



**REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON RETENTION  
TO  
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WHEELING**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ad Hoc Committee on Retention was charged by Mayor Glenn Elliott to identify ways the City of Wheeling might stem its population loss. The committee assessed various causes of population loss, focusing, in part, on younger people raised in Wheeling who sought employment and residence elsewhere; identified assets and resources the City might use in efforts to retain more of its current population, particularly those with post-secondary education and training; and determined effective strategies and actions for retaining population, attracting new residents, and drawing former residents back to Wheeling. Committee members shared successes from other cities we have visited as well as published information on how other cities are successfully retaining or attracting people. Then, the committee developed a questionnaire to gather data from the public about why people leave or stay in Wheeling and what could be developed or improved to motivate them to stay in, return to, or move to Wheeling. We surveyed four generations, but much of the research on population retention and attraction emphasizes millennials – the nation’s largest generation within the U.S. workforce. The committee used the information gathered over seven months to craft recommendations to facilitate short- and long-term population goals.

Our key finding is that the City of Wheeling must foster a socioeconomic environment that attracts the talent that 21<sup>st</sup> century businesses are seeking. Today’s technology-based industries and companies are locating where they can find the talented workforce they need to employ. The Wheeling area has resources to provide the training and education required by these businesses and can develop partnerships to better align educational programs with career opportunities. However, it is equally important to develop an environment in which people, particularly millennials, want to live, not just work.

This report expands on our key finding as well as additional focus areas. In summary, the Ad Hoc Committee on Retention recommends the following priorities for the City of Wheeling:

1. Enhance the city’s physical appearance, particularly along the entrances to downtown Wheeling from Route 2 and Interstates 70 and 470. These improvements need to address streetscapes, lighting, building façades, dilapidated structures, public spaces, and recreation areas near the entrances to the city.
2. Improve the requisites for talent attraction, including:
  - a. Support for innovation and entrepreneurship and partnerships between employers and important community institutions such as schools and colleges, hospitals, and governmental entities.
  - b. Physical conditions to support business growth and attraction like infrastructure, technology, traffic flow, and public transportation.
3. Create a marketing strategy for the City designed, in part, to improve public perception of Wheeling and aid in retention efforts. This strategy should include promoting the City’s assets, creating a unified community brand, and forming groups of ambassadors to welcome and engage new residents and recruit talent from surrounding cities.
4. Develop more of Wheeling’s many neighborhoods as mixed-use neighborhoods and/or “destination” districts, emphasizing unique features, activities, or opportunities that differentiate one neighborhood from another.

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## INTRODUCTION

Wheeling has been losing population every year for many years. As this has occurred, the median age of Wheeling's population has risen and average income levels, when compared to national averages and the cost of living, have declined. Neither Wheeling nor any city can sustain such losses indefinitely. Recognizing this fact, Mayor Glenn Elliott appointed the Ad Hoc Committee on Retention – one of several committees created to examine how the city might break its cycle of decline and begin to grow again, both economically and in population.

The focus of the Ad Hoc Committee on Retention was to recommend strategies for population retention and growth, but we quickly recognized that meeting our end goal involves tackling issues that were being addressed by the housing and industrial development ad hoc committees. We approached our mission with the understanding that, despite their obvious role in population growth and retention, housing and development should not be extensively covered in our report so as to not duplicate efforts of the other committees. The final report of the Retention Committee is based on our discussions and data acquired by three primary means: published articles and survey results; the Committee's observations of local government, businesses, and civic engagement in Wheeling as well as other cities; and a Committee-issued survey via SurveyMonkey (Appendix B). While the City of Wheeling can complete many of the suggested action steps, please note that all recommendations are presented with the understanding that some tasks/goals should be delegated to other organizations.

The Committee established that the availability of employment in one's field and affordable housing were givens not only for Wheeling but also for any town or city. We focused on identifying *what else* Wheeling needs to offer in order to improve the odds that a person would choose to reside in Wheeling rather than other cities. The emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century looks much different than the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when Wheeling grew into an industrial powerhouse and reached its zenith before beginning its decades-long decline. We recognize that many people will need to move outside of their current comfort zones if the city is to take advantage of the opportunities that exist for Rust-Belt cities.

There is a growing potential for Wheeling to change in ways that will prepare it for economic and population growth in the next few decades. One way is for Wheeling to look outside itself. Wheeling City Council has a number of members that were born and raised in Wheeling, moved to other cities after they graduated from college, and have since moved back to Wheeling. There are many other well-educated Wheeling natives who have lived elsewhere and moved back to work and raise their families in Wheeling. These people have brought back with them ideas, expectations, and visions of the city they want to develop here. But their experiences in other cities also lead these boomerang residents to have different requisites for being able to remain permanently in Wheeling.

