

BEFORE THE WABASH COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-85-7

RESOLUTION APPROVING THE WABASH COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The current Wabash County Comprehensive Plan was approved in 2012.

The Board of Commissioners believes it is in the best interests of the citizens of Wabash County to adopt a new comprehensive plan to recognize and address current circumstances.

On June 16, 2022, pursuant to I.C. 36-7-4-508, the Wabash County Advisory Plan Commission held a public hearing pursuant to notice as required by Indiana law to consider a new comprehensive plan for Wabash County, Indiana.

At its meeting following its public hearing, pursuant to I.C. 36-7-4-508, the Plan Commission approved a new comprehensive plan and certified the same to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

The Board of Commissioners is the legislative and executive body for Wabash County, and is by law authorized to adopt resolutions approving a new comprehensive plan pursuant to I.C. 36-7-4-509.

The Board of Commissioners believes that the new comprehensive plan certified by the Plan Commission on June 16, 2022, meets the needs of the citizens of Wabash County, is in their best interests, and should be approved.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners that the comprehensive plan certified by the Plan Commission, a copy of which is attached hereto, is approved as the new Wabash County Comprehensive Plan.

This Resolution is effective immediately upon its date of adoption.

Date: July 18, 2022

Attest:

Marcie Shepherd *MS*
Marcie Shepherd, Auditor

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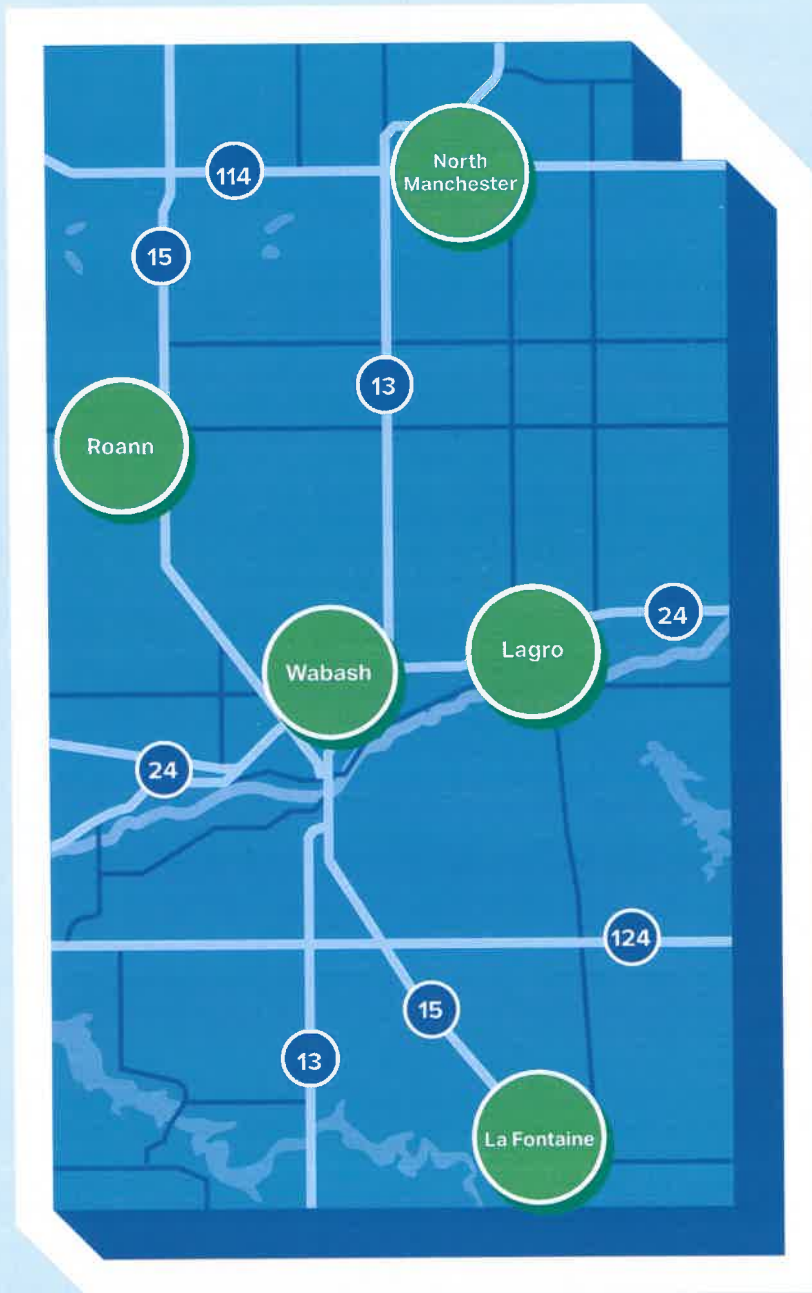
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

WABASH COUNTY

A BOLD PLAN FOR THE COMMUNITIES OF WABASH COUNTY

PRESENTED JULY 2022

THE COMMUNITIES OF WABASH COUNTY



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN RESOLUTION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Imagine One 85 Steering Committee would like to thank the following individuals, stakeholders, and organizations for their commitment and dedication in assisting with Imagine One 85. Sharing your knowledge, thoughts and ideas rendered an invaluable service to the communities of Wabash County. Imagine One 85 is grateful for the many other community members who participated in the process or simply expressed their support and enthusiasm for the effort.

Leadership Team

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Chelsea Boulrisse, Grow Wabash County
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Melissa Ford, Community Foundation
Julie Garber, Community Foundation
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Kyle Bowman
Jeff Dawes
Barry Eppley
Robert Ferguson, Jr.
Diana Heath
Brian Howenstine
John Krhin
Mayor Scott Long
Pat Lynn
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Laura Rager
Jim Reynolds
Scott Siders

Consultants

planning NEXT
Ninigret Partners
Burgess & Niple
Policy Analytics
One Lucky Guitar

Venues

Roann Community Center
The Learning Center
Honeywell Center
MCS Administration Building
La Fontaine Learning Community
Lagro Town Hall

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Brian Hauptert
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Bryan Dillon
Mayor Scott Long
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** Indicates board members joining in 2022.

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Town of Roann Council

Robert Ferguson, Jr.
Richard Morris
Jerry Nelson

Town of Lagro Council

Jim Curless
Richard Monce
Jeff Shelton

Town of La Fontaine Council

Lori Brane
Jay Gillespie
John Krhin

Community Stakeholders

Natural Resource Advocates
Young Professionals of Wabash County
Middle School Students
Commuters
Honeywell Foundation
Human Resource Professionals
Major Employers
Non-Profit Leaders and Social Service Providers
Kiwanis Wabash Club
Manchester University Leadership
Manchester University Town and Gown Committee
Wabash County Board of Zoning Appeals

IMAGINE ONE 85 SUPPORTERS

The Imagine One 85 Steering Committee would like to extend a special thank you to the communities and organizations who helped make this plan possible. These contributions provided the foundation to establish our unified vision for the future.

CITY OF WABASH

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF WABASH COUNTY

DAN AND SUSAN MANWARING

DAVID AND JANE MANN

DAVID AND SANDRA HAIST

DAVID AND VALERIE DOUD

GARY AND DEBORAH BRYANT

GROW WABASH COUNTY

HOFFMAN'S NURSERY AND LANDSCAPING, INC.

JOHN AND GAYLE FORRESTER

LILLY ENDOWMENT INC.

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY

METZGER LANDSCAPING & DESIGN, LLC

PAM AND STEVE NARAGON

RICHARD AND KELLI HALDERMAN

SHEPHERD'S FAMILY AUTO GROUP

TOWN OF LAFONTAINE

TOWN OF LAGRO

TOWN OF NORTH MANCHESTER

TOWN OF ROANN

WABASH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

WABASH COUNTY UNITED FUND

WABASH HARDWARE & RENTAL

A MESSAGE TO WABASH COUNTY

July 11, 2022

To the Communities of Wabash County:

After facing 40 years of declining population, Wabash County leaders banded together to organize the Imagine One 85 initiative to arrest population loss and grow Wabash County. Spanning nearly two years of work, in a pandemic, the planning process culminated in the creation of this document, a countywide comprehensive strategic plan, which represents the synthesis of citizen ideas and expert technical analysis for growth in Wabash County.

The process has been a stimulating exercise that allowed citizens of the county to examine the communities we all live in, the roles we play as residents of these communities, and ultimately what citizens imagine the future of Wabash County to be. The Imagine One 85 Plan examines the use of resources and land, provides a fiscal review, and recommends actions and implementation strategies that revolve around four different components: Great Places, Prosperity, Housing and Community, and Foundations.

With this plan our communities articulate the following vision for Wabash County's future:

We, the communities of Wabash County, are connected, resilient, and growing. We are open, welcoming, and prosperous. Our spirit, like our natural resources, is flourishing and vibrant.

Leadership shines bright in our county. We produce and attract energetic and capable young citizens. Wabash County is a great place to live, work, and learn. Residents and visitors thrive here.

Whose responsibility is it to grow Wabash County? Growth is everyone's responsibility!

While the plan is an official government document, it is far more than a "to do" list for elected officials, municipalities, chambers, or foundations. Organizations, stakeholders and individuals who are passionate about the communities we call home will join in the hard work of implementation. This plan calls upon each of us to ensure the success of the plan's 85 recommendations by considering how our behaviors, decisions, investments, and choices can contribute to growth.

For this plan to succeed, the communities of Wabash County will need to execute the objectives, take bold actions, commit to changes that may be difficult, and above all, work together with generosity and grace to reach this collective goal. We as citizens can find common ground in our passion for Wabash County and our commitment to creating a hopeful future of growth and prosperity. It is our firmest belief that Wabash County can, and will, make this happen.

Please read and share the Imagine One 85 plan. We anticipate you will learn things about Wabash County that may surprise you, and we hope you will find urgency in the recommendations made. Find your place and where you can best devote time, talent and treasure to make a bright future for Wabash County a certain reality.

We are extremely grateful to all of you and the work you do, and we are proud to call Wabash County home.

Patty Grant
Executive Director

Community Foundation
of Wabash County

Keith Gillenwater
President and CEO

Grow Wabash County

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“Everything Imagine One 85 is doing is GREAT! There are visionaries in the county producing results.”

Online Participant

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Imagine One 85 is a community-driven effort to establish a strategic vision for the people of Wabash County and develop a road map for growth and investment for decades to come. This process is open, inclusive, and informed by the experiences of community members and stakeholders. Over a year, the Imagine One 85 Steering Committee helped lead each of the county's unique communities through this process. This plan represents their hard work and leadership. In this section, you'll read more about the driving purpose of Imagine One 85: to arrest and reverse population decline. You'll also learn about the planning process and the communities that compose Wabash County.

A FUTURE WITH FEWER?

THE POPULATION IN WABASH COUNTY IS DECREASING...

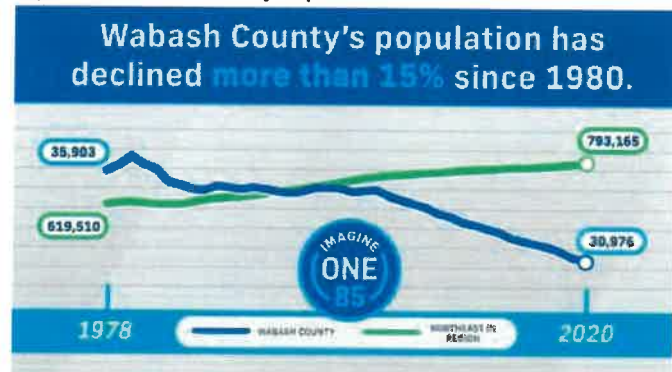
By 2050 Wabash County could have 5,000 fewer residents than it does today. This will represent a 14 percent decline. This slow but steady decline began in 1980 when the county reached its high point for in-migration and population. That year, close to 400 people moved in and the population tipped over 36,500 residents for the first time. Since then, between 50 and 100 households have left each year. Population isn't the only measure for community vitality, but the consistent loss has had an impact and will continue to compound.

The communities of Wabash County are strong and well-defined. Despite the challenges posed by population decline, the county has made significant progress and invested heavily in its future. Regionally, the population is growing and points toward an opportunity for the county. As Wabash decreased from 1980, the 11-county region centering on Fort Wayne grew by more than 150,000, or 25%. This growth outpaced the state (23% over the same period) and has continued through 2020 with bold plans to reach one million total residents in the area by 2030.

FORECASTS PLACE OUR COMMUNITIES AT A CROSSROADS...

Without intervention, the county will continue to lose people. By 2050, another 5,000 residents will move to other communities, taking with them their energy, talent, ambition, and all the big and small investments that come with living or raising a family in a community. The impact of this continued loss could change the county at a fundamental level.

Figure 1.1: Historic County Population



Source: U.S. Census

THE IMPACTS OF THE DECLINE GO WELL BEYOND PEOPLE...



Communities in decline around Indiana and the broader Midwest have experienced a wide range of effects as a result of this trend. Some of these are expected, direct impacts such as declining school enrollment,

lower tax revenue, and increasing tax burden. Many are more subtle, like a softening retail and housing market, smaller workforce, and others. Now, four decades into the trend, Wabash County can document the changes.

A loss of 5,000 additional people would mean 1,800 fewer families and their children in the county's three school districts, 2,000 fewer needed housing units, and a greater challenge in funding necessary repairs and maintenance to our roads and communities.

TREND DOESN'T HAVE TO BE OUR DESTINY...

The communities of Wabash County hold significant potential. Recent projects and initiatives have demonstrated the impact collaboration can have on

broad community goals. These efforts—especially when built around the community's unique assets—raise the collective voice of the county and unlock new opportunities previously unthought of. This plan is an example of this collaboration, and its vision and recommendations represent the interests of hundreds of contributing community members.



WELCOME TO IMAGINE ONE 85

WABASH COUNTY'S COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO A LONGSTANDING CHALLENGE...

In June 2019, a coalition of leaders from all sectors joined in an unprecedented countywide collaboration called Imagine One 85. Together, with input from residents, the group aimed to develop a bold, strategic comprehensive plan for the growth and prosperity of the entire county, and the incorporated communities of La Fontaine, Lagro, North Manchester, Roann, and Wabash.

These leaders studied other communities from around the state and the country to determine that a bold, comprehensive plan for the future is the best possible way to arrest—and reverse—the county's population decline. All community members who care about the future of these communities were invited to contribute their time, talent, and ideas.

Together, residents and leaders sought to create a strategic plan that addresses the population

challenge—and articulates a long-range vision for quality of life, growth, land use, education, environment, economic development, transportation, recreation and public health—in a sustainable, results-oriented and measurable way.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

What is a comprehensive plan?

A comprehensive plan is a broad, multi-topic policy statement that includes goals, strategies, and action recommendations to guide the long-term development of the county. Recommendations support the long-term, community-derived vision statement that imagines where the county—as a collection of communities—should be in 20 years.

In the state of Indiana, a comprehensive plan serves as a policy backstop for key land regulatory tools like the zoning code. It also serves as a guide for decision makers and a playbook for community investment decisions. In the state, plans should include



a statement of objectives for future development, a statement of policy for future land use, and a statement of policy for other public property, such as roads, facilities, lands, and so on. Imagine One 85 meets and exceeds these requirements for establishing a comprehensive plan.

A successful plan takes into account the interconnected nature of these topics and establishes a coherent strategy for future growth and investment. This can mean including non-government partner organizations into the discussion and the final implementation. The leadership coalition for Imagine One 85 was organized to reflect all of these diverse interests.

This plan is a tool to address community needs, prepare for change and protect what the communities treasure. It serves as both a business plan and guidebook for decision-makers. The Comprehensive Plan also serves as a marketing tool for the county to clearly convey the community's values and priorities.

To achieve the vision and goals, the plan includes specific actions (policies, projects and programs) and identifies timing and responsibilities for undertaking those actions. It also contains map-based recommendations that indicate the county's intent for where and how it will use land resources and design infrastructure improvements.

Broadening the coalition...

Plans like Imagine One 85 are typically undertaken by individual jurisdictions alone. It is less common for communities to work together and build a cohesive, countywide strategy. This approach has its advantages. As a network of unique communities, Wabash County has the opportunity to pool its assets and leadership. With a shared vision, each community can play its role in advancing the plan toward the larger goal. More than 1,000 people contributed their ideas and energy to this plan during the process. These ideas were gathered, organized, and considered by the process Steering Committee. This group was intentionally convened to represent the diverse interests of the people, communities, and institutions that are present in Wabash County.

What will the plan mean for the citizens of Wabash County?

The Imagine One 85 plan is a cohesive strategy to improve outcomes for the communities of the county and the community members integral to their growth and prosperity. The plan's recommendations can have a positive effect for residents, business owners, students, or anyone who cares about the future

of the county. This plan—if realized—can have a positive impact on the qualities of life, place, and opportunity for all residents.

Why do we need a plan?

This population decline over the span of decades is partly the result of the absence of a countywide comprehensive strategic vision for growth. Communities, like businesses, cannot reach their potential without a deliberate and thoughtful blueprint. Wabash County's potential has a much better chance to be realized if leaders use an intentional and thoughtful planning process. Imagine One 85 represents a rare process of bringing together all the communities of Wabash County to take charge of their future. This will require a commitment to implementation that leverages our assets and acknowledges into the very real challenges of population decline, economic development, poverty, housing, education, workforce development, and others.

While planning is good stewardship in general, it must also address a community's most urgent challenges. In the case of the communities of Wabash County, that challenge is population decline. The county is home to many great assets such as the Honeywell Foundation and Manchester University along with unique communities from both large and small. It's up to community leaders and residents to take the initiative to develop a plan—and implement it.

But it's not just about the population challenge. Wabash County has great potential. Over the previous decade, communities in the county have beautified the public realm, attracted new businesses, opened up new connections to the rivers, or simply invested in themselves. By joining together for an unprecedented effort, all the distinct communities can define a unified vision that strengthens Wabash County. These are the right, first steps and this plan seeks to build on this momentum.

Who built the plan? Who will implement the plan?

The plan was built by the community through an open process of discovery, analysis, and prioritization. This helped to reveal a series of recommendations or actions. These can be found in the Action Agenda. These recommendations are not limited to the purview of local government. In fact, to successfully implement the plan, the community will need to continue to build on the Imagine One 85 spirit of collaboration and forge new partnerships. These cross-sector relationships will help elevate the cause and drive the movement forward.

THE PLANNING AREA

A NETWORK OF PLACES AND COMMUNITIES...









Imagine One 85's focus is Wabash County and is inclusive of the City of Wabash and the Towns of North Manchester, Roann, Lagro, and La Fontaine, along with all unincorporated land. The county is approximately 412 square miles in size, making it the 32nd largest county in Indiana out of all 92 counties and the third largest land size in the Northeast Indiana region, behind Allen and Kosciusko Counties.

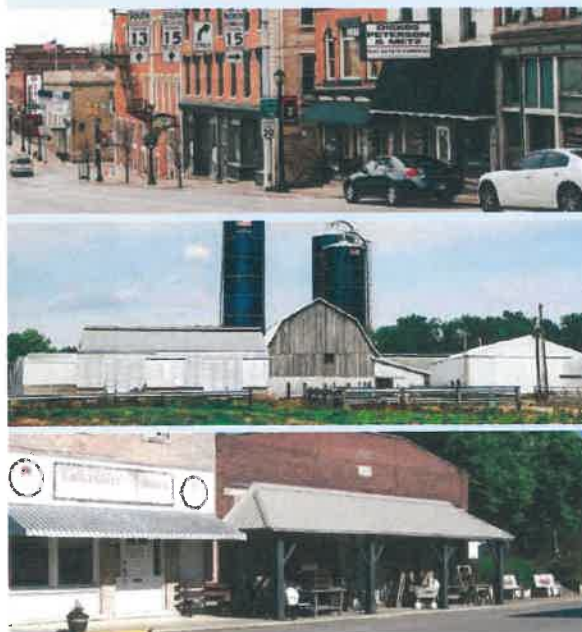
MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL APPROACH TO PLANNING / COLLABORATION...

Countywide planning is quite rare and requires trust and close collaboration. The communities around the county have many shared interests and have the potential to achieve more substantial outcomes by working together. However, each of these communities is unique and has distinct opportunities and challenges. This effort is intended to engage and impact every community in Wabash County, whether part of an incorporated community or a rural main street. As implementation moves toward achieving growth, everyone who is passionate about the communities of Wabash County is encouraged to consider their role in helping our communities grow and thrive.

Map 1.2: Planning Area

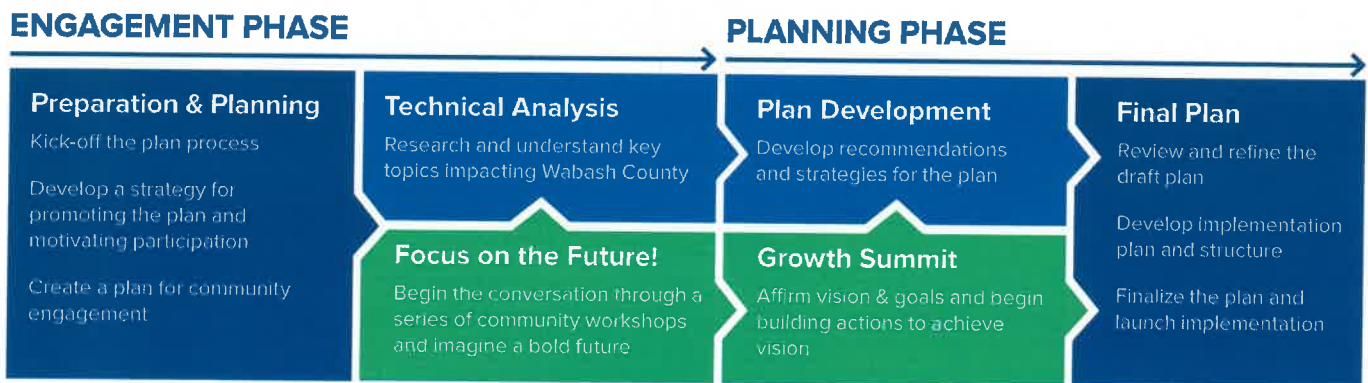
The adjacent map illustrates the planning area for Imagine One 85 including the county, cities, and towns.

-  Wabash County
-  Townships
-  Streets
-  Railroad
-  Trails
-  Rivers, Streams, and Water Bodies
-  Incorporated Communities
-  Parks and Open Space



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Imagine One 85 is an open, inclusive, and transparent process. Anyone who cares about the future of the communities of the county was invited to contribute ideas and is encouraged to take responsibility for growth. In the year-long process of outreach and engagement, hundreds of people participated in the conversation about how the County should grow. Straddling the COVID-19 pandemic and related health and economic shutdowns, the Steering Committee needed to be creative in its approach to engagement. The group had two guiding priorities: safety and openness.



CONVENING A REPRESENTATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE...

The Imagine Steering Committee led the process, making significant decisions regarding substance, outreach, and the plan’s general direction. The Committee also acted as spokespersons for the planning effort, officially represented citizens in the planning process, and provided direction and feedback to the planning team at crucial steps. The 19-member group consisted of elected officials representing the county, the city, and incorporated towns as well as Grow Wabash County and Community Foundation of Wabash County. This group was selected to represent the diverse interests of the county and its communities.

PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

Several important studies and processes pre-dated the Imagine effort. These helped to inform and focus the plan process with a strong foundation of community preferences and key data. The Wabash County Population Analysis and Recommendations, completed in 2019, laid the groundwork by establishing the focus of the plan: population decline. This work also included a series of recommendations, some of which are lifted up later in the plan.

In addition to previous technical research and analysis, community leaders hosted a series of discussions through the Lilly Endowment Gift VII and On the Table initiative in the years leading up to the Imagine process. More than 450 people contributed to these conversations and this input was integrated into the initial round of Imagine community engagement.

Existing Plans and Studies

- ▶ Wabash County Population Report (2020)
- ▶ Wabash County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2019)
- ▶ North Manchester Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2016-2020)
- ▶ North Manchester Housing Analysis (2017)
- ▶ Studies for Advancement Public Report (2017)
- ▶ City of Wabash Housing Potential Analysis (2017)
- ▶ Wabash County Tourism Economic Impact Report (2016)
- ▶ North Manchester Comprehensive Plan (2015)
- ▶ City of Wabash Strategic Investment Plan (2014-2018)
- ▶ City of Wabash Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (2013)
- ▶ Wabash County Comprehensive Plan (2012)
- ▶ City of Wabash Parks Department Master Plan (2010-2014)

STARTING THE CONVERSATION: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

The Focus on the Future community conversations introduced the Imagine One 85 process to the community. These initial in-person and virtual workshops were hosted between November 2020 and March 2021. More than 250 people participated in a discussion and, together, generated thousands of comments and ideas. Taking on the challenges posed by population decline, participants structured their comments as a response or solution. These ideas were wide-ranging, but clustered around several topics, including housing, jobs, education, and amenities.

A series of stakeholder groups were also convened alongside the Focus on the Future workshops. These groups met by invitation to discuss specific, essential topics for Wabash County's future and resulted in a deeper understanding of the community assets and challenges. Topics covered during these events included:

- Manchester University
- Housing
- Diversity
- Natural Resources
- Education
- Employers

Community engagement was designed to generate open comments on paths to improving the county's qualities of place, life, and opportunities. Respondents were primed on key conditions and trends before each workshop. This included the principal focus of the Imagine One 85 planning effort, the county's decreasing population. The input served as a foundation for major elements of the plan including the community's vision, goals, and general direction. These elements were tested back with the public during the second round of engagement.

Each meeting during the Focus on the Future round centered around a consistent set of prompts and discussions. Whenever possible, participants were also provided a background presentation from a member of the planning team. This priming information was intended to help place the process, share key findings related to conditions and trends, and lay out additional steps to come in the planning process.



Participants learned about conditions and trends while sharing their thoughts for the future of the county and its communities.

Major Themes from the Focus on the Future Workshops:

- ▶ **Enrich our education system.** Many respondents noted that the strength of local schools is a major factor when young families are deciding where to live.
- ▶ **Create more and higher paying jobs.** Quality and well-paying jobs may encourage residents to stay in the County or entice non-residents to move in.
- ▶ **Increase housing options and affordability.** Housing availability and affordability are essential to attracting new residents to a community.
- ▶ **Expand and improve high-speed internet access.** Internet access is essential for families, workers, and students. This was made clear by the pandemic and the related economic shutdowns.
- ▶ **Create great places.** Wabash County is home to beautiful natural features and historic charm. Some residents, however, feel that their communities are lacking in the types of amenities that draw in outsiders and retain locals.
- ▶ **Embrace diversity.** For Wabash to grow in population, each resident or prospective resident should feel welcomed and included, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, or cultural background.
- ▶ **Strengthen our health and social support services.** People want to live where they have access to the best health and social service opportunities.
- ▶ **Broadcast our image.** "Wabash County already has a lot to offer!" Some residents suggest that people would move to the County if they only knew how great it already is.
- ▶ **Improve coordination and collaboration across our organizations and institutions.** Working together is a key to promoting growth in the county.
- ▶ **Protect our natural features and develop outstanding new amenities.** While Wabash County is already rich in natural amenities, it will be imperative to proactively preserve and improve upon the existing assets.
- ▶ **Attract and retain young, talented individuals.** Achieving sustained population growth will depend on bringing in new individuals from a younger demographic and retaining those who are already in the county.
- ▶ **Continue to grow a skilled workforce.** A limiting factor in scaling up a community is the availability and skillset of the workforce.



The Imagine One 85 Growth Summit represented a major milestone in the process.



Participants shared their MIGHTY ideas for the future of the county.

IDENTIFYING AND WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS...

The planning team hosted a series of stakeholder group and individual interviews throughout the engagement round. These interviews were not agenda driven like the community conversations but rather, facilitated by the planning team based on the organizing topic. A summary of these interviews is included in the appendix. Groups included social service providers, leadership from small and large businesses, elected or appointed officials, and others. See the full list of groups engaged to the right.

THE IMAGINE ONE 85 GROWTH SUMMIT

The Imagine One 85 Growth Summit was hosted on July 14, 2021 on the outdoor plaza at the Honeywell Center in downtown Wabash. This event was the punctuating community engagement activity for the process. Just over 200 people attended that evening with several dozen adding their comments later online.

During the program, speakers from around the community shared their experiences with living, working, and raising a family

in Wabash County. The planning team then presented key information gathered through the process on demographics, economics, and other topics. Attendees spent the balance of the time sharing their MIGHTY ideas for the future of the county in small groups. Each group first compiled a full list of ideas from each member and then discussed and selected those ideas with the greatest potential to increase population in the county over the 25-year planning horizon. These MIGHTY ideas were collected and posted for all attendees to read.

More than 400 ideas were shared during the Growth Summit with 42 identified as MIGHTY Ideas by group members. The ideas spanned a wide range of topics including: housing, economic development, growth and development, parks, amenities, education, and more. Many of the ideas shared during the summit are represented in this plan and several are indicated as priorities.

Stakeholder Groups engaged throughout the process included:

- ▶ Natural Resource Advocates
- ▶ Young Professionals of Wabash County
- ▶ Middle School Students
- ▶ Commuters
- ▶ Honeywell Foundation
- ▶ Human Resource Professionals
- ▶ Major Employers
- ▶ Non-Profit Leaders and Social Service Providers
- ▶ Manchester University Town and Gown Committee
- ▶ Wabash Kiwanis Club
- ▶ Wabash Rotary Club
- ▶ North Manchester Rotary Club
- ▶ Manchester University
- ▶ Plan Commission of the City of Wabash
- ▶ Plan Commission of North Manchester
- ▶ Wabash County Advisory Planning Commission
- ▶ Wabash County Board of Zoning Appeals



NOW IS THE BEST TIME TO PLAN OUR FUTURE

For more than four decades, the population in Wabash County has slowly decreased. Why is this the right time to act? What is it about this moment that's different or special? Simply put, there is a spirit of collaboration between the communities of Wabash County and there is resolve to act in unison. And while each community will have a unique role to play in the solution, this diversity is a strength. The task is big, but as this section points out, it is also manageable.

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE: LOSING 130 EACH YEAR...

From the high point in 1980, Wabash County has lost over 5,300 residents. That's around 130 people per year, or the average graduating class from any of the county's three school corporations. To regain the high water mark, and indeed grow well beyond it, the communities of the county will need to pull back or attract 5,300 residents. While this seems like a tall order, the goal is realistic.

It is important to think about community decline and growth in terms of households. Very few Americans, and even fewer residents of Indiana, live alone. Rather, people live in household or family units. When a decision is made to move, that decision is inherited by the full unit. Therefore, with growth as the goal, it's not just about attracting individuals, but rather families.

