



Comprehensive Plan— June 2019

Town of Athens



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Appendix



Acknowledgements

Many individuals and groups worked together to establish the Town of Athens' Comprehensive Plan, including:

- The Athens Planning Commission
- The Athens Town Council
- Region 1 Planning and Development Council
- Stakeholders and community members
- The Building Commission
- Concord University
- Town Staff
- The WVU Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic

Chapter 1

Building Tomorrow Today: **The Comprehensive Planning Process**



Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

In 2016, the Town of Athens expressed interest in developing a comprehensive plan. The Athens Planning Commission began work to develop a comprehensive plan with the WVU Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic in May 2016.

“A comprehensive plan is a guide to a community’s goals and objectives and a way to meet those goals and objectives” (West Virginia Code, Chapter 8A-1(a)(5)).



During the comprehensive plan process, the planning commission has worked with stakeholders and community members to identify the top issues and concerns in Athens. Chapter 1 will address the *why, who, what, and when* of comprehensive planning. This comprehensive plan will also provide a community overview, a needs assessment, and an action plan that outlines steps to be taken for the Town of Athens to achieve the overall vision of the community.

Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

Why Plan?

Why Plan? In one way or another, we all plan in our daily lives. We create budgets, schedules, and grocery lists. Most people also set goals and understand that achieving Athens' vision requires specificity and measurability.

A comprehensive plan is a community's roadmap for the future. The Athens Planning Commission has worked alongside community members to establish a vision of where the town should be in ten years. The comprehensive plan guides the implementation of the community's vision.

This comprehensive plan serves as a policy guidance document that informs local decisions over the next five to ten years. Elected officials should reference the plan when considering new programs or policy changes. Implementation strategies should be consistent with Athens' comprehensive plan.



Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

Who develops a comprehensive plan?

Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code authorizes a planning commission to develop a comprehensive plan within their corresponding jurisdiction, if it is the intent of the governing body and the community.

The Athens Planning Commission consists of 5 members. The planning commission serves in an advisory capacity to the town's governing body. Since May 2016, the Athens Planning Commission has worked through the comprehensive plan process by participating in visioning exercises, conducting outreach to stakeholders, and identifying the top issues in the community.

How was the Public Involved?

Public input is essential to the planning process. The development of the Athens' comprehensive plan included:

- An online survey that was made available to all concerned or interested community members. The survey was completed by over 300 respondents. A copy of the survey is provided in the Appendix of this plan.
- An Open House for community members to voice their thoughts about the future of Athens and to learn about the development of the comprehensive plan. At the Open House, the Land Use Clinic and the Athens Planning Commission facilitated a variety of interactive exercises to elicit public input.
- A visit to PikeView High School to gather input from students, many of whom are from Athens or the surrounding area.
- Ensuring all planning commission meetings were properly noticed and open to the public.

Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

What information does a comprehensive plan include?

The West Virginia Code Chapter 8A: Land Use Planning, outlines the specific requirements of a comprehensive plan. The Athens' Planning Commission with assistance from the Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic took care to ensure legal compliance with the West Virginia Code. A full list of objectives and components can be found in Figures 1A and 1B.

Figure 1A: Required Objectives for a Comprehensive Plan

<i>W. VA. Code §8A-3-4(b)(1)-(7)</i>	
Code Provision	
Statement of goals and objectives	Chapter 4
Timeline on how to meet short and long-term goals and objectives	Implementation Matrix
Action plan with implementation strategies	Chapter 4
Recommendations of a financial program for necessary public funding	Implementation Matrix
Statement of recommendations concerning future land use and development policies	Chapter 4
A program to encourage regional planning, coordination, and cooperation	Page 60
Maps, plats, and/or charts - that present basic information on the land, including present and future uses	Throughout Plan

Figure 1B: Required Components of a Comprehensive Plan

W. VA. Code §8A-3-4(c)

Code Provision	Page #
Land Use	
Different land uses (including, for example, residential, agricultural, historic, conservation)	35-36
Population density and building intensity standards	23
Growth or decline management	28
Projected population growth or decline	23
Constraints on development (including identifying flood-prone and subsidence areas)	35
Housing	
Analyze projected housing needs and different types of housing needed (including affordable housing and accessible housing for persons with disabilities)	23
Identify the number of projected housing units and land needed	23
Address substandard housing	22,52-56
Rehabilitate and improve existing housing	23, 53, 63, 71
Adaptive reuse of buildings into housing	23
Transportation	
Vehicular, transit, air, port, railroad, river, and any other mode	25
Movement of traffic and parking	58
Pedestrian and bicycle systems	18, 46-48,57
Intermodal transportation	26
Economic development	
Analyze opportunities, strengths and weaknesses	59
Identify and designate economic development sites and/or sectors	59
Identify types of economic development sought	59
Miscellaneous Components	
Infrastructure	29-34
Public Services	16, 48, 49
Rural	40, 46
Recreation	44, 46-49
Community Design	38-39
Preferred development areas	36-37
Renewal and/or redevelopment	53, 59, 66
Financing	Implementation
Historic preservation	40, 66

Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

When is a plan implemented and updated?

While a comprehensive plan is required to have certain components, a community may choose to focus more closely on a few specific areas of concern. This comprehensive plan focuses on the issues most prevalent to the community of Athens, while complying with all the required components outlined in Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code.

An important part of the comprehensive plan is the action plan. The action plan prioritizes the implementation of both short term and long term goals identified in this plan.

The West Virginia Code requires comprehensive plans to be updated every ten years ((8A-1-1(b)(3))). Similarly, if the Town wishes to enforce a zoning or subdivision ordinance, those ordinances must be consistent with the comprehensive plan.

This comprehensive plan should be referenced when writing grants, considering policy changes, and when exploring new development.

Once a draft of the comprehensive plan is completed, the Planning Commission is required to hold a public hearing. After the planning commission has held a public hearing they can recommend the draft to Town Council for their consideration. Town Council must also hold a public hearing before deciding whether to adopt the plan.



Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

Vision Statement and Goals

During the comprehensive planning process, the Town of Athens created a vision statement to guide both the development and implementation of the plan. This vision statement is intended to be forward thinking and can help ensure that future decisions align with the goals set forth during the planning process.

Town of Athens' Vision Statement

The Town of Athens, West Virginia is a residential community with a focus on preserving and enhancing educational opportunities along with sustainable, small businesses in a safe and welcoming environment for an active and engaged public.

GOAL 1

Update and establish land use ordinances

GOAL 2

Improve and prioritize the safety and opportunities for outdoor recreation

GOAL 3

Strengthen the relationship between the Town and Concord University.

GOAL 4

Improve water and wastewater systems

GOAL 5

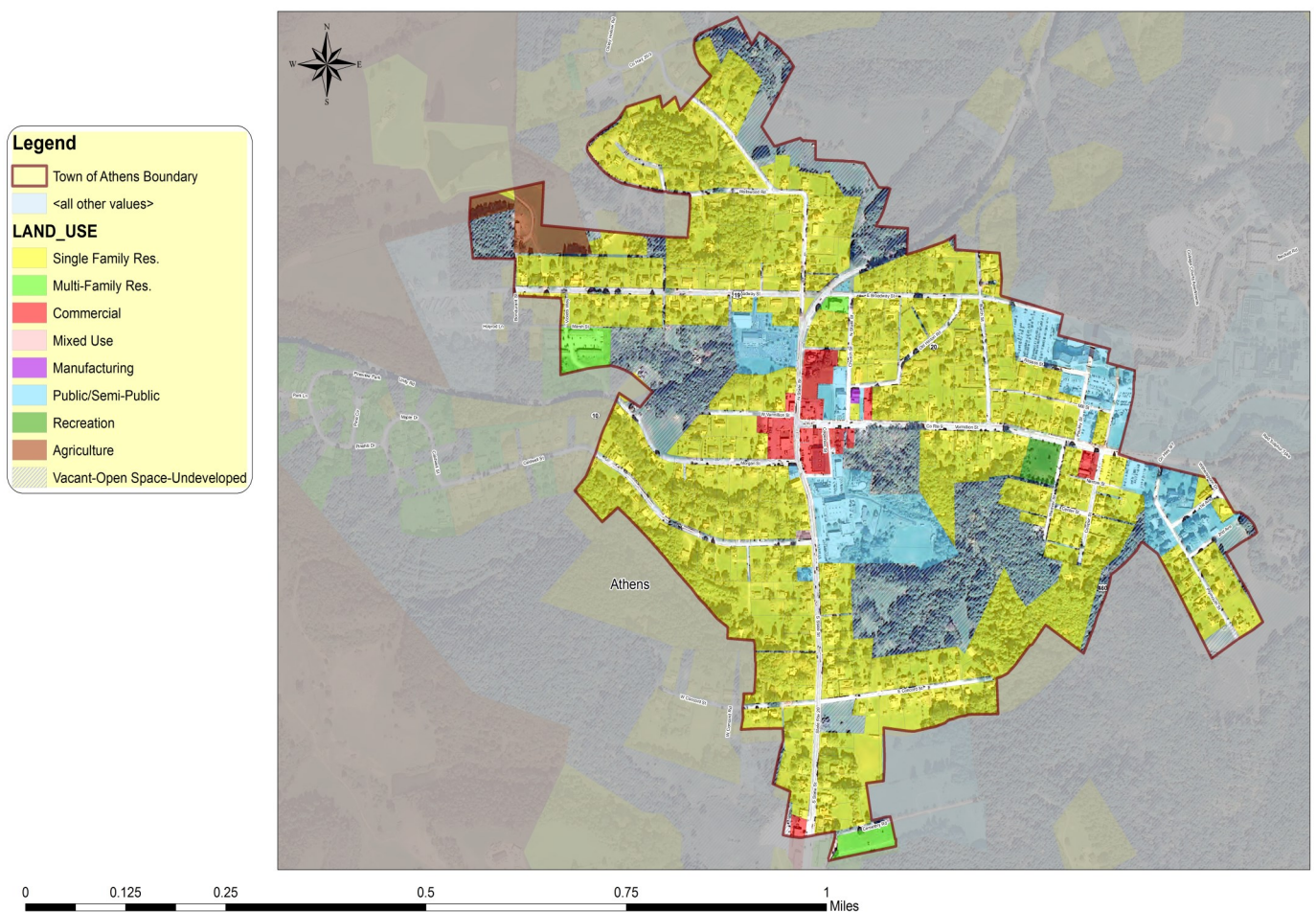
Address the issue of dilapidated and vacant buildings

Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

Existing Land Use

The existing land use map shows how the land in town is generally being utilized. The information for the existing land use map is compiled from many different resources. The map combines the Mercer County Tax Assessor's Office parcel infor-

Town of Athens- Existing Land Use Map



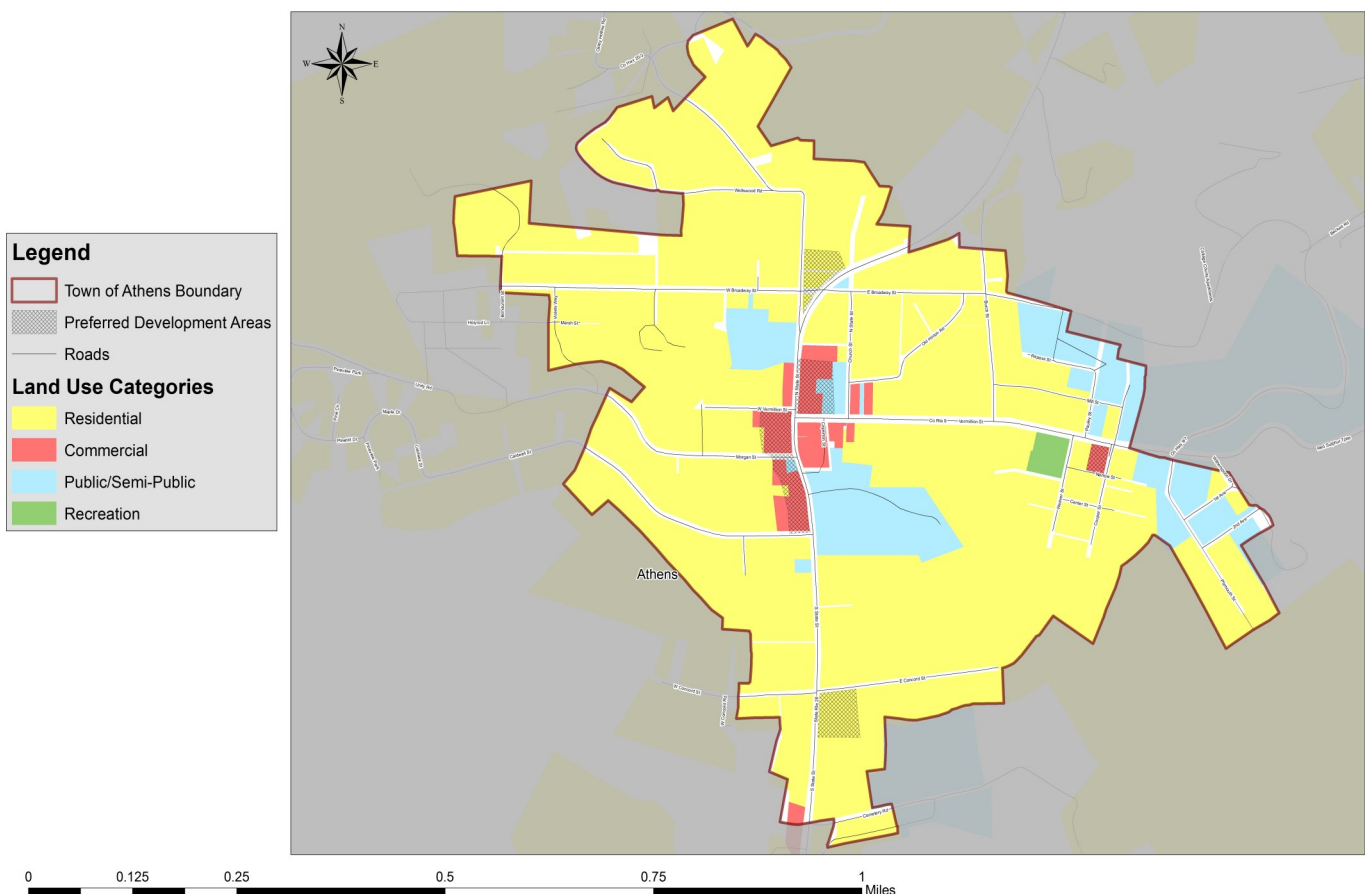
mation, ground-truthing by walking and driving through areas and confirming land uses from a public right-of-way, use of aerial photography, and the local knowledge of the planning commissioners. *(A full size copy of all the maps in the comprehensive plan are available for review in the town hall)*

Chapter 1: The Comprehensive Planning Process

Future Land Use

The future land use map is the community's visual guide to future growth and development of Athens. The preferred development areas are included on the future land use map as well. The existing and future land use maps appear very similar. This means the community is content with how land use development has occurred and would like to see a similar use pattern in the future.

Town of Athens- Future Land Use Map



(A full size copy of all the maps in the comprehensive plan are available for review in the town hall)

Chapter 2

Town of Athens

Community Overview



Chapter 2: Community Overview

The Town of Athens lies in Mercer County, West Virginia. Mercer County, established in 1837, is one of the southernmost counties in West Virginia and also borders the Commonwealth of Virginia. Athens was officially incorporated in 1906.

Community History

Since its inception, the Town of Athens has been a community that offers its residents an ideal place to live and learn. Athens was originally named Concord Church. Some of the town's earliest meeting places centered around the community's churches.

For several years during and following the Civil War, Athens served as the county seat of Mercer County and was only later moved to its present day location of Princeton. Athens is historically a town supported by local business owners, doctors, teachers, and community members.

One of the more notable families in Athens, the Vermillions settled in Athens in 1845 and produced generations of medical practitioners. Today, Vermillion Street derives its name from the influential family.

The Concord State Normal School— today, known as Concord University— has been a focal point in the community since 1875. There were 70 students enrolled in the Normal School's first class (Source: concord.edu). The original building at the Normal School was lost in a fire in 1910; however, a new campus building, Old Main, was completed by 1912.

It was the faculty at the Normal School that recommended the town's name change from Concord Church to Athens in 1896. The faculty wanted to pay tribute to the ancient city of Athens, Greece, which has long been renowned for culture and learning (Source: www.athensweallknew.com).

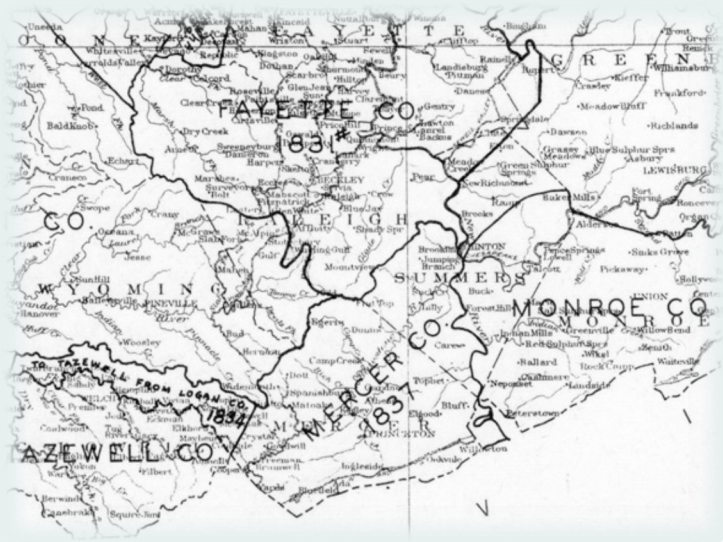


Photo Source: Making a State, Edgar B. Sims, 1956.

Chapter 2: Community Overview

Athens Today

Today, Athens is a community of approximately 1,000 residents. Community members and visitors enjoy Athens' small-town feel, as well as the amenities and events that the town offers. The Town of Athens is one of the highest communities in West Virginia at 2,585 feet above sea level.



Athens is home to Athens Elementary and Concord University. Athens Elementary enrolls students from kindergarten through the fifth grade. Concord University has an enrollment of over 2,400 students and offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Athens is home to a variety of events held throughout the year. In addition to athletic events and artistic performances hosted at Concord University, the town hosts an annual Concord-Athens Social that features bands, food vendors, craft booths, and more. Concord University's Homecoming Parade and Athens Elementary Fall Fest are two other annual events that are well attended.

