



Braxton County Economic Development Authority

Strategic Plan Update

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I. Description of County

Formed in 1836 from parts of Lewis, Kanawha and Nicholas Counties, Braxton County is situated in central West Virginia and contains 513 square miles. Population density based on 2000 Census data is 28.7 persons per square mile. Braxton County presents the best of rural community living as well as the challenges. Its location in the heart of West Virginia offers Braxton County residents and businesses many recreational, social and cultural opportunities within its own boundaries and within an easy one hour commute. Nestled along the Elk and Little Kanawha Rivers, the communities of Sutton (county seat), Gassaway, and Burnsville evoke the small town charm and community spirit indicative of rural West Virginia while Flatwoods thrives because of its scenic beauty and proximity to Interstate 79. While these positive qualities exist, there are still challenges facing these communities, many of which are typical of small rural areas.

Burnsville enjoys a very active senior population that helped to raise local funds to support a small medical clinic, and hosts an annual homecoming event that is extremely well attended by former residents. Future growth is anticipated in Burnsville. Burnsville is in the process of completing a water extension project that will serve residents on Curry Ridge also serve Camp Sunshine Mountain Lakes, a Woodmen of the World project. The Town of Burnsville has completed a renovation project of its municipal wastewater treatment and collection system.

The Town of Sutton and the Town of Gassaway have extremely involved local governments that are striving to develop projects to improve their infrastructure. Sutton is in the process of correcting storm drain deficiencies along North Hill Street. Between the communities of Sutton and Gassaway, the Braxton County Senior Citizens Center is in the process of designing a new senior center to be constructed by fall 2007.

The area around the I-79 interchange at Flatwoods has experienced extraordinary growth due to the interstate and its central location in West Virginia. The economy has experienced an enormous positive impact due to a factory outlet shopping area that continues to expand, a motel/conference center that attracts numerous conferences, and Weyerhaeuser Lumber. The Braxton County Commission and the Flatwoods-Canoe Run Public Service District's (FCR PSD) recently completed the Poplar and Morrison Ridge water extension project. The Commission and the FCR PSD also has received funding to complete the upgrade of the PSD's water treatment plant. Because of Weyerhaeuser's operations and the consistent growth occurring at the Flatwoods I-79 Interchange, the need for this project was significant. The Braxton County Commission has added several other water projects to the region's project list, including many possible self-help projects.

The Braxton County Development Authority constructed an office building in Flatwoods in 2006 with the help of an EDA grant. The building is wired with the latest technological equipment and infrastructure. The Development Authority currently has one tenant and is in discussion with several others about locating there. The Development Authority is also interested in continuing its mission to develop an industrial park.

A. Demographics

The total population of Braxton County according to the 2000 Census is 14,702. More recent population estimates provided by the West Virginia University Regional Research Institute (RRI) show the county with a total population of 14,858. These figures reflect a consistent increase in population since 1990. Braxton County recognized significant growth (13%) in population between 1990 and 2000. This is a much higher growth rate than that of the state as a whole over the same period. Out of the 55 counties in West Virginia, Braxton ranked within the top ten counties experiencing the greatest population increase from 1990 to 2000. The municipalities in the county also experienced population increases with the exception Burnsville and Gassaway which showed a decline in population over the period. Exhibit 1 compares the population growth in Braxton County and its municipalities with that of the State.

Exhibit 1
Population Change in Municipalities, Braxton County,
and West Virginia, 1990 – 2000

Area	Total Population		Numerical Change	% Change 1990-2000
	1990	2000		
Burnsville	495	481	-14	-3
Flatwoods	324	348	24	7
Gassaway	946	901	-45	-5
Sutton	939	1,011	72	8
Braxton County	12,998	14,702	1,704	13
West Virginia	1,793,477	1,808,344	14,867	1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates

Population Projections

The increases in population are projected to continue over the next decade, however, at a much slower rate of growth than has previously been experienced. Exhibit 2 shows the projected population for the County through 2020. These projected growth rates for the County continue to be higher than those projected for the overall state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau the state is projected to have little growth (0.11%) from 2005-2010, no growth from 2010-2015, and slight population loss (-0.5%) from 2015-2020.

Exhibit 2
Braxton County Population Projections, 2010-2020

Year	Total Population of County	Percent Change
1990	12,998	
2000	14,702	13.11
2005 (estimate)	14,858	1.06
2010 (projection)	15,045	1.26
2015 (projection)	15,187	0.94
2020 (projection)	15,291	0.68

Source: West Virginia Regional Research Institute; Terrell Ellis & Associates

Age Distribution

As evidenced in Exhibit 3, the age distribution in Braxton County varied only slightly during the ten-year period between 1990 and 2000. These changes are mirrored in the statewide data for the same period. While Braxton County and the State recognized a slight decline of persons between the ages of 24 years and younger, both recognized minimal increases in persons between the ages of 25 and 64. Based on the 2000 Census over 70% of the population is over 25. Declines in the previous category are most likely indicative of young people leaving the area upon graduation to seek higher education and/or job opportunities outside the area.

Exhibit 3
Age of Population in Braxton County, 1990-2000

Age	Braxton County Population			
	1990	% of Total	2000	% of Total
Under 5 years	872	7	779	5
5 to 24 years	3,549	27	3,669	25
25 to 44 years	3,725	29	4,132	28
45 to 64 years	2,625	20	3,792	26
65 years and older	2,227	17	2,330	16
Total	12,989	100	14,702	100

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates

The largest population growth in the County between 1990 and 2000 was in the 45-64 year old age group. This growth is consistent with statewide trends which indicate a 4 percent increase in population in the 45-64 year old age group, equating to 25 percent of the statewide population. The median age for the County (39.6 years) is slightly higher

than that of the state (38.6 years). The median ages are even higher at the municipal level based on the 2000 Census:

- Burnsville - 41.5
- Flatwoods - 39.0
- Gassaway - 45.1
- Sutton - 45.6

These figures along with information regarding the median age indicates an aging population in the County that will only increase over time.

