

WABASH COUNTY PLAN COMMISSION

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WABASH COUNTY PLAN COMMISSION
BOARD MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 6, 2020

**Wabash County Plan Commission Board
Wabash County Court House
Wabash IN 46992**

Board Members: Randy Curless, Jeff Dawes, Patty Godfroy, Doug Rice, Christian Rosen, Geoff Schortgen, Cheri Slee, Joe Vogel, Attorney Larry Thrush, Plan Director Mike Howard, Secretary Libby Cook

Present: Randy Curless, Jeff Dawes, Patty Godfroy, Doug Rice, Christian Rosen, Geoff Schortgen, Cheri Slee, Joe Vogel, Larry Thrush, Mike Howard, Libby Cook, Joe Cook, Barrie & Teresa Bunnell, Brian Campbell, Mark York, Patty Grant, Keith Gillenwater, John Stephens, Matt Mize

Board Chairman, Randy Curless called the February 6, 2020 meeting of the Wabash County Plan Commission Board to order at 7:00 pm. Mr. Curless then asked if there was a motion on the minutes of the January 2, 2020 meeting. Joe Vogel made the motion to approve the minutes as written; this was seconded by Christian Rosen. The motion carried, the minutes will stand approved as written.

Mr. Curless: The next item on the agenda is Mr. Keith Gillenwater. Mr. Gillenwater introduced himself as the CEO of Grow Wabash County, which is the Economic Development and Chamber of Commerce for the county and was started in 2017. He then introduced Ms. Patty Grant, Executive Director of the Community Foundation of Wabash County which is located in N. Manchester. The Community Foundation was founded 65 years ago and is approaching 60 million dollars in assets thanks to the generosity of Wabash County. We have been pleased to be included in the Lily Endowment GIFT (Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow) initiatives. It is a record breaking initiative that is studied worldwide because of the success of the philanthropy. When it was introduced in 1990 there were only about 10 Community Foundations in the state of Indiana and we were one of them. There is now a Community Foundation in every county in Indiana and the combined assets are approaching three billion dollars. We are here today because they are offering Wabash County five million dollars to address our challenges and our opportunities in the

county. That opportunity is afforded to all Community Foundations in the state, the five million dollars is competitive, and we anticipate that at least in the first round they are only going to be awarding about 6 or 7 Community Foundations. That is unusual to be competitive because most of their initiatives have been offered equally to all Community Foundations. You can imagine that we are pretty diverse, there are some Community Foundations with hundreds of millions and well established programs and rich staff in staff. The initiative has also given us a \$50,000.00 planning grant and the opportunity to submit a proposal for \$100,000.00 Every Community Foundation will get the \$50,000 and the \$100,000, those are determined by population which is another reason to have rich population because you get more money from the endowment. We think that should be the other way around, we should be getting more money for low populations but that is not the way it works. This population study is funded by the Lily Foundation from the \$50,000, it did not cost the full amount. This study along with some others were funded through this. This initiative was started in October of 2018 and I began talking to as many people as I could about what would you do if you had \$5,000,000.00. I talked with Keith Gillenwater at Grow Wabash County and he said “I know what I would do, I would study population decline”. We appreciate you allowing us to be here to present the study. Our consultants have given us 20 recommendations which we have been nicking away at since this study was produced last January.

Mr. Howard: Andrew Carty with the Indiana State Dept. of Agriculture (ISDA) was also scheduled to be here tonight to present the ISDA Ag Based Strategy for Indiana. Due to the weather conditions he was not able to be here. Mr. Carty will be giving his presentation at the March 5th 2020 PCB meeting. I would like to invite everyone here tonight to attend the March 5th meeting.

Mr. Gillenwater: I came to Wabash County in 2014 and was mentored by Mr. Bill Konyah earlier in my career. I was able to start digging in and see what the opportunities were and what the challenges were, the momentum was already there. Mr. Gillenwater shared copies of the summary of the report “Imagine Wabash County, Wabash County Population Analysis Key Findings” July 2019 with Board members. One of the challenges is the population, 1978 – 2017. Wabash County is associated with the 11 county northeast IN area, our economy relates more to the Ft. Wayne region, more so than Indianapolis, Kokomo or Lafayette other areas. You look at the study and you see in about 1979 – 1980 steady trend of the population down to about the mid 80’s and 90’ are fairly flat a little bit up and down, then from about 2000 you see a drop of the population. You see a height of population of about 36,582 to where this takes us to the end of 2016 with a population of about 31,443. If you look at our current population you see a drop from the 31,443 closer to about 31,000. So what you saw since 1979 was a fairly steady population drop leveling off and then an absolute decline since 2000. There are certainly some challenges we have as a community and one of them is population.

Jeff Dawes asked, out of the 11 Northeast counties how many are facing declines in population. Mr. Gillenwater said just one, Wabash County, everybody else are steady, flat, or if they are increasing they are increasing at less than the national average except for Lagrange County which is growing above the national average, they have a larger birth rate. You will see a younger population in that county compared to Wabash County. Of the 11 counties we are the only county in population decline.

Mr. Howard: I agree with what Keith is saying but I did pull some other data from US Census Wabash County from 2010- 2018 was a decline of 4.9 %, Grant County was 5.9%, Miami County was 3.6% Fulton County was 3.6%, and Blackford County was 6.5 % decline. Those aren't in our 11 county region but they are surrounding counties.

