



Priority Issues Workshop Summary

On May 31, 2017, Westmoreland County hosted a Priority Issues Workshop to begin developing goals and actions for Reimagining Our Westmoreland. The workshop was held at Westmoreland County Community College and included the participation of 39 community members. The workshop centered on developing goals and strategies to address seven topic areas identified through previous outreach efforts, including online surveys and in-person workshops and interviews. The topic areas included the following:

Population Retention & Attraction. Westmoreland County's population is a prominent concern for three reasons: it's aging, it's decreasing, and it's lacking diversity. An aging population not only leads to a decreasing population naturally, but can also lead to increased migration out of an area to locations with services and amenities that meet the needs of the elderly. The County's population is also very homogenous at 95% percent white. Community diversity and inclusivity, while sensitive subjects, have been shown to benefit the local economy in areas of tourism, education, and global linkages and may be necessary to reverse population decline.

Transportation. Transportation was noted as a prevalent problem in Westmoreland County throughout the initial community outreach process. Residents are particularly concerned with the lack of public transportation options. Data indicate residents continue to need direct access to Pittsburgh, but certain areas of the county may not meet the required density to support public transit. In addition to public transit, residents and business owners alike are concerned with general maintenance of the County's roadways.

Business Retention & Attraction. There are several challenges facing local businesses including a reported lack of skilled labor for manufacturing trades and the healthcare industry. Further, there is a need to both attract and retain businesses that provide well-paying employment opportunities for local residents and serve to drive population growth.

Main Streets & Neighborhoods. Changes in the local economy resulted in depressed city centers, wherein both downtowns and surrounding residential neighborhoods are experiencing blighted conditions. Vacant storefronts and homes can be found in the downtown areas of nearly every borough, city, and township. Further exacerbating these conditions are new developments in the suburban fringes where land is readily available and, at times, more accessible, which may be cannibalizing local businesses in the urban core and leading to continued disinvestment of the existing housing stock.

Livability. Livability refers to the community facilities, services, and cultural, recreational, and social factors that comprise a community's quality of life. The County has a wealth of natural

and cultural attractions and a historic legacy that need to be maintained, enhanced, and leveraged to contribute to a high quality of life for county residents.

Land Use Regulations & Development. Land use regulation within the County can be inconsistent and piecemeal. Of the 65 municipalities, 46 have either a zoning ordinance or Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) to regulate land use (the remainder are subject to the County SALDO) while only 35 have comprehensive plans to guide land use policy. The lack of coordination between municipalities causes discordant land use patterns and policies, which result in missed opportunities throughout the County with regard to landscaping, pedestrian amenities, and building design. In addition, as new development is occurring most often in suburban areas, Westmoreland County will be challenged to preserve its natural areas and agricultural land.

Shared Services & Regional Decision Making. Westmoreland County is home to a large number of service providers that include, but is not limited to, 17 separate school districts, two dozen water and wastewater agencies, and 65 municipalities with varying tax and fee structures and service areas. While these providers offer necessary programs and services to residents and businesses, numerous providers can result in duplicative and inefficient service delivery.

The workshop began with an overview of the seven topic areas in the County. Participants then had the opportunity to choose one topic to discuss in more detail. Following the overview, workshop participants broke out into small groups to discuss a single issue in-depth.

To begin the breakout group portion, workshop participants were asked to write a statement on why they thought the topic was important to address and what it means for the County. Following the topic importance, participants were presented with several issues surrounding their topic area. For each issue participants were asked to answer three questions:

- What goals could Westmoreland County set to improve this issue?
- What are some actions and strategies the County could take to meet the goals?
- What are some metrics that could be used to track the County's progress in meeting the goals?

This document provides a summary of the input received at the Priority Issues Workshop and is organized according to topic area. It should be noted that while the purpose of the workshop was to establish goals and actions, these tend to overlap and blend together during the course of discussion. As such, many of the goals suggested may also serve as strategies and several issues do not include metrics.