Racial Composition

As shown in Exhibit 4 Braxton County has a very small minority population which reflects the overall state racial characteristics. Although the populations are small, all racial categories experienced increases between 1990 and 2000 in both the County and statewide. The largest increases were shown in the American Indian and Alaska Native and Black or African American categories. At the municipal level, the trend in increases in minority populations continued with the exception of Sutton.

**Exhibit 4
Population by Race in Braxton County compared to West Virginia, 1990 – 2000**

Race	Braxton County				West Virginia			
	1990	% of Total	2000	% of Total	1990	% of Total	2000	% of Total
White	12,905	99.3	14,514	98.7	1,725,523	96.2	1,733,390	96.6
Black or African American	46	0.4	120	0.8	56,295	3.1	62,817	3.5
American Indian and Alaska Native	17	0.1	129	0.9	2,458	0.1	10,644	0.6
Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander	23	0.2	30	0.2	7,459	0.4	12,760	0.7
Some other race	7	0.1	21	0.1	1,742	0.1	5,579	0.3
Total	12,998	100.0	14,702	100.0	1,793,477	100.0	1,808,344	100.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates

Summary

- Braxton County is experiencing population growth at rates much higher than statewide averages. The county is one of the top ten counties in the state in population growth over the 1990-2000 period.
- The population growth is projected to continue through 2020 at rates higher than the overall state, however, these rates will not be as high as those experienced between 1990 and 2000. Beginning in 2010 the growth rate will remain constant but begin to decline.
- The age distribution of the current population in the County and its municipalities indicate that the majority of the population is aging in place. Issues related to senior citizens and social services for the elderly may become even more prevalent as the current population moves towards retirement age.

- Racial minorities do not make up a significant portion of the population at the county or municipal levels; however, increases in all racial groups were shown over the 1990 to 2000 period.

B. Income Distribution

Households and Household Income

The total number of households in Braxton County in 2000 was 5,771. This is an increase of 17% (821) over the 1990 level of 4,950. See Exhibit 5. Although this growth did not keep pace with the state, nevertheless it was positive in comparison to other counties across the State that recognized declines in the number of households. The average household size declined slightly, but kept pace with statewide trends.

Exhibit 5
Braxton County and West Virginia Household Trends, 1990-2000

Area	Households		Household Size	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Braxton County	4,950	5,771	2.61	2.46
West Virginia	500,259	736,481	2.55	2.40

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

In 1990, the majority of household incomes were \$10,000 or less. However, by 2000 household incomes had increased with the largest share of households making between \$15,000 and \$24,999. Although Exhibit 6 depicts the dramatic increases in the number of households in the upper income categories, starting at \$50,000 and up, it also reflects that more than half of the County's households earn incomes less than \$25,000.

In 1999, the median household income (HHI) in West Virginia was \$29,696 whereas the median household income for Braxton County was \$24,412. Both the state and the county showed increases in median HHI from 1989 when the levels were \$20,795 and \$16,359, respectively. The HHI for the County continues to increase as estimates provided by the U.S. Census show a level of \$26,717 for 2003. Increases were also estimated at the state level for the 2003 HHI of \$32,967.

Exhibit 6
Household Income Distribution in Braxton County, 1990-2000

Income	1990		2000		% Change
	Total HH	% of Total HH	Total HH	% of Total HH	
< \$10,000	1,505	30.3	1,096	18.9	-27%
\$10,000-\$14,999	802	16.2	707	12.2	-11.80%
\$15,000-\$24,999	1,088	21.9	1,145	19.8	-52%
\$25,000-\$34,999	672	13.5	983	17	46.30%
\$35,000-\$49,999	532	10.7	749	12.9	40.80%
\$50,000-\$74,999	292	5.9	687	11.9	135.30%
\$75,000-\$99,999	47	0.9	251	4.3	434.00%
\$100,000-\$149,999	16	0.3	102	1.8	537.50%
> \$150,000	10	0.2	72	1.2	620.00%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates

Per Capita Personal Income

Per capita personal income (PCPI) levels have also been increasing at both the County and state levels. In 1999 the PCI for West Virginia was \$20,279. In 2004 the PCI for the state increased to \$25,792, indicating an annual growth rate of 4.5 percent. This level is higher than the U.S. PCPI growth rate of 3.4 percent for the same period. Braxton County fared even better than the state and national averages with a growth rate of 4.8 percent over the 1999-2004 period. In the county the PCPI rose from 14,736 in 1999 to 18,653 in 2004. While this growth is positive, compared to the other counties in the state Braxton county still ranks low in PCPI and was considered 46th out of 55 (West Virginia Economic Outlook 2007, WVU College of Business and Economics).

Poverty and Self Sufficiency

The percentage of person living below poverty in Braxton County has been steadily declining since 1989. This trend is also true for the state as a whole. Exhibit 7 shows the percentage of the population which is considered to be below poverty for the county and the state. Of those individuals living below poverty in the County in 2003, 961 were between the ages of 5 and 18, which is approximately 3 percent of the total population in that age group. While the overall trend in population in poverty is in decline it is important to note that the percentages are still much higher in the County than the rest of the state.