Mr. Gillenwater: So what you will see, not really in the context of our study because ours was more specifically focused. We did pull in a comparison of Miami, Grant, Huntington and Kosciusko as immediate neighbors to us. Generally what you will see where the population loss is occurring not just in Wabash County not just in Indiana but in rural America is when you take where your large population areas are like Ft. Wayne, or Indianapolis and put a ring of counties around it, generally you would see some population growth as that suburbia sort of thing expands. When you take another kind of concentric ring approach away from that you start to see less or decline. So when you look at IN and the counties that are in absolute population decline, like Wabash County it is generally the ones that are farthest away from the population centers. So it is east central IN, New Castle, Henry County, those kinds of areas, it is north central IN, us, Grant, Fulton those that you were talking about. Those are the ones for better or for worse people have been moving to cities that have been moving to cities for a few generations. I don't think that is new to any of us. A lot are in the same boat as we are. Population projections between 2020 – 2050 IN Business Research Center, Indiana University Kelly School 40 year population projections in 5 year increments, looking ahead IBRC is projecting our population to go from 2020 at 31,165 which is about where we are at to 2050 a slow but steady decline which is a loss of about 5,000 people in this community if we continue on with what we are doing right now which is that same sorts of birth rates, our death rate exceeds our birth rate, we are getting older. We are not replacing the population we have year over year so it is a smaller pool and each year it is harder to catch up. I will tell you the US Census Bureau also projects this information out IBRC is probably pulling off of that data as well. The Census Bureau projected out when you look at the age bands, the 45-65 year old age category which are generally your higher income bracket, property owners, property tax payers, that was projected out from 2020 – 2050 to lose about 34.7% of that population of that age group. You lose tax payers, customers, work force and you see the problems that come with that. Interestingly enough, the number of households increased between 2012- 2017. We had a slight increase in households overall, but if you look and see the types of households you will see that traditional married couple household is declining. You are seeing an increase in female headed households, no husband present, female headed family household or non-family household which could be people living with roommates that aren't married or they have no kids. You will see an overall increase in households, but a decrease in the number of the traditional married couple with children households and changing demographic. We also looked at some industry trends and the big key here is the loss of manufacturing jobs that we have experienced over the last several years.

- Manufacturing jobs –Employment 2001 – 2018, comparing to surrounding counties, Grant, Huntington, Kosciusko, Miami, Wabash. It is kind of hard to compare our industry to say Lagrange even though it is in Northeast IN. I was the economic director there prior to coming here, 7 of our top 10 employers were all RV companies or were RV component suppliers. They were pretty focused on that one industry, during the recession they had 20% unemployment rate. Luckily we have a much more diverse industrial base, even though we are very much manufacturing centric here, still we have a more diverse base for

what we are manufacturing. Certainly subject to recession and those kinds of things, we don't have all of our eggs in one basket of one industry in one sector.

- From 2001 – 2018 we looked at 3 sectors there, We looked at manufacturing which is a mix of white collar and blue collar jobs; compared that to other sectors, financial activities which would be CPA, banking, those type of things; then we looked at the professional, scientific, technical services that is generally going to be your research positions, those kind of things. Something that comes along with those two sectors is typically those are some of the more the white collar jobs that would be in more of a corporate headquarters of a manufacturer as opposed to just the actual floor working manufacturing job.

Grant Co. sees a loss of 41% of manufacturing jobs from how many jobs they had in manufacturing from 2001 to 2018. You see a loss in all of our surrounding communities except Kosciusko Co. which sees a slight increase; make that a fairly significant increase 4.4% increase in manufacturing jobs there. Wabash County saw a loss of 2,750 jobs, essentially we have lost over 50% of the manufacturing jobs from 2001 – 2018.

Compare that to financial activities you see Kosciusko had an increase of 16.19% of jobs in the financial sector again you are talking about a smaller sample size than they are manufacturing but you see an increase there and you see an increase in Huntington and Miami County. Wabash Co. and Grant Co. are still at a loss in those jobs, a loss of those white collar jobs in those communities.

Professional/Scientific/Technical, you see those same type of things with the exception of you see an increase there and Wabash I think does pretty good job of growing in that sector. A 45% growth for an 18 year period is great. Again we compare it to Kosciusko to the north of us you have more than 90% growth rate, you see an increase of headquarters of companies starting up there and having some of those white collar and research job there.

Wabash County's share of Regional and National Per Capita Personal Income, this is essentially calculated as all of the income in the community divided by the number of the people in the community. All of the income means wages that are being paid, but it also includes Social Security, pensions, public assistance programs, dividends you earn off of investments, rental income if you have rental properties, those kinds of thing and divide them by the number of people in the county regardless of age. So this is ascribing a wage to a baby, but it is a pretty fair determinate of how we are doing as a community from a wage standpoint so you can compare the Census Bureau and the economist use this metric across every community. Northeast IN also uses this metric, from when the Northeast IN Regional Partnership was formed which was essentially when we put the 11 counties together to try to start working together towards building our economy and building our region. This was a metric that was determined to say how can we compare ourselves against the nation. What you see is that as we perform against the region we are less than the average of the regions per capita personal income but we are pretty close. We started out in 1979 at about 95% and we are still at about 95% of the regions per capita personal income. The challenge is when you compare Wabash County to the national per capita personal income. We started out in 1978 on average making about 90% of what they did in the nation, what you have saw from that is while we have had peaks and valleys throughout that time right now we are at about 78% as of 2016. What that means is that gap is widening between what

someone else makes elsewhere in the country on average verses where we are at. What that means is you are seeing evidence of wage stagnation, and that gap widening.

Mr. Rice asked how we rate nationally or regionally in the cost of living and how that has changed over the same period of time.

Mr. Gillenwater: I don't know historically what the cost of living was I would suspect that it was always lower than the nation's cost of living. I can tell you right now that we are at about 89%. There is still a gap there.