Athens residents enjoy many amenities in the community. Athens' Town Park provides playground equipment and greenspace for community members to relax and recreate. The Town Park has proven to be very popular. It serves as a place where residents and visitors gather and listen to live music. Athens is close to several hiking and biking trails, as well as to Pipestem State Park.

Overall, the Town of Athens offers a quiet and scenic atmosphere for residents, students, and visitors to enjoy.



Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Age

2010 Census Data indicated the population of Athens to be 1,048 people. The median age in Athens in 2010 was 21 years old, significantly lower than the state's median age of 41.8 and lower than the US's median age, 37.6. The lower median age is likely a reflection of Concord University, which sits right outside the town boundary.

While census data suggests that Athens has younger median age, Athens is still home to an aging population, similar to many other communities in West Virginia. An aging population requires additional senior services, such as assisted living facilities, senior activities, arranged transportation, and more. Seniors in Athens should be encouraged to age in place if they so desire.



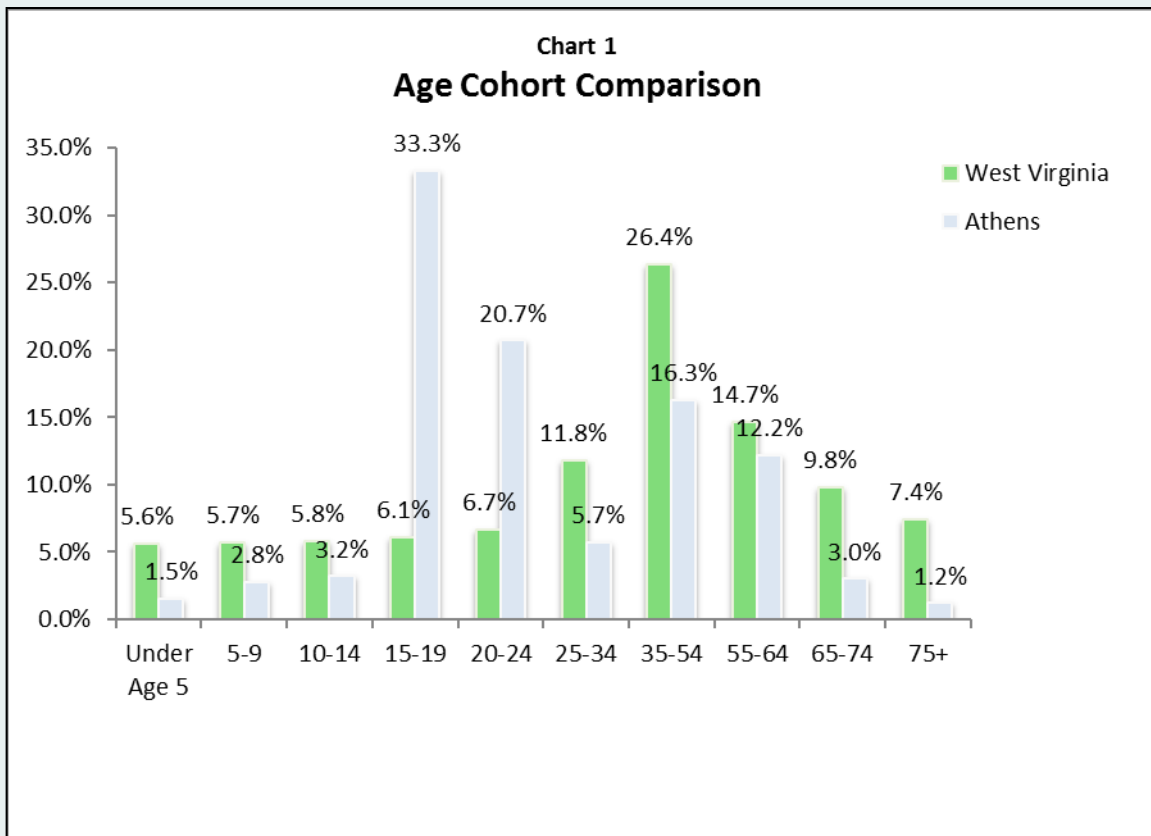
Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Age Cohorts

Chart 1 compares Athens' age cohorts to those of West Virginia. Age cohorts account for the percentage of residents born within a designated timeframe. Taking a closer look at age cohorts can help a community understand the potential needs of its residents in the next 10-15 years.

The high school (15-19 years old) and post-secondary age (20-24 years old) cohorts are significantly higher in Athens than in West Virginia; 6.1% of West Virginians fall between the ages of 15-19, but that percentage increases to 33.3% in Athens. The presence of Concord University likely accounts for the high percentage of residents falling in both the high school and post-secondary age cohorts, although Athens aging population is also significant.



Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Ethnicity and Language

Athens' residents identify as 91.1% white, and 5.6% black or African American; 94% of residents speak only English and 5.9% speak Spanish. In Mercer County 91.6% of residents identify as white, 6.1% identify as black or African American. In West Virginia, 93.9% of citizens identify as white, while 3.4% identify as black or African American.

Economic Characteristics

As of 2010, the median income in Athens was \$46,944, 11.1% higher than the median income in West Virginia, \$41,751. The median income in Mercer County, \$32,131, was significantly lower than that of either Athens or the state.

According to the 2016 Census Estimates, the unemployment rate in Athens was 6.3%, similar to the county's unemployment rate of 6.6%. The unemployment rate for the state was slightly higher at 7.1%. A total of 50.9% of Athens residents do not participate in the labor force, mirroring Mercer County at 50.4%. This percentage accounts for retired community members and may reflect a younger generation that has not yet entered the work force. Census Estimates in 2016 show that 11.8% of all families in Athens live below poverty level. In Mercer County 16.1% and 12.9% of West Virginia families live below the poverty line.



Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Economic Characteristics

Several of the county's largest employers can be found in Figure 2. Educational and health care related organizations make up a large percentage of the top employers in the area. Chart 2 compares employment by industry among Athens, West Virginia, and the United States (2010 Census). The percentage of Athens' residents employed in construction is lower than the state and national averages. However, the percentage of Athens' residents employed in educational services, health care, or social assistance, 51.9%, is significantly higher than the state (26.1%) or national (23.1%) averages.

Figure 2
Mercer County
Largest Employers
(WV Department of Commerce)

- Bluefield Regional Medical Center
- Princeton Community Hospital
- Concord University
- Wal-Mart
- Bluefield State College
- WV DOH
- Winterplace
- Mercer County Board of Education



According to the 2016 US Census Estimates, 77.7% of Athens' residents have "some college or an associate's degree" compared to 44% of Mercer County residents, and 43.2% of West Virginia residents. A total of 6.3% of Athens' residents, 6.2% of Mercer County residents, and 7.8% of West Virginia residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Chapter 2: Community Overview

Chart 2: Employment by Industry 2010

	Athens		West Virginia	United States
Industry	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	9	2.2	5.1	2.0
Construction	4	1.0	6.2	6.2
Manufacturing	22	5.3	8.1	10.4
Wholesale Trade	0	0.0	2.2	2.7
Retail Trade	55	13.2	12.6	11.6
Transportation, warehousing, and utilities	12	2.9	5.4	5.0
Information	3	0.7	1.7	2.1
Finance and insurance, real estate, rental, and leasing	0	0.0	4.1	6.6
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, waste management services	9	2.2	7.8	11.0
Educational services, health care, social assistance	216	51.9	26.7	23.1
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	58	13.9	9.2	9.6
Other services, except public administration	5	1.2	4.3	4.9
Public administration	23	5.5	6.7	4.8

Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Housing

According to the 2106 Census Estimates, there were 365 total housing units in the Town of Athens. Of those housing units, 248 are occupied, and approximately 79, or 21%, were considered vacant. Vacant properties may be further classified as uninhabitable or abandoned. Abandoned and dilapidated buildings pose challenges in many communities throughout West Virginia. In the state, approximately 1 in 16 buildings is classified as vacant or abandoned (American Fact Finder). Addressing the issue of abandoned properties is one of the top concerns addressed in this Comprehensive Plan.

Sixty-eight percent of the homes in Athens are owner-occupied while 32% are rental units. In Mercer County, the numbers are 73% owner-occupied and 27% renter-occupied, respectively. The median rent in Athens is \$442, whereas the median rent in Mercer County is \$598. The selected monthly cost for home owners with mortgages in Athens is \$1,085.

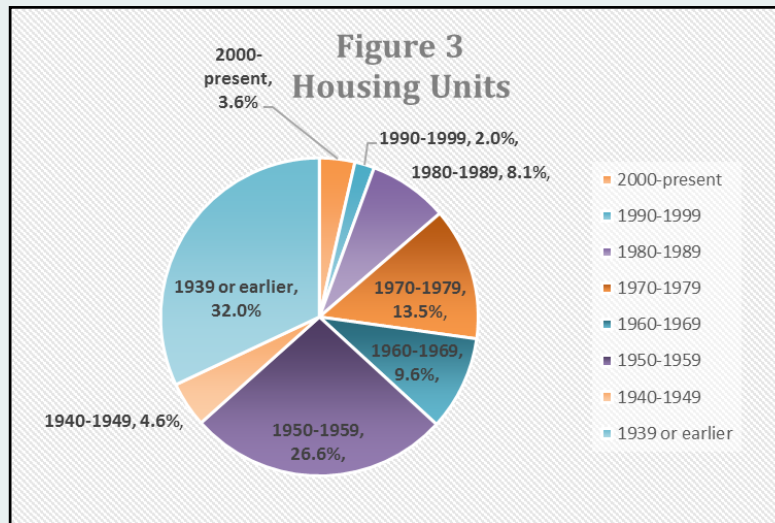
Figure 3 details the years in which Athens' residential structures were built. The majority of residential units, 63.2%, were built prior to 1959, while 13.5% of structures were built in the 70s. Few housing units have been built in Athens after 2000. Older homes often pose challenges with maintenance and upkeep, but can contribute to the historic character of a community.



Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Housing and Population



In 2010, the population density of the Town was 2,687.2 persons per square mile. Meanwhile the housing units (408) were at a density of 1,046.2 units per square mile. The City of Princeton had a population density of 2,136.9 persons per square mile and 1,159.1 housing units per square mile.

The population of Athens has hovered around 1,000 inhabitants since the 1950s. The highest the population has been in Athens is in 1980 at 1,147. Census estimates put the population at around 950. Because of Concord University stabilizing the population there is nothing to suggest that there will be significant population decline. However, there is also nothing to suggest large population growth at this time. More than likely the population will stagnate with the possibility of a slight population loss over the next decade.

It is unlikely that the town will need an increase in the overall number of housing units; however, as dilapidated housing is rehabilitated or demolished, different types of housing options should be considered and encouraged, including, in limited circumstances, the adaptive reuse of commercial structures into housing, especially along State Street and Vermillion Street. The town should encourage citizens to maintain and improve their properties including rehabilitation of their housing so as to not become too dilapidated that demolition is the only viable option. The town should encourage care to address substandard housing.

Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Health Outcomes

The County Health Rankings and Roadmaps program is a collaboration between the Robert Wood Foundation and the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute. The Health Rankings provide county-wide health summaries in the United States. The data provided in the Rankings may help a community realize their strengths and weaknesses as it relates to healthy community living. The Rankings may also indicate areas in which a community should devote additional attention.

Mercer County ranks 50 out of 55 counties in West Virginia in terms of health outcomes such as length of life and quality of life outcomes. Health outcomes are shaped by more than diet and exercise. Many aspects of a community influence health, such as access to care, water and air quality, and the built physical environment.

Twenty-four percent of Mercer County residents have poor or fair health, according to the County Health Rankings: 37% of people living in Mercer County experience adult obesity; and approximately 12% of residents in the county are uninsured. On a scale from 1-10 (1 worst, 10 best), Mercer County ranks 7.0 in terms of access to healthy foods. The lowest score in West Virginia was Wirt County at 6.1, the highest was Jefferson County at 8.7.

The Athens Medical Center, which is affiliated with the Princeton Community Hospital, offers medical services and currently staffs a physician's assistant and a nurse practitioner. The medical center is also scheduled to have a doctor in the office by 2019. Athens' residents also utilize Princeton Community Hospital and Bluefield Regional Medical Center. There is also a dentist office and a physical therapist office located outside the town limits but very close for town residents.



(Picture Source: www.pchonline.org/about/affiliates/athens.aspx)

Chapter 2: Community Overview

Community Characteristics

Transportation

The Town of Athens is serviced by Route 20 which is locally called the Athens Road. Route 20 goes from the City of Bluefield to New Martinsville, in Wetzel County making it the longest state route in West Virginia. Locally the Athens Road connects the Town to Interstate 77, the City of Princeton, Pipestem State Park, and the Town of Hinton. Athens is only about 5 miles off Interstate 77, which provides a major north-south corridor stretching from Cleveland, Ohio to Columbia, South Carolina.

There are no navigable water bodies and no ports in Athens; in fact, there are no floodplains in Athens which makes is an anomaly in West Virginia. However ,flood events have affected Athens including floodwaters that damaged the sewer treatment facility in 2018.



In regard to air transportation, there is Mercer County

Airport, which is located between Princeton and Bluefield. The airport is publicly owned and run by the Mercer County Airport Authority. The airport has two runways that are asphalt and 4,743 by 100 feet in size. The airport has 18 aircraft based on the field and averages 45 aircraft operations per day. Athens citizens will often travel to Charlotte, Charleston, WV, Roanoke, VA, or Raleigh-Durham for domestic and international flights.

There are no active rail lines in Athens, and thus no rail transportation; however, there is an Amtrak Station in Hinton, WV, which provides personal rail transportation to locations all over the continental United States.

Bicycle traffic should be encouraged in Athens, along with better bicycle facilities, including bike lanes and bike racks at various points throughout town. For the most part Athens has

Chapter 2: Community Overview

sidewalks for pedestrian traffic , especially in the downtown areas and areas of town near the University. There are areas that do not have ADA compliant curb cuts for persons with disabilities. There are also areas in town where there are no sidewalks on either side of a road. These roads are typically secondary streets.

Intermodal transportation

There are no intermodal transportation options in Athens at this time. There are no rail lines, no trucking transfer stations, no ports or navigable waterways. It is unlikely that there will be opportunities for intermodal transportation in Athens in the near future.

Chapter 3

Town of Athens

Needs Assessment



Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

A comprehensive plan is a community's vision for the future. The comprehensive plan can address issues and concerns and recommend realistic strategies to fulfill the community's vision. The planning commission meetings, online surveys, open houses, and other community engagement activities were vital to obtaining feedback from the community.

One of the key benefits of creating a comprehensive plan is for a community to identify issues then prioritize and decide what are the most pressing issues facing the community in the next 10-15 years. The prioritization of recommendations is an important exercise to allocate scarce resources to the most important issues facing the community.

The critical issues facing the Athens community have been identified and analyzed through a series of discussions, meetings, surveys, research, and working with other agencies and organizations. There are several issues that need to be addressed in order for the community to achieve its vision for the future. All of these issues, if addressed properly, should act as a holistic approach to decline management. The community does not want to see population decline but rather a stabilization of population and possibly a very steady and healthy increase in population. For example, by providing increased parks and recreation initiatives, it might encourage more folks to settle in Athens and provide a better tax base.

The critical issues identified in Athens are:

- 1. Infrastructure**
- 2. Land Use and Development**
- 3. Relationship with Concord University**
- 4. Parks & Recreation and Marketing**
- 5. Dilapidated and Vacant Buildings**
- 6. Community Facility Improvements and Safety**

There are additional issues that were identified by the community during the comprehensive plan process which can be found at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Issue 1: Infrastructure Improvements

Water Treatment and Distribution

The Town of Athens operates a water treatment and distribution system. The system is regulated by the WV Public Service Commission, the WV Health Department, and the WV Department of Environmental Protection. The treatment and distribution system has an excellent history of compliance with all of these agencies. The system underwent a major upgrade and expansion in the mid 1970's, when the present treatment plant was built and service extended south along Route 20. The Town, in July 2018, purchased and installed two backup generators. One generator was installed at the dam to pump water up and one generator was placed at the plant. With the addition of the backup generators, the town can provide water to customers for up to three days before needing to refuel in the event of a prolonged power outage.

Because of the rising elevation along Route 20 south, the distribution system is divided into an "in town" (low pressure) system and an "out of town" (high pressure) system. Over the years since the upgrade, out of town distribution lines have been extended to serve more customers and the population in the area has increased. The system now serves three public schools, mobile home parks, and new residential developments. Map 3, created by the Region I Planning and Development Council, highlights the Athens water treatment and distribution system.

The Athens' water system is relatively small. The system operators are well trained, experienced and licensed, making for very low overhead. Additionally, the system has no debt. Consequently, Athens water rates are low relative to others in West Virginia, \$24.12 for 3,400 gallons, which puts Athens in the top 16% of least expensive water providers in the state.

Water systems consist of three basic functions- source water acquisition, treatment, and distribution. Although intimately connected, each function has its own distinct challenges and problems.

Source Water

The source of water for Athens' is a reservoir which was created by the construction of a dam on Laurel Creek. The reservoir is surrounded by farm and forested land so the threat of contamination is very low. Originally, the reservoir capacity was 90 million gallons. In 1987, the area experienced a severe drought and the reservoir very nearly went dry. A few years later the Mercer County school system selected a site for a new

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

high school (PikeView), which required water service from the Athens system. To accommodate the school and future dry years the dam was raised, increasing the capacity of the reservoir to 150 million gallons. Surface water sources can have problems with taste and smell and be difficult to treat. Over the years the reservoir has had problems with algae growth in the summer for which treatment with copper sulfate was the best alternative, but recently ultrasound has been utilized to deter algae growth. This has eliminated the need for chemical treatment at a substantial savings and improved the quality of water being delivered to the plant. The reservoir faces no major challenges at this time.

Treatment

The Athens Treatment Plant has always met or exceeded the water quality standards set by the WV Health Department; however, the treatment plant is approaching its maximum throughput capacity. It would be very difficult if not impossible to add a significant number of new customers and from an engineering standpoint it would be difficult and therefore expensive to increase plant capacity. The town is addressing the concern in two ways. It may be possible to shed a small number of lines to other water utilities better able to serve existing and potential customers in our core area. Additionally there is an ongoing effort to find and eliminate lost water due to leakage.

