

The WV INDEPENDENT Observer

JEFFERSON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

DECEMBER 2024

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Over 150 residents from across Jefferson County attended the November 12 Planning Commission meeting to voice concerns about a plan for a bottling plant in Middleway.

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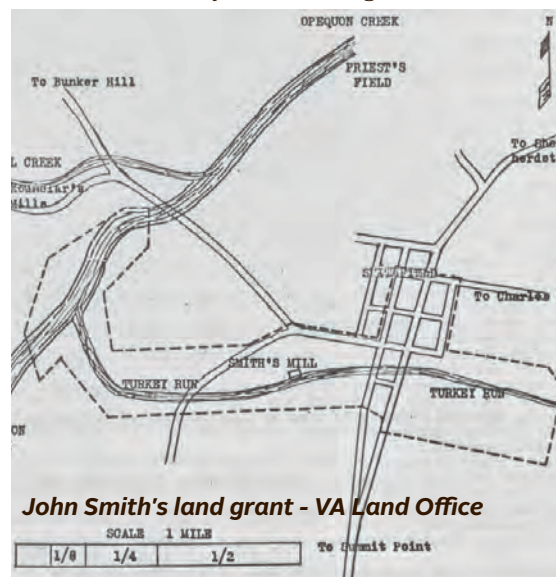
MIDDLEWAY VALUES HISTORY & COMMUNITY

A Local Village Traces Its Connections Through Centuries

MIDDLEWAY DAY, HELD ANNUALLY IN MID-OCTOBER, brings out the community to celebrate this historic Jefferson County village located seven miles west of Charles Town. Middleway traces its history to a land grant of 420 acres from the Governor of Virginia to John Smith in 1734 — the same year the Governor granted 222 acres to Thomas Shepherd for the similar purpose of establishing a settlement in the western part of the Virginia colony.

The plentiful water of Turkey Run figured prominently in attracting English settlers to this location, according to “The Story of Smithfield (Middleway)” by Robert Bates published in 1958. A grain mill powered by the stream was the first commercial enterprise to be established. The village sat near the intersection of two early thoroughfares through the lower Shenandoah Valley, both of which by the mid-1700s had evolved from Native American trails into primitive roads. The east-west route (now Route 51) ran westward from Keys Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The north-south route, known as Queen Street within the village limits, was one of the early paths of the Great Wagon Road, connecting Pack Horse Ford at the Potomac River near Shepherdstown, the settlement at Berryville, and continuing southward into the valley.

In the book’s introduction, Bates quotes an early 20th-century visitor who remarked “Time has changed the place but little. Log houses that date back to the 18th century are still standing and still occupied. The tourist, by a short detour from the main highways, can here see a relic of the past. Log, brick and stone buildings abut the streets. An old tavern stands as it did in the days of Washington.”



Looking north along Queen Street from Grace Street in Middleway. Early 1900s (image above, courtesy Jefferson County Museum). The same view today (image below).



The Middleway Conservancy website has a brief history of the area. It notes that the village’s current name originated with the post office that was established in 1807, designated “Middleway” to avoid confusion with another town with the Smithfield name in the tidewater region of Virginia. The Conservancy website states that there were numerous shops in the village by the early 1800s, but the decision by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to bypass Middleway ultimately led to a sharp decline in commercial activity within the village. The Civil War also wreaked havoc upon the village,

particularly with the battle of Smithfield in August of 1864.

The Middleway Historic District was included in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 with 50 contributing structures. The Middleway Conservancy Association (MiddlewayConservancy.org) was established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to focus on preserving the historic village. The Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission (JeffersonCountyHLC.org) also provides guidance and recommendations for preservation efforts. 🗺️

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THIS PAPER WANTS TO BE RECYCLED.



Big Spring (also known as Lake Louisa) in Middleway circa 1908.. Image courtesy Jefferson County Museum

TO OUR READERS — It's getting harder to find an empty seat in the audience at many local government meetings in Jefferson County. On one hand, it's a positive sign that so many residents are getting involved with our local government. On the other hand, it's evident from public comments that many residents are frustrated with the decisions of our local governments and how our elected officials conduct business.

We're encouraged to be charitable to all, especially during the holiday season. But it's hard to infer good motives to companies — be they multinational corporations or private equity investors hiding behind a nest of LLCs — who come to Jefferson County to exploit and extract our resources, offering few jobs and even fewer benefits to our local community. Projects like the Blake industrial solar complex in Kabletown are a constant reminder of how little a foreign company can care for the local ecology and community.

The residents of Middleway, many of whom still work the farms that were established generations ago, are getting a quick lesson in the “over promise and under-deliver” pattern that seems to play out over and over again in West Virginia. A proposal for a massive bottling plant project (page 8) came up short in its first pass with the Planning Commission, but the investment company behind the project has already teed up another proposal for a second round. Like the first plan, the second leaves many questions unanswered — and challenges county residents to make their voices heard even louder.

Steve Pearson
EDITOR IN CHIEF



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// ELECTIONS

REPUBLICANS SWEEP JEFFERSON COUNTY VOTE

New County Commissioners Will Need To Address Many Issues



THERE WERE 46,016 REGISTERED VOTERS eligible to vote in Jefferson County according to the report provided by Nikki Painter, the Chief Deputy Clerk of Jefferson County, following the official election canvass completed on November 12 and 13. Painter's report shows that 29,447 ballots were cast in Jefferson County during the recent election (including election day, early voting, and absentee ballots). That number represents a turnout of 63.99% of Jefferson County's registered voters, which is slightly lower than the 64.78% turnout rate for the 2020 election.

State Legislature Results

In the West Virginia State Senate, Republican Patricia Rucker will continue to represent Jefferson County. In the House of Delegates, Jefferson County will be represented by four Republican delegates: incumbents Bill Ridenour and Wayne Clark and newcomers Joe Funkhouser and Chris Anders. The final vote splits were:

- Senate: Rucker 60% – John Doyle 40%
- Delegate 100: Ridenour 53% – Maria Russo 47%
- Delegate 99: Wayne Clark 58% – Osmund Anderson 42%
- Delegate 98: Joe Funkhouser 66% – Troy Miller 34%
- Delegate 97: Chris Anders 54% – Lucia Valentine 46%

District 97 includes parts of both Berkeley and Jefferson Counties. In the Jefferson County precincts, Valentine outpolled Anders with 54% of the votes, but received only 41% of the vote in the Berkeley County precincts.