In January 2017, the Committee used SurveyMonkey, a popular open-access tool used by news services, businesses, and government agencies, to assess what people need and want in order to make Wheeling a permanent home for themselves and their families. The survey consisted of 17 questions, including open-ended questions, rankings and ratings, and demographic collectors. There were 605 respondents, only 23 percent of whom were lifelong

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residents of Wheeling. Another 22 percent were born in Wheeling, lived elsewhere for some time, and returned to Wheeling to live. The majority of respondents (64 percent) were between the ages of 25 and 50. There were slightly more female than male respondents (55 percent). Of those who chose to answer, nearly 79 percent had one or more college degrees, and 61 percent reported an annual household income of \$60,000 or more.

### **KEY FINDING: The City of Wheeling must foster a socioeconomic environment that attracts the talent that 21<sup>st</sup> century businesses are seeking.**

There is an industrial revolution occurring throughout the world. It is creating a rush to develop new means of production and distribution that, in turn, demand a workforce with different knowledge and skills. As with past industrial revolutions, there will be winners, and there will be losers. The Committee believes Wheeling has the potential to become a winner in the eyes of businesses and industries seeking to operate in geographically well-placed, small to mid-size cities from which distribution can easily reach major markets. In order to attract these companies, Wheeling must also attract and/or retain a workforce that can fill the new jobs. Accomplishing both will require Wheeling to first do some work to meet the needs and demands of both target groups.

Companies and cities all over the world covet highly skilled and highly educated individuals. Because that level of talent is in demand, those individuals have many options of where to live and work. Skilled, educated workers – the talent – can first choose the kind of place they want to live and then the company where they would like to work, knowing they have the skills to secure employment. Businesses choose to locate where they can find the talent they need. Thus, the first step for Wheeling is to become an even more desirable *place* by improving many of the key factors that are important to the most sought-after demographic: young professionals. This strategy will serve Wheeling in more ways than one. Wheeling, like any municipality that has experienced a dramatic decline, needs to grow its base of both talented individuals and innovative businesses, thus building its tax base. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this report should aid in attracting both. It is also important to factor in the growing trend of businesses allowing employees to work remotely, which could make Wheeling an option for talent even without offering the desired career opportunities.

Wheeling already has some of the elements that are key to attracting new residents and retaining younger residents. Focusing specifically on downtown, the desired amenities include new apartments, kid-friendly recreation areas, bike/hiking trails, a defined market area, periodic family-oriented events at the waterfront and downtown venues, and college-level education.<sup>1</sup> Many of these can be enhanced, expanded, or better promoted as amenities in Wheeling. Published studies have shown the above factors to be important to younger millennials

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<sup>1</sup> John Karras, “12 Strategies that will transform your city’s downtown,” *Urban Scale* Blog (February 5, 2014).

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nationwide.<sup>2</sup> Older millennials want houses rather than apartments but appreciate having housing near downtown shopping, entertainment, and workplaces.

The goal of this report is not only to provide recommendations for population growth and retention, but also insight and data on what today's talent desires. If job seekers cannot find the desired amenities in Wheeling, they can and will find what they want somewhere else. This central thesis is articulated by the following cycle:

***Talent chooses Place. Place needs Business. Business needs Talent. Therefore, Wheeling must offer Talent a desirable Place.***

It is with this in mind that the Retention Committee makes our first recommendation.

### **RECOMMENDATION #1: Enhance the city's physical appearance, particularly along the entrances to downtown Wheeling from Route 2 and Interstates 70 and 470.**

First impressions tend to stick, and the impressions people get when entering downtown Wheeling are often not ones we want them to remember. We are only an hour from what many consider to be the best "front door" to a city – entering Pittsburgh from the Fort Pitt Tunnel. While we cannot replicate that view, we can find ways to enhance our own gateways to create a more positive experience when entering downtown Wheeling.

The improvements need to address streetscapes, lighting, building façades, the appearance of public spaces and recreation areas, and the repair, renovation, and/or removal of dilapidated structures near the major entrances into the city. Our survey identified downtown as the thing respondents liked *least* about the city of Wheeling. In open-ended questions that let respondents choose how to describe their perceptions, the words they used most often to describe downtown's physical appearance included dirty, depressing, dilapidated, rundown, stagnant, outdated, poor, and abandoned.

When asked what they liked about other cities that they thought would improve Wheeling, respondents frequently mentioned cleanliness and improving the physical appearance of downtown. Additional suggestions included having more and better quality options for shopping, entertainment, restaurants, and other businesses and having more events at the Waterfront and other venues like the Capitol Theatre and WesBanco Arena. Given the emphasis that respondents put on family in a number of survey questions, it can be inferred that a wider selection of family-oriented or community-oriented activities would be welcomed.