Mr. Gillenwater discussed school enrollment:

School years 2005-2006 and 2018 – 2019 school year overall you saw fairly flat for MCS and MSD had a more significant loss of about 20% or 497 students, actually had a gain (projected)

Manchester Community Schools % of change	10.93%
Metropolitan School District % of change	9.83%
Wabash City Schools % of change	4.19%

When you look at the total enrollment in the schools there has been a decline of about 400 students in that 12 year period.

The birth rate is not exceeding the death rate.

For the 2017-2018 school year the enrollment / forecast of enrollment to 2026-2027, they are projecting that gap to start widening.

Manchester Community Schools	loss of 172 students
Metropolitan School District	loss of 197 students
Wabash City Schools	slight gain for WCS

Again a net loss for the county.

How did we actually perform verses projected: 2017-2018 school year

	Actual enrollment	Projected enrollment	Difference
MCS	1616	1574	+42
MSD	2172	2005	+167
WCS	1539	1526	+13

2018-2019 school year

MCS	1629	1546	+83
MSD	2116	1954	+162
WCS	1581	1558	+23

We are exceeding what we were forecasted to be. But the moral of the story is we are still projected to lose population, that school population and the challenges that come with that.

Ms. Grant: In addition to the Quantitative Study that Keith just narrated for you the \$50,000 planning grant also paid for some Qualitative research. Amanda Lopez from here in Wabash, Transform Consulting Group, she was able to do some focus groups and some one on one interviews. She spoke to millennials who have moved away and have jobs in other cities, she

spoke to millennials who moved away and came back, she also spoke to people like Keith who didn't grow up here but elected to move here, lastly she also spoke to people who work here in Wabash County but elect to live elsewhere to try to get an idea of why people don't live here. The takeaway from her qualitative research is troubling, 50% of the millennials that she interviewed that grew up in Wabash County but moved away said they do not see themselves returning. 50% of the millennials that grew up here and came back responded that they are unsure or did not expect to stay here more than 5 years. Some of the key threats that her qualitative research revealed is that millennials felt that there was a lack of employment opportunities; lack of high speed internet across all groups in the county was seen as a real detriment. For transplants the key threats are housing, retail, and public transportation. Those that work here but live elsewhere found that housing and job opportunities were a deterrent to living here. Lastly all groups felt that social engagements were tough, not only those that are new to the community but those that are coming back, difficult to engage. The summary of Amanda's work created suggestions to diversify employment and industries, address housing, invest resources in K-12 schools and local career pathways, to more aggressively market Wabash County particularly to inform people of the jobs and cultural opportunities that are here, develop more retail and social offerings, partner with Manchester University there were several comments on capitalizing on what it might mean to be a university community, increase the number of quality jobs and wages.

Mr. Howard stated that in reading the document it commented a few times that past students didn't feel they received the information as to what is available in Wabash County, are we addressing that within our schools? Not necessarily through the schools, but programs through the Community Foundation or things like that to help our young adults get a better idea of what is available in Wabash County.

Ms. Grant: In our recommendations from the consultants it was recommended that we visit some inner cities; in particular it was recommended that we visit Findley Ohio which is experiencing rapid growth. Findley Ohio in conjunction with the University of Findley founded the Center For Social Engagement and that includes sort of the crown jewel of the program is one full time person that works with all the high schools and their industries to try to explain and introduce not only in high school but also in middle school what the industries are, what the job opportunities are, and what the required education pathway is to those jobs. Findley is the home to Cooper Tire, Red Mark, Marathon Oil, and they formed coalitions around each of those industries advance manufacturing or health care, whatever, met with employers and Superintendents, Guidance Counselors, etc. I think one of the things that we have heard here and this is not statistically significant is that our Guidance Counselors are often in the position to manage social and behavioral difficulties in our families and our kids, which leaves them with less opportunity to provide career and vocational guidance, so indeed that is something that is on our list to be a part of the proposal for the \$5,000,000 to perhaps replicate the program that is in Findley that is called Raise the Bar and to supplement our Guidance Counselors work in the community in connecting with the employers. Mr. Gillenwater stated that they are actively meeting with each of the School Superintendents in the county about this very initiative. Mr. Gillenwater added that over the last 5 years their organization has worked pretty closely with Heartland Career Center to try to make sure that we are building as many opportunities as we can there for career technical ed. Obviously we know what has happened with that kind of school training from when some of us were kids to recently and there has obviously been a renewed focus on trying to bring that kind of education

back, we have done a lot with that. As Randy and Jeff know we have come in and asked for money and things in the past, things to help you guys and ask you to help us with applying for education grants to help pay for those kinds of classes. Trying to build up those career pathways, those internship opportunities with our employers has been a focus and it is more critical as each year passes. We have a low unemployment rate, it is hard to find workers and so it is even more important to keep building those career pathways out not only for the high school students, but also to retrain adult workers. We have a project with Heartland Career Center right now to build an adult career education center to attach to Heartland.

Ms. Grant: In addition to Amanda Lopez's Qualitative findings, the researchers from the Community Research Institute at Purdue, led by John Stafford and Mark Becker who is actually with Parkview Hospital. They interviewed 12 seasoned Wabash County citizens to get a little context to give a little historical background with what the data is showing. They had four takeaways from those interviews:

- Certainly we all recognize that there was a wake-up call in 2007 with the closing of GDX, the comment that there had been other manufacturing facilities close but the size of that workforce could not be absorbed by the other facilities.
- They also commented that the regional divide between Wabash and N. Manchester is evaporating; they interviewed many of the citizens from many of the communities and felt that that competition no longer existed.
- Noted that there is very high regard for elected public leadership in the public sector. It is seen as an asset good leadership, not a liability.
- US 24 upgrade has been both good and bad for the county. Better for connections to Ft. Wayne for commerce, for manufacturing and economics, but it also makes it easier for all of us to jump on 24 and go to Ft. Wayne to go shopping. So it is both good and bad.