Jefferson County Commission Results

There were four seats on the ballot for the Jefferson County Commission. The four newly elected commissioners will join sitting commissioner Steve Stolipher (Kabletown seat) for an all-Republican County Commission. The County Commission vote splits were:

- Middleway: Mike Mood 55% – Natalie Grantham Friend 45%
- Charles Town: Jack Hefestay 50% – James Walch 40%, David Tabb 10%
- Harpers Ferry: Pasha Majdi 54% – Lanae Johnson 46%
- Shepherdstown: Cara Keys 57% – Carrie Blessing 43%

Hefestay, Majdi, and Keys are all filling seats that became vacant in the past 18 months, so they assumed office immediately after the County Commission certified the results on November 19. Hefestay will serve the remaining four years of the Charles Town seat term; Majdi, who was previously serving as an appointed commissioner to fill the Charles Town seat vacated by Clare Ath, will serve the remaining two years of the Harpers Ferry seat term. Keys will serve the remaining four years of the Shepherdstown seat term. Mood will take office in early January 2025 when Commissioner Jane Tabb retires at the end of her term.

Full Agendas For New Commissioners

In December, the commissioners will begin discussion of the Comprehensive Plan that was recently drafted by the Planning Commission, with a public hearing on December 4 followed by deliberations and possible revisions to be voted on in early January. Two of the new commissioners, Hefestay and Keys, had been serving on the Planning Commission, so the County Commission will need to appoint two new members to fill those vacant seats (residents can call the County Commission office at 304-728-3284 for information on how to apply).

Next year, the planned acquisition of a new county headquarters building (see page 5) will require a lot of attention from the commissioners during the spring. Discussions for the fiscal year 2025-2026 budget will also begin in December and continue into the spring, with the expectation that inflation and local population growth will significantly affect both the revenue and expense sides of the budget. 🗳️



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// GOVERNMENT

COMMISSION PLANS TO PURCHASE BUILDING

County To Move Offices To American Public University Site

AT ITS NOVEMBER 7 MEETING, THE COUNTY COMMISSION announced its plans to purchase the American Public University building at 393 North Lawrence Street (see image). The Commission intends to use this facility to consolidate various county functions now housed in several buildings in downtown Charles Town and in the Public Services Center in Bardane. The first step of the purchase process was approved during the Commission’s November 7 meeting, with a unanimous vote to authorize the signing of a purchase agreement with American Public University Systems. In the timeline document provided by the County Commission, the next steps include conducting various structural, systems, and environmental inspections of the facility, determining the details of the financing, and executing any necessary updates and reconfiguration of the building to meet the specific needs of the various county departments that will be housed in the facility.

Making The Case For Acquisition

Earlier this year, during the Commission’s June 27 meeting, Laura Kuhn, the Director of Fleet & Facilities Management for the County, provided a comprehensive assessment of the County’s facilities. Her presentation highlighted the costs of utilities, maintenance and major repairs for the County’s existing buildings. The current year utility costs were projected to be \$210,000 and maintenance expense was projected to be \$290,000. Kuhn applied a 2% inflation factor to estimate a ten-year cost of \$2.1 million for utilities and \$3.6 million for maintenance. For major repairs, she estimated an outlay of \$1 million over the same period. Her bottom line was that the buildings are old, non-functional in many aspects, and the maintenance needs will continue to increase and strain the county’s operating budget.

A Longer Timeline

Kuhn’s presentation in June was part of a discussion that stretches back several years. In 2019, the County Commission explored the option of demolishing the buildings between the historic courthouse and Hunter House on East Washington Street and constructing a new building. According to the timeline provided by Kuhn, the County had engaged an architect to create a design and feasibility study in 2019, but that plan was suspended with the onset of the pandemic.



Parking lot behind East Washington St. buildings.



393 North Lawrence Street

The West Virginia Supreme Court’s 2023 announcement of the plan to add a fourth magistrate court in Jefferson County reinforced the County’s need to assess its office space. The most reasonable location to expand the Magistrate Court was in the Margaret Building, where the Sheriff’s tax office is located — but the County had no reasonable alternatives to house the tax office if it moved.

The timeline document indicates that by July of 2023, the focus shifted from “build” to “buy” as the most viable option. The County provided several reasons for this shift, including the expense and difficult logistics of re-locating the existing county offices to temporary space if the County were to follow the original plan of reconstruction on the current East Washington Street site.

Adjusting The Space

The County’s initial focus for a building to purchase was 330 North George Street (the “clock” building). The sales listing for that building indicates 45,000 square feet of office space and 114 parking spaces. The timeline document provided by the County at the November 7 meeting indicates that the feasibility study of this option was completed in February 2024 and found that the space was too small to meet the current and future needs of the County. The County then shifted its focus to the larger building at 393 North Lawrence Street, with the analysis of that space completed by August.

Running The Numbers

According to the purchase agreement, the North Lawrence building has 91,600 square feet of interior space and 393 parking spaces. The total acquisition cost is projected at \$19.1 million according to information provided in the draft impact fee study released by the Commission on November 13. That works out to \$182 per square foot (for comparison, the County provided a cost estimate of \$600 per square foot to construct new Class A commercial space construction).