It's not feasible or desirable to expect those 5,300 people to return overnight or

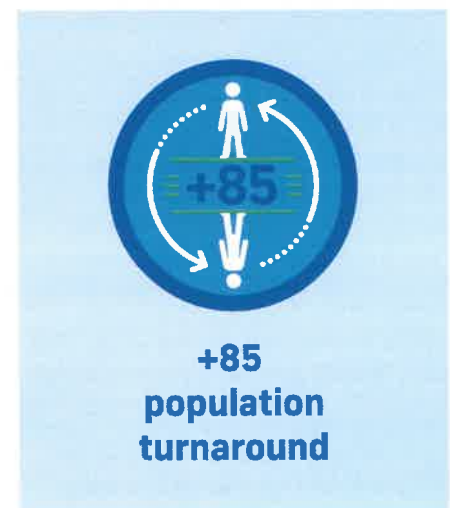
even in a single decade. Gradual, positive change is the goal. This incremental change allows the communities to recapture the energy that has slowly drained out and responsibly re-invest in projects that continue to enhance the county's qualities of life, place, and opportunity.

IMAGINE "PLUS" 85!

Adding 85 families each year would put Wabash County back on pace to reach and grow past its population high point in 1980 in 25 years. Doing so has the potential to add millions in tax revenue, boost school enrollment, and add to the richness, diversity, and sustainability of the communities.

The contents of this plan are squarely focused on the plus 85 challenge. There is no single action the communities can take to reverse the population trend. Rather, the Imagine One 85 process has challenged each of these communities to consider their role in the solution. Through a process

of discovery and analysis, priorities have emerged. Issues like housing, education, and jobs are critical, but they're only parts of the solution. This plan presents a menu of potential actions that squarely address these priorities and builds off the hard-won momentum of other recent, community initiatives.



CHAPTER 2

KEY TAKEAWAYS TO KNOW...

Strong community planning starts with a holistic review of conditions and trends. To better understand the communities, the planning team gathered data, reviewed existing reports, and developed new sets of analyses. The Technical Analysis Memos (People, Prosperity, Place, and Foundation), available in Appendix C: Analysis, present these findings across the major plan topics. After combining this analysis with the priorities from the community and stakeholders, twelve takeaways emerged. These are presented below as principal challenges and opportunities for Wabash County.

1. Population is still declining...

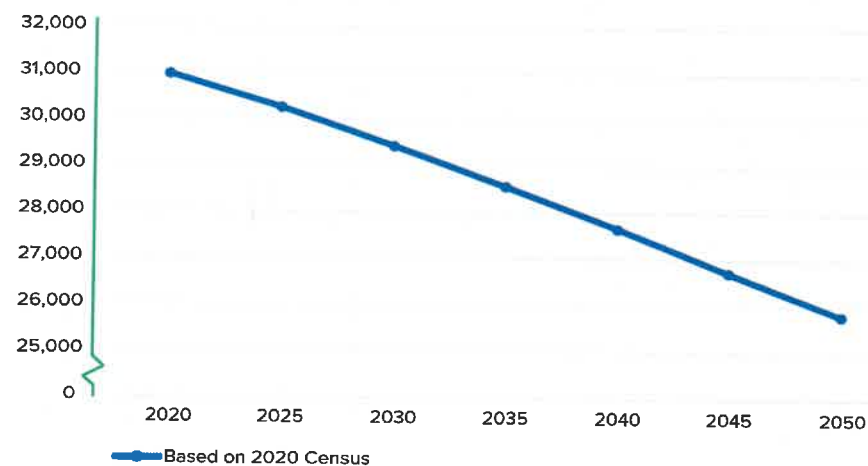
If trends continue, by 2050 Wabash County could have 5,000 fewer residents than it does today. This slow but steady decline began in 1980 when the county reached its high point for in-migration and population. That year, close to 400 people moved in and the population peaked at 36,500 residents. **Since then, between 50 and 100 households have left each year.** Population isn't the only measure for community vitality, but the consistent loss has had an impact and will continue to compound.

The 2020 US Census confirmed this decline had indeed continued through the last decade. Over that period the county shrank by five percent, now just above 30,000 residents. Communities in decline around Indiana and the broader Midwest have experienced a wide range of effects

as a result of the trend. Some of these are expected, direct impacts like declining school enrollment, and lower tax revenue or increasing tax burden. Many are more subtle, like a softening retail and housing market, smaller workforce, and others. Now four decades into the trend, Wabash

County can document the changes. A loss of 5,000 additional people would mean 1,800 fewer families and their children in the county's three school districts, 2,000 fewer needed housing units, along with a greater reliance on community citizens to help cover the costs for needed repairs and community upkeep.

Figure 2.1: County Population Projection



Source: U.S. Census

2. Demographics are changing quickly...

Just like the overall population, the demographic make-up of the communities of the county are also changing. Already an older community, the median age in the county (42) is now four years older than the state. This is reflected in the labor force. In 2020, 26% of the County's jobs were held by people over the age of 55. In critical industries such as manufacturing and agriculture, which account for over 3,000 jobs combined and more than a third of the county's employment, **more than 30 percent of workers are over the age of 55.** This pending wave of retirement has the potential to add to labor scarcity, especially in two of the county's most productive sectors.

Family and household sizes are decreasing as well. At 2.7, the average family size is less than the state (3.1) and only one in five households is home to a child under 18, compared to 23% state average.

With respect to race and ethnicity, the communities remain relatively homogeneous with very small growth in the county's black and Asian communities between 2000 and 2020. Residents identifying as Hispanic or Latinx, however, doubled over this period from a representation of 1.5 to 3 percent. Additionally, this growth may be under-counted as has been the case in similar communities around the Midwest.



First Friday events in Downtown Wabash offer opportunities for the community to gather together.

3. Workforce is shrinking faster than the population...



Employers in Wabash County are casting a wider net to fill their needs and are considering relocation in order to scale their operations. Regionally, there is a similar picture. The 11-county northeast Indiana labor force has decreased by 10,000 people or two percent and this trend has greatly increased the competition for workers, especially skilled labor, around Wabash.

There is a strong, demonstrated link between economic output and the vitality of the local labor force. Population decline further stresses the system, as young people--especially those with a college degree--migrate to other communities. Considering the majority of new jobs in the county (59%) come from business start-ups, this out-migration is troubling. Additionally, while the unemployment rate quickly recovered from a COVID-19 high of 16.5% back down to 4.5%, the labor force participation total (those actively employed



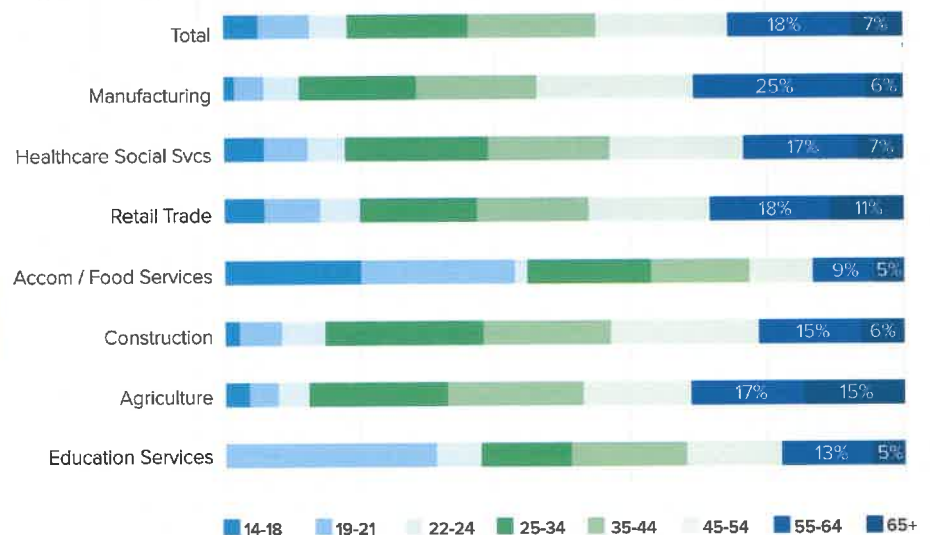
Attracting and retaining a skilled workforce is a critical need for the county and its local businesses.

or looking for work) has fallen at a faster rate than the population: from a high point of 18,400 in 2000 to just over 15,000 in 2020. **This nearly 20% decrease is six times the regional decline and twice the population decline.**

"We're on the cusp of scaling our operation right here in Wabash County, but the limitations or the risks we see have to do with people. We need skilled operators and we're looking farther and farther away and offering more and more to bring workers to Wabash County."

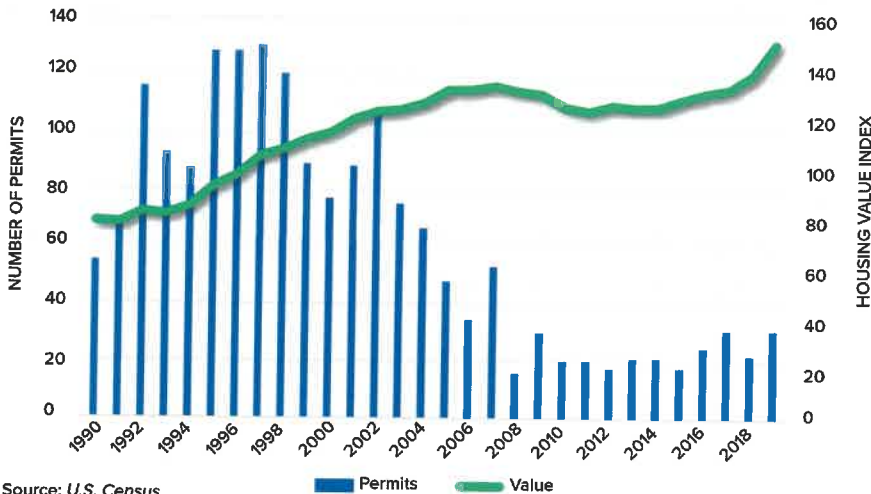
- Local Business Owner

Figure 2.2: Age Distribution in the Workforce



Source: Ninigret Partner analysis of LEHD Data

Figure 2.3: Housing Value vs. Number of Permits



Source: U.S. Census

4. The housing market is stalled...

The sales price for a home in Wabash County is up 21% or \$25,000 from 2020 to 2021. Competition among buyers is fierce, and with limited inventory and very little new builds, the time-on-market is among the lowest in the state. **Over the last ten years, the county has outpaced the state in median sales price growth (85% increase in the county compared to 70% in Indiana) while losing more than 1,000 residents.**

Homebuilding—outside of a handful of small projects—has not occurred in the county at scale in more than three decades. And last, the cost of remodel projects for older homes drastically increased through the pandemic with labor prices and materials prices at all time highs. These factors make for a highly competitive real estate market, even in a community with a declining population.

The number of building permits issued each year is down by over 100 permits since the peak in 1997, and more permits were issued that year than from 2015 to 2019 combined. In the last two decades, very few new housing subdivisions have been developed. There is significant pressure on the county's current supply.

The conditions in the rental market are similar. While the county is dominated by owner-occupied housing (74% of all households), the competition in the for-sale market has driven up rent demand to levels consistent with metropolitan counties like Allen to the east. At the time of this release there were 10 two-bedroom rental units available across the county; there were more than 50 available in Kosciusko County to the north.

"It's not as if people don't want to live in Wabash. I'm working with clients from across the state and as far away as the west coast, who are looking for a home in our county. The issue is with inventory. We simply don't have the options and we're not building them... at least we're not building them fast enough."

- Bob Lundquist, Lundquist Appraisals & Real Estate, Inc.

5. Many roads and bridges are in poor condition...

Asset Management data, collected by communities, from 2020 indicates many roads have poor pavement conditions and a substantial share of local bridges are structurally deficient and need or major repairs. These issues amount to a substantial maintenance backlog, particularly for Wabash County. Of the County's 716 miles of roads, approximately 500 miles or about 70 percent have poor pavement conditions. Further, 12 of the County's 58 bridges are "structurally deficient" and may need to be rehabilitated or reconstructed. **This amounts to an estimated maintenance backlog of at least \$146 million for roadways and \$34 million for bridges.**

Among the County's communities, La Fontaine's streets are also predominantly in poor condition, with a backlog estimated to be at least \$1.2 million. Streets in Wabash and North Manchester are generally in much better condition. In both communities, at least 60 percent of streets, measured by centerline miles, are in fair condition but maintenance backlogs for each community are still substantial with an estimated \$4.5 million for Wabash and \$1.2 million for North Manchester.

Beyond the growing financial cost, poor pavement and bridge conditions can slow traffic and emergency response, contribute to vehicle damage, and difficulty moving freight and agricultural products to market and would send a negative message to residents and prospects about the state of Wabash County.



Roadways, like the one shown above, are common throughout the communities of Wabash County.

6. There has been very little physical growth and development...



Very little development has occurred in Wabash County over the past decades. This limited growth has largely been led by market conditions for the County.

Between 2000 and 2019, fewer than 600 acres transitioned from agricultural or undeveloped to developed. **That's roughly 30 acres per year or the equivalent of eight blocks in downtown Wabash.** Compared to other counties in the region, this growth is small and represents just two-tenths of one percent of the total land mass of the county.

One of the primary assets in the county is the diverse collection of places from urban to rural to natural. But the rural spaces dominate. At just over 220,000 acres (345 square miles), agricultural land encompasses 82 percent of the county's 412 square miles. At the current growth trend, it would take until 2094 to develop just one percent of the county's total agricultural land. In a recent series of Imagine One 85 focus groups, local leadership stressed the importance of finding places for positive community growth.

“Farming and agriculture are essential parts of our identity as a community. We can maintain that legacy, and identify key areas for additive growth. It's not a zero sum game. It's about balance, planning, and a realistic understanding of the inhibitors to population growth.”

- Local Leader

7. Room for growth without affecting the character of the communities...

Community zoning maps support modest development, especially related to housing and employment districts. Of the 23,000 acres zoned for residential, only 60 percent is currently built. If the remaining 9,500 acres were developed - even at the low density of one unit per acre - the communities could create more than 6,650 housing units or homes for 15,000 new residents. Industrial growth capacity is even greater with only 29 percent of the zoned footprint currently developed.

Almost every land use (commercial, residential, industrial, etc.) has at least 40% undeveloped land capacity available for future growth based on the current zoning. Specifically, industrial development capacity is substantial. An estimated 71% or just over 4,080 acres of industrial zoned land is available for future development.

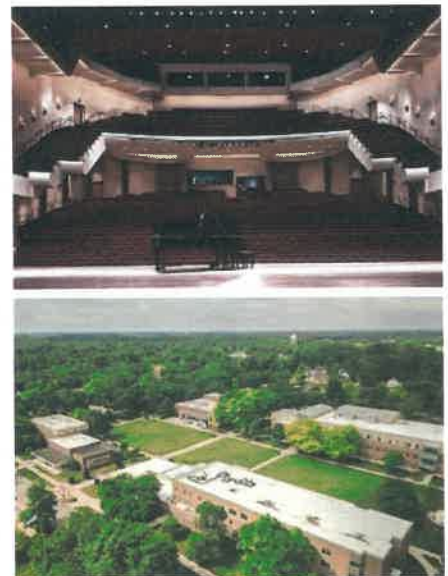
Figure 2.4: Land Capacity by Zoning



8. Strong community partners that provide unique county opportunities...

Many local organizations serve as partners for addressing population decline as well as important assets unique to a rural location like Wabash County. The Honeywell Foundation impacts hundreds of thousands of guests each year by inspiring all ages through the arts. Driven by their mission statement, they remain “dedicated to the enhancement of artistic, social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for all”. These programs, events, and services connect the communities with rich opportunities focused on enhancing quality of life and attracts visitors from the region and State to experience the unique qualities of the County.

As a major institution, Manchester University and its 1,000 on campus students contribute significant impact on the county. Through community service programs, the university offers a variety of engagement opportunities including tutoring for elementary students and supporting Habitat for Humanity. The university further contributes through post-secondary education, enhancing the career readiness of students and professional connections to local industries. **These unique assets are determining factors for achieving many recommendations outlined in Imagine One 85.**



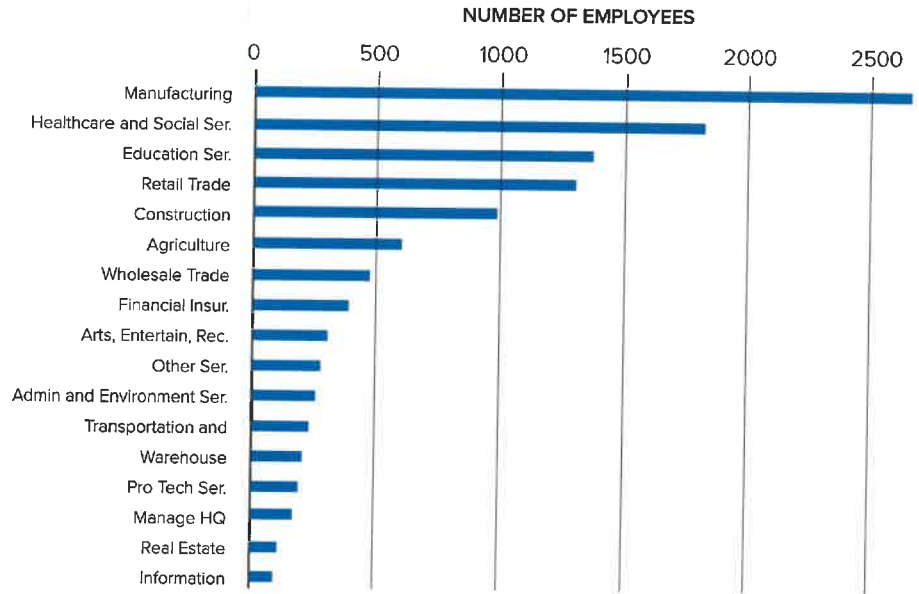
Assets like the Honeywell Foundation and Manchester University are points of pride for the county.

9. Demonstrated economic growth and private business investment...

Despite the decline in population, the county's economy has maintained consistent, if modest, growth. Between 2015 and 2020 the county's gross domestic product grew by three percent to \$1.2 billion. Wages have also continued to grow over the last decade. **Total wages adjusted for inflation are up by approximately \$46 million.** Total payroll wages in the county totaled \$464 million in 2019.

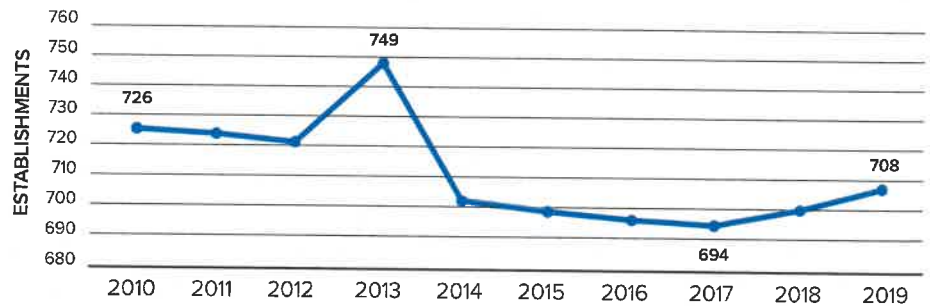
Business establishments are used as a proxy for businesses. Establishments are locations that are recorded for purposes of unemployment insurance and payroll taxes. Establishment counts provides a method to track business formation and losses over time. Based on this data Wabash County has fewer establishments than after the Great Recession. The large gain in 2013 reflects a spike in retail and professional services businesses. For context, the peak number of establishments for Wabash County in the 21st century was 2003 with 771 establishments.

Figure 2.5: Largest Private Employment Sectors



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 2.6: Total Establishments in Wabash County

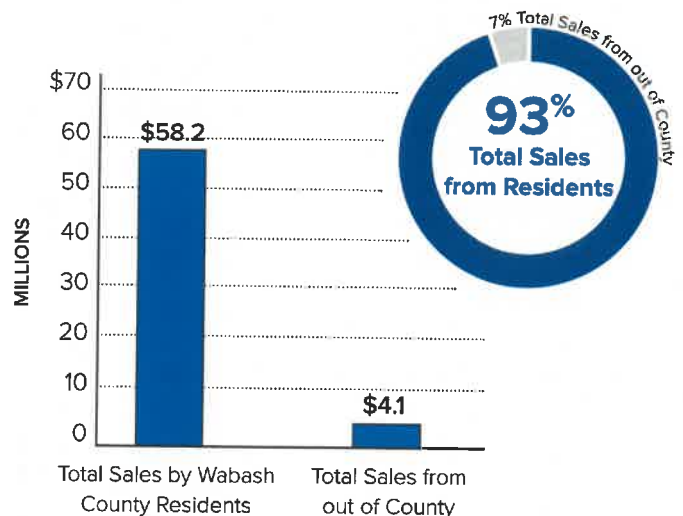


Source: St. Louis Fed FRED Statistics Series

10. New revenue streams available for infrastructure improvements...

While income tax supports a substantial portion of the county's resources, there are several untapped revenue streams available to generate additional funding. The Food and Beverage Tax is applied to retail sales on food and beverages when something is purchased in the county. It has a maximum rate of one percent that is collected for use on countywide resources and improvements. More than 20 counties in the state, including Allen and LaGrange, have implemented a Food and Beverage Tax. **This tax could generate more than \$450 thousand in annual revenue for Wabash County.** Total food and beverage production and export in Wabash County is an estimated \$62 million. Exports are any sale of food and beverage products to a non-resident of Wabash County. Just over seven percent of total food and beverage sales in the County are exported to out-of-county residents.

Figure 2.7: Food and Beverage Production and Export



Source: IMPLAN 2020 Data for model region including Wabash County

Considering the percent of sales from exports, approximately \$32 thousand in tax revenues would be contributed by out-of-county purchasers, leaving \$418 thousand in food and beverage tax revenue drawn from sales to residents within Wabash County. With the large number of visitors coming into the County to enjoy Honeywell Foundation performances, this is a unique opportunity to benefit from expenditures made by visitors from outside the community. If implemented, this fund could support large scale projects that assist with community growth.

Wheel Tax is applied to motor vehicles including both standard cars and commercial trucks. It applies a flat surcharge to motor vehicles at a maximum rate of \$25 for autos and \$40 for trucks, which can be increased if a transportation management plan is established. This tax can be applied at both the county and municipal levels providing substantial revenue for use on capital improvements and infrastructure maintenance. In Indiana, 55 counties have this tax structure in effect providing supplemental resources to income and property taxes. **The county and municipal wheel tax could generate up to \$2.7 million in annual revenue.**

11. Unique connection to natural places...

The rivers, reservoirs, forests, and fields help to shape the identity of the communities of Wabash County. These blueways and greenspaces are important assets and have been well-leveraged by recent projects like park and trail expansions. The Eel and Wabash Rivers are special, unique in the way they connect the communities, each cutting from east to west. Lake Mississinewa and Lake Salamonie are two additional assets that further connect Wabash County to the benefits of water access. Land around these reservoirs is designated as state forests ensuring the protection of wildlife and the operation of the lakes for stormwater management and flood prevention. Aside from recreational uses, these areas are not available for private development due to their importance to flood control and benefit as a regional amenity. **These areas include approximately 15,050 acres of land, or five percent of the county's total land area.**



The county's natural features provide peaceful amenities for both residents and visitors.

12. Not starting from scratch...

When comparing the county to similar communities, it's clear, Wabash County has made progress. **Despite its challenges, the communities have made strong investments in themselves and bet on forthcoming returns.** Each of these efforts has value and can be leveraged from the vibrant main streets in each community to local institutions such as Manchester University and the Honeywell Foundation. The county exhibits a strong sense of place from the natural resources of the Wabash and Eel Rivers to historical assets including museums and covered bridges. It is the culmination of these local community amenities, attractions, and assets that makes it unique within the region. Using the momentum of previous efforts will ensure that a strong, vibrant future is realized through Imagine One 85 and the robust partnership the process has developed for addressing population decline.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Imagine One 85 conducted detailed analysis on 12 key topics essential to the County's future. This information is available in the appendix, organized into four technical analysis memos:

Prosperity

- Economic Development
- Fiscal Capacity
- Fiscal Resiliency
- Housing

People

- Public Health
- Placemaking
- Education

Place

- Land Use
- Agriculture
- Natural Resources / Parks and Rec.
- Historic and Archaeological Resources

Foundation

- Transportation
- Hazard Mitigation
- Public Facilities and Services

CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines a conceptual development framework that reinforces the plan's actions and land use recommendations across the county and its communities. It is presented through a conceptual opportunities map that defines principles for growth, development, and conservation throughout Wabash County.

The principle statements describe the intent around “how” (general character) and “where” (conceptual location) development should occur in the communities of Wabash County. The statements reflect themes identified through the technical analysis and community insight shared from public engagement to either encourage appropriate growth (inward or outward) or maintain unique areas. These themes include development intent (quality, appearance, pattern, character, and organization), environmental quality, community assets, infrastructure systems, and connectivity and mobility options. The principles are supported by a diagram portraying high level concepts for future development and their general boundaries across the county.

MAIN STREETS REMAIN VIBRANT AND AUTHENTIC TO THE COMMUNITY.

- ▶ The City of Wabash and Town of North Manchester acknowledge ongoing efforts to protect, preserve, and enhance their main street.
- ▶ The Towns of Lagro, Roann, and La Fontaine embrace their individuality in attracting community investment.
- ▶ Each community leverages both local and regional investments to connect and revitalize main streets.
- ▶ New development reinforces the unique architectural and historic identity.
- ▶ Main streets continue to serve as the “heart” of community providing a variety of land uses, activities, and experiences.
- ▶ Communities support investments to ensure main streets remain relevant, active, and central to the place's identity.

NEIGHBORHOODS SUPPORT A STRONG DIVERSITY OF HOUSING OPTIONS AND LIFESTYLES.

- ▶ Established neighborhoods and their residents are respected and connected within the community.
- ▶ A variety of housing types are encouraged to meet community needs.
- ▶ Neighborhood investments reflect the unique characteristics of the area and community.
- ▶ Residents are engaged and involved in neighborhood and community-level planning efforts.
- ▶ New housing development is respectful of community character and provides for diverse lifestyles.
- ▶ Investments are led and informed by the community to support ongoing improvements.

COMMERCE CENTERS SERVE AS DESTINATIONS FOR RECREATION, ENTERTAINMENT, AND SERVICES.

- ▶ Areas allow for a mix of uses to support the needs of local residents and regional visitors.
- ▶ Permitted uses are responsive to demand and remain flexible to help the community advance its quality of place.
- ▶ Existing activity centers, infrastructure, and transportation capacity focus new development growth.
- ▶ Projects strive to benefit the community character and fiscal health.
- ▶ Efficient and safe connections are provided between neighborhoods, employment areas, and activity centers.

EMPLOYMENT DISTRICTS PROVIDE MODERN AMENITIES FOR EMERGING INDUSTRIES.

- ▶ Industrial, commercial, and office employers are valued and supported.
- ▶ Communities collaborate with employers to anticipate challenges and identify opportunities.
- ▶ Investments provide modern amenities to support current business operations and allow for industry scaling in the community.
- ▶ New development is focused on diversifying and expanding existing employment districts.

COMMUNITY CENTERS ARE INVIGORATED WITH FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT.

- ▶ Development is encouraged within community centers for the Towns of Roann, Lagro, and La Fontaine to reinforce main streets and established neighborhoods.
- ▶ Growth areas concentrate development to leverage past investments in infrastructure.
- ▶ Mixed-use is encouraged to enhance communities and provide new services for residents, workers, and visitors.
- ▶ Redevelopment, especially near main streets, supports the local economy and acknowledges the existing character.

CORRIDORS CONNECT AND ENABLE COMMUNITIES.

- ▶ Transportation corridors are monitored and evaluated for proactive improvements.
- ▶ Gateways, both internal and external, are representative of the distinct community character within the county.
- ▶ Truck or shipping routes are considered in project evaluation to limit potential impact on the community core.
- ▶ Public right-of-way balances efficiency with community aesthetics to serve as welcoming gateways.
- ▶ Multi-modal connections (bicycle and pedestrian) are integrated into corridors to provide accessible connectivity across the county.

OUTWARD GROWTH IS RESPECTFUL OF THE COUNTY'S RURAL CHARACTER AND HERITAGE.

- ▶ Development along the edge of communities represents a transition to rural areas through density, development pattern, and character.
- ▶ Distinct open space, unique natural features, and prime farmland are preserved.
- ▶ Infrastructure investments are deliberate and protect economic stability.
- ▶ Strengthening community cores is a priority over outward expansion.

OPEN SPACES ARE INTEGRATED AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL COMMUNITY DISTRICTS.

- ▶ Communities strive to connect all districts to park amenities and open spaces.
- ▶ Investments enhance the quality of life for residents and workers across the county.
- ▶ Park coverage is improved to provide a range of activities, amenities, and programs for the community.
- ▶ Maintenance of existing facilities and assets is prioritized over new park or open space growth.
- ▶ New development integrates appropriate connections and park facilities into the design.

TRAILS AND BLUEWAYS DELIVER CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN NATURAL FEATURES AND COMMUNITIES.

- ▶ Stream and river corridors are a focus for multi-use trail corridors, blueway projects, and greenways.
- ▶ Main streets are destinations for local and regional trail networks.
- ▶ Legacy rights-of-way from abandoned railroads, utility infrastructure, or others are leveraged for countywide connections.
- ▶ Major corridors design for safe integration of trail networks, crossings, and amenities.

AGRICULTURAL CHARACTER REMAINS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE COUNTY'S IDENTITY.

