

Chapter 12

Preferred Development Areas

A. OVERVIEW

Establishing preferred development areas allows municipalities to address the problems arising from poorly planned or negative historical growth patterns. Preferred development areas are where incentives may be used to encourage more efficient well-designed development either through infill or redevelopment. Establishing more suitable growth areas that are proximal to existing infrastructure and community facilities prevents sprawl. The preferred development areas are able to tie into existing roads, water and sewer infrastructure and are located near schools, churches and governmental services. Development patterns that provide for a mix of uses within a general area allow people to walk or even bike to and from their homes for work, shopping, recreation and entertainment. Preferred development areas are also places that best integrate the use of open space and natural areas during development.

An important distinction to make at this point is that preferred development areas are not boundaries where the only growth within the municipality can occur. Development is not restricted outside of the preferred area and allowed to run wild within the preferred area. Instead the concept seeks to identify the areas of the municipality that at the time has distinct advantages to being developed over other areas of the community, i.e. proximity to major roadways, water and sewer services, critical mass. The concept is not utilized to create an exclusive area, merely communities implement it, as a means of showing where development should be encouraged and through changing circumstances other areas may emerge as additional preferred development areas.

B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

The goal and actions of this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan are designed to provide guidance and direction for identifying areas most suitable for future development.

Goal:

The City of Fairmont should implement the practice of establishing Preferred Development Areas to encourage efficient and coordinated well-designed development within the community.

Actions:

- Provide a rational pattern for future land development
- Support planned concentration of mixed uses
- Encourage economical infrastructure expansion
- Provide efficient transportation opportunities
- Coordinate infrastructure improvements with private sector development

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS



As discussed in other sections of this Comprehensive Plan, the City of Fairmont was for all intensive purposes “built out” by the 1960’s. The City features included a bustling downtown, densely populated neighborhoods and strong industrial centers. A zoning ordinance was established in the 1959 that regulated development and with some modification through the years, is still the document that guides the growth and development of the City today.

Over time Fairmont has seen buildings become vacant and deteriorate as jobs were lost and the economy shifted from sole dependence on the traditional mainstays of mining and manufacturing as the service and high tech markets emerged. This shift has brought some development to Fairmont, most notably in the creation of the I-79 Technology Park. Over \$5 million dollars in public and private money was spent to renovate the former G.C. Murphy Building in downtown Fairmont in the late 90’s bring the first real Class “A” office space to downtown. Jobs have been created as a result of the new markets, but additional development has been slow. For the residential market, a recently completed housing analysis revealed that only 28% of the existing housing stock in Fairmont has been built since 1960.

With a lack of available land for development, the City’s future development trends will be grounded in redevelopment of current sites and through infill. The growth of the region and the pace of development to the North and South of Fairmont make Fairmont the next logical development area in the corridor. The continuation of improvements and expansion of the City’s infrastructure system, including new planned roadways and upgrades to community facilities such as the new Public Safety Building and Downtown Parking Garage will ripen the environment for future development. The City of Fairmont’s challenge is to promote the environment that is being created for development and to establish policies and procedures that will encourage and attract developers to the community.

D. BASIC ISSUES

As stated above, the Zoning Ordinance that was created in 1959 is regulating the City of Fairmont’s growth and development. Numerous plans and studies have been completed and approved that envision new growth and development for the community, yet there has not been wholesale changes to the document that City officials and developers must abide by when it comes to putting the plan recommendations into action. With changes to the State enabling legislation for planning, the City of Fairmont needs to implement a new approach to their current Zoning Ordinance that will encourage more efficient and coordinated growth for the City and establishes such elements as design and performance standards, planned unit development and the concept discussed in this chapter, Preferred Development Areas. These concepts provide the City of Fairmont with a new set of economic development tools for future growth and development.

The Preferred Development Areas for the City should be established as overlay districts on the Zoning Map that identify areas with advantageous conditions existing for development to occur within. The City of Fairmont should take the lead in establishing the PDA’s with the designation being based on the following set of Growth Principles:

- Parcels of vacant or underutilized land, which may be readily assembled into areas of sufficient size so as to accommodate a mix of uses.
- Areas that are strategically located in proximity to existing infrastructure.
- Areas that offer opportunities for more economical and cost-effective expansion of infrastructure due to the logical progression of infrastructure.

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- Areas that offer opportunities for higher intensity development based on proximity to transportation and utility infrastructure.
- Areas where development can be integrated with open space, providing for community amenities such as parks and recreational facilities.
- Areas where there is a strategic reason for development to be encouraged.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Short Range (2005-2008)

- a. The City of Fairmont should establish a new Zoning Ordinance that implements the concept of Preferred Development Areas.
- b. The City of Fairmont and the Fairmont Planning Commission should designate Preferred Development Areas based on the Growth Principles.
- c. Incentives for developers should be created as part of the PDA's.

2. Medium Range (2008-2011)

- a. Review the success of the PDA's to date and implement any necessary changes.
- b. Analyzing the land use patterns of the community along with the infrastructure improvements and expansions and designate any additional PDA's.

3. Long Range (2011-2015)

- a. Continue infrastructure expansion and improvement projects.
- b. Continue to improve and replace community facilities.
- c. Review the success of the PDA's established to date and implement any necessary changes.
- d. Analyzing the land use patterns of the community along with the infrastructure improvements and expansions and designate any additional PDA's.