Specific action steps suggested for each recommendation can be found in Appendix A and, in some cases, may be appropriate for organizations outside the City to manage.

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<sup>2</sup> Donovan Rypkema, "Economic benefits of preservation," (May 10, 2013) ; and Samantha Sharf, "Survey says millennials want to live in New York. Research suggests they should live in Philadelphia," *Forbes* (June 16, 2016).

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### **RECOMMENDATION #2: Improve the requisites for talent attraction, including:**

- a. Support for innovation and entrepreneurship and partnerships between employers and important community institutions such as schools and colleges, hospitals, and governmental entities.**
- b. Physical conditions to support business growth and attraction like infrastructure, technology, traffic flow, and public transportation.**

Keeping in mind that talent chooses place, businesses are locating in or relocating to areas where workers with the right kinds of knowledge and skills either exist or can be trained quickly using local educational institutions.<sup>3</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, advances in artificial intelligence are increasing worker productivity at a much faster rate than at any time in the past. As this capacity increases, the need for the physical labor of unskilled or semiskilled employees declines.<sup>4</sup>

The kind of worker the emerging economy needs is a member of what economist Richard Florida calls the “creative class.”<sup>5</sup> The creative class is comprised of professionals across many disciplines that are capable of exercising independent judgment and thinking outside the box to develop creative solutions to problems. Wheeling must develop the capacity to produce and retain the creative class in order to attract new businesses, especially to replace those that have closed or that will close in the foreseeable future. This area has an abundance of educational institutions with the capacity to teach students critical thinking and technological skills the new workforce requires. Partnering business leaders with higher education administrators could facilitate this process, as long as school administrators are willing to modify their existing programs to better prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century work environment.

Access to jobs that pay well is important to professionals of all ages, but more specifically, millennials want those jobs to be in downtown areas that also offer affordable housing for both singles and families. For their part, cities are finding it necessary to develop strategic plans and coordinate the activities of city agencies and private organizations in recruiting new businesses and creating support for entrepreneurship. The strategic plans most likely to succeed find ways to involve existing businesses and also major community institutions, such as colleges, hospitals, and key nonprofits, in planning and organizing the efforts to redevelop the city.<sup>6</sup>

As for the physical conditions supporting business growth, streets need to be reframed as social and economic engines. City designers and engineers often forgot that fact in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when streets were considered to be almost entirely for the movement of cars and trucks. People and their desires were nearly forgotten. In reality, people move along streets

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<sup>3</sup> Michele Nash-Hoff, “Why Universities are Important to Rebuilding US Manufacturing,” *Industry Week* (Mar 14, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Antoine Agtmael and Fred Bakker, *The Smartest Places on Earth Places: Why Rustbelts Are the Hotspots of Global Innovation*, (2016) Introduction and Chapter Two.

<sup>5</sup> Richard L. Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Antoine Agtmael and Fred Bakker. *The Smartest Places On Earth: Why Rustbelts Are the Emerging Hotspots of Global Innovation*, Chapters 1 and 5.

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with the intent to get from one place to another for some reason; they want to do something in particular at their destination. Moving people as rapidly as possible through downtown or through any neighborhood actually discourages them from seeing what is available along their route. Wheeling needs to treat its streets and sidewalks as the social and economic engines they have the potential to be.

Current urban trends in downtown infrastructure and traffic flow include the development of community-based broadband technology; eliminating one way streets; reintroducing street cars connecting downtown to urban neighborhoods; closing freeways running along the periphery of downtown, rerouting traffic to city streets and outer beltways, then redeveloping the land the freeways occupied; improving walkability of downtown areas; and creating downtowns as branded entertainment and destination areas.<sup>7</sup> The City of Wheeling can develop local business investment strategies by implementing ideas outlined in the books *Locavesting: The Revolution in Local Investing and How to Profit From It* by Amy Cortese and *Local Dollars, Local Sense: How to Shift Your Money from Wall Street to Main Street and Achieve Real Prosperity* by Michael Shuman.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: Create a marketing strategy for the City designed, in part, to improve public perception of Wheeling and aid in retention efforts. This strategy should include promoting the city's assets, creating a unified community brand, and forming groups of ambassadors to welcome and engage new residents and recruit talent from surrounding cities.**

Unflattering stereotypes are an unfortunate reality for any West Virginia city and present difficult challenges in moving the state forward. On top of these, Wheeling also carries labels that suggest our best days are behind us: our downtown is dead, there is nothing to do here, and everyone is moving away. Overcoming these misconceptions requires strategic, consistent messaging as well as community support in sharing that message. The idea of city ambassadors serves to establish some of the necessary community support. Additionally, ambassadors can help to welcome and engage new residents and recruit talent from surrounding cities.