Exhibit 7
Percentage of Population below Poverty Levels in Braxton County
and West Virginia, 1989-2003

Year	Braxton County	West Virginia
1989	25.6%	19.2%
1999	22.0%	17.9%
2003	19.9%	16.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates

In 2007 the West Virginia Bureau of Employment Programs (BEP) calculated self sufficiency standards for the state and its counties. The standard is a measure of how much income is required for a family of a particular structure in a particular location to satisfactorily meet its fundamental needs without public or private assistance. Based on the BEP calculations the self sufficiency standard for Braxton County would be \$14,792 annual or \$7.00 hourly for one adult and \$36,171 annual (combined) or \$8.56 hourly (per adult) for two adults and two school aged children. These figures are slightly lower than the statewide standard of \$15,849 annual or \$7.50 hourly for one adult and \$39,205 annual (combined) or \$9.40 hourly (per adult) for two adults and two school aged children (WVBEP, 2007).

Summary

- The number of households in the County is growing while the average household size is decreasing. This trend is consistent with state and national averages.
- HHI and PCPI levels are steadily increasing at the County and state levels, however Braxton County continues to lag behind the rest of the counties in the state in these categories. Poverty continues to be a problem for a significant portion of the population in the County even though these rates are in decline from 1989.
- A living wage in Braxton County would be considered to be \$14,792 annual or \$7.00 hourly for one adult and \$36,171 annual (combined) or \$8.56 hourly (per adult) for two adults and two school aged children. This is much lower than the current 2003 PCPI (\$18,653) for the County. However for families it is much higher than the current 2003 median HHI of \$26,717.
- Household incomes have increased significantly (49.2%) during the past ten years, indicating that perhaps local individuals have more money to spend and/or invest in their local community. However, as research indicates, there are still many families with marginal incomes, which reinforce the need for high-paying jobs that provide benefits for employees.

C. Economy

Braxton County has a healthy and growing local economy. Exhibit 8 compares job trends by major industry for Braxton County in 1990 and 2000. The County's major increases are in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services. Tourism related jobs increased 734%, while 170 jobs were lost in the retail field. While this loss unfortunately may reflect declining downtown retail trade industries, Braxton County has recognized significant growth especially in the Flatwoods interchange area. It should also be noted that the Census Bureau has shifted food service and lodging from the retail category and placed it into Arts/Entertainment/Recreation/Food Service and Lodging, a fact which may also explain the significant fluctuation. Although tourism related jobs are important to the local economy, they traditionally are not jobs with high wages or benefits.

Significant growth (99.3%) was recognized in the professional scientific, management, administrative and waste management services category. Sizable growth was also recognized in the areas of construction (36.2%) and manufacturing (21.4%). All of these categories typically offer high paying positions and employee benefits.

Exhibit 8
Earnings by Major Industry in Braxton County, 1990-2000¹

Category	1990	2000	% Change
Agriculture	150	332	121.3%
Construction	470	640	36.2%
Manufacturing	351	426	21.4%
Wholesale Trade	89	201	125.8%
Retail Trade	813	643	(20.9%)
Transportation and public utilities	410	494	20.5%
Information	--	64	--
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	138	111	(19.6%)
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	139	277	99.3%
Educational, health and social services	689	899	30.5%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	44	367	734.1%
Government	139	332	138.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

Based on data provided by the WV BEP from March of 2006 the following business are the top employers in the County²:

¹ The changes shown in the Agriculture, Information, Retail Trade, and Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services categories are assumed to be the result of reclassification from the SIC to NAICS used in the 2000 Census.

² This data is based on the number of employees provided as part of survey that is conducted by the WVBEP during the first quarter of each year. Employees include anyone who worked 1 hr or more during the survey week.

1. Braxton County Board of Education
2. Weyerhaeuser Corporation
3. Braxton County Memorial Hospital
4. Go-Mart, Inc.
5. Braxton County Senior Citizen Center, Inc.
6. Caregiving & Advocacy for the Rural Elderly, Inc.
7. Mountain Cap of West Virginia
8. Central WV Aging Service, Inc.
9. John Skidmore Development, Inc.
10. Coastal Lumber Company

Labor Force

Braxton County has experienced a fairly steady labor force since 1999 with unemployment declining during that period and the overall unemployment rate staying at levels consistent with the rest of the state. The labor pool in the County is also skilled and educated with almost half of the population graduating high school and 25 percent completing at least some collegiate level education.

Exhibit 9
Braxton County Labor Force Statistics, 1999-2005

Braxton County	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Civilian Labor Force	5,330	5,860	5,720	5,900	5,990	5,890	5,950
Employed	4,780	5,430	5,340	5,450	5,550	5,540	5,600
Unemployed	550	430	380	450	450	350	350
Unemployment Rate	10.3	7.3	6.6	7.6	7.4	5.9	5.8

Source: WV BEP; Terrell Ellis & Associates

Retail Sales

Retail sales are an important component of the local and regional economy. Based on Economic Census Data Braxton County experienced growth in retail sales revenue from 1997 to 2002 and remained fairly constant in the number of retail establishments. These trends are comparable to Braxton's neighboring counties which all experienced increases in sales revenue except Clay County which declined slightly. The adjacent counties also all lost retail establishments between 1997 and 2004 except for Webster which remained constant. Of all the neighboring counties Nicholas County had the largest number of retail establishments and highest revenue in 2004, however, Upshur County had the largest increase in retail sales (55%) over the period.

