

The Dominion Post

2025

PROGRESS

EDITION 2

Business & Municipalities

MORGANTOWN AREA PARTNERSHIP

Morgantown adapting in a ‘year of transition’

New leadership challenged to tackle planning, economic growth, workforce shortages



BY EVA MURPHY
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So far, 2025 has been defined by change. New leadership at the city, state and national level, not to mention the advent of a new president at WVU, thrusts Morgantown into a milieu of many unknowns but also a position of great potential. The Morgantown Area Partnership is working to ensure that economic progress continues to gain steam during this unprecedented time. “We call this the year of transition,” said Russ Rogerson, President and CEO of the Partnership. “It’s important for us as a community and as an organization to stay on top of these transitions, making sure that our community’s message, interests and needs are being communicated clearly to the incoming leaders.”

The Morgantown Area Partnership is a collaboration of public and private organizations with a mission to support economic development in the region. Over the past year, Rogerson noted, much of the partnership’s work has focused on laying a solid foundation for long-term growth.

Infrastructure like road upgrades and walkability improvements complements site preparation at key development locations like the Morgantown Industrial Park and the East End Development along Richwood Avenue, which is expected to realize its first land sale later this year.

“That will be a big step in the right direction for this project,” Rogerson shared.

The East End village is expected to host mixed-use development properties with retail suites, amenities and over 300 market-rate apartments that could contribute to alleviating the housing shortage in the area. The project is expected to be completed in the next 3 to 5 years.

The Industrial Park welcomed a significant addition in 2024: a 350,000-square-foot operations and

maintenance facility for medical warehousing and light manufacturing. Rogerson said this was the largest project of its kind in the region and its completion shows the potential future trajectory of local development.

The Partnership also lends its efforts to strategic planning, prioritizing areas like Beechhurst Avenue and High Street. The Partnership participated in the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Microsimulation Study in 2024, which provided insights on reimagining streetscapes, improving walkability and attracting new investment.

Rogerson pointed out that in a shifting economy, it’s not enough for businesses to keep doing what they’ve always done.

“We’re constantly trying to keep companies updated and informed and offer opportunities to improve their business so they become more competitive,” he said.

That includes helping businesses navigate workforce shortages, one of the most significant challenges employers face today. The Partnership offers job posting platforms, real estate tools for site selection, and assistance navigating programs like Build WV, a housing incentive passed in the 2022 Legislative Session that offers tax savings on construction materials for qualifying developments.

“Our mantra is collaboration,” said Rogerson. “We work, problem-solve and come up with solutions together so we can do more as a community.”

Through all of the changes that have been visited upon the community in recent years, Rogerson said the key has been cooperation.

“We haven’t slowed down during these transitions,” Rogerson continued. “We have maintained the level of service we have given to the region for 20 years, and we will continue to grow and develop to meet changing needs.”