The City needs to focus on promoting its assets, both within the city and in regional or even national media. Survey respondents were asked what they considered to be Wheeling's major assets. The most commonly used words and phrases were friendly, affordable, safe, small size, family-oriented, historic, good parks, and sense of community. Additional selling points include an abundance of cultural and recreational activities located within the city or nearby, rich local history, variety of locally produced goods and services, educational opportunities, proximity to Pittsburgh, and the convenience of access to all of the above. Many respondents also noted the city's potential for improvement and for attracting new people or retaining current youth because of the cultural activities and educational opportunities already available.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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### **RECOMMENDATION #4: Develop more of Wheeling’s many neighborhoods as mixed-use neighborhoods and/or “destination” districts, emphasizing unique features, activities, or opportunities that differentiate one neighborhood from another.**

Development of this type is a current trend in small and medium-sized traditional cities that are reversing population loss and deterioration. The days in which business, residential, and other areas of cities were separated and relatively distinct are gone. Today’s downtown areas are living-working-learning-recreation areas in which each kind of activity has a multiplier effect on the population of the area. Other city neighborhoods are also being defined as mixed-use areas, but each with some special kind of activity or characteristic that differentiates it from other neighborhoods. That allows different areas of the city to become individual destinations which give variety to what is available to people.

Historic neighborhoods not only make good destination neighborhoods, they tend to generate greater economic return on investment in housing and other buildings, have lower foreclosure rates during periods of economic stability, and have greater social stability than other neighborhoods. Historic neighborhoods and historic downtowns over the last few decades have economically outperformed other kinds of development investment in terms of jobs created, net tax revenues generated, attractiveness to tourists, and many other metrics.<sup>8</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Wheeling has the potential to reverse its population and economic decline. But doing so will require making a series of changes that will result in developing and retaining a particular demographic: younger individuals who have the knowledge and skill sets that are necessary for work in the emerging technology-based economy. The Wheeling area has the educational institutions that could produce such a workforce. The city has many sites available for new industries that it could attract if it can show that it has and can sustain the kind of workforce 21<sup>st</sup> century industries need. The city has many advantages that can be further developed to maximize its attractiveness to millennials, as well as other generations, who are seeking good jobs in good places. Vision and leadership are essential in order to develop a plan that makes the best use of our present resources and the best strategic development of our potential with a goal of making the city as attractive as possible to talented younger people. The City of Wheeling needs to set the vision for all other organizations to follow and support.

Please see Appendix A for recommended action steps toward the goal of population growth in the City of Wheeling.

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<sup>8</sup> Donovan Rypkema, “Building on the past?” *WorldsAparT* (December 24, 2015) and “Economic benefits of preservation,” (May 10, 2013).

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### APPENDIX A: SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

*While the City of Wheeling can complete many of the suggested action steps, please note that all recommendations are presented with the understanding that some actions should be delegated to other organizations/businesses.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION #1: Enhance the city’s physical appearance, particularly along the entrances to downtown Wheeling from Route 2 and Interstates 70 and 470.**

- Treat entryways/corridors to downtown as “front doors,” whereby visitors’ first impressions are strong, positive ones. Entryway corridors should feel safe with updated streetscapes, signage, design standards, etc. Entryways should promote pedestrian walkability standards as outlined in *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time* by Jeff Speck, and should help guide visitors to notable locations (e.g., Centre Market, the Capitol Theatre, Heritage Port, Victorian North Wheeling).
- Notable entryways to prioritize:
  - i. 10<sup>th</sup> Street to 16<sup>th</sup> Street on Main, Market, Chapline
  - ii. 16<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor from Route 2 to Main Street
  - iii. Eoff Street from I-470 Ramp to 16<sup>th</sup> Street
- Expand existing or create new historical districts protected by intentional design standards that build a continuous feel throughout the city. Look to the feel of Victorian North Wheeling for inspiration.
- Expand and/or doubledown on the façade improvement program.
- Seek funding opportunities for aesthetic improvements like the Benjamin Moore contest where cities compete for thousands of dollars to spend on improving the look and feel of their buildings.
- Implement a process for stringent demolition review. If buildings must be demolished, ensure design standards for new buildings, parking lots, green space, etc., are in place so as to enhance or contribute to the city’s feel and identity.
- Implement lighting projects, both on downtown buildings and on certain streets where pedestrian traffic is needed (e.g., string lighting over Market Street in Centre Wheeling).
- Encourage and support art projects within the city. New murals should replace old, outdated murals/advertisements (e.g., Jamboree USA on the back of the Capitol Theatre, rusting Marsh Wheeling Stogie rooftop sign near I-70), or an effort should be made to restore those murals to their former glory in order to celebrate aspects of Wheeling’s history.

