

**FAYETTE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS
SEPTEMBER 22, 1998 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 29, 1998**

As part of the process of completing the Fayette County Comprehensive Plan, the County held three (3) “Focus Group Meetings”. The meetings were held for the purpose of identifying key issues, concerns, and opportunities within the County¹ related to housing, local government and other general topics.

A “Stakeholders” Focus Group Meeting, a “Local Municipal Officials” Focus Group Meeting and a “Housing Interests” Focus Group Meeting aided the County in identifying key ideas specific to each group. The date of each Focus Group Meeting and parties invited to attend are listed in Table A3-1².

Approximately forty-five (45) people participated in the Focus Group Meeting process. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT), a group facilitation process, was used to insure that all participants were afforded an equal voice in defining their ideas. Issues and ideas were identified by focusing on questions specific to each Focus Group.

The participants were led by neutral facilitators and asked to provide their views related to the questions stated above. Some sample topics were also provided but their ideas could be related to any issue they felt was important.

The NGT process consisted of the following five (5) steps:

- (Step 1) Idea Writing – each person was asked to write down their ideas on the question before the group.
- (Step 2) Idea Recording – Each person’s ideas were recorded one at a time on large sheets of paper predominately displayed in front of the group.
- (Step 3) Idea Discussion/Clarification – Each idea was then discussed and clarified. This step moved the ideas from being those of the individuals to become those of the group.
- (Step 4) Priority Idea Identification – In this step, each group member was given five (5) note cards. The group members were then asked to pick the five (5) ideas from the list before them that are most important to them and to write one (1) idea on each note card. They were then asked to rank each idea with the most important idea being number 5, and the least important idea ranked number 1.
- (Step 5) Presentation – After both groups had completed the exercise, the key ideas and findings were presented to the entire group.

¹ The “Stakeholders” Focus Group Meeting was held on the Penn State Fayette County Campus. The “Local Municipality Officials” and “Housing Interests” Focus Group Meetings were held in the County Courthouse.

² Fayette County Office of Community and economic development mailed letters to invite Focus Group attendees.

**FAYETTE COUNTY
FOCUS GROUP MEETING INFORMATION**

Focus Group	Date	Generalized List of Those Invited
Stakeholders	Tuesday, September 22, 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various Local Authorities • School Representatives • Local and County Planning Commission Members • Zoning Hearing Board Members • State and Local Representatives • Hospital Directors • County Commissioners
Local Municipal Officials	Thursday, September 24, 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Officials throughout the County • County Commissioners
Housing Interests	Tuesday, September 29, 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County • Housing Authority of Fayette County • Real Estate Agency Representative • Westmoreland/Fayette County Private Industry Council • Fayette County Community Action Agency • Tele Tech – the most recent • Business that has Job Opportunities • Homebuilders Association • County Commissioners

**Stakeholder Focus Group Meeting
September 22, 1998**

**FAYETTE COUNTY
STAKEHOLDERS FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS
SEPTEMBER 22, 1998**

QUESTIONS

1. What elements of the County do you like and would like to see continue in the future?
2. What regional issues need addressed?
3. What issues, needs, challenges, or opportunities do you see facing Fayette County, the local government, and the County government (now and in the future)?

Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
A, L, N, O, Z, FF, LL	1, 5, 5, 5, 5, 3, 3, 5	The rural scenic and historic heritage is a strength. The natural and agricultural areas have scenic value. The Comprehensive Plan must protect the natural resources, recreation. Tourism is our livelihood. We do not want to be like everyone else. We don't want urban sprawl. The scenic areas are littered with trash and numerous unstructured dumps. These areas need to be regulated and enforced on the municipal level. The expressway will bring growth. We need to set designated growth areas, particularly in Uniontown, Connellsville, Brownsville, etc. Land use overlays (such as the Youghiogheny River and the Monongahela) should be considered, as well as major transportation corridors to push development away from the interchanges and into communities. Commercial signage is too strict, need to recognize unincorporated commercial areas (e.g. need to look at little village areas).
B		Beautify the City of Uniontown, which is the County seat (i.e. people get a bad impression of the County through the City).
C, I	3, 4, 4, 4, 3, 2, 2, 1, 5	Expand infrastructure, i.e., water, sewer, gas, and secondary transportation and access routes. Where there is potable water, there is growth.
D	2, 4, 1, 4	Need coordination among all groups (e.g. economic, recreation, communities, etc.). Everyone will benefit if they work together.
E, H, AA	1, 2, 1, 3	Tourism – need to appreciate what we have (arts, culture). Need to improve collaboration with economic development on a countywide basis. There are numerous bike trails, waterway (Monongahela, Ohiopyle) walking trails, riverfront developments, ski slopes, etc. Consider marketing Fayette County to the Pittsburgh region, e.g. advertising.
F		Need to bring economic development into the County so that any development benefits the area.
G		The County has an excellent secondary education system. County should expand their four (4) year education program, e.g. Penn State expansion.
J	4, 5, 3	Need to improve public transportation for seniors, etc.
K	5, 2	County suffers from the inability to answer the questions, “Why would a corporation relocate to Fayette County?”
M	3, 4	Inexpensive cost of living for individuals and businesses.
P		Need to focus on the Fayette County Airport. It needs a lot of improvement and expansion. Tie the airport into the economy, recreation, tourism, etc.
Q	3	Crack down on slum landlords.
R		County has agricultural land preservation program.