The \$19.1 million project amount includes the \$16.6 million purchase price for the property, anticipated renovation expenses, furnishing, and professional services fees. The impact fee study (see page 6) indicates a portion of the total cost can be covered by impact fees collected for new growth. The County is currently exploring options for financing \$6.6 million of the project cost. If the inspection and financing tasks are successfully completed, the County expects to close the deal in May 2025, followed by renovations and relocation of staff in the following months. 📌

// GROWTH

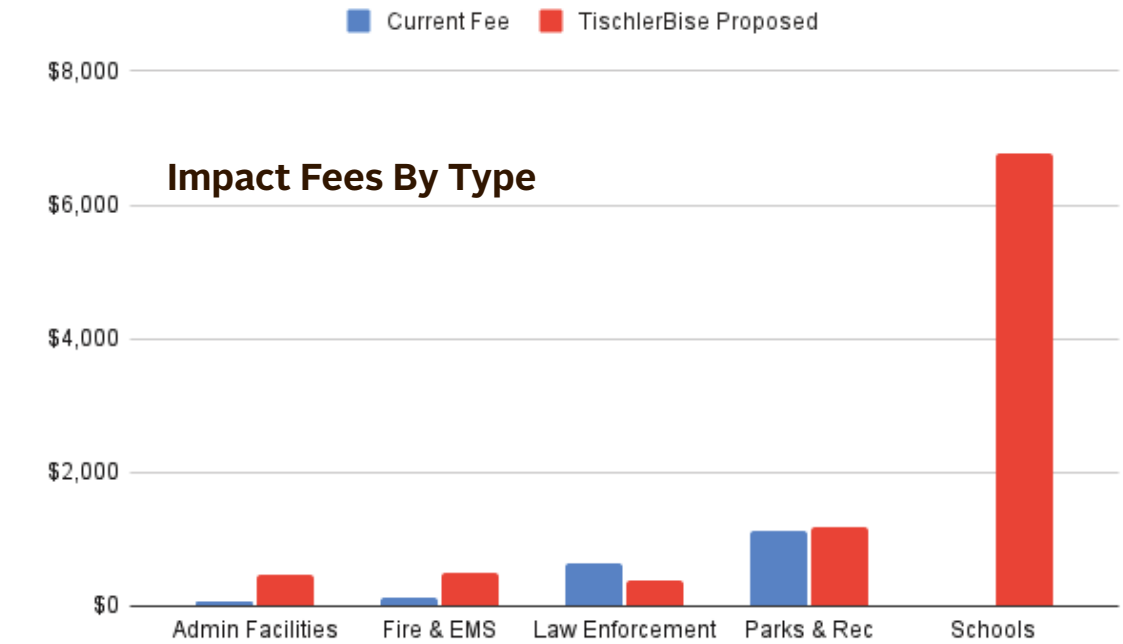
COUNTY COMMISSION REVIEWS IMPACT FEES

Public Hearing On November 19 Generates Many Questions

EARLIER THIS FALL, THE COUNTY COMMISSION indicated that it intended to move quickly to update the impact fees charged to new construction and adopt the necessary ordinances before the end of 2024. After receiving a revised draft of the report prepared by TischlerBise, the consulting firm hired to advise the Commission on updating the fees, the Commission's plan was to hold a public hearing on November 19, then vote on the fees at the regular Commission meeting two days later on the 21st. Following a lengthy discussion at the November 19 public hearing between the commissioners and the consultant, the commissioners seemed to have more questions than answers, indicating that they were unlikely to be ready to vote on November 21.

The consultant provided a brief presentation on impact fees prior to the public hearing. According to the consultant, the basic concept of impact fees is simple — new construction (both residential and commercial) is charged an up-front fee to cover the cost of expanding the infrastructure needed to support the new residents or new businesses that occupy the new construction. However, the details get complicated.

As explained by the consultant, there needs to be an “essential nexus” between the new growth and the infrastructure fee. So for example, new commercial construction can't be charged a fee to cover the cost of expanding parks. The fee also needs to be “roughly proportional” meaning that new construction can't be charged more to cover the cost of expanding services for both new and existing residents. To continue the park analogy, if



The County Commission reduced the school impact fee to \$1 per housing unit several years ago, citing declining enrollment. How to project school enrollment continues to be a key question in the debate.

the current “level of service” for county parks is 1 acre per 100 residents, the fee on new construction should be set to cover the costs of acquiring 1 acre per 100 new residents. If the county wants to upgrade the “level of service” to 2 acres of parkland per 100 residents, it would need to demonstrate that it had a plan to tax existing residents for the cost of acquiring the acreage required to meet that standard for the existing population before it could justify charging new growth at that level.

Jefferson County Schools has already acquired land for a new high school, so that expense cannot be factored into the impact fees.