Distribution

When the system was upgraded in the 1970's, there were no distribution lines out of town so the out of town distribution system consists of plastic lines dating from the relatively recent upgrade. The upgrade also consisted of construction of the dam, the new treatment plant, and new tanks both in and out of town. In town new plastic lines were installed between the plant and the new tank and then to Concord University.



The existing in town distribution system was retained. Over the years, much of the old distribution system has been replaced, particularly on the side streets, but what remains consists of old cast iron lines that are the source of numerous maintenance problems as well as dirty water when the system is disturbed. One of the very first “threats” listed during the initial Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Exercise with the planning commission was old water lines. The Town is continuing to ad-

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

dress this issue with a water line project starting in 2018. Town officials have committed \$70,000 for the replacement of valves which will allow the Town to turn off the old lines as customers are removed from the old lines and be placed on the new water lines.

Based on the findings, the town should develop a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for replacing the water lines. The CIP can provide a general schedule of when certain infrastructure projects will be completed.

Customer Service

Water providers own and are responsible for all lines and related equipment up to and including meters and meter settings. Customers own and are responsible for service lines leaving the meter setting and if needed, pressure reducing valves. The town has a detailed written policy regarding leaks on the customer's side of the meter as required by WVPSC regulations. In some cases bill adjustments may be made by the town if the leak is underground in the service line.

When meters are read, unusually high monthly usages are noted, double checked and if correct the customer is notified. In most cases excessive usage is due to leaking toilets or other appliances and are not eligible for adjustments.

Customers can request meter checks. In those cases the town will change out the meter and test it according to the West Virginia Public Service Commission (PSC) regulations.

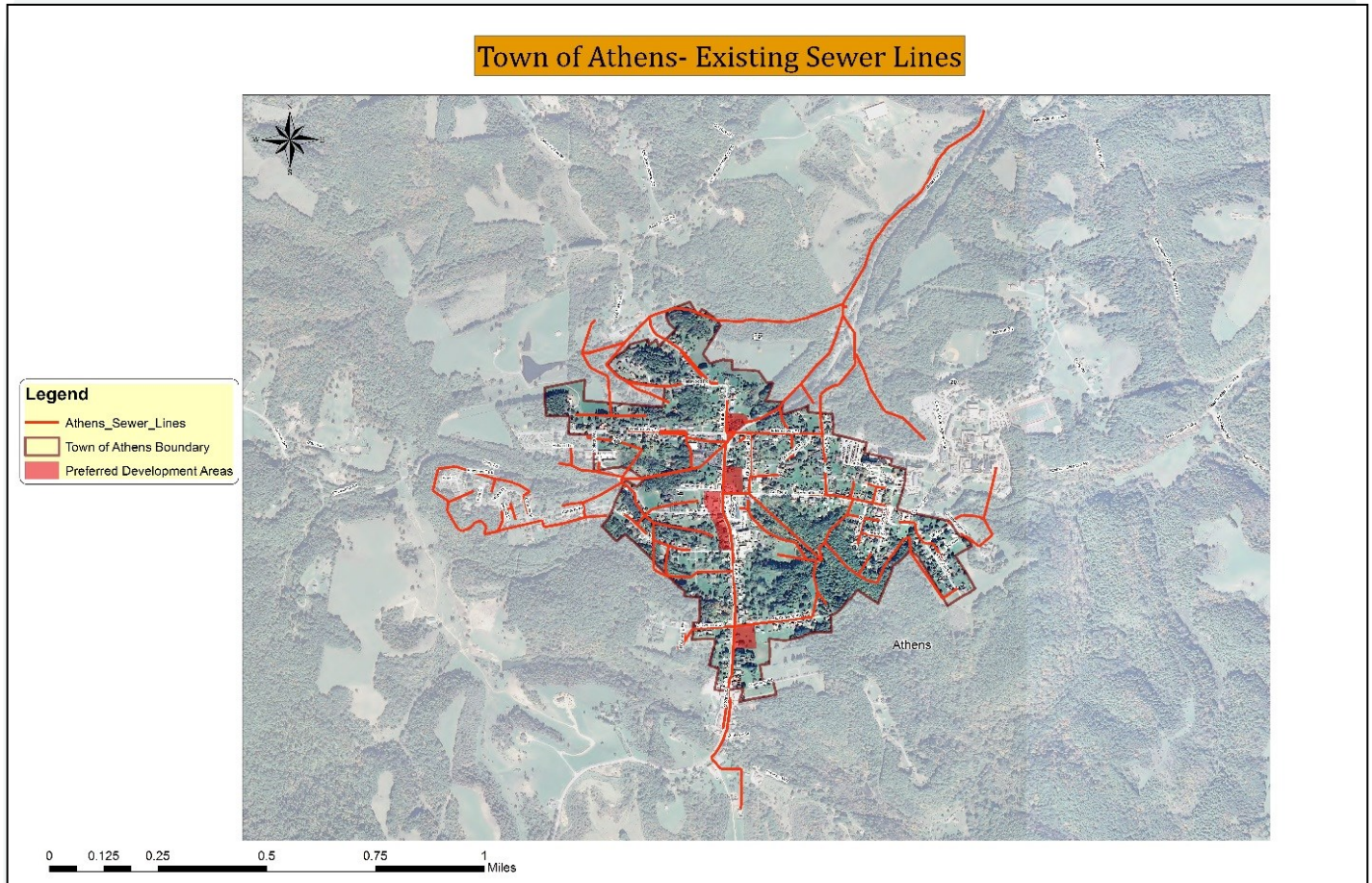
The Athens water system performs and publishes the results of all water quality testing required by the various regulating agencies. The town has written policies regarding the responsibilities of the system to the customer and those of its customers themselves. The town has information and could make suggestions on ways customers could conserve water and look for leaks as well as other information that may be of assistance. Athens should consider improving accessibility to information by posting it on the town's web site.

Waste Water Collection and Treatment

The Town of Athens waste water system serves principally, the Town of Athens and Concord University. In West Virginia, waste water systems are regulated by the WV Public Service Commission and WV DEP, (Department of Environmental Protection).

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Map 4: Existing Town of Athens' Sewer Coverage



(Source: Region I Planning & Development Council) *(A full size copy of all the maps in the comprehensive plan are available for review in the town hall)*

The waste water plant is located roughly one mile from the town limits north at the Rt 20 bridge over Laurel Creek. See Map 4, prepared by Region One Planning and Development Council, as to the extent of the current system. The main collection line from the town to the plant was replaced in 1997 and a new waste water treatment plant was constructed in 2004.

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

There are nine wastewater treatment systems in Mercer County. The Town of Athens charges \$41.39 per 3,400 gallons (as of the summer of 2018). As a comparison, the City of Princeton charges \$28.64 and the Bramwell PSD charges \$54.44 for 3,400 gallons. Athens' wastewater rates are higher than average in West Virginia as a result of the two construction projects mentioned above.

Treatment

The new wastewater treatment plant, built in 2004, utilizes modern technology and is more than adequately sized. The plant is operated by an experienced team with no significant operational issues; however, the plant is located in an area prone to flooding, and in the summer of 2018, sustained considerable damage due to a flash flood. There is a strong possibility that future floods may cause more extensive damage. To address this possibility, the stream bank on the plant side of Laurel Creek will have to be armored, some portions of the opposite side protected to mitigate further erosion and the stream bed cleaned out. This work will be expensive but should be a high priority to the town.

Collection

Despite Athens' relatively small size, the waste water collection system consists of 11.8 miles of lines. Because of the uneven terrain on which Athens is located, the collection system consists of both gravity and force flow lines. There are seven lift (pumping) stations supplying the seven force flow lines. These stations have been upgraded at various times over the years but have a finite life. One lift station, installed in 1983, has been targeted by staff for replacement in the near future. An inventory of the stations with an upgrade / replacement schedule should be prepared.

One gravity flow line was severely damaged during the rain event that flooded the wastewater treatment plant in the summer of 2018. This line has been returned to service but is in very poor condition. Short term plans should include substantial repairs to this line.

In general, because of the age and size of the collection system, I & I (infiltration and inflow) is a problem. Town personnel have smoke tested parts of the system and made repairs, however staff has suggested that smoke testing should be outsourced so that the whole system can be done thoroughly at one time. The results of this testing can help prioritize collection line replacement.

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Based on the findings, the town should develop a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for replacing the sewer collection system. The CIP can provide a general schedule of when certain projects will be completed.

Town personnel have prepared educational material suggesting ways customers can prevent sewer problems like clogged lines and consequent backups. The town should consider publishing this material on the town's web site.

Stormwater

Stormwater was identified as an issue in some places around town including the following areas:

The area east of the post office on Vermillion has ponding water during large amounts of precipitation.

East Broadway from the intersection of Church Street to the intersection of Burch Street. There are a number of drains in this area but water pools up in 2 to 3 inch pools when large amounts of precipitation occurs. This area needs to be evaluated to see what can be done to address this issue.

West Broadway Street, 500 feet from the intersection of North State Street has water ponding issues when a large amount of precipitation occurs.

The first block of Cooper Street also has an issue with stormwater ponding.

Stormwater issues can be caused by flat terrain, which causes standing water, inadequate drainage system, clogging of the drainage system, or there could be combined sewer and stormwater drains which cause contamination. During water and sewer line replacement projects, stormwater issues could simultaneously be addressed along with paving and sidewalk projects.

Municipal Facilities

In addition to parks and miscellaneous green spaces the municipality



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of the Town of Athens owns a town hall and a town garage. The town hall provides office space, a police office, a meeting room and a room used as a staging area for the maintenance crew, water meter testing and storage as well as miscellaneous storage. The garage houses equipment and spare parts for various construction and maintenance functions of the municipality and the water and sewer utilities..

The existing Town Hall, while still functional, is in the vicinity of 100 years old. It has little distinguishing architectural merit and as a result of its inexpensive construction is unsuitable for renovation. Athens citizens and Town Council have long recognized that it should be replaced. In recognition of this, the Town Council has established a building fund that currently has a balance of roughly \$144,000. The Council should work along with the Planning Commission to develop a plan for a future town hall that, as the current building does, provides for efficient administration of town business both office and maintenance and at the same time enhances the appearance and character of Athens. To this end, the Council should dedicate the as yet undedicated revenue from the recently established 1% sales tax to the town building fund until such time as a new town hall is in service.

The town garage was built in the 1980's and is in good shape, but because the demands of maintaining town, water, and sewer infrastructure have increased over the years there is no more workspace or storage room available in the garage and some equipment has to be stored outside. Additional equipment storage will very likely be needed in the future.



Issue 2: Land Use and Development

Limits to Development

The Floodplain or “Special Flood Hazard Areas” is an area where there is a 1% chance of flooding in any given year. If a citizen owns property, is within the floodplain and has a federally-backed mortgage, then they are required to carry flood insurance. The only way owners are able to receive flood insurance is if their community (city, town, or county) participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Most communities in West Virginia have a portion of their jurisdiction within a floodplain. Only a handful of municipalities in West Virginia do not have any area in the floodplain. Athens is one of those communities. However, surrounding areas, including Laurel Creek to the south and east and Little Laurel Creek to the west are within the floodplain. Any analysis of annexation should in-

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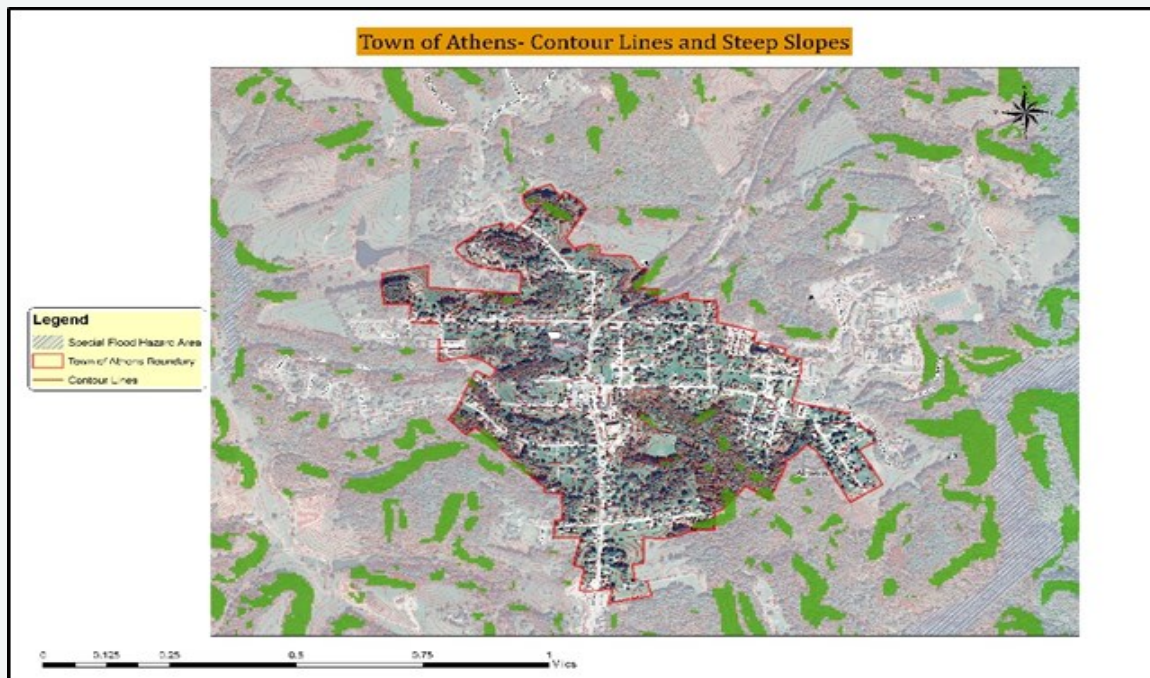
clude the discussion of possibly adding floodplains into the community.

Subsidence Areas

Steep terrain (or slopes) can also limit growth and development. Having steep slopes can make it very difficult to build. Properties on steep slopes can be susceptible to erosion and landslides. Land use controls such as subdivision regulations or zoning overlay districts may place additional regulations on any new development contemplated for areas with steep slopes.

Map 5 shows the areas that have been identified as “steep slopes” or “cliffs.” This dataset was created by the Natural Resources Analysis Center at West Virginia University. There are steep slopes present in small areas throughout the town. The town should understand where these areas are when looking at future growth and development patterns. If the town enacts subdivision regulations or updates their zoning ordinances, town officials should ensure that adequate provisions are in place to limit any impacts of new development due to steep slopes.

Map 5. Steep Slopes



A full size copy of all the maps in the comprehensive plan are available for review in the town hall)

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The Karst Water Institute defines Karst as “a special type of landscape that is formed by the dissolution of soluble rocks, including limestone and dolomite. Karst regions contain aquifers that are capable of providing large supplies of water.” Some areas that exhibit karst topography might be susceptible to subsidence and should be carefully considered when looking at future growth and development.

Karst topography is found within Mercer County. There is a belt of Avis Limestone, which appears to be east of the Athens corporate limit; however, the exact location is not known for sure. The potentially karstic area underlain by the Avis Limestone is limited to exposures along the slopes of the Laurel Creek Valley and its tributaries, southeast of the town center. If there are concerns about karst topography as it relates to future growth and development, a more detailed study or analysis should be completed.

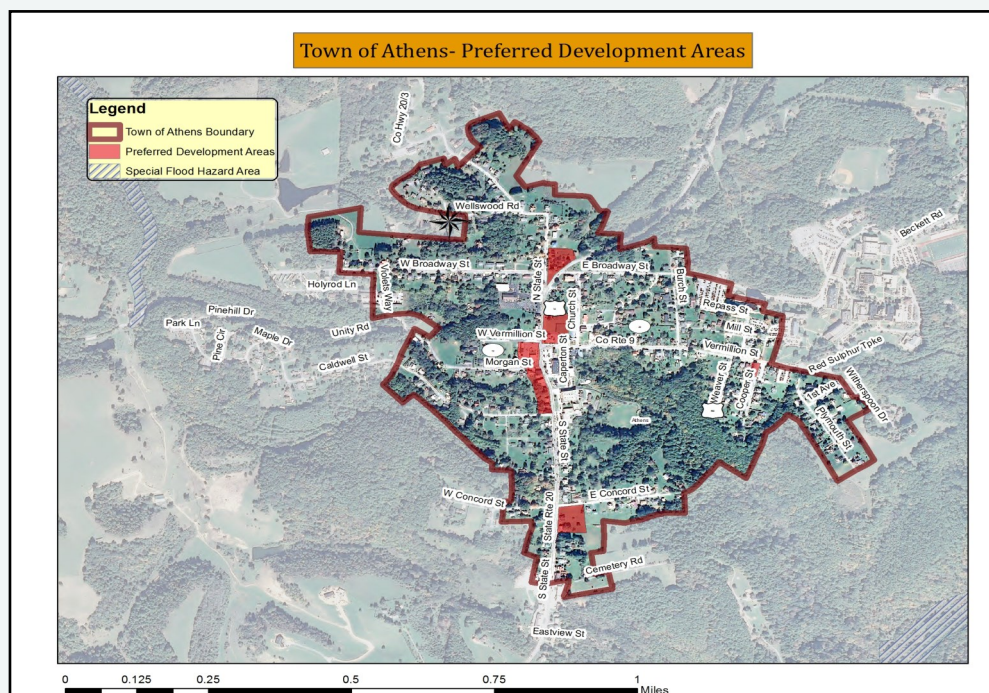
Annexation is the incorporation of land into municipal boundaries. In West Virginia, there are three ways a municipality can annex land from the county, 1) annexation with election, 2) annexation without election, and 3) annexation by minor boundary adjustment. The Town Council needs to understand, including a cost/benefit analysis, these methods before pursuing any type of annexation. The town officials should also work with affected property owners to gauge interest and explain the advantages and disadvantages of annexation into Athens.

Preferred development areas are areas “which are geographically defined where incentives may be used to encourage development, infill development or redevelopment in order to promote well designed and coordinated communities.” (W. Va. Code 8A-1-2-(y)) These are areas of a community where the town wants to encourage responsible growth and development in the next 10 to 15 years.

