

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & POLICIES: A ROADMAP TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

As stated previously, the Plan is a road map for where the community would like to be in the future. This chapter provides guidance that if followed will help the community stay on the right course.

To ensure that Marion moves in the right direction, goals, objectives and policies (GOP) have been developed based on the ideas and concepts identified in the community visioning process. The purpose of the GOP is to help guide the City in its journey for achieving the community's long term vision. Each of the eight elements are arranged in order beginning with a stated goal, followed by a series of objectives and policies recommended for achieving that goal.

*A **GOAL** is a general statement by the community in which a particular final outcome is intended.*

*An **OBJECTIVE** is a sub-section of a goal that provides a measurable strategy for achieving the desired goal. It is not uncommon to have more than one objective in order to accomplish a goal.*

*A **POLICY** is an operational or administrative action relevant to completing the goal. It states the action and/or position that the City shall take to help achieve a specific goal.*

The GOP alone will not drive the plan to action. It will take continued public support and must represent the values and needs of the community. The GOP must be readily accepted and part of common understanding for the plan to be an effective tool for positive change and evolution. It shall require the fundamental principle of the Cognitive Criterion for Public Support:

“An effective policy must be popular if it is to stand the test of time and it must be popular for the right reasons, namely because it promotes the right long-term values in the minds of citizens, reinforced through the lived experience”

It is anticipated that a variety of initiatives will occur – some immediately, some in the next few years, and some in the longer term, in response to this Plan. A number of initiatives as indicated in this section are presently taking place or are beginning to occur as a result of the initial focus group meetings.

The framework for the GOP is developed around the overarching themes that were identified in the community visioning process. Each focus group identified priorities that the community would like to see planned for and/or accomplished within the planning horizon. The following is a list that complies that list into four main themes followed a detailed list from each focus group.

1. Develop sidewalks and bicycle lanes which promote health, provide alternative and more convenient transportation options, and connect neighborhoods with parks, schools, employment, goods, and services providing greater accessibility for all ages, abilities, and income levels.
2. Protect the unique and irreplaceable historical, cultural, and environmental resources located within the community and surrounding area that are enjoyed by residents, attract visitors, and generate economic development opportunities.
3. Place greater restrictions on mobile home development, which tend to drive down neighborhood property values; and place design standards on metal and modular building construction requiring the use of masonry materials and/or architectural designs standards to help create a more attractive building which maintains its appearance over a longer period of time helping to maintain the economic stability of the community.
4. Promote higher density residential development and infill development through adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized buildings, nonconforming lots and structures, and other blighted areas to create a more inviting, walkable, and family-oriented urban environment that provides affordable homeownership opportunities, convenient access to employment, goods and services, and recreational activities.

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LAND USE

The City of Marion's geographic location has influenced its land use patterns overtime from the industrial boom to the development of the first zoning ordinance. A combination of natural amenities, low taxes, and convenient location makes Marion a desirable location to live, which in time has attracted a steady increase in residential growth in and around the community. As the City continues to grow special attention should be given to infill development; the stabilization of property values; the protection of environmentally-sensitive areas; transportation and its direct relationship to existing and future land use patterns; and new development standards that will create a more sustainable development pattern over time.

The first step in building a framework for this plan is to outline a pattern of land uses that will not only preserve the quality of life the community has come to enjoy, but also provide guidance for creating and maintaining livable and walkable neighborhoods, attractive and accessible shopping areas, conveniently located public services and spaces, productive centers of employment, and a network of natural areas and greenways tied together by the vitality generated from well-integrated uses and activities.

This section includes goals, objectives, and policies that set forth the pattern of land uses that the City envisions as continues to grow and change.

GOAL 1.1: Guide Future Growth and Land Use Development That Best Meets the Needs and Desires of the Community, and which Makes the Best and Most Efficient Use of Public Infrastructure, Facilities, and Resources to Ensure the Long-Term Sustainability of the Community.

Objective 1.1.1: Guide Growth and Development According to the Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) identified herein establishes suitable areas for future land use, growth, and development.

Objective 1.1.2: Objective: Establish Future Land Use Designations. The future land use designations, as depicted on the Future Land Use Map, are established as defined within the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. They are not established to direct immediate and sweeping changes to the City's Zoning Districts, but rather to guide new development overtime that is logical and thoughtful to existing land uses, and which makes efficient use of public infrastructure and services.

Objective 1.1.3: Objective: Utilize the FLUM in Land Use Decisions: Use the FLUM as a guide for making land use and other planning decisions. The FLUM serves as the foundation for long-term desired outcomes, and while circumstances will occur that warrant deviations from the FLUM they should not be in such conflict that it undermines the overall vision set forth in the Plan.

Objective 1.1.4: Objective: Create a Mechanism for Amending the Future Land Use Map. Trends in land use development, population change, public policy, infrastructure and services shall serve as indicators of possible changes in land use needs. The City Planning & Development Department shall periodically evaluate the Future Land Use Map to determine if changes are necessary. Land use policy and regulations shall be refined as needed in order to remain responsive

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to evolving issues. Changes to the Future Land Use Map should not be amended based on individual need, but when it serves the greater good of the community.

Objective 1.1.5: Objective: Implement the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Implement the Plan beginning with any necessary revisions to the Official Zoning District Map and the City's land development regulations to guide growth and development consistent to the Plan.

Objective 1.1.6: Objective: Utilize the FLUM for Public Infrastructure and Services Planning. The FLUM should be utilized for planning new infrastructure and services to ensure consistency and coordination between all state, regional, and local agencies and departments, including but not limited to:

- Comprehensive Transportation Plan
- Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Long-Range Plan for Police and Fire Services
- Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Parks & Recreation Master Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Economic Development Plan
- Watershed Protection Plans
- Neighborhood or Community Master Plans

Policy 1.1.7: Support Focused and Consolidated Land Use Development. The City shall support new development that is suitable in location and makes efficient use of land, avoids unnecessary traffic congestion, or places a strain on public facilities and services. It shall be the City's policy to evaluate the impact of proposed developments on the City's fiscal and operational ability to provide and maintain services and infrastructure necessary to support such development.

Goal 1.2: Develop A Mix of Interdependent, Compatible, and Mutually Supportive Land Uses That Integrates Multiple Uses, Shortens and Reduces Automobile Trips, Promotes Pedestrian and Bicycling Accessibility, and Decreases Infrastructure and Housing Costs, and Discourage the Location and Design of Development That Creates a Pattern of Isolated and Disconnected Land Uses.

Objective 1.2.1: Expand the Number of Zoning Districts to Provide a More Harmonious Transition Between Residential and Non-Residential Uses. Existing zoning districts provide little transition between residential, commercial and other higher intensity land uses (greater noise, traffic, activity, etc.), which has contributed to lower residential property values, decrease in residential quality of life, and encroachment of incompatible land uses. The City shall evaluate existing land uses and modify existing zoning district designations that create a more harmonious transition between land uses.

Objective 1.2.2: Develop Standards for Integrating Mixed Uses in New and Established Areas of the Community. The Planning and Development Department shall review

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existing land development regulations and incorporate standards for a mixture of interdependent, compatible, and mutually supportive land uses that based on type, size, intensity, and scale create vitality and benefit the surrounding neighborhood and/or business area.

Objective 1.2.3: Develop Standards That Concentrate Land Uses for Greater Transportation Efficiency. Concentrate and mix commercial and residential activities and land uses around defined centers in order to create more diversity and synergy between uses, and that provide the public with greater ability and access to viable pedestrian and bicycle corridors, and which can support future transit service needs.

Policy 1.2.4: Support High-Density Infill Development and Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Buildings. The City shall support and seek opportunities to assist developers and property owners to refurbish older vacant buildings that have overtime become functionally obsolete and no longer support the original land use for which the building was established.

Policy 1.2.5: Work with Property Owners and Business Owners To Expand Mixed-Use Development to Improve Downtown Vitality. The City shall work with downtown property and business owners to help expand mixed-use development in existing buildings, encouraging upper floor residential and office land-uses and store-front businesses that in turn support downtown living such as food and goods retail, restaurants and other social gathering establishments, civic and cultural land uses, and other employment-related businesses.

Policy 1.2.6: Discourage Incompatible Development Contiguous to the City. The City shall work with McDowell Economic Development Association and other interested stakeholders for developing a standard review system for new projects within the County that are in need of City infrastructure and services in order to develop.

Goal 1.3: Enhance Marion’s Sense of Place by Improving Overall Appearance, Creating a Framework of Public Spaces, Parks, Greenway, Trails, and Other Areas That Connect to Every Corner of the Community, and Preserve the Cultural and Historical Aspects That Make Marion a Healthy and Vibrant Community in Which to Live, Work, and Play.