Exhibit 10
Retail Sales in Braxton County and Surrounding Region, 1997-2004

	Retail Trade	Braxton	Calhoun	Clay	Gilmer	Lewis	Nicholas	Upshur	Webster
2002	Establishments	86	27	31	24	80	120	95	32
	Sales (\$1,000)	123,859	25,325	36,474	26,010	149,870	267,385	240,478	31,623
1997	Establishments	87	29	33	25	89	139	101	32
	Sales (\$1,000)	111,123	20,729	37,899	23,432	143,578	213,706	155,231	31,192

Source: Economic Census, US Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

Summary

- The County's major economic increases are in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services sectors. Such tourism-related jobs are important to the local economy; however are not typically high-wage earning positions.
- Significant growth (99.3%) was recognized in the professional scientific, management, administrative and waste management services category. Sizable growth was also recognized in the areas of construction (36.2%) and manufacturing (21.4%). These sectors generally provide much higher wages than tourism-related industries.
- Retail sales have increased in the county and remain competitive with neighboring counties.
- Unemployment and unemployment rates have been declining since 1999 and the County has a strong labor force of skilled and educated workers.

D. Housing

Housing in Braxton County varies in terms of age and condition. According to the Census, 61.4% of the housing stock is at least 25 years old. However, during the past ten years there have been an additional 1,666 single-family housing units built in the community, significant growth for a rural community. This figure significantly outpaces statewide trends. In 2005 the number of housing units increased again by 198 units or 2.7 percent.

Exhibit 11
Number of Housing Units Braxton County and West Virginia, 1990-2000

Place	1990	2000	% Change
Braxton County	5,708	7,374	29%
West Virginia	781,295	844,623	8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

The most dramatic change in the housing market is demonstrated by the increase in the housing values in the County. In 2000, the median house value was \$59,300, a significant increase over the median value of \$39,300 declared in 1990. This figure lags behind the state median house values of \$72,800.

The median mortgage value in the County in 1990 was \$451 per month, this value increased to \$611 per month in 2000. The median rent for the County over the same period was \$264 per month in 1990 and \$332 in 2000. These figures are slightly lower than the corresponding statewide averages.

Housing Stock Characteristics

The majority of the housing stock in the County is considered to be single-family detached housing. Less than five percent of the total housing stock is multi-unit which may indicate a severe shortage in apartment-style and multi-family housing which could be problematic for lower-income individuals. The lack of this style of housing is also apparent at the state level. Manufactured and mobile housing makes up approximately 26 percent of the total housing stock in the County, a rate which is ten percent higher than the state average.

**Exhibit 12
Housing Units and Structure Types in Braxton County and West Virginia, 2000**

Units and Structure Type	1990		2000	
	Total	Total	Total	% Total
Total Housing Units:	5,708	100.0	7,374	100.0
1, detached	4,117	72.1	4,740	69.1
1, attached	52	0.9	82	1.6
2	81	1.4	88	2.6
3 or 4	46	0.8	94	2.9
5 to 9	71	1.2	75	2.6
10 to 19	33	0.6	51	1.5
20 to 49	0	0.0	24	0.9
50 or more	0	0.0	12	1.5
Mobile home	1,254	22.0	1,958	16.9
Boat, RV, van, etc.	54*	1.0	250	0.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

* 1990 Census had "other" category instead of "Boat, RV, van, etc."

Approximately 20 percent of the housing stock in the county was built between 1990 and 2000. The majority of the units were built between 1960 and 1989 with a significant portion of the stock built in 1939 or earlier. This breakdown is consistent with the housing stock averages throughout the rest of the state with a slightly higher percentage of newer construction in the area. See Exhibit 13.

In Braxton County in 2000 approximately ten percent of all housing lacked complete plumbing facilities and approximately eight percent lacked complete kitchen facilities. These levels are much higher than the statewide average of three percent for both plumbing and kitchen facilities.

**Exhibit 13
Housing Unit Age in Braxton County and West Virginia, 2000**

Age	Braxton County		West Virginia	
	Total	% Total	Total	% Total
Built 1999 to March 2000	231	3.1	16,300	1.9
Built 1995 to 1998	655	8.9	57,953	6.9
Built 1990 to 1994	621	8.4	56,800	6.7
Built 1980 to 1989	1,332	18.1	121,243	14.4
Built 1970 to 1979	1,439	19.5	156,862	18.6
Built 1960 to 1969	748	10.1	91,692	10.9
Built 1950 to 1959	581	7.9	99,887	11.8
Built 1940 to 1949	514	7.0	80,765	9.6
Built 1939 or earlier	1,253	17.0	163,121	19.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

Vacancy

The homeownership rate in the County in 2000 was 78.2%, three percent higher than the state average rate. As shown in Exhibit 14 vacancy rates for both homeowners and renters have fluctuated at the municipal and county levels between 1990 and 2000. The county and all municipalities experienced increased in homeowner vacancy rates from 1990 to 2000 with the exception of Flatwoods which showed a slight decrease. In comparison, the rental market fared somewhat better over the same period with vacancy rates going down in all areas except Flatwoods which experienced a slight increase. Overall the County vacancy rates are in line with statewide averages.