Note on Summary Context

The following is a summary of the thoughts, comments, and opinions received in the workshop in response to the above questions. Some comments were shared with the entire group, while others were recorded privately on worksheets. It is important to note that the items identified in this summary are not recommendations or observations of the consultant, but rather feedback and comments received from those who participated in the workshops.

Population Retention & Attraction

Topic Importance: Why is population retention and attraction important to Westmoreland?

1. Quality of life for all residents.
2. Because it's less attractive: less business, less jobs, and not very cosmopolitan.
3. I am raising my daughters bilingual: Spanish-speaking. Wish there was more diversity.
4. Impact on economic development of community. Lack of diversity.
5. I am a life-long resident raising children and want them to have future opportunities here, if they choose to stay, with jobs, diversity, etc.
6. Declining population/aging population/lack of diversity/lack of in-migration.
7. We are whiter than Wisconsin.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. The population in Westmoreland County is decreasing.

Goals participants suggested were making parks, libraries, recreation tailored to young people and developing a campaign designed to raise consciousness regarding difference and acceptance. Participants also suggested creating more cultural avenues and jobs, developing affordable housing, and attracting new residents. Other goals were improving transportation options between Pittsburgh, retaining graduates, and dismissing the belief that growth is the only model of economic health. Action items to achieve these goals included creating attractions and neighborhood activities for all age groups, developing a program to refurbish older houses, increasing metro transit to Pittsburgh, and pressuring the governor to change corporate tax structure. Other action items were cutting spending and raising taxes and having employers that actively recruit diverse employees. Participants suggested measuring the percentage of retained local college graduates as a metric to measure success.

2. The County's population is homogeneous, and does not reflect trends across the country.

Goals participants suggested included welcoming multicultural families, improving transportation, and valuing history multiculturalism. Participants also noted convincing residents that adding immigrants to the area would benefit the community, implementing a metro transportation system, and incentivizing businesses with tax breaks. Another goal was utilizing institutional engagement to create recruitment programs. Action items to achieve these goals included advertising, having more language possibilities in schools, actively recruiting and welcoming immigrants, and holding diverse cultural festivals. Participants suggested measuring the participation rates as a metric to measure success.

3. The County's population is aging.

Goals participants suggested were unifying educational opportunities, strengthening ties to Pittsburgh, and improving the affordable housing stock. Participants also suggested addressing blight, beautifying the County, and advertising to get people to move to the County. Action items to achieve these goals included creating a transportation hub, funding libraries, improving parks, and implementing beautification projects along major roadways. Other action items included developing an advertising campaign outside of the County, partnering with local universities, balancing citizen needs with business voices, and creating volunteer opportunities. Participants suggested measuring the percentage of workforce diversity change as a metric to measure success.

4. Residents do not express a desire to remain in Westmoreland County.

Goals participants suggested were creating good job opportunities, determining where and how wealth is leaving the County, and marketing the County's attractions. Participants also suggested focusing on safety and health, outdoors and nature, and standardizing school funding across the districts. Action items to achieve these goals included consolidating public services and combining school districts and municipalities. Participants suggested measuring the number of volunteers attending a training as a metric to measure success.

Transportation

Topic Importance: Why is transportation important to Westmoreland?

1. The transportation system is the skeleton of the community, the bones upon which the remainder of the flesh is attached, and thus shapes the total organism.
2. Connects people, goods, services, and communities.
3. Connect the community; provide service to those who may not have other means.
4. From the vantage point of impact, transportation is important to address in the County Comprehensive Plan because it is one of the key areas that the County can influence. Westmoreland County has a seat at the regional-decision-making table at the SPC. Reps of the County must represent the County Plan when transportation decisions are made.
5. The County exists due to the main rail line. Access to main routes will allow it to continue to exist and thrive.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. Traffic congestion is heavy along major routes throughout the County, particularly Route 30.