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Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
S		Continue our expansion of telecommunications; it could be major player in County.
T	5	Best way to accomplish the wish list is by capitalizing on the Mon-Fayette Expressway because it will bring development into the community.
U		We do not have an adequate transportation system.
V		The community needs more education on the interrelation of economic development, recreation, tourism, transportation, etc.
W	2, 3, 2, 4, 3	The government structure needs help. There is concern about whether or not the three (3) commissioner system is effective. Consider developing qualifications for holding that office.
X, JJ, KK	3, 3, 1, 1, 2	Need to encourage upscale housing developments. Existing housing stock will not bring people into the County. Target Route 51 and Route 119 in the northern section of the County (Brownsville, Route 40) for residential development. This area is easily accessible to Route I-70/79 and potentially Morgantown, W.V. (access new expressway). Housing issues are two (2) fold: (1) preservation of existing housing stock; and (2) creation of new housing stock in structured areas to best utilize the land.
Y		Reform the overall taxation structure (little relationship between tax assessment and market value).
BB, DD	1, 2, 5, 1, 2, 2	There is a concern that although good secondary education opportunities exist, we are not sending enough onto post secondary education. The types of jobs that we want to bring to the County will necessitate post secondary education. The County has a significantly low education level based upon state statistics. Need adult education opportunities to expand skill/education for workforce.
CC		Need to enhance/add wastewater facilities. Over sixty (60%) percent of the County is unserved.
EE		Need to improve some aspect of every question listed.
GG		Need to give plans that can make real decisions. Need documented and objective evident (hard data) of issues.
HH, II	5	Need an overall change in public perception (image) of Fayette County from within and from the outside.
MM		Identify and evaluate Brownfield sites/wetlands.
NN		Fayette County has lots of federal and state park land/forest/game lands. Need to identify these as a resource.
OO		County is currently working on national heritage inventory.
PP		State has "lenz on litter" – County sponsors this program as a contest.

**Local Municipal Officials Focus Group Meeting
September 24, 1998**

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**FAYETTE COUNTY
LOCAL MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS
SEPTEMBER 24, 1998**

QUESTIONS

1. What elements of the County do you like and would like to see continue in the future?
2. What elements of the County would you like to see change?
3. What issues, needs, ideas, challenges, or opportunities do you see facing Fayette County, the local governments, and the County government (now and in the future)?

Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
A	3	Tired of everything being a special exception. Streamline ordinance to allow business to come in.
B		Need to coordinate with local government/County Commissioners to know how many funds are allocated – no communication causes burden on wastewater treatment plant.
C		Local governments know the most details about development issues occurring within the County.
D	5, 3	Service our customers and consider all residents customers.
E, U	3, 1, 1	Maintain stable tax base – housing and jobs (need housing and small businesses to keep people in area). Need industry and jobs to keep the young people from moving away.
F, V, Y, Z	5, 2, 3, 5, 2, 5, 5, 5,	Need for fund of water/sewage projects and other forms of infrastructure. 119 Corridor – Bullskin Township to Westmoreland County line have no sewer. Fifty (50%) percent of the people do not have water source. Need to educate the community as to the benefit of public water/sewage. Consider using an association that is not mandatory to all to implement public sewer vs. an authority. It's all in the way you market it. Want business along the 119 Corridor.
G		Need more money to improve the local roads and bridges.
H	3, 2, 2,	Put cap on school district taxes (they have no cap).
I, M	5, 5, 4, 2	State level – townships that are non-entitlement (low budget communities) want a share of annual CDBG money. It's an unfair system to local governments that have a population of 4,000 or less. The problem is unfunded mandates from state, county, and local governments are expected to follow/jump through hoops – money = mandates (e.g. Act 537).
J	4, 4, 3, 4, 4, 4	Corridor/interchange land use controls for economic development need controls along the Corridor interchanges of the Mon-Fayette Expressway to help manage growth.
K		South Union has a strong tax base – DEP in continuously changing regulations that impact development (e.g. rejected the 537 plan four times). Governor Ridge has been no help. It's difficult to develop.
L	5	Borough of Ohiopyle and Stewart Township want to promote tourism. Borough estimates only 250 people live there, but need to upkeep roads and other services to serve the more than one million tourists a year. Tourists will bring money into the County.

