



## Whitley County Comprehensive Plan Update

June 2021





# A MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY

The Form Whitley County Steering Committee, Whitley County Commissioners and Columbia City / Whitley County Joint Planning & Building Department are pleased to present this update to the Whitley County Comprehensive Plan.

This document updates and replaces the previous (2011) plan with revised recommendations and a new future character and land use plan. They were created with input from many different sources, including the public, local planning and government staff, the Steering Committee, and Task Force members. Hundreds of community members contributed comments throughout the planning process, both through in-person workshops and a robust online engagement effort. The plan also integrates land use and technical analysis that was conducted in order to create a user-friendly, forward-thinking document that will help shape decision-making for years to come.

The result is a collective set of recommendations that will allow the County, both local government and the community at large, to expect and manage change in a slow, deliberate manner, while retaining what makes it unique and special. This is especially important relative to a strongly expressed desire to preserve the County's rural lifestyle and aesthetic while allowing for housing and targeted new development to support a robust economy and high quality of life. Of particular importance is the Future Character and Land Use Plan, which depicts not only anticipated land uses throughout the County but also the desired qualities of the future buildings, spaces, and places.

Some of these plan recommendations should be implemented by the Whitley County Plan Commission, the Joint Planning & Building Department, or other government departments and officials, but many may be led by businesses, organizations, or individuals. Others could be collaborative among many parties.

We want to thank the community members who offered their time and ideas to the Form Whitley County process. We look forward to implementing the plan in partnership with residents, businesses and property owners and working together to make the plan's recommendations a reality.

Sincerely,

The Form Whitley County Steering Committee

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MANDATE

The State of Indiana empowers communities, through the terms stated in Title 36, Article 7 of the Indiana Code, to plan with the purpose of improving “the health, safety, convenience, and welfare of the citizens,” and to plan for the future development of their communities to the end:

1. that highway systems be carefully planned;
2. that new communities grow only with adequate public way, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities;
3. that the needs of agriculture, forestry, industry, and business be recognized in future growth;
4. that residential areas provide healthful surroundings for family life; and
5. that the growth of the community is commensurate with and promotive of the efficient and economical use of public funds” (IC 36-7-4-201(b)).

The Statute states that counties may establish planning and zoning entities to fulfill that purpose (IC 36-7-4-201(c)). The Plan Commission is the body designated to prepare and maintain a comprehensive plan (IC 36-7-4-501), which is required by state law to be developed and maintained if the community wishes to exercise zoning powers (IC 36-7-4-601).

Indiana Code 36-7-4-502 states the required elements of a comprehensive plan, listed below.

1. A statement of objectives for the future development of the jurisdiction.
2. A statement of policy for the land use development of the jurisdiction.
3. A statement of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

Additionally, a comprehensive plan may include surveys, studies, maps, charts, reports, programs, and plans of various types as listed in IC 36-7-4-503.

This mandate serves as the foundation for the Form Whitley Comprehensive Plan update and the 2011 Whitley County Comprehensive Plan upon which it is based. Throughout the planning processes and within the Comprehensive Plan, all State of Indiana minimum requirements have been met or exceeded.

- The Form Whitley Comprehensive Plan update analyzes the physical characteristics of the County including existing land use, transportation systems, community facilities, the built environment, and natural land features.
- Public involvement provided the foundation for this Comprehensive Plan. The public input exceeded the State’s requirements by providing numerous opportunities for input through the planning process. That input is integrated into the content of this document. The public was given the opportunity to review a draft version of the document and provide feedback prior to the State-required public hearing.
- The Form Whitley Comprehensive Plan update is grounded in the required elements stated above, and also contains additional components. While being comprehensive in scope, for practicality the Plan cannot be all-inclusive in content, but its overall purpose is improving the health, safety, and welfare of residents.

