



Braxton County West Virginia

Sutton is the county seat of Braxton County, which is in central West Virginia on the Allegheny Plateau. Contributing to the economy of the area are lumber operations, oil and natural gas wells, coal, and granite quarries. Beef production is the major agricultural activity.

Sutton was established in 1826 and it was the leading center for a farming region at that time. It is in the geographical center of the state. John D. Sutton, for whom the city is named, formed the first settlement in 1810. In its 1826 charter the city was originally called Suttonville, but a new charter in 1889 reinstated the name of Sutton.

Confederate Army Capt. Jack Tuning burned the town in the winter of 1861. It was eventually rebuilt and the new charter given.

Carter Braxton, an American Revolutionary political leader, is honored in the naming of Braxton County, which was founded in 1836. The county comprises some 520 square miles of land in the central part of the state. Braxton was a Virginia statesman and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

In July of 2003, Braxton County had an unemployment rate of 9.1%, which is down from 12.8% in January of 2003. This rate is ranked “Worse Than Average” statewide. Braxton County’s unemployment rate is consistently high. Between January and July of 2003, Braxton’s average rate was 10.6%. This unemployment rate is indicative of the need for increased economic development and diversification.

Transportation Development

Braxton County is located in central West Virginia. In fact, the Town of Flatwoods is often referred to as the “geographic center of West Virginia.” Approximately 57 miles of four-lane (Interstate 79; Route 19) highway serves the county, which is the key to most of the new economic development occurring. Mostly secondary roads serve the County. There are some railroads; Burnsville is the site of a CSX maintenance yard. No commercial air or water transportation exists in Braxton County. There is a small general aviation facility near Flatwoods.

In the late 1990’s Route 19 in southern Braxton County was upgraded to a four-lane, Appalachian Corridor type road. This new road provides excellent access to the undeveloped southern region of Braxton County.

Little Kanawha River Parkway: This highway would connect I-79 and I-77. The I-79 intersection would be in Braxton County and would provide a “hot” development site at a crossroads. Region VII Planning and Development member governments are pushing forward to positive response for funding for initial development. Progress has been slow but is steadily gaining speed.

Infrastructure

Braxton County has made good progress in developing potable water for residents. Flatwoods-Canoe Run PSD recently completed the Bluefield Water Extension and now is preparing for installation of waterlines in the Morrison and Poplar Ridge district east of Sutton. Public water to the Curry Ridge area is in the design stage.

Burnsville has a sewer upgrade project ready for construction that will add several customers. Flatwoods Canoe Run PSD is now developing a major wastewater treatment/upgrade project for the municipalities of Gassaway and Sutton. Severe malfunctioning of an antiquated system is causing raw sewage seepage and odor problems. All funding sources will be needed.

Cluster Development

A retail cluster has developed at the Flatwoods I-79 Exit/Entry site. Fuel stations, truck stops, fast food, vehicle & equipment dealers, hotel/convention center, and an outlet mall are the features of what is claimed to be the geographic center of West Virginia. An extensive motor sports complex is in the planning stages for this same locality in Braxton County.

Braxton County is adjacent to the Hardwood Alliance Zone and has many wood products firms operating within its borders. Creosote ties and rough sawn lumber are produced in Braxton County. Weyerhaeuser's Oriented Stand Board Plant is located 5 miles north of the Flatwoods retail cluster.

With the complete upgrade of Route 19 to Summersville and I-64, one can expect some economic development 6 miles south of Sutton at Route 19's intersection with I-79.

Braxton County is home to two Army Corps of Engineer lakes. Seven large lakes from Summersville to Morgantown form what is called the Mountain Lakes Region. This water resource cluster provides flood control for 6 headwater rivers of the Ohio Valley and provides many hours of outdoor recreation.

Technology

The Braxton County Economic Development Authority is in the process of constructing a multi-tenant building, which could be used to relocate an expanding local business at Flatwoods.

Existing Community Conditions

Braxton County experienced an increase in population between the 1990 Census and the 2000 Census. In 1990, the population was listed at 12,998 residents. Census 2000 data indicate a 13.11% increase, bringing the count to 14,702. Much of this increase can be attributed to economic development in and around the Town of Flatwoods. A retail outlet mall is thriving, which is giving birth to many service businesses, such as restaurants, etc. Also, a large hotel/conference center, a regional jail, and a large lumber company are located near Flatwoods.

Development in the timber and tourism industries has sparked a recovery of the county's economic base; however, existing industry, agriculture and oil and gas remain static.

In 1990, the per capita income in the county was \$8,249. That figure has increased to \$16,522 in 1999, which can be attributed in part to the development in the Flatwoods area. While this income has increased, so has the cost of living. As a result, many residents are still living in an impoverished state.

The county is provided public water service from two (2) public service districts and the West Virginia American Water Company. A project is nearing the construction phase that will extend service to the Morrison and Poplar Ridge area. Many areas in the county are still without, and in dire need of water service. Waterline extensions to the Curry Ridge and Herold Route areas are on the project list. The Town of Burnsville provides its own utilities, and is exploring the feasibility of a self-help project to extend water service to the Burns Run area.

Braxton County does have a need to improve rural fire protection. Many rural areas are not easily accessible and are without public water and hydrant systems. Also, the county fire departments are in need of facility and equipment upgrades.

The central business district (CBD) in all four (4) of the county's municipalities has suffered in recent years, especially as the Flatwoods area continues to develop. The Town of Sutton (county seat) is a community with an aging residential area surrounding the struggling CBD. According to the 1990 Census, 35.6% of the homes in Sutton were built prior to 1939. The Town of Gassaway hopes of completing a Community Design Team program for the revitalization efforts of its main street. The Town of Burnsville is working to complete a sewer system upgrade, which will allow for the residential and economic growth of the town. Interstate 79 passes through the municipal limits of Burnsville. The intersection of the proposed Little Kanawha Parkway and I-79 is near Burnsville.