Objective 1.3.1: Create Guidelines That Will Help Shape the Physical Form of Development. The Planning & Development Department shall incorporate new standards that further help achieve a desired design of new construction and combined it with existing zoning controls to create a more predictable outcome of new development that is balanced, and in harmony with adjoining neighborhoods and business activity centers. Considerations for the following should be considered during the revision process:

- A. Reduction to the proportion of street frontages and rights-of-ways lined by parking lots, solid non-dimensional walls or facades, which gives the appearance of strip-shopping centers that have been discouraged since the adoption of the C-2 General Business District.

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- B. Increase street connectivity and discourage dead end streets, gated-residential development, and cul-de-sacs.
- C. Introduce non-homogenous standards for multi-family developments that promote healthy and safe family-oriented living.
- D. Create standards for conservation-based and cottage-style subdivision design to protect the natural environment and large open-space areas for social and recreational activity.

Objective 1.3.2: Use Public Spaces to Help Frame the City. Utilizing the FLUM identify opportunities for long-range planning that will expand upon the exiting greenway and trail system so that such system will extend into a citywide network of trails, parks, open space, and other public spaces for the community to enjoy, recreate, and live healthy active lifestyle.

Objective 1.3.3: Amend City Ordinances as Necessary to Improve Citywide Appearance. The City has existing ordinances that require properties to be maintained from junk, debris, and other trash, but limited regulations for the maintenance and upkeep of buildings and structures. The City shall review existing ordinances and identify opportunities for improving citywide appearance.

Policy 1.3.4: Make Public Spaces an Integral Part of the Land Use Patten. The City shall continue to enhance and protect the natural, cultural, and scenic areas including, parks, greenways, and other trails as critically important land uses and infrastructure that represent significant public and private investment that have become an integral part of the City's land use pattern.

Policy 1.3.5: Work With the Community to Enhance Citywide Appearance. The City shall continue to work with community and economic-based organizations, property owners, and other interested stakeholders to identify opportunities for and solutions to appearance challenges as a result of property abandonment, lack of property maintenance, and other areas of blight that continue to hurt the overall appearance and activity of adjacent business and neighborhood land uses.

Policy 1.3.6: Work with Stakeholders to Enhance And Protect Historic, Cultural, and Natural Resources. The City will support and work with stakeholders such as the Historic Marion Foundation, McDowell House Committee, McDowell Trails Association, and other key stakeholder organizations and individuals to enhance and protect Marion's historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Goal 1.4: Value Land Use Patterns and Decisions That Encourage Walking, Bicycling, and Public Transportation Use, and Help Make These Transportation Options Be a Safe and Convenient Choice for the Community.

Objective 1.4.1: Plan, Design, and Create Well-Structured Neighborhoods. The City shall help plan, design, and create complete and well-structured neighborhoods whose physical layout and land use mix promote walking, bicycling, and public transportation use as a means of accessing services, food, retail, employment, education, health care, recreation, and other destinations.

HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

The purpose of the housing goals, objectives and policies is to further the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods, new residential neighborhoods, and a plan for moving forward to ensure that an adequate housing supply is available to meet both the existing and forecasted housing demand. In the previous chapter, the Plan includes an inventory and analysis of the local housing stock and information such as age, condition, type, market value, occupancy, and historical characteristics of all the housing within the municipality. This section identifies ways to promote the development of new housing and maintenance or rehabilitation of existing housing and recommendations for providing a range of housing choices that meet the needs of the residents of the municipality, while maintaining and enhancing residential quality of life.

Goal 2.1: Protect and Enhance the Quality of Life of Residential Neighborhoods from Incompatible Development That Either By Design or Land Use Have or Have the Potential To Be Unsafe or Disruptive to Residential Living and Harmful to Property Values.

Objective 2.1.1: Plan and Design for Residential Quality. The Planning and Development Department shall evaluate and amend new regulations for design and land use that ensure the stability, compatibility, and defining qualities of residential neighborhoods.

Objective 2.1.2: Establish an Appropriate Mix of Housing Types and Densities in Residential Neighborhoods. Establish an appropriate mix of housing types that provide property owners and developers with the opportunity to quickly respond to shifting housing markets in response to changing demographics and socioeconomic characteristics, lifestyle choices, and market conditions while maintaining and enhancing existing quality of life standards.

Objective 2.1.3: Provide Incentives for Quality Design and Development. The City shall develop incentives to encourage property owners and developers to construct projects that will enhance existing residential areas.

Policy 2.1.4: Encourage Active-Living Senior Housing Projects. Marion and the surrounding community, like many places, has a growing senior demographic that will become increasingly more dependent on both medical and public services, as well as access to those services. Senior housing developments can allow Marion's population to 'age in place' and shall be encouraged by the City.

Policy 2.1.5: Support the Preservation and Protection of Historic Mill Villages. The City's historic mill villages represent some of the most well-designed and vibrant neighborhoods within the community. In addition to their historic value, property values have remained stable unlike other neighborhoods and offer first-time home buyers, retirees, and young family's opportunities in home-ownership due to size and reasonable value. The City shall support and encourage property owners within the mill villages to protect their neighborhoods, which can include designation as a historic district to gain access to tax credits for maintenance and repair.

Policy 2.1.6: Support Live-Work, Loft Units, Upper Floor Condominiums and Apartments Within the Downtown. Downtown has struggled to maintain long-term vitality. Existing development and design offers unique opportunities for an urban residential lifestyle within a small-town setting. Current zoning regulations allow for upper-floor residential land uses. The City shall continue to encourage upper-floor residential housing as a means to help support the long-term economic vitality of the downtown area.

Goal 2.2: Reverse the Slow Decline of Residential Properties to Help Improve the Overall Health of Neighborhoods.

Objective 2.2.1: Improve Substandard Housing Stock to Provide Safe and Decent Living Conditions while Improving Neighborhood Vitality. The City shall use data from the housing and neighborhood inventory within the Plan to identify areas where active abatement and enforcement of dilapidated and blighted homes and structures should take place, and identify opportunities to revitalize those areas with appropriate new housing types that increases the vitality of the neighborhood, enhances property values, and improves residential quality of life.

Objective 2.2.2: Create Walkable and Bikeable Neighborhoods To Promote a More Healthy and Active Lifestyle. The Planning and Development Department shall review and amend zoning and subdivision regulations as necessary to encourage neighborhood design that creates a walkable and bikeable environment for residents to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle.

Objective 2.2.3: Establish A Program or Citizen Guide For Neighborhood-Level Planning. The City will establish a program or guide for neighborhood-level planning, and work with interested residents to help identify opportunities and solutions to overcome challenges specific to their residential area.

Policy 2.2.4: Turn City-Owned Properties into Neighborhood Assets. It shall be the City's policy to work with housing agencies and other advocates to redevelop vacant and/or once blighted properties that are in city possession so that they can be reestablished as opportunities for equitable home ownership, community common areas, parks, greenways, or other neighborhood enhancement.

Policy 2.2.5: Support Programs That Encourage Active Living. The City shall support and work with health advocates to help promote a culture of active living within the community and support program efforts to reduce chronic health disease and make Marion a more active and healthy community.

Policy 2.2.6: Improve the Safety and Pride of Existing and Future Neighborhoods by Encouraging Neighborhood Associations. To help the City identify and solve public health and safety problems and identify other opportunities to enhance residential areas, Neighborhoods shall be encouraged to work together to make positive changes that improve their overall quality of residential life.

Goal 2.3: Encourage the Development and Redevelopment of Decent and Affordable Housing for Present and Future Populations while Preserving Existing Residential Neighborhoods and Protect Residential Quality of Life, and Discourage the Installation and Replacement of Single-Wide Mobile Homes.

Objective 2.3.1: Encourage the Construction of Diverse, Affordable, and Decent Housing Options Throughout the Community.

Building permit trends indicate that mobile homes account for a majority of new affordable housing being established within the City for both owner-occupied and renter-occupied residents. This trend has hurt residential property values, and had a negative impact on many residential neighborhoods. The Planning and Development Department shall amend the City Code as necessary to protect neighborhood property values by prohibiting residential development that harms property values, including but not limited to the installation and/or replacement of single-wide mobile homes, and shall make recommendations for alternative site and building designs that will allow for diverse and affordable housing options.

Objective 2.3.2: Encourage Quality Infill Development by Creating Regulations for “Cottage-Style” Townhome Development, Conservation-Based Development, and Multi-Family Attached and Detached Housing.

The City has zoning and subdivision regulations in place for traditional single-family home development, but few regulations in place for attached, semi-attached, and non-traditional detached housing such as “cottage-style” and “conservation-based” development. These types of developments require special approval and longer review periods, which creates a disincentive to smaller site-built affordable housing projects. The Planning and Development Department shall amend the city code to allow for small-scale attached and detached residential development projects that will encourage more diverse and affordable housing options within the City.