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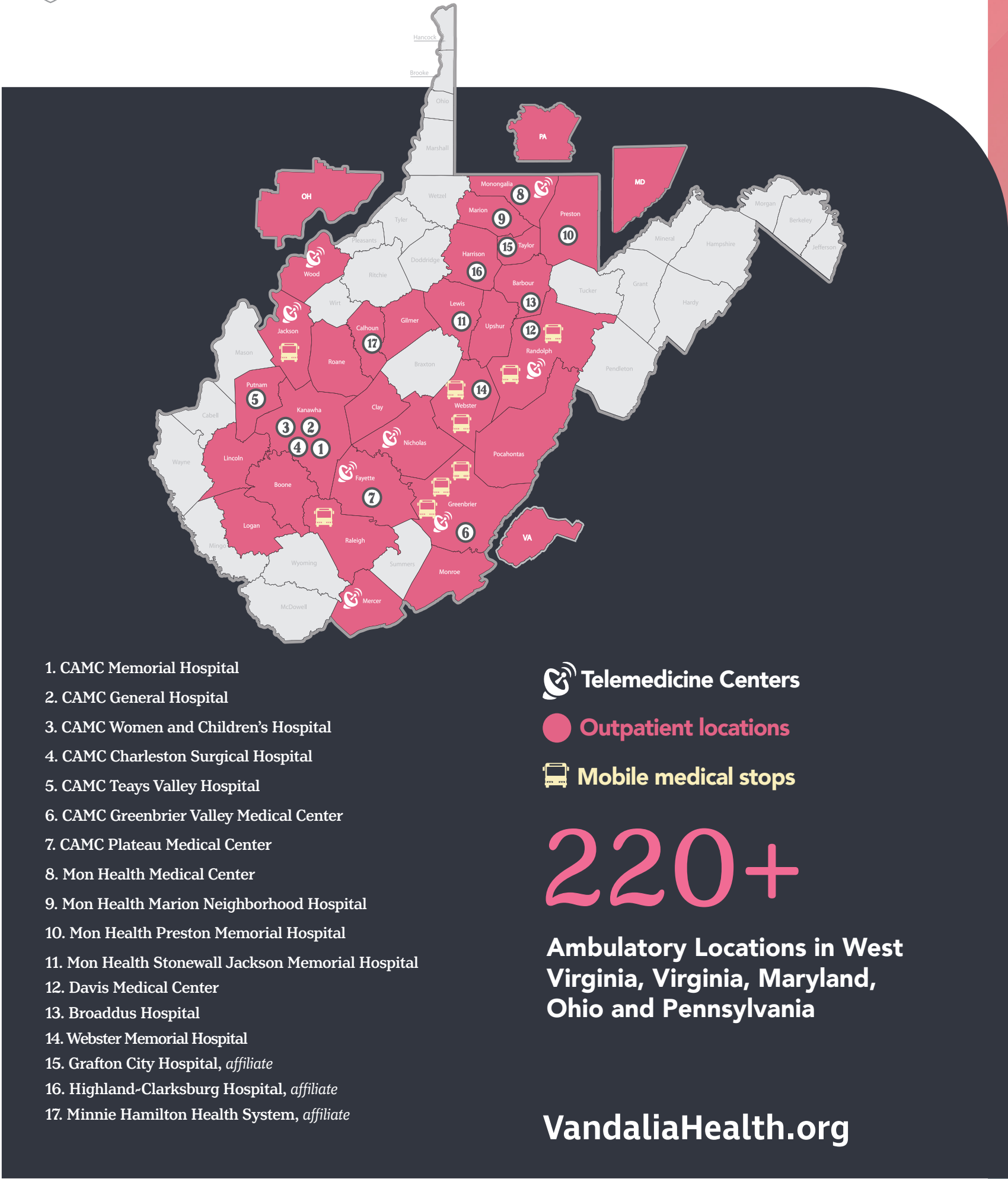
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Preston County EDA awarded nearly \$4M



Submitted photo

A \$3.95-million Abandoned Mine Lands grant will be used to prepare the former TAZ Sawmill site in northern Preston County for new development.

Former TAZ Sawmill redevelopment on tap

DPNews@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — Preston County is ready to breathe new life into an old property. The Preston County Economic Development Authority has been awarded a \$3.95-million Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization grant by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection to support the redevelopment of the former TAZ Sawmill site near Bruceton Mills. This major investment will not only revitalize a dormant industrial property in a prime location, but also pave the way for future business

growth in the region. The project includes the purchase of the 43-acre former TAZ Sawmill property currently owned by Spirit Services — located just 1.5 miles from the Interstate 68 Hazelton exit — and an approximately 12,000 square-foot building. Plans also call for the extension of sanitary sewer and natural gas infrastructure to the site, two critical utilities needed to make the property development-ready. The site is located near the Northpointe Business & Industry Park and Pointe Plaza, two key commercial assets already owned and managed by

the PCEDA. “This is a transformational project for Preston County,” said Robbie Baylor, executive director of the PCEDA. “The redevelopment of abandoned mine lands into usable property for economic development is exactly the kind of investment we need to attract new businesses and support local job creation.” The AMLER program, funded by the federal government and administered by the DEP, is designed to revitalize former coal-impacted sites by putting them back into productive use. In a county with a legacy of coal and timber,