Goals participants suggested were using alternative travel routes and increasing transit service. Participants also suggested providing an interchange on the turnpike (130) and opening better routes to reduce travel times. Action items to achieve these goals included a growth interchange, prioritizing close communities, prioritizing sidewalks and cycles, and installing smart traffic signals. Participants suggested measuring the travel time during peak periods at target rates as a metric to measure success.

2. Bus service in the County has limited stops and destinations.

Goals participants suggested were adding transit service and prioritizing expedited service. Also, changing focus and determining key points of interest. Action items to achieve these goals included increasing locations with viable transit options and autonomous vehicles. Participants suggested measuring ridership numbers as a metric to measure success.

3. Airlines at Arnold Palmer Regional Airport have reduced destinations in recent years.

Goals participants suggested were simply maintaining the current level of service and helping the airport become a destination. Action items to achieve these goals included promoting assets and the region as well as creating an express transit service from Latrobe to Pittsburgh. Participants suggested measuring density against ridership as a metric to measure success.

4. Freight-trucks have difficulty navigating certain areas of the County.

Goals participants suggested were targeting money to key points and freight land uses. Action items to achieve these goals included standardizing roadway characteristics. Participants suggested measuring congestion travel times as a metric to measure success.

5. The County has a lack of active transportation infrastructure (sidewalks, bike lanes, trails).

Goals participants suggested were connecting the last mile of active transportation with transit and other actions. Participants also suggested connecting the whole active transportation network and sharing the road with cyclists. Action items to achieve these goals included promoting cycle and pedestrian uses within areas of a certain density. Participants suggested measuring the percent of communities with access to trails and bike infrastructure as a metric to measure success.

Business Retention & Attraction

Topic Importance: Why is business retention and attraction important to Westmoreland?

1. Jobs are key to a healthy economy and healthy community. Yet I hear that jobs are available but businesses can't find qualified applicants. This seems like something we can "fix."
2. Business provides revenue for government services and provides a means to support families.
3. I know so many people who feel lost and hopeless as far as their jobs go, they don't have financial or health security and feel undervalued and disrespected.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. There is a lack of high school graduates choosing a career in trade work and businesses are having difficulty finding skilled trade employees.

Goals participants suggested were creating a task force to work with employers to identify gaps, determining jobs and skills needed in the County, getting high schools to be more progressive, and removing the stigma of vocational jobs by introduction in earlier grades. Action items to achieve these goals included bringing in more jobs, promoting community colleges, holding a skilled-trade demonstration in elementary schools and junior highs, and high school development of those skills. Also, working with businesses to determine why people turn down jobs. Participants suggested measuring the number of students in skilled-trade demonstrations and the increase in hires as metrics to measure success.

2. The working population in Westmoreland is aging.

Goals participants suggested were effectively marketing of the advantages and amenities of the County, promoting the need for healthcare jobs, creating jobs for older residents and increase jobs for young people, and retaining and attracting young workers. Action items to achieve these goals included creating a task force to work with employers to identify gaps, providing brochures for employers to give applicants, highlight family benefits, and providing quality of life necessities and amenities. Also, educating the public on the value of diversity. Participants suggested the number of students in a workforce program as a metric to measure success.

3. Healthcare workers are difficult to find in Westmoreland.

Goals participants suggested were transforming the healthcare compensation model, transform the healthcare compensatory paradigm. Action items to achieve these goals included identifying a long-term

plan, increasing pay, reducing stress, making the public aware of challenges, and education niches. Participants suggested measuring the percent change of healthcare workers as a metric to measure success.

4. There is a need for well-paying jobs.

Goals participants suggested were making employers aware of what the County has to offer, improving the quality of life, and encouraging development. Action items to achieve these goals included workshops and training to close gaps, addressing the location of jobs, providing green jobs, and ensuring employers take more responsibility. Participants suggested measuring the number of ad campaigns as a metric to measure success.

Main Streets & Neighborhoods

Topic Importance: Why are main streets and neighborhoods important to Westmoreland?

