squeaky Fromme, and Tokyo Rose. Billie Holiday was there. Alderson also has an historic Black Church that served as a stop on the Underground Railroad. There is more to tell in these intriguing stories.

Secondly, make sure that the town has something to offer so that visitors will stop there when they are traveling through the region. In this report, IEDC has discussed an expansion of B&B type lodging. The importance of having a place where visitors can stay, spend some time on the pedestrian bridge, kayaking on the river, and shopping at the arts gallery is a package deal. When this full mix of offerings exists, the town becomes very attractive to visitors. The Team heard that the Greenbrier River Camp Ground currently rents canoes and kayaks to the general public. We also heard potential development of a B&B in a historic Victorian-architectural home.

The team felt that people will want to stay in Alderson. The river is wide and beautiful and the town has a gazebo and park at its edge. The marketing only has to reflect the reality: a real river, real people. History. A quiet city, a gem out of time. Life, vitality. Caring about what matters.

Lodging will be key to attract weekend destinations. Fishing packages can attract some visitors, while history, culture and the arts may appeal to others. A package could be developed to entice passengers on the thrice weekly railroad to stop over.

Marketing suggestions are included in the preceding section.

5. Agriculture
The Town of Alderson is partly in Monroe as well as Greenbrier County. Monroe is a primarily agricultural county. The team heard a mix of challenges and opportunity developments happening around agriculture. One participant felt that the people who own land in Greenbrier/Monroe County do not want to farm it either because they are too old or not interested in farming. Fruit trees were once popular. Cattle are the most abundant type of farming in Alderson/Greenbrier County.

The IEDC team also heard, however, that Downstream Strategies is washing and packing produce, working with the Monroe County Coop. The Green Grocer is developing relationships with small scale farmers, providing a market for their product, although there are not yet enough suppliers for the Grocer’s needs. Morgan Orchards operates in Monroe County, set up for pick-your-own visitors.

MACED, the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, is reported to be a strong resource and support for agriculture. Appalachian Regional Commission grants are supporting development and growth of agriculture enterprises.

The growing agricultural sector is aware of the need to increase the amount grown, to have a consistent supply, and to develop aggregation and distribution partnerships. In addition they should be looking to develop value-added agricultural product that can be leveraged into a new small business/businesses. One
participant noted that there is an industrial kitchen located in a former school in Greenville, WV, designed to have regional participation.

The team heard that there is a new agricultural commission in Alderson who wants to work with veterans. 2015 Census information regarding veterans residing in Alderson shows that 14% of civilians 18 years or older are veterans in Alderson. 40% are Vietnam era veterans, while 32% fought in the Gulf wars. 80% are male; 20% female. 72% of veterans in Alderson have some college or a college degree, as compared to 55% for the civilian population 25 years and older. On another IAS community visit, the Team met with McDowell County Farms, which is run by two veterans. This organization would be a good contact for the Alderson group.

6. Housing & Community Repair
The right kind of housing in the right kind of place is a key to successful economic development. The town understands and is acting on clean-up of homes and neighborhoods. The town wants to attract more people with resources. The town faces challenges from an aging housing stock. The 2016 Comprehensive Plan collected housing data and made extensive recommendations. The team supplements those with a few additional thoughts given below.

Housing:

1. Inventory the condition of the housing stock to get a clear understanding of the situation. Consider using the technical assistance offered by the PRI program (Property Rescue Initiative.)
2. Provide assistance to existing residents for home repair and beautification. Create a suite of programs for that will address the findings of the inventory. These can include:
   a. A no-interest, forgivable loan program for home rehabilitation
   b. Connect with agencies that offer rehabilitation services:
      i. Neighbor Works Chapter
      ii. WV Housing Development Fund
      iii. North Central Community Action Agency
      iv. Bethlehem Farms
   c. Summer youth program for town clean-up to include appliance and furniture pick-up from front porches and yards. Engage National Guard to bring dump trucks to haul away debris.
   d. Community service in place of jail or fines to contribute to community and home clean-up days.
3. Speak with real estate brokers regarding what’s for sale in Alderson. What are buyers saying?
4. Market the town. Have a showcase open house for real estate brokers and developers to expose the opportunities that exist in Alderson. Have a host who invites these people – the host could be a bank president or an artist. “You do not know Alderson is here because there is no promotion.” – IEDC expert
5. Upgrade the housing stock.
   a. Track housing foreclosures. Consider buying foreclosed HUD-financed homes at 50 percent of value and put back on the market without HUD covenants.
   b. Consider some limits on mobile homes. Consider ordinance governing mobile homes when they have reached the end of their safe and healthy life.
c. Inventory historic homes. Start programs to encourage upkeep or resale. Consider “historic home” markers with name of original home owner and date built. Work with a regional organization to develop specific incentives for purchasers of historic homes. Let realtors know these homes are available and part of a town initiative.