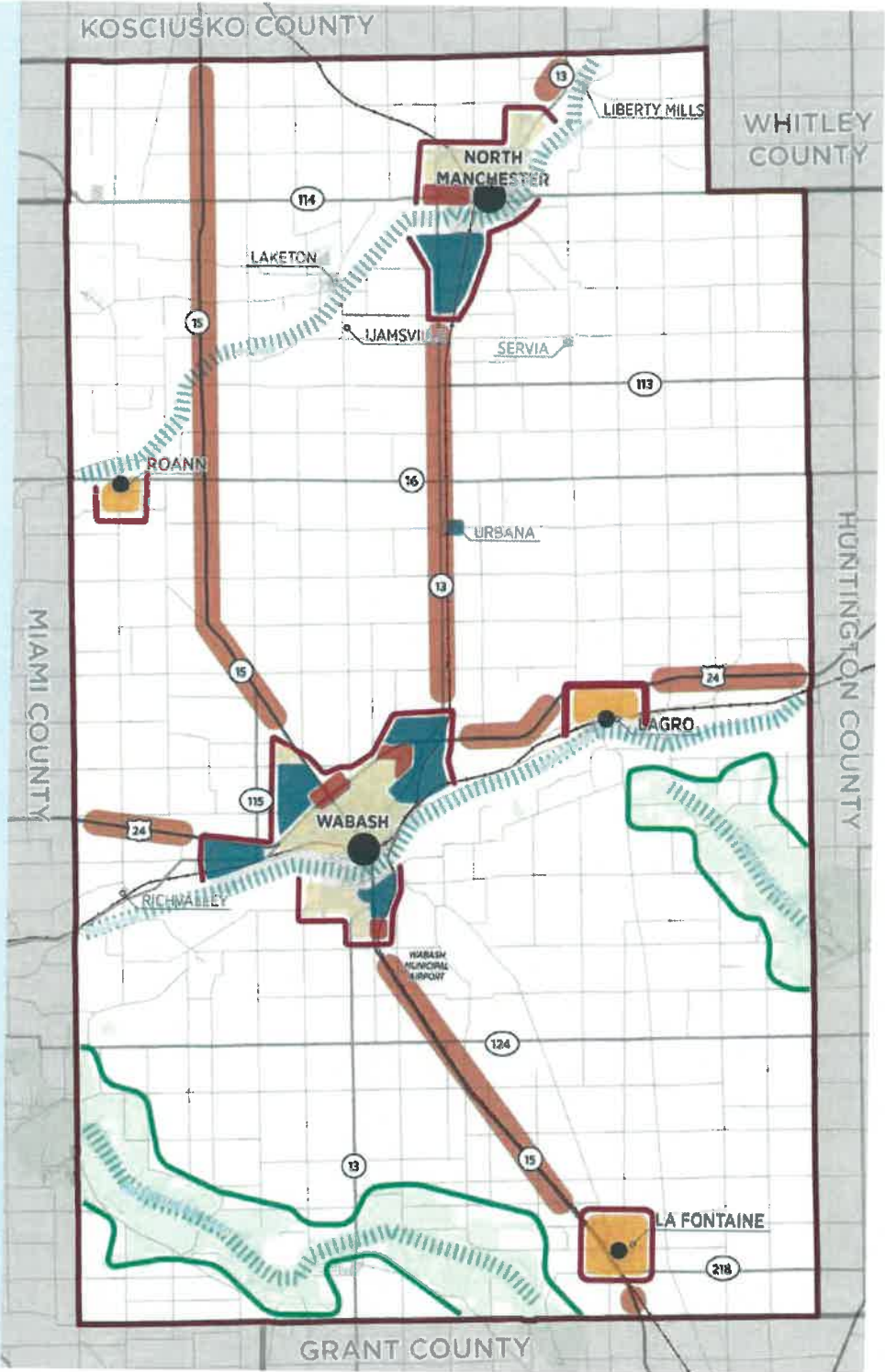
- ▶ Farmland is reserved for ongoing agricultural production, allowing for appropriate compatible development opportunities.
- ▶ Communities work closely with agricultural industries to support operations, understand challenges, and embrace opportunities.
- ▶ Agricultural innovation is encouraged for existing operations and emerging practices.
- ▶ Investments maintain a balance between community growth and agricultural identity.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK COUNTYWIDE VIEW

Map 3.1: Development Framework

The adjacent map illustrates the conceptual locations across the planning area where the principles would apply.

-  Main Streets remain vibrant and authentic to the community.
-  Neighborhoods support a strong diversity of housing options and lifestyles.
-  Commerce centers serve as destinations for recreation, entertainment, and services.
-  Employment Districts provide modern amenities for emerging industries.
-  Community Centers are invigorated with focused development investment.
-  Corridors connect and enable communities
-  Outward growth is respectful of the county's rural character and heritage.
-  Open spaces are integrated and accessible to all community districts.
-  Trails and blueways deliver connectivity between natural features and communities.
-  Agricultural character remains an essential component of the county's identity.



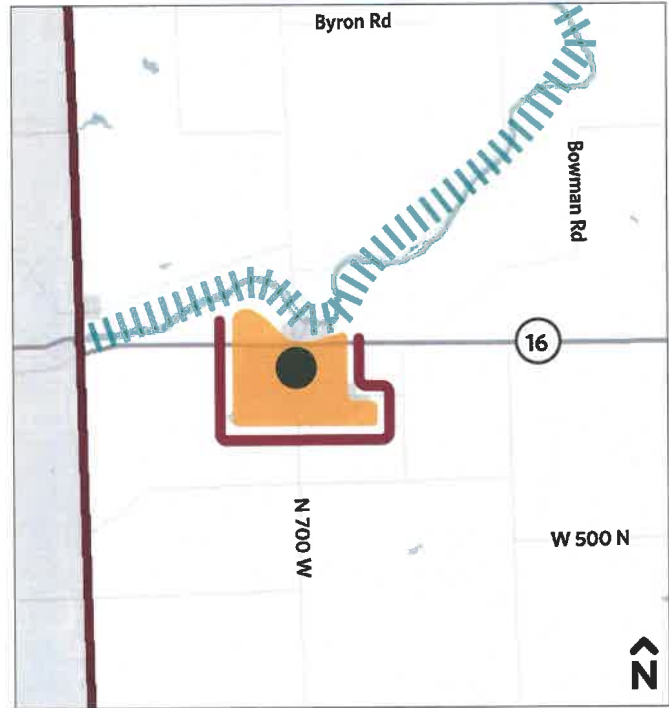
CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

COMMUNITY VIEWS

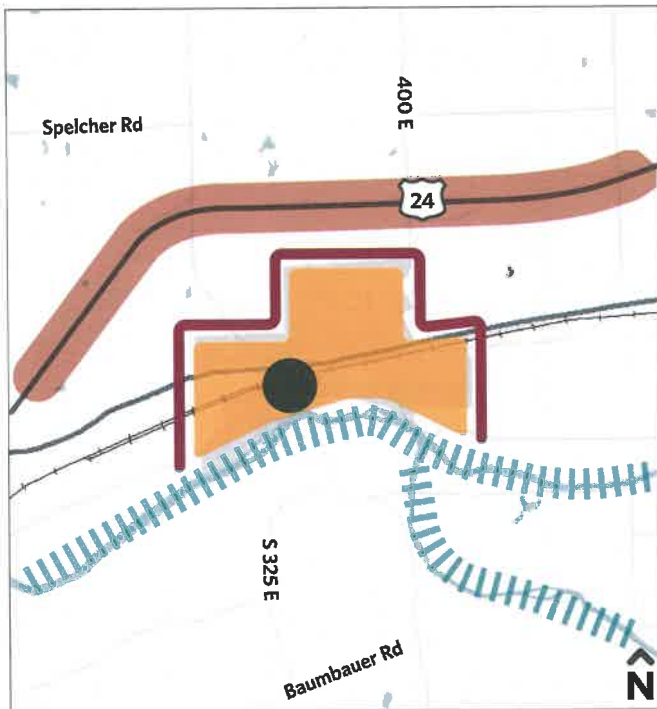
Map 3.2: Community Development Framework

The adjacent map illustrates the conceptual locations across the planning area where the principles would apply.

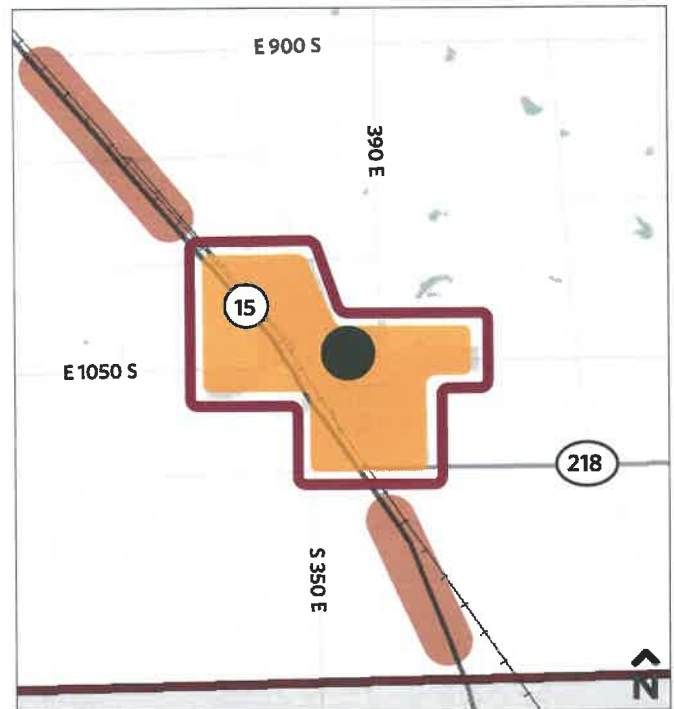
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ROANN



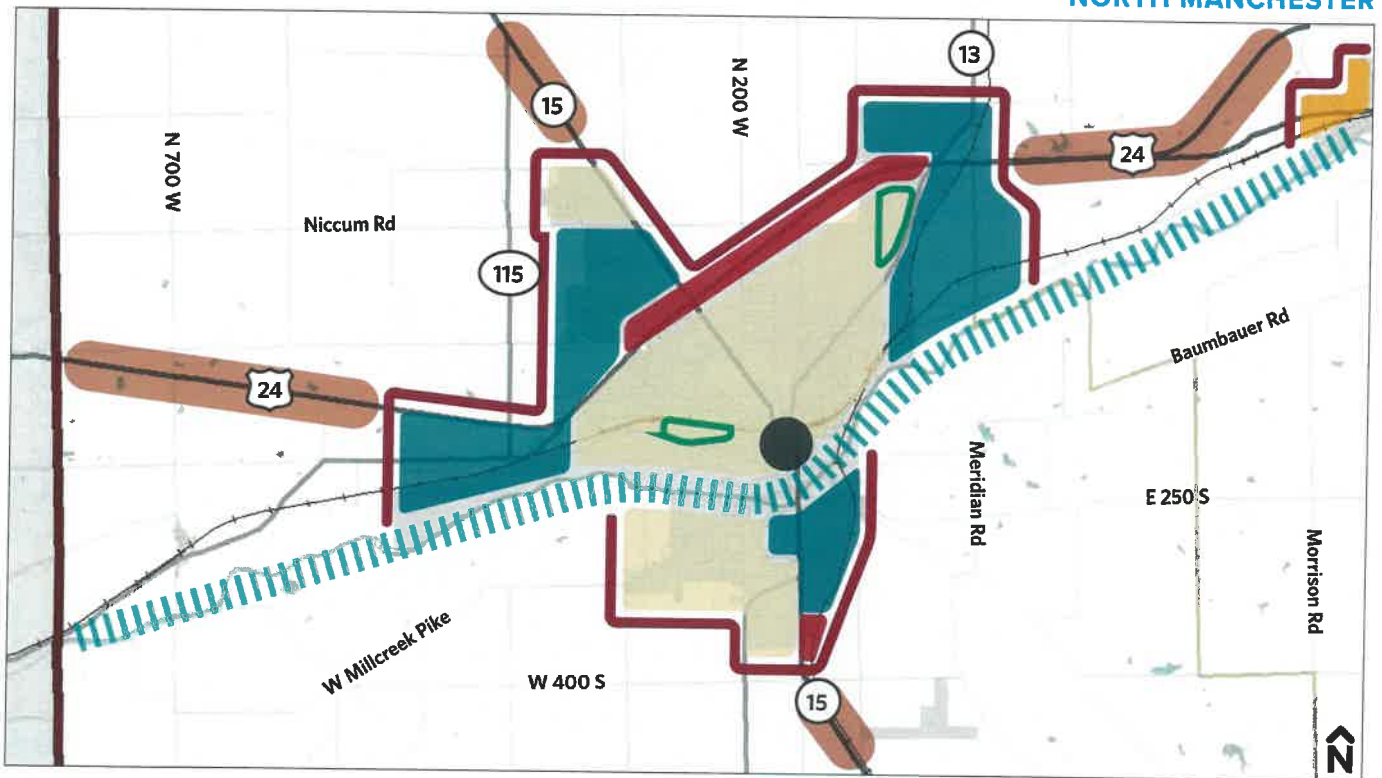
LAGRO



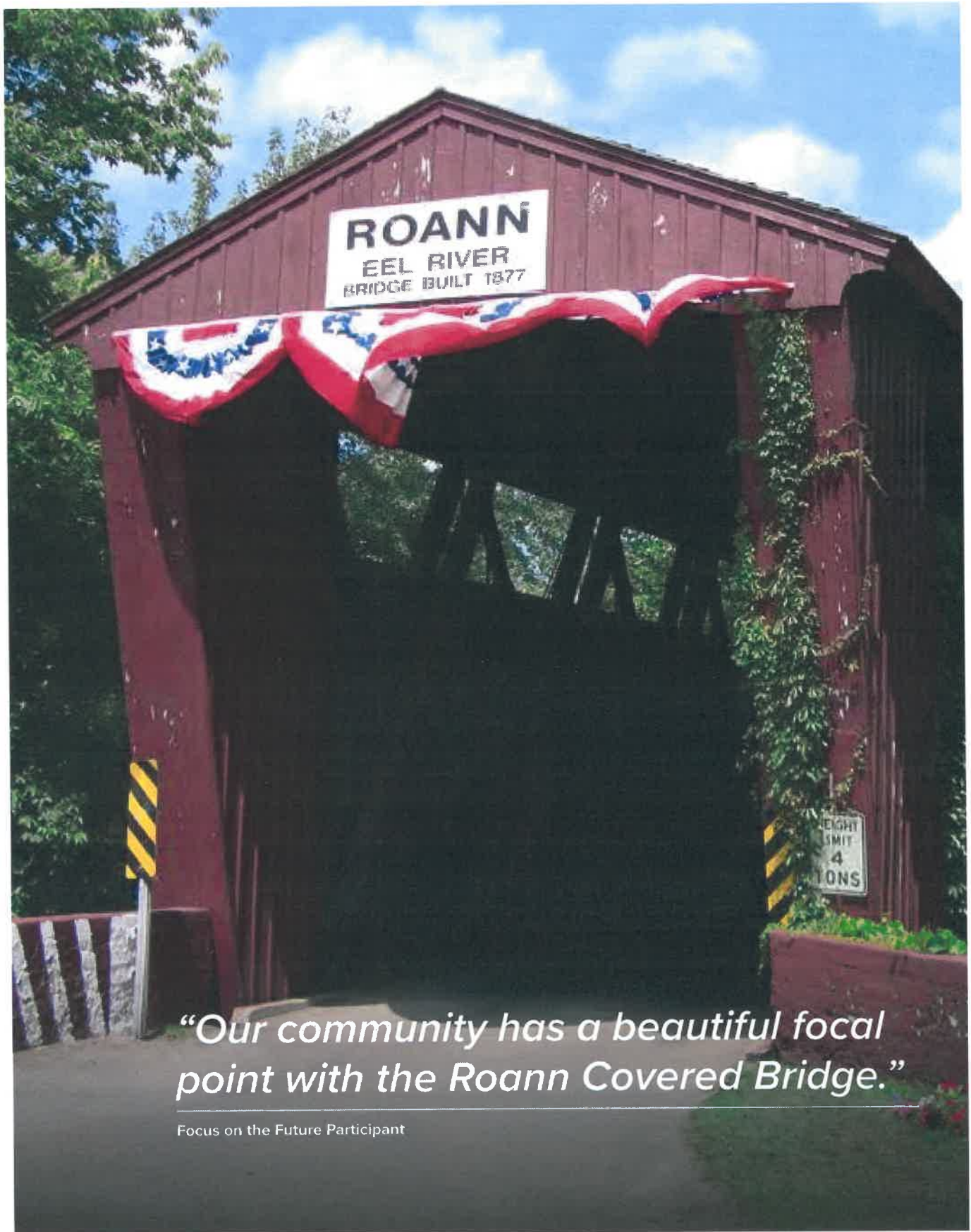
LA FONTAINE



NORTH MANCHESTER



WABASH



“Our community has a beautiful focal point with the Roann Covered Bridge.”

Focus on the Future Participant

CHAPTER 4

FUTURE LAND USE AND CHARACTER

The Future Land Use and Character Map expresses the intent for how Wabash County should use its land resources in the future. This map considers the ideal character types, which are types of places that share attributes of urban and rural form and function, as well as the ideal land uses for an area. The future character types identified are based on an evaluation of existing types found throughout the county and its communities and are intended to define the characteristics of development that are desirable. These will be achieved through local policy decisions including infrastructure investment, zoning regulations, and neighborhood revitalization. The existing and future land use maps along with the character type descriptions are presented on the following pages.

BENEFITS OF A CHARACTER-BASED APPROACH

This plan takes a character-based approach to shaping growth across Wabash County. While the Future Land Use and Character types identify both primary and secondary uses, they also convey more detail about the built form that is desired or already exists in each area. There are a number of advantages to this enhanced approach, including:

- It strengthens previous planning work, building upon the recommendations for land use and development identified in previous comprehensive plans;
- It describes the overall intent for each area, which helps decision-makers to understand whether a particular development aligns with the purpose and focus of the area;
- It provides clearer expectations about the physical characteristics of development in an easy-to-understand format; and,

- It provides an indication of potential improvements (such as sidewalks, street lights, crosswalks, landscaping, etc.) that would be beneficial.

FUTURE LAND USE AND CHARACTER TYPES

Several character types guide the future development intent for the county. These define characteristics for a spectrum of land uses from agricultural to mixed use and include:

- ▶ Downtown Core
- ▶ Town Center
- ▶ Commercial Center
- ▶ Institutional Campus
- ▶ Industrial Center
- ▶ Traditional Neighborhood
- ▶ Mixed-Rural Residential
- ▶ Rural Living
- ▶ Open Space / Conservation

OUR DEFINITION FOR GROWTH IN THE COUNTY

Growth is often related to expanding or removing features for new development that may or may not align with the character of the community. For Imagine One 85, growth is about celebrating who we are as both a county and a collection of communities. It is the collective roadmap for growth and development over the next several decades and supports addressing population decline by investing in the people, businesses, and places that helped shape Wabash County. While new development is encouraged, it is dependent on supporting our unified vision and strengthening the character of each community. Imagine One 85 strives to ensure our natural assets, farmland, and neighborhoods are preserved, protected, and enhanced through appropriate development.

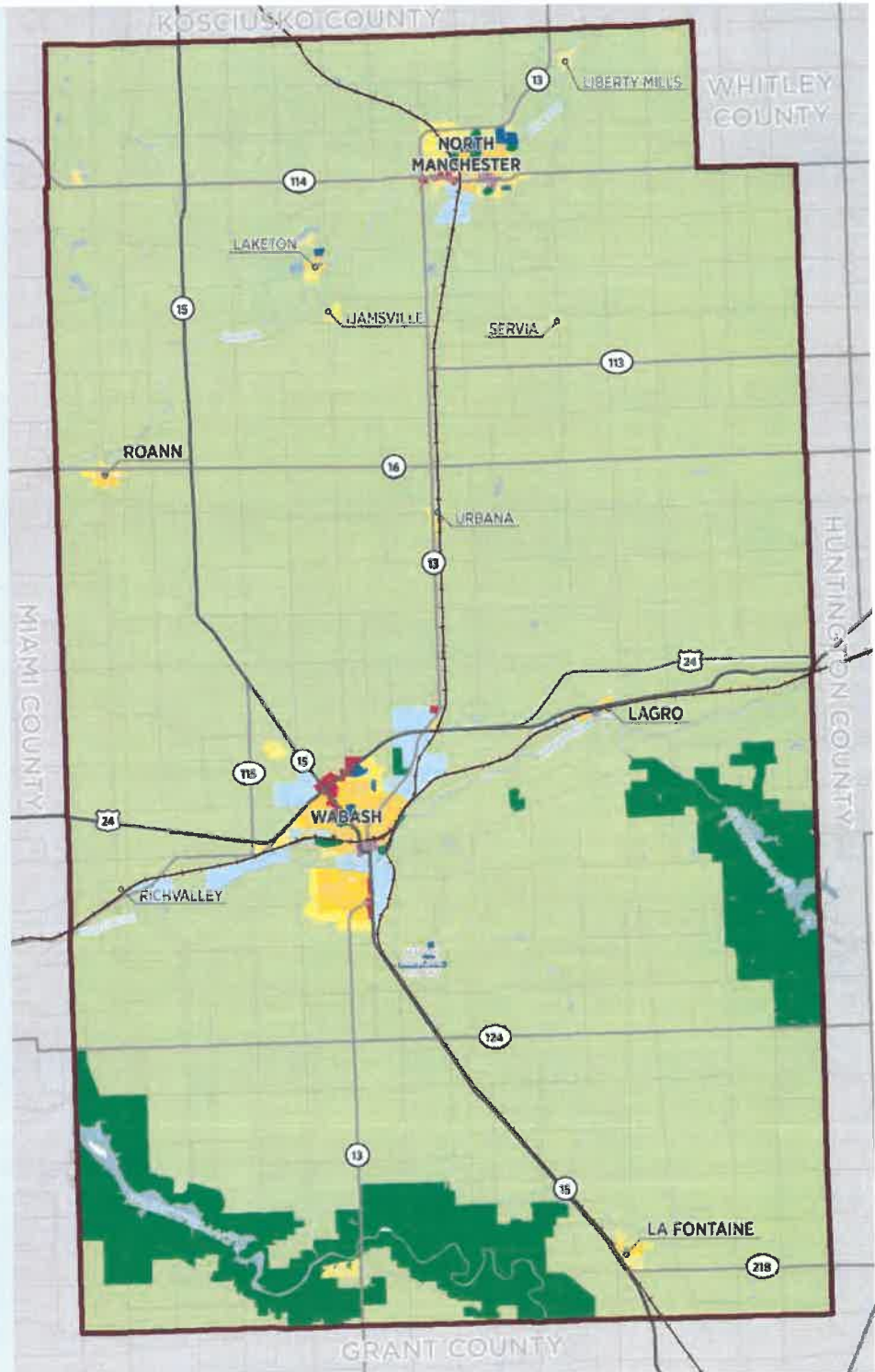
EXISTING LAND USE MAP

COUNTYWIDE VIEW

Map 4.1: Land Use Character Types

The adjacent map illustrates the existing land use character types across the county and its communities.

-  Open Space / Conservation
-  Rural Living
-  Mixed Rural Residential
-  Traditional Neighborhood
-  Town Center
-  Commercial Center
-  Downtown Core
-  Industrial Center
-  Institutional Campus



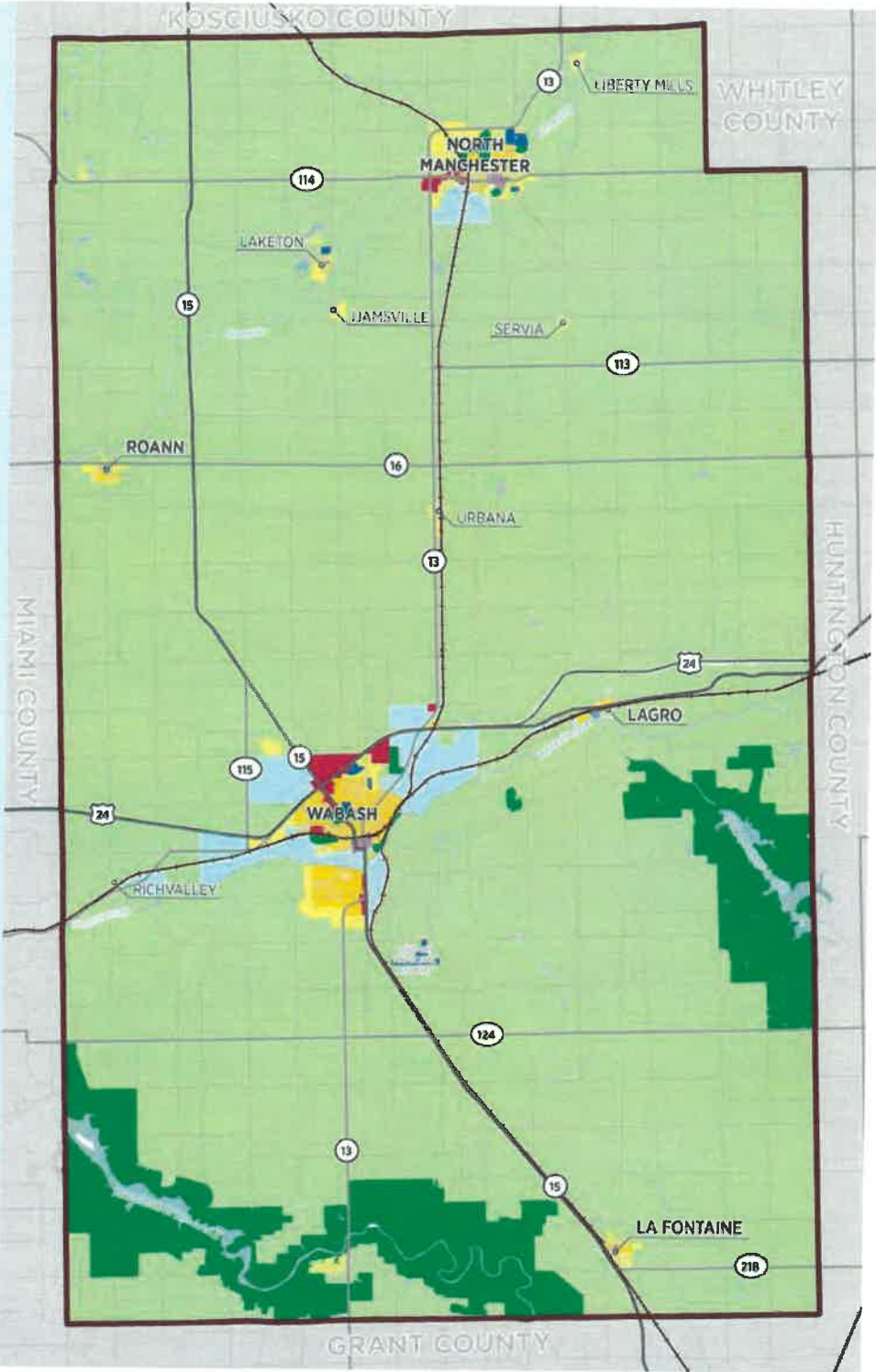
FUTURE LAND USE MAP

COUNTYWIDE VIEW

Map 4.2: Land Use Character Types

The adjacent map illustrates the future land use character types across the county and its communities.

- Open Space / Conservation
- Rural Living
- Mixed Rural Residential
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Town Center
- Commercial Center
- Downtown Core
- Industrial Center
- Institutional Campus



EXISTING AND FUTURE LAND USE MAPS

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The Future Land Use and Character Map expresses how the communities of Wabash County should use its land resources in the future. This map considers several factors for identifying the appropriate future character type for a property including the existing land use, current zoning district, and strategic investment potential. Provided in this section are a series of maps comparing the existing and future land use character types for each community along with a brief description for the intended growth in the area.

CITY OF WABASH

- Commercial growth near major crossroads including US-24 and SR-15 to provide a diversity of shops and services for the community.
- Opportunities for industrial or employment oriented uses adjacent to existing employment centers east of SR-115, near SR-13, and along the southern corridor of US-24, specifically near the western and eastern edges of the City.
- Residential support near existing neighborhoods that allow for diverse housing types and encourage infill residential near Downtown and central neighborhoods.

TOWN OF NORTH MANCHESTER

- Commercial growth near the crossroads of SR-13 and SR-114 providing services to existing neighborhoods and employment centers in the Town's industrial park.
- Residential neighborhood extension along the Eel River, activating the corridor with integrated park spaces, trail connections, and water access.
- Continued industrial growth within and around the industrial park, adjacent to the railroad, encouraging industry attraction and expansion in the community.

TOWN OF LA FONTAINE









- Focused development near the Town Center and surrounding neighborhoods providing investment opportunities for offering commercial shops, businesses, and restaurants to the local community.
- Infill residential in existing neighborhoods, specifically new housing types that promote a range of lifestyle options while maintaining the existing character.

TOWN OF LAGRO

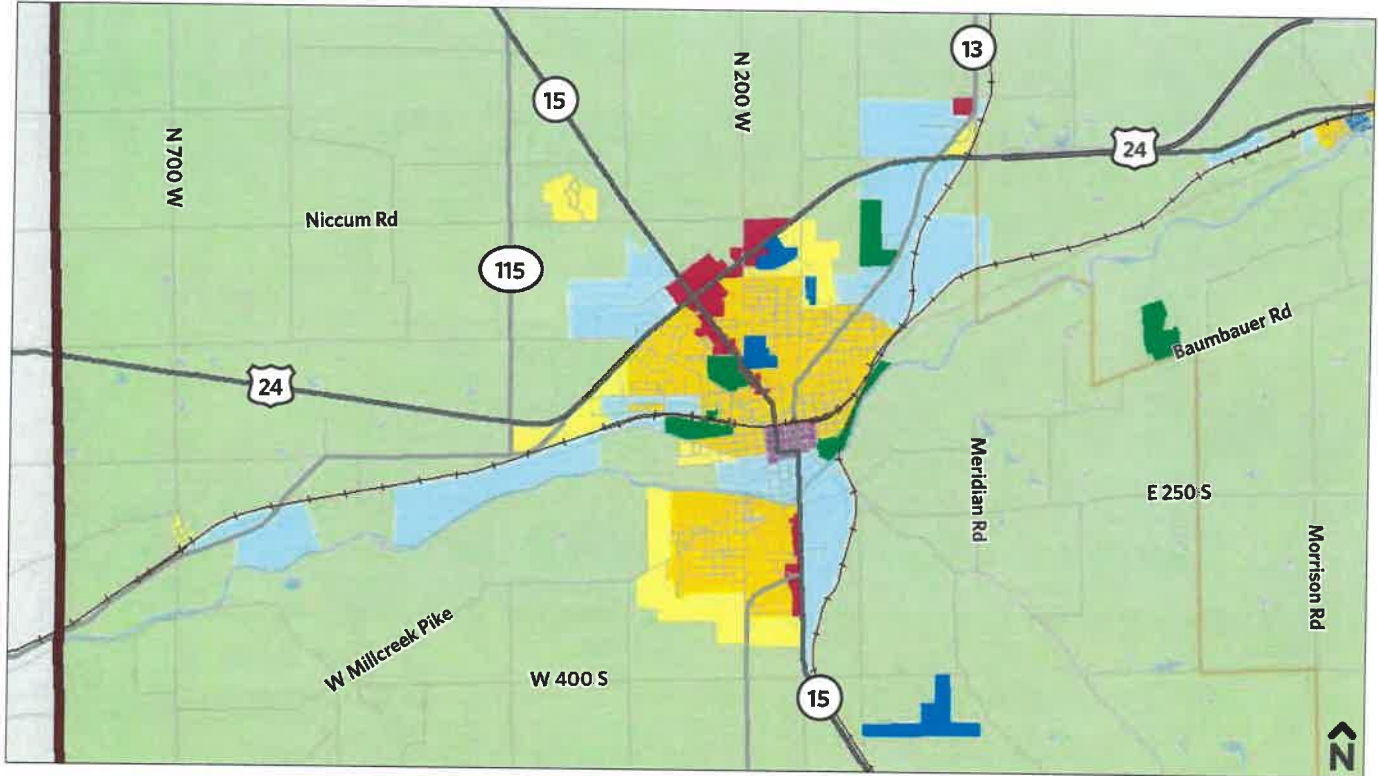
- Focused development near the Town Center and surrounding neighborhoods providing investment opportunities for supporting existing commercial shops and businesses while providing a mix of new services to the community.
- Maintaining existing neighborhoods by encouraging appropriate infill residential that diversifies the housing stock and offers new options to current and future residents.
- Integration of park spaces and water access within existing neighborhoods and adjacent to the Town Center, specifically south along the Wabash River.