1. Blight. Increased rental units in borough.
2. Trafford workshops are concerned with local business and neighborhood needs: curb appeal, main street, and civilians versus local government.
3. Walkable neighborhood. Transportation. Retain community. Great Building.
4. Neighborhoods attractive to visitors.
5. We all need a place to live we want to be attractive to visitors.
6. Culture. Strength of a nation is the strength of local economics.
7. It is important to maintain a productive neighborhood free from empty buildings and houses. Those places become hubs of crime, and empty; abandoned properties decrease curb appeal.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. The County has limited multi-family housing.

Goals participants suggested were determining why multifamily housing isn't being built, know who owns property, assisting renters in becoming owners, enforcing code compliance, and building mixed-use residential. Participants also suggested building County-owned rental units, construct ample parking, and increasing funding availability. Action items to achieve these goals included creating a registry of owners, having standard codes throughout the County, and funding for building code compliance. Also, creating more marketable tax incentives. Participants suggested measuring the number of enforcement and court resolutions and the decreased number of vacant buildings as metrics to measure success.

2. Housing in Westmoreland County is aging.

Participants suggested were implementing freedoms to demolish and rehab buildings, removing blight, creating incentives to build, and encouraging owner accountability. Participants also suggested creating historic districts, enforcing maintenance, and holder owners accountable. Action items to achieve these goals included providing County funding for demolition, defining historic districts and preservation, and creating community programs for refuse removal. Participants suggested measuring the number of restored buildings as a metric to measure success.

3. There is significant blight in nearly every community within Westmoreland County.

Goals participants suggested were addressing animal encroachment into neighborhoods, providing reliable help to rehab properties, having funding matching options, and incentivizing new business growth. Also, creating tax incentives for new business and to build. Action items to achieve these goals included advocating for state laws related to tagging and neutering wild animals, increasing owl and hawk habitats, and enforcing Act 90. Also, advertising for businesses, improving signage, and increasing sidewalk seating. Participants suggested measuring the number of new businesses, business revenue, the number of vacant businesses, and the number of chain businesses versus nonchain businesses as metrics to measure success.

4. New development and businesses are locating in suburban areas of the County over developed urban areas.

Goals participants suggested were creating walkability in new suburban development and having new developments match existing design and character. Action items to achieve these goals included making them walkable through foot and motor traffic. No metrics were provided for this issue.

Livability

Topic Importance: Why is livability important to Westmoreland?

1. Important to attract and retain residents, business, and visitors and provide good quality of life.
2. People may have jobs, houses, and families but if the community's not livable all is for naught.
3. It's the foundation for attracting and retaining residents, businesses, and visitors and provides an economic base.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. School enrollment is declining in the County.

Goals participants suggested were having innovative school curriculums, STEM attrition, and emphasizing sports, arts, band, and a unique curriculum. Participants also suggested stabilizing and increasing the population throughout the County, and promoting successful schools and family-friendly environments. Action items to achieve these goals included developing a coordinated database of school metrics, creating a partnership between schools and libraries, promoting the value of smaller schools, and creating appeal for cyber and home schools. Participants suggested measuring grades as a metric to measure success.

2. Drug abuse is prevalent in Westmoreland.

Goals participants suggested were finding the root cause of drug usage, increasing police enforcement for drug usage, creating a public prevention campaign for drug usage, and addressing drug usage in general. No action items or metrics were provided for this issue.

3. Some areas of Westmoreland County are not served by parks.

Goals participants suggested were creating linear parks with trails, implementing parks in areas that are lacking, creating more local parks, identifying land for strategic acquisition, and increasing transportation to parks. No action items or metrics were provided for this issue.

4. Westmoreland County libraries are having trouble maintaining services.

Goals participants suggested were creating maker spaces in libraries, developing more fundraising efforts for libraries, and differentiating Westmoreland County from Allegheny County. No action items or metrics were provided for this issue.