d. The agency that manages the Housing Authority’s rental property in Alderson is investing across the county in aging in place properties. Explore potential of getting an aging-in-place project. They accept residents up to 135% of poverty rate.

6. Develop design standards to help home owners adapt in flood zone areas. Look into whether hazard mitigation funding could assist with housing needs in flood zones.

7. Consider potential for secondary home market. The recreation is available for it, but it appears that the real estate is not.
Town of Pineville, Wyoming County

Background
The town of Pineville, West Virginia is the county seat of Wyoming County, which is located in the southern coalfield region of the state. As of 2016, the population of Wyoming County was 21,896, a decrease of 6.7 percent over the last five years. The number of jobs existing in the county in 2016 was 5,773. There were 739 unemployed people in Wyoming County in 2016.

Of the 5,773 jobs existing in Wyoming County, the four largest employment sectors and their corresponding average earnings in 2016 were:

- Government (1,236 jobs with average earnings of $50,034)
- Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (960 jobs with average earnings of $97,774)
- Healthcare and Social Assistance (801 jobs with average earnings of $35,145)
- Retail Trade (760 jobs with average earnings of $22,710)

Over the course of the last ten years, the growing and declining industries of Lincoln County are as follows:\textsuperscript{10}

- Bituminous Coal Underground Mining + 73
- Child and Youth Services + 71
- Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals + 69
- Bituminous Coal and Lignite Surface Mining - 131
- Elementary and Secondary Schools (Local Government) - 156
- Community Food Services - 175

Additional data and information pertaining to Pineville and Wyoming County may be obtained through the Wyoming County Background Report

\textsuperscript{10} Emsi Q4 2016 Data Set – Industry NAICS codes
**Observations:**

Pineville is a town of 665 persons located in Wyoming County, West Virginia. The built environment of the town is densely constructed due to limited developable land existing between the surrounding mountains and the Guyandotte River. The two roadways leading into Pineville are West Virginia Route 10 and West Virginia Route 97. Visitors entering Pineville for the first time are immediately struck by the scale of its neo-classical courthouse. Built in 1916, the Wyoming County Courthouse is the primary architectural focus of the town.

The Guyandotte River runs through the center of downtown Pineville, creating a natural amenity for the community. On the north side of the river is downtown Pineville’s primary commercial street, Main Avenue, which has several businesses including a furniture store, post office, pharmacy, and Save-a-Lot grocery store. While Main Avenue contains a variety of businesses, a number of storefronts suffer from vacancy and blight. Upon crossing the river to the south, visitors can find the office of the Wyoming County Commission, as well as a former high school that is now vacant due to recent school consolidations.

For several years, Pineville and Wyoming County have suffered economically. Years of employment declines in the coal industry have not been kind to the local economy. Wyoming County’s allocation of coal severance tax from the state has enabled it to offset decreasing local tax revenue in recent years. At present, however, Wyoming County is facing a significant fiscal challenge as coal severance tax funds are nearly depleted and public-sector financial obligations exceed local tax revenue. Consequently, county officials are facing difficult budget realities.

The IEDC team developed sector-specific economic development recommendations for Pineville in the areas of:

- Leadership
- Small Business & Entrepreneurship
- Tourism
Leadership

Observations:
In recent months and years, community stakeholders have begun to discuss ways of making the local economy more resilient. Acting on these ideas will require active and strong leadership. Provided below is a list of areas where local leadership is needed.

Recommendations:

1. The IEDC team recommended that community members focus on doing instead of meeting. This means a majority of work should be conducted outside of meetings. When meetings are held, their primary function should be to discuss the progress of actions occurring outside of the meeting.