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- Ask the Arts & Cultural Commission to hold a city flag contest in which citizens submit initial designs invoking aspects of Wheeling's heritage. Have the commission narrow the designs down to finalists, and allow citizens to vote on the successful flag. Hang flags/banners throughout the city, and sell the city flag and merchandise with the flag on it to raise additional funds for city beautification.
- Continue to build up Wheeling's prominent monuments and statuary at strategic locations by adding new, life-sized statues that celebrate individuals from our city's history (Betty Zane, Governor Boreman, Samuel McCulloch, Lewis Wetzel). Ensure such additions support a pedestrian friendly town that anchor interesting destination locations.
- Look to Fairlawn, Ohio, for its lead in handling their panhandling problem. The city allows for panhandling, busking, etc. but only after the individual has registered with the city and has obtained a permit to do so.
- Contract with an independent grant writer to pursue grants to improve Wheeling. Incentivize continuous performance by paying a percentage of each grant awarded.
- Consider user fees. Huntington, Charleston, and Weirton all have various user fees. If a user fee is implemented in Wheeling, a suggested use of the funds is city beautification or efforts to make neighborhoods more livable.

### **RECOMMENDATION #2: Improve the requisites for talent attraction, including:**

#### **2a. Support for innovation and entrepreneurship and partnerships between employers and important community institutions such as schools and colleges, hospitals, and governmental entities.**

- Form a special committee to investigate the implementation of Community-Based Broadband in Wheeling. Community-Based Broadband has had and continues to have a tremendous impact on cities that implement it, most notably Chattanooga, TN (<https://www.thenation.com/article/chattanooga-was-a-typical-post-industrial-city-then-it-began-offering-municipal-broadband/>), by providing better, cheaper internet service as a public utility while also providing the necessary infrastructure for technology firms to locate within the municipality.
- Look to successful municipal programs designed to enhance entrepreneurial support, such as Generation Start Up in Detroit, where older or vacant homes/buildings/industrial sites are repurposed as shared workspace for startups. Could the vacant city-owned space on the ground floor of the Intermodal Center be repurposed into our first Business Incubator, or a WVNCC/City partnership for a culinary incubator similar to the Pittsburgh Strip District's Smallman Galley? We recommend a visit.
  - About Generation Start Up: The renovation work on the sites is performed by startup construction businesses. The city provides workspace/living space to

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qualified tenants so they can focus on building their business within one year. Then they must move on to commercial space within the city.

- Create shared technology spaces for mobile workers to rent or use space on a pay-as-you-go basis. Telecommuting is becoming more and more prevalent (more on this in the next section). Oftentimes, telecommuters need a workspace away from the distractions in their homes. Such a move by Wheeling would send a signal to telecommuters that the city has the infrastructure and desire to support their efforts. It could also allow for small tech-related companies to keep overhead costs low as they launch.
  - About Telecommuting: Businesses large and small have less of a need for employees, particularly of the creative class, to be on site in a physical location than ever before. Roles represented by telecommuters vary wildly from administrative managers in Phoenix assisting vice presidents of mid-western territories residing in New York City, to sales representatives living in Wheeling with responsibility for all of West Virginia, to marketing managers who work from home several days a week but fly in to a corporate office in Philadelphia on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Whatever the role may be, chances are someone somewhere is performing it from home in some capacity. Wheeling should try to win these jobs just as it would try to win businesses with a physical storefront. Some thought should be put into the recruitment of telecommuters thanks to our low cost of living and community assets as outlined above, or to explore the possibility of building a closed network where citizens of Wheeling inform other qualified citizens of telecommuting opportunities available within their company. The network could also build a “talent bank” of former Wheeling residents (as well as their qualifications) who desire to return home should the right job become available.
- Continue and expand support for businesses like Grow Ohio Valley and other small pop-up farmer’s markets. Both the City of Clarksburg and the City of Morgantown have erected open-air, covered steel-frame structures that turn into full-fledged farmer’s markets on the weekends. Such a market placed downtown would serve the city’s goal of attracting residents to downtown to spend time, shop, etc. The markets also periodically transform to host events such as concerts or festivals. Additionally, during the week when the markets aren’t in use for commercial purposes, they double as a free parking spot for anyone visiting downtown to do business.
- Continue to support, start, or expand “pitch contests” like Show of Hands or full-fledged business plan competitions where winners receive a cash prize and a limited amount of professional services donated by local professionals (Morgantown’s West Virginia Open For Business Plan Competition).
- Create a professional development or mentoring program. An example from the past is the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program in the 1970s.