TOWN OF ROANN

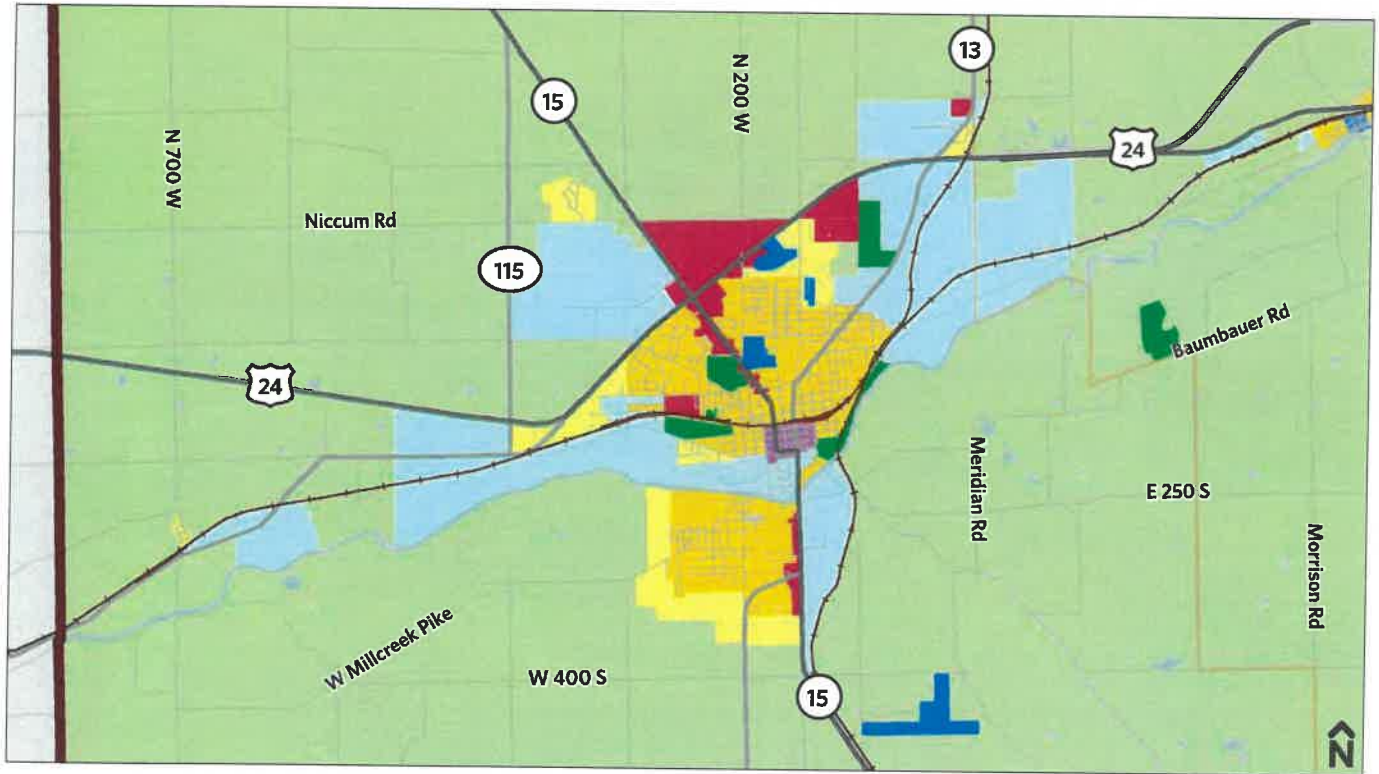
- Town Center investment that provides a wider range of uses to the surrounding neighborhoods including commercial, shops, restaurants, and new housing.
- Creation and integration of a community park space that is centrally located to both the Town Center and existing neighborhoods.
- Improved access to the Eel River, north of SR-16, that provides additional trail connections and natural areas for the community.

 Open Space / Conservation	 Traditional Neighborhood	 Downtown Core
 Rural Living	 Town Center	 Industrial Center
 Mixed Rural Residential	 Commercial Center	 Institutional Campus

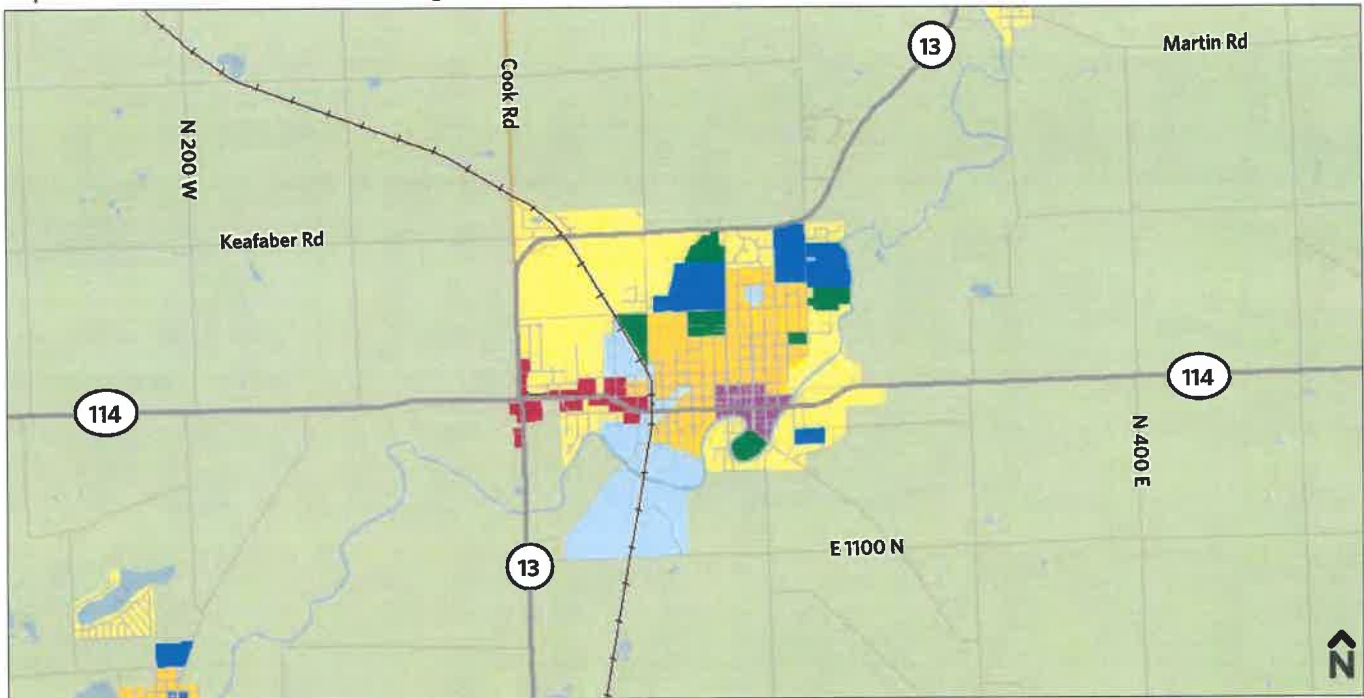
Map 4.3: City of Wabash Existing Land Use



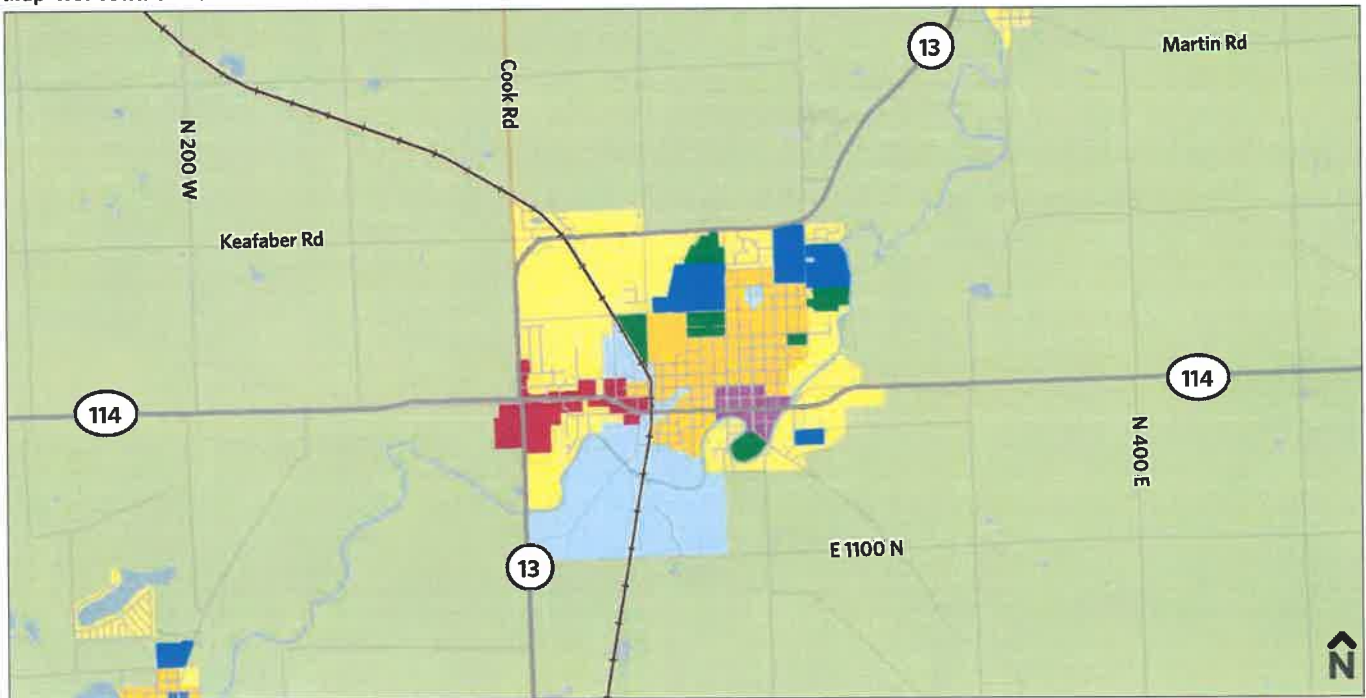
Map 4.4: City of Wabash Future Land Use



Map 4.5: Town of North Manchester Existing Land Use



Map 4.6: Town of North Manchester Future Land Use



Land Use Character Type Legend

 Open Space / Conservation	 Traditional Neighborhood	 Downtown Core
 Rural Living	 Town Center	 Industrial Center
 Mixed Rural Residential	 Commercial Center	 Institutional Campus

Map 4.7: Town of La Fontaine Existing Land Use



Map 4.8: Town of La Fontaine Future Land Use



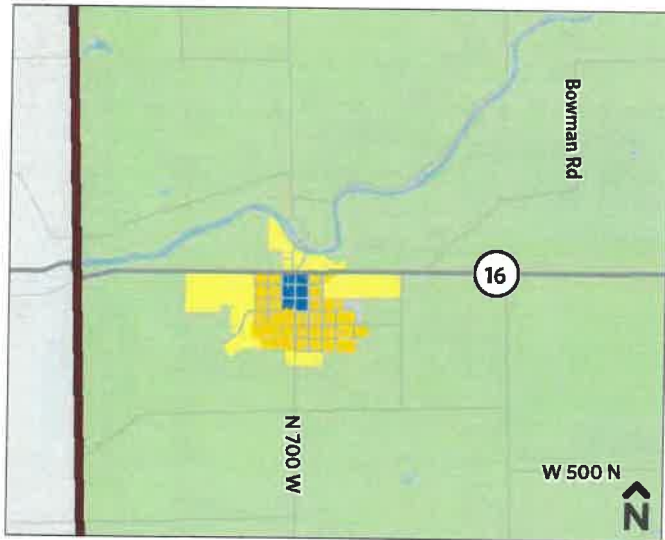
Map 4.9: Town of Lagro Existing Land Use



Map 4.10: Town of Lagro Future Land Use



Map 4.11: Town of Roann Existing Land Use



Map 4.12: Town of Roann Future Land Use



Note: There are no changes between the existing and future land use maps for the Towns of La Fontaine, Lagro, and Roann.

DOWNTOWN CORE



The historic, civic, and cultural centers of urbanized areas. These areas provide a variety of uses in a compact, walkable center such as commercial, office, and residential. Buildings are located very close to one another or are directly attached and are constructed close to the roadway. Streets are connected in a grid pattern with sidewalk and pedestrian connections throughout, encouraging walkability. Complementary uses such as park space or community facilities are closely integrated with other major destinations.

INTENT

- Support infill of vacant lots, especially within the center of communities
- Adapt and reuse existing historic buildings or currently vacant commercial and industrial sites
- Encourage vertical mixed-use development (residential or office above commercial) at an appropriate scale to the district
- Reduce / consolidate surface parking to allow for additional infill development or conversion to public gathering spaces



Example character pattern.

Primary Uses

- ▶ Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)
- ▶ Office
- ▶ Commercial / Retail
- ▶ Multi-family residential
- ▶ Civic / Cultural / Institutional

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Single-family residential
- ▶ Parks and Open Space

TOWN CENTER



Traditional activity centers with a mix of small-scale commercial, office, and residential uses. They may be in either incorporated communities or unincorporated areas but typically serve as the activity center for the community. These areas are generally walkable, being developed on small, grid-like blocks but may not have complete sidewalk connections. Buildings are constructed close to the roadway with small parking areas or some on-street parking adjacent to the main entrance.

INTENT

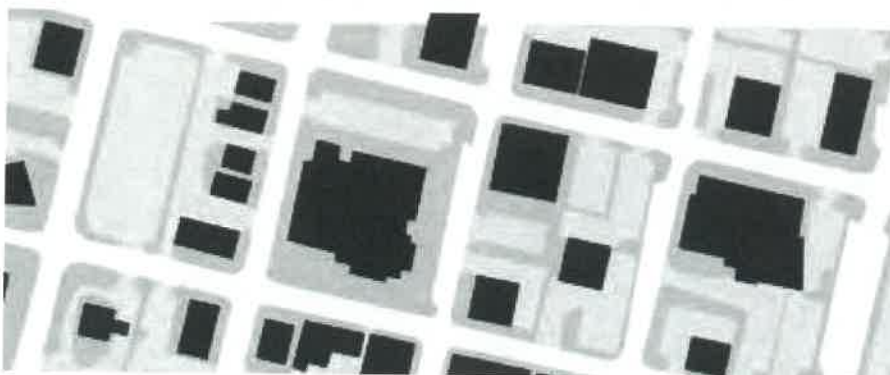
- Provide connectivity between commercial / retail and surrounding residential areas
- Locate new buildings near street on at least one side and accommodate parking to the side or rear of buildings, or provide on-street parking
- Improve / provide public realm features such as signs, sidewalks, landscaping and public art
- Encourage streetscape continuity with respect to scale and character Infill development on vacant lots

Primary Uses

- ▶ Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)
- ▶ Office
- ▶ Commercial / Retail

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Multi-family residential
- ▶ Single-family residential
- ▶ Civic / Institutional
- ▶ Parks and Open Space



Example character pattern.

COMMERCIAL CENTER



These are predominantly commercial and retail areas characterized by large footprint buildings or shopping centers along major corridors. Buildings are set far back from the roadway with surface parking lots between the building and roadway. Sites have minimal landscaping integrated along the edge of parking areas with hardscaping elements such as patios, pavilions, etc. Areas may have some pedestrian / sidewalk connections but are typically accessible by vehicle only due to site layout and corridor use.

INTENT

- Provide connectivity to nearby uses (paths, streets)
- Locate new buildings near street on at least one side and accommodate parking to the side or rear of buildings
- Improve / provide public realm features such as signs, sidewalks and landscaping
- Reduce the number of access points into development for pedestrian and vehicular safety
- Reduce and consolidate surface parking



Example character pattern.

Primary Uses

- ▶ Mixed-use
- ▶ Commercial / Retail
- ▶ Office

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Civic / Institutional
- ▶ Multi-family Residential
- ▶ Parks and Open Space

INSTITUTIONAL CAMPUS



These areas include academic, government, hospital, religious centers, and church centers providing a range of building types to support their functional use. Some sites contain one primary structure while others require several buildings arranged in a campus to provide necessary operations. These areas are typically integrated into neighborhoods or commercial areas and are walkable to many community amenities. Private open space and sidewalk connections are common features that further integrate the site into the surrounding area.

INTENT

- Encourage better physical links between campus and other areas, including through multi modal transportation
- Promote development along the edges of campuses that are compatible with adjacent land uses and character
- Provide economic development opportunities through supporting commercial and retail

Primary Uses

- ▶ Civic / Institutional

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Office
- ▶ Commercial / Retail
- ▶ Parks and Open Space



Example character pattern.

INDUSTRIAL CENTER



These areas are characterized by large footprint manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, and other similar employment oriented uses. Street connections are typically limited to provide direct site service to major corridors and highways. In some instances, businesses have outdoor operations that require additional screening or buffering from adjacent development. Most sites have multiple access drives to separate general employee and customer traffic from heavy truck or machine movement.

INTENT

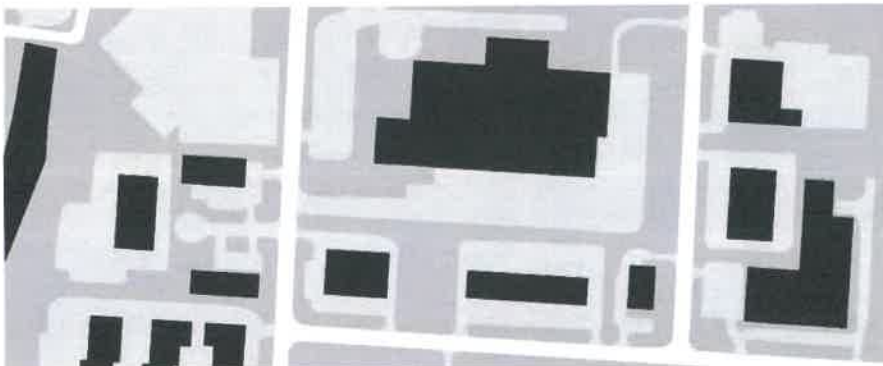
- Promote opportunities for larger employers to locate and conduct business, as well as for the clustering of businesses
- Ensure adequate utilities and transportation to support business activities and operations
- Encourage use of appropriate design covenants to integrate industrial parks into the surrounding community with appropriate separation or buffering from neighborhoods and parks

Primary Uses

- ▶ Industrial
- ▶ Light Industrial
- ▶ Office
- ▶ Commercial

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Retail
- ▶ Parks and Open Space



Example character pattern.

TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD



These consist of primarily residential areas featuring a mix of housing types such as detached single-family, duplex, manufactured home parks, and townhomes. These areas are typically near activity centers and developed in a traditional, grid-like street pattern. Housing is generally older and can include historic neighborhoods or properties near the center of the community. New infill residential can occur throughout the neighborhood taking a variety of forms from detached single-family to townhomes. These neighborhoods can include appropriately scaled retail or office uses and complementary uses like parks or community facilities.

INTENT

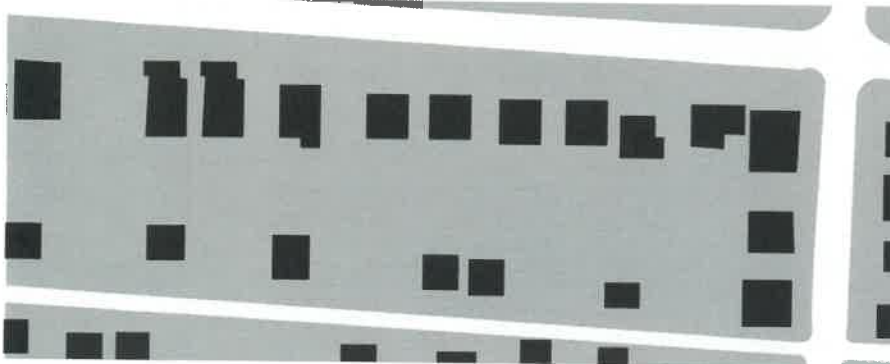
- Provide streetscape features such as sidewalks, street trees, and lighting
- Introduce neighborhood-scale commercial centers at key intersections
- Allow neighborhood-scale commercial or mixed-use centers at key intersections within neighborhoods

Primary Uses

- ▶ Multi-family Residential
- ▶ Single-family Residential (small lot)

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Commercial / Retail
- ▶ Parks and Open Space



Example character pattern.

MIXED RURAL RESIDENTIAL



Areas characterized by larger lot residential or standalone subdivisions near the outskirts of a community or adjacent to a rural setting. These areas represent the transition from rural to urban areas providing a mix of small businesses and institutional uses near subdivisions. Homes range in age from older, mid-century stock to modern housing options constructed in new subdivisions. Lots are generally one acre in size near agricultural areas or smaller near activity centers and Traditional Neighborhoods.

INTENT

- Encourage preservation of natural features as open space amenities for the community and visitors to the region
- Promote trail connections for conservation areas and open spaces to create an established, connected greenway system
- Support low-intensity development in designated areas that integrate into the natural landscape

Primary Uses

- ▶ Single-family Residential (large-lot)
- ▶ Agricultural

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Commercial / Retail
- ▶ Institutional / Civic
- ▶ Parks and Open Space



Example character pattern.

RURAL LIVING



These consist of primarily agricultural areas which include single-family residential, agricultural support buildings, small-scale commercial, and institutional uses in a mixed rural setting. Homes and other buildings are generally set back from the roadway but may be developed close enough to share common driveways. Properties are typically over one acre in size and may range up to several acres when adjacent to large farm tracts. These areas may have municipal water and sewer service if located near a more developed portion of the city but are typically served by private water wells and septic systems. These areas may also include light industrial plants, pole barns, utility buildings, or other similar farming facilities that are essential to production.

INTENT

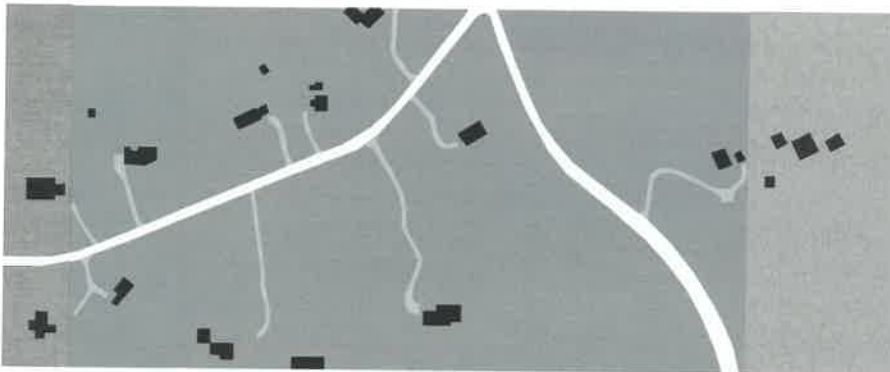
- Support agricultural activities and minimize incompatible land uses
- Promote co-location of local businesses to encourage industry growth
- Limit most new major subdivision development to preserve and protect natural features
- Allow the division of land for minor / large-lot subdivisions, per Indiana law

Primary Uses

- ▶ Agricultural
- ▶ Single-family Residential (large-lot)

Secondary Uses

- ▶ Commercial / Retail
- ▶ Light Industrial
- ▶ Institutional / Civic



Example character pattern.

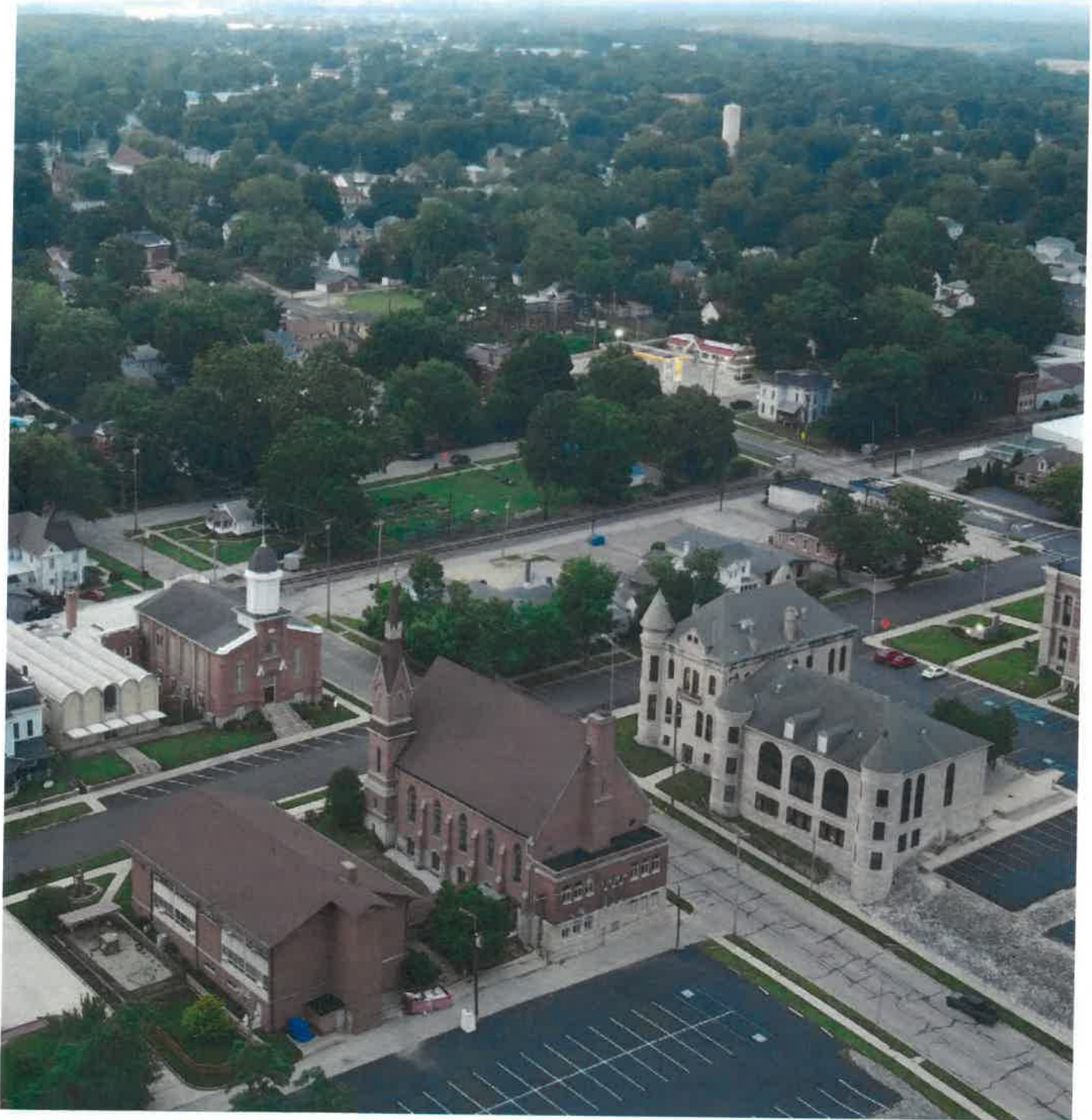
OPEN SPACE / CONSERVATION

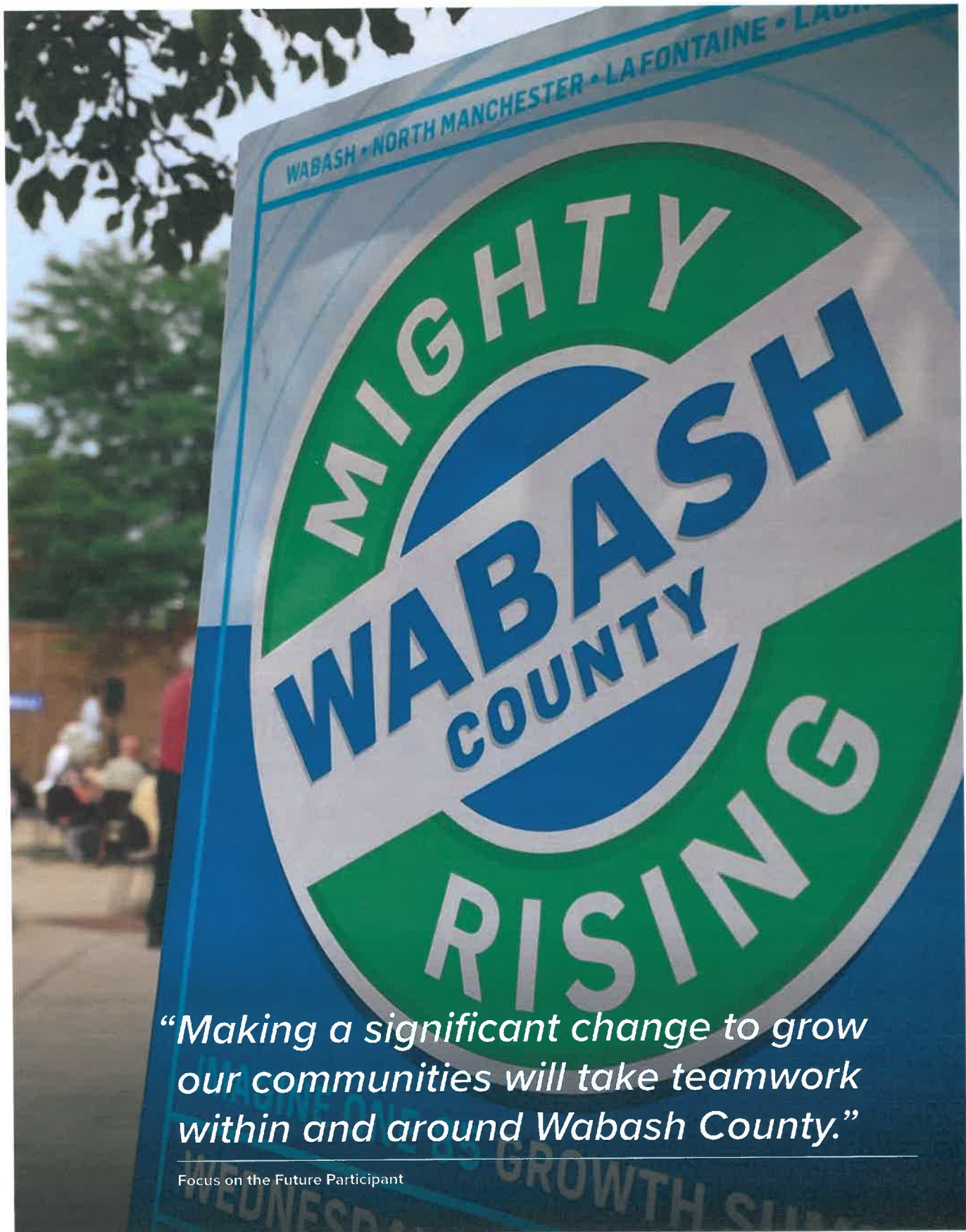


These areas include parks, open spaces, or undeveloped natural areas that may serve recreational or conservation purposes and are protected from future development. These are represented at a variety of scales from neighborhood parks of less than an acre to large, regional conservation sites composed of hundreds of acres. In some instances, additional amenities are provided to enhance the area based on the community or region's desires.