2. Community leaders should set realistic and achievable goals that are oriented around a specific task. When community volunteers give of their time, they generally like to work toward the completion of a particular project or goal.

3. Use grant funds strategically. With state and federal grant allocations waning in recent years, community leaders should make sure that awarded grants are used in a sustainable way. This means utilizing grants in a way that allows the impact of the funding to continue even after the money is gone.

4. Empower younger generations to lead. Allow young adults to spearhead initiatives and take ownership of projects. If young people feel connected to their town, they are more likely to stay in the community and continue to serve in leadership roles as adults.

5. Overcome self-imposed or perceived constraints. The IEDC team heard from county officials that logging is not a viable industry in Wyoming County because 87 percent of county land is owned by mining companies. Community leaders should conduct meetings with mining company land owners to determine for themselves whether or not logging is a possibility. If logging is a possibility, county leaders should work to find area businesses that can benefit from it.

6. Recognizing that there are limited financial and human resources to get work done, EDOs and Chambers of Commerce in southern West Virginia should try to pool their resources and reach out to neighboring counties to begin a dialogue center around regional economic growth strategies.

7. Wyoming County leaders should work with the Southern Community and Technical College (SCTC) to conduct an inventory of the 25,000 people the school has trained to determine where they live and whether or not they are employed. The findings from this inventory can then be used by both SCTC and county leaders to align employment needs with skills.

Small Business & Entrepreneurship

Observations:
The town of Pineville realizes that in order to increase its population, it first needs to increase the number of employment opportunities that exist in the community. Working to help existing small businesses grow is an attainable and critically important element of the town’s growth strategy.

Recommendations:

1. It will take years of solid effort to diversify the Wyoming County economy. In the interim, it is important to focus on fostering entrepreneurship. This can and should be done in the following ways:

   a. Partner with organizations like Entre-Ed, which works with local area elementary schools to teach entrepreneurship. Instilling entrepreneurial concepts into all levels of education will help empower local student to become future business owners.

   b. Community leaders should work to identify entrepreneurs and encourage them to take risks. One powerful and inexpensive tool community leaders can use to foster entrepreneurship is recognition. Business owners appreciate receiving recognition for their contributions to a community, yet this seldom occurs. Wyoming County leaders should use recognition and/or awards to bring attention to entrepreneurs.

   c. Expedite efforts to teach the local community how to do business online. Individuals can become entrepreneurs and sell products and services online, while others can work for other firms that need assistance with data entry, research, writing and other jobs that can be done online for companies that are located elsewhere.

2. A few small business successes can generate momentum. In a community of modest size such as Pineville, modest economic advancements go a long way and create momentum for future successes. Since a majority of a community’s growth is the product of existing business expansions, Wyoming County should consider undertaking a Business Retention and Expansion program. If existing organizations do not have sufficient staff, perhaps they could supervise a part-time volunteer who would find it interesting to research companies, become familiar with business resources in the area, and then make time to visit the businesses acting as a liaison from the town. It is important that the person is experienced in business. Business owners are busy, and the endeavor can’t appear to be a “learning experience” but rather a genuine offer of support and assistance. This person should become very familiar with IEDC’s BRE webinar for West Virginia. The Business Support Specialist’s role would be to find ways to help local businesses grow. The focus should be on developing relationships and bringing support to the “traded sector” companies. Measure success by how many connections the BSS was able to make between these Pineville businesses and regional resource agencies. Develop other measures of success as the program evolves.

3. Keep metrics on entrepreneurial activity because that is key indicator of economic growth. Also, keep track of 10-12 projects and where things stand with each project.

4. Consider developing a shared online workspace environment for entrepreneurs. Shared knowledge that occurs within a communal workspace can often lead to new ideas, innovations, and even new businesses.
5. Communicate the benefits of the sharing economy to local residents who might be interested in using it to start a side business. A sharing economy is defined as an economic model in which individuals are able to borrow or rent assets owned by someone else.\(^\text{11}\) Given the annual volume of people riding the Hatfield McCoy Trails, residents of Wyoming County could benefit from renting their house(s) through AirBnb, VRBO, HomeAway, etc.

6. The Wyoming County EDA could expand its capacity by pursuing federal EDA economic adjustment funds, or CDFI funds to grow its support for small businesses.