Policy 2.3.3: Support Housing Advocates and Organizations That Help to Enhance Housing Conditions and Access to Diverse Housing Options.

Work with local, regional, and state housing advocates and organizations to develop and identify specific housing needs, programs, and incentives for workforce and “starter-home” housing, as well as improve overall access to diverse housing options.

Policy 2.3.4: Work with Developers and Property Owners to Provide Safe and Adequate Housing.

The City shall work with property owners and developers encouraging them to more actively preserve existing neighborhoods by maintaining and enhancing their properties, and encourage quality design of future developments in a manner, which promotes neighborhood settings, aesthetics, and community cohesiveness.

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TRANSPORTATION

The City of Marion envisions a transportation system that encourages healthy, active living; promotes transportation options and independent mobility; increases community safety and access to healthy food; reduces environmental impact; mitigates climate change, and supports greater social interaction and community identity by providing safe and convenient travel along and across streets through a comprehensive, integrated transportation network for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit, motor vehicle drivers, passenger and freight rail, and people, of all ages and abilities, including youth, families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.

Goal 3.1: Plan and Develop a Safe and Efficient Transportation System That Allows for Efficient Travel Through and Around the Community.

Objective 3.1.1: Consider the Type, Size, and Level of Service (LOS) Needed for New Developments and the Impact It Will Have on the Existing Transportation System.

Roadway infrastructure improvements and routine maintenance require significant public investment. Those costs increase when new or expanded roadways are needed to accommodate new land use development. The City, through the development review process, shall give greater consideration for the needs of medium and large scale development projects to ensure that the existing roadway system has the capacity to carry additional traffic loads, and that all roadway improvements are designed and constructed in an efficient manner in an effort to avoid higher long-term costs.

Objective 3.1.2: Develop a Transportation Inventory and Future Facilities Plan to Identify Opportunities for Greater Connectivity and Traffic Flow within the City.

The City does not have a future facilities plan for local streets, and in some cases platted streets and alleys have never been opened, or were developed in areas other than that identified on the original plat. The City should inventory and plan for future transportation needs to provide, to the greatest extent possible, a transportation network that improves connectivity and efficiency.

Policy 3.1.3: Improve the Aesthetic Appearance of Transportation Corridors by Incorporating Landscaping into Future Projects.

The City shall consider where feasible to include tree lawns, landscaped islands, and other landscape treatments when design new streets or retrofitting existing streets to improve the overall all aesthetics of the roadway network and community appearance.

Goal 3.2: Provide Safe and Comfortable Routes for Walking, Bicycling, Public Transportation to Increase Use of These Modes of Transportation, Enable Convenient and Active Travel as Part of Daily Activities, Reduce Pollution, and Meet the Needs of All Users, including Children, Families, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities.

Objective 3.2.1: Develop a Citywide Multi-Use Trail System. Continue working on a multi-use trail system that has both internal and regional connectivity and that focuses on:

- A. Collaboration with other communities in order to create a regional trail system.

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- B. Plans for a citywide trail network, and
- C. Fills in incomplete trail linkages.

Objective 3.2.2: Adopt the City of Marion Safe Routes to School Action Plan. Adopt the City of Marion Safe Routes to School Plan, implementing its recommendations and utilizing it as a guide to plan future SRTS projects as service and need grow.

Objective 3.2.3: Continue to Construct Sidewalks in Areas of the Community That Lack Adequate and Safe Pedestrian Facilities. Build upon the Safe Routes to School Plan for planning future sidewalk improvements and extension as well as off-street trails and greenways where other pedestrian treatments are not feasible.

Objective 3.2.4: Develop a Comprehensive Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Develop a long-term plan for a bicycle and pedestrian network that meets the needs of users, including pedestrians, bicyclists people of all ages and abilities, including children, families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.

Objective 3.2.5: Incorporate Complete Street Principles in New and Retrofitted Street Projects. The City where feasible shall integrate complete streets infrastructure and design features into new and retrofitted street design and construction to create safe and inviting environments for all users and ability levels to walk, bicycle, and use public transportation.

Policy 3.2.6: Consider Pedestrian, Bicyclist, and Public Transportation of All Users and Ability Levels as Part of the Transportation Network. In planning, designing, and constructing complete streets the City shall make every reasonable effort to:

- A. Include infrastructure that promotes a safe means of travel for all users along the right-of-way, such as sidewalks, shared-use paths, bicycle lanes, and paved shoulders.
- B. Include infrastructure that facilitates safe crossing of the right-of-way, such as accessible curb ramps, crosswalks, refuge islands, and pedestrian signals; such infrastructure must meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities and people of all ages.
- C. Ensure that sidewalks, crosswalks, public transportation, stops and facilities, and other aspects of the transportation right-of-way are compliant with the American with Disabilities Act and meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities, including mobility impairments, vision impairments, hearing impairments, and others.
- D. Prioritize incorporation of street design features and techniques that promotes safe and comfortable travel be pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders, such as traffic-calming circles, narrow vehicle lanes, raised and/or landscaped medians, bulbouts, road diets, physical buffers and separations between vehicular traffic and other users.
- E. Ensure use of additional features that improve the comfort and safety of users:
 - 1. Include public safety officer in design review to identify potential crime risks and design strategies to prevent crime based on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards.
 - 2. Provide pedestrian-oriented signs, pedestrian-scale lighting, benches and other street furniture, bicycle parking facilities.

3. Encourage street trees, landscaping, and planting strips, including native plants where possible, in order to buffer traffic noise and protect and shade pedestrians and bicyclists.
4. Reduce surface water runoff by reducing the amount of impervious surfaces on streets.

Policy 3.2.7: Make Every Effort to Incorporate Infrastructure That Improves Transportation Options for All Users. In all street projects, make every effort to include infrastructure that improves transportation options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation systems for all ages and abilities.

- A. Ensure that this infrastructure is included in planning, design, approval, construction, operations, and maintenance phases of street projects.
- B. Incorporate this infrastructure into all construction, reconstruction, retrofit, maintenance, alteration, and repair of streets, bridges, and other portions of the transportation network.
- C. Incorporate multimodal improvements into pavement resurfacing, restriping, and signalization operations where safety and convenience of users can be improved within the scope of work.
- D. Develop a system and set of guidelines for design and incorporation of such infrastructure into construction and reconstruction of private streets.
- E. Allow exclusion of such infrastructure from street projects only upon approval by City Manager, Streets Committee, or North Carolina Department of Transportation and only where documentation and supporting data indicate one of the following bases for the exemption:
 1. Use by nonmotorized users is prohibited by law.
 2. The cost would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable future use over the long term;
 3. Significant adverse environmental impacts outweigh the positive effects of the infrastructure.
 4. There is an absence of current and future need, or
 5. Inclusion of such infrastructure would be unreasonable or inappropriate in light of the scope of the project.

Policy 3.2.8: Develop Policies and Tools to Improve Complete Streets Practices.

- A. Develop a pedestrian crossings policy, addressing matters such as where to place crosswalks and when to use enhanced crossing treatments.
- B. Develop policies to improve the safety of crossings and travel in the vicinity of schools and parks.
- C. Develop a checklist for the City of Marion's development and redevelopment projects, to ensure the inclusion of infrastructure providing for safe travel for all users and enhance project outcomes and community impact.

Policy 3.2.9: Support Initiatives for Expanded Public Transportation Service. Support efforts to enhance and expand public transportation service to a broader group of users throughout the City of Marion and surrounding area; encourage the development of a public transportation

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system that increase personal mobility and travel choices, conserves energy resources, preserves air quality, and foster economic growth.

Policy 3.2.10: Continue to Seek Funding Sources to Implement Complete Streets Projects. Identify additional funding streams and implementation strategies to retrofit existing streets to make infrastructure improvements that will benefit all users.

Goal 3.3: Make Complete Streets Practices a Routine Part of the City of Marion's Everyday Operations.

Objective 3.3.1: Develop Street Standards and Design Manual. Develop street standards and design manual to add cross-section templates and design treatment details, to ensure that standards support and do not impede complete streets policies; coordinate with related policy documents such as the City of Marion Comprehensive Transportation Plan, Safe Routes To School Action Plan, and/or Downtown Streetscape Plan.

Objective 3.3.2: Revise City Ordinances and Policies That are in Conflict with Complete Streets Principles. As necessary, restructure and revise zoning and subdivision codes and other plans, laws, procedures, rules, regulations, policies, guidelines, programs, design manuals, templates, or any other similar documents, in order to integrate, accommodate, and balance the needs of all users in all street projects on public and private streets.

Objective 3.3.3: Train Appropriate Personnel on Complete Streets Principles. Make training available to planning and public works personnel and city contractors on the importance of complete streets and on the implementation and integration of multimodal infrastructure and techniques.