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- Work with the Community Foundation for the Ohio Valley to enhance/expand their internship program and explore the possibility of a fellowship program like Generation West Virginia now offers.
- Create a “Millennials Council” to seek direct input from young professionals. Look to Comcast as an example.
- Develop a strategic plan for Wheeling and its major institutions. Look to Akron, OH, as an example.
  - About Akron: The City of Akron enlisted the President of the University of Akron to develop their strategic plan, not only to gain a different perspective, but also to ensure that the city and the university developed a symbiotic relationship with mutually beneficial opportunities that fed into each other to ensure each met the other’s needs. For instance, Akron had a large population of unemployed workers who knew how to work with rubber. The university and the city set out to retrain these workers in the polymer field and have been successful at attracting polymer companies thanks to the concentration of workers skilled in that field.
- Identify industries that the city can successfully court (such as supply-chain management and distribution, thanks to our proximity to major transportation networks), and then work with local institutions to ensure their curriculum produces talent prepared to enter those industries. Likewise, the city must work to close the loop between current major employers and universities to ensure students with needed skills are being produced.
- Continue to work with presidents at West Liberty University, Wheeling Jesuit University, Bethany College, and West Virginia Northern Community College to ensure that their students have continual access to the City of Wheeling and all it has to offer. This may include running dedicated transportation routes to and from the universities or to Wheeling’s parks. The goal is to integrate the students into the fabric of the City of Wheeling as much as possible. Some members of this committee have had preliminary discussions with university presidents, and they are eager and willing to develop solutions to the mutual benefit of the institution, its students, and the City of Wheeling.
  - Support: According to a 2016 study released by Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, for every 1,000 new students enrolled, the economic impact is \$42.2 million and 726 full-time jobs in the Corpus Christi area alone ([https://www.tamucc.edu/about/president/assets/2015\\_tamucc\\_economic\\_report.pdf](https://www.tamucc.edu/about/president/assets/2015_tamucc_economic_report.pdf)).

### **2b. Physical conditions to support business growth and attraction like infrastructure, technology, traffic flow, and public transportation.**

- Develop ride-sharing. If efforts to attract services such as Uber, Lyft, etc., prove fruitless, the city should consider developing its own ride-share service and possibly seek to establish it through OVRTA. If an additional or expanded levy is necessary to bring this

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to fruition, OVRTA should only allow ride-share pickups from municipalities that have opted into the new levy.

- Modernize OVRTA. On top of possibly adding ride-share services to its scope, the city must do as much as it can within its power to improve OVRTA. For instance:
  - Create a digital fare system. Buses still require exact change at a time when other cities are issuing reloadable RFI cards with digital balances on them. Riders pay a small refundable deposit up front at a kiosk (via cash or credit) and then load their cards with the appropriate balance.
  - Ensure that bus routes and schedules are readily searchable and available on applications such as Google or Apple Maps. Fairmont, WV, successfully loaded their entire bus schedule onto all appropriate platforms. Potential riders can search for the best route and can see estimated trip time as well as the nearest bus stop or stops along their route.
  - Consider outside-the-box transportation possibilities. Cities are successfully reintroducing streetcars and alternate modes of transportation in order to help facilitate the flow of pedestrians, tourists, and commuters between districts.
  - Improve the look and feel of buses, including the design of their exterior. Buses can be wrapped in a modern design. Buses can sell space on the exterior and interior for advertising to supplement cash flow.
  - Equip buses with bike racks to integrate bike service with Heritage Trails and provide a unified means of alternative transportation.
  - Review bus routes and times. Are the current routes enough? Are they serving the maximum potential ridership? Cities sometimes make the decision to add or forgo coverage areas to improve schedule consistency and to expand hours. If Wheeling wants to foster an improved, vibrant downtown, buses (or shuttles of some sort) must run later than they do, at least on targeted routes. Citizens, tourists, etc. need alternate means of getting to and from the downtown later than 6:00 p.m.
  - Partner with local colleges to implement internships that dive into data-driven public transportation platforms such as ReMix that will help OVRTA to make informed decisions on changes that need to be made.
- Aggressively pursue making Main and Market Streets two-way streets, and implement walkability standards designed to improve the pedestrian experience.
- Look at opportunities for developing new industries linked to solar energy. Wheeling is taking steps to prepare for a nearby cracker plant and should be commended for doing so. Continue to build on this approach. The Island of Kaua'i, which boasts the rainiest spot on Earth, just opened one of the largest solar farms in the world thanks to commercial

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battery technology developed by Tesla that finally solved the problem of storing energy generated by solar farms. This technology is expected to explode for both home and commercial use in the coming years. What can Wheeling do to develop a pocket solar panel manufacturing, servicing, or distribution industry?