7. The Southern Community and Technical College (SCTC), located five miles from Pineville in Saulsville, WV should continue offering educational programs that afford unemployed skilled laborers an opportunity to retool and retrain. SCTC has taken a leadership role in this effort by offering an apprenticeship program with Mohawk flooring to retrain former miners. Programs such as this should continue and be actively encouraged and supported.

Tourism

Observations:
Wyoming County benefits from a beautiful natural landscape. It also benefits from a local community that is eager to share these assets with visitors and tourists. Of particular importance to the local tourism sector is the Hatfield McCoy Trails, a network of over 600 miles of ATV trails crossing nine counties in southern West Virginia. Now in its seventeenth year of operation, the Hatfield McCoy Trails organization has grown to become a major driver of economic activity in the region. Revenue from the nearly 40,000 permits issues annually, as well as state funding, support the Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization’s operating budget. In 2014, an economic impact analysis of the Hatfield McCoy Trails revealed that it was responsible for a direct economic impact of over $14 million per year.\(^\text{12}\) The town of Pineville is in close proximity to one of the trailheads for the Hatfield McCoy Trails, and realizes that it can do more to reap the full economic benefits of this asset.

In addition to the Hatfield McCoy Trails Organization, two other trail groups exist in the county: Rail-Trail and the Great Eastern Trail. The Rail-Trail is the idea of local resident Matthew Allen, who realized the potential community and economic benefit of repurposing an abandoned rail line that to connect several communities within Wyoming County. The Rail-Trail is in currently in a conceptual stage, but local stakeholders view the project as a way to attract recreational tourist while simultaneously promoting physical activity among locals. Unfortunately, the Norfolk Southern Railroad, which owns the abandoned rail line, has no interest in working with the Rail-Trail team.

The Great Eastern Trail is a hiking trail that will extend from New York to Alabama upon completion. Similar to the better-known Appalachian Trail, the Great Eastern Trail plans connect existing sections of trail together to form an uninterrupted recreational hiking corridor. A portion of the trail is planned to pass through Wyoming County and Pineville, creating a tremendous opportunity for the tourism-sector upon completion. Tim McGraw is a county resident who is volunteering as local partner of the Great Eastern Trail to help it acquire access to the land it needs in Wyoming County. Unfortunately, the owners of the property


in question are not willing to grant the Great Eastern Trail the property rights it needs to move forward with the trail in Wyoming County.

Another idea centered on recreational tourism in Wyoming County is the development of an RC Car racetrack. We heard from the recreation and tourism group that RC Car owners will travel long distances to RC Car racetrack for competitions. In Wyoming County, a group of local citizens is proposing to develop an RC Car racetrack, which will act as a tourist destination and way for local businesses to capture out-of-town revenue.

**Recommendations:**

1. Work to increase the number of lodging options in Pineville, as current offerings seem sparse for the number of people who visit the county for to ride the Hatfield McCoy Trails.

2. Community stakeholders should encourage local business to cross-promote one another. Visitors to the area may not be familiar with what businesses exist in the area, so the more county residents can promote local businesses, the better.

3. Determine ways to develop effective wayfinding and signage in the county. Visitors to the area depend upon wayfinding and signage to navigate new areas; without it, local businesses may not be fully capturing tourist dollars.

4. A consortium of water, river, bike, and ATV groups should be created so collective opportunities and challenges can be shared. The consortium should be used to advocate for issues of collective concern at the state level, such as land acquisition issues.

5. Rail-Trail and Great Eastern Trail advocates should meet with uncompromising land owners to better understand their concerns. Sometimes conversations such as these can result in favorable outcomes for both sides.

6. Before seeking funding for the Rail-Trail project, project organizers should partner with the SCTC to conduct an economic impact assessment of the trail. When seeking funding for a project such as this, having economic impact data is a powerful tool to share with elected officials.

7. A conservancy approach to property access should be used to cherry-pick property rights needed for trail development while keeping other property rights intact.
Expanding Economic Development Resources in the Coalfield Region

Throughout this project, IEDC team members had opportunities to meet periodically with local economic developers in the 5-community region of West Virginia. Typically each county has its own economic development office which is staffed by one person. These economic development organizations (EDOs) have varied focus: some offer subsidized business loans, others look at developing sites and marketing. As a whole, however these EDOs do not have formalized programs to help existing businesses.