Mr. Howard: I heard recently that Manchester University will be removing some areas of schooling due to lack of students for those areas. That was a concern to me as far as growth. We seem to be spending more time getting help from them or working with them than we did in the past and I just thought that was a concern to see a decline there in students or programs.

Ms. Grant: It is a concern and you are right. They are still going to offer Economics as an example, there won't be an economics major, there will still be classes in economics that is true of some of the arts related programs, and principally I think where you see some of the decline is within the Humanities programs. At that same time they are introducing new programs in the health sciences. They are introducing a nursing program that will launch in September 2021 and that would include a both a return for individuals that might have a BA to go back for a short term to get a nursing degree and a 2 year Associates program as well as a four year nursing degree. They have introduced Pharmacogenetics. You are right there are programs that they have cut, but I think it accounted for 25 current students so those are low demand courses to start with. They are supplementing it with health care, it is considered to be one of the major industries in the region even though they have the pharmacy school in Ft. Wayne. They are putting their focus right now on developing that high demand area. Mr. Gillenwater, in the same timeframe as you would have seen that announcement from Manchester you would have seen one from St. Francis in Ft. Wayne, I think it is a realignment to what employment opportunities are and to where the economy is going. There are not many of us history degree carriers out there anymore.

Mr. Howard: I appreciate that, I know that there were two things that stuck out to me. Ms. Grant said she believes the other area was Philosophy and Religion the classes are being offered just not the major. Mr. Gillenwater added that he thought Chemistry was one area, I had the same reaction at first, but it is hard to pay for professors when you have two students.

Ms. Grant: I would say that has been their history in the liberal arts, but as Keith has been mentioning our students are demanding that their higher ed or post-secondary ed be more vocationally oriented. Students now want to make short term decisions, a two year degree or something 18 months. They are also putting demands on any time education which is why you see such a boom in on-line courses, which by the way Manchester University has just been recently accredited to offer on-line courses in any of the subjects that they teach. It is short term, any time, also low cost, low risk. I think Universities like Manchester are pivoting to capture that market for what students demand and certainly students in Wabash County.

Mr. Gillenwater discussed Why Population Loss Matters:

- Declining enrollment means reduced state funding in our schools that is a challenge. It makes it harder to offer the courses that aren't required for a diploma.
- Smaller base for customers, restaurants, retail, professional services.
- Shrinking workforce, we know that when you have a low unemployment rate it is hard to hire good quality employees, people that are trained and will stick with a job. What you start seeing is relaxing employment policies to get employees, things that normally would not get you through the front gate now will get you in there and get you working, drug testing and those kinds of things. When you are relaxing all of those policies it is troubling in and of itself. Everyone wants us to go out and bring in new manufacturing and create a couple thousand jobs, but all of this data is a matter of public information, so if I am a manufacturer and look at that data I am going to wonder if I move there will I become an employer of choice, can I get good employees, is my investment going to pay off. For new employers or for those already here, you have two choices if you can't find employees you can move to where the employees are or you can automate those jobs out. Neither one bode well for creating new jobs.
- Loss of community leadership depth. You all serve on a Board here and I am guessing that most of you serve on other Boards in the community. The challenge is when you see that loss of population, we still have those organizations and the need of leadership, if you continue to take people away from the community, the need is still there however it gets taxing on those who do serve.

Implications of Findings:

- Population loss is not the fault of local leadership; this is part of a national macro- economic trend of people moving towards the cities.
- Growth of adults age 45 and older we have a lower family formation, an increase in households, but a loss of those traditional style households.
- Low birth rate, death rate exceeds out birth rate

- Loss in manufacturing we have lost over half of our manufacturing jobs over the course of 18 years. Those employment opportunities and you are not gaining those white collar jobs, typically higher paying jobs that is a challenge.
- Geographic isolation, no interstate access, distance from metro areas.
- We are not a diverse population here, the groups that have a higher birth rates are unrepresented here compared to national averages. We have to grow just to maintain because of the birthrate/death rate.

Ms. Grant: What Do We Do? Our researchers identified 7 things and 21 recommendations; they reminded us that there is no magic bullet. They tell us to be strategic, intentional, bold don't just do stuff, focus on what you can control that means to use the assets that are here to the best of our ability. David McFadden said "Where we are going is not where we have been." Of the seven things number one overall is to implement a civic engagement model, the community Foundation studied several different models.

- Columbus IN Civic Lab Model brought together industry leaders and the schools that made some really innovative changes in creating the pathways we were talking about.
- Chicago Community Trust – On the Table – that we have studied and implemented. This a Community Foundation organized in trust format, they realized that they were not well connected to some of the diverse and disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city of Chicago, so they trained a Cadre of volunteers and stationed a volunteer in highly populated areas like laundromats, post offices, grocery stores and unemployment offices. They would station the same person there predictably at the same time and day of the week until people started to trust them and get acquainted with them until they could sit down and have a conversation about the challenges you face, whether it was housing, not enough youth organizations, or food deserts or police problems. The On the Table model has become a model for other communities. Lexington KY has used it to develop their strategic plan. We asked volunteers and trained our Board to conduct On The Table conversations at their leisure and at their convenience, to choose whether it was their church group, their bridge club, or euchre party or whatever to sit intentionally and talk with these people for 2 hours and take notes, this is not the time where the facilitator puts their hand on the scales but just to listen to what the people had to say. We conducted over 45 of those conversations with over 600 individuals in the county in one week. In addition to asking volunteers to choose with individuals that they were comfortable to talk with, within their work we also did public ones, Keith did one and I stationed myself at McDonalds in the afternoon and went to the Aquatic Center in N. Manchester. We have received some survey results but we have not received back the qualitative comments. The individual's identity was protected, we simply took notes and sealed the envelope and sent it to the Psychology Dept. at Manchester University to codify so that if there are common things we can look at things that are statistically relevant in terms of the comments. We are excited about, we are supposed to have the results within the next couple of weeks.
- Ball State – IN Community Institute, they came and did a training with 30 volunteers about community development.
- Purdue University – Strategic Doing, that is the next step in terms of implementing some of the ideas we want to do. How do we go about doing that? We all know that robust,

growing communities have rich and robust civic engagement, people that are involved in their communities. All of these models are intended to help develop that.