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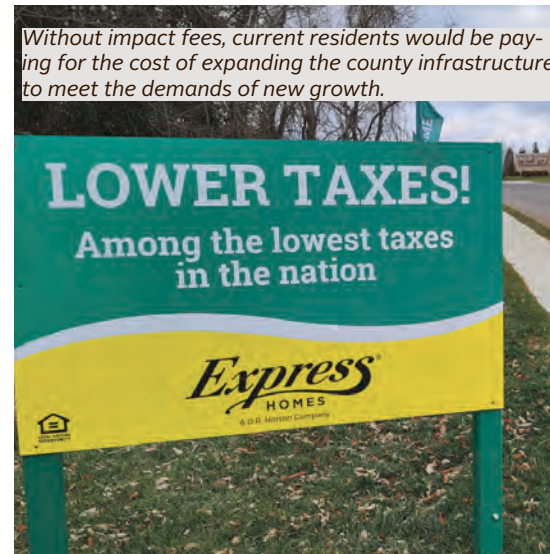
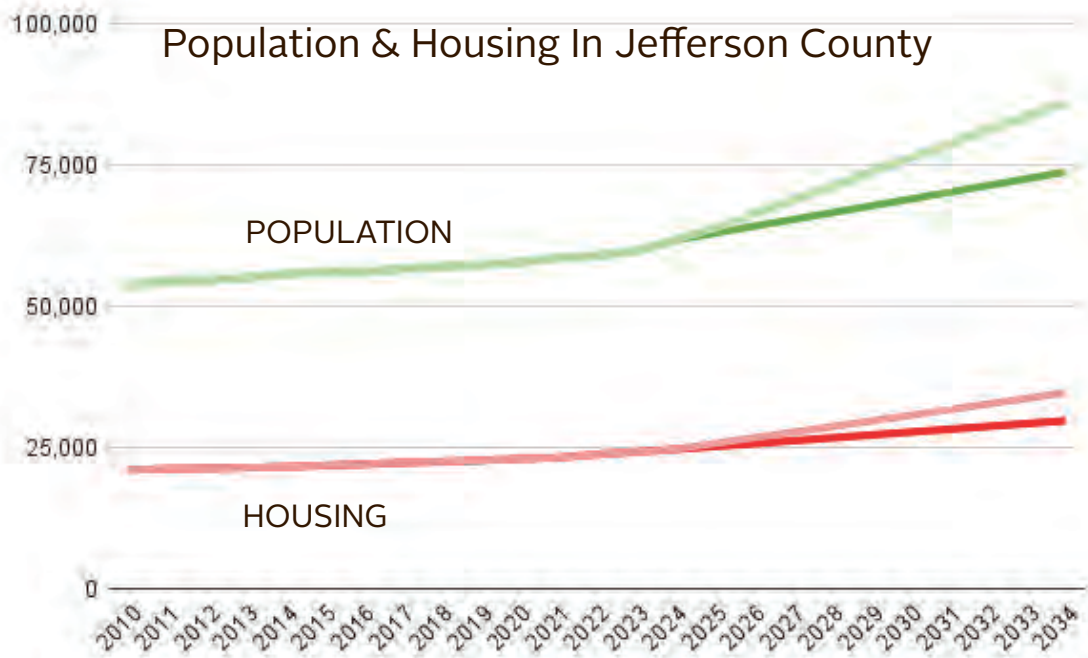
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// GROWTH

Population Projections

The TischlerBise report includes a projection for new housing construction in Jefferson County over the next 10 years. The methodology used for the report uses an average number calculated from the previous 5 years, which leads to an estimate of 500 new housing units annually (a housing unit is a single family house, duplex, townhome, or apartment). In the past two years the rate of construction has increased significantly, running closer to 1,000 units per year. Using the TischlerBise projection, there will be a total of 30,000 homes in the county by 2034 (chart, right). If the trend of the past couple of years continues, the total home number will be closer to 35,000 by 2034. TischlerBise estimates approximately 2.5 new residents per house, so the 2024 population projection in the report is 74,000. A projection based on the higher home construction numbers of the past two years would forecast a 2034 Jefferson County population of 86,000.



“The man who promises everything is sure to fulfill nothing, and everyone who promises too much is in danger of using evil means in order to carry out his promises, and is already on the road to perdition.”

— C.G. Jung
(Civilization in Transition, Chapter 3, p.201)

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// COMMUNITY

MIDDLEWAY BOTTLING PLAN REJECTED

Commissioners Vote No, Say Concept Plan Was Incomplete

By Steve Pearson

IT TOOK MORE THAN FOUR HOURS to hear 56 public comments on the Mountain Pure bottling plant concept plan during the November 12 Jefferson County Planning Commission public workshop attended by approximately 150 people. All 56 commenters voiced concerns and opposition to the plan — there were no public comments in support of it.

The Mountain Pure concept plan for a 1 million square foot bottling facility was first submitted to the Planning & Zoning Office on September 27, 2024 (file # 24-29-SD), listing Sidewinder Enterprises, LLC of Newport Beach, California as the property owner. The concept plan also included a subdivision plan for a single 260-acre property located at 1 Grace Street in Middleway, which is zoned Industrial-Commercial. According to Planning & Zoning staff, the concept plan sketch submitted on September 27 showed the property subdivided into 6 parcels, which was inconsistent with the waiver Sidewinder had received from the Planning Commission in August 2023 to allow the property to be subdivided into 4 parcels.

Sidewinder submitted a revised concept plan sketch on October 7. This plan for the property showed the site subdivided into 4 parcels: a 37-acre parcel (Phase 1 Bottling Facility 304,000 sq-ft), a 74-acre parcel (Phase 2 Bottling Facility 696,000 sq-ft), a 1.6 acre parcel (future water treatment facility), and a 147-acre parcel that encompasses the former 3M facility, Turkey Run, and stormwater management areas.

Concerns About Water & Traffic

The public comments during the November 12 workshop focused on two major concerns, that the water extraction would harm neighboring landowners by depleting the aquifer, and that the additional traffic described in the concept plan notes would cause an undue hardship on the property owners in Middleway.

Following the public comment, the Commission invited the company's representative, Mark Dyck of Integrity Federal Services, to respond. Dyck disclosed that the company has already drilled three wells on a nearby parcel currently zoned "Rural" and intends to construct a pipeline through the Middleway village to connect the wells with the bottling facility. In response to the water use concerns, Dyck proffered several assurances to monitor and replace wells of adjacent landowners under certain conditions.

Regarding the traffic, Dyck referred to the WV Department of Highway's plan to install a signal at the Route 51 & Leetown Road intersection (in place of the existing blinking signal) but dismissed the concerns of heavy truck traffic through the narrow roads of the historic Middleway village, citing a lack of evidence that traffic can cause harm to old structures.

Commissioners Question Missing Details

Following Dyck's responses, the planning commissioners spent another hour discussing the project. The staff report had deemed the concept plan complete, but the commissioners seemed concerned about the lack of disclosure about the water source and the legality of

extracting water from a property in the Rural Zone for use outside of that rural property. In the end, the missing information was the justification that the Planning Commission referenced in rejecting the concept plan.

A Vote to Reject

After four hours of comment and discussion, the commissioners took a vote (transcription is from the meeting video):

[Commissioner Keys states motion]

We find this plan, insufficient

[Commissioner Stolpher interrupts] *incomplete*

[Keys continues] - *incomplete and would like to motion that we table it*

[Commissioner Shepp interrupts] *No, deny it.*

Send it back. They have to start over.

[Keys] OK

[Shepp] *As I understand it.*

[Keys continues] - *due to the lack of parcels included for the whole site.*

[Keys restates motion]

I'd like to make a motion that this is incomplete.