Nonprofits and regional organizations are doing a good job of supporting targeted new economic sector development. Coalfields Development, a nonprofit xxxx, for example, has developed Refresh Appalachia to support the development of the local agriculture and food movement. The Hatfield McCoy Trails Association, for example, is supporting tourism based on the development of the ATV trails system.

Volunteers are primarily taking up the work of promoting other special economic development activities, such as expanding outdoor recreation, promoting coal field heritage and redevelopment, downtown revitalization and the arts. These efforts rely on donations and the local energy and commitment of volunteers. Sustainability may depend on the level of success, resources and time available.

Given the depths and complexity of West Virginia’s coal-field declines, IEDC believes that in order for the region to stop and reverse long-term disinvestment, existing businesses must be fully supported for concentrated growth.

Business Retention and Expansion

While attracting new businesses is a necessary part of stabilizing the economy, in large part because of the declining population, it is IEDC’s recommendation that West Virginia’s coal communities should put a solid and persistent paid professional focus on business retention and expansion (BRE) activities. In many large communities around the country, this function is performed through surveys that are then tallied in databases, leading to policy actions or specific economic development programs that address community weaknesses.

In small, weakened communities, however, BRE usually entails more efforts by local officials led by EDOs to talk and build relationships with existing businesses. By talking with company owners and managers, local officials can learn more about what type of help may be needed. For example, several concerns of local businesses that were heard by the IEDC teams included a lack of suitable move-in ready business sites due to the dilapidated state of locally-owned buildings. Others required permit assistance, resources to develop needed infrastructure, or simply access to capital. Others required technical assistance; while there is interest in starting businesses, there may be a significant lack of expertise. It may be helpful, therefore, for
local economic development organizations – working in partnership with other subject matter experts – to offer training to would be business owners in such things as how to develop business plans, marketing plans, how to finance businesses and develop financial controls, where to access permitting assistance and other topics.

In line with business retention, it was shared with IEDC that many small businesses are now for sale or looking for ways to stay in business. Part of the BRE effort could be to help identify ways to sell or refinance businesses, connect with other businesses that might like to consolidate, or even provide assistance to form employee co-operatives to take over from owners. *(For more information on this topic, see the Democracy at Work Cooperative http://institute.coop)*

**Emphasis on Manufacturing**

Another effort that requires additional expertise is the attraction or growth of alternative types of manufacturing that are not dependent on coal. What minimal manufacturing exists is at a level that is not enough to support communities. As a whole, the southern region of West Virginia is still importing more than it is exporting. This leakage is causing the economy to continue to shrink. It is the recommendation of the IEDC team that a more thorough and detailed planning effort be made to bring in economic development expertise and create a plan specifically for manufacturing. This should focus on natural resources or needs that can be exported immediately outside of the southern West Virginia region. For example, there is an abundance of wood products and a very small cluster of companies that use them.

What specific measures are needed to help these firms expand their businesses? This discussion should first take place with existing companies.

**Downtown revitalization** is needed by many of the communities in the 5-country area, but this requires a long-term, holistic approach. The state of West Virginia has a Main Street program (see [www.wvcommerce.org](http://www.wvcommerce.org)) which provides the following types of assistance:

> “The program provides technical assistance to West Virginia’s nationally-certified Main Street communities. Communities learn how to make their revitalization efforts more effective with Main Street services and training customized to meet local needs. Key areas include business retention and recruitment, market analysis, fundraising, vision and strategic planning, property development and more.”

There is a requirement, however, that the community employ a full time staff person and maintain national certification to be eligible for technical assistance. Any traditional, historic downtown or neighborhood commercial district in the state that has for at least two years, participated in the ONTRAC program is eligible. Meeting this requirement may not be feasible for many small towns in the coal-impacted area. Therefore, it is IEDC’s recommendation that this condition be waived and more assistance be made available to help communities like Alderson and Madison, for example.
Training for long-term economic development capacity

Another weakness in local economic development efforts appears to be a lack of training and locally-based expertise. Most EDOs are one-person offices, staffed by people from the community who do not possess advanced knowledge of the full range of economic development systems and best practices. What’s more, local officials such as mayors, city councils and county officials have not been trained in the basics of economic development. IEDC attempted to provide some training through a series of six webinars which were held from January through March of 2017 – but there is more that could be done. For example, the coal communities could benefit from “boot camp” style economic development training that IEDC has developed for small and rural communities. One such course is slated to take place in May 2017, funded by the Greater Kanahwa Valley Foundation, but more may be necessary.