Policy 3.3.4: Encourage Coordination Among Agencies to Prioritize and Implement Projects. Encourage coordination among agencies and departments to develop joint prioritization, planning, and implementation of street improvement projects and programs.

Policy 3.3.5: Support State Initiatives That Look Beyond Level of Service (LOS) Standards to Prioritize Street Improvements. Encourage and support efforts by NCDOT to replace automobile level of service (LOS) as a dominant determination with multimodal level-of-service assessment criteria.

Policy 3.3.6: Collaborate with Others to Integrate Complete Streets into Regional Transportation Planning. Work in collaboration with NCDOT, NCDENR, IPRC, McDowell County Government, and other agencies to integrate bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation facility planning into regional and local transportation planning programs and agencies to encourage connectivity between jurisdictions.

Policy 3.3.7: Continue to Encourage and Support Public Involvement in the Planning, Prioritization, and Implementation Process. Continue to encourage and support public involvement in the planning process to ensure opportunities for local advocates to share information on community needs, and partner with the McDowell Health Department, McDowell Trails Association, and other agencies and organizations who have a vested interest in projects that strengthen their own mission and goals.

Goal 3.4: Encourage Alternative Forms Transportation by Fostering a Safe Environment For Pedestrians, Cyclists, and Public Transportation Users By Promoting Transportation Safety.

Objective 3.4.1: Identify Safety Issues and Solutions to Make Pedestrian and Bicycle Travel Safer. Identify safety issues and improvements that would make bicycle and pedestrian travel safer along major bicycling and walking routes and add them to the appropriate agency's improvement schedule.

Policy 3.4.2: Encourage Transportation Safety and Education. Encourage McDowell Schools, McDowell Senior Center, YMCA, McDowell Hospital, McDowell Trails Association, public safety agencies, or any other agencies or advocacy groups to provide community education about safe travel for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, and others.

Policy 3.4.3: Discourage Development That Impedes Walking and Bicycle Safety in Residential Areas. Discourage development design that impedes walking and bicycling in neighborhoods and near schools and parks.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPEMENT

While the community has had its share of economic hurdles, Marion does have a growing economy that continues to diversify and strengthen. This section provides guidance on the areas of economic development that the City should continue to foster, as well as actions that the City can take, in partnership with local economic development organizations, to build upon recent success and ensure a healthy and economically prosperous future.

Goal 4.1: Promote and Encourage Increased Diversity of Employment and Business Opportunities, Promote Access to Education and Training, Expand Entrepreneurial Opportunities, and Promote the Establishment of Retail/Service-Oriented Businesses Closer to Residential Neighborhoods Providing Synergy and Vitality Between Both the Business and the Neighborhoods They Serve.

Objective 4.1.1: Develop an Economic Development Master Plan. Work with partner organizations to develop an economic master plan that utilizes the existing retail market analysis completed in 2008 to evaluate the existing local economy, identify and articulate comparative advantages, and evaluate Marion's strengths and weaknesses in engaging in diverse economic sectors.

Objective 4.1.2: Create a Market Assessment Summary To Market Marion and Attract New Corporate Business. Work with partner organizations to develop a market assessment summary report to utilize as a tool to attract new businesses in sectors with growth potential identified in the market analysis and economic development plan, as well as sectors of growth with linkages to existing businesses within the region.

Objective 4.1.3: Streamline The Development Review Process For Vacant or Underutilized Commercial Properties. The Planning and Development Department shall look for opportunities and implement a program that establishes flexible development standards and streamlined review process for vacant and/or functionally obsolete properties that under current regulations discourage or prevent adaptive reuse or redevelopment.

Policy 4.1.4: Offer Commercial and Industrial Development Incentives to Attract New Businesses. Continue to work with partner organizations to offer commercial and industrial development incentives such as land grants, tax rebates, and tax increment financing, and seek out new strategies that provide incentives as they may become available.

Policy 4.1.5: Strengthen Economic Competitiveness Regionally and Statewide. Continue to work with MEDA, McDowell Technical Community College, MBA, and Chamber of Commerce, Advantage West, NC Rural Center, and State Department of Commerce to strengthen economic competitiveness in the state and region.

Policy 4.1.6: Prepare a Well-Educated Work Force to Meet Evolving Business Needs. Support and encourage partner organizations that provide consulting, business development, as well as management and workforce training programs to develop a well-educated and skilled workforce sought by expanding businesses and industries.

Policy 4.1.7: Support Primary and Secondary Schools in Their Efforts to Provide High Quality Education. Support and encourage quality primary and secondary education, and recognize that access to quality education is a critical component to attracting future employers and employees who care about their children's education.

Policy 4.1.8: Encourage Improvements to and Expansion of Workforce Housing Stock. Recognize that current and future workforce housing availability and needs is a critical component of Marion's overall economic development strategy.

Policy 4.1.9: Support Efforts to Establish Commercial Incubators to Foster New Business Growth. Support the efforts of interested economic organizations and other stakeholders to establish, operate, and manage a small business incubator to foster and nurture new small business startups, providing the mentoring, synergy, cost-saving support needed to become a long-term success.

Goal 4.2: Promote the Stabilization, Retention, and Expansion of Existing Businesses; and Foster An Environment Conducive To Their Growth and the Employment Opportunities Created From That Support.

Objective 4.2.1: Support Marion Business Association and Their Efforts to Promote Economic Development in Marion. The City shall continue to fund and coordinate economic development programs and support services with the Marion Business Association building on the successes achieved since the organization's creation, and continue to encourage efforts that have been successful including but not limited to:

- A. Surveying local businesses periodically to determine plans for changes or expansions, and attitudes towards current government policies;
- B. Business roundtables and breakfasts as an opportunity to learn from others success and failures, and to network with other business members in the community;
- C. Regular personal visits to businesses to offer economic development services;
- D. Publications and marketing materials that help support local businesses;
- E. Active involvement and coordination with other economic agencies and organizations to promote local businesses; and
- F. Including business owners on the board and advisory committees to discuss, recommend, and implement economic initiatives that help local commerce.

Objective 4.2.2: Create Greater Economic Vitality Along Smaller Corridors That Serve as Collectors Between Neighborhoods. Smaller corridors serving as residential collectors offer the greatest potential for businesses that focus on goods and services that support daily lifestyle needs. Encouraging such land uses to locate in close proximity to residential areas provides greater access and convenience for residents who are in turn more likely to patron those businesses. The Planning and Development Department shall amend regulations as necessary to promote more economic activity along smaller mixed-use corridors and residential collectors.

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Objective 4.2.3: Study the Feasibility and Logistics of Developing a Revolving Loan Fund. The City shall work with the MBA and other interested stakeholders to determine the feasibility of a revolving loan fund, if found to be a feasible opportunity, the City shall work with MBA and others to establish such a program.

Policy 4.2.4: Make Business Retention and Attraction a Priority. City shall continue to work with MBA and other agencies to develop and provide economic development incentives to locally-owned businesses to help them grow and expand.

Policy 4.2.5: Be Responsive to the Needs of Businesses. The City shall always be responsive to the business community and work with business owners to overcome challenges that the government can help to rectify.

Policy 4.2.6: Encourage The Use of New Technologies to Expand Market Base. City shall support efforts by the MBA and McDowell Technical Community College to develop programs to train and assist small businesses to utilize new technologies to expand their market base beyond the Marion market.

Goal 4.3: Promote and Market Marion’s Strengths and Assets That Contribute to the Quality of Life, That While Sometimes Are Intangible In Terms of Direct Economic Benefit, Make the Community an Attractive Place to Live, Work, and Do Business.

Objective 4.3.1: Continue to Revitalize Downtown Marion into the Most Vibrant Commercial Activity Center in the City. The City shall continue to work with MBA and other partnering organizations to foster revitalization and redevelopment on Main Street and downtown Marion in order to make it livable, walkable, and the most vibrant commercial activity center in Marion.

Objective 4.3.2: Initiate a Marketing Campaign That Promotes Marion as a Destination. Work with the Marion Tourism Authority or other marketing agency to develop a promotional campaign for Marion that focuses on quality of life, recreational and cultural opportunity, and unique points of interest that set it apart from other destinations in Western North Carolina. Utilize materials developed for not only tourism-based marketing but as a business and industrial recruitment tool.

Policy 4.3.3: Support Locally-Owned Businesses to Enhance The Community’s Unique Sense of Place. The City shall work with MBA and other organizations in retaining community character by encouraging and supporting the development of new locally-owned businesses and helping existing locally-owned businesses grow and expand.

Policy 4.3.4: Marion’s Historic, Cultural, Recreational, and Natural Resources Are Its Greatest Economic Recruitment Assets. The City recognizes that it’s historic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources are its greatest economic assets and will continue to enhance and protect them from incompatible land use development practices so that they can continue to be used as one of the most lucrative tools in attracting new business and employment to the community.