We would like to send this back to have this redone to include all the parcels moving forward.

[Commissioner Louthan seconds motion]

[Shepp asks if any further discussion, calls the vote & announces motion passes (unanimous)]

The Commissioners Reasoning

Afterwards, Commissioner Keys summarized the reasoning behind her motion: "The Planning Commission voted to reject based on insufficient information. This was a final decision on this plan, but the applicant can submit a different plan."



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// COMMUNITY

NEW PLAN SUBMITTED FOR BOTTLING SITE

Company Identifies Two Other Parcels, Well, And Pipeline Path

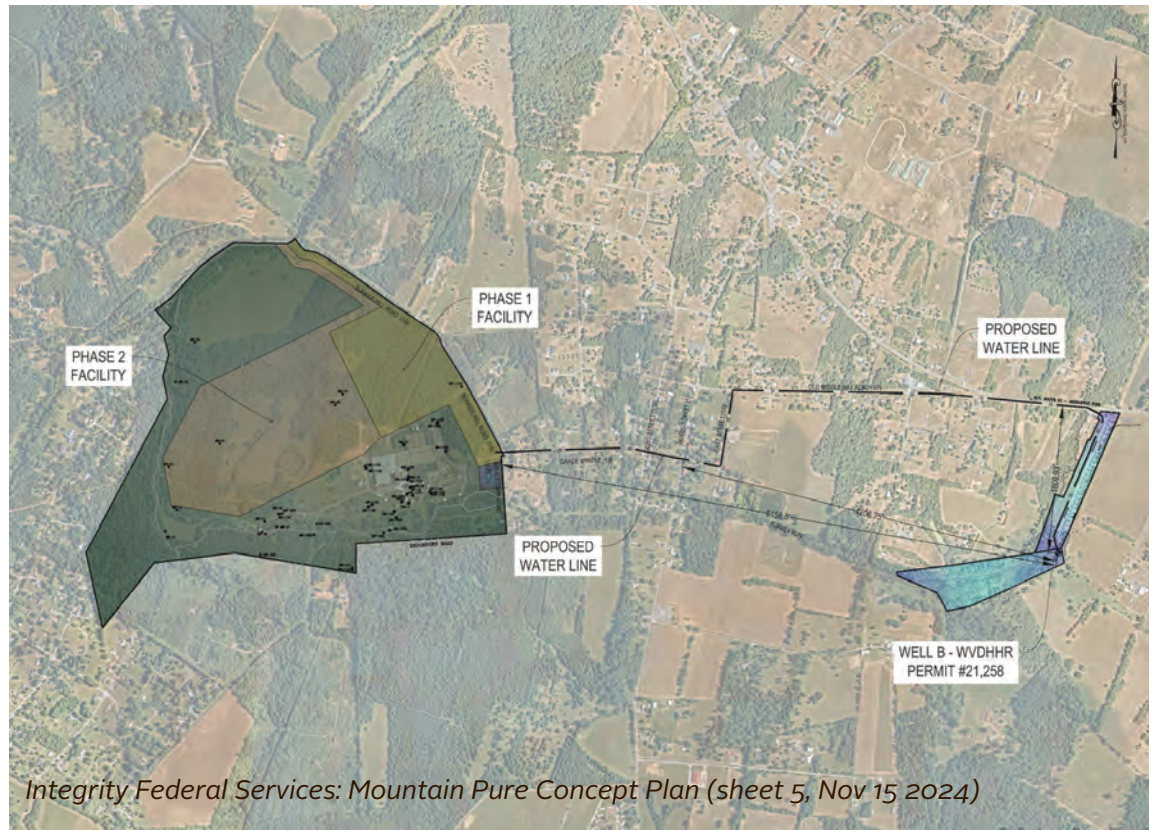
By Steve Pearson

ON NOVEMBER 15, SIDEWINDER ENTERPRISES, LLC submitted a new concept plan for its Mountain Pure water bottling facility project (file # 24-6-SP). The Planning Commission has scheduled a special meeting to hold a public workshop on Tuesday, December 17, starting at 7:00 pm. The meeting will be held in the basement meeting room of the Charles Town Library (200 East Washington St, Charles Town – side entrance on Samuel St). Written comment to be included in the meeting packet is due by 5:00 pm on December 10.

The November 15 plan shows the same 4 parcel subdivision for the 260-acre property located at 1 Grace Street in Middleway which is zoned Industrial-Commercial and adds two additional parcels: a 8.3 acre parcel that is currently used as a trailer park and a 13.2 acre site that surrounds Lake Louisa. Both of the additional parcels are zoned Rural.

Changes From The First Plan

For the original 260-acre property, the new plan shows the same 4 parcel subdivision and the same two bottling facility buildings. The new plan describes the proposed use as “Heavy Manufacturing and Distribution,” which is a change from the “Manufacturing Limited” proposed on the rejected plan. The notes indicate a significant change in the estimate for the number of employees, adjusting the vehicle parking down from 550 per shift in the previous plan to 150 per shift (for both phases). The new plan notes 406 trailer parking spaces,



Integrity Federal Services: Mountain Pure Concept Plan (sheet 5, Nov 15 2024)

a detail not specifically noted in the concept plan presented at the November 12 meeting.

The new plan references only 1 of the 3 wells the company has drilled adjacent to the Lake Louisa property. The notes refer to WV DEP permit number WV0021258 for a 1000 GPM well, but the permit document is not included in the materials submitted with the plan. The new concept plan notes do include

the conditions offered by the company at the November 12 workshop.

The new plan shows the route of the proposed waterline that extends from the trailer park property located along Route 51. The pipeline path runs down Old Middleway Road, turns left onto East Street past the church and cemetery, then right on Grace Street to connect with the industrial site.



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// COMMUNITY

FOUNDATION ADVOCATES FOR RESIDENTS

SEVERAL OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY RESIDENTS who spoke during the November 12 workshop for the Mountain Pure concept plan (story on page 8) identified themselves as presenting research prepared by the Jefferson County Foundation (JCF). Dr. Christine Wimer, the president of the organization, is a regular presence at public meetings throughout Jefferson County.