projects like the TAZ site redevelopment serve the dual purpose of environmental restoration and economic renewal. The PCEDA views the TAZ site as a key strategic location for future business development, particularly given its visibility and proximity to I-68. With available land near the interstate with all utilities difficult to find in Preston County, this site adds valuable inventory to the authority’s portfolio and enhances the region’s competitiveness for attracting manufacturers, logistics providers and other commercial enterprises. “We know that when a com-

pany is looking to expand or relocate, they want a site that is ready to go — flat land, utility access and highway connectivity,” Baylor added. “This investment checks all those boxes and positions us well for the next generation of job opportunities in Preston County.” The PCEDA expects that once infrastructure improvements are complete, the site will be actively marketed to potential employers seeking a strategic location in north-central West Virginia. For more information on this project or PCEDA’s business development efforts, visit www.prestonwv.com.

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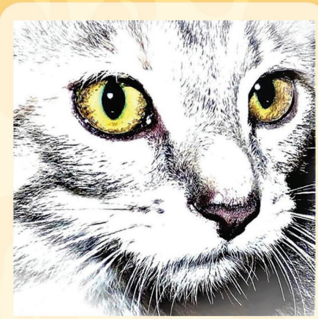
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MORGANTOWN

Lasting legacy

Morgantown making progress on the projects that will impact the community for coming generations

BY BEN CONLEY
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You could call them legacy projects. They're not the kind of initiatives that are completed over a summer and help pedestrians access the neighborhood park, or increase the energy efficiency in public buildings — important as those things are. These are projects that stretch over years, and, hopefully, have impacts on the community that stretch into generations to come. There are two such projects underway currently in the city of Morgantown. Less than a year ago, there were nearly 60 old houses spread across a hillside a short walk from downtown Morgantown.



Ben Powell/The Dominion Post

Morgantown is a blend of new and classic buildings, university facilities and commercial operations, homes and parks.

store, boutique hotel and others. Biafora has said he expects the development to bring in somewhere in the range of \$115 million in direct investment and likely closer to \$200 million when accounting for the economic impact to the surrounding community. Russ Rogerson, representing MCDA, said he expects the first structures to start going up in 2026 and the entire project to be completely built out within three to five years. Less visible than Richwood, but no less critical to the city's future, is the ongoing runway extension project at the Morgantown Municipal Airport. The city recently moved just over \$10 million in federal and state grant dollars in place for phase four of the work to add 1,001 feet to the city's runway. That work, awarded to Cast & Baker out of Canonsburg, Pa., for \$9,122,000 in September, is currently underway and includes the culverting of the unnamed tributary that runs into Wolfe Run Creek. The city has also opened bids ranging from \$6.7 million to \$10.7 million were opened for phase five of the work, which will entail the construction of a retaining wall and the start of work on an embankment. While planning and investment in the runway extension began more than 15 years ago, actual construction started in March 2021. Since then, just over \$29.4 million in federal and local dol-

lars have been awarded. Of that amount, \$4 million went into planning and environmental analysis and the rest has gone into construction. All told, the city is currently estimating an overall cost of \$62 million and a completion timeline as early as 2028 or as late as 2030 depending on the flow of funding. The runway project has long been touted as potentially being the most important capital improvement ever undertaken by the city. While it may not be considered a legacy project — and it's certainly not to the scale of the East End Development or runway extension — talk of the Walnut Street Streetscape project currently underway downtown began more than a decade ago. It ended up being a tough nut to crack. The city spent \$143,150 in 2014 on an engineering contract to get an understanding of just how much the old vaults that run beneath the street's sidewalks would complicate things. But one delay ran into another, and, for whatever reason, the project never got started. That changed in February, when Blue Gold Development showed up. In February. The Walnut Street work will run between Spruce Street and High Street for a cost of \$1,203,349. The recently completed Pleasant Street streetscape only cost about \$200,000 more despite being more than twice the length — from University Avenue to Spruce Street. West Virginia Division of Highways Regional Construction Engineer Jason Nelson explained why. "There is extensive lighting work to be performed. Also, the asphalt overlay in this case is a full overlay — curb to curb, as compared to partial overlays on Pleasant. One of the major issues to be addressed in this project, which was minimal on the Pleasant Street project, is that there are eight vaulted areas that exist under the sidewalk. These areas extend out from the basements of adjacent buildings. Some will be reinforced and allowed to remain in use, while others will be backfilled and sealed off. This work has added a significant cost to the project," Nelson said. The Walnut Street project is expected to be completed in late summer.