# PREFACE

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# INTRODUCTION

The Form Whitley County process was a special opportunity to chart a course for Whitley County for many years to come. This plan was updated from the existing plan document, published in 2011, through a deliberately collaborative and open process. It was informed by technical expertise that was strategic in nature, focusing on the most critical issues for the County. This chapter provides some context about the work that was undertaken.

## BACKGROUND

With a gradually growing population of nearly 34,000, Whitley County is predominately agricultural and has a rich heritage and strong rural character. It also boasts a strong local economy and high quality of life. In 2011, the County adopted a comprehensive plan to establish a policy framework to guide public decisions regarding development and growth management, while preserving what makes the County unique.

With this planning process, the County audited the current plan to ensure that the vision and goals were consistent and viable after a decade, and addressed emerging planning issues through updated recommendations. This update aims to ensure that the plan remains an actively used and relevant document.

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A comprehensive plan is a long-term guide that expresses the values and aspirations of a community for the next 20-30 years. It is comprehensive in scope but not all-inclusive in scale. It can plan for future physical development in order to promote the public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, and general welfare. It considers the input of residents, workers, and other stakeholders. The plan helps the County respond to change and acts as a guidebook for decision-makers. It provides a framework for future decision-making that provides predictability and efficiency, while maintaining flexibility.

### HOW THIS PLAN IS ORGANIZED

This plan is organized into chapters by topic:

1. Community Profile
2. Goals and Recommendations
3. Character and Land Use Plan
4. Transportation
5. Appendix

### 2011 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The previous comprehensive plan was adopted in 2011; this update reflects changing trends and priorities while being focused on the future. Regular comprehensive planning represents good stewardship and establishes a foundation for well-supported policies to create the best possible future. The 2021 update was undertaken to address the items above and improve upon the previous plan.

## PURPOSE OF THE UPDATE

Whitley County's leadership has updated the existing comprehensive plan to address current trends and planning issues and to consider new opportunities that will shape the County's future. The intention of the planning process is to identify qualities of the County that should be preserved, respond to current development trends, and create a shared vision for the future. Form Whitley County is focused on maintaining the County's position as a desirable place in which to live, work, play, and invest.

## WHO WAS INVOLVED

Fundamentally, this is the community's plan. Many individuals were involved in order to guide and shape this document.

### STEERING COMMITTEE

Process, outreach, topical guidance

- ▶ A Steering Committee helped to guide the public process and the plan's recommendations.

### STAKEHOLDERS AND TASK FORCES

Targeted input

- ▶ Individuals with specific interests or expertise were engaged to provide insight throughout the Form Whitley County process.

### PUBLIC

Input and feedback

- ▶ Public involvement was vital to Form Whitley County's success. A number of broadly publicized in-person and online opportunities were provided for public input. Accommodations were made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### STAFF

Project management and local knowledge

- ▶ County staff supported and helped to coordinate the work and provided local knowledge and expertise to each element of the plan.

### ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS

Guidance and adoption

- ▶ Elected officials helped give direction for the plan. The final plan will be formally adopted by the County Plan Commission and County Commissioners, both of which will have a central role in guiding its implementation.

### CONSULTANTS

Process leadership and expertise

- ▶ The consultant team worked closely with the Steering Committee and staff to facilitate the process and share experience from similar communities nationwide.

## VISION

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**Whitley County is a community focused on creating the best climate to develop and grow industry, including the agricultural industry, while acknowledging the importance the environment plays. With careful planning, strong partnerships, and cooperation, residents of Whitley County will enjoy a high quality of life with local employment opportunities, a strong and advanced agricultural industry, rural character, and environmental assets.**



# GOALS

The vision and goals were carried over from the previous plan (with minor adjustments to the goals) and the recommendations were edited and supplemented based on 2021 analysis and public input.

## GOALS

### STRUCTURE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This plan includes five goals. Each goal is supported by recommendations.

### GOALS

Intended results expressed in simple terms for the plan's five topical areas. These represent overarching desired outcomes for the plan.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

More specific objectives or actions that can be taken to advance the goals.