Another significant task for local EDOs should be promoting and growing entrepreneurship, investing in downtown revitalization, and developing real estate – as in the case of the desire by at least one community in Boone County to create a significant new industrial center. Such efforts require significant expertise and long-term commitment. IEDC teaches courses in each of these topics. For more information and best practices, see www.iedconline.org.

In support of local capacity building, the Appalachian Regional Commission and U.S. Economic Development Administration have funded organizations such as the West Virginia Community Development Hub, IEDC and numerous others to help support local communities on specific, time-sensitive programs. Such programs should also be coordinated with the state, counties and local cities for additional leverage and ongoing continuity.
The Need for Visitor Accommodations

The southern region of West Virginia has a promising opportunity to expand tourism, taking up the momentum of the expansion of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail, as well as river kayaking along the Little Coal River Water Trail, and heritage tourism (as yet untapped). One of the keys to expanding the economic benefits, however, is opening up more places where visitors can spend their money.

The definition of a visitor is someone who comes from 50 miles or more to see or do something in a destination. When someone is coming from that distance, the rule of thumb is you must give them at least four hours of activity potential for every hour of travel. The most immediate need in growing tourism beyond adding more attractions is providing the right range of accommodation offerings to meet the demand.

Throughout this project, it was stated and observed that more accommodations are needed; however, there was no comprehensive projection of how many overnight rooms would be necessary to meet peak demand, nor where they should be located. The www.visitWV.com website currently lists 25 traditional-type hotels and 26 campgrounds throughout the state, five resorts and five B&Bs in the subject area.

In the New River / Greenbrier Valley, tourism impact for 2014 in terms of accommodations reached $124 million and provided some 4,000 jobs (jobs are combined with food service). The less developed Hatfield-McCoy Mountains area saw $5 million in accommodations revenue providing for 700 direct jobs. Total industry earnings with multipliers included $660 million and $163 million in overall destination spending, respectively.

Organizers of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail indicated that they believed there was a need for more campgrounds and cabins as well as traditional accommodations to support the approximately 40,000 people that are using the trail for ATVs. Promoters of the Little Coal River Water Trail also expressed a desire to see more accommodations along the river. There is currently an ambitious plan by the City of Madison to tear down a dilapidated public swimming pool and community center building and in its place put in a riverside camping facilities and parking.

Rather than building new hotels which would take development time and a lengthier return on investment, the IEDC team recommends that West Virginia residents join the “sharing economy” and identify suitable properties for bed and breakfast (B&B) inns. For example, there are a number of large, underutilized historic (some Victorian) properties that could be renovated and converted to B&B’s. Such accommodations would carry several benefits: offer unique places where visitors could experience local hospitality, history and character, providing a more memorable experience than chain hotels; many such buildings already exist that are either underutilized or vacant; old residences could be renovated more quickly than new hotels could be built; in addition to providing overnight accommodations for visitors, these could also continue to be homes
for local residents, who could benefit from the entrepreneurial opportunity to turn their residences into income generators.

The Morris Harvey House in Fayetteville, West Virginia is a New River Gorge bed and breakfast. With five guest rooms and four and a half guest baths, the B&B offers visitors the opportunity to unwind in a special home on the National Register of Historic Places.

What exactly is a B&B? "Bed and Breakfast inn" means any establishment (i) having no more than 15 bedrooms; (ii) offering to the public, for compensation, transitory lodging or sleeping accommodations; and (iii) offering at least one meal per day, which may but need not be breakfast, to each person to whom overnight lodging is provided.