**Exhibit 14
Housing Occupancy in Braxton County and Municipalities
Compared to West Virginia, 1990 – 2000**

Area	Homeowner Vacancy Rate		Rental Vacancy Rate	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Burnsville	1.2	7.1	11.5	8.7
Flatwoods	1.9	1.6	6.9	7.1
Gassaway	4.4	8.6	12.8	12.0
Sutton	3.3	8.0	15.8	13.0
Braxton County	1.8	3.1	9.0	7.6
West Virginia	2.2	2.2	10.1	9.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

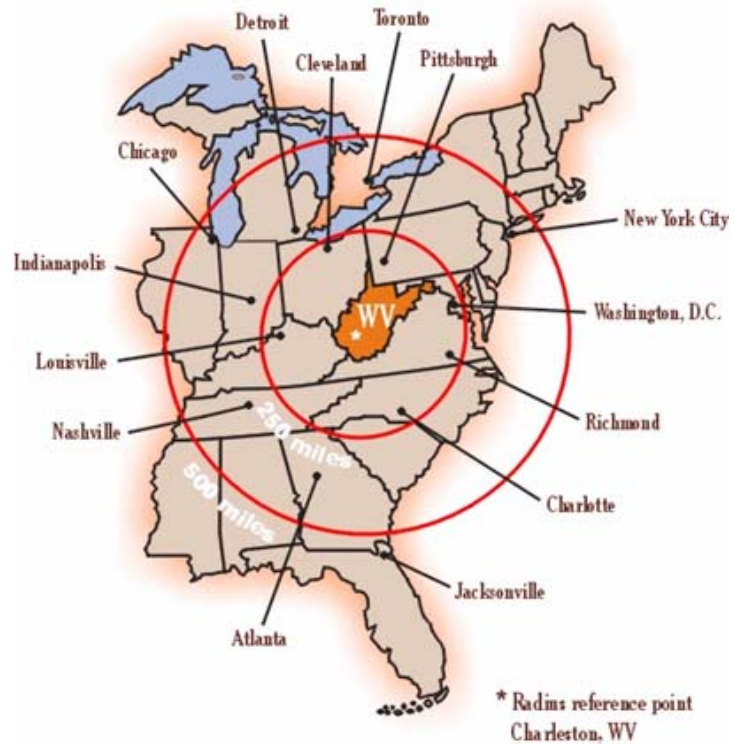
Summary

- Braxton County is experiencing growth in housing at a rate faster than statewide averages. Homeownership rates are also higher than state averages.
- Rental vacancy rates are declining within the County but some municipalities are seeing significant rises in homeowner vacancy rates.
- The majority of the housing stock in the County is less than 50 years old and a substantial portion of the total units have been built within the last 15 years.
- A significant number of units in the County lack adequate plumbing and kitchen facilities.

E. Transportation

Located in the heart of West Virginia, Braxton County is conveniently situated along Interstate 79. The County is located within 500 miles of 60 percent of the population of the United States, enabling Braxton County businesses to reach their markets quickly, efficiently and within a reasonable budget. The County is located within one hour of the State Capitol and one to two hours from other major urban areas of the state.

The intersection of two major highway systems is located in Braxton County. Interstate 79 is a major north-south transportation corridor providing direct access to the ports on the Great Lakes. In Morgantown, I-79 intersects with I-68, a link to most major arteries on the eastern seaboard. Forty miles north of Morgantown I-79 connects with I-70, which runs through the Midwest and ties in with all major highway networks in the northeast. In Charleston, I-79 intersects with I-77 and I-64, opening the area to the south and Midwest.



West Virginia Division of Tourism; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

The county is also the northern terminus for U.S. Route 19, or Appalachian Corridor D, which has recently been upgraded to a four-lane highway. U.S. Route 19 connects I-79 and I-64/I-77 at Beckley.

The following data reflects average daily traffic (ADT) counts gathered at various points on these highways in 2006 and earlier. These traffic counts reflect a steady increase in the I-79 area in Braxton County.

Exhibit 15
Highway Traffic Counts (Per Day), 1997-2006

Location	1997 ADT	2003 ADT	2006 ADT
Interstate 79 – Between US 19 and (Exit 57) and WV 4 (Exit 62)	16,500	20,000	24,000
Interstate 79 – Between WV 4 (Exit 62) and US 19 (Exit 67)	16,500	20,000	22,000
Interstate 79 – Between US 19 (Exit 67) and WV 5 (Exit 79)	16,000	21,500	22,500
U.S. Route 19 – North of Sutton	4,900	5,100	5,000
U.S. Route 19 – North of WV 15	4,800	5,300	4,650
U.S. Route 19 – South of Flatwoods	3,500	4,000	4,300

Source: WV Department of Transportation, Division of Highways; Terrell Ellis & Associates, Inc.

In addition to highways, the County is also served by additional ground transportation services such as freight rail and interstate bus service. Braxton County has its own general aviation airport in Sutton. The Braxton County Airport is a publicly owned and operated airfield with a 4000 foot asphalt runway which is lighted and open to the general public. 100 low-lead fuel and jet fuel are available on site. The Braxton County Airport Authority is also starting construction soon on taxi lanes for future development of T-Hangars, Corporate Hangars, and Box Hangars. The nearest commercial aviation services to the County is the Harrison-Marion regional Airport located 59 miles away in Bridgeport, WV. The nearest international airport is the Pittsburgh International Airport which is 169 miles from the County.

Summary

- Braxton County’s central location, proximity to major interstate corridors, and existing transportation services make it well suited for both inter and intra-state commerce.

F. Public Opinion Survey Results

In early April of 2007 a series of three public opinion surveys were distributed in Braxton County in support of the Strategic Plan Update process³. One survey was sent to a

³ It is important to note that the findings of this public opinion survey are only intended to provide an additional source of data to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in the County. The information was obtained from a very small subset of the overall population and should in no way be considered statistically significant or valid

selected group of leaders in the County who were identified by the steering committee members, another to a randomly selected set of business representatives based on data obtained from the state tax department, and the remaining survey was available to the general community on-line on the Braxton County Development Authority's website. Respondents were given approximately two weeks to provide their responses. A total of 73 completed surveys were received by the April 16, 2007 deadline. Of those, 36 respondents out of 40 completed the leadership survey, 25 out of 79 completed the business survey, and 12 community surveys were completed on-line. A discussion of the survey findings is provided below and an overall summary of each of the survey responses is provided as an attachment to this report.