#### 1. FOCUS GROWTH

- ▶ Encouraging development where and when it is feasible, suitable, advantageous, consistent with the land use strategy, and supported by the community's values.

#### 2. FOSTER SAFE AND CONVENIENT CIRCULATION

- ▶ Improving the road network's efficiency, effectiveness, safety, quality, and compatibility with the land use strategy.

#### 3. NURTURE THE ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Managing environmental resources, energy consumption, public health and safety, and sustainability.

#### 4. ADVANCE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Promoting commerce, jobs, and overall vitality that is consistent with the County's economic strategy, beneficial county-wide, diverse and inspiring, and consistent with the land use strategy.

#### 5. ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE

- ▶ Improving the lives of the people of Whitley County through opportunities, quality service, sense of place, communication, and predictability.



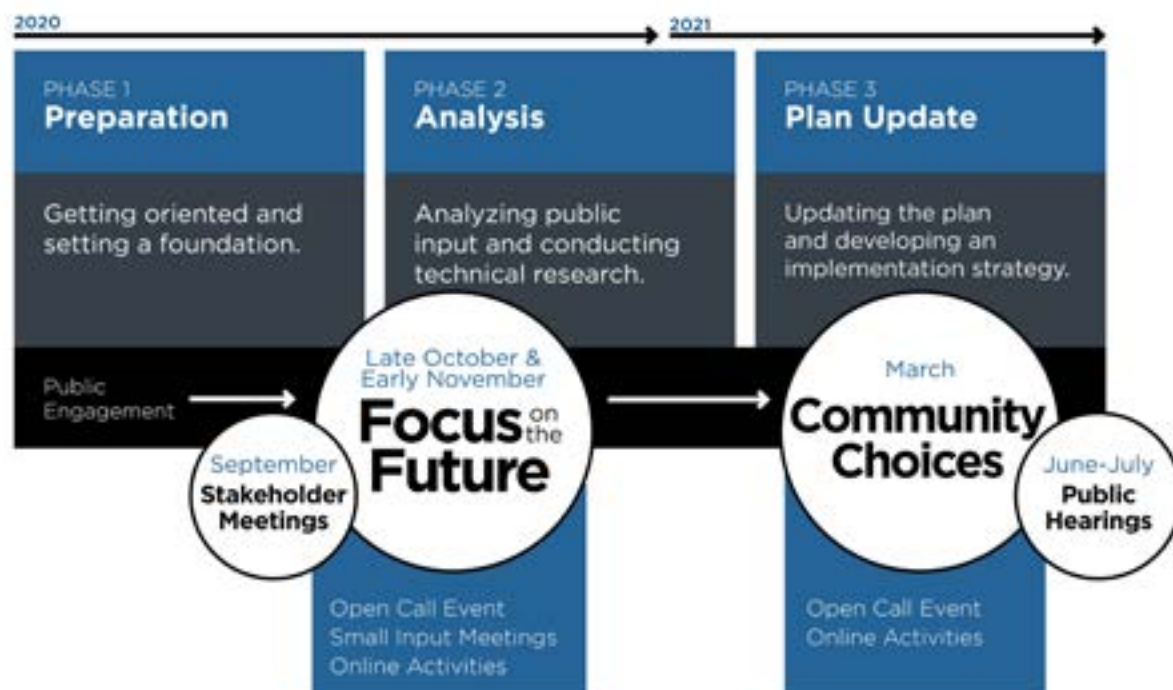
# PLANNING PROCESS

To ensure that the planning process for Form Whitley County was open, inclusive and transparent, robust public engagement was conducted. Following is a summary of the public engagement process, which included two key opportunities for public input throughout the planning process.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Form Whitley County effort blended technical analysis with community ideas and insight. The plan's public engagement process included two rounds of distinct opportunities in which the Whitley County community could participate.