Policy 4.3.5: Make Visitors Feel Welcome and Invited While Visiting Marion. The city shall continue to support the Chamber of Commerce as the main welcome center, while also ensuring visitor information is available after hours at other convenient locations such as Downtown Marion, and other key destinations throughout the community.

Policy 4.3.6: Promote and Market Marion to Potential Business, Industry, Tourism-Related Interests on the Internet. Online marketing is one of the easiest and most cost effective means of marketing a community, and for better or worse, it provides outside interests with a first impression of the community. The City shall maintain an up-to-date and attractive web presence to help make a positive and inviting introduction for new business and visitor interests to enjoy.

Policy 4.3.7: Support Marion's Local Farmers Market and Promote the Economic Benefit It Provides to Area Farmers. Work with MBA and Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) to help create and expand local food markets that promote Marion's local agricultural heritage, gives residents, businesses, and visitors access to fresh, healthy food, and keeps farms in production.

Policy 4.3.8: Continue To Be Actively Involved In Programs and Initiatives Sponsored by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) sets Western North Carolina apart from the rest of the world, and as a federally funded National Park Service Program it promotes Western North Carolina as a regional destination and has been successful in attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors to the mountains each year. The City shall continue to be actively involved in program and initiatives sponsored by the BRNHA.

Policy 4.3.9: Continue to Improve the City's Way-Finding Signage Program to Assist Visitors in Navigating the Community. The City has a successful way-finding signage program, and shall continue to seek opportunities to expand the program to assist visitors with navigating the community and promoting destinations to visit.

INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC SERVICES

The City's infrastructure and public services provide the backbone for economic commerce and residential living in the community. Without adequate infrastructure, the quality of life in the city is reduced. To attract new businesses and maintain a quality of life that residents enjoy and have come to depend on, it is the City's responsibility to maintain quality of the infrastructure and services provided, and bring those systems up-to-date to meet future growth and development. Overall, the City's public utilities are meeting the current demands of the community. However, as is indicated in the Plan, meeting future needs will require planning and financial investment. New services will also be required as the City continues to grow, therefore planning ahead for infrastructure and services will be essential to ensure that the City has the resources to manage those additional services as required by state and federal law.

Goal 5.1: Continue to Provide and Maintain the Quality of Public Infrastructure and Services That the Public Has Come to Enjoy and Depend On from the City.

Policy 5.1.1: Continue to Provide Adequate Public Infrastructure and Services to the Community. Continue to work to ensure that Marion residents have access to adequate public infrastructure and services, and strive to maintain the quality of service currently provided as the community continues to grow and develop.

Policy 5.1.2: Maintain Policy Requiring New Development to Connect to Water and Sewer System. Require that the installation of infrastructure as occurs concurrently with new development.

Policy 5.1.3: Implement New Programs, Policies, and Standards as Required By State and Federal Agencies. From time to time, state and/or federal agencies amend regulations or implement policies and/or programs that public utilities and service providers are required to implement. The City shall implement new programs, policies, regulations, and other standards as required to remain in compliance with state and federal agencies.

Goal 5.2: Ensure That the Community Has a Safe, Potable Water Supply and an Adequate System of Distribution including Water Towers, Retention Wells, and Service Lines.

Objective 5.2.1: Make Upgrades as Needed to the Water Treatment Plant. Study the need for updates to the existing water treatment plant to ensure safe and adequate water supply is maintained.

Objective 5.2.2: Maintain a Safe and Adequate Water Supply. Evaluate the future adequacy of Marion's water supply and identify opportunities for off-stream impoundments for the development of emergency water intake on the Catawba River for the use in drought conditions or other warranted event.

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Objective 5.2.3: Loop Water Service Lines to Provide Maximum Service. The City shall continue to look for opportunities to loop the water line system where feasible to ensure maximum service coverage at all times.

Objective 5.2.4: Maintain and Improve Water Pressure as Needed for Optimal Operating Conditions. Replace outdated and/or undersized existing water lines, as is appropriate, striving to maintain normal working pressure of between 50 and 60 psi, and no less than 35 psi and no greater than 100 psi under normal operating conditions.

Policy 5.2.5: Investigate the Cause Water Pressure Problems and Correct Any Problems That Are Found. If water pressures of below 35 psi or 100 psi are found within the system the City shall evaluate the condition and make recommendation for improvements that bring psi to acceptable operating levels to avoid contamination or leakage.

Policy 5.2.6: Provide Potable Water That Has Been Treated and Regularly Tested. Protect the health of residents by providing a safe water supply through the treatment and regular testing of water before distribution to the community.

Policy 5.2.7: Improve the City's Fire Rating by Providing Adequate Water Supply. Maintain, if not improve, the City's fire rating that is in part affected by the quality and quantity of the water service available in the community.

Policy 5.2.8: Maintain the City's Policy for Only Allowing the Use of Alternative Water Systems Under Special and Limited Circumstances. Continue to support the policy that allows the City to evaluate the feasibility of using a private well on a case-by-case basis. In addition, the policy should establish a procedure for the proper abandonment of an unused well.

Goal 5.3: Ensure That Residents Have an Adequate Sanitary Sewer System Including Treatment Facility, Lift Stations, and Collection Systems.

Policy 5.3.1: Treat Waste Water In Accordance with State and Federal Guidelines. Protect public health by treating sewage in accordance with Federal and State guidelines before releasing it back into Corpening Creek.

Policy 5.3.2: Maintain Adequate Capacity to Support Needs of Current and Future Users. The City shall maintain a waste treatment system has adequate capacity to support the existing community as well as any new development that may be proposed.

Policy 5.3.3: Maintain the City's Policy for Only Allowing the Use of Septic Systems When It Can Be Reasonably Justified. The City shall maintain its policy for only allowing the use of private septic systems on a limited and justifiable basis. In addition, the policy should establish a procedure for the proper abandonment of an unused or abandoned system.

Policy 5.3.4: Replace Outdated and/or Undersized Sewer Lines to Maintain Adequate Service. The City shall replace outdated and/or undersized existing sewer lines as needed to maintain existing quality of service, or as needed to accommodate expanding needs.

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Policy 5.3.5: Reduce Level of Storm Water Entering the Waste Treatment System to Improve System Efficiency. The City shall eliminate to the greatest extent possible the infiltration of storm water entering the waste treatment system, which becomes a financial and operational burden.

Goal 5.4: Maintain a Clean and Safe Community by Providing Adequate Solid Waste Services to Meet Existing and Future Needs.

Objective 5.4.1: Work With McDowell County to Update the Countywide Solid Waste Management Plan. The City Solid Waste Department shall work closely with McDowell County to update the County-Wide Solid Waste Management Plan as is required every three years in accordance with N.C. General Statute 130A-309.09A.

Objective 5.4.2: Expand the City's Recycling Program. Increase the number of recycling locations within the City by providing additional recycling collection points at all public parks and other city-owned facilities, and encourage the implementation of private recycling programs and activities.

Policy 5.4.3: Provide Solid Waste Services to All Members of the Community. The City shall continue to provide disposal capacity, waste collection services, and waste reduction programs to all members of the community at an equitable price.

Policy 5.4.4: Reduce the Improper Disposal of Waste and Expand Waste Reduction Opportunities. The City shall continue to implement cost effective waste reduction programs that are convenient and accessible to the public in an effort reduce improper disposal of waste.

Policy 5.4.5: Continue to Educate the Importance of Recycling. The City shall continue to work with McDowell County and Keep McDowell Beautiful to help educate the public on the benefits of recycling, and opportunities available to keep Marion a clean and safe community.

Goal 5.5: Continue to Provide the Most Professional Level of Public Safety Service to the Community to Maintain the Quality of Life, Public Safety, and Protection That the Community Depends On.

Objective 5.5.1: Maintain a Current Emergency Operations and Hazard Mitigation Plan. The City shall review and update the City's Emergency Operations and Hazard Mitigation Plans, as necessary, to respond to physical growth and change within the community, and work with county and regional public safety agencies to prepare and strengthen response to natural disasters and other hazardous events.

Objective 5.5.2: Evaluate Current Training, Equipment, and Facility Needs and Establish Plan For Timely Improvements and Upgrades. The City currently provides equipment, training, and facilities for public safety personnel and volunteers so that they are prepared and equipped to respond to any public safety situation. To maintain the safety of personnel, volunteers, and the public, the City shall as needed, evaluate current training, equipment, and training facility needs, and establish a plan for improvements and upgrades to provide the most professional service to the community.

Objective 5.5.3: Study the Need for Public Safety Substations and Establish a Plan for Adding Substations to Respond to Community Growth and Development. The City has doubled in size over the past ten years. As growth continues, it will necessitate the need to establish substations in additional areas of the community to provide adequate response to public safety needs. The City shall evaluate the existing need by determining thresholds that reduce sufficient ratings and overall response to public safety needs, and establish a plan for new substations.