Quality of Life Issues

There were several questions asked in each of the surveys that addressed various quality of life issues. Overall, respondents seemed generally satisfied with current public safety services in the county. Adequacy of social services was rated average to low. Child care services were considered a weakness on some surveys. Existing programs for senior citizens, however, were viewed as strengths of the County. Accessibility, adequacy, and affordability of health care facilities in the county were viewed as average with some respondents identifying health care as a weakness. In terms of aesthetics, the general appearance of the community was rated low and considered a weakness of the area with a particular emphasis on the condition of the downtowns. Recreation programs and facilities, including public access to recreation areas, were ranked average and considered a weakness for the County on some surveys. Access and availability of cultural facilities/activities ranked low across all three surveys and is also considered a weakness of the County.

Housing

Housing availability and cost overall was ranked as average or a weakness for the County. The survey form for the leadership category asked additional detailed questions about housing issues that the other two forms did not address. Of the 31 respondents who participated in the leadership survey most felt that the availability of executive-level housing was a weakness in the county along with the availability of rental apartments and the overall availability of accessible housing.

Education

The quality of educational facilities at all levels (primary, secondary, post-secondary) was ranked satisfactory or average for most respondents. The availability of job skills training was considered a weakness in the County. Another identified weakness was the involvement of the community and parents in the school district. An identified strength was the involvement in the community by higher education institutions.

Government

A variety of questions in all three surveys addressed issues related to state and local government policies and leadership. Issues related to planning generally ranked very low. Adequacy of local planning and zoning ranked low for respondents along with the adequacy of local building codes and long-range planning for municipal improvements

and capital budgeting. Government attitude towards businesses was considered a weakness, especially among the respondents from the business community. Property and sales taxes were considered average and in some cases strengths for the County. Additional local government questions were asked in the leadership survey. This subset of the overall respondents further identified the following issues as weaknesses of the local government:

- The level of awareness of the community regarding local development programs
- Involvement of both public and private sectors in development programs for the community
- The level of funding for local development programs
- The level of communication and cooperation between various organizations involved in the development programs for the community
- The level of leadership commitment to advancing the growth and development of the community

Infrastructure

Transportation infrastructure was considered both strengths and weaknesses for the County. Adequacy and access to local major highways is a definite strength due to the location of the County along I-79. Public transportation was considered a weakness along with commercial and freight air passenger service. Rail service also ranked low in a majority of survey responses. Other infrastructure such as water, sewer, electricity, natural gas, and telephone service were considered normal or average. Drinking water quality ranked as a strength, however, some low rankings were given for water and sewer service and storm drainage. Internet access was considered a weakness for the County.

Labor

The majority of respondents ranked the labor situation in the county as average to below average. Availability of quality well-paying jobs consistently ranked low and is considered a weakness in the County. The availability of skilled and educated laborers along with access to training was also considered a weakness. The diversity of the local economy was identified a weakness among the respondents from the business community.

Market

The location of the County for serving the national market and the proximity to other major markets in the state ranked as strengths. The appearance of the highway-oriented retail and commercial areas ranked high as attractants for business activity and are viewed as strengths of the County. The downtowns, however, were identified as weaknesses in terms of their ability to attract businesses. From a development standpoint, the availability of fully served, attractive, and suitable site for all types of development (i.e., industrial, office, commercial/retail, residential) is considered a weakness for the County. Availability of industrial sites was identified as a particular concern among many respondents. Access to capital for business and personal loans was considered average. The availability of low-interest loans for small businesses and access to venture capital ranked low and are considered weaknesses of the county. Availability of local business incentives also ranked low. In terms of services, support

for business development was considered a weakness for the County. Respondents indicated that current programs to market industries as well as attract new retail and commercial businesses are inadequate. Respondents also ranked funding to support tourism development as a weakness.

Summary

- The strengths of the County are considered to be its geographic location, proximity to major interstate transportation corridors, public services, infrastructure, and the physical and environmental characteristics of the area.
- The major weaknesses of the County deal with access to quality jobs, job training, skilled workers, lack of diversity in the local economy, condition of the downtowns, availability of various housing types, lack of local planning, lack of developable sites for a variety of uses, internet access, and cooperation between government and businesses.

G. Conclusions

Demographics

Braxton County is experiencing population growth at rates much higher than statewide averages. The county is one of the top ten counties in the state in population growth over the 1990-2000 period. Population growth is projected to continue through 2020 at rates higher than the overall state, however, these rates will not be as high as those experienced between 1990 and 2000. Beginning in 2010 the growth rate will remain constant but begin to decline. The age distribution of the current population in the County and its municipalities indicate that the majority of the population is aging in place. Issues related to senior citizens and social services for the elderly may become even more prevalent as the current population moves towards retirement age. Racial minorities do not make up a significant portion of the population at the county or municipal levels; however, increases in all racial groups were shown over the 1990 to 2000 period.

Income Distribution

The number of households in the County is growing while the average household size is decreasing. This trend is consistent with state and national averages. Household income and per capita personal income levels are steadily increasing at the County and state levels, however Braxton County continues to lag behind the rest of the counties in the state in these categories. Poverty continues to be a problem for a significant portion of the population in the County even though these rates are in decline from 1989.

Economy

The County's major economic increases are in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services sectors. Such tourism-related jobs are important to the local economy; however are not typically high-wage earning positions. Significant growth (99.3%) was recognized in the professional scientific, management, administrative and waste management services category. Sizable growth was also recognized in the areas of construction (36.2%) and manufacturing (21.4%). These

sectors generally provide much higher wages than tourism-related industries. Retail sales have increased in the county and remain competitive with neighboring counties. Unemployment and unemployment rates have been declining since 1999 and the County has a strong labor force of skilled and educated workers.