The first round of engagement, called Focus on the Future, was held in Fall 2020. It included socially distanced engagement at an initial county-wide 'kick-off' event, held on October 26, and seven sessions held throughout the County from October 26 to November 16. Online engagement opportunities were made available from October 26 through November 30, which mimicked the in-person activities. The second round of community engagement, called Community Choices, included an in-person event on March 13 as well as online activities which were made available from March 8-21. This round focused on feedback on draft recommendations and a draft Character and Land Use Plan.



## PROCESS HIGHLIGHTS

1. A Steering Committee was formed by the Commissioners to help guide the public process and the plan's recommendations.
2. The Steering Committee met on a regular basis to provide guidance on the planning process, research and draft plan elements. Steering Committee members met both in-person and virtually throughout the process, in order to accommodate COVID-19 state and local guidelines.
3. Stakeholder interviews were conducted in Fall 2020 to understand key interests and gather input from people with specific knowledge and expertise.
4. Word of mouth, social media updates, press releases, local radio, articles published in the County's newspapers, and emails sent through established organizations were all used during the process to keep the public informed and engaged. The URL [www.FormWhitleyCounty.com](http://www.FormWhitleyCounty.com) redirected visitors to a dedicated webpage on the County's website, which served as a hub for communications, online engagement and plan resources throughout the process.
5. Seven Task Forces were formed to provide input relating to different aspects of the plan including agricultural/rural, lakes, residential/urban, circulation, economic development, environment and quality of life. Task forces met and provided comments on draft plan materials.
6. Hundreds of people participated in the planning process, including in-person meetings and online engagement and nearly two thousand comments were received, a significant increase in participation over the 2011 plan.
7. The plan will go through a formal adoption process, including public hearings with the Plan Commission and County Commissioners.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The planning process was named Form Whitley County to convey the importance of built character in creating quality places and supporting compatibility between land uses and activities.

A poster titled "FOCUS on the FUTURE" with a green and blue color scheme. It contains information about a public event on October 26 (Monday) from 3-7 pm at the 4-H Community Center. The poster also mentions a survey for those who can't attend and the Form Whitley County logo.

**FOCUS** on the  
**FUTURE**

Share your thoughts on how Whitley County can take action for the future!

You're invited to help update the County's comprehensive plan.

- Share your insights on how the County can promote desirable land uses, attractive places, a strong economy, and more.
- "Drop in" at your convenience to view idea boards and comment at your own pace.

**October 26**  
(Monday)  
3-7 pm

4-H Community Center  
680 W. Squawbuck Rd.  
Columbia City

Registration encouraged at [FormWhitleyCounty.com](http://FormWhitleyCounty.com).

Event includes accommodations for social distancing. Masks are required per the requirements of Stage 5 for public events.

Can't attend? A survey will be launched on October 26 at:  
[FormWhitleyCounty.com](http://FormWhitleyCounty.com)

**FORM**  
WHITLEY COUNTY  
sculpting our future

*Over 1,000 printed rack cards, advertising the Focus on the Future "drop in" events, were distributed throughout the County.*

## STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee guided the public process and helped to shape the plan's recommendations. The Committee provided direction and feedback to the planning team at key moments in the process.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted to inform the work and provide supplementary feedback to the rounds of public engagement. A series of interviews with 27 stakeholders were conducted virtually in September 2020 by planning team members. A range of interest groups were represented, including agriculture, economic development, education, environmental resources, local government, land developers, transportation and utility sectors. In addition to the feedback obtained from stakeholder interviews, comments submitted via email by some who could not attend these interviews also informed the planning process.



*Community members who attended workshops were able to view materials in socially distanced settings and provide feedback.*

## TASK FORCES

In addition to stakeholder interviews, task force meetings were held to provide additional information contributing to the comprehensive plan update. Volunteers were solicited at the Focus on the Future workshops and via the project website to serve on technical task forces in key topical areas, including land use and development, transportation and economic development. These task force findings and review, along with the results from the project's engagement initiatives, ultimately shaped the recommendations proposed under each of the plan's five Goals.