5. Available law enforcement in the County have limited jurisdiction.

Goals participants suggested were creating a Westmoreland County police force, consolidating police departments, realigning services, and exacting legislation to allow greater jurisdiction. No action items or metrics were provided for this issue.

6. Westmoreland has significant historic and cultural destinations that need to be enhanced and marketed.

Goals participants suggested were hosting more historic and cultural festivals, holding more large-scale events in County parks, cleaning up areas around historical and cultural sites, and promoting a healthy lifestyle among kids by making use of the County's natural resources. No action items or metrics were provided for this issue.

Land Use Regulations & Development

Topic Importance: Why are land use regulations and development important to Westmoreland?

1. Issue is very important in that lack of plans and ordinances results in unregulated development. This impacts all residents because of strains on infrastructure and services as well as potential loss of open space and environmental assets.
2. Also, it discourages potential investment since developers and property and business owners are not sure what can or can't be done with their properties or what may happen with adjacent properties.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. Twenty-nine percent of the municipalities in Westmoreland County do not have a zoning ordinance or SALDO to regulate future land use.

Goals participants suggested were creating Citizen Planning Commissions for municipalities, educating elected and appointed officials and citizens on the value of having plans and ordinances to regulate development, and increasing the number of communities that have paid planning staff. Action items to achieve these goals included working with citizens to prepare recommendations for land use and review proposed development plans, establish a nine-member regional board to work with smaller local boards, and assisting with hiring process for communities that have the resources to add staff. Participants suggested measuring the number of established municipal planning commissions, the number of project applications submitted for review, and the number of communities that have in-house or retained planning staff as metrics to measure success.

2. Forty-six percent of the municipalities do not have a comprehensive plan to serve as a community vision for growth.

Goals participants suggested increasing funding for local planning and getting more communities to adhere to County planning guidelines. Action items to achieve these goals included helping communities prepare grant applications, actively engaging with community leaders, commissions and citizens to recognize the value of coordinated planning, and establishing a set of standards and guidelines for all communities that do not have their own to use. Participants suggested measuring the increase in funding for smaller communities, the number of grant applications submitted, the number of communities adhering to County guidelines, and the policy recommendations for land use and zoning as metrics to measure success.

3. New development is occurring in suburban areas of the County.

The goal participants suggested was restarting smart growth. The action item to achieve this goal included balancing growth and development to ensure reinvestment in urban core while allowing for growth that attracts investment in rural areas. Participants suggested measuring the number of communities establishing the principles of smart growth, amount of development that has taken place in established areas versus greenfield development, and the loss of open space as metrics to measure success.

4. Greenfield development threatens agricultural and natural areas.

The goal participants suggested was increase communication between neighboring communities. The action item to achieve this goal included coordinating on development and investment between communities. Participants suggested measuring the number of “regional” projects such as road improvements, streetscaping, and other initiatives shared between one or more communities as a metric to measure success.

Shared Services & Regional Decision Making

Topic Importance: Why are shared services and regional decision making important to Westmoreland?

Limited feedback was submitted as outreach participants held no interest or had insufficient knowledge of the topic.

Issues, Corresponding Goals & Strategies

1. Smaller municipalities have limited resources to provide services for residents.

Goals participants suggested were having County government absorb failing boroughs and townships and combining small towns with neighboring boroughs. Action items to achieve these goals included lobbying the Commonwealth to ease statutes, educating the public about wasted money, and providing funding. Participants suggested measuring the number of reduced municipalities and the number of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 people as metrics to measure success.

2. The large number of service providers contributes to duplicative services and inefficiency.

Goals participants suggested combining police forces from 33 to five. Action items to achieve these goals included lobbying the Commonwealth to ease statutes. Participants suggested measuring the number of reduced police departments as a metric to measure success.

3. Sharing services between municipalities is challenging.

Goals participants suggested were lobbying state to pass legislation encouraging consolidation. Action items to achieve these goals included implementing letter and phone campaigns. Participants suggested measuring the number of letters and calls as a metric to measure success.