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GRANVILLE

Recreation amenities, Home Rule at top of list

Community balances being a small town and a center of Monongalia County retail

BY BEN CONLEY
BConley@DominionPost.com

The town of Granville has a land area of just over 1.3 square miles and a population of just over 2,500 residents.

You'd be hard pressed to find a municipality of that size anywhere else in West Virginia with as much on offer as Granville, the self-proclaimed "Small town with big fun."

That claim is supported by the amount of lodging taxes pulled in by the town each year.

In overly simple terms, a lodging tax — sometimes called a hotel/motel tax — is up to 6% of the cost of a hotel room, Airbnb, etc. Those taxes are split between the local taxing body — either the county or a municipality — and the area's convention and visitor's bureau. The funds that go to local government are restricted to recreation and tourism-related uses.

In Granville's case, the town has three hotels and anticipates receiving \$600,000 in lodging taxes in the next fiscal year.

In comparison, the city of Morgantown is a little over 12 times the size of Granville in terms of population, has about \$1.2 million in lodging taxes as part of its current budget.

Granville Mayor Patty Lewis said the town has two significant recreation projects in mind for some of those funds.

The first will address longstanding issues with drainage in and around the parking lot that serves the town's ballfields, located off Dents Run Boulevard on Dave Bean Circle.

The town council approved a \$298,789.64 bid from Anderson Excavating for the work.

Lewis said the cost will be divided between the town's lodging tax account and general



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Parts of Granville resemble many of the small towns in the region, but not far away from the town's honor roll is the University Town Center, one of the major retail locations in Monongalia County.

fund because the lot is also utilized by the town's neighboring public works facility.

Further, the town has begun investing in what it hopes will be a multi-year project to significantly improve its boat docks and riverfront access.

Named for one of the town's founders, Felix Scott Landing has become a major focus as the town looks to improve its connection to Monongahela River.

"We're doing some additional

work down there now to make the docks more accessible and a little bit easier to get to for folks who want to go fishing. Then we're going to pave part of that parking lot as well this summer for trucks and trailers putting boats in the river," Lewis said.

Lewis said there currently isn't an overall budget for the riverfront project. Funding is being pulled from hotel/motel taxes as the town is able to complete the work.

Moving beyond recreation, another recent development that promises to have a significant impact on the town's future pertains to Home Rule.

Lewis said the town received word on April 22 that its application to the West Virginia Home Rule program had been accepted.

Home Rule began as a four-city pilot program in 2007 with the goal of giving the state's municipalities freedom within the

law to tackle unique challenges.

As of 2019, Home Rule is a permanent program with more than 60 cities enrolled, including Morgantown and Westover, both of which utilized it to enact municipal sales taxes.

And that's just what Granville intends to do.

Lewis said the town's legal counsel is developing an ordinance to enact the tax, which is expected to generate just over \$4.4 million.

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WESTOVER

Holland Avenue remains atop the checklist

Westover looking for major infrastructure upgrades, including railway streetscape

BY BEN CONLEY

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You'd likely have to go back at least three years to find a Progress feature on the city of Westover that didn't mention Holland Avenue.

Clearly, this one will not buck that recent trend.

But unlike years prior, this story isn't about what's being done behind the scenes to line up financing and nail down the logistics for the much-needed project.

The progress being made now is visible for all to see.

As of this writing, Blue Gold Development is 49 days into what's expected to be a 90-day construction window that will stretch into mid-June, if weather cooperates and all goes according to plan.

Blue Gold Development was awarded the Holland Avenue contract for \$2,958,025 in September.

Discussions of the Holland Avenue project began in early 2021 after years of frustration over the condition of the road.