## FOCUS ON THE FUTURE WORKSHOPS

The public engagement process kicked off with a county-wide Focus on the Future event, followed by seven, small public engagement sessions from October 26 to November 16. Engagement at the in-person sessions and the accompanying online opportunity included two main exercises: a rating exercise and an opportunity-mapping exercise.

During the rating exercise, participants were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strong Agree”) and provide any additional comments in response to their statement ratings. The statement prompts corresponded with each of the five County goals, as identified at the start of the activity: Focus Growth; Foster Safe and Convenient Circulation; Nurture the Environment; Advance Economic Development; and Enhance Quality of Life.

The mapping exercise asked participants to identify key opportunity areas in the county and to explain why these areas were selected. An opportunity area could be a place that should be protected or that should be improved or enhanced.

Over 150 people participated in this first round of public engagement through one of the in-person sessions, or the online survey. (This first round surpassed participation from the entire 2011 process, during which 94 people completed surveys throughout the process.). Approximately 1,500 individual comments were collected, including both statement rating and opportunities mapping.

All comments were recorded in a database, indexed, and categorized. As this document is an update to the plan, attempting to obtain a statistically-valid sample was not as crucial as gathering reactions to the 2011 Plan.

Some of the most prevalent topics included prioritizing future-oriented workforce development initiatives, maintaining pedestrian and vehicular safety along heavily trafficked roads in the County, preserving the agricultural heritage in the County, CFOs (both supporting comments and concerns), and enhancing the quality of life for residents by ensuring critical services and technologies, such as broadband Internet access.

These topics reinforced the plan's goals and informed updates to its recommendations. The consultant team then identified common themes important to participants and key opportunity areas to focus on, from which preliminary actions were developed.

**1,500**

**INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS  
COLLECTED**

**95%**

**OF PARTICIPANTS  
FELT COMFORTABLE  
PARTICIPATING**

## COMMUNITY CHOICES

In early 2021, the second round of public engagement was held, which included a series of Community Choices activities. A "drop in" workshop was held over a period of four hours on Saturday, March 13 using similar social distancing and safety accommodations as in the first round of public engagement. Participants had the chance to review and comment on draft plan recommendations and a draft Future Character and Land Use Plan.



*At the Community Choices "drop in" workshop, participants had the chance to share comments on preliminary draft plan content.*

## ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Providing participants with access to online engagement activities was critical to the success of Form Whitley County. Thoughtfully replicated engagement activities were made available online to anyone who was unable to attend the in-person Focus on the Future sessions. These online engagement opportunities were especially useful in providing continuous public engagement throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the entirety of the Form Whitley County process. All virtual activities were created to mimic the Focus on the Future in-person activities. These activities were publicized in a variety of ways, including social media channels, emails, word of mouth and press releases.



*Access to online engagement tools was critical to the success of Form Whitley County.*



# Part 1 **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

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# INTRODUCTION

The following sections provide an overview of history, physical attributes, demographics, community values, and input provided by the public and community leaders. This information is provided in order to convey some of the conditions and trends in the County that have informed the update to the plan.

## THE HISTORY

### NATIVE AMERICANS AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

The area now known as Whitley County was originally occupied by the Miami and Pottawatomie Indian tribes. A treaty signed in 1826 between the Miami tribe and the US Government established several reserves around prominent chiefs' villages. These were dissolved as reservations in the 1840s, but Seek's Village, Chapine, Beaver, and others are still seen on modern survey maps.

White settlement of Whitley County began in the mid-1830s along the Eel River in Smith Township and subsequently in Cleveland Township at Springfield (now South Whitley). In 1838, Whitley County was formally organized by the State legislature. The centrally located town of Columbia (City) was selected as the county seat, and with the extension of the first railroad from Fort Wayne in 1856, it grew to become the commercial focus of the county.