- Make sustainability a priority. Can Wheeling become the Environmental Mecca of West Virginia? Being a “green” and “sustainable” city is incredibly important to young talent. Can Wheeling identify best practices throughout the country and replicate them?
  - Examples: Marin County, CA, requires citizens put out three separate bins: true trash, recyclables, and compost. The compost and recycling pickup service is free (it is harvested and sold by the city to reclamation companies or farmers, respectively). In Natick, MS, residents pay \$10.00 per bag of trash. At a minimum, when a title transfers on a house, the new resident should receive information on the city’s limited recycling program, as well as their bin.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: Create a marketing strategy for the City designed, in part, to improve public perception of Wheeling and aid in retention efforts. This strategy should include promoting the city’s assets, creating a unified community brand, and forming groups of ambassadors to welcome and engage new residents and recruit talent from surrounding cities.**

- Market Wheeling’s assets and strengths (while continuously building upon them):
  - Low cost-of-living: Wheeling is in a strong position to capitalize on the trend of working remotely due to its proximity to a major metropolitan city and various quality of life features that talent is seeking. Wheeling should leverage these as competitive advantages and develop a campaign aimed at individuals who can work from any location.
  - Unique architecture: We live in a time where the same shopping center with the same stores can be found on the parameter of any given city. While these carbon-copy shopping centers serve their purpose for the everyday resident, unique cities attract individuals seeking a genuine or new experience.
  - History: Wheeling has a colorful history that many cities envy; yet we largely fail to capitalize on this history (Galway, Ireland, or Charleston, SC, are shining examples). Connect historical experts (like Margaret Brennan, Joe Roxby, and Sean Duffy) with tourism experts who know how to build an industry around monetizing history.
  - Family: Over and over again, survey respondents listed Wheeling as a great place to raise a family. When discussing a list of our current amenities with a young family in Morgantown, one turned to the other and asked, “I had no clue. Where could we find half of that in Morgantown?” Double down on efforts to brand Wheeling as a city where families can set roots and thrive within the community.

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- Proximity to outdoor activities: the City of Wheeling’s own Jesse Mestrovic shared with us that Wheeling was recently named one of the top 25 cities in the country to raise an outdoor kid thanks to our proximity to an abundance of year-round outdoor activities. This is a niche that has incredible potential, particularly for individuals who love all four seasons. Strategically designed, targeted marketing campaigns branding Wheeling in a specific light can pay dividends.
- Engagement: Promote Wheeling as a place where residents can be a meaningful part of the community and get involved, make connections, and create an impact. millennials, in particular, are looking to locate in cities that offer this opportunity.
- Create a city marketing budget to fund branding, advertising, merchandise, ambassador programs, etc.
- Host hospitality training for employees working in customer service, in both City of Wheeling offices and in the community, so representatives at hotels, restaurants, stores, entertainment venues, etc., are sharing Wheeling’s message and creating a positive experience for people throughout the city.
- Form a team of Wheeling ambassadors and provide training and materials for them to share with new or potential residents. Like the Chamber ambassador program, this would help to make residents feel more welcomed and informed. Consider our values as a community (e.g., what we care about, how we envision the future) and make these talking points for ambassadors. Also, for tourists, model an ambassador program after Dublin, Ireland’s *City of a Thousand Welcomes* program where individuals meet tourists for a free pint or a cup of tea while discussing the city and its gems (<https://www.littlemuseum.ie/visit-the-museum/city-of-a-thousand-welcomes/>).
- Tell Wheeling’s story and the stories of people who choose Wheeling. Partner with communication majors to produce stories/videos to share on social media as part of a larger campaign.
- Develop the community’s online presence. Resources or workshops could be offered to help businesses and organizations become more accessible online, especially through social media.

### **RECOMMENDATION #4: Develop more of Wheeling’s many neighborhoods as mixed-use neighborhoods and/or “destination” districts, emphasizing unique features, recreation activities, or opportunities that differentiate one neighborhood from another.**

- Create an ad hoc committee to identify and pursue placemaking opportunities throughout the city and its neighborhoods. The co-chair attended a full-day webinar on placemaking and walked away with a “placemaking playbook” – a comprehensive 600-page guide. The guide should be used to help inspire and implement potential opportunities for

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placemaking.