INTENT

- Preserve existing conservation areas
- Improve recreational assets to match community needs





“Making a significant change to grow our communities will take teamwork within and around Wabash County.”

Focus on the Future Participant

CHAPTER 5

THE VISION

Imagine we achieve our goals. Imagine we begin growing again. We build a community that has energy and attracts talent from around the country. The communities of Wabash County emerge as the American example of reinvention and self-determination.

We find ourselves at a critical moment. Without intervention we'll continue to lose population and suffer the related consequences. But together, we've worked hard to imagine an alternative and established a plan to move our communities forward. Population decline is the challenge, Imagine One 85 is our collective response.

WHO ARE WE?



Participants share Mighty Ideas at the Imagine One 85 Growth Summit.

VISION

We are

MIGHTY WABASH COUNTY RISING...

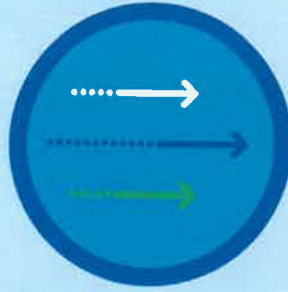
We, the communities of Wabash County, are connected, resilient, and growing. We are open, welcoming, and prosperous. Our spirit, like our natural resources, is flourishing and vibrant.

Leadership shines bright in our county.

We produce and attract energetic and capable young citizens. Wabash County is a great place to live, work, and learn.

Residents and visitors thrive here.





Vision → Goal → Actions

PLAN STRUCTURE

This plan is organized into five topic areas, which reflect themes from community input. Each topic area is supported by a goal and several objectives that serve to organize the 85 specific actions detailed in the plan.

Vision

Unified aspirations for the future quality of life and place across all the communities.

Goals

Intended outcomes expressed in simple terms for the plan's five topic areas.

Objectives

Sub themes within the goal that serve to organize actions.

Actions

A project, policy, or program.

GREAT PLACES (GP)

A range of diverse and beautiful environments – thriving town centers, productive agricultural lands, verdant natural spaces – that, collectively, define Wabash County.

PROSPERITY (PR)

A strong and growing network of communities built through their commitment to competitive and lifelong education, support for entrepreneurs and local businesses, and investment into bold projects and initiatives.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY (CO)

A healthy housing system with a wide range of options, safe and attractive neighborhoods, and choices for residents of all ages and lifestyles.

FOUNDATIONS (FD)

A reliable base of enabling infrastructure helps to connect, grow, and protect our communities, while also supporting logical investments that expand opportunities for residents and businesses.

IMPLEMENTATION (IM)

A commitment to the people of Wabash County to realize the vision and goals of the Imagine One 85 process through strategic investment, logical sequencing, and ongoing monitoring and maintenance.



“Good things can happen when a few capable citizens put their heads together toward a common cause.”

Focus on the Future Participant

CHAPTER 6

THE ACTION AGENDA

The Imagine One 85 Comprehensive Plan is a collection of actions that, when achieved, will move the community closer to its vision and establish a strong growth trajectory for decades to come. These actions are discrete policies, projects or programs. They include existing initiatives to be lifted up and better supported and new actions applied from best practice research and community conversation. On the whole, the Action Agenda is a menu of community-supported and Wabash County-tailored opportunities to move the communities forward.

REPRESENTING THE COMMUNITIES

Wabash County is home to more than five unique communities each with its own story, stakeholders, and special set of opportunities. These places are connected by the county's rich agricultural heritage and abundant natural spaces. Each of these communities played a strong role in developing this plan. Through direct engagement and analysis the Steering Committee and planning team has gathered an action agenda (presented through the subsequent chapters) that will have a positive impact on each community.

WHY THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

This Action Agenda includes dozens of proposals to enhance the quality of life and quality of place in Wabash County. These actions were derived through a robust community conversation, and strong research and analysis. These processes were conducted in parallel with the findings, one informing the other. The public process was an iterative conversation with the community and stakeholders about the future of the communities of Wabash County. Using real data and analysis to inform the discussion, community members were asked to consider the best way forward. At the same time, the planning team conducted its own research into the county's conditions and trends. This research, coupled with the input from the community, revealed areas for further study. Within the Imagine

One 85 recommendations, specific actions have been identified as community priorities due to their ability for immediate and transformative impact. These are listed on Page 66 and identified with a unique icon in the Action Agenda.

HOW TO READ THE AGENDA

The action recommendations represent resonant areas of discussion through the process and are introduced in this section. Each of these recommendations is responding to a central challenge or opportunity identified through the research or community conversation. These actions vary significantly in terms of scale, timing, responsibility, and cost. They range from small ideas to help carry forward the existing community momentum to transformational projects that will require significant resources and collaboration. Every one of the action proposals has been linked to an implementation strategy, detailed in the Implementation Chapter.

Implementation is a critical focus within the Action Agenda and at its core, the ability to fund these recommendations. Through the process, a detailed fiscal analysis was conducted on the communities existing capacity and untapped revenue sources. These takeaways along with an overview of each community are provided on the following pages. This information provides an important foundation when considering how to implement Imagine One 85 actions.

FISCAL REVIEW OF WABASH COUNTY

Achieving the Imagine One 85 vision will require the creative use of limited public dollars. Community leaders will need to prioritize resources that are aligned with the strategic vision. This may require elected officials to implement new or alternative revenue sources to provide for the investments necessary for long term economic and fiscal growth.

LOCAL INCOME TAX

Wabash County imposes more income tax per-capita than any other county in the region. The local income tax is a flexible source of funding, and has strong potential for growth as wealth increases in Wabash County. However, the County should work to understand the competitive implications of its tax rate as it attracts new residents.

Wabash County has maximized the income tax rate, so there is no additional capacity to increase the rate in the future. This means income tax revenue growth is dependent on increasing personal income, the tax base, within the county and adding new residents.

PROPERTY TAX

Property tax rates in Indiana are limited by the State’s constitution. In addition, the property tax base in Wabash County has grown slowly over the past decade. Combined, these factors limit the prospect for future property tax revenue growth for Wabash County and its communities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Wabash County must increase its tax base to grow its revenues. The County has already maximized its income tax rate (for government expenditures), and has limited property tax rate capacity due to the constitutional rate caps. Therefore, the County must grow its tax base(s) to increase local government revenues.

In Indiana, local income taxes are paid to the county of residence, so population growth is a path to revenue growth. Even commuters, who live in Wabash County, but work elsewhere contribute to the income tax base.

Property tax base growth comes from capital investment – in housing, business,

Figure 6.1: Local Income Tax Revenue



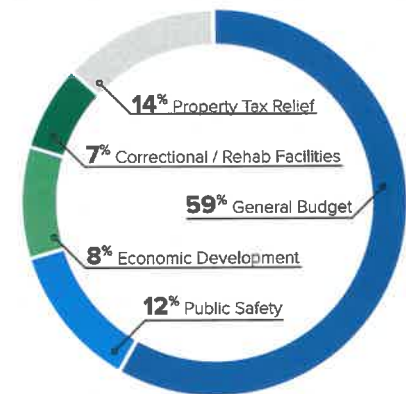
Source: Policy Analytics

and agriculture. Local leaders must balance the incentives necessary to attract private investment with the growth of the property tax base needed to maintain public services and infrastructure.

A capital plan is needed to match resources to priorities. Elected officials will need to make decisions regarding funding priorities and trade-offs. A comprehensive capital plan for each community will align investment priorities to available revenues to create realistic time horizons and inform phasing decisions. A capital plan will also identify resource shortfalls, so that elected officials can reallocate resources or leverage new revenue sources, however capital planning can pinpoint projects and expenditures which will enhance and expand revenue sources, new and existing.

Wabash county communities currently use debt on a very limited basis. While overextending municipal finances carries negative consequences, the smart, sustainable use of debt allows communities to leverage current resources into projects that will serve their communities for years. Capital planning will help communities

Figure 6.2: Allocation of Local Income Tax



Source: Wabash County LIT Expenditure Rates (CY 2022)

efficiently use debt to invest in long-lived projects, and to understand when and where additional resources are needed.

New revenue sources should be considered for transformational projects. Nobody likes new taxes. However, new revenue sources can be leveraged to address historic underinvestment and invest in projects that will provide long-term economic returns. The local food and beverage tax, and the county and municipal wheel tax are revenue sources used by other peer communities in Indiana.

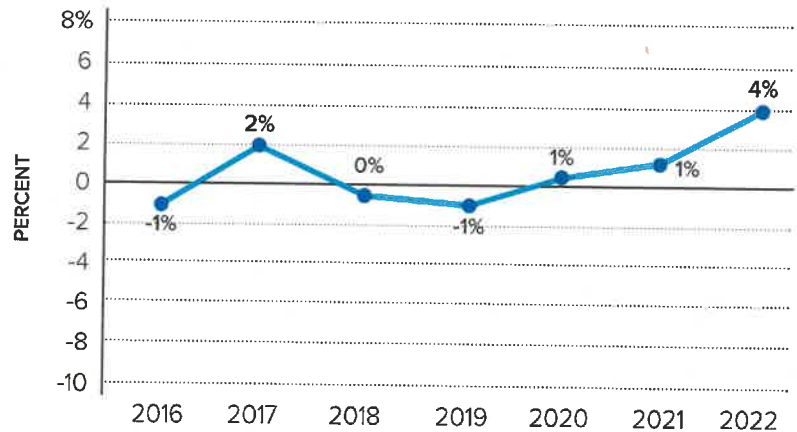
WABASH COUNTY

Successful plans require an understanding of a communities fiscal capacity and the availability of alternative or new revenue sources. These fiscal profiles provide a summary of key data points relevant to the strategic planning process and are intended as a resource when considering action implementation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TAX BASE CHANGE (2015-2022)

+0.8 percent

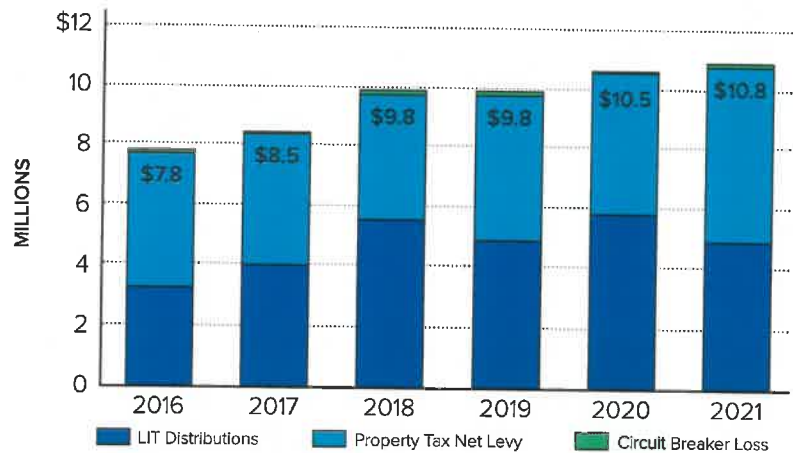
Changes to farmland assessments caused volatility in the tax base through 2019, but the County has experienced three consecutive years of assessed value growth since.



LOCAL FUNDING

\$10.8 million

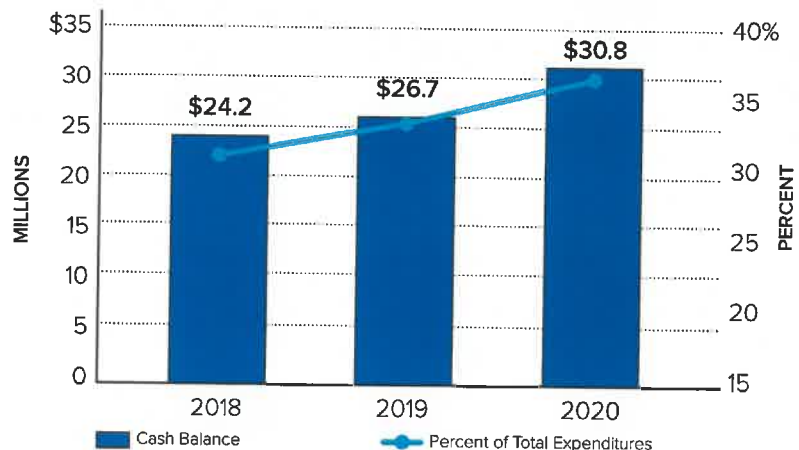
Wabash County receives roughly equal funding from property taxes and local income tax. Since 2016, income tax revenues have increased 38 percent. Circuit breaker impact is on an upward trend, reaching 6.5 percent of property tax levies in 2021.



YEAR-END CASH BALANCE

\$31 million

Strong cash reserves provide flexibility for unexpected revenue fluctuations or costly events / expenses. Year-end cash reserves have increased each year since 2018. In 2020, Wabash County held approximately four months worth of cash reserves.



AVERAGE HOMESTEAD VALUE

\$132,000

Wabash County’s tax base is primarily agricultural and has been significantly impacted by changes in farmland assessment practices. Tax base growth has occurred primarily in the areas surrounding the City of Wabash and in the northeast portion of the county.

LEGEND

- Greater than 10% Increase
- 5 to 10%
- 3 to 5%
- 0 to 3%
- 0 to -3%
- 3 to -5%
- 5 to -10%
- Greater than 10% Decrease
- Tax Exempt

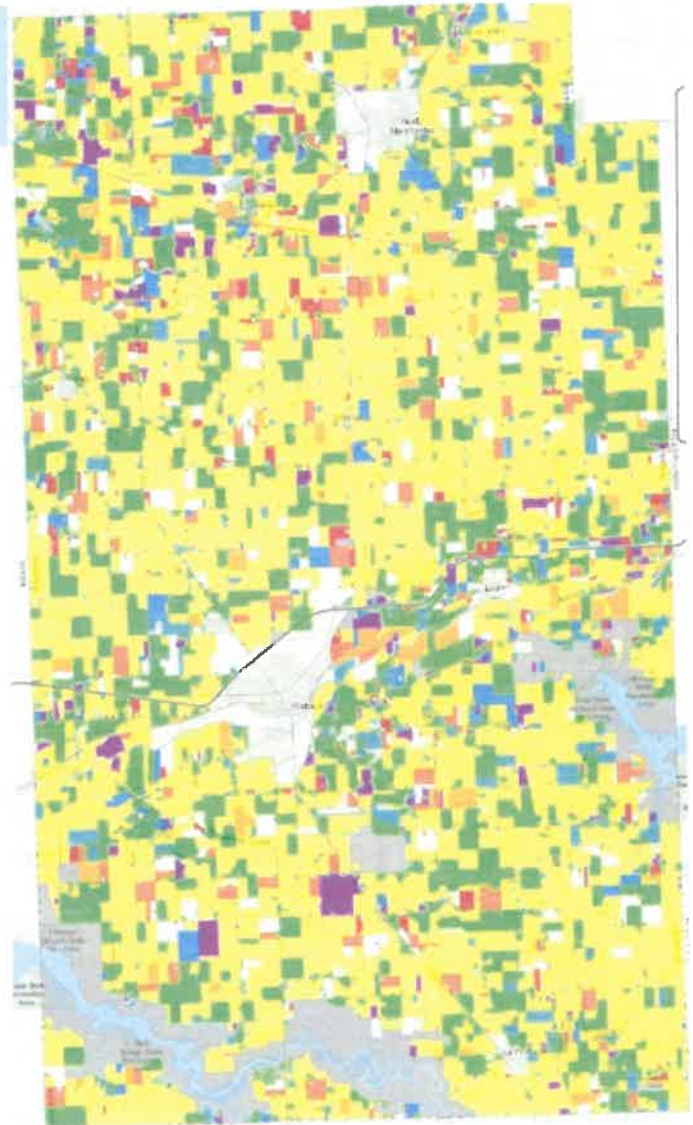


Figure 6.3: County Change in Assessed Land Value (2012-2021)

ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

SOURCE	PROJECTED VALUE	DESCRIPTION
County Wheel Tax and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$1.6 million	Wabash County could generate \$1.6 million annually from enacting a County Wheel Tax and Surtax.
County Food and Beverage Tax Capacity	\$450,000	The County could generate \$450,000 annually from enacting a one percent Food and Beverage Tax on all sales.
Tax Increment Financing as a Percentage of Tax Base	6.5%	Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is in use at the County level and could be further leveraged for economic development.
Cumulative Capital Development Capacity	\$468,000	Counties can enact a cumulative capital fund with a rate up to \$0.333, which would generate \$500,000 annually.
Total Outstanding Debt	\$327,000	Wabash County has \$327,000 in outstanding principal as of its last report, but is in the process of financing a correctional facility

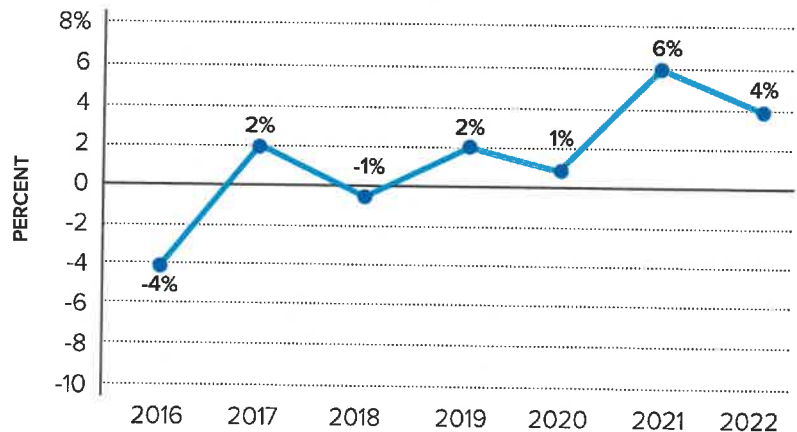
CITY OF WABASH

Successful plans require an understanding of a communities fiscal capacity and the availability of alternative or new revenue sources. These fiscal profiles provide a summary of key data points relevant to the strategic planning process and are intended as a resource when considering action implementation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TAX BASE CHANGE (2015-2022)

+1.3 percent

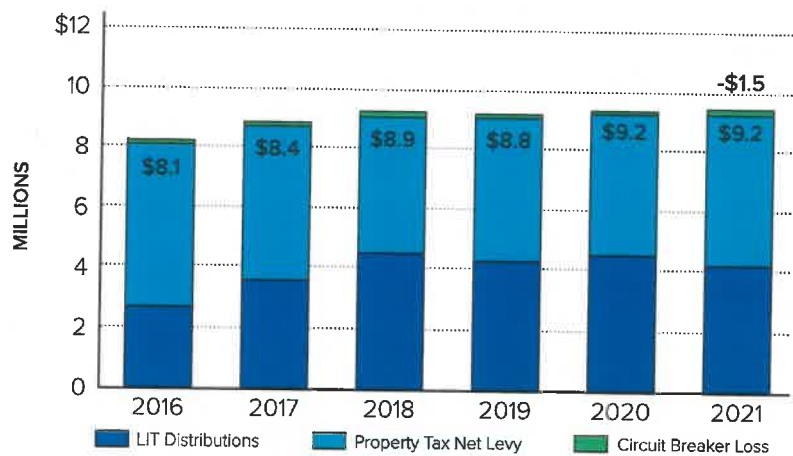
The tax base for Wabash Civil City remained relatively flat through tax year 2020. However, the tax base has increased faster than the County average, and has had two consecutive years of strong growth.



LOCAL FUNDING

\$9.2 million

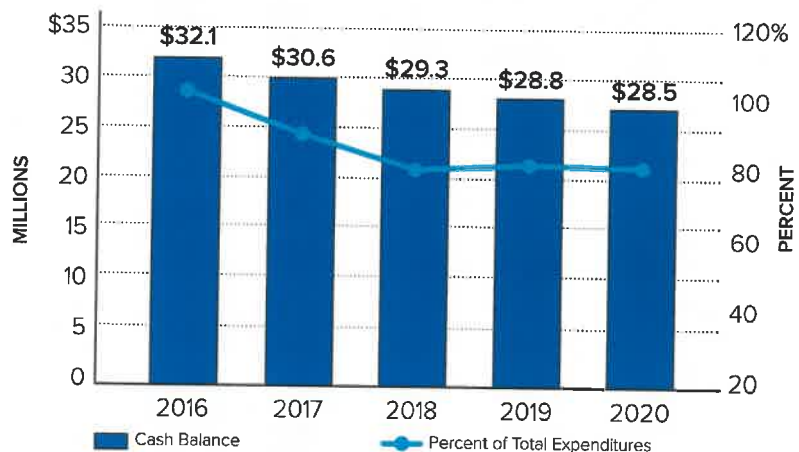
Wabash receives approximately \$9.2 million in local funding via income and property taxes. Circuit breaker loss has had an increasing effect on the fiscal situation, 1.5 million in 2021.



YEAR-END CASH BALANCE

\$28 million

Wabash has managed its cash balance down over the period of 2016-2019, but still maintained nearly 10 months of cash reserves in balance.



AVERAGE HOMESTEAD VALUE

\$100,000

Wabash has experienced moderate growth in the residential sector, but less growth in non-residential assessed value. A major policy will be how and where to expand housing stock in order to attract and retain residents in the community.

LEGEND

- Greater than 10% Increase
- 5 to 10%
- 3 to 5%
- 0 to 3%
- 0 to -3%
- 3 to -5%
- 5 to -10%
- Tax Exempt

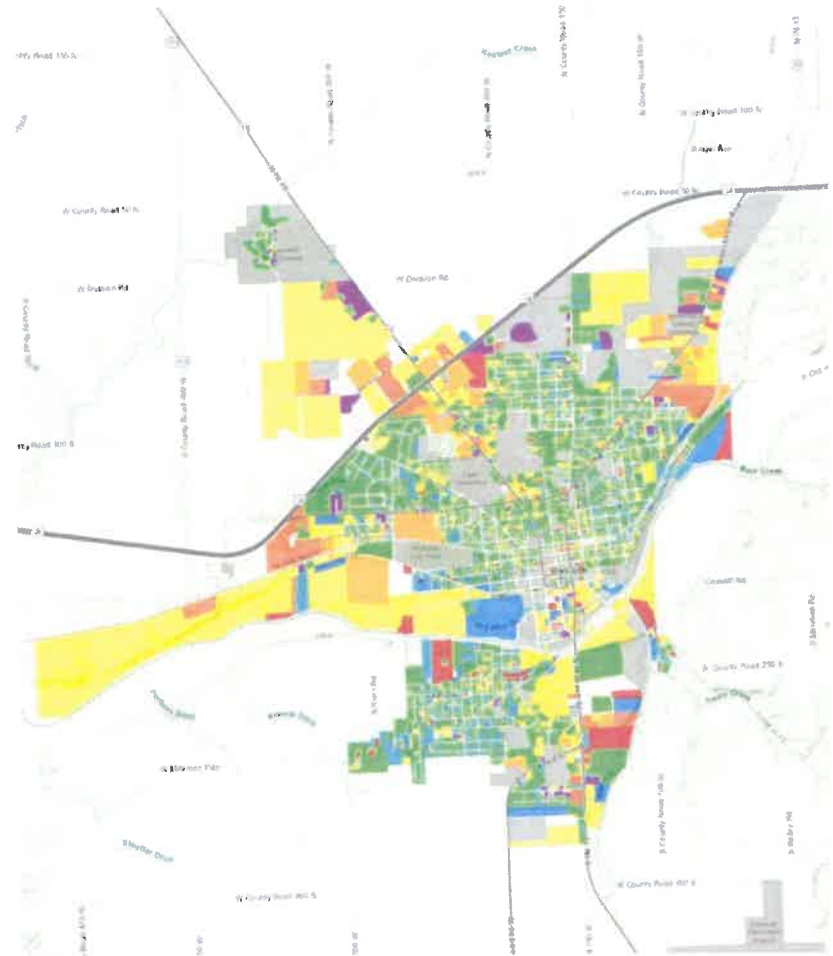


Figure 6.4: City of Wabash Change in Assessed Land Value (2012-2021)

ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

SOURCE	PROJECTED VALUE	DESCRIPTION
County Wheel Tax and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$273,000	Enacting a County Wheel Tax would generate \$273,000 annually for the City of Wabash.
Municipal Wheel and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$342,000	A Municipal Wheel Tax could generate an additional \$342,000 annually for the City. This tax requires a population size of 5,000 residents.
Tax Increment Financing as a Percentage of Tax Base	16%	Wabash captures a relatively high proportion of assessed value in the TIF increment.
Cumulative Capital Development Capacity	\$181,000	Municipalities can levy a cumulative capital fund rate of \$0.05 which would generate \$181,000 in Certified Levy.
Total Outstanding Debt	\$16 million	General obligation debt can be a source of funds for capital projects. Wabash currently carries \$16 million in outstanding debt.

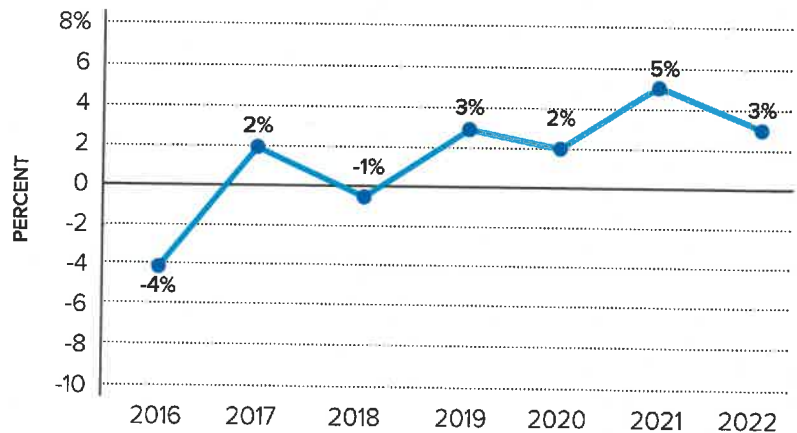
TOWN OF NORTH MANCHESTER

Successful plans require an understanding of a communities fiscal capacity and the availability of alternative or new revenue sources. These fiscal profiles provide a summary of key data points relevant to the strategic planning process and are intended as a resource when considering action implementation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TAX BASE CHANGE (2015-2022)

+1.2 percent

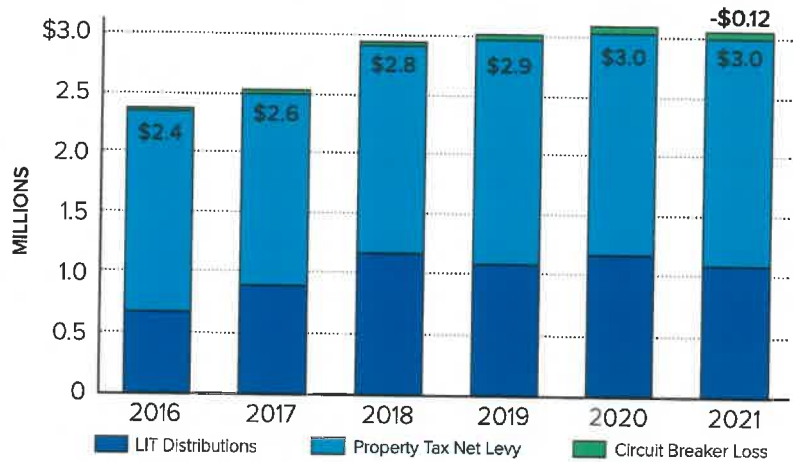
After reductions from 2016-18, the North Manchester tax base has increased at a relatively consistent rate of between two to three percent per year since 2018.



LOCAL FUNDING

\$3 million

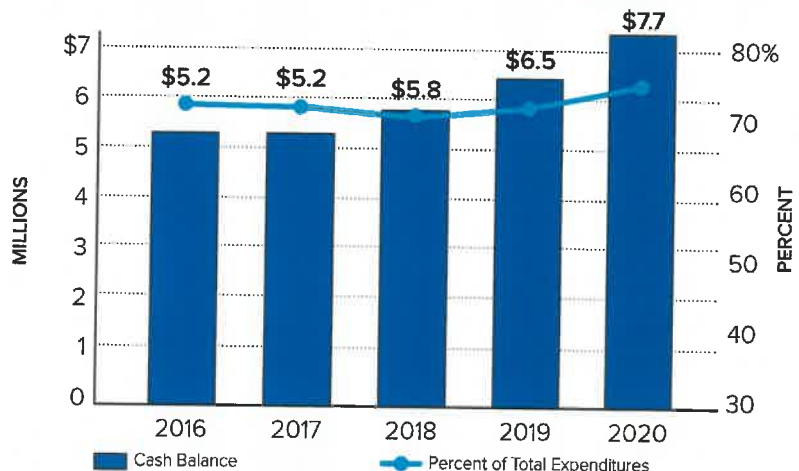
North Manchester has increased its annual revenues by 26 percent since 2016, indicating a greater investment in local services and fiscal stability.



YEAR-END CASH BALANCE

\$7.7 million

Cash reserves have increased since 2016 to 70 percent of the local budget, allowing for future flexibility and resiliency.