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Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
N	4, 2	Fayette City Borough is a small borough that has a difficult time maintaining city police departments to address drugs, vandalism, etc. Do not meet grant criteria for three year police grant to receive funding.
O, P, R, T, BB	3	German Township doesn't have a lot of taxes. They would like to abolish police department. The issues are taxes and the need for reassessment. Abolish school tax and put in a sales tax that will cover everyone. Current tax assessment structure discourages building of new housing. Want residential wage taxes to build the tax base. Sewer/water is the ticket to residential, commercial, and industrial development. The County lost Miller Brewing due to poor roads.
Q	3, 5	Need to stop the Pennsylvania State Education Association from running the schools.
S	2	Sandmounds don't work long-term.
W		Fayette County could be a bedroom community to Morgantown, W.V. and Pittsburgh to general an additional wage tax.
X		Sewage Authority in Dawson in existence for twenty years, but no sewers.
AA	3, 1, 2, 1, 4	Need to combine as one county school administration system. Need to make sure to offer the best education.
BB		School taxes need to be lowered (e.g. Connellsville School District).
CC		Keep industry in the Industrial Park, not in the residential areas.
DD, LL	2, 3, 4, 2, 5	County needs to improve image. Marketing of Fayette County – work in conjunction with tourist market. Develop new attractions.
EE, FF	3, 2	Number one issue in developed communities is stormwater management (e.g. Uniontown area). Need cooperative management (or less municipalities – done fairly).
GG, HH, II	1, 2, 1, 3, 4	Local government needs to communicate. Each office needs to have a fax machine, computers, etc. to better communicate with each other. Some municipalities don't even have a building to operate out of. Adjoining municipalities should be able to share (some can't afford all necessary equipment). This could be accomplished by written cooperative agreement (e.g. South Uniontown has a cooperative agreement with North and South Union Townships; e.g. Ohio and Stewart share work back and forth; e.g. EMS).
JJ	1, 4, 2	Need countywide garbage collection and a tax on garbage collection (this could help with large dumping issue). Need state legislation to improve many problems from flies.
KK	4	Need to revisit Countywide police system – area or County police authorities.
MM	2	Fayette County Agricultural Preservation Program municipal officials need to work with County to determine how much should be preserved.
NN	5	Where is our water going? If it is leaving the County, the County needs to get paid for it. Westmoreland County Water Authority is taking water out of the Yough River. They want more. Fayette County needs to take advantage of this and charge. Take this money and apply it to a conservation program.
OO		Need trees – what about our trees? Need a reforestation program. There will be no water if there are no trees.

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Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
PP		Need to look at a College System in County, not at \$300 per credit. Need Fayette Community College.
QQ		Taxes eased on senior citizens, based on income (e.g. small percentage of property taxes and garbage bills).
RR		Need just one phone book for County. There are now six.
SS		Less paperwork, too much red tape, too many mandates.
TT		County should have idea of historic and architectural assets and see how they fit into the current systems (e.g. not everything should be preserved; zoning to preserve (County and municipal wide) need basic education on the significance of the resources – hospitality training to recognize benefit).
UU		ADA causes elevators to be required in 2-3 story buildings. This uses up tax dollars. Why can't they just permit schedules to accommodate ADA persons on the first floor?