Objective 5.5.4: Improve Fire Hydrant Visibility: The City shall, through interdepartmental coordination, paint fire hydrant caps with high-visibility reflective paint to increase visibility to assist in locating hydrants in the dark or under low visibility conditions and to increase overall response time.

Policy 5.5.5: Recruit Well-Qualified Public Safety Personnel and Volunteers. The City shall continue to actively recruit and maintain highly skilled and trained police and fire personnel and volunteers to provide the best quality and professional service to the public.

Policy 5.5.6: Continue to Ensure That Marion is a Safe Community by Meeting or Exceeding Recognized Standards for Public Safety. City Public Safety Departments shall strive to meet and exceed recognized and professional standards in their respective fields through professional certifications and above average rating achievements.

Policy 5.5.7: Maximize Visibility By Optimizing Patrol Deployment. The City shall continue to maximize visibility within the community by having routine uniform patrol within residential neighborhoods, and strengthen visibility through routine evaluation of public safety data and statistics.

Goal 5.6: Improve Energy Conservation and Make Efficient Use of Other Utilities to Preserve Resources and Reduce Operational Costs, and Encourage the Community To Do the Same.

Policy 5.6.1: Maintain Close Partnerships with Utility Providers. The City shall continue to work with utility providers, including Duke Energy, Frontier, Charter, and other service providers to ensure that residents of the community have access to good quality services.

Policy 5.6.2: Coordinate with Utilities when Land Development Activity Occurs. The City shall continue to work cooperatively and communicate openly with utility providers regarding land use development so that services can be provided in an orderly and timely manner to meet the potential utility and energy needs.

Policy 5.6.3: Encourage the Use of Clean Energy Initiatives. Encourage utility providers as well as private development interests to consider clean energy initiatives, increase energy efficiencies through better design and operation, and when feasible install more efficient technologies, such as solar, geothermal, and/or wind energy to increase efficiency, protect the environment, and reduce consumer costs.

Policy 5.6.4: Encourage Utility Providers to Enhance Services. Encourage utility providers to explore ventures that would enhance services to their customers.

PARKS & RECREATION

Being located in a region full of national parks, forests, lakes, and rivers is one the City's greatest assets. Those who enjoy being outdoors have access to a variety of settings suitable for either land-based or water-based recreation. The City has also been very active in building parks in residential neighborhoods and establishing greenways and other trails linking residential areas to parks, schools, and commercial areas. Within Marion's parks a variety of facilities can be found such as fitness trails, basketball and tennis courts, splash pad, and Frisbee golf. This section provides guidance on new facilities that will build upon the existing parks and recreation system and link these assets together through a network of greenways and other trails.

Goal 6.1: Provide a Balanced Recreation and Open Space System That Meets the Needs of the Community That is Efficient to Administer and Maintain.

Objective 6.1.1: Maintain a Parks, Recreation and Open Space Designation. The City of Marion shall identify public park sites, recreation facilities and open space on the City's Official Zoning Map and FLUM. The Recreation and Open Space (RO) zoning and land use designation is intended to accommodate existing public parks and recreation facilities, and open space systems. The City shall designate such areas based on the development of new or expanded parks and recreation systems and dedicated open space to help identify current service areas and future needs

Objective 6.1.2: Update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Every Five Years. The City of Marion shall review the need for new or enhanced recreation and open space sites and facilities predicated on data, standards and policies, and update the Parks and Recreation Plan as needed to ensure that community recreational needs are being met.

Objective 6.1.3: Monitor and Update Recreation Supply and Demand. Beginning after the effective date of the comprehensive plan, every five years thereafter, the City of Marion shall prepare a report updating the recreation and open space inventory and analysis of the plan. If the analysis identifies any deficiencies, the City shall enact a method for meeting the deficiency.

Policy 6.1.4: Receive Recommendations by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. The Marion Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee shall assist, under their role and responsibility, to periodically evaluate the City's parks and recreation system and make recommendations to the City Council.

Policy 6.1.5: Provide a Balanced Parks and Recreation System. The City shall continue to provide a balanced park and recreation system available to all segments of the community, and shall encourage people of all ages and ability levels to participate in programs and facilities to improve their health and fitness.

Policy 6.1.6: Designate or Acquire Land for Parks, Recreation and Open Space. As land, facility, and improvement needs are identified, the City shall investigate the potential of funding through use of public or private non-profit agency resources to designate or acquire land for the purpose of enhancing the City's parks and recreation system.

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Policy 6.1.7: Coordinate with Other Organizations and Agencies. The City of Marion shall coordinate with other local, state, federal agencies as well as, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector in fulfilling the recreation and open space needs of the community.

Policy 6.1.8: Seek Grants and Alternative Sources of Funding to Build Parks and Recreational Facilities. The City of Marion shall ensure that local and non-local sources of financial and technical assistance for land acquisition, planning, design and development of parks, recreation and open space are sought and received to ensure that recreation goals are achieved in a cost effective and fiscally equitable manner.

Goal 6.2: Ensure Parks and Recreational Facilities Are Well Planned to Ensure Safe and Accessible Facilities for All Users.

Policy 6.2.1: Maintain Safe Recreational Facilities. The City shall maintain and enhance parks sites and recreation facilities to ensure safe public facilities are available. Annually, prior to the adoption of the annual budget, the City shall review the need for improvements, repairs and general preventive maintenance, and shall set aside capital for such needs during the budget process.

Policy 6.2.2: Treat Parks and Open Space as an Amenity That Improves Quality of Life. The City shall continue to maintain, preserve, and enhance the desirable and distinctive characteristics of the community and its individual neighborhoods by strengthening its sense of place through neighborhood parks, recreation facilities and open space.

Policy 6.2.3: Build a Comprehensive Greenway System. Identify, evaluate and prioritize the acquisition and dedication of lands that will remove barriers, which restrict access, in order to connect residential areas with other land uses to create an interconnected system of parks, trails and open space.

Policy 6.2.4: Incorporate Creative Design Concepts and Conserve Environmentally Sensitive Open Space. Active and passive recreation areas shall be planned in a manner compatible with the natural resources found within the City. Park improvements shall be designed to preserve, protect and enhance the environmental, historical, and cultural resources found on each site. Where appropriate, recreation areas shall be designed to provide a circulation system that minimizes conflict between bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles. Adequate landscape and screening shall be integrated into park improvement plans to minimize land use conflicts, protect stability of established residential areas and enhance community appearance.

Policy 6.2.5: Ensure Recreation and Open Space Facilities are ADA Accessible. All public recreational facilities shall continue to be compliant with federal ADA standards and made accessible to all ages and ability levels, as appropriate and safe, given a facility's function as part of the recreation and open space system.

Policy 6.2.6: Promote the Urban Forestry Program. The City of Marion shall work with the City Tree Board to promote urban forestry activities that provide additional landscaping and tree planting along transportation routes and throughout the City to enhance public open space and public parks.

Goal 6.3: Support Public and Private Partnerships to Plan and Implement Efficient Delivery of Parks and Recreation Services.

Objective 6.3.1: Continue to Build and Strengthen Partnerships with Recreation-Based and Public Health Advocates to Enhance Health and Fitness Community-Wide. The City of Marion shall continue to partner with and strengthen partnerships with other public agencies and private organizations to enhance the City's parks and recreation system to increase access to recreational amenities that improve health and fitness community-wide.

Policy 6.3.2: Ensure Citizens Recreational Needs and Priorities Are Met. The City of Marion shall through the public process maintain an open dialogue with the community to encourage and accommodate citizen participation in how plans, constructs, and operates its parks and recreation facilities and services.

Policy 6.3.3: Support the Expansion of Recreational Facilities and Programs Provided by Partner Organizations and Agencies. The City shall support partner organizations such as the McDowell Trails Association, YMCA, McDowell County Health Department, Foothills Conservancy, Muddy Creek Restoration Partnership, Rails to Trails, NCDENR Division of Parks and Recreation, and other groups that provide additional recreational opportunities that encourage a healthy active lifestyle.

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PUBLIC HEALTH & NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

Abundant natural resources define Marion's unique sense of place. The mountains, forests, rivers and streams, and agricultural land are tangible assets that make the community an appealing place to live and work, while contributing directly and indirectly to the local economy. In order to ensure that the health and well being of the community is protected and Marion's unique sense of place is preserved it is necessary to recognize how the built environment influences the natural environment, and take measures to mitigate any impacts that destroy natural resources, damage personal property, and/or harm the public's safety. In large part, Marion has not had to face many of the environmental challenges that are commonly associated with increased development and urbanization. However, as the City continues to grow and develop these challenges will become increasingly difficult to manage, and have the potential to become a considerable socio-economic burden on the community. Fortunately, Marion has taken steps both directly and indirectly to protect natural resources and mitigate risks to public safety and personal property. Moving forward with similar low-cost and practical solutions to these challenges will reduce long-term economic impact and enhance community well being.

