

# Chapter 21

## Citizen Participation

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The involvement of citizens in the governing of society is the subject of history itself. The demand for greater citizen involvement and control has been the central issue in wars as well as revolutions in this and other countries. Within the governmental system of the United States, the level and effectiveness of citizen participation have varied in both kind and degree.

For the development of this Comprehensive Plan, citizen participation is not only vital to the success of the plan, but is specifically cited in the WV State Enabling Planning Legislation in §8A-3-1 (b) as the comprehensive plan is described as the process through which **citizen participation** and through analysis are used to develop a set of strategies that establish as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future land development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning commission.

The City of Fairmont Planning Department and the Fairmont Planning Commission undertook several steps to ensure citizen participation was open and welcomed during the planning process. Over forty letters were sent out to community leaders advising and inviting them to participate in the weekly work sessions that were scheduled for the planning process. With that letter was a schedule of the work session dates and the topic that would be discussed. Simultaneously, the local newspaper ran several stories on the new planning legislation and the Comprehensive Plan process that the City of Fairmont was undertaking. The articles also included the schedule for the work sessions and follow-up articles were written that would give citizens an update on the planning process as well as encourage them to attend an upcoming work session. All but two of the work sessions were held in the Fairmont City Council Chambers, which is handicapped accessible and able to accommodate large audiences. Two work sessions were moved due to the November 2004 Election process to the City of Fairmont Water Filtration Plant Conference Room, which is also an ADA compliant facility. Fittingly, the topics of Public Services and Infrastructure were discussed on those nights and gave officials with the City the opportunity to give the public a tour of the new facilities and explain the water treatment process to residents.

The development of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Fairmont began in September of 2004 with the first work session and continued weekly (no work sessions were held during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays) until the end of January, 2005. During the month of February, 2005 the Fairmont Planning Department staff compiled notes from the work sessions, completed mapping and prepared for a final work session to be held in early March, 2005, which would allow the public final input in the document before its scheduled Public Hearing before the Planning Commission in late of March, 2005. Again, the public received notification of the work session through direct mail and through newspaper article. While the nine members of the Fairmont Planning Commission served as the core group meeting each week with the Planning Department staff, several community leaders attended all of the workshops during the plan's formation.

The City of Fairmont Planning Department staff maintained a file for citizen's complaints during the planning process just as they do for projects funded by the Small Cities Block Grant Program and no complaints were filed during the planning process. The planning staff also maintained a project file that included the documents prepared and reviewed during the work sessions, research for the plan's preparation, notes and other miscellaneous information. This file was available for

review by the public and a composite of this information has been included at the end of this chapter.

While the City of Fairmont's choice to prepare this Comprehensive Plan utilizing City staff was originally based on their financial inability to hire a consulting firm for the plan's development, it became clear during the work sessions that the community and residents felt more apart of the process due to their familiarity with the City planning staff and members of the Commission. The result is a true grass root oriented Comprehensive Plan prepared by those with a vested interest in the growth and development of the City of Fairmont.

### March 5, 2005 Work Shop at City of Fairmont Filtration Plant