### RAILROADS AND TOWNS

By 1871, another railroad was laid in a roughly southwest to northeast direction, connecting South Whitley and Churubusco. A third line across the southern part of the County in the 1890s left only Thorncreek and Etna-Troy townships without railroad service. New populated places grew along the tracks, including Larwill, Coesse, Dunfee, and Collins. Additional towns located around the County included Laud, Collamer, Tunker, and Etna. Summer resorts such as Tri-Lakes were established around the County's natural lakes starting in the 1900s, eventually transforming into year-round population centers.



## INDUSTRY AND SUBURBS

Through the mid-20th Century, industries located within Columbia City, South Whitley, and Churubusco, while the other County towns served local, mostly agricultural, needs. This changed in the 1960s when new industry began locating outside of the incorporated areas as availability of large property tracts and road access gained greater importance for site selection. This continues today, such as with the industrial parks in Union Township.

Similarly, improved automobile transportation and utility availability starting in the 1940s made locating homes outside of the established population centers feasible and enticing for many new residents. Over time this shift increased the number of non-farm residences in agricultural areas, some of which are organized as subdivisions, such as Stable Acres, Westfield Passage, and Fox Run, while many are located as single parcels throughout the unincorporated County.



## THE LAND

Whitley County is located in northeast Indiana. The County seat and largest community is Columbia City. Churubusco, South Whitley, and Larwill are other important and organized communities. Additionally, there are several unincorporated “villages” throughout the County that contribute to its character.

The Eel River runs from the northeast corner of the County to the southwest and splits the County into two different land formations. Land north of the Eel River is characterized by hills and deep depressions (e.g., lakes). Land south of the Eel River is characterized by gently rolling landscapes and flat lands.

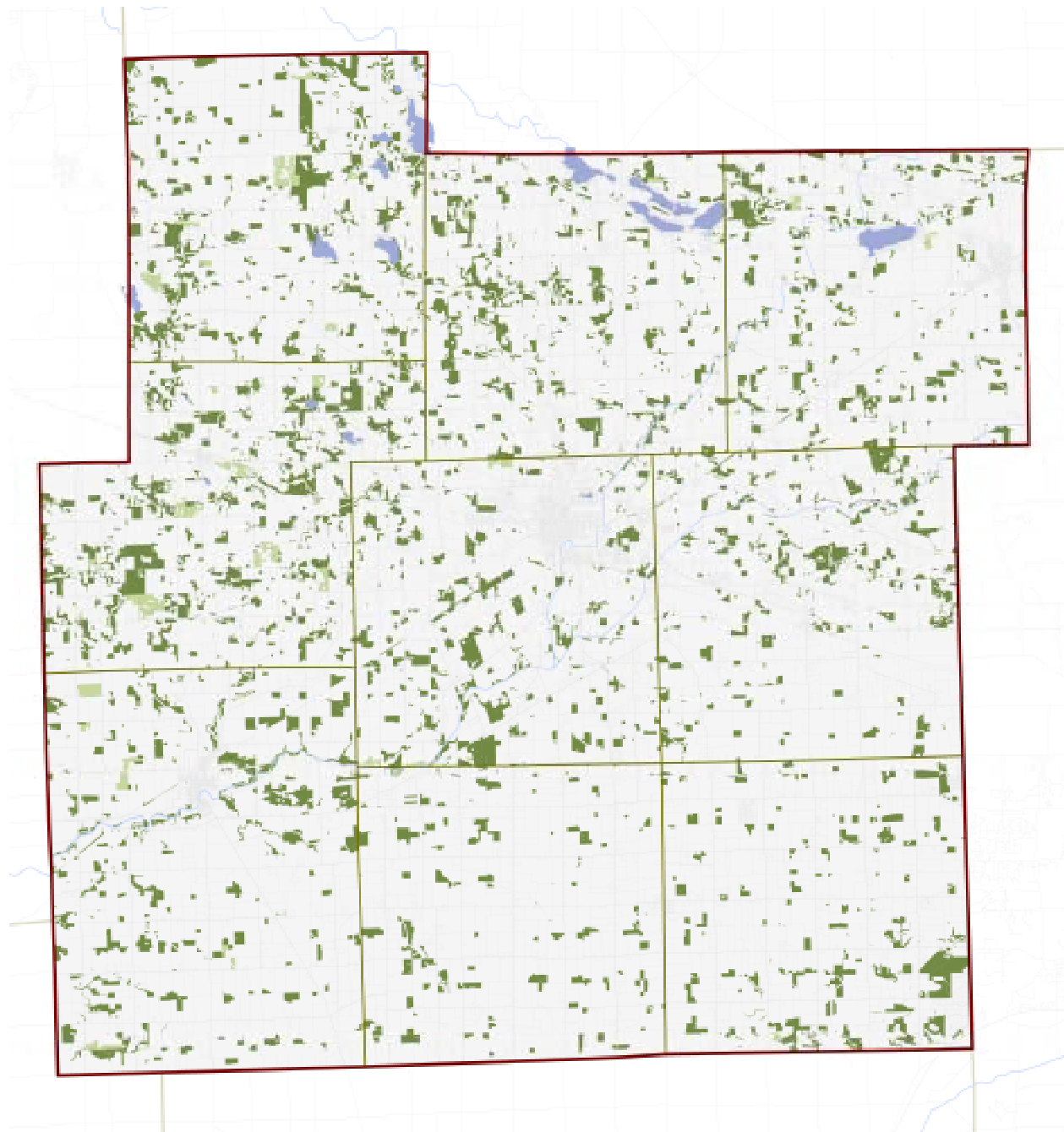
The County contains 30,758 acres of forest or wetland and a large proportion of the County’s land (nearly 95%, not including incorporated areas) is zoned for agricultural use.