The proposed Mountain Project in Middleway is just one of many recent issues and projects for which the foundation has provided analysis and recommendations. According to the JCF website, the organization was formed as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2018 to support scientific analysis and legal advocacy work in response to community concerns related to the Rockwool factory that had been announced just before Thanksgiving in 2017. The foundation's stated mission is to advocate for accountable local government and sustainable development that balances economic vitality and quality of life for residents while maintaining the rural heritage and natural environment of Jefferson County.

In response to an inquiry from *The Observer*, Dr. Wimer (image above right, presenting at the Ranson City Council) reports that over the past year, in addition to its current work on the proposed Middleway bottling



facility, Jefferson County Foundation worked to raise awareness of the Bird Hill development concept plan; provided recommendations to improve the Comprehensive Plan drafts for both Jefferson County and the City of Ranson; worked to stop the addition of a new Preferred Growth Area around the future site of the Shepherdstown Elementary School; worked to stop a proposed high-density rezoning proposal for the Harvest Hills subdivision; and worked to improve the Ranson zoning text amendment redefining the industrial zone.

Wimer highlighted what she feels is the most impactful and important accomplishment of the foundation this year — a modification to the Rockwool Ranson factory

air permit. According to Wimer, “Rockwool was quietly working to reduce the protections in its air permit. The Foundation intervened with the WV Department of Environmental Protection in Rockwool’s appeal of its air permit on behalf of Jefferson County residents and was successful in blocking the company from markedly increasing its particulate matter emissions.”

Dr. Wimer also noted that JCF relies on the tax-deductible donations from hundreds of supporters to fund expert scientific evaluation and legal work necessary to support its mission. Details about the foundation’s work on these projects and its current activities can be found online at JeffersonCountyFoundation.org. 📍

PERSPECTIVE // NATURE

GET CRACKING, IT'S BLACK WALNUT TIME

By Doug Pifer

Doug Pifer is an artist, naturalist, and writer. He has a Master's Degree in Journalism from Penn State and has been an editor and art educator. His illustrations have appeared in various books and magazines and he has been a contributor to The Observer for several years. He lives with his wife and assorted animals on 5.7 acres in a historic farmhouse near Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

THE DAYS BETWEEN THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS are walnut season to me. Not store-bought English walnuts, but native black walnuts. Nothing beats their spicy fragrance and sweet taste. You can buy black walnuts at a grocer or a farm market. Or you can spend time and energy cracking them yourself. Either way, they're worth it.

In my younger days I enjoyed going with my dad to our favorite woods to gather nuts. We'd bring burlap bags, easy to find back then, to our favorite groves of nut trees and fill them with fallen nuts. Late fall and early winter evenings after dinner we would descend to the cellar and start cracking. By Thanksgiving we would have filled two freezer bags with shelled walnuts, ready for the nut-breads and cookies my mother would bake.

Black walnuts are stately trees with serpentine branches, wide spreading crowns and thick twigs. In winter the tree looks sparse. In spring the leaves begin to fill the spaces between the branches and by early May the green, rope-like-like flowers appear. These give way to round, green fruits.



The thick green hull of a walnut is really the fruit, and the nut is the seed. In June these fast-growing fruits are the size of marbles but by July they're as big as golf balls. By August they are the size of large hens' eggs. Bright green with a pebbly texture, they have a spicy, distinctive fragrance. The season of falling leaves comes early for black walnuts. Their compound leaves start to turn yellow and fall on windy days in late July.

For many years we lived in a house beside an enormous black walnut tree. This magnificent tree produced a consistent yield but most nut trees alternate between productive and lean years. We loved working and sitting in the shade of the great tree. Nuts would start falling in September, so we had to duck or wear a hat if we spent much time there. By October, fallen nuts covered the grass. Passing under the tree meant risking a fall over rolling nuts underfoot. I needed to rake them before mowing that part of the yard. Now I regret that during those years I became complacent about walnuts and cracked very few.

Black walnuts would be rare without the help of squirrels. These little rodents can't wait for the nuts to fall and start to cut them off with their teeth in late August. I saw a squirrel last September with its face, chest and forelegs stained blackish-brown from walnut husks. Caching walnuts for the winter, squirrels bury so many they never find them all. Then in spring, black walnut seedlings sprout in fields, yards, and flower beds. We brought a squirrel-planted young tree from our old place when we moved to West Virginia and it's now big enough to produce its own walnuts.

Squirrels make a lot of noise opening a black walnut. Listen for the ringing rattle of teeth against shell. The squirrel gnaws the walnut around the middle for easy access to both halves of nutmeat. Where squirrels hang out, it's easy to find chewed halves of walnut shells with visible tooth marks.

If you cut or bruise the green fruit, a yellowish juice will stain your skin yellow. Since the early days, people have used walnut hulls to produce dye. Rich in tannic acid, walnut hulls dye wool, cotton and other fabrics rich brown. Dye made by boiling the hulls is permanent and requires no mordant or fixative.

Black walnut wood is strong and hard with beautiful grain and dark color. It is valued for making furniture, musical instruments, and gunstocks. To make gunstocks during World War II, walnut trees were cut down and the wood was donated by patriotic Americans to munitions factories. By the end of the war, most sizable walnut trees were gone. Since then, foresters and tree farmers have successfully reestablished this native tree.

Black walnut meat is oily, rich and tastes very different from English walnuts. But first you need to remove the husks. One traditional method — spreading nuts on the driveway and driving a car over them will remove most of the dried outer covering. Then cracking black walnuts involves a hammer and a rock, anvil or other flat, hard surface. Conventional nutcrackers are no match for these American beauties. And the hard shells splinter easily, so wear gloves and shield your eyes from flying shards.

Everybody develops their own method of cracking black walnuts. My dad could split a walnut with one crack of a hammer. I never mastered his technique. I encourage you to try until you figure out what works for you. With luck, you'll have a small bag of spicy, delicious black walnuts for holiday baking treats. Happy cracking!



