

**The Western County is Unique and Needs Policies that Fit Its Economic, Business and Social Structures**  
**By the Fair Access Committee for the Western County**  
**February, 2023**

*Background and Thesis*

The Western County's economic, business and social structures simply do not fit the metrics often used in the rest of the much more populated, suburban/urban county. We are a rural "oasis" in the midst of large areas of population concentration down county where more "urban style" problems exist.

The many improvements and investments needed in our area from the school to a new community center to a year-round pool are part of a broader vision that supports a diverse, thriving and economically viable Ag Reserve. The "hub" of Poolesville provides support for this vision by offering access to a modern, state of the art high school, a new community center, health care services, and a year-round swimming pool. The many spokes around Poolesville in the Western County including a rich array of historical sites of interest, particularly African American communities that blossomed around Poolesville right after the Civil War, wineries including the new Grape Crush facility, breweries like Landmade, farms and orchards, and outdoor recreation opportunities such as at White's Ferry and the C&O canal, as well as Sugarloaf Mountain among other places benefit from a vibrant center in Poolesville and the town benefits from the many attractions throughout the Western County. The broader county benefits from all of this economic activity helping Montgomery County thrive.

As the hub of Poolesville improves and offers more services and programs like those available in the rest of the county helping to attract visitors and as more spokes like Crossvines emerge in the Western County, a "virtuous cycle" takes shape. The hub and the spokes reinforce and support each other and benefit from more visitors, while the number and range of visitors expands and increases. The Western County truly becomes a center of growth and vitality for the entire county based on tourism, outdoor activities, outdoor entertainment and leisure, with its based remaining firmly linked to agriculture and farming.

*Understanding and Improving the Economy of the Western County*

As noted, the Western County's economic, business and social structures simply do not fit the metrics often used in the rest of the much more populated, suburban/urban county. We are a rural "oasis" in the midst of large areas of population concentration down county where more "urban style" problems exist.

The Western County's economy is not based on large corporate investments and operations, large chain stores, and major government facilities as is the case in much of the densely populated down county areas. Instead, the "hub" of Poolesville is anchored to the collective operation and success of many local businesses, most of which are locally and/or family owned and small in size. Poolesville is also connected to the many businesses, farms, historic sites, and outdoor recreation facilities that dot the Western County. These "spokes" attract visitors of many kinds from many areas who are interested in everything from buying fresh, locally grown vegetables to visiting historic sites of many kinds to hiking, biking or watching wildlife. The Western County already has many elements for economic success, but it can truly become an even more robust center of growth and vitality for the entire county based on tourism, outdoor activities, agriculture, and outdoor entertainment and leisure.

However, from all we can determine, the County has very little solid information on the entire economic fabric that makes up the Western County, particularly how small businesses and tourism contribute to economic vibrancy and how to enhance it. Studies and research need to be done to substantially improve our understanding of how to enhance the economic vitality of the Western County. Work also needs to be done to significantly improve and expand work done to promote and attract visitors to the Western County. Finally, all of this work should be put to use by developing a robust strategy and policy framework that drive future improvements. These efforts will take resources but the payback both to economic growth and the lives of Western County residents can be substantial.

Funding should be included in the FY2024 Operating Budget to support an economic and business study of the Western County. The study should be undertaken by the Office of Legislative Oversight in cooperation with Visit Montgomery.

# The Hub and Spoke