In addition our consultants recommended that we develop one overall plan. Mark Becker calls this recommendation not only foundational but transformational. When we put all of our communities together talking about what we could accomplish, what Wabash County could do with the resources that we have. His experience has been in the Mayor's office in Ft. Wayne as the Deputy Mayor of Ft. Wayne, and had worked to develop a countywide plan in Allen Co. His experience is telling us that it is incredibly important that we do that. Keith and I have spent time with each of the incorporated towns in the county and are getting agreement about developing a one county plan. A part of that county plan includes not a fiscal policy analysis, really more of a fiscal resource analysis to try to study and understand where the revenues for the county come from and to stay ahead of pay as you go and not fall behind.

Mr. Gillenwater: I have worked in several communities, but I have never been a part of where you get the mayor of the largest communities, the town clerk or town board members of the smallest community to sit down in the same room, when they all have their own political jurisdiction, they all have their own planning/zoning for example, some of that you (PCB) do for them like Roann, Lagro and LaFontaine, Wabash City has their own trying to get everyone fully represented to sit down at the table together and say should we develop one comprehensive plan that everybody has their own individual comp plan for the community, then use that to develop one comprehensive plan for the entire county that kind of threads together the priorities of Roann, Lagro, LaFontaine, N. Manchester, Wabash, Co. Commissioners, and the Co. Council all together to say what are we going to do, what are the things that we can take action on that will make this community grow to be what we need it to be?

Ms. Grant: III. Collaboration and Leadership (align with regional partners):

Wabash Co. is a member of the Northeast Regional Partnership. Just last Monday we invited the Regional Partnership to come over and facilitate the creation of the Wabash County's Talent Dashboard. The Regional Partnership has an initiative called "The Road to One Million" and they look at this as a means or the call to develop talent. That means attracting talent to Wabash County, developing it when it is here and making the connection of talent in the county to keep the talent in the county. Ryan Twist from the Regional Partnership came over and with about 30 people including the Superintendents and social service agencies helped us map out what are the agencies in the county that are involved in either talent attraction, talent development, or talent connection. They too will take all of that back and will come back with a poster board that identifies all of the different agencies and helps us identify where the gaps are, where are the weaknesses, what could we do better to attract talent. This will be very useful for the Community Foundation in particular, if you weren't aware we have discretionary grant money available and we have prioritized educational attainment and have about \$200,000 a year to use in that way so we are looking forward to that research and that work to figure out how it can be put to use. Develop leadership and create ways for leaders to in ways that can impact the community. The Community Foundation funds the Leadership Development program that Grow Wabash County implements. Welcome newcomers, particularly from diverse cultures. Mayor Long has convened a diversity and inclusion committee, the Community Foundation and other social service agencies are a part of that. They are in conversation about what can we do to create a more diverse culture and to be

more welcoming. Initiate intercommunity visitation program, I mentioned that a busload of about 30 people went to Findley OH for a day, we intend to go back and do a deeper dive into the Raise the Bar Initiative in the organization that they call the Center for Civic Engagement.

IV. Community Development:

Strengthen the resources is the role of the Foundation, I think that is what this initiative is pushing us into. Leverage Wabash County's unique assets and strengthen their synergy. That again is looking at the assets like the Talent Development Dashboard. What are the assets in the community and how can we use them to strengthen their work. Focus on continued downtown revitalization in Wabash and N. Manchester. The streets of Wabash are just gorgeous; Canal St. and Market St. are just beautiful. Manchester has initiated some improvements as well. How can we continue, what are the resources available to continue that work? Advance housing strategies in Wabash and N. Manchester, I think you are all familiar with that N. Manchester has a housing development going up. Keith's office and the Mayor's office are working on that initiative in Wabash. Focus on the near term, the quality of place. That is really important, what can we do right now that would attract people to our area. Mr. Gillenwater added that is a focus of our organization, when we reorganized in 2017, that community development role and what we refer to as livability, what are those assets that make your community livable and make somebody want to move into this community. What attracted me? I was attracted to the job, but I could get a job elsewhere, I was attracted to the community, when you drive in and see the Charlie Creek and when you go do things and see opportunities there it is like how do you market those and how do you create more of those things so that when people come in we get our hooks in them.

V. Economic Development:

Make sure we are supporting our existing businesses. Building our entrepreneurship program. Long term what are our strengths. Diversify away from being as dependent on manufacturing as we are, we saw what has happened in the past 18 years the loss of 50% of our manufacturing jobs. While manufacturing will always be an important part of our economy and our community. We make things really well here, right? Indiana is a manufacturing state and Wabash County does a really good job of making things and so not to abandon that by any stretch of the imagination but what are the other opportunities so that when you see that threat from off shoring or that threat from automation or that kind of thing, how can you bounce back from that and keep people employed.