A state-maintained route that runs through the heart of the city, the West Virginia Division of Highways has been reluctant to invest significantly in the road over the years due to the impact of broken down city infrastructure that runs beneath it.

The work will replace approximately 2,800 feet of gravity sewer line and 3,000 feet of storm sewer line beneath the road's surface. It also included the replacement of the retaining wall that runs along the road's lower section, which was the first phase of the project completed.

Around the time Holland Avenue is wrapping up, it's expected work will be ramping



The Dominion Post

The Holland Avenue project to replace sewer lines and a retaining wall is expected to be completed in mid-June.

up on its sister project – the replacement of the Dunkard Avenue lift station that serves as the heart of the city's sanitary sewer system, pumping flows from Westover beneath the Monongahela River to meet up with the wider Morgantown Utility Board system.

Green River Group was awarded a \$2,958,025 contract to do the work.

In addition to a new pump station, the project will include 500 feet of sanitary sewer line

and 500 feet of force main

Looking down the road a bit, the city is eager to hear what the DOH has planned for U.S 19 corridor, which runs through the heart of Westover as Fairmont Road and the aforementioned Holland Avenue.

The city found out earlier this year that a highly requested sidewalk project along Fairmont Road was being delayed at least a year as the DOH wanted to take a more holistic approach to the entire thoroughfare.

One of three federal RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) grants provided to the WVDOH was a little over \$1.2 million for this planning study. Projects in Charleston and Beckley were also selected for funding.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, "The project will improve the safety of the U.S. 19 corridor for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. The corridor currently

poses a range of safety risks, which will be addressed with a combination of new sidewalks, repaired sidewalks, bike lanes and enhanced traffic management."

The local Metropolitan Planning Organization agrees it's a priority. It listed the corridor as a Tier 1 project as part of the 2022 update to its Metropolitan Transportation Plan. At that time, the cost of the needed upgrades was estimated at \$13.3 million.

But what's a nice road or sidewalk, if you don't have a destination?

According to a recent submission to U.S. Sens. Jim Justice and Shelley Moore Capito, the city of Westover is interested in highlighting its connection to the Monongahela River to create just that.

The city is seeking funding for a railway streetscape project aimed at significantly enhancing the economic, environmental and public safety landscape for the Monongahela River corridor.

According to the grant application, the funds would be used to improve railroad crossing safety, storm drainage and road paving, and pedestrian access and lighting enhancements.

"These improvements will revitalize a key riverfront area adjacent to downtown Morgantown, encouraging increased pedestrian traffic across the Westover Bridge, fostering economic development, and improving livability for residents. The recent opening of new businesses such as a brewery and a golf-themed attraction is a testament to the area's growth potential. Enhancing infrastructure along Long Street will support these developments and attract further private investment."



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Judging a book by its cover

Morgantown supports three independent bookshops

BY EVA MURPHY
DPNNews@DominionPost.com

The book industry is not immune from modern pressures to be fast, frictionless and maybe a bit impersonal. It may be surprising, then, that Morgantown is home to three independent bookshops that encourage a different approach. According to Consumer Culture Theory, consumption patterns reflect social values, identity and culture. “Every time you spend money, you’re casting a vote for the kind of world you want,” wrote author Anna Lappé. Morgantown seems to be voting for literacy, community connection and a more reflective pace of life. Newcomer Strange Light Coffee & Books opened at 304 Willey Street this spring. Owner Morgaine Sand-

ers, originally from California, fell in love with Morgantown and saw it as the perfect place to open a used bookstore to rival the one in her hometown that inspired her as a child. “I love a used bookstore because it is a very cozy thing to come into,” she said. “And pre-loved books that have been passed from person to person have unique stories to tell.” Sanders is focused on building something sustainable, not just for herself but for the readers around her. “I want the bookshop to reflect the students and people here,” she said. Her store accepts donations in exchange for store credit, a system she hopes will help circulate academic texts and fiction alike among students and town residents.