AVERAGE HOMESTEAD VALUE

\$118,000

Housing values in North Manchester are higher than in many other areas of the county. Most residential areas have seen between a 0-3 percent in annual assessed value growth over the past decade.

LEGEND

	Greater than 10% Increase
	5 to 10%
	3 to 5%
	0 to 3%
	0 to -3%
	-3 to -5%
	-5 to -10%
	Greater than 10% Decrease
	Tax Exempt

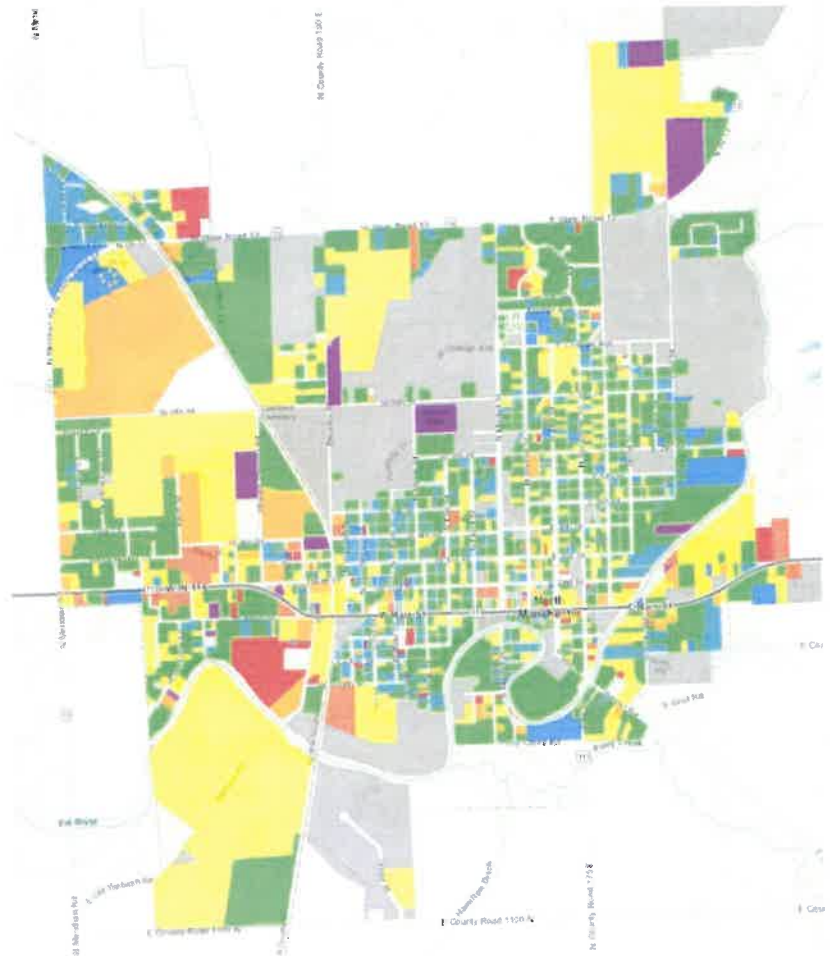


Figure 6.5: North Manchester Change in Assessed Land Value (2012-2021)

ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

SOURCE	PROJECTED VALUE	DESCRIPTION
County Wheel Tax and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$140,000	Enacting a County Wheel Tax would generate \$140,000 annually for the Town of North Manchester.
Municipal Wheel and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$196,000	A Municipal Wheel Tax could generate an additional \$196,000 annually for the Town. This tax requires a population size of 5,000 residents.
Tax Increment Financing as a Percentage of Tax Base	2.7%	North Manchester currently makes limited use of tax increment financing.
Cumulative Capital Development Capacity	\$66,000	Municipalities can levy a cumulative capital fund rate of \$0.05 which would generate \$66,000 in Certified Levy.
Total Outstanding Debt	\$4.8 million	General obligation debt can be a source of funds for capital projects. North Manchester currently carries \$4.8 million in outstanding debt.

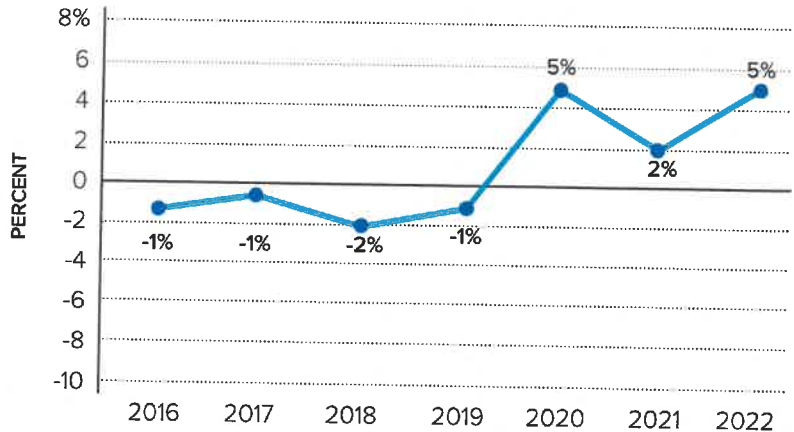
TOWN OF LA FONTAINE

Successful plans require an understanding of a communities fiscal capacity and the availability of alternative or new revenue sources. These fiscal profiles provide a summary of key data points relevant to the strategic planning process and are intended as a resource when considering action implementation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TAX BASE CHANGE (2015-2022)

+1.0 percent

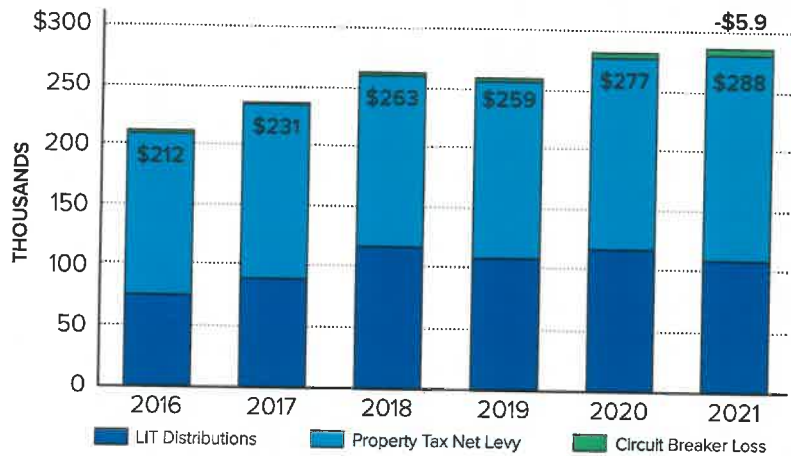
After four years of declining assessed value growth, the La Fontaine tax base began increasing in 2020, and is up by seven percent over the past five years.



LOCAL FUNDING

\$288,000

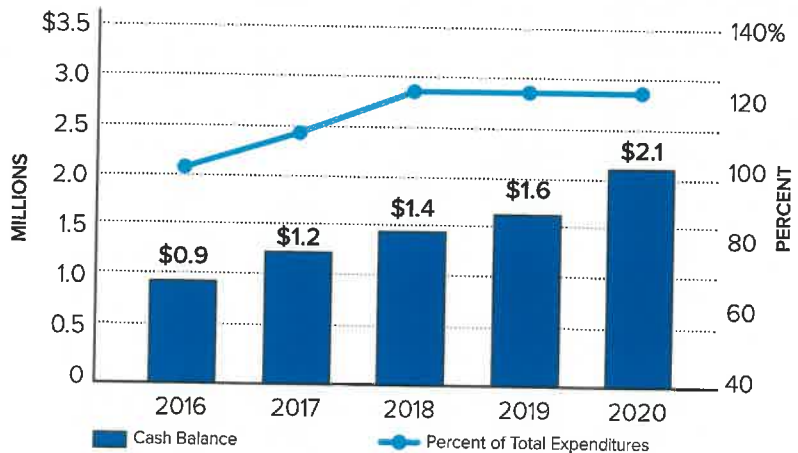
La Fontaine maintains relatively consistent levels of local funding for governmental services and is largely unaffected by circuit breaker losses. Alternative options should be explored if the demand for service delivery increases.



YEAR-END CASH BALANCE

\$2.1 million

La Fontaine maintains relatively large cash reserves and has managed balances at a consistent level since 2018. As a small community, larger reserves provide protection in case of infrequent but often expensive events.



AVERAGE HOMESTEAD VALUE

\$81,000

The housing stock in La Fontaine has appreciated by zero to three percent annually over the past decade. The tax base is predominantly residential, with a few non-residential land uses.

LEGEND

- Greater than 10% Increase
- 5 to 10%
- 3 to 5%
- 0 to 3%
- 0 to -3%
- 3 to -5%
- 5 to -10%
- Greater than 10% Decrease
- Tax Exempt

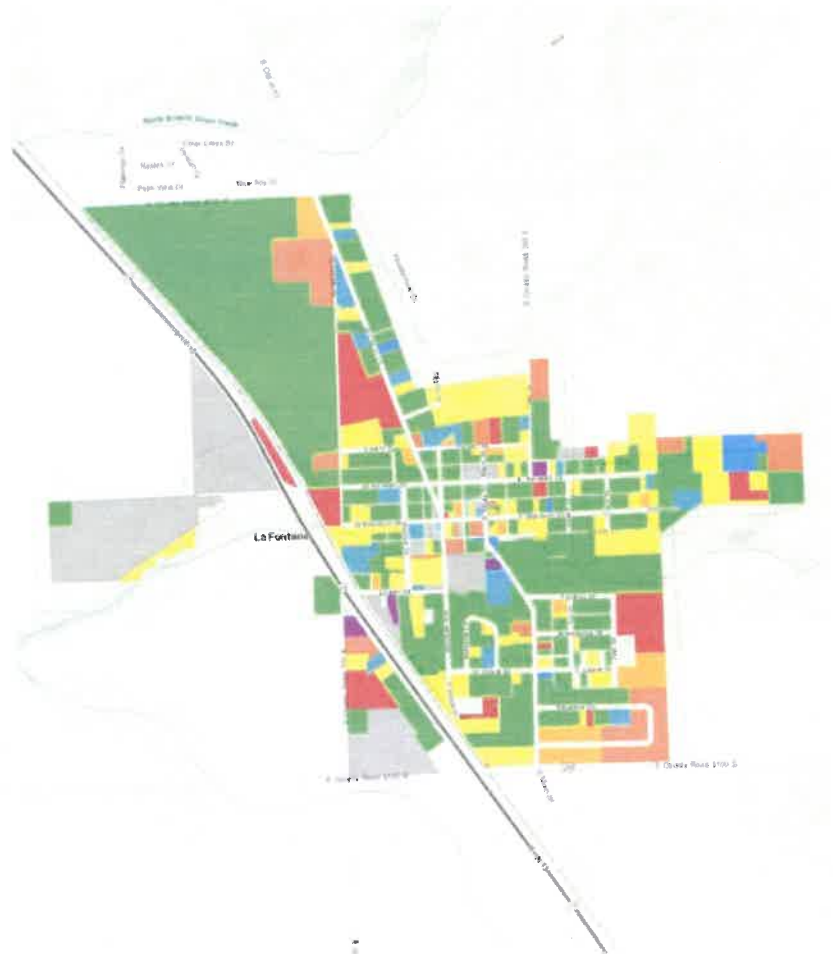


Figure 6.6: La Fontaine Change in Assessed Land Value (2012-2021)

ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

SOURCE	PROJECTED VALUE	DESCRIPTION
County Wheel Tax and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$26,000	Enacting a County Wheel Tax would generate \$26,000 annually for the Town of La Fontaine
Tax Increment Financing as a Percentage of Tax Base	0%	Tax Increment Financing is not currently utilized in La Fontaine but could be viable for financing an appropriate project.
Cumulative Capital Development Capacity	\$6,700	Municipalities can levy a cumulative capital fund rate of \$0.05 which would generate \$6,700 in Certified Levy.
Total Outstanding Debt	\$1.5 million	General obligation debt can be a source of funds for capital projects. La Fontaine currently carries \$1.5 million in outstanding debt.

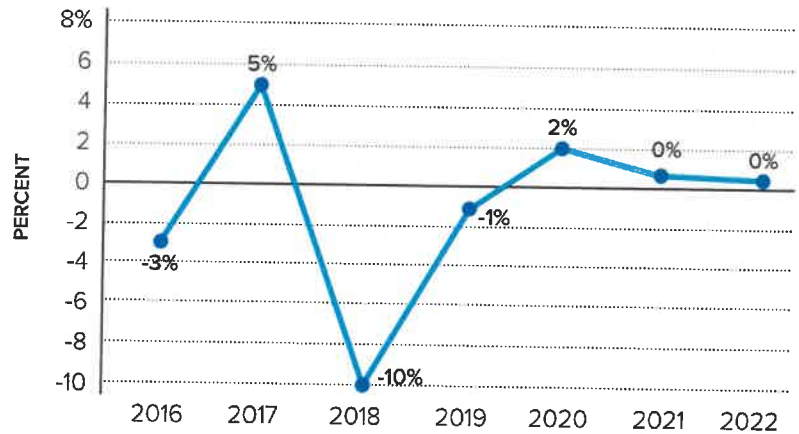
TOWN OF LAGRO

Successful plans require an understanding of a communities fiscal capacity and the availability of alternative or new revenue sources. These fiscal profiles provide a summary of key data points relevant to the strategic planning process and are intended as a resource when considering action implementation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TAX BASE CHANGE (2015-2022)

-1.0 percent

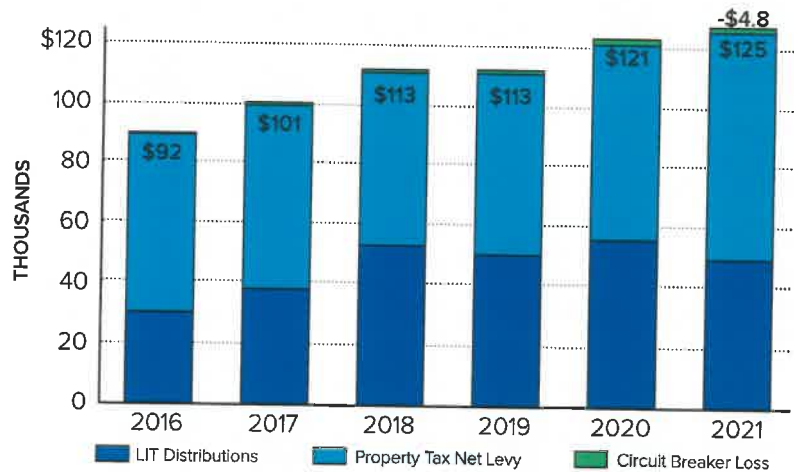
Lagro has experienced a net reduction in tax base since 2016. Slow tax base appreciation limits the town’s ability to generate new revenues without increasing property taxes.



LOCAL FUNDING

\$125,000

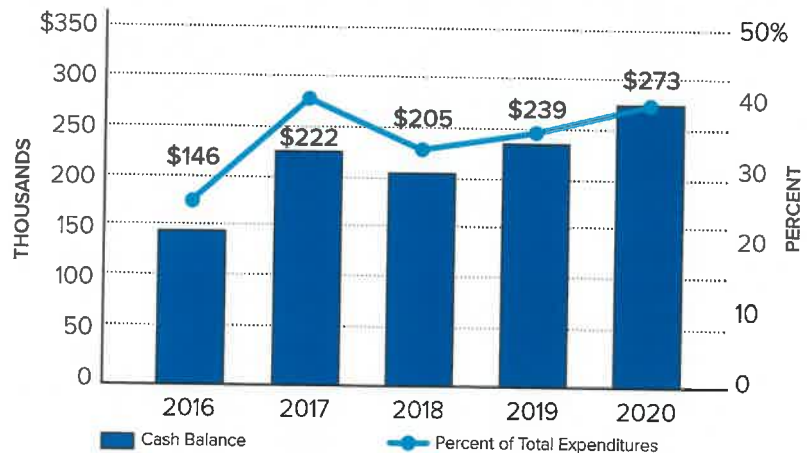
Local government services are funded predominantly by property taxes, though the share of income tax revenues has increased substantially since 2016.



YEAR-END CASH BALANCE

\$273,000

Lagro has increased its cash reserves since 2016, but holds a relatively small balance compared to other communities in Wabash County.



AVERAGE HOMESTEAD VALUE

\$49,000

Lagro has the lowest average home value in the County. Its smaller and older housing stock limits the potential for long-term tax base growth without new investment.

LEGEND

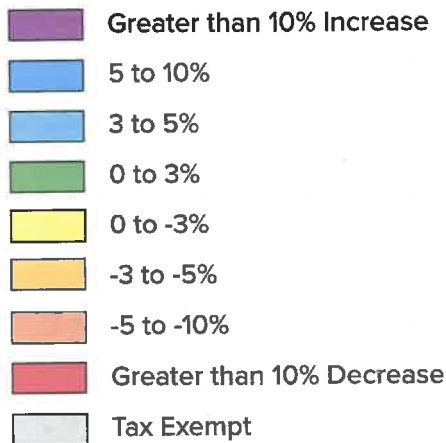


Figure 6.7: Lagro Change in Assessed Land Value (2012-2021)

ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

SOURCE	PROJECTED VALUE	DESCRIPTION
County Wheel Tax and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$8,000	Enacting a County Wheel Tax would generate \$8,000 annually for the Town of Lagro.
Tax Increment Financing as a Percentage of Tax Base	0%	Tax Increment Financing is not currently utilized in Lagro but could be viable for financing an appropriate project.
Cumulative Capital Development Capacity	\$2,300	Municipalities can levy a cumulative capital fund rate of \$0.05 which would generate \$2,300 in Certified Levy.
Total Outstanding Debt	\$259,000	General obligation debt can be a source of funds for capital projects. Lagro currently carries \$259,000 in outstanding debt.

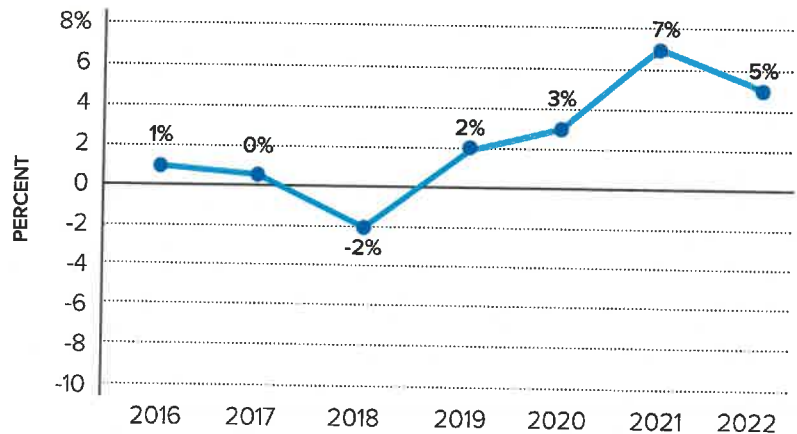
TOWN OF ROANN

Successful plans require an understanding of a communities fiscal capacity and the availability of alternative or new revenue sources. These fiscal profiles provide a summary of key data points relevant to the strategic planning process and are intended as a resource when considering action implementation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TAX BASE CHANGE (2015-2022)

+2.0 percent

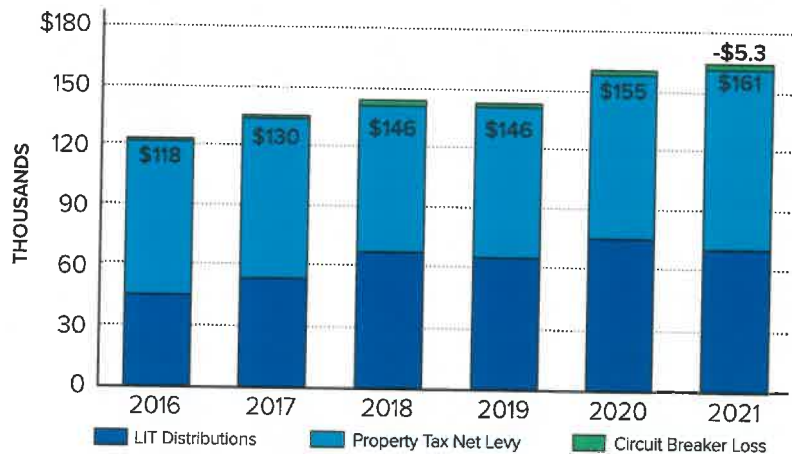
Roann's tax base has increased by over two percent annually since 2016, the fastest pace of any municipality in Wabash County.



LOCAL FUNDING

\$161,000

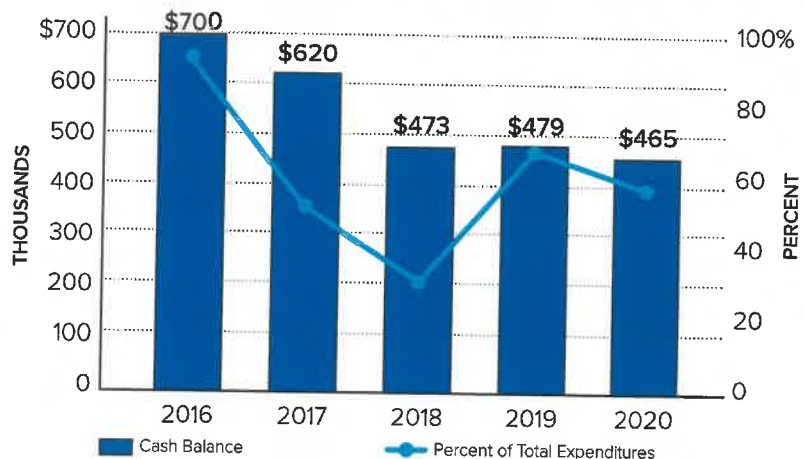
Local funding sources have remained at a relatively stable rate since 2017. Approximately 40 percent of Roann's local tax revenue is derived from income taxes.



YEAR-END CASH BALANCE

\$465,000

Roann's cash reserves have remained stable since 2018 and represent approximately 60 percent of annual expenditures. This provides seven months of ongoing cash reserves.



AVERAGE HOMESTEAD VALUE

\$88,000

The average home value in Roann is \$88K, the highest of the three smaller communities. Most residential property within the town tax base has increased by zero to three percent annually over the last decade.

LEGEND

- Greater than 10% Increase
- 5 to 10%
- 3 to 5%
- 0 to 3%
- 0 to -3%
- 3 to -5%
- 5 to -10%
- Greater than 10% Decrease
- Tax Exempt

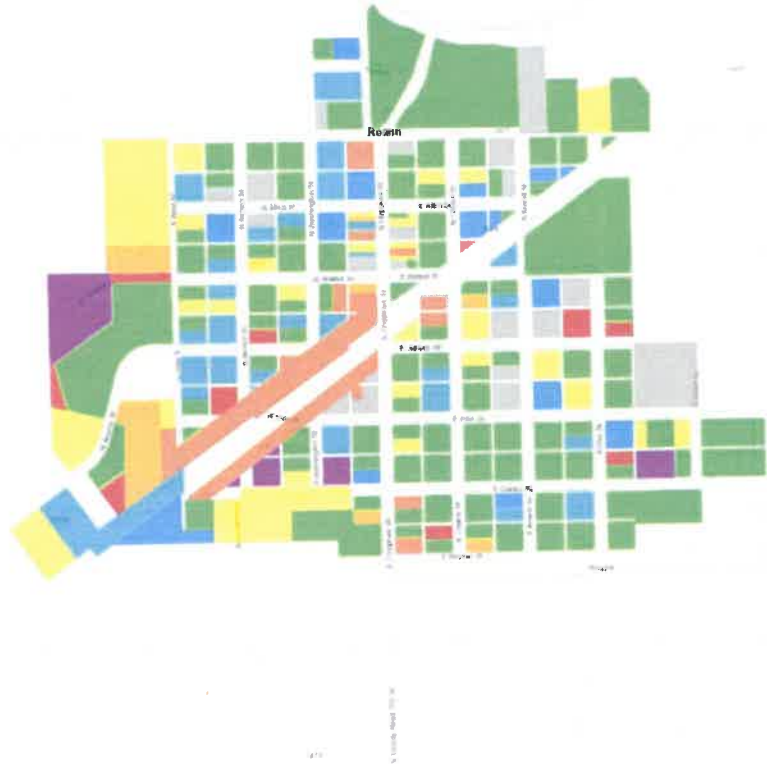
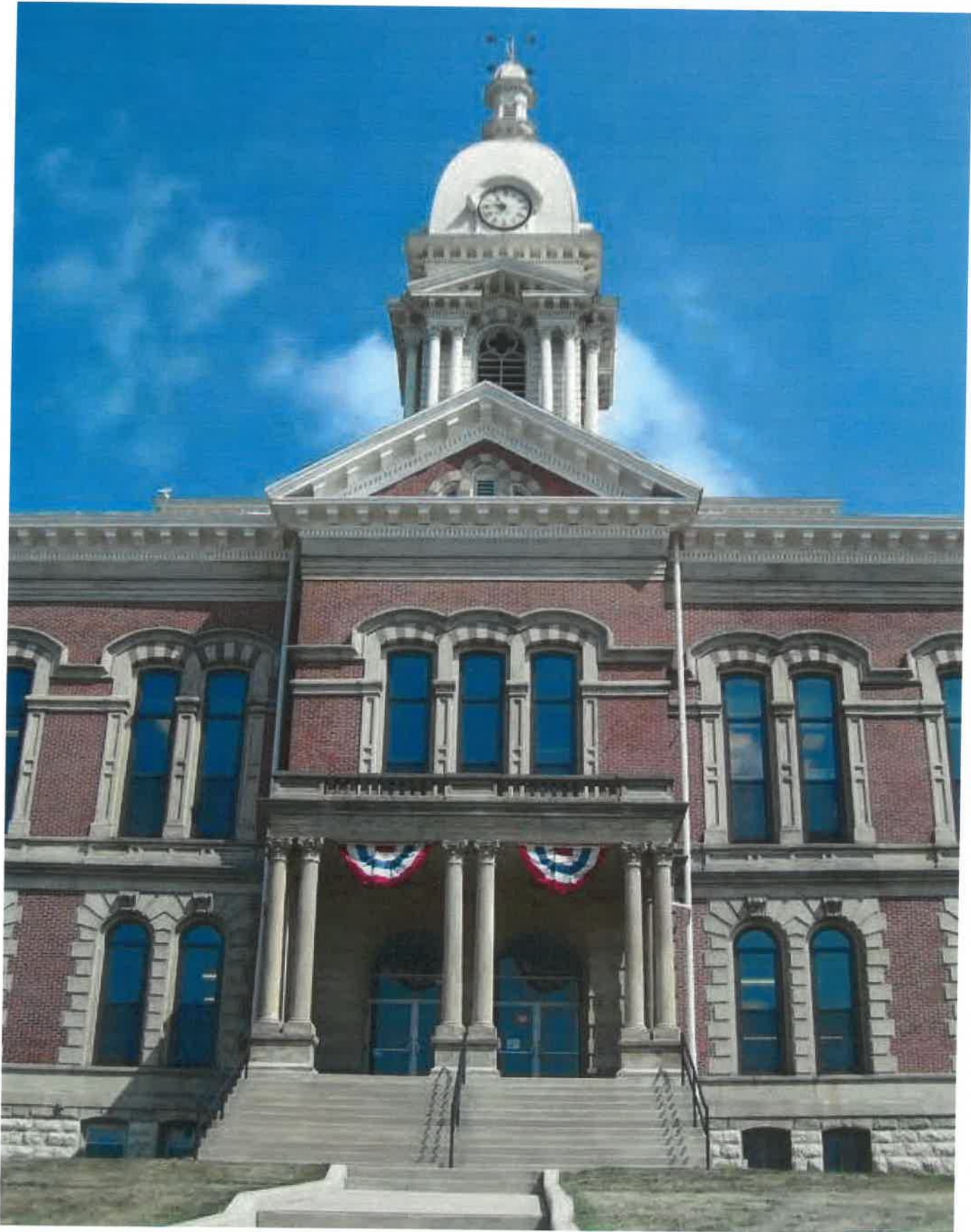


Figure 6.8: Roann Change in Assessed Land Value (2012-2021)

ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

SOURCE	PROJECTED VALUE	DESCRIPTION
County Wheel Tax and Excise Surtax Capacity	\$14,000	Enacting a County Wheel Tax would generate \$14,000 annually for the Town of Roann.
Tax Increment Financing as a Percentage of Tax Base	0%	Tax Increment Financing is not currently utilized in Roann but could be viable for financing an appropriate project.
Cumulative Capital Development Capacity	\$3,700	Municipalities can levy a cumulative capital fund rate of \$0.05 which would generate \$3,700 in Certified Levy.
Total Outstanding Debt	\$89,000	General obligation debt can be a source of funds for capital projects. Roann currently carries \$89,000 in outstanding debt.



THE PRIORITIES

While all the actions identified in Imagine One 85 are important, several actions emerged as priorities for addressing the population decline. These priorities were identified based on community input and leadership insight to move the communities of Wabash County forward into the future. Criteria for evaluating priority actions is outlined below. The priorities are organized by the five topical areas and are not intended to be in a ranked order. The numbered actions are described in detail within the specific area of the action agenda.

CRITERIA FOR A “PRIORITY”

Priority actions serve a unique role within Imagine One 85. These represent pathways forward for the county and its communities by establishing a strong foundation for success. Listed below are the criteria used to evaluate the action recommendations and identify priorities.

Direct Challenge

The action squarely addresses the population decline in order to change the county’s trajectory.

Foundation Building

The action has a strong potential impact that supports multiple goals of Imagine One 85.

Visible

The action demonstrates the influence of Imagine One 85 and will continue to show progress for the county over time.

Catalytic

The action is capable of opening pathways for other action recommendations.

Return-on-Investment

The action has the potential to generate substantial investment returns for funding partners.

THE PRIORITY ACTIONS

Great Places (GP)

- GP 1.1 Pursue a strategic approach to countywide development and growth.
- GP 1.2 Fund a strategic land acquisition program.
- GP 3.1 Pursue the North Manchester Riverfront redevelopment project.
- GP 5.6 Continue to support the County’s commitment to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for all.
- GP 5.8 Launch the “Mighty Wabash County” micro-grant program.

Prosperity (PR)

- PR 1.1 Further develop small business/ entrepreneur recruitment and development programs.
- PR 2.1 Build a spec, flexible industrial and warehouse facility.
- PR 2.4 Develop a robust business and industry retention program.
- PR 3.1 Establish the vision for excellent education in Wabash County.
- PR 3.2 Expand access to quality and affordable childcare.
- PR 5.1 Pursue a diversified tax revenue model through new sources.