Map 6 also shows the preferred development areas (PDAs) for the Town of Athens. Two of the preferred development areas are found downtown on either side of State Street, near the intersection of Vermillion Street. Another preferred development area is at the southeast corner of State Street and E. Concord Street. The only other area identified as a preferred development area is along Vermillion Street near the intersection of Cooper Street. As the town reviews and updates their zoning and contemplates whether to adopt a SALDO, the preferred development areas map should be utilized to understand where growth should occur. The Town should also think about incentives for growth in the PDAs.

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Map 6. Preferred Development Areas



(A full size copy of all the maps in the comprehensive plan are available for review in the town hall)

Zoning

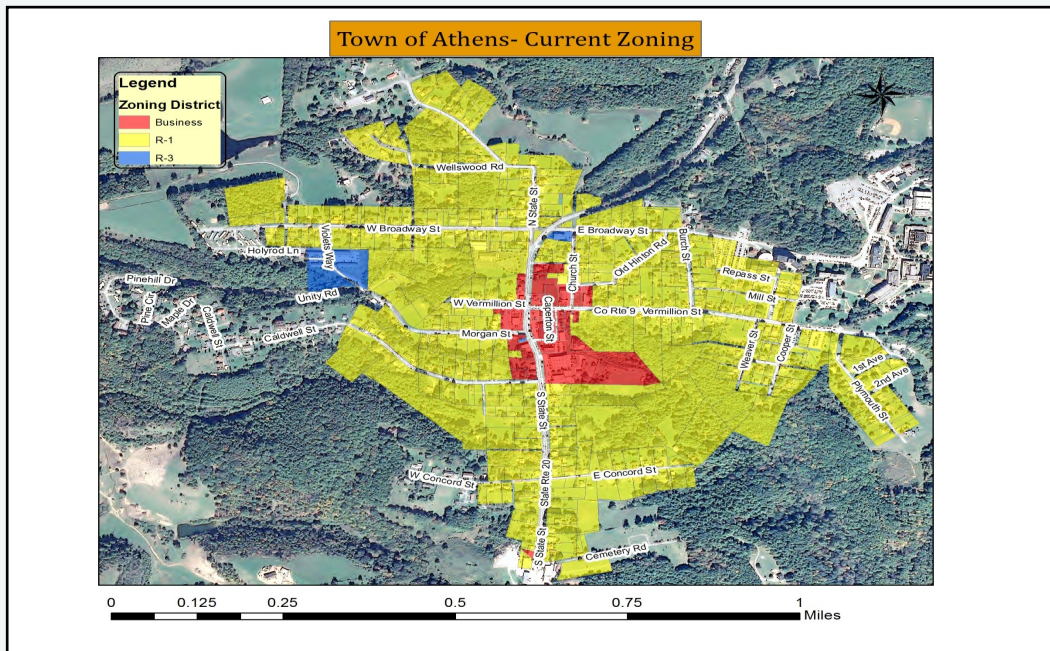
The Town of Athens currently enforces a zoning ordinance. West Virginia Code, Chapter 8A defines zoning as “the division of a municipality...into districts or zones which specify permitted and conditional uses and development standards for real property within the zones or districts.” (W. Va. Code §8A-1-2)(gg)) Athens currently has divided up the town into four zoning districts, R-1 Residential District, R-2 Residential District, R-3 Multi-Family Residential District, and BD- Business District.

Once the comprehensive plan has been completed and adopted, the town council, with assistance of the planning commission, should complete a “Study and Report on Zoning” to determine if a new zoning ordinance is needed. Map 7 depicts Athens’ current zon-

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ing. There are no plans for the Town of Athens to implement any kinds of community design requirements or standards through zoning as it relates to a certain aesthetic or design criteria for color schemes, or certain materials required for aesthetic purposes.

Map 7. Current Zoning Map



(A full size copy of all the maps in the comprehensive plan are available for review in the town hall)

Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances (SALDOs)

The town should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of developing a subdivision and land development ordinance (SALDO). A SALDO can provide the town with a process by which the town can require certain improvements to the land being subdivided or developed before the subdivision or land development can be recorded in the county courthouse. The SALDO process will require that land be developed in a manner conducive to the comprehensive plan and in accordance with the other land use controls. An applicant may be required to develop roads, sidewalks, hydrants, streetlights, and other infrastructure improvements that the town deems important for the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens.

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Currently there are no state or federally designated historic districts in Athens. The closest historic district is found in Princeton at the Virginian Railway Yard. Additionally, there are no federally designated historic structures in Athens. However, there are approximately 30 identified historic structures in Athens. Town officials are currently not interested in historic district designation at either the state or federal level. However, historic preservation on a more informal basis is advantageous. The town should encourage folks to preserve their historic structures as it helps with aesthetics and maintaining and improving property values. The Town should also provide information for property owners on grants and tax credits, as well as state and federal programs that help fund historic preservation initiatives.

The community, while interested in demolishing structures that are beyond repair, would like to see refurbishment or renovation of structures, particularly if they have some historic qualities. Encouraging renovation of existing structures helps maintain the image of Athens as a historic community.

Currently, there is very little “rural” land in Athens, though there are a few areas of town that could be characterized as “agricultural” in nature. A large part of the town, east of State Street and south of E. Concord Street, are open fields. There is also an open, undeveloped area in the northern part of town off W. Broadway Street, which could be considered rural land. These areas could be developed, but were not identified as preferred redevelopment areas, except for part of the area of East Concord Street, and are likely to remain undeveloped. If these areas are encouraged to remain open space, then the town should consider updating the zoning ordinance to include a zoning district whose primary purpose is to limit development of open space or lands that are rural in character.

Issue 3: Relationship with Concord University

Concord University is a unique asset to the Town of Athens’ community. The university was established in 1872 and currently enrolls 2,451 students. The university offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees, while providing a safe and healthy atmosphere for students to thrive. The Town of Athens should seek to increase collaboration with Concord University, for the benefit of both students and residents alike.



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Volunteer Opportunities

In the online survey distributed during the comprehensive planning process, many respondents indicated that they would like to see additional collaboration between the Town of Athens and Concord University. An increase in volunteer projects was suggested by multiple respondents. Students studying at Concord University are already required to volunteer through the mandatory class, “University 100.” The town and university officials should expand the number and types of projects offered to students in University 100 and should formalize opportunities for students to continue volunteering throughout their years at Concord University.

Students attending Concord University should be able to earn community service hours by volunteering with the town. The town should further organize volunteer projects

and collaborate with the university to post volunteer opportunities online. Concord University already has a Career Services website that provides students with internship and other job opportunities. The town should enquire about the possibility of using this website to share volunteer openings. The Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service and the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance are two National



Days of Service in which the town and university could annually participate. An inventory of need would be a first step in building additional volunteer opportunities.

It is important that students learn the benefits of volunteerism early in their college career. Concord University and the town could collaborate to establish several volunteer projects during the move-in week at Concord University. By participating in volunteer projects from the onset of the academic year, students will develop a connection to the town during their first week in college. The town could consider hiring a summer intern(s) to coordinate volunteer opportunities between the students and the town. The

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Bonner Scholarship program at Concord University stipulates that part of the satisfying the scholarship requirements is to complete a certain amount of community service. The town should work with the University to identify where Bonner Scholars and other University students might be able to assist the town and satisfy community service requirements.

Volunteer projects for Concord University students could be used to improve the town. For example, students might participate in town beautification projects. During move-in week, students could volunteer to contribute to a mural in town. Later in the school year, the town could create opportunities that correspond with popular holidays, such as Earth Day, and create litter clean-up projects. Students could also volunteer at local events, such as Fall Fest, the Mercer County Fair, or the Concord-Athens Social. Additionally, Concord University students could volunteer at Athens School, tutor local youth, or organize clubs for kids, such as a Drama Club.

Interns need to be carefully vetted by town officials, to ensure they are finding the right students for the positions. Because of the small number of town staff, town officials need to find interns and identify programs that do not require a large amount of time to be expended by town staff. Depending on faculty/staff interest, the intern(s) could be jointly supervised by town and university staff. The town could use assistance and may be of interest to interns is for a student recreation internship. The intern could be expected to provide updates to Town Council.

Increased Communication

Increased and clearer communication between the Town of Athens and Concord University is another need identified during the comprehensive planning process. Many participants in the online survey wanted to know more about up-



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coming events at Concord University, such as musical performances, film screenings, or sporting events. Open lines of communication via social media or by distributing flyers about upcoming events would be mutually beneficial. Concord University and Athens could consider creating a joint “Town and Gown” social media page that updates any interested individuals or organizations about upcoming events in Athens or at the university.

The town should continue to support the Athens-Concord Town Social, which is a great example of the celebration between both the university and town.

Another important reason to improve communication is for public safety concerns. Fire, police, EMS, disaster preparedness, and other situations call for quick and efficient action and response. The town and university should evaluate their current lines of communication in both emergency and non-emergency situations and formalize procedures for communication.

A joint University /Town committee that addresses concerns involving both the town and university should be explored. Likewise, the joint committee could also recommend a student code of conduct pertaining to student behavior off-campus.

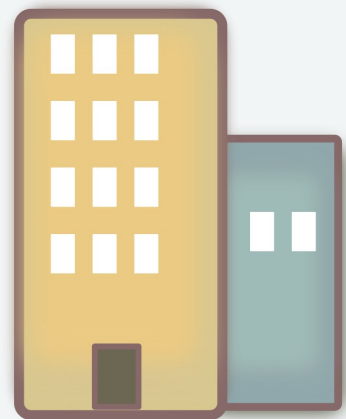
Housing

The town and university should collaborate and develop a plan that outlines future housing needs for students at Concord University. The university should also send a survey to Concord University students to determine housing needs and preferences.

The need for additional in-town housing for professionals working at Concord University was also identified. Overall, the development of new housing in Athens should account for the diverse housing needs of the university, including accessible housing for persons with disabilities.

Recreation at Concord University

When possible, the town and university should rely on each other’s recreational



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assets. Concord University currently has a fitness center that is open to both students and the public. The university also has a track that community members can access after signing a waiver; however, public use times have been reduced over the years. The university has a Facebook page titled “Concord University Recreation and Wellness” that provides up-to-date information on Concord University’s fitness facilities. The Athens community benefits from these recreational amenities and, as such, should continue to advocate for the community’s access and for the facilities’ maintenance. Another amenity that was seen as a community asset is the University pool which has recently been closed down.

Many online survey respondents would like the University pool to be repaired and reopened for local swim team practices and general recreational swimming. The town should encourage and support Concord University in finding a solution that would allow the pool to reopen.

Increased Dining Options

During the planning process, the need for additional restaurants, especially for Concord students, was reiterated. In the community-wide survey, many participants noted a need for additional dining options. One participant stated “we are basically the only college town without a McDonalds or any kind of hip restaurant, coffee shops, or anything that would pertain to students. Even a quality Chinese restaurant that would deliver to the university would be huge.”



The town should encourage the development of a coffee shop, wood-fired pizza restaurant, or other unique food establishments that cater to the college age demographic. The town should advertise to potential business owners the opportunity to create hangouts and study areas for students. Likewise, students noted the need for a late-night venue to grab snacks. The town should seek development that encourages students to relax, eat healthily, and study in Athens. A local coffee shop or brewery is likely to appeal to residents and visitors, as well.

Many colleges and universities have had success with businesses run in part by students and university

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staff. The Town of Athens should encourage Concord University to develop a business that builds from relevant course material and provides students with an employment opportunity the town might be able to identify physical space downtown for a business venture.

For example, students studying Graphic Design could generate logos and marketing materials. Additionally, business administration courses could have the university business integrated into the curriculum. The business should seek to fill a gap in the community and university.

Other Housing Issues

The planning commission identified a need for additional townhomes and affordable housing in Athens. Overall, a greater variety of housing options, including apartments, townhomes, and single-family homes, will encourage folks to live in and enjoy Athens.

Like many communities in West Virginia, the Town of Athens should explore ways to care for an aging population. An elderly population usually requires specific services and amenities. The town should encourage additional senior housing to ensure that residents are able and encouraged to age without having to leave Athens.

The town should encourage the development of one story housing and age restricted housing. An age-restricted development (usually age 55+) should provide options for different groups of seniors—for example, some seniors may seek independent living, while others may require nursing care. Athens' zoning ordinance should be reviewed to ensure that developers are not hindered from developing different senior housing options. Accessibility of amenities—such as groceries, green spaces, and retail—should also be considered while promoting aging in place.

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Issue 4: Parks & Recreation, Public Safety, and Marketing

Emphasizing the importance of parks and recreation can improve health benefits in the Town of Athens. Likewise, insuring pedestrian safety on trails and sidewalks will contribute to the overall wellbeing of the community.

Parks and Recreation

The Town of Athens should maintain its current recreational assets. Some of the youth at PikeView High School responded that they value the area’s “scenery” and “lovely geography.” Nearby parks, such as Pipestem State Park and Bluestone State Park, are valued by members of the community. Athens should promote the town’s proximity to scenic, outdoor opportunities, and should also promote the parks’ health and preservation. If the town seeks to develop volunteer opportunities during move-in week at Concord University, the local parks may be interested in hosting volunteer groups. Volunteers could work on trail or facility maintenance, litter clean-up, or other needs the parks may have.

A need for additional recreational activities for seniors also emerged as an issue during the comprehensive planning process. The town should promote additional daytime hours and activities at local senior centers. Local organizations such as the Appalachian South Folklife Center might be interested in facilitating an Appalachian-based craft workshop at the senior center. Likewise, the organization could connect local musicians to the senior center for afternoon concerts. More generally, other events that connect seniors to community should be promoted. If the town is interested in hosting a summer camp oriented to the performing arts, a



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practice-run through of the production could be held at the senior center.

The Town of Athens planning commission noted that Athens is a great place for road biking. Camp Creek State Park and Forest, about 10 miles outside Athens, offers good biking. The park offers nearly 30 miles of mountain biking trails. The town should seek to build off these assets and promote the area to bikers.

The Town could also sponsor bike nights, where community members interested in biking can join for a bike ride followed by a dinner at a local restaurant. Likewise, the community could also foster the creation of a mountain biking club that takes a monthly trip to Camp Creek. The town should apply for bike-friendly community status through the League of American Bicyclists, with the goals of improving health and boosting Athens' image as a bike friendly destination.



Establishing bike lanes in town could enable bike riders to more safely traverse through town; however, establishing bike lanes would require coordination with the WV Division of Highways.

Another idea for enhanced recreational opportunities was for the town to create a splash pad in Athens. The splash pad could be located

at the town park. A splash pad would provide a place to recreate, a meeting place, and an opportunity fairly unique to Athens.

It was also identified that the town should explore ways to better accommodate persons with disabilities at the town park. Equipment in the Town Park should be upgraded and made accessible for ranging physical abilities.

The Athens-Concord Walking Trail winds through town. The trail is an asset and should be maintained to promote community health for Athens residents and Concord University students. The town should assess the interest in and feasibility of painting paw

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prints along the walking trail. Paw prints would mark the route of the walking trail and would correlate with Concord University's mascot, the mountain lion. The skate park is another asset in town that should be maintained and improved. The Town should survey the youth to see how to enhance the park to get more kids to frequent the park.

Trythiswv.com provides information about developing healthy opportunities and events at a local level. As new projects and programs are developed, the site may serve as a helpful resource.

Events

Concord University and the Town of Athens should continue to hold their annual Athens-Concord Town Social. The Athens-Concord Town Social is one of the area's largest events, occurring every fall. The event, held on the Sunday after move-in day at Concord University, serves as an annual reunion and attracts people from out of town. The town and the university should prioritize and grow this event.

The town should also support the Concord Theater program, which is already established and has been providing entertainment to the area for several years. The town should develop other annual events, so that visitors and community members have events they look forward to and plan for. The town should work with the Mercer County Visitors and Convention Bureau (CVB) to help plan and advertise events in Athens.

A survey could gauge community interest in what events people would like to attend. Some potential events include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An Art & Food/Drink Stroll held during the spring. At this event, local artists—including students at Concord University—could display or sell their work along Vermillion Street. Local wineries could sell wine and offer tastings. Foot traffic could be directed in such a way that visitors complete the art walk near the Town Park, where they can enjoy live music.
- Coupon nights that correspond to other events in the area. Athens businesses could build off events that are already scheduled at Pipestem, such as Oktoberfest. Oktoberfest is a one-day event with live music, local beer, and German food. The event attracts approximately 2,000 visitors. The people attending Oktoberfest will likely drive through Athens to reach the event. Athens' businesses could piggyback off this event and offer discounts or promotions at stores in town.

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The Town of Athens should collaborate with other organizations and community partners to build the capacity for events. For example, the Mercer County CVB may be a good partner in developing new events to attract visitors to Athens. The Arts & Beautification Committee, if revitalized, would be another potential partner for growing events in Athens.

The Town of Athens could consider the development of an events committee. The events committee could be comprised of volunteers that coordinate and advertise events. The aforementioned parks and recreation intern could also assist members of the events committee. The events committee could grow town events by

- Choosing what events to prioritize
- Event planning
- Reserving venues, communicating with vendors, seeking sponsors, etc.
- Notifying local merchants of upcoming events
- Developing promotional materials
- Publicizing events

Services

Libraries often serve as cultural and community hubs and provide important public services such as after school activities, free use of computers, Wi-Fi, adult education programs, literacy programs and much more. Concord University, just outside of town, is home to the J. Frank Marsh library. The University library is part of the Mountain Library Network and provides access to more than 1 million items. The library has long

Local Highlight:

The Appalachian South Folklife Center is a local organization whose focus “is on education about our heritage and culture, not only for area children but also for folks from around the country.” The Center hosts events such as a Learning Day Camp, Culturefest World Music and Arts Festival, and an Earth Day event that includes discussions, live music, and education. The organization also runs service programs, such as the Home Repair Program, that helps struggling individuals or families maintain both the interior and exterior of their home.

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been used by area residents including Athens' citizens and is an excellent resource for the university and the community as a whole. The Town of Athens has a free little library in the town park where folks can place used books into the kiosk and take books out to read. The town could put information to the other libraries in the area on the side of the free little library. To this end the town should support the local libraries such as the Princeton Public Library and the Craft Memorial Library in Bluefield.

Pedestrian Safety

The Town should promote Athens' walkability and pedestrian safety. Community members and visitors should have the opportunity to bike or walk downtown. Students of all abilities should be able to walk throughout Athens to grab a bite to eat, enjoy a park, or exercise.