Numerous outdoor recreation facilities are located in Braxton County. Most are associated with Sutton Lake and Burnsville Lake. West Virginia Wildlife Management areas exist on US Army Corps of Engineers properties at each of those lakes. Two (2) athletic fields are associated with the Braxton County High School. A project to install field lights at the county 4-H baseball fields is in development, and would better allow

the Braxton County High School baseball team to complete its schedule. More facilities, however, are desirable.

Despite the existence of outdoor recreation facilities and a county recreation program, there is a need for indoor recreation facilities for residents of all ages. Only limited facilities are available at local schools. Braxton County does have a senior center located in Gassaway; however, that center is in need of upgrades to bring it into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and allow it to expand its existing programs. A fully developed grant application has been submitted to the Small Cities Block Grant Program.

The county detachment of the West Virginia State Police and the Braxton County Sheriff's Department staff a total of ten (16) officers combined. The municipal police departments are small. Burnsville and Flatwoods each employ one (1) full-time officer, Gassaway employs one (1) full-time and one (1) part-time officer and Sutton maintains two (2) full-time officers. There are volunteer fire departments and a county EMS system in place. Additional staffing for the fire and EMS detachments is needed because of the high accident rate on Interstate 79.

Housing Conditions

According to the 2000 Census, there are 7,374 housing units in Braxton County. This figure is up from 5,708 housing units in 1990. Of these, 5,771 are occupied and 1,603 are vacant. Renters occupy 1,260 of the housing units while owners occupy 4,511.

According to the 2000 Census, nearly 17% (approximately 1,253 units) of the county's housing stock was built prior to 1939. Approximately 1,507 units (20%) of the housing units were built between 1990 and March of 2000.

In general, there are no large areas of deterioration. However, individual locations of deterioration are scattered throughout the county, and should be immediately addressed. There is a need for both elderly/family assisted housing and multi-family development.

Areas such as street paving, storm drainage and scattered housing rehabilitation need to be addressed by the county. While none of these problems appear to be severe, immediate attention will keep them from becoming so.

Community Needs Assessment and Priorities

Economic Development is a priority for many West Virginia counties, including Braxton. Current national trends show that high-tech development is increasingly attractive and successful. Thus, it is desirable to bring high-tech businesses into West Virginia.

Construction of a 30,000 sq ft multi-tenant "flex" building near Flatwoods is an economic priority. The Development Authority has two committed tenants for this building, which will create 96 new jobs over a three-year period.

Documentation

1. Small Cities Block Grant Hearing
2. Housing Data from the 1990 Census
3. Housing Data from the 2000 Census
4. Population Data from the 2000 Census
5. Region VII Planning and Development Council Regional Development Plan
6. Economic Development Plan (1998 / 1999)
7. Region VII Planning and Development Council Project Priority List
8. West Virginia Economic Summary, August 2003

BEARFACTS 1991-2001 Braxton, West Virginia

Braxton is one of 55 counties in West Virginia. It is not part of a Metropolitan Area. Its 2001 population of 14,775-ranked 39th in the state.

PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME

In 2001 Braxton had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$15,594. This PCPI ranked 52nd in the state and was 68 percent of the state average, \$22,862, and 51 percent of the national average, \$30,413. The 2001 PCPI reflected an increase of 2.9 percent from 2000. The 2000- 2001 state change was 4.8 percent and the national change was 2.2 percent. In 1991 the PCPI of Braxton was \$11,441 and ranked 45th in the state. The 1991-2001 average annual growth rate of PCPI was 3.1 percent. The average annual growth rate for the state was 4.2 percent and for the nation was 4.3 percent.

TOTAL PERSONAL INCOME

In 2001 Braxton had a total personal income (TPI) of \$230,405. This TPI ranked 41st in the state and accounted for 0.6 percent of the state total. In 1991 the TPI of Braxton was \$151,499 and ranked 42nd in the state. The 2001 TPI reflected an increase of 3.3 percent from 2000. The 2000-2001 state change was 4.4 percent and the national change was 3.3 percent. The 1991-2001 average annual growth rate of TPI was 4.3 percent. The average annual growth rate for the state was 4.2 percent and for the nation was 5.5 percent.

COMPONENTS OF TOTAL PERSONAL INCOME

Total personal income includes net earnings by place of residence; dividends, interest, and rent; and transfer payments received by the residents of Braxton. In 2001 net earnings accounted for 53.8 percent of TPI (compared with 53.6 in 1991); dividends, interest, and rent were 15.2 percent (compared with 16.7 in 1991); and transfer payments were 30.9 percent (compared with 29.7 in 1991). From 2000 to 2001 net earnings increased 2.0 percent; dividends, interest, and rent increased 2.3 percent; and transfer payments increased 6.2 percent. From 1991 to 2001 net earnings increased on average 4.3 percent each year; dividends, interest, and rent increased on average 3.4 percent; and transfer payments increased on average 4.7 percent.

EARNINGS BY PLACE OF WORK

Earnings of persons employed in Braxton increased from \$116,389 in 2000 to \$118,980 in 2001, an increase of 2.2 percent. The 2000-2001 state change was 3.9 percent and the national change was 2.5 percent. The average annual growth rate from the 1991 estimate of \$82,101 to the 2001 estimate was 3.8 percent. The average annual growth rate for the state was 3.9 percent and for the nation was 5.6 percent.

Note: All income estimates with the exception of PCPI are in thousands of dollars, not adjusted for inflation.