Housing and Community (CO)

- CO 1.1 Develop and monitor a spec-housing program.
- CO 2.1 Launch a housing remodel revolving fund.
- CO 2.3 Identify opportunities for quality affordable housing.
- CO 3.1 Conduct and regularly update a countywide Residential Market Analysis.

Foundations (FD)

- FD 2.1 Significantly expand access to high-speed internet.
- FD 2.3 Increase wastewater capacity and utility access.
- FD 3.4 Complete active transportation plans and implement recommendations.



To address population decline, we will...

Look for this symbol next to priority actions identified in Imagine One 85.

FINDING THE FOCUS: WHAT DO WE CONTROL?

It’s easy in community planning to try and “boil the ocean”, with action recommendations that balloon in scale and intended impact. The scale of the challenges present a root cause dilemma where a solution to one challenge reveals the next, deeper challenge, and so on. The Imagine One 85 Steering Committee were committed to an open and iterative planning process where the emergent challenges would be studied and addressed. But the team also committed to taking on actions recommended through the plan. The Action Agenda is, therefore, tightly focused around the initiatives for which the communities of the county have some degree of control or influence.

ACTION AGENDA

GREAT PLACES

Great places are known for their unique character that is defined by the built and natural environment. Preserving, enhancing, and strengthening these places is a critical element of the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter provides guidance for Wabash County’s physical development within the communities, preservation of agricultural land, and protection of natural resources and features. It addresses strategies for supporting main streets, efficient land distribution and use, physical connections between areas, and community experiences around historic, cultural, and natural assets.

GOAL

A range of diverse and beautiful environments – thriving town centers, productive agricultural lands, verdant natural spaces – that, collectively, define Wabash County.

OBJECTIVES

1. Strengthen the efficient use of developed and undeveloped land.
2. Enhance community character through the built environment.
3. Embrace rivers in city and town development.
4. Sustain agriculture as a critical part of the county's identity.
5. Celebrate unique community experiences through attractions and amenities.
6. Ensure physical connections within and between communities.

CHAPTER TOPICS

- Land Use
- Development
- Agriculture
- Natural Resources and Parks
- Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Placemaking

OBJECTIVE 1

Strengthen the efficient use of developed and undeveloped land.

Actions

GP 1.1 Pursue a strategic approach to countywide development and growth. The conceptual development framework leverages the county’s previous planning efforts and existing zoning regulations to define appropriate areas for development. This framework along with the future land use and character types provide a pathway for redevelopment, infill development, and new development across the communities of Wabash County. Policies and regulations at all levels of government should strive to support the framework and future land use and character types. Zoning regulations should align with the recommendations of Imagine One 85 to encourage development that helps stimulate the local economy, elevates community character, and provides new attractions and amenities.



GP 1.2 Fund a strategic land acquisition program. Land acquisition and consolidation is one of many economic development tools for attracting business growth. Local organizations can monitor strategic properties to develop an incentive package and process that makes establishing a new business easier. By establishing a funded acquisition program, local economic professionals can purchase strategic sites for marketing to emerging or growing industries. This program could also support landbanking, where properties that are underused, abandoned, or foreclosed are purchased for future redevelopment opportunities. They can work with communities to understand zoning limitations, utility infrastructure, and site amenities that reduce barriers for relocating an industry to Wabash County. The fund should operate through a strong partnership to ensure that all groups are represented and involved when acquiring and selling property. Efforts should focus on promoting economic development and neighborhood revitalization that enhances the local community.



LANDBANKING

Landbanking is an economic development tool where governmental entities or non-profit organizations purchase vacant, abandoned, or foreclosed properties. Consolidating land allows for future resale and redevelopment opportunities, converting the land into productive use that benefits local property taxes. Examples in Wabash County may include the ongoing redevelopment of the East Market Street corridor and the former General Tire site.

GP 1.3 Support continued reinvestment in Downtown Lagro. The Town of Lagro has seen significant recent investment. Where possible, programs and projects should build on this momentum to encourage additional investment in Downtown Lagro, providing local entrepreneurs incentives for enhancing the community. This includes leveraging opportunities for restaurants, trail connections, housing options, and other similar investments.

GP 1.4 Encourage reuse and rehabilitation of existing industrial structures. Projects that revitalize vacant or run down industrial sites - especially those located in central parts of a community - can bring new life to areas that have been neglected. These sites provide opportunities for creative and adaptive reuse tailored to each community.

GP 1.5 Develop a pop-up retail and temporary use program on vacant lots and in vacant buildings. This program would allow small businesses to rent tenant space in Downtown or Town Center areas of the county. Short-term leases would promote local business growth while activating vacant storefronts and reducing underutilized buildings.

OBJECTIVE 2

Enhance community character through the built environment.

Actions

- GP 2.1 Fund a countywide Facade Improvement Fund.** The City of Wabash recently gained access to \$1.3 million in matching funds to restore 23 historic building facades in the Downtown area. Expanding a facade improvement program to serve and benefit all communities will provide a greater distribution of revitalization efforts around the county.
- GP 2.2 Maintain an endangered historic building list.** This list would serve as an inventory of endangered historic buildings and could include a prioritization scheme for future preservation efforts.
- GP 2.3 Support eligibility determinations and designation of structures and districts on the National Register of Historic Places.** Wabash County has pursued historic designations for over four decades. Continuing this legacy of preservation will require proactive efforts to ensure that the county retains its historic character and heritage.

OBJECTIVE 3

Embrace rivers in city and town development.

Actions

- GP 3.1 Pursue the North Manchester Riverfront redevelopment project.** The riverfront redevelopment project is a significant recommendation that emerged from the North Manchester Comprehensive Plan. The project establishes a regional amenity along the Eel River that connects green and open space to Downtown North Manchester. It includes a river trailway, pedestrian plaza and boardwalk, community pavilion, river access, and many other amenities that build upon the core of the community. This project would redefine downtown, providing economic opportunities for local businesses and recreational attractions for residents and visitors. Efforts should strive to support the implementation of the riverfront redevelopment project as a catalyst for the community. Partnerships should be established to identify and advocate for funding to pursue property acquisition along the river. A phased buildout should be evaluated that seeks to establish the riverfront project over time, making design and funding less burdensome.



GP 3.2 Continue to build access and use of the Eel and Wabash Rivers.

The county’s rivers are great assets for outdoor recreation, but limited public access has kept these resources from reaching their full potential. Creating additional boat launches and other access points will provide community members and visitors with more opportunities to responsibly enjoy the county’s natural features.

GP 3.3 Create incentives to encourage wide natural buffers along streams. Vegetative buffers offer environmental health incentives by filtering sediment and contaminants from stormwater before they reach the water body. Incentives to create and preserve these buffers may encourage developers and landowners to make wise environmental decisions that will help maintain water quality in the county.

OBJECTIVE 4

Sustain agriculture as a critical part of the county’s identity.

Actions

GP 4.1 Expand opportunities for agritourism across the county.

Attracting visitors to farms for recreational, educational, or retail purposes may increase profit margins for local farmers. Supporting and promoting activities such as farm tours, animal interactions, pick-your-own produce, and other experiences would capitalize on existing agricultural assets.

GP 4.2 Study the impact of tile drainage on local flooding. Tiling practices recently introduced in the county have raised concerns about increased flooding in communities downstream such as La Fontaine. A study should be conducted to understand the impacts of these tiling practices and how to mitigate potential flooding.

GP 4.3 Build on the local farm-to-table movement. In 2017, six percent of Wabash farms were already selling directly to consumers and several farms were selling directly to schools. Encouraging and expanding these types of transactions could help support the local economy and foster a greater sense of community.

OBJECTIVE 5

Celebrate unique community experiences through attractions and amenities.

Actions

GP 5.1 Explore a state park designation for the areas around Salamonie Lake. The Salamonie Lake Reservoir area covers more than 12,500 acres in the eastern part of the county. Attaining a State Park designation has the potential to increase tax revenues, drive tourism, increase amenities, and strengthen environmental preservation efforts.

GP 5.2 Work with local entrepreneurs to build a restaurant in Downtown La Fontaine. Increasing amenities and attractions along main streets can serve both nearby residents and members of other communities within the county. La Fontaine has an opportunity to grow local business while providing a destination for Wabash County residents.

GP 5.3 Build a community park in Roann. Roann is a small but beautiful community that would benefit immensely from a designated community park. Providing a park amenity would enhance the character of Roann while providing residents with direct access to recreational opportunities.

GP 5.4 Expand summer arts offerings. Building upon the successes of the Honeywell Arts Academy for professionally pathed musicians, opportunities to create additional summer arts (visual and performing) and other “camp” experiences for all ages should be explored. This initiative could involve connecting with agri-tourism, farm-to-table efforts, as well as rivers, trails, and reservoirs to build a summer “camp” experience.

GP 5.5 Prepare a comprehensive marketing plan. The communities of the county have important assets and opportunities. They could better realize their potential, but more needs to be done to “tell the story.” A comprehensive marketing strategy would include research of the assets and opportunities and specific markets that could be targeted. It would also include the leadership of unique and impactful institutions like the Honeywell Foundation and Manchester University. The marketing strategy should look inward to the county as well as externally as the first step to advance the way residents, employees, businesses, and institutions experience the communities. Branding efforts around the County’s economic opportunities, ecotourism, and agritourism along with wayfinding and county signage should further support the message. It should also identify opportunities for strengthening resident’s and worker’s emotional attachment to place.

GP 5.6 Continue to support the County’s commitment to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for all. Wabash County is committed to celebrating the diversity of its residents and welcoming all backgrounds to its communities. Resources should ensure that existing programs and initiatives are supported, accessible, and made available to all residents of the county. Efforts to celebrate the county’s diversity should be explored, aligning with local opportunities including fairs, festivals, and civic events to share the unique characteristics of the community. Services should also encourage aging in place that provides resources for all age groups in the community.



GP 5.7 Establish a Wabash County peer community program. A peer community program encourages neighboring communities to evaluate and share programs, policies, or initiatives that have been successful in their community for potential countywide implementation. The communities would collaborate with one another to share lessons learned, discuss regional challenges and opportunities, and scale unique or strategic investments throughout the county.



GP 5.8 Launch the “Mighty Wabash County” micro-grant program. Micro-grants allow anyone to seek funds in small amounts (approximately \$1000 or less) for fun creative projects that take place in the county. These efforts build pride in the community and encourage taking action around projects or programs that excite residents. Establishing a micro-grant program enables the community to get involved in shaping their quality of life and quality of place. The program could define different categories of projects that support the vision and objectives of Imagine One 85 such as entrepreneurship and beautification, offering annual opportunities to apply for funding. Grant opportunities can extend over several years to maintain ongoing success stories or help elevate programs or projects to new scales.

GP 5.9 Initiate an inter-community visitation program. The county should establish a program to encourage visiting local sites or businesses across the county. Local “passports” or unique trails can incentivize residents to explore the distinct places in their county and become a “visitor” in their own towns. Tourism connections can attract additional activity, showcasing the places that local residents frequent along with regional destinations.

OBJECTIVE 6

Ensure physical connections within and between communities.

Actions

GP 6.1 Improve connections between the University and Main Street in North Manchester. Manchester University is a distinct asset to the community and through increased and improved connections will strengthen ease of access for Manchester students to enjoy downtown North Manchester.

GP 6.2 Conduct a study on opportunities for trail extensions. Trails serve as a major recreational resource for residents and attract visitors to the County that help support local businesses. Conducting a study would identify major corridors for extending the existing trails based on community feedback and local destinations.

GP 6.3 Perform a feasibility analysis for pedestrian improvements on Miami Street in the City of Wabash. Improvements such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and other streetscape elements may increase pedestrian safety and enhance the overall design. Miami Street, in the City of Wabash, could serve as an initial pilot project for pursuing improvements that can be scaled to other corridors.

ACTION AGENDA

PROSPERITY

Prosperity, both personal and community, is a core element of the Comprehensive Plan. Wabash County's economy is dependent on fostering a strong entrepreneurial spirit that attracts growing industries and a talented workforce. This chapter emphasizes the economic advantages the county and its communities can leverage to grow its industrial portfolio, support educational and professional development, and advance the local economy. The strategies identified will ensure that the communities of Wabash County achieve a strong and sustainable future.

GOAL

A strong and growing network of communities built through their commitment to competitive and lifelong education, support for entrepreneurs and local businesses, and investment into bold projects and initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Provide support for local entrepreneurs.
2. Encourage continued growth of the county's industrial areas.
3. Elevate an environment to develop, attract, and retain talent.
4. Advocate for improving personal prosperity, health, and safety.
5. Maintain a fiscally strong economy.

CHAPTER TOPICS

- Economic Development
- Fiscal Health and Resiliency
- Education
- Public Health

OBJECTIVE 1

Provide support for local entrepreneurs.

Actions

PR 1.1 Further develop small business / entrepreneur recruitment and development programs. The communities of Wabash County are supported by a strong network of local business owners and innovators. These individuals continue the tradition, providing new opportunities and investment to grow their unique industries. Building upon local entrepreneurs, a recruitment and development program would seek out like minded individuals who can provide essential goods and services to the greater Wabash County community. Emerging industries can be marketed to identify “what’s missing” in the county today and the resources in place to support start-ups. Connecting these new businesses to the entrepreneurial community will ensure they leverage all of the county’s assets in establishing, maintaining, and expanding their business. Economic incentives, both current and potential, can also be shared with local business start-ups as an incubation method for remaining in their community. Resources and local partnerships should be aligned to continue and expand programs offered through Grow Wabash County.



PR 1.2 Revisit local business support systems to ensure the right services are being provided. Many local partners have offered long standing and successful systems to support local business growth. As industries shift, these courses, incentives, and programs should be reviewed and evaluated for potential updates to ensure that the local business community has a strong and vibrant support network.

PR 1.3 Expand internship opportunities to support workforce needs. There is a widespread need for employees. The Grow Wabash County is working to address this need, but university students should be considered a resource, from short-term internships to long-term careers. Internships can be a pathway for the students and fill the needs of employers. This could be a comprehensive program or handled by the employers individually. With either option a tracking and reporting a process should be created.

OBJECTIVE 2

Encourage continued growth of the county's industrial areas.

Actions

PR 2.1 Build a spec, flexible industrial and warehouse facility. The county is currently limited in the diversity and availability of specific industrial spaces. Although land is readily available, the cost of new construction and infrastructure connectivity presents a considerable challenge for attracting business growth. To address this challenge, the county should collaborate on the construction of a spec industrial and warehouse facility within an industrial park. The facility would be an appropriate size to allow for large single-tenant users while also providing sufficient space for subdivision to encourage smaller, multi-tenant industries. The "skeleton" structure would provide the essential services and framework for companies to fit out their individual spaces in a timely and cost-effective manner. Similar communities across Indiana and the country have leveraged this as an economic incentive, paving the way for Wabash County to establish its own marketable facility.



PR 2.2 Continue to support and adapt the county's industrial parks. These industrial parks provide opportunities for economic growth and job creation for current and future residents. With significant land available for development, these parks should receive the support necessary to attract new industries such as zoning alignment, utility connections, marketing, and economic incentives.

PR 2.3 Establish a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy. Wabash County and the State of Indiana have a robust history of attracting international investment into the community as evidenced by the four internationally owned companies currently located in the county. Wabash County should create a robust foreign direct investment strategy to pursue international investment and further explore opportunities to support these efforts such as establishing key Sister City relationships and creating the environment to support these new investments.

PR 2.4 Develop a robust business and industry retention program. Wabash County should build upon its existing business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts to ensure that businesses already invested in Wabash County have the necessary support to not only survive but thrive. A strong existing industry base is critical to attracting new businesses to Wabash County.



OBJECTIVE 3

Elevate an environment to develop, attract, and retain talent.

Actions

PR 3.1 Establish the vision for excellent education in Wabash County. Recent studies have revealed opportunities for the county to strengthen and expand its educational system. As an important first step, the county should collaborate on a vision for the future of lifelong learning across the communities of Wabash County. Major stakeholders including school districts, public agencies, local governments, non-profit organizations, and private groups should convene an ongoing discussion around the existing educational system and desired outcomes for the county. This should result in a unified vision that defines the end result and clear steps towards achieving the outcomes identified by the group.



PR 3.2 Expand access to quality and affordable childcare. Early Childhood Education has many known benefits for the developing child. Early childhood education programs also has benefits for families who work full time, employers who want to attract young workers, and communities that count on workforce participation for revenue. Lack of reliable, high quality childcare in Wabash County was responsible for millions of dollars in lost wages, hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost tax revenue, and the loss of the full-time equivalent of nearly 200 employees. In 64% of households with children under five, all adults are working and in need of care for their children. Affordable, quality care is essential for positive education outcomes for children, our future workforce, the retention of current employees and the recruitment of new employees.



PR 3.3 Invest in arts-infused learning opportunities for early childhood education. In collaboration with Honeywell Arts and Entertainment, opportunities should be explored to invest in Visual Thinking Strategies and Arts Integrated Residencies. These learning opportunities will strive to provide curriculum-based, arts-infused learning for all Wabash County students between grades 1-5.

PR 3.4 Strengthen Community Foundation Early Award Scholarship and the Wabash County Promise as public school/private charity collaborations. To create a generation of educated, engaged, and self-sufficient citizens who possess post-secondary preparedness, we champion investments in these programs, which harness the motivational power of saving and early scholarships to create identity, agency, self-sufficiency and a view of the future as education dependent. Early assets help families see post-secondary education and training as the pathway to success, higher paying jobs and a bright future. Assets earned early raise parental and student educational expectations and serve to reduce financial barriers to pursuing training and education after high school.

PR 3.5 Continue the Community Foundation's College Scholarship program for grades 9-12. Build on the consciousness-raising work of early award scholarships by exposing students in grades 9-12 to traditional senior scholarships. The longtime practice of awarding college scholarships to 12th grade students robs the foundation's substantial scholarship funds of the power they have to incentivize college-going during the early years of high school when school work gets more difficult and some students give up on education after high school. Expand senior scholarship application process downward to the ninth grade as a way to build self-confidence in one's own ability to afford college.

PR 3.6 Expand exposure programs for students to include advanced manufacturing and agricultural jobs. The County has a strong history with agricultural innovation and is home to several technical and vocational programs such as Heartland Career Center. These provide unique hands-on-training in emerging industries located within local communities. With the growth potential for advanced manufacturing and agricultural jobs, efforts should support connecting local school districts with local businesses to expose this as an alternative career paths to those currently covered.

PR 3.7 Work with employers to adapt workforce training for adults based on the needs of employees. As industry innovation continues and the workforce demographic changes, employee training needs will shift. Periodic review and evaluation of training courses, programs, and initiatives ensures that employees are provided essential skills to support local industries. Continue funding grants to employees and individuals who are willing to train for a high demand job or skill up in a high demand field.

PR 3.8 Explore the potential for a Purdue Polytech Campus. The Purdue Polytechnic Institute is a growing extension of Purdue University that offers access to technology degrees in a local setting. These extensions provide additional post-secondary options that align with the strong industries in Wabash County. An open dialogue should be established with Purdue University to explore a potential extension in the county, leveraging Wabash County' strong relationship with agricultural and manufacturing industries to guide the conversation.

OBJECTIVE 4

Advocate for improving personal prosperity, health, and safety.

Actions

- PR 4.1 Prepare a countywide health response report to the COVID-19 Pandemic.** The adequacy of the health system, resiliency of local businesses, and adaptability of the education system have all been dramatically tested throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. A countywide report will help to understand how various sectors within the county were affected and how they responded. It will also provide insights into strategies for improving resiliency in the future.
- PR 4.2 Initiate a Safe Routes to School Program.** The Safe Routes to School program encourages youth activity while defining safe and efficient ways for children to get from their neighborhood to school. Establishing this program will promote an active lifestyle through collaborative efforts to identify routes throughout every community.
- PR 4.3 Connect residents without health insurance to applicable federal programs.** 6.8% of the County's population age 19 and over does not have health insurance. Providing information and/or assistance in applying for relevant federal programs may decrease the portion of the population without health insurance coverage.
- PR 4.4 Work with local hospitals and healthcare providers to address transportation gaps.** Healthcare facilities are concentrated in the City of Wabash and North Manchester. Older residents, particularly from the smaller communities, often face difficulties accessing these locations due to transportation limitations and a lack of mobility options. Exploring new and creative transportation options may help improve health access and outcomes for community members. Partnerships with local institution can assist in funding mobility options that provide direct service for those individuals seeking healthcare.

PR 4.5 Create a kindness initiative. The past five or so years saw a significant decline in civility in the country. These are tough times for many people, whether it is a pandemic or economic opportunity. The communities of Wabash County are not immune to this phenomenon. In general, people are less inclined to live and or invest in places that are divisive. Some of this is about politics, some of it is about race and much of it could traced to fear and uncertainty. Some in the county are addressing this. In October 2021, the Board of Trustees of Manchester University adopted an anti-racism resolution to declare the institutions intent on treating people better. To facilitate greater civility and kindness—and stronger brand—a kindness initiative should be created and executed. This can start small and grow to be comprehensive, but it should with visible and impactful activities.

PR 4.6 Develop a strategic plan for a community support network for university students. Manchester University has numerous outwardly focused programs to assist the community. This asset—and its impact on Wabash County—could be greatly enhanced with a focused external program. In other words, a focus by the Town of North Manchester to look inward, to see what the community could do to impact the non-academic challenges of students. A strategic plan should be developed to understand the needs and to create opportunities to support the university students. This could take many forms, from providing additional amenities to addressing food insecurity to expanding internship opportunities in the community.

OBJECTIVE 5

Maintain a fiscally strong economy.

Actions

PR 5.1 Pursue a diversified tax revenue model through new sources.

Wabash County is dependent on two primary sources of revenue for local services: property tax and income tax. The fiscal analysis identified that while the county has seen significant growth in income tax, it is nearing the maximum threshold leaving little room for additional revenue. Property taxes on the other hand, while more consistent, have seen little change over time due to the lack of development across the county. As the communities of Wabash County plan for the future, additional revenue sources should be incorporated into the general services stream. Wheel tax and Food and Beverage taxes represent two primary streams that can greatly improve the financial stability of the county. Pursuing these and additional revenue streams will strengthen resources that can be used for capital improvements and county services, providing long-term benefits and returns.



PR 5.2 Review the fiscal model for county and city expenditure allocations.

Complementing new revenue streams, the county and city should evaluate how funding is allocated based on the detailed fiscal model. This analysis identified critical areas for how the county and city could better utilize existing revenue to provide high-levels of service and address essential infrastructure. An annual or periodic review cycle should be established to monitor progress of new revenue streams and allocations for expenditures to maximize return-on-investments.

PR 5.3 Communicate bonding capacity and “best use” analysis to local leadership.

The analysis and evaluation revealed through Imagine One 85 provides an in-depth understanding of the county’s financial structure. This information will have a significant impact on how local governments can and should operate moving forward. Local leadership should be convened in a series of conversations to share the results of the analysis and discuss potential pathways forward that improve the fiscal resiliency of Wabash County.

PR 5.4 Align local plans and Imagine One 85 priorities for federal funding opportunities.

Several federal programs, such as the American Rescue Plan of 2021 and the pending national Infrastructure Bill, offer a variety of resources to local governments. Establishing partnerships and collaboration among different agencies may help to apply for federal funding to implement priority actions.

PR 5.5 Adopt a countywide Capital Improvement Plan funding model.

A Capital Improvement Plan identifies priority investments for the County that support the business community and residents. Major infrastructure is monitored for maintenance and significant upgrades, allowing the county to plan for large-scale investments several years in advance. The Plan should be continuously monitored and updated to align investment with other local and regional agencies to repair aging infrastructure and pursue improvement projects to bring systems and networks to modern standards.

ACTION AGENDA

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

Neighborhoods represent the quality of life characteristics that attract people to a community. They reflect the lifestyles, personality, and features that residents desire and are essential to the future of Wabash County and its communities. This chapter focuses on the residential options and design elements that compose neighborhood character. It addresses strategies for diversifying housing stock across each community, elevating aesthetics in established neighborhoods, and pursuing opportunities for appropriate growth and revitalization efforts.

GOAL

A healthy housing system with a wide range of options, safe and attractive neighborhoods, and choices for residents of all ages and lifestyles.

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase community housing options and opportunities.
2. Strengthen the vitality, character, and design of existing neighborhoods.
3. Establish models for monitoring housing demand and promoting Wabash County as a welcoming community.

CHAPTER TOPICS

- Housing
- Neighborhoods

OBJECTIVE 1

Increase community housing options and opportunities.

Actions

CO 1.1 Develop and monitor a new spec-housing program. Spec-housing refers to move-in ready homes that are constructed by a homebuilder for a target residential market. The county has seen little to no recent residential development with many homebuilders focused on other areas of the region. Developing a program in collaboration with local homebuilders can provide the county and its communities with new residential growth. A partnership should be established to analyze the residential market to identify specific housing types to pursue. Model home plans should consider existing character in each community, matching the aesthetic and architectural features. Expedited permitting and inspections can ensure the spec-housing is constructed quickly and timely, further supporting new residential growth. Periodic review and updates should occur that refine the program as new housing is constructed across the county.



CO 1.2 Expand housing options for students and workers. Supporting the next generation of workforce is an essential component for the county's population growth. The county should encourage the creation of diverse housing options that serve students, young professionals, and working families. Housing may include single-family, small-lot single-family, townhomes, triplexes and duplexes, or other similar missing housing types.

CO 1.3 Build and launch a countywide housing development task force. Stimulating the housing market will require a diverse group of stakeholders. A task force composed of key public, private, and non-profit organizations should be established to identify the critical challenges for the housing market and develop methods for supporting new residential growth.

CO 1.4 Enable Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) countywide. ADUs provide increased housing diversity and affordability without altering the character of a neighborhood. Allowing development of ADUs countywide, through the zoning ordinance, reduces barriers that would increase the cost of housing development and provides unique options for current and future residents.

CO 1.5 Align resources and regulations to support infill development. Resources for funding opportunities, loan programs, and development regulations should be reviewed and updated to support strategic infill development. Prioritizing smaller communities protects outward growth and encourages investment outside of main streets.

CO 1.6 Establish a countywide Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO). Wabash County should establish a countywide housing development organization (CHDO) responsible for launching and monitoring new housing initiatives. This can include incentives for residential development or programs like My Chatt House which reduce barriers for constructing infill residential while protecting existing neighborhoods.

CO 1.7 Explore the establishment of residential housing incentives. The county should explore establishing residential development tools that will help incentivize further investment in the community such as new residential Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts or other housing designations as available. Local, state, and federal initiatives should also be monitored as they become available to implement.

MY CHATT HOUSE

My Chatt House is a resource developed for the Chattanooga, TN community to encourage appropriate development in two established neighborhoods. A key component of this program is the preparation of pre-designed building plans for both single-family and multi-family homes. The homes are based on architectural styles found in the neighborhoods and include details for the minimum lot size, floor plans, gross square footage, and design elements such as porches, patios, etc. These plans streamline the process for homebuilders by outlining the requirements for homes that match the existing neighborhood character. Local manufacturers are identified for building material specifications to further encourage high-quality design from local industries. The information and supporting graphics reduce the risk for infill development, defining clear expectations for architectural character while reducing overall building costs for the homebuilder.

OBJECTIVE 2

Strengthen the vitality, character, and design of existing neighborhoods.

Actions

CO 2.1 Launch a housing remodel revolving fund. Wabash County has an aging housing stock which places an increasing burden on homeowners to maintain and modernize their homes. Providing financial incentives to lessen this burden provides residents with a system for seeking renovations that enhance return-of-investment for individuals and the surrounding neighborhoods. A remodel revolving fund is one potential option where renovation funding is provided to a homeowner, in partnership with a local lender. These loans provide low interest options with specific deadlines for repayment where the money returned through the loan is leveraged to fund additional remodels. As more residents use the loan, more funding returns allowing the application to expand across the county and its communities. This financial incentive ensures the housing stock, despite its overall age, retains modern amenities and investment is continuously provided toward neighborhood revitalization. The county should identify local partners to support the initial fund and develop clear application guidelines and requirements based on best management practices.



CO 2.2 Launch a rental property registration and management program.

Renters are often vulnerable to cost, condition, and maintenance factors due to lack of policy and management. Requiring registration and adherence to general requirements will ensure that rental properties protect renters and contribute to the aesthetics of the community.

CO 2.3 Identify opportunities for quality affordable housing. Providing a diverse array of housing includes ensuring that quality affordable housing options are readily available. In some areas, properties have deteriorated or been neglected to the point where they become health and safety hazards for the neighborhood. Efforts should inventory where existing quality affordable housing exists today, where options are needed, and align resources to support expanding the quality housing stock. Priority should be given to those areas where housing was removed due to condition to ensure communities have a access to a wide array of types, available to all income levels in the county.



CO 2.4 Establish development standards for “complete” neighborhood design.

These standards should specify a street pattern of walkable blocks and multiple connections to adjacent neighborhoods. Residents living in these neighborhoods should have easy access to pocket or community parks and direct connection to local businesses.

CO 2.5 Create countywide blight abatement guidelines. Targeted demolition for deteriorating buildings can serve to improve neighborhood safety and promote stabilization. The program should include evaluation criteria for a structure’s viability and procedures for supporting efforts to redevelop the site that benefits the neighborhood and greater community. Support should be given to existing code enforcement officers and procedures to assist with addressing blight across the county.

OBJECTIVE 3

Establish models for monitoring housing demand and promoting Wabash County as a welcoming community.

Actions

CO 3.1 Conduct and regularly update a countywide Residential Market Analysis. A market analysis will reveal the latent demand for certain types of housing which can be leveraged for strategic housing development. Maintaining an up-to-date analysis will ensure that Wabash County is attracting the right type of housing for current and future residents.



CO 3.2 Update and modernize the County Government website. By improving the user-friendliness and connections to local resources, the website can serve as an online gateway for Wabash County and its communities.

CO 3.3 Build a “Welcome to Wabash County” package and program for new residents. Developing a welcome package for new residents embraces the people who make the county unique and offers an opportunity to share highlights about the assets and amenities available across the county.

CO 3.4 Develop a model short-term rental policy (AirBnB, VRBO, etc.). Short-term or seasonal rentals can impact a neighborhood if not monitored or managed. Establishing a policy on nuisance, maintenance, and registration requirements will prevent short-term rentals from negatively impacting the surrounding community.