Not everyone is prepared to open up their homes to strangers. For aspiring innkeepers, there is a variety of resources available that offer training, assistance with business and marketing plans, as well as financing ideas. A few online resources include:

https://www.iapcollege.com/program/bed-and-breakfast-ownerourse
http://www.lodgingresources.com
http://eliotdalton.com/shop
https://bbteam.com/seminars/

The neighboring Commonwealth of Virginia has just passed legislation to allow for regulation and tax of B&Bs and Air BN Bs (houses that rent out one or more rooms on a short term basis). For a summary, see:

http://www.vacvb.com/resources/Documents/Spring%202016/The%20AirBnB%20Legislation.pdf
Appendix A

2017 IEDC Webinar Comments and Evaluations

Comments:

Webinar 1: Business Retention & Expansion
Having taken the IEDC BRE training program, I found this webinar to be an outstanding way to show how the concepts laid out in the BRE program are used on a practical basis to address the needs of the community.

☐
The more specific the info is to WV communities, the better.

☐
Very good information. Nice seamless A/V technology used.

Webinar 2: Marketing for Small and Rural Communities
All the presentations were inspiring.

Although much of the info was not new to me, the presentations were excellent and good reminders

Honestly, I left the webinar after about 5-10 minutes, as I saw that it was specifically focused on West Virginia, which I didn't see when I signed up for the webinar - it was only shown as "Marketing for Small and Rural Communities".

☐
This felt too general. More of an in-depth case study approach could have made this presentation stronger.

☐
Although WV was mentioned, and the topic was small and rural communities, some content implied cities with multiple businesses operating in their environs. Tiny towns where the local school is the largest employer just don't have a lot of business news to promote via internet

☐
I like the use of slide where you can have highlights of the discussion to write down. On most the slides went too quickly to write everything down.

☐
I never thought about Wikipedia

☐
The presentation was not what I thought (I understood it to be (how to market IN small rural communities) however I did get a big benefit from listening to it.

☐
My first webinar through WV Hub. Very well done, a lot of useful content, presentations were thoughtfully prepared.

☐
Really nice job by all of the presenters, with useful content.

Limit to one hour.

**Webinar 3: Rivers & Recreational Trails**

Great webinar!

We need more "how to" information. If a river trail is good, how do you actually get one built? The big issue is buying the land for the trail and handling objections from adjacent property owners who don't want people walking by their property.

Specifically on this one, more focus on actually pulling it all off rather than ideas.

The subject matter was ok but it did not apply well to the West Virginia situation and locations.

I was hoping there would be more about actually developing a river trail. The promo showed people on the river, if I recall correctly.

**Webinar 4: Best Practices for Dealing with Dilapidated & Vacant Buildings**

This webinar felt like it was geared toward areas that have far more economic development infrastructure than we have in parts of Southern West Virginia. I'd love to see more experts from similarly under resourced areas present on these issues moving forward.

One of the best webinars I've attended.

**Webinar 5: Preserving Our Stories – Heritage Tourism**

These presentations have been excellent. I've joined from SE Ohio and been able to reap benefit from the information shared.

Would have liked to learn more about the economic impact in terms of change in jobs and income in the tourism areas. How were changes in hotel stays and restaurant tax incomes attributed to tourism efforts and separated from other economic development activities?

The presentations were good, but they seemed to be more basic. I would have liked more practical advice. My community has heritage tourism, for example, but we have many different committees who sometimes have trouble coordinating or deciding on what our story is. I would have liked more info on how to organize in a situation like this.

**Webinar 6: Maximizing the Use of Federal & State Tools**

It is a shame this webinar was only an hour. They are both very knowledgeable. I am sure they have even more to offer.
The webinar was not helpful for me. It may have been better for others but was really nothing new. Don't want to seem negative but maybe it just wasn't at my level.

**Suggestions from Evaluators for Additional Topics of Interest**

Gender Streaming in Economic Development in Communities with wide Gender Equality Gaps

Sessions on Urban and Rural ED policy

Food sector programs, local foods, etc.

More webinars about Placemaking

Using social media to promote local tourism

Neighborhood Revitalization

How to motivate communities to work together to influence regional tourism.

I would be interested in more webinars on funding projects.

grant writing

Arts presenting and catalyzing arts and other cultural assets as a tool from economic and community revitalization.

More discussion surrounding funding for development. How to leverage tax credits, for instance.

Best Practices in rural ED

Finding funding

Entrepreneurship/Small Business start up/AgriTourism

I loved how contiguous the presentations were!

I sometimes have difficulty finding adult care for my special needs son so I appreciate the information coming to my home, it is also cheaper!