The Town should complete an inventory to identify inadequate pedestrian facilities, including sidewalks. Sidewalks should have both even surfaces and curb cuts, where appropriate. Curb cuts should be present at each new block intersection to ensure that community members with disabilities can safely navigate town. The town should also install pedestrian signals, such as audible warnings, for individuals with low vision or blindness.



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Town officials indicated that many citizens do not know they have the responsibility to maintain sidewalks adjacent to their property. The Town Officials should provide educational materials in the water bill and online that explains who has the responsibility of sidewalk upkeep, as well as a listing of ways to ensure that the sidewalks are in good condition.

The planning commission also suggested that the town conduct a thorough review of municipal ordinances that might be related to sidewalks. The town needs to ensure that sidewalks are clear from obstacles that there are proper curb cuts, and that the pedestrian facilities are ADA compliant.

The town should also address the issue of texting while driving through law enforcement. There may be grant funding available for law enforcement initiatives to reduce distracted driving in town.



Marketing

What first impressions does Athens' Town webpage give visitors? What might someone think upon driving into Athens for the first time? The town should consider these questions to ensure that perception and reality are matching up. Athens' best qualities should be emphasized in any marketing campaign.

Consistent marketing materials should be created and used on the town's website, informational flyers, and in municipal buildings, so there is uniformity in marketing the town. The marketing materials need to be consistent with existing town seal and with existing efforts of the CVB and Mercer County EDA, and Chamber of Commerce. Residents and visitors develop positive connotations with the town's seal.

In the past, Athens' community members painted the town's fire hydrants in creative and vibrant ways. The town should revamp this project and explore methods for funding supplies.

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Issue 5: Dilapidated and Vacant Buildings (including houses)

Addressing the vacant and dilapidated structures in Athens is a high priority. Dilapidated structures are unsightly, a safety hazard, and lower property values in the surrounding neighborhood.

In order to adequately gauge the depth and breadth of the issue, the Town needs to complete a community-wide survey to see how many structures are abandoned or dilapidated. The Town can break up the community into voting districts or wards, then volunteers either walk or drive along every right-of-way in their designated area. Once the survey has been completed, the information is combined and the town can identify how many structures there are, where there are clusters, and what type of structures (residential, commercials, etc.) are dilapidated or abandoned. Having this survey will better inform town council about which tools might be the most appropriate for Athens.

One option is to adopt the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The IPMC is part of the West Virginia State Building Code (WVSBC). The IPMC can be adopted by Athens without having to adopt the entirety of the WVSBC, which comprises 11 different code standards, which includes plumbing, electric, mechanical, residential, and other codes. The IPMC is intended to establish minimum property maintenance standards for light, ventilation, heating, sanitation and fire safety. In West Virginia, the IPMC has primarily been utilized to address unsafe structures and external property nuisances. One of the advantages of adopting the IPMC is that it has technical provisions that are time-tested and periodically updated.



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The West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (PRI) will allocate \$1 million over a 5-year period for a revolving loan program available to communities, such as Athens, that want to rid their communities of blighted or dangerous properties. To be eligible, the town must have the authority to acquire and/or demolish the property and the structure to be razed must constitute a health and safety hazard. The PRI loans may not exceed \$250,000 per year, however payments may be deferred the first 2 years, and if the loans are paid off in the first two years, there is no interest. Thereafter, they are low interest loans. (Source: West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative: Program Guide)

- Some of the projects that the PRI loans can be used for include:
 - The acquisition of property and/or the demolition or deconstruction of residential structures
 - The removal and proper disposal of all debris, including hazardous materials
 - Pre-demolition costs such as surveys and title searches and supplemental work associated with demolition

(Source: West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative: Program Guide)

Partnerships with Financial Institutions

An informal strategy to address dilapidated structures in the Town of Athens is to work with financial institutions such as banks. A partnership between Athens and a reputable financial institution could establish goals such as the bank providing a forgivable or low-interest loan to individuals or developers. The bank can also create an agreement to transfer neglected properties to new owners for free or at a low cost with the requirement that the new owners rehabilitate or redevelop the neglected properties in a certain amount of time.

For a partnership to work, local officials need to work with the banks in a collaborative environment. The banks need to understand the benefit for them and realize common goals with the Town. One benefit is that the bank may receive positive publicity for working with the community to make it a better place to live and work. A few disadvantages of trying to establish a partnership with financial institutions include communicating with large lenders and it may be more difficult to secure loans for properties in blighted areas because of the risk in investment.

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The West Virginia Weatherization Assistance Program is a statewide initiative under the auspices of the West Virginia Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). The mission of the Weatherization program is to reduce the energy costs for low-income families and people with disabilities by improving the energy efficiency of their homes, while ensuring their safety. (Source: West Virginia Weatherization Webpage, <http://www.oeo.wv.gov/weatherization/Pages/default.aspx>) This mission is not directly tied to abandoned and dilapidated structures; however, improved weatherization of homes can reduce the likelihood of dilapidation.

OEO contracts statewide with 12 local community action agencies that employ trained weatherization crews to install in low-income homes energy efficiency and conservation measures. Weatherization examples include, but are not limited to, installing insulation, reducing air-infiltration, performing heating and cooling tune-ups and modifications, and when appropriate, replacing heating units for energy efficiency and safety.” Community Action of South Eastern WV (CASE WV) is the local WV Weatherization Provider.



Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

W. Va Code §8-12-16 enables municipalities to regulate unsafe and unsanitary structures. This statute was amended in 2017 to give clearer guidance in regard to enforcement, notice of violation, and the process after the notice of violation has been issued. There are specific steps that need to be taken depending on whether the community has also adopted the IPMC. .

W. Va. Code §8-12-16(c) enables West Virginia municipalities the authority to establish a registration program for vacant properties within their jurisdiction. If a property meets the definition of “vacant” under the ordinance, the property can be listed on the registry. As part of being placed on a registry, the property owner may be required to pay an annual registration fee.

Fees collected through the vacant property registry are required to be utilized for administration of the program and for improving public safety. Many communities are having success with this program by renovating or demolishing the property or by transferring the property to a responsible party. The disadvantages of the registration program are the resources it takes to enforce the program.



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The Town of Athens has the statutory authority to place a lien for debris removal after a fire. While the applicability of this authority is narrow in scope, it can be very helpful for a community that wants to clean up damaged property after a fire. “When a property owner files an insurance claim for a real property loss due to fire, a statutory lien is created in favor of the local government to ensure the proceeds are used for clean up.” (WV LEAP Toolkit) This tool can be helpful in getting the damaged property back into productive use quickly and can help local governments mitigate some of the costs of demolition and debris removal.

The town can also use injunctive relief to address the issue of abandoned and dilapidated buildings. The town would need to declare the property a public nuisance and proceed through the circuit court for injunctive relief. This option would require Athens to enact a nuisance ordinance that outlines what constitutes a public nuisance. The nuisance ordinance should reference other health and safety codes. While addressing a property through a nuisance code does not require a certified building inspector, it will likely require the utilization of legal counsel.

While the demolition of dilapidated properties might be necessary in some cases, the community should also encourage rehabilitation of properties. Many Athens properties are historic in nature and have architectural characteristics that are appealing to folks, including tourists.

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Additional Issues

Safety

The Town should work with the WV Division of Highways (DOH) to fix the crosswalks along Main Street. Curb cuts and striping as well as traffic signals with audible prompts should be installed where there are designated crosswalks.

The town should also petition the state to lower the speed limit to 25 mph throughout Athens on all state-maintained roads. Safety is a top priority and there have been several speed-related accidents in town over the years. Lowering the speed limit could also be beneficial to encouraging more bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

Two intersections were discussed several times during the comprehensive plan process as safety concerns. The first area of concern is at the intersection of East Concord and Route 20. The main concern with this intersection is the difficulty some folks having pulling out of E Concord onto Main Street (Route 20).



The second intersection is at Broadway Avenue and Route 20. At this intersection, a knoll blocks visibility for people driving southbound on Route 20 and for the drivers that are on Broadway trying to turn onto Route 20.

There have been efforts in the past to make the intersection safer. Town Officials contacted

the WV Department of Transportation for guidance. The Department evaluated the intersection and because of the grades involved, there were no improvements that could be made that would comply with existing road construction standards. However, road construction standards may have changed over the years, allowing for modification of the intersection. The intersection at Broadway Avenue and Main Street (Route 20) is an ideal place to create a gateway with plantings, signage, and other decorations that give visitors a good first impression of the town.

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Transportation

Transportation is often a concern in small communities in West Virginia. In Athens, the primary concerns are safety and alleviating some traffic congestion. Public transit and accommodating alternative forms of transportation were also identified as important objectives during the comprehensive plan process.

The Bluefield Area Transit (BAT) provides public transit services throughout Mercer County, including the Town of Athens. BAT has kneeling buses with published routes and is partially subsidized by the Concord University Student Council.

There is one main road in an out of town, Route 20. During the wintertime, Route 20 between Athens and Princeton can be dangerous. Increased signage that can alert drivers of hazards in and around Athens and on routes normally traveled by Athens residents should be pursued.

Traffic congestion was not seen as a major concern in Athens. There were a few noted places where traffic can be congested in Athens. The traffic can back up between 7:15am and 7:45am at the Athens School, when kids are being dropped off. There can also be some congestion stemming from Concord University students, especially along Vermillion Street. Traffic can also be backed up when there is bad weather, especially on Athens Road. Parking is generally not a concern in town; however, during special events parking can become an issue. No specific areas where parking is an issue were identified.



Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Economic Development

While Athens has historically been a residential community, there are opportunities for economic development consistent with the town's vision for the future. The town needs to collaborate with Concord University to identify the types of businesses that would be utilized by students. The town should encourage services that are ancillary to the services rendered by the University and not in direct competition.

Several online survey participants identified not having a place to grab food late at night as a weakness. A few Concord students attended a planning commission meeting also indicated that a place to grab a late night snack in Athens would be well utilized by the students, who will sometimes venture over to Princeton for the same kinds of meals.

Another potential for small business growth is in the mountain biking industry. Because of the terrain and the location of Concord University, mountain biking is a popular sport in and near Athens. The redevelopment of a vacant storefront into a bicycle shop should be encouraged. Officials should actively seek out responsible entrepreneurs that could develop an appropriate business model for operating a mountain biking outfitter in Athens.

Small-scale commercial development commensurate with the existing community is needed in Athens. The town can establish minimum requirements and limit the type of commercial enterprise through its zoning ordinance.

According to the online survey responses, 46% of the over 300 participants indicated that "availability of retail" was one of the top 3 most important things for Athens to improve moving forward. Discussions with Concord officials, with student groups, the Mercer County Chamber of Commerce, and the Mercer County Economic Development Authority are critical when trying to market for new business in town.

The Town has fairly limited space for new commercial development; however, there are few empty lots that could be developed for commercial purposes. There could also be redevelopment of vacant commercial structures especially along Main Street. The Town should encourage businesses that are conducive to the community's vision and that have a long term stake in the well-being of the community.

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment

Regional Coordination and Cooperation

The Town of Athens recognizes and understands that in order to adequately address the needs of the town moving forward, it needs to work with other local governments, organizations and agencies. The Mercer County Commission will likely be a very important partner in helping to implement many of the recommendations in the comprehensive plan. The same can be said about Region 1 Planning and Development Council that has already shown a strong willingness to help the town with various needs such as mapping and other services related to infrastructure and planning.

One of the main issues that the comprehensive plan outlines is a partnership with Concord University. The town believes that Concord University is a central partner moving forward and wants to ensure that there is future collaboration between the town and the university. Athens is also interested in maintaining an open line of communication with the other municipalities in Mercer County. Many issues that have been discussed and analyzed in the Town of Athens' comprehensive plan are issues that other Mercer County municipalities are dealing with or have dealt with in the past.

Later as Athens begins to implement the adopted comprehensive plan, town officials should consult the comprehensive plan, and consider reaching out to one or more of the many partners identified in this section for guidance, assistance, and collaboration. Having an open line of communication, whether it's in regard to land use, infrastructure, public services, or education is essential for the future success of the region.



Chapter 4

Town of Athens

Action Plan



Chapter 4: Action Plan

Chapter 4: Action Plan

Chapter 4 of the Town of Athens Comprehensive Plan is comprised of an Action Plan that breaks down the issues discussed in the Chapter 3- Needs Assessment and identifies goals and objectives aimed at addressing those issues. The previous chapters of this comprehensive plan provided relevant details and background information on each of the issues identified during the planning process. The goal of Chapter 4 is to provide the town with specific steps to achieve Athens' vision for the future.

The goals of the Athens Comprehensive Plan correspond to the key issues identified by the Planning Commission and community. Those goals are as follows:

1. Improve water and wastewater systems
2. Update and establish land use ordinances
3. Strengthen the relationship between the Town and Concord University
4. Improve and prioritize the safety of and opportunities for outdoor recreation
5. Address the issue of abandoned and dilapidated buildings

Each goal has specific objectives and action steps that the town should take to implement Athens' goals.

Goals, objectives, and action steps are formatted as follows:

Goal X

Objective X.1

Action Step

Chapter 4 concludes with an implementation matrix that shows how the planning commission prioritizes and assigns a tentative timeline and relative priority to each recommendation. The implementation matrix also includes key partners, responsible organizations, estimated project costs, and funding sources for each identified recommendation.

The language in the Chapter 4 Action Plan mirrors the discussion of issues in Chapter 3. The Action Plan in Chapter 4 is intended to be a precise and useful tool that provides the Town with attainable steps that achieve the town's goals.

Chapter 4: Action Plan

Goal 1) Improve water and wastewater systems

Objective 1.1 Initiate water and sewer line replacement projects

Action Step 1.1.1. Create an up-to-date inventory of Athens' water and sewer lines. Inventory the size, composition, age, and placement of the lines as accurately as possible.

Action Step 1.1.2. Continue to develop and update a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for replacing water, sewer, and stormwater catchment lines.

Action Step 1.1.3. Increase public awareness as to the benefits of checking water service lines, which are the responsibility of the property owner, for leaks and contaminants.

- Consider methods, such as flyers, to distribute information about possible grant funding for voluntary service line testing and/or replacement.

Action Step 1.1.4. Continue project to replace valves and water lines.

Action Step 1.1.5. Repair the waste water gravity flow line in the Mount Jackson Area

Action Step 1.1.6. Conduct a smoke test throughout the entire waste water collection system for infiltration and inflow issues, which can help prioritize collection line replacement.

Objective 1.2 Protection of waste water treatment plan

Action Step 1.2.1 Rehabilitate the plant from flood damage, including pavement, fencing, and creek bank that surrounds the plan.

Action Step 1.2.2. Protect plant against future natural disasters, reinforced retaining walls, and further bank stabilization.

Objective 1.3 Increasing reliability of the sewer system

Action 1.3.1. Upgrade or replace the pump station.

Objective 1.4 Address stormwater concerns

Action 1.4.1. Anytime there is work on the sidewalks or roads either WV DOH or

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the Town should try and also address standing water and other stormwater concerns at the same time.

Goal 2) Update and establish land use ordinances

Objective 2.1. Consider constraints to development, and encourage sustainable growth

Action Step 2.1.1. In the future, if areas within the floodplain are annexed into Athens, the town should participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which allows property owners to receive flood insurance, if such insurance is required.

Action Step 2.1.2 Create a steep slope overlay district in the updated zoning ordinance that would place additional limitations to development in areas that are steeper than 15%.

Action Step 2.1.3. Consider the need for a detailed study and analysis about karst topography as it relates to future growth. A belt of Avis Limestone, a potentially karstic area, may be situated just to the east of Athens' corporate limit.

- The karstic area is likely along the slopes of Laurel Creek and its tributaries, southeast of the town center.

Objective 2.2. Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of annexation

Action Step 2.2.1.
Understand the different methods of annexation in West Virginia.

- Methods for annexing land in West Virginia are 1) annexation with elec-



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tion, 2) annexation without election, and 3) annexation by minor boundary adjustment.

Action Step 2.2.2. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis before pursuing any type of annexation.

Action Step 2.2.3. Work with affected property owners to gauge interest and to ensure that any concerns are considered.

Objective 2.3. Review and Update the Town of Athens' Zoning Ordinance

Action Step 2.3.1. Athens Town Council, with assistance from the planning commission, should complete a “Study and Report on Zoning” to determine if the zoning ordinance needs to be updated.

Action Step 2.3.2. During this review of the comprehensive plan and the current zoning ordinance, officials should review and analyze whether the existing zoning districts align with the current development needs of the town, is consistent with the comprehensive plan, and is enforceable.

- Review the types of uses, their definitions, and their placement within the town as a use permitted “by right” or as a “conditional use.”
- As the town reviews and possibly updates the zoning ordinance, the preferred development areas created during the comprehensive planning process should be utilized to understand where growth should occur.

Objective 2.4. Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of developing a Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO)

Action Step 2.4.1. Understand the advantages and disadvantages of creating and administering a SALDO for the community, before such ordinance is enacted.

Action Step 2.4.2. If the town decides to create a SALDO, ensure that all requirements are clear enough so that property owners can understand what is expected of them during the application process.

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Objective 2.5. Preserve Athens' historic structures

Action Step 2.5.1. Encourage renovation and redevelopment of existing viable structures to maintain the image of Athens as a beautiful and historic community.

Action Step 2.5.2. Periodically identify and disseminate information on voluntary grant funding or tax credit opportunities for property owners interested in historic preservation.

Goal 3) Strengthen the relationship between the town and Concord University

Objective 3.1. Work with Concord University to expand volunteer opportunities for students

Action Step 3.1.1. Create an inventory for volunteers and volunteer projects to improve quality of life in the Town of Athens.

Action Step 3.1.2 Create volunteer opportunities that coincide with National Days of Service such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service and September 11th National Day of Service.

Action Step 3.1.3. Inquire about advertising volunteer opportunities on Concord University's Career Services website.

Action Step 3.1.4. Work with Concord University to establish volunteer opportunities during move-in week or weekend at Concord University so that students connect with the Town of Athens early in the academic year.

Action Step 3.1.5. Discuss the community service requirements for Bonner Scholars at Concord University and identify opportunities for Bonner Scholars to volunteer in town.

Objective 3.2. Consider hiring an intern to coordinate volunteer opportunities between Concord University students and the Town of Athens

Action Step 3.2.1. Work with Concord University to see if the university would be willing to jointly supervise an intern each semester.