All images courtesy D. Pifer

EXPLORE // CHARLES TOWN & RANSON

HOLIDAY EVENTS

Nov 30 - Historically Hip Holiday Kick-Off (downtown) Santa arrives between 10 am and noon.

Nov 30 - Ranson tree lighting 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Dec 6 - Charles Town City Lighting (downtown). Santa arrives between 4 and 5:30 pm. Kids ornament making 4:00 to 5:30 pm. City lighting at 6:00 pm. Businesses open late.

Dec 7 - Charles Town - Ranson Christmas Parade (downtown). Begins at 2:00 pm.

Dec 6, 7, 8 and 14,15,16 - A Christmas Story at the Old Opera House

Dec 8 - Happy Retreat open house (600 Mordington Ave). 2:00 to 4:00 pm (HappyRetreat.org)

Dec 14 & 15 - Claymont Court open house (577 Claymont Mansion Dr). Noon - 3:00 pm (Claymont.org).

Dec 14 - Pizza with Santa (Ranson Civic Center). 11 am to 2 pm; Santa arrives at noon.



Dec 15 - Jazzy Christmas at Happy Retreat with Robert Sykes (600 Mordington Ave). 2:00 pm (HappyRetreat.org)

Dec 15 - Leg Lamp Paint Party at Abolitionist Ale Works (129 West Washington St). 2:00 to 5:00 pm. FB: Abolitionist Ale Works

Dec 15 - Jefferson County Community Chorus (Corner Connection, 129 East Washington St). 3:00 pm.

Dec 22 - Sounds of the Season, chamber music concert at Happy Retreat (600 Mordington Ave). 3:00 pm (HappyRetreat.org)



Charles Town * Harpers Ferry
Bolivar * Ranson * Shepherdstown



There is nothing like the warm feeling ever present over the holidays in our historic Jefferson County towns. This holiday season, find those extra special gifts at our local businesses. Not sure what to buy? A gift card is the perfect option. Supporting local shops and restaurants keeps our small towns thriving and great places to live and work. Help make the holidays special for everyone by shopping local in Jefferson County.

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EXPLORE // HARPERS FERRY & BOLIVAR

HOLIDAY EVENTS

Friday, December 6

7:30 pm: Lighting of the Yule Log and Caroling
8:15 pm: Living Nativity

Saturday, December 7

10:00 am: Shops Open
11:00 am – 2:00 pm: Horse and Wagon Rides
1:00 – 1:45 pm: Harpist Barbra Bailey Bradle
1:00 – 3:00 pm: Pine Cone Ornament Making for Ki
1:00 – 4:00 pm: Father Christmas visits
2:00 – 3:00 pm: Fiddlin’ Dave and Morgan Appalachia Music
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Historic Candy Making Workshop
3:00 pm: A One-Man Performance of A Christmas Carol
4:00 pm: Angel Band
5:00 pm: Luminaries Lit
6:00 & 8:00 pm: Living Nativity
9:00 pm: Shops Close

Sunday, December 8

10:00 am: Shops Open
11:00 am – 1:00 pm: Historic Candy Making Workshop
11:00 am – 2:00 pm: Horse and Wagon Rides
2:00 – 3:00 pm: Fiddlin’ Dave and Morgan Appalachia Music
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Santa and Mrs. Claus
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Historic Candy Making Workshop
3:00 pm: A One-Man Performance of A Christmas Carol
6:00 pm: Shops Close

Saturday, December 14th

10:00 am: Shops Open
11:00 am – 1:00 pm: Historic Candy Making Workshop



1:00 – 2:00 pm: Washington High School Chamber Choir
2:00 – 2:45 pm: Harpist Barbra Bailey Bradley
2:00 – 3:00 pm: Fiddlin’ Dave and Morgan Appalachia Music
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Father Christmas
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Historic Candy Making Workshop
3:00 pm: A One-Man Performance of A Christmas Carol
4:00 pm: Christmas Parade
5:00 pm: Luminaries Lit
6:00 pm: Living Nativity
8:00 pm: Living Nativity
9:00 pm: Shops Close

Sunday, December 15th

1:00 – 2:00 pm: Tuba Christmas
2:00 – 3:00 pm: Fiddlin’ Dave and Morgan Appalachia Music
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Santa and Mrs. Claus
2:00 – 4:00 pm: Historic Candy Making Workshop

Details at ExperienceHarpersFerry.com



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HOLIDAY HANDMADE MARKET – BOLIVAR
60 Panama St, Bolivar WV
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9 am - 4 pm
web.sites.google.com/view/HFHmarket

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— C.G. Jung
(Letter to Frances G. Wickes - November 1926)

Cathryn Polonchak LCSW
Psychotherapist & Jungian Analyst

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EXPLORE // SHEPHERDSTOWN

HOLIDAY EVENTS

November 29 — Welcome to Christmas

- 4:00 - 7:30 pm: Kiwanis Chili Fest
- 4:00 pm: Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer (Opera House)
- 4:30 - 8:00: SVFD Bonfire
- 6:00 - 6:15: Mrs Claus storytelling
- 6:15: Tree Lighting
- 6:15 - 9:00: Visit with Santa (McMurrin Hall)

November 30

- Small Business Saturday (all day)
- Noon - 3:00 pm: Who-liday Celebration (Community Club)
- 11:00 - 5:00 pm: History Museum open
- 5/6/7 pm: Living Nativity (Trinity Church)

Dec 1, 1:00 - 4:00 pm: History Museum open

December 7

- 10:00 - 11:00 am: Christmas Parade
- 11:00 - noon: Taiko Drummers (McMurrin)
- 11:00- 5:00 pm: History Museum open
- 2:00 pm: Holiday Movie (Opera House)
- 6:30 pm; Contra Dance Holiday Party (Community Club)
- 7:30 pm: Holiday Gala Concert (Frank Center)
- 10:00 - 2:00 pm: Cookie Walk (Trinity Church)
- N/1/5/6/7 pm: Living Nativity (Trinity Church)