**Housing Focus Group Meeting
September 29, 1998**

**FAYETTE COUNTY
HOUSING INTEREST FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS
SEPTEMBER 24, 1998**

QUESTIONS

1. What issues, needs, ideas, challenges, or opportunities do you see facing Fayette County in terms of housing stock?

Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
A		Need more community involvement. The perception is that people do not want to get involved with the County.
B		Need to defeat the negative image of the County; people do not want to get involved, do not take a step forward, chase good people away.
C		Housing Authority vacancies need to know why and what kind – no waiting list ever for seniors. There is an estimated 10% vacancy rate.
D	4, 4, 4, 3	Need for a housing market analysis for all incomes.
E		Need to get a strategy on an individual community basis; e.g. Uniontown – need code enforcement – rental firms don't want to take care of rental units.
F	3, 2, 5	Code enforcement is an issue Countywide. In Uniontown and Connellsville, a lot of neighborhoods are turning into rental which decreases the value and upkeep goes down. Absentee landlords (absence from neighborhood, but within the County). Some homeowners renting their homes and moving out to South or North Union Township when the neighborhood changes. Currently don't have a system to compile data because there is no uniform building code that would track new additions, etc.
G		Need to find the money for stricter code enforcement. In older communities, enforcement is up to local government. There is no money/staff to enforce codes.
H	2	Need money for demolition to take down deteriorated structures.
I		Problem with the District Magistrate enforcing housing codes violations.
J	5	Foundation for new housing grants based on infrastructure. Water/sewage expansion need to happen for this to take place, e.g. freeze on taps, etc.; e.g. watch lines into rural areas need to go back to each community and put together and rank.
K		Rehabilitation/weatherization. The County has funding has funding for 125-130/year and waiting list of 600-700 applicants. Very underfunded; for rehabilitation 1100 on waiting list and with current funding can do with current 60 units per year. Need more money.
L	1	Need additional housing for elderly and other populations with special needs.
M	3	Rehabilitation for resale – biggest drawback is the down payment and closing costs. Need to find a public or private way to fund/subsidize those monies to promote homeownership and build credit (need a credit counseling program to assist people to get out of debt).
N		Most important is demographics. Where will the need be? There is money available to do what we need.

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Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
O		Would like to see a program that for every two low to moderate houses built an old one should be raised and cleaned up. Want to upgrade existing patches of housing. Infill housing in existing neighborhoods. There is a need for low cost housing, i.e., some mini-parks, and new modern homes under \$40,000 in areas.
P		Need to identify the need for \$100,000 to \$200,00 housing.
Q		Why is PA the second largest state for elderly population?
R	1, 4	Continue developing a GIS system with planning commission, 911, redevelopment authority, assessment office, human services. County agencies are asked for one GIS system. GIS could help identify the needs for all local communities.
S		Patch towns are a resource for housing opportunities. There is a problem with getting federal money, because they are potentially eligible for historic destination. There is a study currently being done the Pennsylvania Historic Museum Commission to develop standards that are affordable for the rehabilitation of historic properties. Relates to patch towns – old company towns, e.g. architectural standards for infill. PHMC is looking at the following patch towns – Smock, Whiteset, Star Junction, and Shouf.
T		Need activities for youth and other recreational opportunities. These help to strengthen the housing market.
U		Springwood formed a self-contained community located in North Union Township. Parallels the Penn Craft Village 1930.
V		Need to do community organizing. Ask that type of development needs to be done. Need someone, or group, to go in and work with the communities to develop ideas/needs for housing (infill, demolition, etc.).
W		Historic preservation, e.g. festival marketplace, using old structures, bring in a James Rouse project.
X		Need to create open green spaces and recreation opportunities in neighborhoods (e.g. convert vacant sites/lots into a playground, open green space, passive recreation – Lions Club in Connellsville took a vacant lot and turned it into an urban park).
Y		How many units of new housing are being built in Fayette County? Need 1,000 dwelling units per year. We should keep a statistic of how many dwelling units are being demolished, etc. We should have a raising permit to track.
Z		What happens to structures that burn down? Who is responsible for clean up? State has legislation that allows municipalities to pass an ordinance. Insurance companies require that all taxes must be paid and site be leveled and cleaned up before money can be paid to the claimant. Need to I.D. which municipalities have adopted legislation/ordinance. Also want to I.D. municipalities that have adopted BOCA Housing Code.
AA		Currently no enforced standards for housing in County. Need to address this issue. No uniform code. Power and gas companies require inspections. BOCA uniform plumbing code, fire code, fire marshals are electrical inspectors.

Letter	Priority Ranking	Ideas/Comments
BB		Fayette Street/Pennsylvania Avenue – Uniontown businesses are moving in and fixing up old houses (converting dwelling units to business) and improving/revitalizing the streets.
CC	5, 5, 2	We need reassessment.
DD		Every small town in Fayette County has vacant rooms/apartments above storefronts. Estimate 70-80% of upper level/upper floors too costly to renovate – cheaper to build new.
EE		Good things are being done on a “spot” basis – housing rehab – but need to be tied together and spread.
FF		As downtowns are redeveloped, rehabed, etc. There is a lack of parking for commercial and residential space. Need to look at parking issues for businesses and apartments. Need to look at all options.