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VI. Education:

How do you maintain a public K-12 education system, essentially how do you position Wabash County schools, by that I mean all Wabash County schools systems to be a school of choice. How do make someone want to choose to come based on the quality of our education system here, to move a family here and put kids in schools. How do we develop those programs to inform those k-12 kids of the local job opportunities, kind of back to Mike's question earlier how do you let our youngest know what are the opportunities in this community and how do they make it to that goal. They say I want to work at Ford Meter Box and I want to be an industrial engineer, how do you create that pathway for them from the earliest age to know what that is, what they have to study, what skill sets they have to develop so that they can work in that job, that career choice later. Create some sustainable incentives for young adults to start their careers in Wabash County. What makes the community attractive to get a young adult to come back here and choose to do a career

here as opposed to going to Ft. Wayne, Indianapolis, or Los Angeles? Developing programming that encourages community, family and school engagement. That goes back to Patty and I having our ongoing conversations with our Superintendents. What is it that the school is doing that the Community Foundations, Grow Wabash County and everyone else here coming together to help you build out to make sure that people want to come here. Ms. Grant added that “The Promise” is intended to promote student engagement in school. Keith is a member of the Early Childhood Coalition, if Wabash County is considered an early childhood desert we have far too few seats to take care of pre-K or pre public school students if we can start as a community to improve the quality of child care we anticipate that that increases in school engagement and student success. That is what is behind that is to fund early childhood programs, to continue to fund The Promise and early learning programs.

Mr. Gillenwater stated that he is the parent of a Kindergarten student, my child was just turning one when we moved here, and finding day care is tough. We have gaps that need to be filled in in the system that we have here. I love where my son is at now, my son is in the second year of a dual immersion program, at 6 he speaks more Spanish than I can, he will be bi-lingual by 8th grade. I think we are doing those things to position our schools to be schools of choice is just building on those things. Mr. Howard asked if they had any thoughts on why some day care facilities are closing. Ms. Grant replied that some of them have closed because the public schools have opened their doors to 4 year olds. When the 4 year olds leave the daycare center you have lost the ratio of childcare provider, you are left with infants which then requires a lower ratio of child to provider so it becomes more expensive in a childcare center to care for the 1, 2 year olds and infants because you no longer have the revenue from the 4 year olds. Mr. Gillenwater added that the industry is not a high wage payer, so you don't get into that industry if you are looking to get rich and that is a challenge. Ms. Grant stated that for our part we have been providing grants to child care centers or registered ministries to move up what Indiana calls Paths to Quality, there are stages of Quality to Care dealing with the level of education of the care provider. If someone has a 4 year degree from Manchester University in Early Childhood, believably the quality of care from a learned person is different than not, the problem is what Keith just said entry level and you have a 4 year degree in Early Childhood you are still only going to get probably 8 or 9 dollars an hour. So you are in a really tough place to attract the talent to get the quality of care so that you can perhaps charge higher prices when you can't pay the individual with the credentials. It is a real problem. Mr. Gillenwater added that is why Economic Development got involved. When I came here I brought a one year old with me, I almost didn't move to Wabash County because of day care for my child. If I didn't move here chances are that I am not going to be here six years later. It is tough if you move to a community you are not from and grandma doesn't live around the corner and that kind of thing.

Mr. Gillenwater:

The last recommendation was Marketing/Branding, how do we build Wabash County's brand. When we talk about that we are not necessarily talking about tourism, I think our tourism, Christina does a great job of live, work, play the idea of tourism and coming to visit Wabash County. How do we brand beyond tourism, how do we brand it for schools of choice, how do we brand it for a great place to start a business, how do we brand it for not only a school of choice but that you could transition into Manchester University. How do you sell that whole package and build that pride. Ms. Grant shared in closing that of the recommendations that you have heard when we did

our 3 public addresses that were probably attended by about 150 – 180 people. The number one initiative voted was to maintain a competitive K-12 education. The second most common priority was to develop one plan. The third most commonly voted was to market the brand, market Wabash. So the next steps, we will be doing On the Table again if you are interested in hosting one in your neighborhood, church group, wherever you work, let us know. It won't be for a while but we would love to be able to talk to more and more people. Also, please pick up the phone and tell what you think of the suggestions and recommendations that our consultants have made. We are trying to nick away at every one of them but we would be very interested in hearing what you have to say. We appreciate the opportunity to be here and hope this was helpful, thank you. Mr. Gillenwater stated that they would be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. Howard: For those that are here tonight I appreciate you coming. I think the program that you presented tonight and the part that I wanted to tie in with it The State of Indiana Department of Agriculture, is pushing toward revitalizing, adding to the agriculture industry in the state as a whole. They have done a lot of research similar to what you have presented here, I think they go into the state but it was all counties, there is a lot of data you can find from all counties. I wanted them to be here tonight to give an idea of what the Agriculture Initiative is, how we could look at that and include that into this program as well as the other areas of our residential developments. Mr. Howard asked Ms. Grant and Mr. Gillenwater if either one of them have a copy of the current County Comprehensive Plan, Mr. Gillenwater said he has an electronic copy pulled off. 2012 is when we initiated that, we collected a lot of data at that time. We had town meetings and as far as what the interest and desires of the people of those communities were, we went to every sector of the county. Mr. Gillenwater said that they did share that with their consultants as well park plans, comp plans, City Stellar plans, anything that was publicly available for a review of that. Again as we progressed toward this idea of one comprehensive plan that everyone has a piece on from all the incorporated communities and the county as well we have started that collection so anything as far as getting updates from you we will be sure to share as we are going to be putting a call out for our consultant to essentially develop six comp plans at the same time for each community and then tying them all together. Any of that stuff that you can share we are glad to have.

Mr. Howard: The County Ordinance draft is with the County Attorney at this time for review, He asked Commissioner Mr. Dawes if there were any updates on that. Mr. Dawes stated that he has talked with Mr. Downs regarding the review of the Ordinance.