Goal 7.1: Enhance the Management of Natural and Manmade Hydrological Systems Throughout the Community to Mitigate Problems Associated with Erosion and Flooding on both Public and Private Properties, Reduce Infiltration Into the Public Waste Treatment System, and Reduce the Number of Pollutants Contaminating the Community's Natural Water Resources.

Objective 7.1.2: Establish an Incentive Program to Encourage Compliance with Flood Standards to Reduce Risk of Damage from Flood Events. The City shall establish a program that allows for flexible development regulations in federally designated flood hazard areas providing property owners development opportunities not obtainable under standard regulations, while encouraging floodplain compliant redevelopment that reduces risk of public health and safety as well as damage to personal property from a flooding event.

Objective 7.1.3: Create a Storm Water Best Management Practices Guide for Property Owners. Work with MCRP to develop a public guide of Best Management Practices for alternative storm water management that will provide strategies and solutions for improving site specific storm water problems.

Objective 7.1.4: Work with MCRP to Resolve Marion's Current Storm Water Problems. Work with MCRP to identify storm water problem areas within the community, and allow them to engineer and implement sound storm water management solutions that help protect properties from erosion, reduce pollutant loads in adjacent waters, and enhance the areas natural beauty, including areas that can be used for or in conjunction with parks, open spaces, and/or greenways.

Objective 7.1.5: Prepare for State Mandated Storm Water Regulations. The City shall prepare itself for new regulatory requirements for locally implemented storm water management

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programs by studying the financial impact it will have on the City, and identify opportunities prior to any mandate that would lessen the financial burden on the City and City taxpayers.

Policy 7.1.6: Comply with all State and Federal Storm Water Regulations. The day will come when the City will be required by state law to implement a storm water program, when that day comes the City shall comply with all State and Federal regulations for storm water regulations.

Objective 7.1.7: Amend City Regulations as Needed to Reduce the Frequency of Soil Erosion Problems Associated with Storm Water Runoff. The City shall review regulations that require developers to work with the natural environment and its characteristics in order to protect the city and adjacent property owners from flooding and erosion problems.

Goal 7.2: Improve and Sustain Community Quality and Livability by Mitigating Adverse Impacts from Excessive Noise, Glaring Light, Dust and Other Pollutants That Are Detrimental to the Comfort, Enjoyment, and Well Being of the Community.

Objective 7.2.1: Create a Landscape Manual to Promote Citywide Beautification. The City shall design a user-friendly landscape manual that provides information to property owners and developers including useful information regarding native landscaping and other materials suitable to Marion, innovative design solutions and examples, interpretation of the City's landscape regulations and review process, and any other information that may be of benefit to the community and promote best management practices for the installation and maintenance of landscape and open space areas.

Policy 7.2.2: Continue to Require the Installation of Landscaping as Part of All New Development Projects. The City shall continue to require the installation of landscaping in all new development projects including designated areas and size of open space that includes a mixture of vegetation and other natural materials to enhance the aesthetics of the property, provide shade protection and reduce heat gain "urban heat island effect" thus reducing energy costs for cooling, and reduce the amount of impervious surface which contributes to stormwater runoff, erosion, and degradation of water quality.

Policy 7.2.3: Promote Open Space and Natural Resource Protection Through The Landscape Ordinance. The City shall continue to promote the preservation of open space, protection of the natural environment, and the physical appearance of the community through the use of landscape regulations.

Policy 7.2.4: Use Professional Landscaping Practices in City Projects. It shall be the City's policy to incorporate professional practices as recommended in the landscape manual in city projects in an effort to promote good landscape and environmental design, provide local examples of techniques outlined in the manual, and enhance the appearance of public spaces.

Objective 7.2.5: Review and Update the Landscape Ordinance When Zoning District and Development Standards Warrant Changes. The City of Marion shall evaluate and revise the City Zoning Regulations to amend landscape and open space requirements that are more suitable

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to the size and scale of development, the intensity and density of land uses, and the transition of such land uses.

Policy 7.2.6: Allow For Flexible and Alternative Landscape Practices. It shall be the City's policy to work with the public to allow for alternative landscape practices when such design is similar to or exceeds the City's regulatory standards or where meeting the requirements would have a negative effect on the public or well-being of the community.

Objective 7.2.7: Find Solutions to Poor Landscape Practices and Work with Property Owners to Make Improvements. The City shall continue to work in the community to resolve problems associated with poor landscape design, management, and/or land use practices that have a negative impact on the natural environment, water-quality, community appearance, and property values.

Policy 7.2.8: Continue Active Enforcement of Poorly Maintained Properties. The City shall actively pursue code violations associated with unmaintained open space areas on developed properties, as well as properties that have been cleared of naturally existing vegetation and have not been maintained to developed standards in appearance.

Policy 7.2.9: Support the Efforts of Organizations Working to Enhance the Community's Natural Environment. It shall be the City's policy to work with organizations and interested stakeholders to promote best management practices for landscaping, open space, and environmental design, and strive to preserve and protect the natural resources that are of importance to the community's long-term economic and public vitality and sustainability.

Policy 7.2.10: Support an Active Tree Board and Oversee Urban Forestry Program. The City shall continue to support the Marion Tree Board who work to install trees and other landscaping community-wide, which provides shelter, beauty, urban heat reduction, and separation from automobile traffic.

Policy 7.2.11: Support Local Efforts to Eradicate Invasive Plants and Animals. Invasive species can adversely affect the natural ecosystem if left unchecked. The City shall support efforts to eradicate these species before they spread and cause greater harm to the local ecosystem.

Policy 7.2.12: Minimize Removal of Vegetation in All New Developments. The City shall encourage new development to minimize the unnecessary removal of existing vegetation. In particular, the cutting of mature native trees, especially on unstable slopes and along creek and river banks to avoid soil erosion and bank destabilization.

Goal 7.3: Protect Marion's Quality of Life and Sense of Place by Limiting Noise and Light Emissions that Produce Glare, Light Trespass, Noise, Vibrations, and Other Sensory-Related Nuisances That Make the Community a Less Desirable Place to Live.

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Objective 7.3.1: Study the Impacts and Solutions To Light and Noise Pollution. The City shall study the impacts of noise and light pollution on adjacent properties paying particular attention to the impacts of noise on residential neighborhoods and public uses and facilities, and provide recommendation on strategies and other solutions to mitigate potential noise and light impacts.

Objective 7.3.2: Establish an Outdoor Lighting Ordinance. The Planning and Development Department shall draft an outdoor lighting ordinance that will guide the illumination levels, types of lighting, shielding and placement of lighting, and heights of light fixtures to minimize glare and light trespass onto adjacent properties, while allowing for acceptable levels illumination that adequately address individual lighting needs.

Objective 7.3.3: Minimize Existing Light Pollution Problems. The City shall identify and provide opportunities to minimize existing light disturbances through various strategies and/or programs that provide assistance and/or incentives to replace or refurbish lighting equipment.

Policy 7.3.4: Encourage Citizens To Install Appropriate Outdoor Lighting. The City shall encourage citizens to install only the level of outdoor lighting necessary for safety, security, and utility purposes while limiting light trespass onto neighboring properties.

Objective 7.3.5: Amend City Ordinances as Necessary to Address Noise Pollution. The City shall draft new noise regulations based on recommended strategies, guidelines, and opportunities for managing noise as identified in the noise impact study.

Policy 7.3.6: Work with the Marion Police Department Curtail Noisy Vehicles. The City shall continue to promote the load vehicle postcard complaint program and work together with the Marion Police Department to curtail noisy vehicles.

Policy 7.3.7: Continue to Minimize Noise Disturbance in Neighborhoods. The City shall continue to minimize noise disturbance in neighborhoods, with a particular emphasis on reducing noise at night and in the early morning hours.

Policy 7.3.8: Discourage New Development That Increase Noise Levels Beyond Acceptable Levels. The City shall discourage development that will significantly increase existing noise levels, unless mitigation measures are designed as part of the project to limit noise emissions to an acceptable level compared to existing sound levels. It is recommended that future developments requiring board of adjustment approval consider criteria that would encourage proper site planning and/or building orientation to lessen noise intrusion and minimize noise elements on adjacent land uses.

Policy 7.3.9: Encourage NCDOT to Maintain Adequate Sound Barriers Between Highways and Residential Land Uses. The City shall strongly encourage NCDOT to maintain adequate sound barriers between highways and residential land uses utilizing soundproofing walls or heavily vegetated buffers.