- Wheeling has a great many assets, from parks to interesting neighborhoods to restaurants, but they tend to be disconnected from one another. Wheeling needs to identify areas that have the potential to serve as “destination districts”, and work hard to develop them into mixed-use areas individuals can spend a day exploring. Water Street between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> is the most obvious example of a location aching to become the anchor of the city, as is Centre Market.
- Create more historic districts. As mentioned earlier, historic districts have quite the return on investment and allow for much more creative approaches to redevelopment. Wheeling should look to expand creative districts where possible.
- Develop a separate building code for restoration/renovation of structures in historic districts.
- Reevaluate current zoning in neighborhoods in order to facilitate desired change to mixed-use neighborhoods.
- While the committee strongly believes that the majority of effort and development needs to be focused on downtown Wheeling (for the time being), the city should support and encourage events, festivals, and activities taking place within specific neighborhoods. South Park in Woodsdale or Garden Park in Warwood are examples of green space that should be used to foster periodic community events.
- Visit cities such as Vanwert, Ohio; Fredericksburg, Texas; Winchester, Virginia; Asheville, North Carolina; Sonoma, California; and Frederick, Maryland. Be inspired by their successes, and meet with city officials to determine how they revitalized their cities.
  - Vanwert, Ohio is similar to Wheeling in that two different shopping plazas such as the Highlands, and the Ohio Valley Mall flank it. Nonetheless, their downtown is full of vibrant local businesses that are supported by events organized by the organization *Main Street Van Wert*.
  - Fredericksburg, Texas lives in the shadow of San Antonio, yet citizens from all over Texas visit the small town to spend a day walking its impressive Main Street exploring one unique business after another. These boutique businesses thrive by offering products that cannot be found at your cookie-cutter shopping center. From gourmet salsa shops to breweries to antique stores to a vintage poster and sign shop, Fredericksburg offers thousands an incredible *experience* every single day.
  - Winchester, Virginia realized its architecture was an asset and moved to protect it long ago. Design standards that enhance and celebrate its colonial past give the streets and buildings a consistent feel throughout town. Winchester also serves as a case study on how cities can boldly transform a street build for vehicles into a

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successful pedestrian walking mall lined with thriving businesses.

- In many ways Asheville, North Carolina’s downtown looks and feels like downtown Wheeling – or at least what it could be in the near future. The “hilly” downtown is lined with old, repurposed buildings and individuals walking from one business to another with smiles on their faces. The city is also a shining example of how a municipality and a university can partner together for their mutual benefit.
- Sonoma, California is a great example of a small town utilizing mixed-use zoning to maximum benefit. The main town square, adjacent to residential housing, serves as a recreational and social gathering place for citizens of all ages. From picnic tables to playgrounds to green space to municipal buildings, the square has it all. It is also surrounded on four sides by a thriving business district with storefronts at street level and apartments on the second or third floor. While the square is always buzzing with vehicles, traffic-calming practices are in place to communicate that the pedestrian is the primary concern of Sonoma.
- Frederick, Maryland is an example of what can happen when a municipality thinks big. A few decades ago, Frederick’s downtown faced a problem we know all too well here in Wheeling: flooding. In response, Frederick developed a remarkable infrastructure plan that rerouted its creek into underground culverts that effectively served as a downtown bypass. The city then controlled aboveground flow, and redeveloped a central business district and waterfront park around it. The new downtown Frederick is a marvel.
- Improve recreation opportunities within neighborhoods. Create a city recreation budget as well as a strategic plan for the ongoing development and maintenance of recreation facilities.
  - Create new green space with simple landscaping and benches, or interesting “pocket parks” in place of abandoned buildings.
  - We cannot build many of our steep hillsides. Could a system of hiking trails similar to the City of Akron Metropark System be developed?
  - Bike-sharing kiosks located throughout cities are a major trend having positive impacts. While this may be better handled by the private sector, creating access to the rail trail near Kroger in Woodsdale should be a priority. In addition, expanded bike lanes should be explored throughout parts of the city. McCulloch Street serves as a relatively flat, natural entryway into downtown via 16<sup>th</sup> Street that could be better developed for recreational access.
  - Work with the West Virginia Division of Highways to transform unused land buffering interstates or state highways into productive recreational areas. The City of Charleston is currently pursuing an opportunity where the land underneath the

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I-77/I-64 superstructures is transformed into ice rinks, basketball courts, etc. The City of Wheeling's Parks and Recreation Director has also identified land near the I-470 split in Elm Grove that could be repurposed as a mountain biking park.

- Continue the city's process of evaluating and modernizing amenities offered at its various parks and playgrounds. If necessary, work with private donors or organizations that can help with the heavy lift of rejuvenating so many parks in a short period of time.