Strange Light also offers a community room for rent for \$10 per hour for events like game nights, book club meetings and study groups. Strange Light’s business model demonstrates an underlying value system that supports access, second-hand markets and face-to-face connections. Not far away, Monkey Wrench Books on High Street has worked towards a complementary vision since it launched in 2024. Founded by activist Lindsey Jacobs, Monkey Wrench combines bookselling with a social mission. Jacobs has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of Morgantown’s most vulnerable residents, and her shop’s curated collection of books on environmentalism, social justice and local interests further supports the wellbeing of the community.



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Monkey Wrench serves as a community hub, and not just because of the fully stocked, accessible coffee bar. Open Mic Night, held on the first and third Tuesdays of the month, showcases the talent of local musicians, poets, authors and storytellers. Craft nights, readings and dramatic performances give artists and makers a platform to share their gifts. More than just a place to buy books, Monkey Wrench encourages dialogue, civic engagement and grassroots literacy.

Then there’s Pinocchio’s Books & Toys, a long-time resident of the downtown scene that recently moved to University Avenue in Star City. Known for its expertly chosen collection of books, educational toys and games, Pinocchio’s has been quietly nurturing early literacy for decades, weathering many economic storms that caused other small businesses to

shutter. Its enduring presence speaks volumes about not only the shop itself but the community that has continued supporting it over the years.

What unites all of these establishments, other than selling books, of course, is that they defy assumptions. While the modern world seems to discourage such endeavors, Morgantown’s oldest independent bookshop has persevered and continued to thrive through downturns, recessions and pandemics. And the opening of two more in the last year suggests a growing desire in Morgantown for spaces that foster conversation and engagement. It signals a culture that values the shared experience of reading. Progress, in this case, isn’t an algorithm or automation. It’s slower, more intimate and a little analog. One town supporting three independent bookshops exhibits the most remarkable type of progress.



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Courtesy of the City of Fairmont

This computer rendering shows what City Manager Travis Blosser envisions the new Beltline Neighborhood to be.

No longer boxed in

Demolition of once-proud property in Fairmont will clear path for Beltline revitalization, city says

BY JIM BISSETT
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FAIRMONT — For decades, the Belt-line industrial district was a key destination for this Marion County city that was never off the clock.

Factories lined up like LEGOs in the district behind 12th street, including the Monongah Glass Co., known across the nation in the early 1900s for its decorative lamps, goblets and other fine glassware.

These days, the former glassmaking

concern, reinvented decades later as a box factory, is casting a new mold for the Beltline and the city.

The old building is coming down – to open avenues for the city and its once-bustling, mixed-use neighborhood.

Literal avenues.

The building is located behind East-West Stadium, a masonry marvel built as a Works Progress Administration project and still heavily used by Marion County’s school district for football, soccer and lacrosse.

Sports, ideally, will be the linchpin for a Beltline renaissance, Fairmont City Planner Shae Strait said.

Demolition means automatic expansion for the West Fork Rail-Trail, which runs the Beltline where the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad used to go, along with the whole stretch of the district.

With East-West already being a sports destination, additional tennis courts and other fields of play could sprout up – which could lead to spinoff restaurants and shops, he said.

And the civic playing field is already

leveled, he said, with the Beltline having been on the books for years, for mixed-use.

“If you’re a company or a family moving in, what are the first things you look at?” he asked.

“Well, you look at the first things people always say you look at. You look at roads and schools. And housing. You look at medical facilities and recreational facilities.”

Fairmont has seen its economic fortunes wax and wane over the generations, as neighboring Clarksburg and