CO 3.5 Create a model employment-residence policy. A major institution/employer recently created policy that requires senior-level employees (executive and directors) to live in Wabash County. This is a new (2021) policy intended to increase the number of residents living in Wabash County. Given the significant trend of declining population in the county, a model employment-residence policy should be created. This model could be used by any employer in the County on a voluntary basis.

CO 3.6 Design a “Welcome to the Communities of Wabash County” program for college students. The 1,500 students of Manchester University represent about 25 percent of the population of North Manchester and significant part of Wabash County. Every one of these students represents a potential resident and or employee of the County. In short-term, they also represent four-year tourists. While there are efforts to welcome students in North Manchester, the efforts could be more robust and include other parts of the County. It is reported that many students do not feel comfortable on their adopted community. A welcome program could be a collaborative and impactful to connect students to the community and, in doing so, strengthen the community.

ACTION AGENDA

FOUNDATION

A community is strengthened by foundational elements including infrastructure, mobility, and emergency preparedness. These components have a strong correlation to how the community experiences the built and natural environment and will support the realization of many recommendations. This chapter explores the relationship of the county's infrastructure systems, roadway network, and mobility options on achieving the vision for Wabash County. It outlines strategies that build upon the recommendations of the previous chapters, providing the pathway towards a strong, safe, and vibrant future.

GOAL

A reliable base of enabling infrastructure helps to connect, grow, and protect our communities, while also supporting logical investments that expand opportunities for residents and businesses.

OBJECTIVES

1. Strengthen infrastructure management programs and funding.
2. Modernize and upgrade infrastructure throughout the county.
3. Improve community connections, design, and efficiency.

CHAPTER TOPICS

- Transportation
- Facilities and Infrastructure
- Hazard Mitigation

OBJECTIVE 1

Strengthen infrastructure management programs and funding sources.

Actions

FD 1.1 Increase funding for maintenance of local roads and bridges, and continue pursuing matching funds. The calculated deferred maintenance backlog is quite large for Wabash County, La Fontaine and, to a less extent for Wabash and North Manchester. Roads in poor condition often have degraded to the point that they need an overlay of asphalt or to be reconstructed, driving most of the backlog - estimated to be at least \$146 million for the County and \$1.2 million for La Fontaine. While pavement conditions are generally better in Wabash and North Manchester, pavement condition backlogs are estimated at \$4.5 million and \$1.2 million respectively. With respect to local bridges which are maintained by the county, a backlog of at least \$34 million has been estimated. The need is great and additional funding will be needed to slow the decline and make progress toward improving pavement and bridge condition ratings. Additional work may need to be performed by area maintenance superintendents to forecast

pavement deterioration and the construction and maintenance program that can be funded given anticipated revenues. With this information, it should be possible to estimate the amount of additional funding required to slowly improve conditions to state standards over a plan horizon, e.g. 10 years. This may serve as a justification for pursuing additional funding from taxpayers.

FD 1.2 Prioritize maintenance activities across the roadway network. While roadway pavement conditions are reported in aggregate, poor conditions on heavily traveled roads create a disproportionate impact on the traveling public. As such, some agencies prioritize maintenance based on a road’s importance within the overall network. With such a system, routes are assigned to a tier based on functional classification, importance to emergency response, and/or traffic volumes. Each tier may then have corresponding pavement condition standards, funding priority, or both. Over time, conditions will improve and be more consistent across the network of higher tier (priority) roads, and this may be achieved more quickly. This is of particular importance given how large the pavement maintenance is, and presumably how many years and more funding it may take to substantially address this issue. Local maintaining agencies should add a tiered maintenance approach to the strategies listed in their Asset Management Plans. This approach should include the establishment of tier categories and their respective condition rating targets. This could be done by assigning a higher share of funding per lane mile to higher tiers, tackling rehabilitation projects on high tier roads first, and / or by some other strategy.

OBJECTIVE 2

Modernize and upgrade infrastructure throughout the county.

Actions

FD 2.1 Significantly expand access to high-speed internet. The COVID-19 Pandemic revealed the importance of internet connectivity for both education and work and the discrepancies with the current infrastructure network. As an essential utility for the county, priority should be placed on rural areas with communities that are underserved in this respect. Additionally, the availability of high speed internet can assist in attracting businesses considering locating in the County. Ensuring communities and specifically employment centers have access to high-speed internet will provide an additional asset for attracting and retaining emerging businesses.



FD 2.2 Pursue a phased approach to improving downtown streetscapes in Wabash and North Manchester.

The downtowns of Wabash and North Manchester are both charming places supported by substantial streetscape investments. Yet, more could be done to help activate and enhance these places. Examples may include the creating sidewalk dining parklets and introducing more planters or street trees. Further, some crosswalks may benefit from being marked with high-visibility pavement markings patterns such as ladder style crosswalks. For this recommendation, local leaders and businesses are encouraged to assess their respective downtowns and look for opportunities to enhance these spaces with a focus being increasing comfort, safety, and access through incremental improvements.

FD 2.3 Increase wastewater capacity and utility access. Access to utilities is critical to both public health and economic development. Efforts should strive to provide additional capacity for all utilities but specifically with wastewater management. The City of Wabash and Town of North Manchester in particular has an immediate need for additional capacity due to outward development growth. State and federal funding should be explored for expanding and upgrading existing facilities.



FD 2.4 Plan for the long-term phase out of community septic in small communities. Several areas in the county are dependent on outdated and aging septic systems. The county should collaborate with small communities to identify critical infrastructure needs and the long-term removal of private septic systems.

FD 2.5 Support opportunities for “homegrown” ridesharing businesses and organizations. Alternative mobility options would both serve community members with limited access to transportation and promote small business development. Efforts in line with these priorities should be encouraged and supported.

FD 2.6 Improve Cass Street (SR-15) between Harrison and Wedcor avenues in the City of Wabash to include complete street accommodations. Today, N. Cass Street has no sidewalk or path to serve those walking and biking in the corridor between Harrison and Wedcor avenues. This is particularly problematic because this stretch likely has pedestrian and bicyclist activity due to a high concentration of retail uses and multifamily residential developments. Preferable accommodations may include a shared use path on both sides of the road, a shared use path on one side and sidewalk on the other side, or buffered bike lanes and sidewalks on both sides of the road. The same multimodal treatment does not need to be used along the entire corridor. Beyond these improvements, the corridor could benefit from the addition of street trees, aesthetic enhancements, and consolidation of access points.

FD 2.7 Improve County Road 1200 N (SR-114) in North Manchester to include complete street accommodations. The most recent traffic counts in INDOT's count database show traffic volumes vary from 6,200 to 6,500, much less than the 25,000 to 35,000 vehicles a similar five-lane road facility can typically accommodate. Given the lack of sidewalks or side paths and lack of traffic, it's recommended to consider reallocating some of the roadway for pedestrians and bicyclists. Practically, this may occur by closing the outside or curb-adjacent travel lanes. In the short-run, these can be marked as a shoulder; however, the best long-term option is to provide physical separation between traffic and both pedestrians and bicyclists. Separation can be provided by removing pavement, followed by possibly installing curb and gutter adjacent to the remaining travel lanes. A tree lawn and either sidewalks or path should be placed behind the curb.

OBJECTIVE 3

Improve community connections, design, and efficiency.

Actions

FD 3.1 Explore rerouting SR-15 around Canal and Market streets to reduce traffic in downtown Wabash. While there is an official truck route for SR-15 that avoids Market and Canal streets, the route is circuitous and at least some truck drivers don't take it. Rerouting SR-15 along a more direct alignment will reduce traffic volumes on Market and Canal streets, reducing noise and pollution. This will improve the experience of visiting downtown Wabash and make activities such as sidewalk dining more attractive. Further, it may be possible to adjust traffic operations on both streets such as allowing two-way traffic. If implemented, the project is likely to impact some residents or businesses. The intent would be to improve or build one of the options as a two-way connection. Options south of Market and Canal show optional realignments of Cass Street to allow a more direct connection to existing or proposed streets leading to Wabash Street (SR-13).

FD 3.2 Establish a task force to consider transit operations, and methods to maintain and even expand service. There is a need for community leaders to come together to consider how to best support and even expand transit operations. Before and now into the pandemic, Wabash Transit's budget has been tight and it struggles to find skilled workers at pay rates it can afford. And without sufficient staffing, some customers may not be able to schedule trips when desired. Further, the cost of providing some trips for out-of-county medical care vastly exceeds reimbursement rates and funding provided by Medicaid, Medicare, and/or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). At the same time, there is a desire to maintain a fixed-route service between Wabash and North Manchester. Clarity is needed to define these and other specific issues, and to work with local leaders to consider how those issues can be addressed, potentially through expanded partnerships.

FD 3.3 Establish a cycling connection between North Manchester and Wabash. Improving connectivity between North Manchester and Wabash is a priority of the plan, including for bicyclists. A two-pronged approach may be pursued, including signing an alternate route along parallel local roads, most of which are paved but have very low traffic volumes. Signage along local roads, parallel to SR-13, such as CR 400 E, which directly connects to the City of Wabash and Town of North Manchester, would help create a dedicated and safe route. Extending the asphalt paved shoulder to six feet would effectively provide a bike lane but the speed of traffic is still a substantial safety and comfort issue.

FD 3.4 Complete active transportation plans and implement recommendations. Each community is encouraged to perform an active transportation plan to further understand barriers and identify countermeasures to make their community more walkable and bikeable. These planning processes should be led by local agencies and supported by a consulting engineer familiar with pedestrian and bicyclist planning, as well as best practices and Indiana design standards for streets, traffic control, and ped/bike facilities. At minimum, these plans should identify desired destinations and travel corridors as well as areas where walking and biking is difficult due to lack of facilities and high traffic volumes and/or speeds. The final plan should address any proposed policy changes and provide a list of locations where capital improvements such as new crosswalks, sidewalks, and trails are recommended.

FD 3.5 Pursue an extension of the primary runway at Wabash Municipal Airport using cost-containment strategies. Aviation insurance companies will only cover jets hangared at airports with a runway that exceeds 5,000 feet in length. Wabash's runway is just 4,401-feet and needs to be extended an additional 600 feet to satisfy this requirement. This extension may improve the attractiveness of doing business in Wabash County; however, the airfield is less than 22 miles away from three airports which have longer runways and hangar space. Clarity is needed to determine if this investment will pay off and, if possible, allow for cost-containment so resources are not diverted from other needs in the community.

FD 3.6 Evaluate options for improved mobility for university students. The students at Manchester University are reliant on walking, biking, public transit, or carpooling in and around Wabash County. If the students are to experience the County—including spending their money, accessing key services—other mobility options are needed. Alternatives such as bike share programs, electric scooter rentals, bus routes, and ride share programs should be evaluated that improve their access to opportunity and provide potential benefits to local businesses and institutions.



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

A number of resources are available to help guide the process for walking and biking plans. These include FHWA's Guide for Improving Pedestrian Safety at Uncontrolled Crossing Locations. This guide describes a thorough and effective planning process for improving pedestrian and bicyclist accommodations. It also provides the latest guidance for choosing appropriate countermeasures at unsignalized crossings. A second resource to consider is the Ohio Department of Transportation's Active Transportation Plan Guide which provides a step by step planning process and resources to support those undertaking such a project. Available INDOT resources pertain to trail development, which has been identified as a statewide priority.



CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION

Imagine One 85 is intended to be used on a daily basis as both public and private decisions are made for the future of Wabash County and its communities. It is recommended that businesses, community groups, and organizations align their efforts with the priorities of this plan to help realize recommendations and achieve a Might Wabash County. The following is a summary of how decisions and processes should align with the goals and actions of Imagine One 85.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

A comprehensive plan is a decision making guide for community leaders. The process to develop the plan integrated thorough technical research and analysis with robust community and stakeholder engagement. The vision, goals, and recommendations reflect the best thinking of the Imagine One 85 Steering Committee based on these two crucial sources.

Plan implementation is an ongoing process that invokes a regular cycle of prioritization, work planning, funding, evaluation, and celebration. This is a management cycle that involves multiple organizations around the community. More broadly, however, long term implementation involves several practices summarized or through the governance-focused action recommendations.

ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMS AND BUDGETS

Individual departments, administrators, boards, and commissions should familiarize themselves with the plan's actions when preparing annual work programs and budgets. Specific actions that align with the vision and mission of an organization can guide investment in achieving the unified vision for Wabash County.

DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals may be pursued as a means of implementing recommendations of the plan. Decisions by appropriate entities and organizations should reference the Imagine One 85 Comprehensive Plan in their analysis.

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

Economic incentives should be reviewed to ensure consistency with supporting the actions of the plan.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Decisions regarding infrastructure investment such as utilities or transportation should align with recommendations and intended growth areas throughout the county.

PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Property owners and developers should consider the goals and strategies of the plan in their land planning and investment decisions. New development, infill development, or redevelopment should complement the plan's actions.

CONSISTENT INTERPRETATION

Planners and policymakers throughout the County should collaborate to ensure clear and consistent interpretation of major actions in this plan.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

The following actions support the ongoing implementation of Imagine One 85.

OBJECTIVE 1

Promote Imagine One 85 and its recommendations.

Actions

- IM 1.1 Appoint a Director of Imagine One 85.** As the first step towards implementation, a position should be established to facilitate the recommendations of Imagine One 85. This director will coordinate efforts across the communities to achieve the recommendations of the comprehensive plan.
- IM 1.2 Provide copies of the Plan throughout the communities.** Once adopted, Imagine One 85 should be made available in each community as well as online on partner websites.
- IM 1.3 Provide educational sessions and training on the plan recommendations.** Many policies, programs, and projects may be new to Wabash County while others seek to strengthen the county's assets. Sessions should be held throughout the county where residents and business owners can learn more about Imagine One 85 and ask questions about the plan's recommendations.

OBJECTIVE 2

Support, monitor, and share implementation progress.

Actions

- IM 2.1 Identify and secure funding for plan recommendations.** Funding sources could include grants, tax measures, bonds, private investments, public-private partnerships, and many others. These should be identified and implemented based on the community priorities.
- IM 2.2 Prepare a countywide Annual Growth Report about development, population change and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.** On an annual basis, the county should release a progress report for Imagine One 85 and its effect on the communities of Wabash County.
- IM 2.3 Prepare updates to Imagine One 85 at regular milestones.** The county should anticipate the need for updating the plan and action recommendations at major milestones. Minor updates should be considered every five years with major updates occurring every 10 years to ensure Imagine One 85 remains up-to-date.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

The following table summarizes the plan’s objectives and actions. The table is organized by the plan’s five thematic chapters to assist with tracking implementation over time. Priority recommendations are shown below followed by a list of all recommendations organized under the goals and objectives. For each action, essential details are defined including the tentative timeframe for implementation, lead group / organization, potential partners, and the level of resources necessary to implement the recommendation. A legend is provided below.

Timeframe

Ongoing	Underway and expected to continue
Immediate	Implemented in 2022
Short-Term	1 to 3 years
Mid-Term	3 to 6 years
Long-Term	Beyond 6 years

Cost



Low level of resources; for example, a minimal amount of staff time and/or a nominal amount of funding.



Moderate level of resources; for example, a moderate amount of staff time and/or a notable amount of funding that could be covered by normal budgets or may depend on multiple sources.



Significant resources; for example, a high amount of staff time and/or funding from multiple sources beyond normal budgets.

Community Priorities



Priority actions for establishing a strong foundation for success

Group / Organization Abbreviations

CFWC	Community Foundation of Wabash County	NIPSCO	Northern Indiana Public Service Company
CHDO	Community Housing Development Organizations	PU	Purdue University
COA	Council on Aging	PUE	Purdue University Extension
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture	SBDC	Small Business Development Center
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee	VWC	Visit Wabash County
EMA	Emergency Management Agency	WCHSEC	Wabash County High School Entrepreneurship Collaborative
FFA	Future Farmers of America	WCSWCD	Wabash County Soil and Water Conservation District
GWC	Grow Wabash County	WMI	Wabash Marketplace, Inc.
HLC	Higher Learning Commission	WRT	Wabash River Trail
IDNR	Indiana Department of Natural Resources	YPWC	Young Professionals of Wabash County
IEDC	Indiana Economic Development Corporation		
INDOT	Indiana Department of Transportation		
IO85	Imagine One 85 Committee		
LMC	Learn More Center		
MA	Manchester Alive		
MU	Manchester University		
NCI-SHRM	North Central Indiana SHRM		

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
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OBJECTIVE 1: STRENGTHEN THE EFFICIENT USE OF DEVELOPED AND UNDEVELOPED LAND

PLUS 85	GP 1.1	Pursue a strategic approach to countywide development and growth.	Ongoing	IO85	Plan Commissions, Local Governments, GWC, MA	
PLUS 85	GP 1.2	Fund a strategic land acquisition program.	Short-Term	Local Governments	County Government, Plan Commissions	
	GP 1.3	Support continued reinvestment in Downtown Lagro.	Ongoing	Canal Foundation	GWC, Town of Lagro	
	GP 1.4	Encourage reuse and rehabilitation of existing industrial structures.	Ongoing	GWC	Local Government, Private Businesses	
	GP 1.5	Develop a pop-up retail and temporary use program on vacant lots and in vacant buildings in small towns and cities.	Short-term	GWC	MA, WMI	

OBJECTIVE 2: ENHANCE COMMUNITY CHARACTER THROUGH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

	GP 2.1	Fund a countywide Facade Improvement Fund.	Mid-Term	Local Governments	County Government, Property Owners	
	GP 2.2	Maintain an endangered historic building list.	Short-Term	Indiana Landmarks	Local Government, Property Owners	
	GP 2.3	Support eligibility determinations and designation of structures and districts on the National Register of Historic Places.	Ongoing	Indiana Landmarks	Property Owners	

OBJECTIVE 3: EMBRACE RIVERS IN CITY AND TOWN DEVELOPMENT












PLUS 85	GP 3.1	Pursue the North Manchester Riverfront redevelopment project.	Immediate	Local Governments	MA, Property Owners, Non-Profits	
	GP 3.2	Continue to build access and use of the Eel and Wabash Rivers.	Ongoing	WRT, Upper Eel River Watershed Alliance	White Rock, Wander Brand, IDNR, River Defenders, WCSWCD, Sweeten	
	GP 3.3	Create incentives to encourage wide natural buffers along streams.	Ongoing	WCSWCD	IDNR, Upper Eel River Watershed Alliance	

OBJECTIVE 4: SUSTAIN AGRICULTURE AS A CRITICAL PART OF THE COUNTY'S IDENTITY




	GP 4.1	Expand opportunities for agritourism across the county.	Short-Term	VWC	Local Farms, CSA	
	GP 4.2	Study the impact of tile drainage on local flooding.	Immediate	County Government	Town of La Fontaine, Wabash County Drainage Board	

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
GP 4.3	Build on the local farm-to-table movement.	Ongoing	Local Farms	School Districts, Private Businesses	

OBJECTIVE 5: CELEBRATE UNIQUE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES THROUGH ATTRACTIONS AND AMENITIES

GP 5.1	Explore a state park designation for the areas around Salamonie Lake.	Short-Term	Wabash River Defenders	IDNR, State Government, Army Corps of Engineers	
GP 5.2	Work with local entrepreneurs to build a restaurant in Downtown La Fontaine.	Mid-Term	Town of La Fontaine	Private Businesses	
GP 5.3	Build a community park in Roann.	Short-Term	Town of Roann	Non-Profits	
GP 5.4	Expand summer arts offerings.	Mid-Term	Honeywell Foundation	MU, Eagles	
GP 5.5	Prepare a comprehensive marketing plan.	Short-Term	IO85	VWC, GWC, CFWC, MA, County Government, Local Governments	
 GP 5.6	Continue to support the County's commitment to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for all.	Ongoing	DEI	County Government, Local Governments, GWC, CFWC, MU, School Districts	
GP 5.7	Establish a Wabash County, peer community program.	Short-Term	VWC	MA, GWC	
 GP 5.8	Launch the "Mighty Wabash County" micro-grant program.	Mid-Term	CFWC	IO85	
GP 5.9	Initiate an inter-community visitation program.	Ongoing	VWC	MA, GWC	

OBJECTIVE 6: ENSURE PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS WITHIN AND BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

GP 6.1	Improve connections between the University and Main Street in North Manchester.	Ongoing	Town of North Manchester	MU	
GP 6.2	Conduct a study on opportunities for trail extensions.	Mid-Term	Local Governments	Plan Commissions, IDNR, WRT, Property Owners	
GP 6.3	Perform a feasibility analysis for pedestrian improvements on Miami Street in the City of Wabash.	Short-Term	City of Wabash	Plan Commissions, VWC	

PROSPERITY (PR)

26 ACTIONS

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
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OBJECTIVE 1: PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

PLUS 85	PR 1.1	Further develop small business / entrepreneur recruitment and development programs.	Ongoing	GWC	SBDC, SCORE, MU, INGUARD, IEDC	
	PR 1.2	Revisit local business support systems to ensure the right services are being provided.	Immediate	GWC	SBDC, MU	
	PR 1.3	Expand internship opportunities to support workforce needs.	Mid-Term	MU	GWC, Private Businesses, Local Governments	

OBJECTIVE 2: ENCOURAGE CONTINUED GROWTH OF THE COUNTY'S INDUSTRIAL AREAS

PLUS 85	PR 2.1	Build a spec, flexible industrial and warehouse facility.	Short-Term	City of Wabash, County Government	GWC, NIPSCO, IEDC, Duke	
	PR 2.2	Continue to support and adapt the county's industrial parks.	Ongoing	GWC	County Government, City of Wabash, Town of North Manchester	
	PR 2.3	Establish a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy.	Ongoing	GWC	County Government, Local Governments, Private Businesses	
PLUS 85	PR 2.4	Develop a robust business and industry retention program.	Ongoing	GWC	WMI, MA	

OBJECTIVE 3: ELEVATE AN ENVIRONMENT TO DEVELOP, ATTRACT, AND RETAIN TALENT

PLUS 85	PR 3.1	Establish the vision for excellent education in Wabash County.	Short-Term	CFWC	School Districts, GWC, MU, Local Governments	
PLUS 85	PR 3.2	Expand access to quality and affordable childcare.	Ongoing	CFWC	School Districts, First Five Committee, Transform Consulting	
	PR 3.3	Invest in arts-infused learning opportunities for early childhood education.	Immediate	CFWC	School Districts, Non-Profits, Honeywell Foundation	
	PR 3.4	Strengthen Community Foundation Early Award Scholarship and the Wabash County Promise as public school/private charity collaborations.	Immediate	CFWC	School Districts, Non-Profits	
	PR 3.5	Continue the Community Foundation's College Scholarship program for grades 9-12.	Ongoing	CFWC	School Districts, Non-Profits	
	PR 3.6	Expand exposure programs for students to include advanced manufacturing and agricultural jobs.	Short-Term	Private Businesses	GWC, Ivy Tech, WorkOne, HLC	

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
PR 3.7	Work with employers to adapt workforce training for adults based on the needs of employees.	Ongoing	Private Businesses	GWC, Ivy Tech, CFWC, WorkOne, HLC, UFWC, LMC, NCI-SHRM	
PR 3.8	Explore the potential for a Purdue Polytech Campus.	Mid-Term	PU	School Districts, HLC, GWC, CFWC	

OBJECTIVE 4: ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVING PERSONAL PROSPERITY, HEALTH, AND SAFETY

PR 4.1	Prepare a countywide health response report to the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Immediate	Health Department	Local Governments, UFWC, EMA, Bowen Center	
PR 4.2	Initiate a Safe Routes to School Program.	Mid-Term	Local Governments	School Districts, EMA, Property Owners	
PR 4.3	Connect residents without health insurance to applicable federal programs.	Mid-Term	CFWC	UFWC, Non-Profits, Health Department, Bowen Center, Parkview Hospital	
PR 4.4	Work with local hospitals and healthcare providers to address transportation gaps.	Mid-Term	Living Well Wabash County	Parkview Hospital, CFWC, Non-Profits	
PR 4.5	Create a kindness initiative.	Short-Term	CFWC	MU, School Districts	
PR 4.6	Develop a strategic plan for a community support network for university students.	Short-Term	Town of North Manchester	MU, CFWC, GWC, VWC, Local Governments, Private Businesses	

OBJECTIVE 5: MAINTAIN A FISCALLY STRONG ECONOMY

85	PR 5.1 Pursue a diversified tax revenue model through new sources.	Short-Term	Local Governments	-	
	PR 5.2 Review the fiscal model for county and city expenditure allocations.	Short-Term	Local Governments	-	
	PR 5.3 Communicate bonding capacity and "best use" analysis to local leadership.	Short-Term	IO85	GWC, CFWC	
	PR 5.4 Align local plans and Imagine One 85 priorities for federal funding opportunities.	Immediate	IO85	GWC, CFWC, Living Well Wabash County, UFWC	
	PR 5.5 Adopt a countywide Capital Improvement Plan funding model.	Mid-Term	Local Governments	GWC	

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY (CO)

18 ACTIONS

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
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OBJECTIVE 1: INCREASE COMMUNITY HOUSING OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES








PLUS 85	CO 1.1	Develop and monitor a new spec-housing program.	Short-Term	County Government	GWC, HPG Network, Local Governments, Plan Commissions, Private Businesses, Developers	
	CO 1.2	Expand housing options for students and workers.	Mid-Term	Local Government	GWC, MU, Local Governments, HPG Network, Plan Commissions, Developers, Private Businesses	
	CO 1.3	Build and launch a countywide housing development task force.	Short-Term	IO85	GWC, Plan Commissions, HPG Network, Developers, Private Businesses	
	CO 1.4	Enable Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) countywide.	Short-Term	Local Governments	GWC, Plan Commissions, HPG Network, Developers, Private Businesses, Property Owners	
	CO 1.5	Align resources and regulations to support infill development.	Mid-Term	Local Governments	GWC, Plan Commissions, HPG Network, Developers, Private Businesses, Property Owners	
	CO 1.6	Establish a countywide Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO).	Mid-Term	IO85	GWC, Plan Commissions, HPG Network, Developers, Private Businesses, Property Owners	
	CO 1.7	Explore the establishment of residential housing incentives.	Ongoing	Local Governments	GWC, Plan Commissions, HPG Network, Developers, Private Businesses, Property Owners	

OBJECTIVE 2: STRENGTHEN THE VITALITY, CHARACTER, AND DESIGN OF EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS

PLUS 85	CO 2.1	Launch a housing remodel revolving fund.	Mid-Term	GWC	CFWC, Local Governments, Non-Profits, Developers, Private Businesses	
	CO 2.2	Launch a rental property registration and management program.	Long-Term	CHDO	Local Governments, Plan Commissions	
PLUS 85	CO 2.3	Identify opportunities for quality affordable housing.	Long-Term	CHDO	Local Governments, Plan Commissions	
	CO 2.4	Establish development standards for "complete" neighborhood design.	Long-Term	CHDO	Local Governments, Plan Commissions, Developers	
	CO 2.5	Create countywide blight abatement guidelines.	Mid-Term	CHDO	Local Governments, Plan Commissions	

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
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OBJECTIVE 3: ESTABLISH MODELS FOR MONITORING HOUSING DEMAND AND PROMOTING WABASH COUNTY AS A WELCOMING COMMUNITY



	CO 3.1	Conduct and regularly update a countywide Residential Market Analysis.	Short-Term	CHDO	GWC, Local Governments	
	CO 3.2	Update and modernize the County Government website.	Short-Term	County Government	-	
	CO 3.3	Build a “Welcome to Wabash County” package and program for new residents.	Short-Term	VWC	GWC, CFWC, Private Businesses, Local Governments	
	CO 3.4	Develop a model short-term rental policy (AirBnB, VRBO, etc.).	Short-Term	Local Governments	-	
	CO 3.5	Create a model employment-residence policy.	Short-Term	CHDO	Private Businesses, Non-Profits, Local Governments	
	CO 3.6	Design a “Welcome to the Communities of Wabash County” program for college students.	Short-Term	VWC	MU, GWC, YPWC, Local Governments	

FOUNDATION (FD)










15 ACTIONS

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
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OBJECTIVE 1: STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS AND FUNDING


FD 1.1	Increase funding for maintenance of local roads and bridges, and continue pursuing matching funds.	Immediate	Local Governments	County Government, INDOT	
FD 1.2	Prioritize maintenance activities across the roadway network.	Immediate	Local Governments	County Government, INDOT	

OBJECTIVE 2: MODERNIZE AND UPGRADE INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY

 FD 2.1	Significantly expand access to high-speed internet.	Immediate	Local Governments	Utility Providers	
FD 2.2	Pursue an incremental approach to improving downtown streetscapes in Wabash and North Manchester.	Ongoing	City of Wabash, Town of North Manchester	Manchester Alive, Wabash Marketplace, Private Businesses	
 FD 2.3	Increase wastewater capacity and utility access.	Immediate	Local Government	Utility Providers	
FD 2.4	Plan for the long-term phase out of community septic in small communities.	Long-Term	County Government	State Government, WCSWCD	
FD 2.5	Support opportunities for “homegrown” ridesharing businesses or organizations.	Mid-Term	Local Governments	GWC, Private Businesses	
FD 2.6	Improve Cass Street (SR-15) between Harrison and Wedcor avenues in the City of Wabash to include complete street accommodations.	Long-Term	INDOT	Local Government, Private Businesses	
FD 2.7	Improve County Road 1200 N (SR-114) in North Manchester to include complete street accommodations.	Long-Term	INDOT	Local Government, Private Businesses	

CODE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	COST
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OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, DESIGN, AND EFFICIENCY

FD 3.1	Explore rerouting SR-15 around Canal and Market streets to reduce traffic in downtown Wabash.	Mid-Term	INDOT	Local Governments	
FD 3.2	Establish a task force to consider transit operations, and methods to maintain and even expand service.	Mid-Term	COA	INDOT	
FD 3.3	Establish a cycling connection between North Manchester and Wabash.	Mid-Term	IO85	County Government, VWC, Manchester Alive	
 FD 3.4	Complete active transportation plans and implement recommendations.	Mid-Term	IO85	County Government, VWC, Manchester Alive	
FD 3.5	Pursue an extension of the primary runway at Wabash Municipal Airport using cost-containment strategies.	Mid-Term	Wabash Airport Board	State Government, Property Owners	
FD 3.6	Evaluate options for improved mobility for university students.	Short-Term	Manchester University	Local Government, County Government	

IMAGINE ONE 85

APPENDICES

The following are appendices that support the plan:

Appendix A: Support

Community Endorsements

Appendix B: Engagement

Round One Engagement Summary Memo: Focus on the Future

Round Two Engagement Summary Memo: Growth Summit

Appendix C: Analysis

Technical Analysis Memos (People, Prosperity, Place, and Foundation)