Mr. Howard: As I look at this and think about it, the one thing I think about is residential development, I am not opposed to seeing residential development in the county; I think there are places that it fits in the county. Along the line of residential development and because of some of the issues we sometimes run into, I have a hard time saying this could be a good spot for a development because they want control what happens beyond the development area. I don't agree with that, if you are going to move out into ag land then you are going to have to accept what ag land is and go accordingly to what ag land is. If you can't accept that then you need to find someplace else to build. We run into that issue way too much where people are irate about something. In looking through this program and doing some research over the last month I went back and looked at some nuisance things, I know livestock is an issue and I am not going to argue that point with anybody here tonight. I read through a nuisance suit where a farmer ended up in court because of the wet spring and when he could finally get in his fields he was working through

the night. Residents filed a nuisance suit against him, we can't have that. People are going to have to understand what goes on in the Ag community. That is why in our Ordinance draft we put the Right to Farm clause in there, people are going to have to understand that and accept it. If you are going to move out there those are the things you are going to have to deal with. From subdivision development, I have talked with several people and the one thing they always came back to is out in the rural county subdivisions where they put in their own septic or sewage treatment plant have not worked because they don't have the funding to maintain the plant properly and they always have issues. Northcliff is another great example. My personal feeling is if they want a subdivision it would need to be close enough to the city to connect to the city works. There is potential out in the county; the copy of the map I gave everybody tonight is a map of the zoning proposed for the new Ordinance draft. It took over a year's time, to develop. I went through every square mile in the county and looked at about 10 or 15 things and determined if that square mile should be zoned Ag 1 or Ag 2. The goal there is that if it is Ag 1 zone and you want to build there you are going to have to meet a certain point total on a form. When I say that, if I go out and ask someone to sell me two acres to build on, I will have to meet the criteria, it is different for an immediate family member, they would be permitted without having to meet the criteria. The Ag 2 zones are more available, properties where maybe the soil isn't as good, or the contours, or the crops aren't quite as good. Ag 2 would be readily available to build in. When we talked previously about subdivisions, in the early 60's there was a subdivision created, developed, and approved by the county called Johnson Heights. There were 89 lots on 48 acres, and to this date there are only 3 lots that have ever been occupied. On 24 east of Wabash close to the county line, Rosewood Hills was created. and we ended up completely vacating that because they could never sell the first lot, it was 5 lots on 36.718 acres on the Bitzer property. That is just 2 of the many subdivision created in the county, and to date most still have vacant lots. I think as a Plan Commission we have offered and allowed and platted some spots but they have never been developed to the full potential.

Matt Mize: So you are concerned about agricultural ground being converted to residential. I think there are stock within the communities. Ian Poston has built I think 6 houses in N. Manchester. Medcore just bought a property in Manchester and is going to tear it down and redevelop it, here the hospital property, so I think you are right, there are areas within our communities that can be developed before we start taking ag land. Obviously because of the issues that you were concerned about, you're going out to agriculture there is a pig farm there, they are going to spread pig manure, so yes we want to be careful of those issues. I think this one plan we can talk about this, how do we as a county take the existing stocks that we have, because this is a county issue. We've got a property that assesses for \$15,000.00, that doesn't help the county, so let's spend the \$15,000 buy the house and tear it down and put a \$150,000 house there. I know Manchester is trying to do some of that stuff, the hospital the Mayor is trying to do some of that. We have property within the communities to develop new housing to attract younger folks. I know planning, this is your bailiwick, that is happening but at a bigger level I think we need to talk about that and put funding behind that, at a County Council meeting. Where do we need to spend money to hit the points that these guys are talking about to attract young people back, to make housing attractive? I know REMC is starting to do something, high speed internet, they came to the Council to ask for a tax abatement, we approved, that is going to hugely help the rural area. That is going to help attract the youth back, everybody has to have their internet. I have 3 internet service providers at my house because I can't rely on one of them, I can't wait for REMC to get there. We have got to work together, we can't do it alone. It is a county issue at a county level and we need to deal with

it. I think your concern is good, but I don't think we have to worry about that yet. Let's use what we have.

Mr. Howard: I appreciate what you are saying, my opinion, I am not opposed to one comprehensive plan, provided we don't lose the comprehensive plan for the county, at the same time they have to serve each other well and work for each other. After I was here for a while, as far as the county doing demolition and cleaning up properties, we put so much in each year and what we didn't use at the end of the year went back into the general fund, what we started doing is putting permit fees into an Unsafe Premise Fund, there is money coming into that fund and that is what we use for demolition and clean up. We are concentrating on platted areas.

Mr. Mize: We need to find those builders and say here is a lot. Do we own the properties, that is part of that process that we have got to get figured out. We have spent money to tear it down but do we have the right to sell it?