Goal 7.4: Encourage Others to Preserve, Protect, and Utilize Natural Resource in a Sustainable Manner That Are Beyond Local Jurisdictional Control, but Influence Marion's Unique Sense of Place.

Policy 7.4.1: Support Land Acquisition That Protects Natural Resources and Preserves Public Access. The City shall support regional projects that work to protect the natural environment and preserve existing and future public access for the public to enjoy.

Policy 7.4.2: Discourage Steep Slope Development. The City shall not support development projects in areas susceptible to landslides which create irreparable damage, and which permanently impact Marion's scenic vistas, aesthetic character of the area's natural features.

Policy 7.4.3: Support Measures That Protect the Region's Air Quality. The City of Marion shall support measure that protect air quality so that air pollution levels do not threaten public health and safety, and discourage measures that would place undue burden on the community as a result of socio-economic conditions and/or geographical location.

Policy 7.4.4: Encourage Comprehensive Planning of Regional Open Space Protection And Preservation. The City shall encourage and work with organizations engaged in regional comprehensive planning for open space protection and preservation.

Policy 7.4.5: Support the Preservation of Unique Plant Communities and Wildlife Habitats. The City shall be supportive of efforts to preserve and protect habitats shown to be necessary for the protection of rare and endangered plants and animals.

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COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Throughout the planning process, citizens and stakeholders frequently expressed their desire to “preserve and enhance Marion’s small town character”. Through public meetings and public input the community envisions that Marion will grow steadily, without losing its small town character and sense of place. The first thing visitors often notice about a community is the overall design, care, and planning given to the details of the community. Even though some design elements may be time consuming and costly, they are the most rewarding and often build upon the community’s existing legacy and landmarks. Marion should consider these efforts and the community’s desire for “preserving and enhancing Marion’s small town character” when addressing community design in the future.

The Community Character section focuses on the elements that define Marion’s identity and unique sense of place. It is a collection of both tangible and intangible characteristics that make the community inherently unique from any other place and have special meaning and value to citizens. An attractive and inviting city will attract quality development, instill civic pride, enhance visual character, promote healthy living, and create a strong, positive image for Marion. This section provides direction for these characteristics and how they can be protected, reinforced, and enhanced to foster greater physical identity, economic vitality, and social well-being.

Goal 8.1: Maintain and Enhance, Whenever Possible, the Quality of Life and Sense of Place That Citizens Value and Enjoy.

Objective 8.1.1: Establish Design Guide and Form-Based Standards That Preserve and Enhance The Community. The City shall establish a set of design guidelines and form-based regulations that encourage preferred development and redevelopment that enhances and preserves the distinctive, attractive character and the community’s strong sense of place of Marion and amend current ordinances and regulations as needed to encourage alternative development and redevelopment opportunities.

Objective 8.1.2: Minimize the Impact of Automobiles in Residential Neighborhoods. Minimize the impacts of automobiles in residential neighborhoods by providing multi-modal transportation alternatives, applying road treatments that are aesthetically pleasing, enhancing neighborhood appearance, and through amending current ordinances and regulations to foster an appropriate mix of land uses that help create healthy walkable neighborhoods.

Policy 8.1.3: Focus on Community Assets and Citizen Engagement to Enhance Blighted and Underutilized Areas. At times, tired, transitional, or blighted areas appear to be overwhelming of a challenge. The City shall work with citizens to identify the assets that can be capitalized on and utilize resources available to improve and enhance blighted and underutilized areas to enhance appearance, make areas more productive, and increase property values.

Policy 8.1.4: Encourage Retail Centers to Maintain an Attractive Appearance. The City shall encourage retail centers to maintain distinctive and attractive appearances to create a destination, which is inviting, attracts consumers, maintains tenant occupancy, and increases revenues.

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Policy 8.1.5: Consider Needs of the Aging Population and Other Demographic Shifts When Planning New Facilities and Services. Incorporating specialized community design strategies related to housing, transportation, and land use will enable older citizens to maintain their independence, allow them to age in place, foster better health, and to actively participate in community life. The City shall consider the needs of the aging population and other demographic shifts when planning new facilities and services.

Policy 8.1.6: Seek Opportunities to Improve the Appearance and Vitality of Corridors. The City shall look for opportunities that will help improve the appearance of corridors utilizing strategies and initiatives implemented in the downtown.

Policy 8.1.7: Foster a New Generation of Civic Leaders. The City shall continue to educate and involve young citizens and professionals by providing opportunities for them to gain a better understanding of all that the local government does to make the community a vibrant and healthy place to live, work, and play.

Goal 8.2: Foster an Environment That Supports the Arts and Cultural Events That Will Enrich Lives and Build Greater Appreciation While Creating a More Attractive and Vibrant Sense of Place.

Policy 8.2.1: Support the Arts and Events That Provide Community Enrichment. The City shall continue to support local arts and cultural organizations, events, and facilities such as Marion Business Association, Historic Marion Tailgate Market, McDowell Arts Council, and Historic McDowell House that offer enriching experiences and enhance the community.

Policy 8.2.2: Establish Art in Public Places. The City shall support a favorable environment for a flourishing arts community and promote the full range of artistic and cultural activities, including but not limited to programs and activities that establish and provide access to art in public places such as parks, schools, public building, and encourage the community support this effort.

Goal 8.3: Improve Health, Safety, and Mental Well Being of Residents by Creating Convenient and Safe Opportunities for Physical Activity and Access to Healthy Food.

Objective 8.3.1: Remove Barriers That Hinder Access to Healthy Food Options. The Planning and Development Department shall evaluate existing regulatory barriers that hinder access to healthy food choices, and make recommendation on increasing accessibility in close proximity to residential areas, in particular, low income areas where access is more limited.

Policy 8.3.2: Support Community Urban Agriculture and Garden Projects. The City shall support urban agriculture projects that provide access to healthy food options within walking distance of residential neighborhoods such as community gardens, school gardens, urban orchards, and other agricultural-based projects, as well as native plant or botanical gardens that support educational opportunities all of which provide direct benefit to the community.

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Policy 8.3.3: Provide Equal Access to Public Parks and Other Recreational Amenities.

The City shall continue its efforts to ensure that residents of all ages and income levels have access to walking trails, public parks, and/or other recreational amenities providing them with the facilities that will help them meet their daily exercise needs.

Policy 8.3.4: Improve Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Public Transportation Connectivity.

Continue to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and public transportation access to and connectivity between residential areas, educational and child-care facilities, hospital and health care services, employment centers, grocery stores, retail centers, recreational areas, historic and cultural sites, and other key destination points within the City.

Policy 8.3.5: Create a Safe and Healthy Environment for Children Through the Safe Routes to School Program.

The City shall work with NCDOT and other agencies to provide children with safe and appealing opportunities for walking and bicycling to school in order to decrease school-hour traffic, reduce energy consumption, and improve air quality. Encourage exercise and healthy living habits in children, reduce the risk of injury to children through traffic collisions near schools, and foster an environment that improves their ability to learn.

Policy 8.3.6: Continue to Work with Schools to Improve Transportation Safety.

The City shall continue to work with area schools to improve transportation safety, including drop-off and pickup zones, and locations where interactions occur between pedestrians, bicyclists, automobiles, and buses.

Policy 8.3.7: Assist Public Health Advocates in Their Efforts To Improve Public Health.

Assist public health advocacy organizations in their efforts to reduce asthma levels, diabetes, obesity, chronic and cardiovascular disease, and other ailments, as well as reduce social isolation that all enhance community well-being.

Goal 8.4: Protect Marion’s Historic Resources and Create Public Awareness, Knowledge, and Appreciation for These Assets That Make the City a Unique Place.

Objective 8.4.1: Maintain an Inventory of Historic Resources. The Planning and Development Department in coordination with The City’s Historic Preservation Commission shall maintain and update as needed an inventory of historic resources within the corporate limits and make that information available to the public. The information shall include a survey of historic resources within the city limits and GIS mapping of their location.

Objective 8.4.2: Seek Certified Local Government Status. The City shall work with the Historic Preservation Commission to apply for Certified Local Government (CLG) Status through the State historic Preservation Office, and utilize opportunities through this status to enhance Marion’s resources.

Policy 8.4.3: Support Property Owner’s Efforts to Restore Historic Buildings. The City shall work with property owners in their efforts to rehabilitate historic buildings providing information on funding sources and other opportunities available to them for restoration purposes.

Policy 8.4.4: Utilize Marion’s Historic Assets to Promote and Market Marion. The City shall continue to encourage the Historic Marion Foundation and McDowell Tourism Association to promote and market Marion and its historic assets.

Policy 8.4.5: Encourage the Preservation of Marion’s Mill Villages. The City shall encourage Cross Mill, Clinchfield, and the East Marion neighborhoods to preserve the integrity of their mill villages and acknowledge them as areas that contribute to the history of Marion.