Housing

Braxton County is experiencing growth in housing at a rate faster than statewide averages. Homeownership rates are also higher than state averages. Rental vacancy rates are declining within the County but some municipalities are seeing significant rises in homeowner vacancy rates. The majority of the housing stock in the County is less than 50 years old and a substantial portion of the total units have been built within the last 15 years. A significant number of units in the County lack adequate plumbing and kitchen facilities.

Transportation

Braxton County's central location, proximity to major interstate corridors, and existing transportation services make it well suited for both inter and intra-state commerce.

Survey Results

According to the limited public opinion survey that was conducted as part of the Strategic Plan Update process the strengths of the County are considered to be its geographic location, proximity to major interstate transportation corridors, public services, infrastructure, and the physical and environmental characteristics of the area. The major weaknesses of the County deal with access to quality jobs, job training, skilled workers, lack of diversity in the local economy, condition of the downtowns, availability of various housing types, lack of local planning, lack of developable sites for a variety of uses, internet access, and cooperation between government and businesses.

III. Goals, Objectives, Strategic Actions, and Evaluation Measurements

Goal 1: Encourage new development within Braxton County.

Objective 1-1: Assist in the diversification of the local economy by supporting and encouraging a variety of new development (i.e., industrial, commercial, office, retail, and residential).

Strategy 1-1A: Develop an inventory of potential developable sites in Braxton County and existing available sites in downtowns (including suitability for various types of development).

Strategy 1-1B: Work with appropriate federal, state, and local agencies to better understand the development potential surrounding lakes in Braxton County.

Strategy 1-1C: Actively market available development sites based on completed inventory and suitability for different types of development.

Strategy 1-1D: Begin planning and development of new office/small scale manufacturing building similar to completed Braxton Technology Center.

Evaluation Measurements:

- Number of new businesses created in county and municipalities.
- Number of businesses interested in locating in county or municipalities.
- Amount of available space by type and square foot (both raw and developed).
- Number of properties removed from inventory database due to lease or sale.

Goal 2: Assist in the creation and retention of new jobs in Braxton County.

Objective 2-1: Identify business sectors to market and attract to Braxton County.

Strategy 2-1A: Utilize the information collected under Strategies 1-1A, 1-1B, 1-1D, 4-1A, 4-2A, and 4-2B to target suitable businesses and industry sectors to market.

Objective 2-2: Retain existing job base through implementation of regular business retention visits to all sectors of the local economy.

Strategy 2-2A: Track issues that are identified in retention visits and develop strategies to address.

Objective 2-3: Lead the exploration of an entrepreneurial training program for central West Virginia.

Evaluation Measurements:

- Number of new businesses created in county and municipalities.
- Number of retained businesses created in county and municipalities.
- Number of businesses contacted for retention visits.
- Satisfaction survey of businesses to evaluate impacts of visits and programs.
- Annual review of key socioeconomic indicators such as job growth/loss by sector and employment/unemployment rates, etc.

Goal 3: Improve infrastructure in Braxton County to support economic development projects.

Objective 3-1: Increase access to broadband Internet services in the County.

Strategy 3-1A: Continue to support and expand on the Research Zone pilot project.

Objective 3-2: Develop a better understanding of what some of the infrastructure limitations are that may prevent development from occurring in the County.

Strategy 3-2A: Coordinate with local and state agencies to identify problem areas with existing infrastructure and potential projects necessary to address the problems.

Strategy 3-2B: Work with local businesses and potential new markets to identify infrastructure needs.

Evaluation Measurements:

- Number of households/dwelling units served by broadband/highspeed internet.
- Percentage of broadband/highspeed internet coverage in the county.
- Number of identified infrastructure projects.
- Satisfaction survey of existing and potential future businesses regarding infrastructure.

Goal 4: Provide support for the development of the labor pool in Braxton County.

Objective 4-1: Develop a better understanding of what skills are required by existing business in the County and in support of potential new markets.

Strategy 4-1A: Work with local businesses and potential new markets to identify training needs through the creation of a business consortium that meets regularly.

Objective 4-2: Provide support and opportunities for vocational training in Braxton County.

Strategy 4-2A: Identify and market existing training programs offered through the Braxton County School district.

Strategy 4-2B: Establish partnerships with appropriate local, regional, and state agencies as well as public and private educational institutions and private industry to explore possible training programs/partnerships in Braxton County.

Evaluation Measurements:

- Satisfaction survey of existing and potential future businesses regarding training efforts and communication/partnership process.
- Number of training sessions offered.
- Attendance at training sessions.
- Increase in participation in existing training programs.
- Amount of interest expressed in training programs.
- Evaluations from participants in training programs.

Goal 5: Improve communication and coordination among agencies and the public in support of economic development in Braxton County.

Objective 5-1: Address organizational issues for the Braxton County Development Authority.

Strategy 5-1A: Determine the appropriate level of staffing and funding commitment for the organization.

Strategy 5-1B: Work with local businesses through the creation of a business consortium that meets regularly.

Strategy 5-1C: Increase local capacity by creating subcommittees to focus on specific goals and objectives and invite the general public to participate in the committees.

Objective 5-2: Provide coordination, support, and guidance for communities within the County conducting their own economic development projects.

Strategy 5-2A: Respond to requests for support from local governments engaging in their own economic development activities.

Objective 5-3: Increase involvement with the community regarding economic development programs sponsored by the BCDA.