- The intern would be expected to provide periodic updates to Town Council.

Objective 3.3. Improve lines of communication between Concord University and the Town of Athens

Action Step

3.3.1. The town and university should evaluate their current lines of communication in both emergency and non-emergency situations and institutionalize methods for handling both.



Action Step

3.3.2. The town and university should discuss the potential establishment of a joint committee that manages concerns involving both the town and university.

- Distributing flyers that advertise town and university events is another way to communicate with community members.

Action Step 3.3.3. Continue to support the Athens-Concord Social, which is a celebration between both the university and the town.

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Objective 3.4. Maintain access and quality of recreational assets that benefit both students and residents

Action Step 3.4.1. Continue to advocate for community access to Concord University's fitness center and track.

Action Step 3.4.2. Encourage and support the University in finding a solution that would allow Concord University's pool to reopen.

Objective 3.5. Promote the development of increased dining options for students living in Athens

Action Step 3.5.1. Advertise to potential business owners the opportunity to grow hangouts and study areas for students, such as coffee shops, wood-fired pizza restaurants, or other unique food establishments.

Goal 4) Improve Wellbeing and Safety

Objective 4.1. Promote the town's proximity to scenic and outdoor recreational opportunities

Action Step 4.1.1. Promote the health and preservation of Pipestem State Park, Camp Creek State Park, and Bluestone State Park.

Action Step 4.1.2 Work with local park officials to see if there is an interest and need for volunteers.

Objective 4.2. Increase recreational activities for senior citizens

Action Step 4.2.1. Promote the idea of "aging in place" through the development of senior classes, activities, and ensuring that accessible housing is permitted for persons with disabilities.

Action Step 4.2.2. Continue to identify other events and opportunities that could connect seniors to the community, such as afternoon concerts or performances in the park.

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Objective 4.3. Promote Athens as a bike friendly destination

Action Step 4.3.1. Collaborate with Concord officials to implement a recreational trail all the way to PikeView High School.

- Faculty and students at Concord are already working on the planning phases.

Action Step 4.3.2. Support Athens' Bike Trail and Bluestone River Trail

Action Step 4.3.3. Sponsor a bike night, where community members can join in an afternoon bike ride, followed by dinner at local restaurants.

- The town could likewise explore the possibility of creating a bike club that takes monthly trips to nearby parks, such as Camp Creek State Park.

Action Step 4.3.4. Communicate with the WV Division of Highways about the feasibility of establishing bike lanes in town, especially along Route 20.

Objective 4.4. Maintain the Athens-Concord Walking Trail

Action Step 4.4.1. Assess the interest in and feasibility of painting mountain lion paw prints along the walking trail.

Objective 4.5. Develop annual events for visitors and community members

Action Step

4.5.1. Brainstorm ideas for potential events and gauge community interest by developing a survey.

- Other annual events should complement the



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Athens-Concord Social held on the Sunday after move-in day at Concord University.

Action Step 4.5.2. Consider the feasibility of and interest in revitalizing the Arts & Beautification Committee that would provide leadership in event promotion and development.

Objective 4.6 Develop and utilize effective marketing materials

Action Step 4.6.1. Develop and use consistent marketing materials so that residents and visitors appreciate and admire the town's seal.

Action Step 4.6.2. Revamp the painted fire hydrant project and explore methods for attaining funding for arts supplies.

Objective 4.7 Promote Athens' walkability and pedestrian safety

Action Step 4.7.1. Survey the entire town and create an inventory of inadequate sidewalks. Sidewalks should have even surfaces, be clear of obstacles, and have appropriately placed curb cuts, which are ADA compliant.

- Curb cuts should be present at each new block and stretch of sidewalk.
- Discuss with Region I Planning and Development Council the possibility of mapping the sidewalks, utilizing GIS, after the inventory.

Action Step 4.7.2 Work with the WV Division of Highways to install updated pedestrian signals, to include audible prompts, for individuals with low vision or blindness.

Action Step 4.7.3. Provide educational materials, in water bills and online, that explain that sidewalk upkeep is the homeowner's responsibility. The educational materials could also include methods for sidewalk maintenance and a number to call if a homeowner is unable to repair their sidewalk.

Action Step 4.7.4. Review municipal ordinances that might apply to sidewalks. Up-

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date any ordinances that are not consistent with the goals and objectives related to sidewalks in the comprehensive plan.

Goal 5) Address abandoned and dilapidated buildings

Objective 5.1. Conduct a community-wide inventory of abandoned and dilapidated buildings

Action Step 5.1.1. The community-wide inventory should be a starting point that the town can use to identify clusters of abandoned and dilapidated buildings, as well as trends in the types of dilapidated buildings.

Objective 5.2. Explore tools that the Town of Athens may use to rehabilitate or demolish abandoned and dilapidated buildings

Action Step 5.2.1. Read through and understand the WV LEAP Toolkit: From Liability to Viability.

- Understand and evaluate tools such as using injunctive relief or liens for debris removal after a fire.

Objective 5.3. Determine eligibility and apply for loans through the West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (PRI).

Action Step 5.3.1 Work with appropriate state agencies to assess the feasibility of applying for a loan and repayment options.

Objective 5.4. Establish a registration program for vacant properties, as enabled by W. Va Code §8-12-16.

Action Step 5.4.1. Establish an annual fee to be paid by owners whose property is listed on the registry for vacant properties.

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Goal– Improve Housing

Objective 3.7. Improve and increase the diversity of housing options in Athens

Action Step 3.7.1. Encourage additional senior housing to ensure that residents are able and encouraged to age in place. Ensure that there are no barriers to development of accessible housing for elderly and persons with disabilities.

Action Step 3.7.2. - Encourage the development of townhomes and affordable housing to improve diversity of the town's housing stock.



Town of Athens Comprehensive Plan - Implementation Matrix

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Goal 1: Improve Water and Waste Water Systems						
Create an up-to-date inventory of Athens' water and sewer lines. Size, composition, age, and placement of the lines should be inventoried.	High	Short-term	63	Town's Water Department, Regional I Planning and Development Council	Costs of mapping, staff time and effort	Grant funding
Continue to develop and update a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP should establish a strategic process for addressing old water distribution lines and old sewer and storm water catchment lines.	High	Mid-term	63	3rd Party Consultant, Water & Sewer Department	Development of a CIP could cost thousands of dollars	General Fund, Grants
Increase public awareness about the benefits of checking water service lines on personal property for leaks and contaminants.	Moderate	Mid-term	63	Town Staff, Water & Sewer Department	Staff Time, Educational materials	General Fund
Continue project to replace valves and water distribution lines.	High	Mid-term	63	Town Water Department	Staff Time, costs of materials	General Fund
Repair the wastewater gravity flow line in the Mount Jackson area of town	High	Short-term	63	Town Wastewater Department	Staff time, costs of materials	General Fund
Conduct smoke test throughout the entire wastewater collection system for infiltration and inflow issues.	Low	Long-term	63	Private Consultant	Several thousands to complete testing for entire system	General Funds, grant funding
Rehabilitate the wastewater treatment plant from flood damage	High	Short-term	63	Staff, private contractor	~\$50,000	General Fund

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Protect wastewater treatment plant against future natural disasters.	High	Mid-term	63	Staff, private contractor	several thousand dollars	General Fund, Infrastructure grant
Upgrade or replace the pump station for wastewater treatment system	Moderate	Mid-term	63	private contractor	costs dependent on several variables, including power needed, technology used	Infrastructure grants and/or loans
Address existing or foreseeable stormwater concerns anytime work is being completed on streets or sidewalks	Moderate	Long-term	63	Town Street Department, WV DOH	costs dependent on scope of work	State transportation funds, town street funds.
Goal 2: Update and Establish Land Use Ordinances						
While Athens does not currently have any areas located within the floodplain, any annexation conversations should discuss the addition of areas in the floodplains or steep slopes to the town.	Low	Mid-term	64	N/A	Staff Time, Attorney Fees	General Fund
Reference the steep slopes map when considering future growth to ensure that subsidence issues would not hinder development.	Low	Long-term	64	N/A	Staff Time	General Fund
Create a steep slope overlay district in any updated zoning ordinance that would place additional limitations to development in areas with steep slopes.	Low	Mid-term	64	3rd Party Consultant	Staff Time, mapping and meeting time of consultant	General Fund
Determine the need for a detailed study on karst topography, as it relates to future growth. A belt of Avis Limestone, a potentially karstic area, may be located near the Athens corporate limit.	Low	Short-term	64	3rd Party Geotechnical Consultant	Depends on scope of project, could cost thousands.	General Fund

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Understand municipal annexation laws in West Virginia.	Moderate	Short-term	64	WVU Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic	Staff Time, Cost of education on annexation	General Fund
Conduct a cost-benefit analysis before pursuing annexation.	Moderate	Short-term	65	N/A	Staff Time	General Fund
Work with affected property owners to identify the advantages and disadvantages of annexation.	Moderate	Mid-term	65	Affected property owners	Staff Time, Meeting with citizens	General Fund
Complete a "Study and Report on Zoning" to determine if a new zoning ordinance needs to be completed.	High	Short-term	65	Planning Commission, 3rd Party Consultant	Staff Time, possible consultation fees	General Fund
Understand the advantages and disadvantages of creating and administering a SALDO for the community, before such ordinance is enacted.	Low	Short-term	65	WVU Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic, and Planning Commission	Staff Time	General Fund
The preferred development areas map should be used to understand where growth should occur.	Low	Short-term	65	Town officials and the planning commission	Staff Time	General Fund
Encourage voluntary renovation and redevelopment of existing structures to maintain Athens' historic image community.	Moderate	Mid-term	66	Elected Officials	Dependent on scope of project	State Historic Preservation Office Grants
Periodically identify and disseminate information on voluntary grant funding or tax credit opportunities for property owners interested in historic preservation	Moderate	Mid-term	66	State Historic Preservation Office	Town staff and officials time	N/A

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Goal 3: Strengthen the relationship between the town and Concord University						
Create a list of volunteers and volunteer projects that can improve quality of life in the Town of Athens.	High	Short-term	66	The local faith-based community and organizations, nonprofits, businesses, etc. Concord Greek Life and University 100	Staff Time/Dependent on scope of project	N/A
Create volunteer opportunities that coincide with National Days of Service, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, Earth Day, and September 11th National Day of Service.	Moderate	Long-term	66	Local organizations, nonprofits, businesses, etc., and Concord University	Staff Time/Dependent on scope of project	N/A
Inquire about advertising municipal volunteer opportunities on Concord University's Career Services website.	Moderate	Short-term	66	Concord University	Staff Time	N/A
Work with Concord University to establish volunteer opportunities during move-in week so that students connect with the Town of Athens early in the academic year.	Low	Mid-term	66	Concord University	Staff Time	N/A
Understand the community service requirements for Bonner Scholars at Concord University and identify opportunities for Bonner Scholars to volunteer in town.	Moderate	Mid-term	66	Concord University and Bonner Scholars' Committee/ Supervisor	Staff Time	N/A
See if Concord University would be willing to jointly supervise a municipal service intern, and carefully select students that would not need large amounts of supervision	Moderate	Mid-term	67	Concord University	Staff Time/Meeting Time	N/A
Evaluate current lines of communication in both emergency and non-emergency situations between town and university.	High	Short-term	67	Concord University	Staff Time	General Fund

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Continue to support the Athens-Concord Social	High	Long-term	67	Concord University and local businesses, organizations, and restaurants	Dependent on scope of project	General Fund
Continue to advocate for community access to Concord facilities, including the fitness center and track.	High	Long-term	68	Concord University	Dependent on scope of project	N/A
Support a solution that would allow Concord's pool to reopen.	High	Mid-term	68	Concord University	Dependent on scope of project	N/A
Encourage investors and/or students to consider developing hangouts and study areas for students, such as coffee shops, wood-fired pizza restaurants, or other unique food establishments.	Moderate	Mid-term	68	Concord University, and Local business stakeholders	Staff Time and potential advertising costs. Private development costs	Private Investment
Goal 4: Improve Wellbeing and Safety						
Promote Pipestem State Park, Bluestone State Park, and Camp Creek State Park.	High	Long-term	68	Pipestem State Park, Camp Creek State Park, Bluestone State Park, the West Virginia State Parks Foundation, and the Mercer County CVB	Staff and Volunteer Time	Partner Funds
Communicate with representatives from local parks to gauge the interest and need for volunteers.	Low	Short-term	68	Pipestem, Bluestone, and Camp Creek State Park officials	Staff Time	N/A
Promote the idea of "aging in place" through the development of senior classes, activities, and ensuring that accessible housing is permitted for persons with disabilities.	High	Mid-term	68	Concord University, Bluefield State College, CASE WV, faith-based organizations	Staff Time	N/A

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Continue to identify opportunities to connect seniors to the community, such as afternoon concerts or performances in the park.	Moderate	Short-term	68	CASE WV, Local Senior Centers and Events Committee	Staff and Volunteer Time, paying for entertainment	Arts and Entertainment Grants
Collaborate with Concord University officials to implement a recreational trail from the University to PikeView High School.	High	Long-term	69	Concord University, private land owners	trail surfacing, any land acquisition, maintenance	private donations; grant funding
Support Athens' Bike Trail and Bluestone River Trail	High	Long-term	69	Concord University, Mercer County CVB, Camp Creek State Park officials, WV State Parks	Staff Time	General Funds, Partner Funds
Sponsor a bike night, where community members can join in a bike ride, followed by dinner at local restaurants.	Moderate	Short-term	69	Local bicycling enthusiast, local restaurants	town could produce marketing materials, minimal costs	and donations/discou nts from local businesses
Communicate with the WV Division of Highways about the feasibility of establishing bike lanes in town, especially along Route 20.	Moderate	Short-term	69	WV Division of Highways, Mercer County Commission	Staff Time	Federal Highway Administration Grants
Assess feasibility of painting paw prints along the walking trail.	Low	Mid-term	69	Concord University and town maintenance	Staff Time, Student Volunteers	General Fund
Consider the feasibility of and interest in revitalizing the Arts & Beautification Committee, to include events planning	Moderate	Short-term	70	Interested citizens, committee members	Staff and Volunteer Time	General Fund
Inventory and map places where there are inadequate sidewalks.	High	Short-term	70	Region I Planning and Development Council, 3rd Party Consultant	Staff Time	Design Grant, General Fund
Install pedestrian signals, such as detectable warnings, for individuals with low vision or blindness.	High	Short-term	70	WV Division of Highways	Dependent on scope of project	Transportation Funding

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Provide educational materials, in water bills and online, that explain that sidewalk upkeep is adjacent homeowner's responsibility.	Low	Short-term	70	Water Department (Town Athens).	Staff Time	General Fund
Review and update municipal ordinances that might affect sidewalks.	Moderate	Short-term	70	Legal Counsel	Staff Time	N/A
Develop and use consistent marketing materials	Moderate	Mid-term	71	Mercer County CVB and local advertising and marketing businesses	Marketing Costs; Staff Time	General Fund
Revamp the painted fire hydrant project	Low	Mid-term	71	Interested citizens	Staff and Volunteer Time, arts supplies	Private donations for supplies
Goal 5: Address the issue of abandoned and dilapidated buildings						
A community-wide inventory of dilapidated structures should be completed to identify abandoned and dilapidated buildings.	High	Short-term	71	WVU Land Use Clinic, BAD Buildings	Staff/volunteer time	N/A
Determine eligibility and apply for loans through the West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (PRI).	Moderate	Short-term	71	WVU Land Use Clinic, BAD Buildings	Staff time and effort	Property Rescue Initiative funds
Communicate with local financial institutions to identify incentives for addressing neglected properties.	Low	Mid-term	71	local banks, property owners	Staff time and effort	General Fund
Collaborate with CASE WV to improve the energy efficiency of homes belonging to low-income families and people with disabilities.	Moderate	Mid-term	71	CASE WV	Costs dependent on scope of work completed	WV Weatherization Program

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Page # Reference	Recommended Partners	Costs & Financing	Funding Sources
Explore other tools that the Town of Athens may use to rehabilitate or demolish abandoned and dilapidated buildings.	Low	Long-term	71	WVU Land Use Clinic	staff time and effort	Vacant Property Registration Program funds can be utilized
Additional Goals and Objectives						
Encourage the development of one-story housing and age restricted housing	Moderate	Long-term	72	Potential senior living investors, CASE WV, local housing authority. Athens Planning Commission and 3rd Party Consultant	Staff Time	N/A
Encourage the development of townhomes and affordable housing to improve diversity of the town's housing stock.	Low	Mid-term	72	Potential housing investors	Staff Time	N/A

Timeframe Column (target completion time after adoption of comprehensive plan)

Short Term = 0 to 3 years

Moderate Term= 4 to 7 years

Long Term= 8 + years

Appendix

Town of Athens, West Virginia
Planning Commission
The Comprehensive Plan Procedures for Public Input

Pursuant to the requirements of W. Va. Code § 8A-3-6(c), the Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") of the Town of Athens, West Virginia (hereinafter "Town") hereby adopts the following procedures to encourage and promote public participation in the drafting of the Town's comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan is being drafted pursuant to W. Va. Code § 8A-1-1.

- (1) Prior to recommending a new or amended comprehensive plan, the Commission will hold a public meeting on the new comprehensive plan. The purpose of a public meeting is to gather input from the general public as to the Town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they pertain to matters in the comprehensive plan.
- (2) The Commission will request input from other affected governing bodies and units of governments that may be affected by the adoption of the comprehensive plan.
- (3) Under W. Va. Code § 8A-3-6(b), once the Commission has completed a draft of the comprehensive plan, and before submitting a plan to the Town Council for adoption, it must publicize and hold a public hearing on the draft of its plan.
 - a. More particularly, under W. Va. Code § 8A-3-6(b), at least thirty(30) days prior to the date set for the public hearing, the Commission will publish a notice of the date, time, and place of the public hearing as a Class I legal advertisement in compliance with the provisions of article three, chapter fifty-nine of the West Virginia Code. The notice shall run in a general circulating publication, the publication area will be the area that will be covered by the comprehensive plan.
 - b. In addition to the requirements at W. Va. Code § 8A-3-6(b), above, the Commission will publish its draft of the comprehensive plan at least thirty (30) days prior to the public hearing. Specifically, the Commission will post a draft of the plan for public review at Athens Town Hall and on the Town's website.
- (4) For purposes of this comprehensive planning process, the Commission considers the "community" of the Town of Athens to be broader than just full-time residents within the corporate borders. For input into the comprehensive planning process, the Commission will look to business owners who live outside the corporate borders, part-time residents, university students and employees, those who are employed in the Town but live outside the corporate borders, visitors, and others.
- (5) Public notice of Commission meetings will be given pursuant to the West Virginia Open Governmental Proceedings Act, where applicable.
- (6) No provision herein shall be construed as limiting the Commission's ability to engage in additional public participation efforts as the Commission deems appropriate. No provision herein shall prohibit the Commission from amending these procedures.