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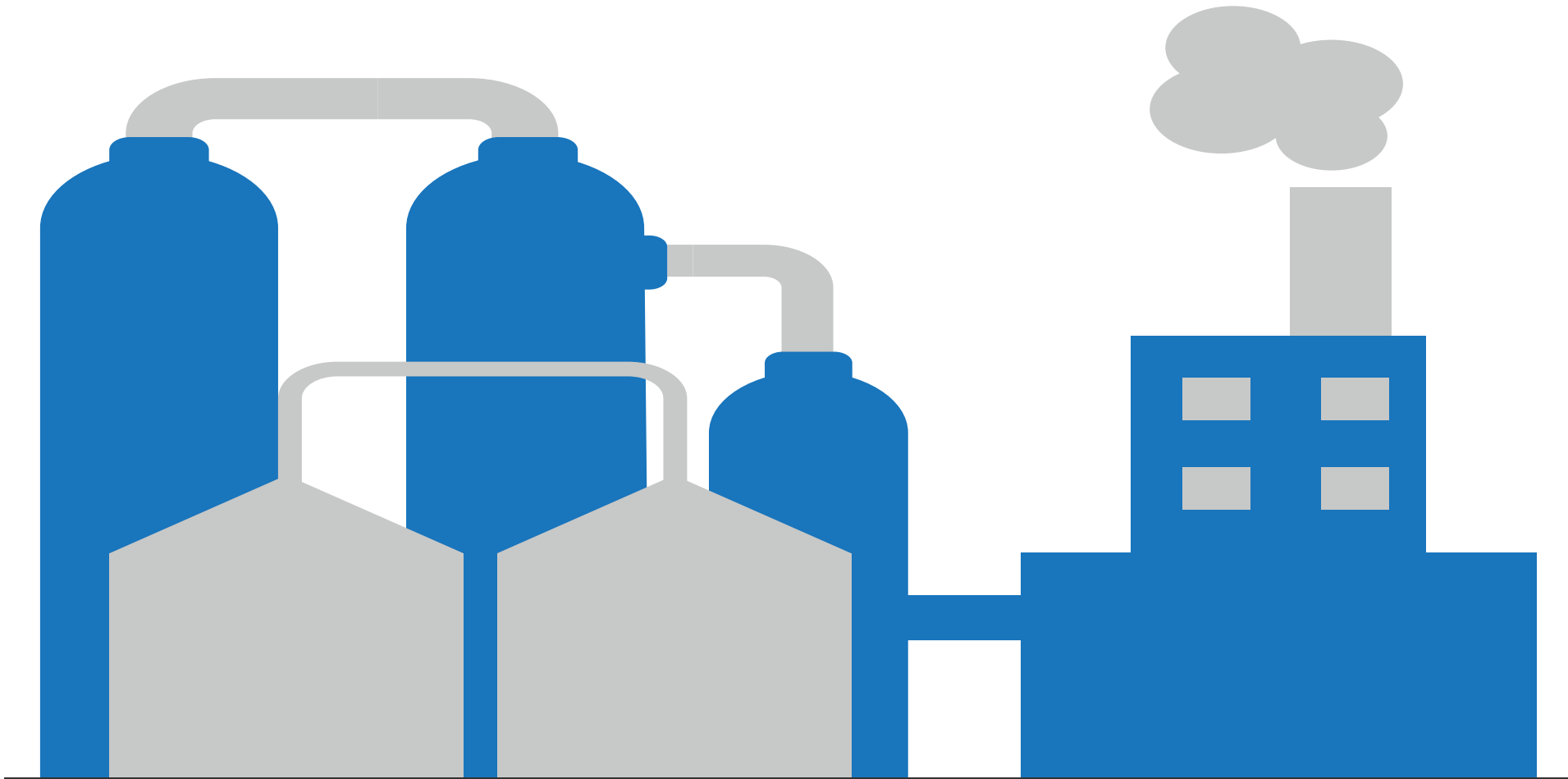
Morgantown have prospered. The former Middletown Mall, then West Virginia's first enclosed shopping mall, opened in 1969 just outside of the city. It didn't take long for all those shops that lined Adams Street to relocate. Today, that site is known as Middletown Commons, as reimagined by Morgantown developers Richard and David Biafora. I-79 Technology Park, just down the road in South Fairmont, is home to the region's burgeoning high-tech industry, and adding to activity taking place in the outer rings of the city. Then there's the Beltline, City Manager Travis Blosser said. "We can't bring it back to what it was, but we can reinvent it," the administrator said. "The potential is almost limitless – if the people want it."



Shown are two perspectives of the Fairmont Box Factory.



Photos courtesy of the City of Fairmont



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