Grants, how to find them and qualify for them
Business coaching training and programs that have worked well helping rural areas learn how to run businesses. Also more info on special financing packages for small businesses in rural areas.

Maybe something about attracting and inspiring volunteers.

More examples of smaller River Trail projects

Tourism and how to reach local potential partners.

More on changing the attitudes of the local newspaper - promotional people.

I would like to see something along these lines but not specifically for West Virginia

How can a region determine it’s assets

How to get your community excited

Focus more on West Virginia. The people presenting have good ideas and are undoubtedly successful in their areas, but they do not seem to come close to WV rural and small town issues. And in WV small town means really small, not even 3000 people.

Working with State Departments to get work done.

Small Business Innovation in Rural towns

Collaboration between municipal governments and volunteer-led orgs in (very) small communities for business development

Examples of sustainable practices with historic preservation.

How arts presenting, and activating the cultural community has been used as a tool for economic revitalization in rural areas.

All the upcoming topics look good, especially the river and the dilapidated buildings

Information on how to positively introduce zoning in counties that do not have it and some residents don’t want it

Tourism marketing
Appendix B

Summary of Agencies & Programs Addressing Abandoned Property in West Virginia

ABANDONED PROPERTIES COALITION
www.wvhub.org/abandoned-properties-coalition

The Abandoned Properties Coalition (APC) convenes and coordinates organizations and community leaders across the state to advocate for policy solutions to adequately address problem properties. The APC is housed within the West Virginia Community Development Hub.

THE WEST VIRGINIA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT HUB
www.wvhub.org

The WV Community Development Hub believes the health of a community depends on individuals coming together. The Hub works in dozens of communities to coach community members through a process that helps them identify leaders and assets; develop plans and set goals; and connect with a wide network of resources to meet those goals.

THE WV BROWNFIELDS ASSISTANCE CENTERS AT WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY & MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
www.wvbrownfields.org

The West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Centers promote economic development, environmental, and public health protection through innovative redevelopment of brownfield sites.

THE BAD BUILDINGS PROGRAM
www.wvbadbuildings.org

The BAD (Blighted, Abandoned, and Dilapidated) Buildings Program is a statewide technical assistance program through the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center. The program works with community-based teams to identify, prioritize, and redevelop problem properties.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY LAND USE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LAW CLINIC
www.wvleap.wvu.edu

In late 2015, the Land Use Clinic published From Liability to Viability: A Legal Toolkit to Address Neglected Properties in West Virginia, which includes accessible summaries of relevant legal authorities and case studies on specific approaches.
COALFIELD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
www.coalfield-development.org

The Coalfield Development Corporation provides quality and affordable homes, creates quality jobs, and generates opportunities for quality life for low-income families in Wayne, Lincoln, and Mingo Counties. Coalfield’s signature program is its Quality Jobs Initiative, an innovative on-the-job training mentorship program.

PRESERVATION ALLIANCE OF WEST VIRGINIA
www.pawv.org

Preservation Alliance of West Virginia is a statewide nonprofit that provides technical assistance to individuals and organizations working to preserve, reuse, and redevelop historic properties, including abandoned and vacant properties.

HUNTINGTON URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY LAND BANK
www.huralandbank.com

Operating since 2009, the Huntington Urban Renewal Authority (HURA) Land Bank addresses dilapidated buildings in the greater-Huntington area by putting viable properties and land into the ownership of individuals and groups that will enhance them.

WEST VIRGINIA PROPERTY RESCUE INITIATIVE
www.wvhdf.com/wpri

The West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (PRI) expands the scope of the Housing Development Fund’s previous Demolition Fund. PRI combines a demolition / deconstruction loan program for residential property with technical assistance provided by the WV Community Development Hub, the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center, and the WVU Land Use Law Clinic.

MAIN STREET WEST VIRGINIA
www.wcommerce.org/people/communityresources/communityrevitalization/mainstreetwestvirginia/mainstreetcommunities/default.aspx

Multiple Main Street West Virginia communities address dilapidated building mitigation through their Economic Development committees and facade grant programs.

WEST VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
www.wvml.org

The West Virginia Municipal League has been a key advocate for the passage of policies to address dilapidated properties, including Home Rule expansion, Land Reuse Agencies, and vacant property registries.