Adopted this 17 day of August, 2017.

President

Vice-President

Don E White
Secretary

SS Pt
Member

D. McINURFF
Member

Member

James M. Linn
Member

James E. Larden
Member

Dan Kuder
Member

Member

Athens, WV May 9, 2016 SWOT

Strengths

- Concord University
- Town park
- All amenities are centrally-located
- Proximity to Princeton, Pipestem and Bluestone; and people must drive through town to get to these places
- I-77 nearby
- Walkable community- sidewalks
- Walking trails
- Recycling program
- Have own water and sewer system
- Elementary school in heart of downtown
- Mild, four season climate
- Very low crime
- Athens Medical Center
- Centrally-located post office
- Close proximity to Bluestone Lake
- Dentist right outside of town
- Large community hospital in Princeton
- Nice restaurant in town and other restaurants
- Bluefield State College, Bluefield College, several community colleges, technical schools
- People
- Natural beauty
- Low property tax
- Quiet, residential community
- Town/Gown Social at start of the school year

Weaknesses

- One road in and out of town- in the winter, this can be a problem
- Lack of employment opportunities (young people move away)
- The road between Athens and Princeton is not great- dangerous road for young drivers
- Aging population
- Dilapidated buildings
- Loss of mining jobs
- No activities/places to go for young people
- Increasing drug use, crime
- When Concord's enrollment is up- housing issues, student partying
- Town/gown relationship
- No more than 3 unrelated person in single-family home is not enforced
- Town Hall building is run down
- Lack of parking
- On-street parking makes it tough for school buses
- Fire Department needs to be upgraded

Opportunities

- Traffic passing through town to go to Pipestem, Bluestone
- Main Street facelift
- Lots of parcels in downtown to develop- development opportunities
- Elementary school building- municipal offices? Senior center?
- (Athens is/could be) Retirement community
- Scott property- townhouses? For senior citizens?
- Need a shopping center (for senior citizens)
- Need better housing (for senior citizens)
- Market the community as a nice place to live
- Mom and Pop shops
- Collaboration with university to share assets
 - University's coffee shop
 - Offer courses to retirees
- Need more town parks, etc- to increase attractiveness as a residential community
- Market town to college students- places to live, places to shop
- Town/Gown social at start of school year
- Community facilities- share with university
- Reopen Athens Lake
- Trail through woods

Threats

- WVU- Beckley Campus (if programs duplicated and enrollment decreases at Concord)
- Declining enrollment at Concord- impact on sewer system, etc.
- Aging population, etc.- increase in vacant properties
- Infrastructure
 - Old water lines
 - Old sewer lines
- County not addressing dilapidated buildings
- Vacant buildings downtown not addressed
- Dilapidating buildings
- Lack of zoning in county
- Closing of more mining businesses (domino effect of closings)

Athens Comprehensive Plan Open House Workshop

Date: Wednesday, May 2, 2018

Time: 4:00-6:00 PM

Location:

Concord University- The State
Room

Athens, WV

Please attend the Open House to provide input, ask questions, and to be part of planning for Athens' future.

Drop in for a few minutes or stay the full time to share your thoughts with city officials, staff, and fellow residents.

Questions?

Contact:

Tim Pike, Mayor, Town of Athens

(304) 384-3525

OR

Jared Anderson, WVU College of Law- Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic: (304) 293-1698

**This is YOUR opportunity
to provide input on the
future of Athens!**



Athens Comprehensive Plan- Open House

May 2, 2018

Public Meeting Sign In Sheet

Please sign in below and provide your contact information to receive future reminders of upcoming public meetings. If you do not have email, please provide a mailing address. Thank you!

Name:

Email or Mailing Address:

1	Sharon Jones	sharon457@outlook.com
2	Husti Skeat	hlskeate@gmail.com
3	Bill Skeat	" " "
4	Paul Hodges	elijahpresident@link.net
5	Nancy Hodges	" "
6	Tom BONE III	cebore55@yahoo.com
7	Pat Edle	rrich@citlink.net
8	Robert Richardson	"
9	Chris Smallwood	Smallwood@Concord.edu.
10	JERRY BEASLEY	
11	Carol Bard	cbardwv@hotmail.com
12	David Bard	bardd@concord.edu
13	Debra Shorter	athensun@frontier.net
14	Karen Griffiee	griffieek@concord.edu
15	Steve Kuehn	skuehn@concord.edu
16	David Johnston	johnston.d@gmail.com
17	Bill Archer	COMMISSIONER.Archer@gawt.com
18	John Scott Jr	Mercer Co Planning Com
19	Eene Bratcher	Mercer County Comm.
20	LUKE DUFFY	coach.duffy@concord.edu.
21	Anne B' Sullivan	Kevinannes@hotmail.com

Athens Comprehensive Plan- Open House
May 2, 2018

Name:

Email or Mailing Address:

22	Steven Pratt	FoxHuntR2@Suddenlink.net
23	Sharon Griffiee	ysgriffiee@gmail.com
24	Edith Martinez	martinez@pot
25		martinez08@mycu.concord.edu
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Athens Comprehensive Plan- Open House
May 2, 2018

Name:

Email or Mailing Address:

45	Kendra Bogess	president@concord.edu ★ send copy of comp plan
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Town of Athens Open House Results

The Town of Athens' Planning Commission hosted an open house at Concord University on May 2, 2018. The goal of the open house was to gain public input on economic development and redevelopment, housing, transportation, infrastructure, historic preservation, public service, recreation, rural land/environmental resources, and land use for Athens. The information received will help the Athens Planning Commission and Town Council of things to include in their comprehensive plan draft. The results of the open house are as follows:

Exercise 1: "Spend my tax dollars on...to help improve the quality of life in Athens."

- Beautification
- Increase police patrol to catch speeders, especially on Vumidin Street
- Completing the new Town Hall project
- Address housing needs for seniors and off campus students that are safe and affordable
- Very careful extension of business to campus
- Taste of the water
- Encouraging a supermarket to come into town (maybe a public-private partnership to build a shell building)
- Community garden
- Elementary school summer activities
- Bike trail

Exercise 2: "Looking to the Future!"

"What is your favorite thing about Athens?"

- Our neighbors!
- Community spirit
- Safe to walk
- Pet friendly – waste stations at park & Concord
- Safety
- Little free library sites

"What is something that needs to be improved, regarding Athens, in the next few years?"

- Beautification
- Old vacant buildings need attention
- Small businesses
- Better sidewalks
- More parking at Post Office
- New or improved Town Hall
- Restaurant/social hangout spot within walking distance of Concord
- Run-down buildings

Exercise 3: “Neglected Property and Housing”

Instructions: Place one blue sticker (O) under Neglected Properties and one blue (O) sticker under Housing for the objective/action step you believe is most important. Additionally, place one red (O) sticker under Neglected Properties and one red (O) sticker under Housing for the objective/action step you believe is 2nd most important.

Neglected Properties/Action Steps:

- Complete a community-wide inventory of neglected properties in Athens. OOOOOOOOOOOOO
- Consider adopting the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) to systematically address abandoned and dilapidated structures. OOOOO
- Communicate with reputable financial institutions to create incentives for addressing abandoned and dilapidated building structures.
- Collaborate with Community Action of South Eastern WV (Case WV) to improve the energy efficiency of homes belonging to low-income families and people with disabilities. OO
- Establish a registration program for vacant properties, as enable by W. Va. Code §8-12-16c. OOOO
- Explore other tools that the Town of Athens may use to rehabilitate or demolish abandoned and dilapidated buildings, such as injunctive relief or liens for debris removal after a fire. OOOOOO
- Take a lot of care when trying to implement demolition and forced restoring of dilapidated structures.
- Search for solutions for financial barriers that prevent people from fixing up buildings.
- Consider broader community/economic development which might then drive renewal. O
- Consider not just housing, but also dilapidated store fronts.

Housing/Action Steps:

- Encourage additional senior housing to ensure that residents are able and encourage to age in place. OOOOOOOOOO
- Encourage the development of one-story housing and age restricted housing. OO
- Review Athens’ zoning ordinance to ensure that developers are not hindered from developing senior housing. OO
- Encourage the development of townhomes and affordable housing to improve diversity of the town’s housing stock. OOOOOOOO

Exercise 4: “Infrastructure and Land Use Goals”

Instructions: Place one blue sticker (O) under Infrastructure and one blue (O) sticker under Land Use for the objective/action step you believe is most important. Additionally, place one red (O) sticker under Infrastructure and one red (O) sticker under Land Use for the objective/action step you believe is 2nd most important.

Infrastructure/Actions Steps:

- Create an up-to-date inventory of Athens' water and sewer lines. ○○○○○○○○
- Continue to develop and update a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for replacing water and sewer lines. The CIP should also facilitate a strategic process for addressing old water distribution lines as well as old sewer and stormwater catchment lines.
○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
- Increase public awareness about the benefits of checking water service lines for leaks and contaminants. ○○○

Land Use/Action Steps:

- Understand different annexation methods that a municipality can take to extend its boundaries. ○
- Understand where floodplains are located in the context of any future annexation proceedings.
- Understand where steep slopes are located when considering limitations to development.
○
- Consider creating a study and analysis for the presence of karst topography (i.e. sinkholes) as there may be karst near current town borders. ○○
- The town should conduct cost-benefit analysis and work with affected property owners so that a thorough analysis for annexation is completed. ○
- Complete a "Study and Report on Zoning" to determine if new zoning ordinance needs to be completed. ○○○○
- The town should understand the advantages and disadvantages of adopting subdivision regulations for the orderly development of land. ○○
- Encourage voluntary renovation and redevelopment of existing viable structures to maintain the image of Athens as a historic community. ○○○○○○○○○○○○. Citizen comment: Where is the \$\$ coming from?

Exercise 5: "Relationship with University and Public Safety Goals"

Instructions: Place one blue sticker (○) under Relationship with Concord University and one blue (○) sticker under Public Safety for the objective/action step you believe is most important. Additionally, place one red (○) sticker under Relationship with Concord University and one red (○) sticker under Public Safety for the objective/action step you believe is 2nd most important.

Relationship with Concord University

- Create an inventory of need for volunteers and volunteer projects to improve quality of life in Athens. ○○○
- Target volunteer opportunities for students enrolled in "University 100." ○○
- Create volunteer opportunities that coincide with National Days of Service, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service and the September 11th National Day of Service.
○○

- Work with Concord University to establish volunteer opportunities during move-in week at Concord, so that students connect with the Town of Athens early in the academic year. OO
- Work with Concord to see if the university would be willing to jointly supervise a municipal service intern. OO
- The town and university should evaluate their current lines of communication in both emergency and non-emergency situations and institutionalize appropriate protocols. OOOOOOOOOO
- Create a joint “Town and Gown” Facebook page that provides updates to any interested individual or organizations about upcoming events in Athens or at the university. O
- Collaborate and develop a plan that outlines housing needs for Concord students, faculty, and staff. OOO
- Maintain access and quality of recreational assets that benefit both students and residents. O
- Advertise to potential business owners the opportunity to develop hangouts and study areas for students, such as coffee shops, wood-fired pizza restaurants, or other unique food establishments. OOOOOOOOOOOOO
- Communicate with Concord University to explore the possibility of developing a student-run business, such as a restaurant, that builds from relevant course material and provides opportunities for professional development. OOOOOO

Public Safety/Action Steps

- Promote the preservations and enhancement of Pipestem State Park and Bluestone State Park. OOOOOOO
- Communicate with representatives from local parks to gauge the interest and need for volunteers. OOOOO
- Promote the additional daytime hours and activities at Athens’ local senior centers. OOO
- Identify other events and opportunities that could connect seniors to the community, such as afternoon concerts or performances. OOOOO
- Sponsor a bike night, where community members interested in biking can join an afternoon bike ride followed by refreshments.
- Communicate with the WV Division of Highways about the feasibility of establishing bike lanes in town, especially along Route 20. OOOOOOO
- Brainstorm ideas for potential events and gauge community interest with a survey. O
- Consider the feasibility of and interest in revitalizing the Arts & Beautification Committee. OOOO
- Identify and inventory of areas with missing or inadequate sidewalks throughout town. OOOOO
- Install pedestrian signals with audible warnings, for individuals with low vision or blindness. OOOO
- Develop and use consistent marketing materials so that residents and visitors develop positive connotations with the town’s seal. OO

- Schools

Exercise 6: Assets and Challenges

*Write down or identify areas on the map in **green** that you think are assets for the community. Also, write down or identify areas on the map in **red** that you think are challenges for the community.*

Assets (**Green**)

- Town park
- Daycare
- Downtown is an asset
- Concentrated commercial development
- Many students walk to Dollar General
- Pretty covered trail
- Schools
- Concord University
- Good sense of community
- Future bike trail
- Location in relation to Bluestone and State Park

Challenges (**Red**)

- Need stop light and curb on corner of North State Street and County Route 9
- Bad roads and sidewalks on North State Street and State Route 20
- Blind spot @ intersection of North State Street and East Broadway Street
- City hall – fix it!
- Could promote trails more and incorporate other trails
- Learn more about property & trail
- Conservation easement?
- Dilapidated structures
- Need to annex more land
- University not in town
- No grocery store
- No restaurants/family restaurants
- Social opportunities for younger people off campus lacking (coffee, restaurant, etc.)
- No access to public reservoir
- No bike lanes
- Reservoir not in town, but serves town

Exercise 7: Presentation of New Bike Trail Proposal by Concord University Class and Professor

- Concord University students and one of their professors presented a map of a proposed bike trail. They explained where the bike trail would be situated throughout the town and made sure to ensure to the open house attendees that it was not set in stone yet. Overall, the public appeared to support the idea and even espoused their support in a couple of the preceding activities.

Town Of Athens- Comprehensive Plan Survey

The results from this survey will be used by the Town of Athens Planning Commission to identify issues/ concerns and then make recommendations, which will form the basis of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. Please fill out all questions to the best of your ability. Please limit to one survey per person. We appreciate your time in completing this survey!!!

* 1. How do you feel about the overall quality of life in the Town of Athens?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Indifferent
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

2. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction for each of the following in Athens

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Availability of recreation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fire protection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Police protection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public school system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Library services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Arts and Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pedestrian / bicycle safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Infrastructure (water / sewer)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enforcement of Ordinances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sidewalks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Street conditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visual appearance of Athens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting information about town events and matters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of retail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traffic circulation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emergency management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stormwater management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recycling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall effectiveness of town government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Historic preservation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 3. What do you think are the 3 **MOST** important things for Athens to improve in the next 5 to 10 years?
(select 3)

- ☐ Availability of recreation
- ☐ Fire protection
- ☐ Police protection
- ☐ Public school system
- ☐ Library services
- ☐ Job opportunities
- ☐ Arts and Culture
- ☐ Pedestrian / bicycle safety
- ☐ Infrastructure (water / sewer)
- ☐ Enforcement of ordinances
- ☐ Housing options
- ☐ Sidewalks
- ☐ Street conditions
- ☐ Visual appearance of Athens
- ☐ Getting information about Town events and matters
- ☐ Availability of retail
- ☐ Traffic circulation
- ☐ Public transportation
- ☐ Emergency management
- ☐ Stormwater management
- ☐ Recycling
- ☐ Overall effectiveness of town government
- ☐ Youth activities
- ☐ Historic Preservation
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 4. What do you think are Athens' 3 greatest strengths? (select 3)

- ☐ Availability of recreation
- ☐ Fire protection
- ☐ Police protection
- ☐ Public school system
- ☐ Library services
- ☐ Job opportunities
- ☐ Arts and Culture
- ☐ Pedestrian / bicycle safety
- ☐ Infrastructure (water / sewer)
- ☐ Enforcement of ordinances
- ☐ Housing options
- ☐ Sidewalks
- ☐ Street conditions
- ☐ Visual appearance of Athens
- ☐ Getting information about Town events and matters
- ☐ Availability of retail
- ☐ Traffic circulation
- ☐ Public transportation
- ☐ Emergency management
- ☐ Stormwater management
- ☐ Recycling
- ☐ Overall effectiveness of town government
- ☐ Youth activities
- ☐ Historic Preservation
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Other (please specify)

5. In 10 years I want Athens to... (complete the sentence)

6. In what ways can the Town and the University work together for the benefit of both?

7. What is your opinion about the recreation provided in the Town of Athens? (please answer yes / no)

Yes/No

There are enough
recreational facilities for
families

There are enough
programs and facilities
for teens and children

There are enough
programs and facilities
for senior citizens

More park space and
facilities are needed

Comments (optional)

8. What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18 years
- ☐ 18 - 24 years
- ☐ 25 - 34 years
- ☐ 35 - 44 years
- ☐ 45 - 54 years
- ☐ 55 - 64 years
- ☐ 65 years and older

9. Where do you live?

- ☐ Town of Athens
- ☐ On Campus Residence
- ☐ Other (please specify)

10. Do you...

- ☐ Own your home
- ☐ Rent your home
- ☐ Other (please specify)

11. Number of people in your household

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6 or more

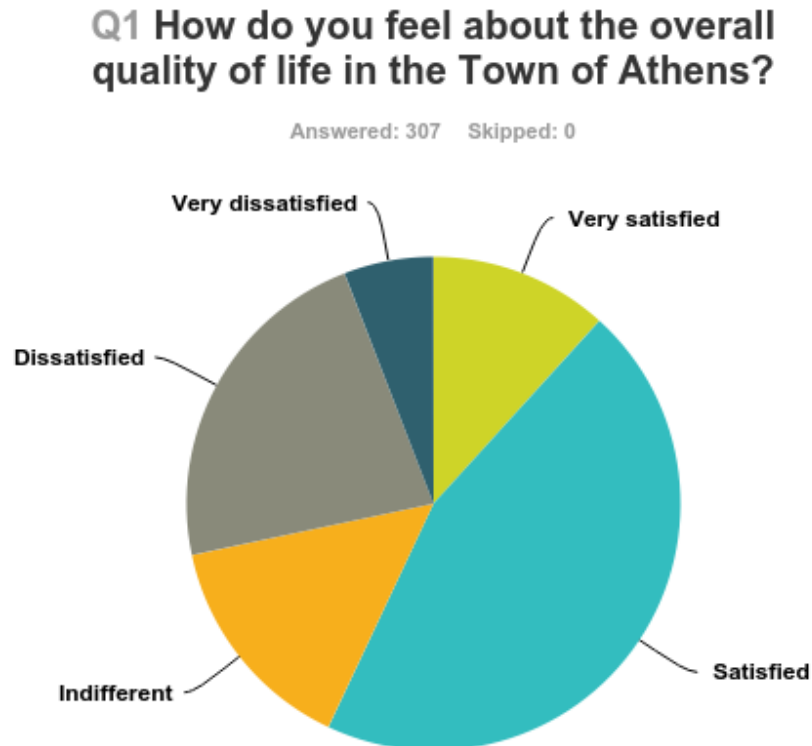
12. Are you a water customer of the Town of Athens?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Town of Athens Comprehensive Plan

Survey Results

1. How do you feel about the overall quality of life in Athens?



45.28% of survey respondents marked that they were satisfied with the quality of life in Athens, while 22.48% of respondents were dissatisfied. Over half the respondents, 57.01%, were either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in Athens.

2. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction for each of the following in Athens:

In this question, respondents indicated their level of satisfaction with a variety of services, amenities, and other aspects of the town of Athens. **Job opportunities, availability of retail, and youth activities** ranked the highest in terms of dissatisfaction. **Fire protection, the public school system, and library services** ranked the highest in terms of satisfaction. Overall, services pertaining to public safety and infrastructure tended to rank highly, while services pertaining to the arts and recreation generally ranked lower.

3. *What do you think are the 3 most important things for Athens to improve in the next 5 to 10 years?*

The highest percentage of respondents, 45.93%, believe that the **availability of retail** is the most important area of improvement for Athens in the next 5 to 10 years. The **availability of recreation** and **job opportunities** were the next highest ranking responses. **Youth activities, arts and culture**, and the **visual appearance of Athens** were also marked as areas on which Athens should focus for improvement.

15.96% of respondents listed “other” as one of their three most important improvement areas. 15 of the respondents who marked “other” also wrote that they would like to see additional **restaurants** or places to socialize. Several respondents also would like to see additional **businesses**.

Overall, the areas with the most dissatisfaction from Question 2 were listed as priority improvement areas in Question 3.

4. *What do you think are Athens’ 3 greatest strengths?*

The highest percentage of respondents, 33.88%, marked that the **public school system** is Athens’ greatest strength. **Police protection** (27.36%) and **fire protection** (26.38%) were the second and third highest choice. **Job opportunities, youth activities, and availability of retail** were ranked the lowest for Question 4.

12.05% of respondents marked “other” as one of Athens’ greatest strengths. Within this category, 14 respondents wrote that **Concord University** is one of Athens’ greatest strengths. 11 respondents wrote that Athens’ greatest strength is its **safe, small community**.

The responses to Questions 3 and 4 are generally consistent to the areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction marked in Question 2, with the exception of the additional answers, Concord University and the safe community atmosphere.

5. *In 10 years, I want Athens to...(complete the sentence)*

248 respondents replied to this open-ended question. While the answers varied, several ideas were echoed throughout the responses.

Over 60 respondents wanted to see the **more businesses** attracted to and supported in the town. Many people noted that they wished they had **more retail options**. Additionally, many respondents noted that new businesses in Athens, such as coffee shops or breweries, should be oriented toward the students attending Concord University.

Over 30 respondents would like to see **increased opportunities for recreation** within the town. Many people said that Athens should strive to attract tourists and should provide additional entertainment options. Several respondents also said that there should be a greater variety of “things to do” for youth.

Several other ideas were reiterated in Question 5. Many people wrote that Athens should embrace its status as a **college town** and seek to provide additional amenities to students. Several responses indicated interest in **bike lanes or bike paths** in or near the town. Several people wanted to see more **restaurants**, including fast food, located in Athens, and many also noted interest in a weekly **Farmer's Market**. A need for **improved healthcare** also was repeated in the responses. Finally, many people noted the wish to see **abandoned and dilapidated buildings** gone from their town, in addition to the preservation of old, **historic homes**.

6. In what ways can the Town and the University work together for the benefit of both?

232 people responded to this open-ended question. A few main points were reiterated in the answers.

First, over 50 respondents want to see **increased collaboration** between the Town of Athens and Concord. Many specific ideas were shared in the responses. For example, students attending Concord could earn community service hours by volunteering in the town. Volunteer projects could pertain to town improvements, such as beautification projects. Likewise, Concord students could be invited to participate or assist in facilitating local events, such as field days.

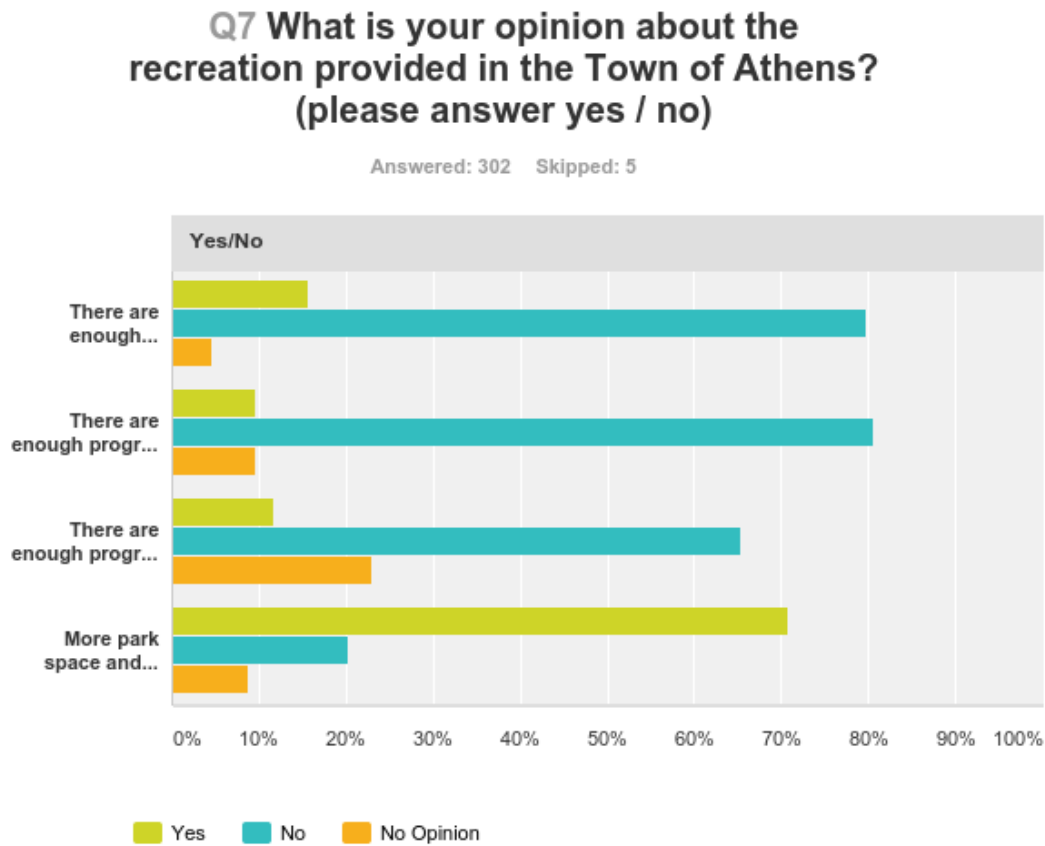
Programming between the town and university could also be increased. For example, art students could help local school students paint a mural. Art and science camps or programs could be hosted in the evenings or summertime. Overall, many respondents wanted to welcome increased collaboration on projects that would involve both college students and Athens residents.

Over 30 respondents would like to see **businesses that cater towards college students**, such as cafes or restaurants.

Many people noted that Concord and Athens should work together to provide **healthy, recreational activities** for both students and residents, such as bike trails. Over 25 respondents wanted to see the **University pool** re-opened.

Several respondents also believe that the town and university should work to **improve their communication**. The town and college should notify one another about upcoming events, from festivals to plays to sporting events.

7. What is your opinion about the recreation provided in the Town of Athens?



In this yes/no/no opinion question, people responded to the following statements:

There are enough recreational facilities for families.

There are enough facilities for teens and children.

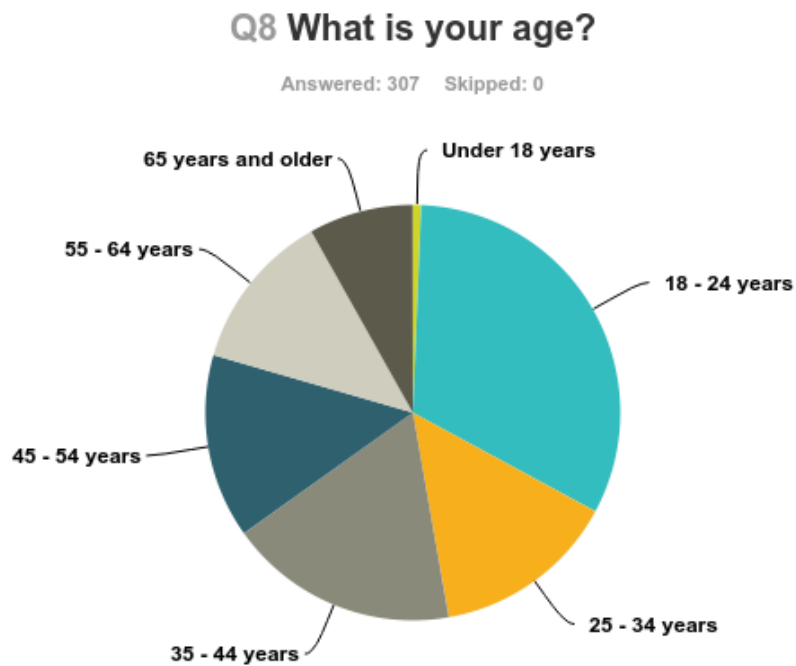
There are enough programs and facilities for senior citizens.

More park space and facilities are needed.

79.67% of respondents felt that there are not enough recreational facilities for families. Additionally, 80.67% of respondents felt that there are not enough programs and facilities for

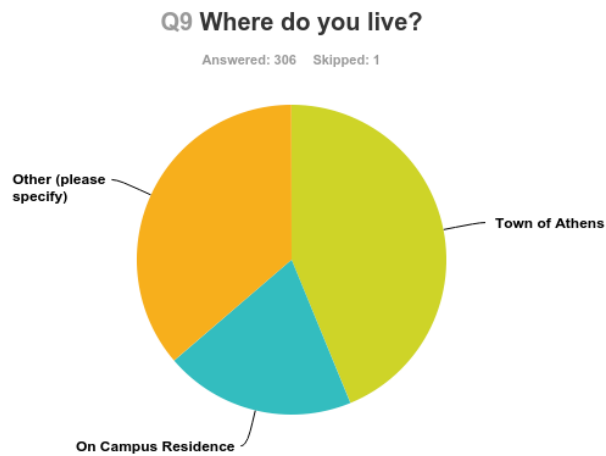
teens and children. 70.85% of respondents felt that more park space and facilities are needed. 65.32% of respondents noted that there are not enough programs and facilities for senior citizens.

8. *What is your age?*



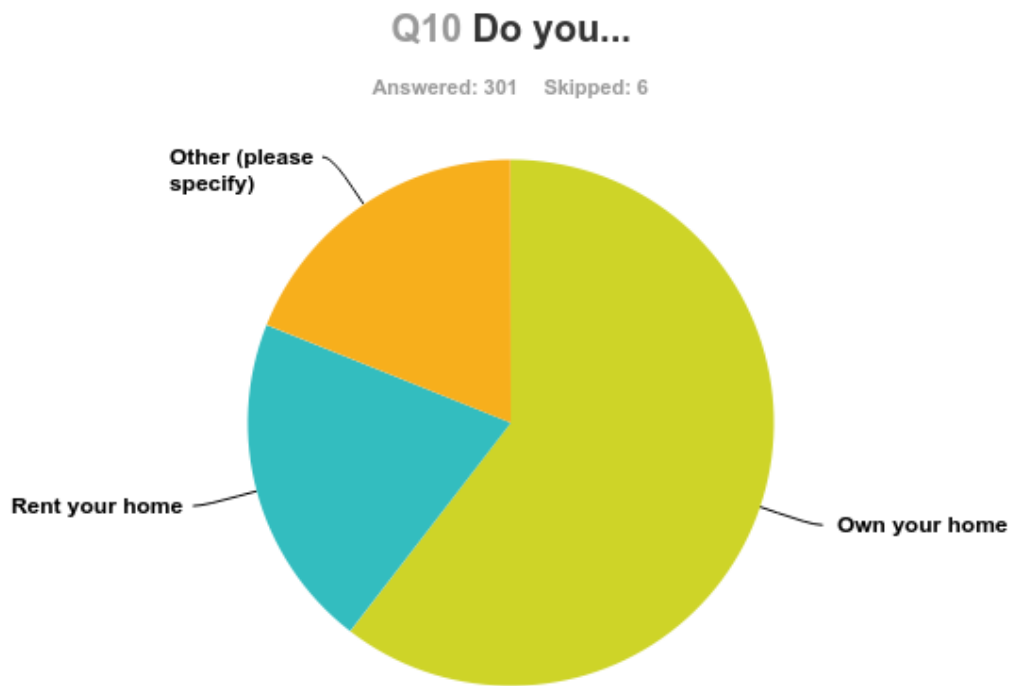
47.88 % of survey respondents were under the after of 34. Respondents between ages 18-24 accounted for 32.25 % of the surveys completed.

9. *Where do you live?*



43.79% of respondents said that they live in the Town of Athens. 19.93% report that they live on-campus, and 36.27% marked “other.” Of the respondents that marked “other,” approximately 30 individuals live near Athens. Approximately 35 respondents live in Princeton. A small amount of respondents are commuters or live in Virginia, while some respondents live in Beckley, Fayette County, Summer County, and Lewisburg. 5 respondents live in Leron.

10. Do you...

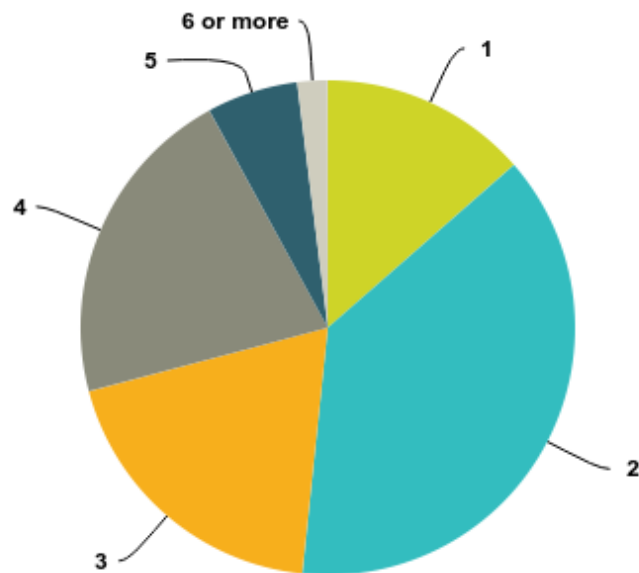


60.47% of respondents own their home, while 20.60% rent their home. 18.94 % of respondents marked “other.” Many of the respondents who marked “other” noted that they live with parents and family members or that they live in a dorm on-campus.

11. Number of people in your household

Q11 Number of people in your household

Answered: 302 Skipped: 5

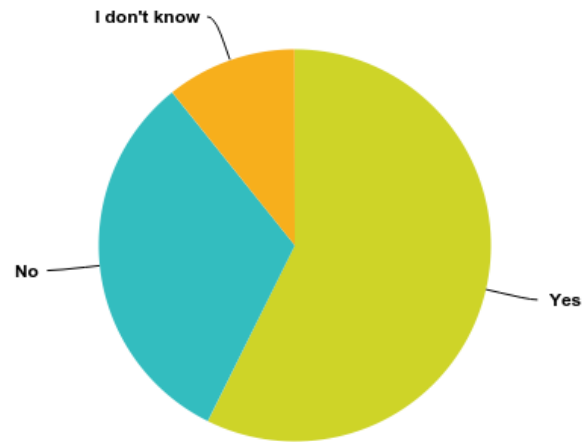


The majority of respondents, 38.09%, live in a two-person household. 70.87% of survey respondents live in a household with between one and three people.

12. Are you a water customer of the Town of Athens?

Q12 Are you a water customer of the Town of Athens?

Answered: 307 Skipped: 0



57.33% of survey respondents are water customers of the Town of Athens, while 31.92% of respondents were not. 10.75% of respondents do not know if they are water customers of Athens.

NOTICE that the Town of Athens Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on Monday, February 11, 2019 at 6:00 PM at Athens Town Hall, 202 South State Street, Athens, WV 24712. The public is invited to attend and submit comments on the draft comprehensive plan. A copy of the draft comprehensive plan can be viewed at the Athens Town Hall during normal business hours (Mon-Fri, 8:00AM-4:00PM) or on the town's website, www.townofathens.com. Members of the public can call Town Hall at 304-384-3525 if they are unable to review the draft plan. Written comments can be submitted prior to the scheduled hearing at the Athens Town Hall, 202 South State Street, Athens, WV 24712.

NOTICE that the Town of Athens Town Council will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, June 4, 2019 at 6:00 PM at Athens Town Hall, 202 South State Street, Athens, WV 24712. The public is invited to attend and submit comments on the draft comprehensive plan. A copy of the draft comprehensive plan can be viewed at the Athens Town Hall during normal business hours (Mon-Fri, 8:00AM-4:00PM) or on the town's website, www.townofathens.com. Members of the public can call Town Hall at 304-384-3525 if they are unable to review the draft plan. Written comments can be submitted prior to the scheduled hearing at the Athens Town Hall, 202 South State Street, Athens, WV 24712.