December 8

- 1:00 - 4:00 pm: History Museum open
- 2:00 pm: Holiday Bingo Bash (Fire Hall)
- 3:00 pm: Holiday Gala Concert (Frank Center)
- 12:00 - 3:00 pm: Community Meal (Fire Hall)

Dec 10, 7:30 pm: Youth Chorus & Recorder Concert (Frank Center)

- Dec 11, 7:30 pm: Community Strings Concert (Frank Center)
- Dec 13, Downtown Shopping Night until 9 pm.
- Dec 13, 8:00 pm: Holiday Movie (Opera House)
- Dec 14, 8:00 - 11:00 am: Lions Breakfast with Santa (Blue Moon Cafe)
- Dec 14, 1:00 pm: Tuba Christmas (McMurrin)
- Dec 14, 2:00 pm: Big Band Concert (Frank Cntr)
- Dec 15, 2:00 pm: Holiday Movie (Opera House)
- Dec 15, noon - 3:00 pm: Holiday Tea (Cmty Club)

Dec 15, 1:00 - 4:00 pm: History Museum open

- Dec 20, 7:00 pm: Nutcracker (Frank Center)
- Dec 21, 11- 5 pm: History Museum open
- Dec 21, 2:00 pm: Nutcracker (Frank Center)
- Dec 21, 7:30 pm: Celtic Christmas concert (Presbyterian Church)
- Dec 22, 1:00 - 4:00 pm: History Museum open
- Dec 22, 1:30 pm: Nutcracker (Frank Center)
- Dec 22, 2:00 pm: Holiday Movie (Opera House)
- Dec 26, 4:00 - 7:00 pm: Historic Houses of Worship Tour
- Dec 30, 11:00 am: Chamber Concert - Duo Delights (Train Station)
- Dec 13, 3:00 pm: Chamber Concert - Nordic Celebration (Community Club)

Details at FB: Christmas in Shepherdstown



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Merry Christmas

Festive Friday Shopping Dec 13

Downtown Shepherdstown shops will stay open late. Food and drink specials by participating restaurants.

Shop LOCAL & Experience Shepherdstown

EXPLORE // JEFFERSON COUNTY

LOCAL CHARITIES FOCUS ON FOOD

KEITH LOWRY, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of Jefferson County Community Ministries painted a concerning picture of housing insecurity during a presentation to the County Commission in September. Due to the rising costs of housing (particularly rental housing) Lowry and his staff are seeing an increase of working families who struggle to find permanent housing in the county. The rising costs of housing are also creating an expanding number of Jefferson County residents who struggle with food insecurity.

Around the county, there are four organizations that focus on providing food to families and individuals. All of these charitable organizations have 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status and welcome your donations of money, food and other supplies to support their work year-round.



Community Markets has partnered with JSB Bank

Jefferson County Community Ministries JCCM has been serving the community since 1982. The organization is supported by a coalition of 50 local churches that offers safety-net assistance of food, clothing, and limited financial aid for rent eviction, utilities termination, medicine, cooking and heating fuel, emergency shelter, and gasoline. JCCM serves residents throughout the county from its headquarters in downtown Charles Town. Email info@JCCM.us or call 304-725-3186 for information on programs. JCCM.us

Blue Ridge Food Pantry

This organization started in 2023 to serve residents on the mountain. It operates a food pantry in the old Episcopal church located 65 Mission Road in Harpers Ferry. Email blueridgefoodpantry@gmail.com for more information. BRFoodPantryWV.com

Shepherdstown Shares

This organization started in 2020. It currently operates a food pantry in the Trinity Episcopal chapel in Shepherdstown. The pantry is open on Mondays (4-6 pm), Thursdays (3 - 5:30 pm), and Saturdays (10 - noon). Email ShepShares@gmail.com for more information. ShepherdstownShares.org

Community Markets

This organization was founded in 2021. Its food box giveaways provide fresh and local food to food insecure families in Jefferson County, WV and the surrounding region. One Giveaway is held every few months at Saint James Catholic Church in Charles Town. Call (703) 789-1879 for more information. CommunityMarketsInc.org



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ENGAGE // COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PUBLIC HEARING FOR COUNTY PLAN ON DEC 4

New Commissioners Will Decide On Revisions To Draft Plan

THE COUNTY COMMISSION WILL HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING on Wednesday, December 4 at Jefferson High School (4141 Flowing Springs Rd, Shenandoah Junction). The purpose of this hearing is to hear public comments on the draft of the Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Guide that was recently approved by the Planning Commission. The formal public hearing (where the commissioners listen to comments, but do not respond) will begin at 6:00 pm in the auditorium; there will be an “open house” session from 5:00 to 6:00 that will allow commissioners and planning department staff to engage in discussion with residents.

The draft plan and land use guide were presented by the Planning Commission on October 17, which started a 90 day window for the County Commission to adopt, amend, or reject the drafts. Even though the Planning Commission has already approved both of these documents, the County Commission has the final vote on any changes.

After the County Commission received the plan on October 17, Dr. Christine Wimer, president of Jefferson County Foundation, provided a summary of her organization’s analysis of the plan, focusing specifically on Objective 1.4, which had been the subject of a pointed discussion among the members of the Planning Commission: “Our concern with Objective 1.4 is that it may be used to undermine zoning. This objective contemplates

New Commissioners Cara Keys & Jack Hefestay were sworn in on Nov 19.



additional land uses of all types, in all zones, and does not indicate what the criteria of the “research and review” should be for a land use to be added to one or all zones. There is also no standard for public engagement that is defined as part of this objective. If any and all uses can be added to any zoning district, why have zones? If land owners cannot rely on the zones limiting development to appropriate uses, then the whole purpose of zoning is undermined.”

Residents are also invited to email comments to Complan2045@JeffersonCountyWV.org. Copies of the draft Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use guide are posted on the county website (scan the QR code or visit ObserverWV.com/jefferson-comp-plan-2024 for links to the county website).



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