Mr. Gillenwater: Some of the historical deals with subdivisions you are talking about I am not familiar with them. I understand where you are coming from, no one is going to argue with you that smart growth makes sense. There has to be adequate planning on both sides to make sure that something makes sense. If you build a house next to a hog farm you would expect the smell, anybody would. We acknowledge Ag as an important industry in the county and frankly as an opportunity for growth in this county as well. As we have seen from this study that housing is a need in this community, we have an aging housing stock, a lot of rentals in some of our cities and towns. Over the last 6 years I have had discussions with several people that have ideas about building homes or subdivisions or doing infill, the ones we have been the more supportive of, the sites we are focusing on for the redevelopment aren't going out and buying a 50 acre field in the middle of Ag zoned land. The land that we are focusing on is the Parkview Legacy site, we have a very real project there now that hopefully we will be able to break ground on this year, that is infill of a lot and neighborhood stabilization. The GDX site, the process is underway to remediate that site. My organization, we are doing a capital campaign right now raising money privately, one of the things we want to do with that capital is to buy up some blighted properties and bring someone in to develop. I think that infill housing is absolutely important. We need to be open to opportunities, if someone comes in tomorrow and wants to build a subdivision I think there has to be a team effort going forward to make sure it is smart and that it works for the county. At the end of the day if we can get some additional housing opportunities, the new subdivision in Manchester has the opportunity to be a game changer for the town of N. Manchester. Mr. Mize stated, let's say it could be for the county. As we transition to this one plan effort, don't underestimate how much potential I think there is for this opportunity. We have been convening this one plan committee, Kyle Bowman from the Co. Council, Barry Eppley from the Co. Commissioners representing the county, Mayor Long, Jim Reynolds from the Board of Works, sitting at the table together and Bob Ferguson from Roann has the same seat at the table. Don't underestimate how powerful that can be and the good that can come from that. Everyone is going to have their own unique things, what is important to the Mayor for downtown and industrial park development, and what is important to Roann is going to be different but they all have a place when you talk about how to grow this community.

Mr. Howard asked, why there are no board members from the PCB filling a seat in the group. Ms. Godfroy stated that she had facilitated one of the At The Table discussion groups. I have seen one of these already.

Mr. Gillenwater: We have presented to every town board meeting this exact presentation, we have went to the City Council, the School Boards, public meetings at the Honeywell Center and one in N. Manchester. We did the On the Tables, we did 45 in the course of one week. When we started out to build this one plan we reached out to each of the governmental entities, what I didn't reach out to was I didn't go ask the City Board of Works, I didn't go ask Medcore in Manchester, I didn't ask the Building Commissioner, I asked the mayor to bring a representative to the table and it happens to be him. I went to the County Council and Commissioners and asked and that is how it turned out to be Kevin and Barry. We didn't pick the representative for them. We have done a pretty good job over the last three months of meetings where we are going to put out an RFP to bring in the consultant. I will also tell you that during this process as we begin to develop these individual plans I can't go and develop a comprehensive plan for the town of Roann, I don't live in Roann. I pass through Roann. I know a handful of people in Roann. I can't go develop their comp plan they have to develop their own plan so the two representatives, and every one of the entities has two representatives, it is up to them to get their community brought in and engaged to develop this plan. The it is going to be up to our consultants and that steering committee to tie together what all of those communities are.

Mr. Rice: It is surprising to me that you have been doing this for 3 months and a major part of this is the County Comprehensive Plan, and the individual who knows the most about it was not included in anything. Mr. Howard said if we all want this to work and I think we all do, we have to be on board. Mr. Gillenwater asked if you are suggesting that we broaden our scope of the one plan and where do we stop at as far as inviting all the different boards and commissions to have a say?

Mr. Howard: I just feel there should be representation from this board.

Mr. Curless: How do you see Wabash County Plan Commission Board, basically we represent all rural areas of Wabash County. How do you see our part of this, what can we do to help the situation?

Mr. Gillenwater: As each entity submits plans and we try to tie them all together. I would absolutely think you have a roll in that, developing the county's particularly. I would absolutely see you having a roll, I can't imagine that the Co. Commissioners and Council wouldn't involve you in that. Ms. Grant stated that would have been her expectation that we have the county representation and they would have been representing you.

Mr. Dawes: I knew Barry Eppley was the representative from the Commissioners, but we have not discussed where they are or where they are heading with this.

Mr. Mize: I know that they are working to get things moving, they are going to need more people. I am on the Co. Council and the attorney for the town of N. Manchester. Of course you guys would have to be involved when it comes to county planning. I just don't know if they have hit a point

that they say that this is a county planning issue let's pull in county planning. What size of the group will make it effective or just too broad?

Mr. Howard: We haven't had communication to the Board. I feel that as a Board we should be involved. We need to know what is going on.

Mr. Curless asked for any comments from the audience.

Mr. Dawes said that he would like to recognize Heartland Career Center, they have applied for a grant and the Commissioners have pledged some CEDIT money if they get that grant. That could be a real game changer, it is not only for students but to address some adult work skills redevelopment.

Mark York: On the Ag side, it is going forward correctly with the Ag 1 Zone and finding out about other residential sites.

Mr. Curless thanked Mr. Gillenwater and Ms. Grant for their presentation to the Board, he asked that they let this Board know what we can do and asked if they would keep the Board informed.

Mr. Curless: Representatives from the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) will be present at the March 5th Plan Commission Board meeting to discuss Ag Based Strategy for Indiana. Mr. Howard invited Mr. Gillenwater and Ms. Grant to attend the March 5th meeting.

Mr. Curless: next on the agenda is the unsafe premise order for NORAG. Mr. Howard stated that he is following up to see that they are doing what was requested.

Mr. Curless: Next is the Year End Reports

Mr. Howard: Reviewed the following reports:

Unsafe Premise fund

Permit Summary by Permit Type: 201 permits were issued in 2019, 13 were Special Exceptions and 16 were Variance Requests, 172 were building permits. There were no CFO pre-applications in 2019.

New Homes, 23 permits issues were for new homes in the county.

Annual Permit Income

Summary and averages of permits issued between 1990 through 2019.

Permits by category and Township

Complaints for 2019: Total worked on in 2019	60
New complaints for 2019	52
Complaints moved forward from 2018	8
Open complaints moved to 2020	6
Complaints resolved	54
Moved forward to 2020 3 unsafe premise orders	3

There being no further business Mr. Curless asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Vogel made a motion to adjourn, this was seconded by Ms. Godfroy. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Libby Cook
Secretary, Wabash County Plan Commission Board
mih