Strategy 5-3A: Increase marketing for existing programs so that the general public is more aware of current efforts.

Strategy 5-3B: Develop a feedback loop for the public to comment on existing programs and to assist in determining needs and developing future programs.

Strategy 5-3C: Provide training to the BCDA board regarding available funding programs to support economic development activities.

Evaluation Measurements:

- Satisfaction survey of existing and potential future businesses regarding training efforts and communication/partnership process.
- Number of participants in subcommittees.
- Attendance at meetings and training sessions.
- Amount of support provided to local government economic development projects.
- Number of hits to BCDA website.

IV. Implementation Plan

Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party	Timeline	Budget/Funding Source	Action/Product
Strategy 1-1A: Develop an inventory of potential developable sites in Braxton County and existing available sites in downtowns (including suitability for various types of development).	High	BCDA	July-Sept., 2007	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of available sites with detailed descriptions.
Strategy 1-1B: Work with appropriate federal, state, and local agencies to better understand the development potential surrounding lakes in Braxton County.	High	BCDA, Corps of Engineers, WV DNR	January, 2008 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact) Establish subcommittee to focus on issue.
Strategy 1-1C: Actively market available development sites based on completed inventory and suitability for different types of development.	High	BCDA	October, 2007 and ongoing	\$25,000 Source: Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of marketing efforts and strategy (records of contact, advertising efforts, etc.)
Strategy 1-1D: Begin planning and development of new office/small scale manufacturing building similar to completed Braxton Technology Center.	High	BCDA	January, 2008 and ongoing	Unknown Source: Federal and state grants and loans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure property Design facilities Procure tenants Complete construction

Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party	Timeline	Budget/Funding Source	Action/Product
Strategy 2-1A: Utilize the information collected under Strategies 1-1A, 1-1B, 1-1D, 4-1A, 4-2A, and 4-2B to target suitable businesses and industry sectors to market.	High	BCDA	July-Sept., 2007	\$5,000 Source: Grant to do targeted industry analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of suitable markets to target based on other data collection activities related to site and labor pool development. • Documentation of marketing efforts and strategy (records of contact, advertising efforts, etc.)
Strategy 2-2A: Track issues that are identified in retention visits and develop strategies to address.	High	BCDA, WVDO	July, 2007 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of issues impeding business development • Development of strategies to address issues
Strategy 3-1A: Continue to support and expand on the Research Zone pilot project.	High	BCDA, Research Zone Institute	July, 2007 and ongoing	Unknown Source: Federal and state grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of broadband service in areas of the County that are currently not served.
Strategy 3-2A: Coordinate with local and state agencies to identify problem areas with existing infrastructure and potential projects necessary to address the problems.	Low	BCDA, County Commission	October, 2008 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of infrastructure projects needed in the County. • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact)

Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party	Timeline	Budget/Funding Source	Action/Product
Strategy 3-2B: Work with local businesses and potential new markets to identify infrastructure needs.	Low	BCDA, County Commission	October, 2008 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of infrastructure projects needed in the County. • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact)
Strategy 4-1A: Work with local businesses and potential new markets to identify training needs through the creation of a business consortium that meets regularly.	High	BCDA, Business Advisory Council	October-December, 2007	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of training projects needed in the County. • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact)
Strategy 4-2A: Identify and market existing training programs offered through the Braxton County School district.	High	BCDA, Braxton Board of Education	January, 2008 and ongoing	Unknown Source: Operating Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a list of existing and future training programs in the County. • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact) and identification of partnership opportunities. • Documentation of marketing efforts and strategy (records of contact, advertising efforts, etc.)

Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party	Timeline	Budget/Funding Source	Action/Product
Strategy 4-2B: Establish partnerships with appropriate local, regional, and state agencies as well as public and private educational institutions to explore possible training programs in Braxton County.	High	BCDA, Training Providers	January, 2008 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact) with Workforce West Virginia, WVU, Fairmont State, etc. and identification of partnership opportunities and potential programs. • Strategy to address training needs identified in Strategy 4-2A.
Strategy 5-1A: Determine the appropriate level of staffing and funding commitment for the organization.	High	BCDA	July, 2008	\$100,000 per year Source: state, county, grants, earned income, contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational chart showing structure of BCDA. • Descriptions of positions.
Strategy 5-1B: Work with local businesses through the creation of a business consortium that meets regularly.	High	BCDA, Business Community	October, 2007 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact) with members of business community.
Strategy 5-1C: Increase local capacity by creating subcommittees to focus on specific goals and objectives and invite the general public to participate in the committees.	Medium	BCDA	July, 2007 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of coordination efforts (meeting notes, records of contact)

Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party	Timeline	Budget/Funding Source	Action/Product
Strategy 5-2A: Respond to requests for support from local governments engaging in their own economic development activities.	Low	BCDA	October, 2008 and ongoing	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of coordination efforts with members of municipalities and identification of partnership opportunities and potential programs.
Strategy 5-3A: Increase marketing for existing programs so that the general public is more aware of current efforts.	Medium	BCDA	March, 2008	\$5,000 Source: Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of existing and future programs and projects sponsored by the BCDA. • Strategy for marketing. • Documentation of marketing efforts.
Strategy 5-3B: Develop a feedback loop for the public to comment on existing programs and to assist in determining needs and developing future programs.	Medium	BCDA	July, 2007 and ongoing	\$2,500 Source: Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment form on the BCDA web site. • Public meeting to encourage participation. • Staffed office for BCDA.
Strategy 5-3C: Provide training to the BCDA board regarding available funding programs to support economic development activities.	Low	BCDA Staff	March, 2008	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented state, federal and other business assistance programs • Training session for board members