Whitley County drains into three watersheds. The northwest corner of the County drains into the Tippecanoe River drainage basin. The southeast corner and most of the southern edge of the County drains into the Wabash River drainage basin. The rest of Whitley County drains into the Eel River basin. This watershed covers nearly two-thirds of the County, including all four incorporated communities. The Eel River flows southwest, converging with the Wabash River in Logansport.

In 1917, John H. Shiltz wrote in the Soil Survey of Whitley County, “The real source of wealth in this county is the soil.” Whitley County’s soil is still considered good for agriculture and structural integrity. However, clay soils drain poorly and in most cases are not ideal for septic systems.





## NATURAL AND PRESERVED LANDS



Source: Land Cover 2011, IndianaMAP

### LEGEND

	Water
	Forest/Woodland
	Wetland

The County's natural resources and scenic beauty are highly valued and contribute positively to residents' sense of attachment to where they live. However, water quality degradation due to stormwater runoff, failing septic systems, and negative impacts from development have eroded the quality of the environment in certain locations. This has been a concern for some residents.

## THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

### HISTORIC ROADWAY DEVELOPMENT

The County's road system developed organically in the 19th Century, largely based on the land survey section grid, with additional transverse roads connecting population centers. In 1913, the Lincoln Highway was designated to follow what is now US 33 through Churubusco. By 1930, it was numbered US 30 and realigned to cross the County; this route is now known as Lincolnway. In the early 1960s, US 30 was widened and partially rerouted. This four-lane, divided highway linking Fort Wayne to Chicago has had a tremendous impact on development in Whitley County.

### TODAY'S MULTIFACETED SYSTEM

Today, US 30 is the chief transportation feature in the County, providing access to jobs, products, and services in the region. It provides direct, fast access to Interstate 69 to the east and Warsaw and other major cities to the west. However, increasing traffic volumes have made safety on the road a major concern, especially since 2006. In addition, several other highways currently traverse Whitley County, including State Roads 5, 9, 14, 105, 109, 114, and 205, and US 24 and 33.

Over 640 miles of County roads combined with the state highways create an efficient transportation network. County roads in the south half of the County follow section lines creating a grid pattern. Lakes and varied topography make the County roads in the northern portion of the County less grid-like (more irregular).

Whitley County is currently crossed by two rail corridors. The Chicago, Fort Wayne, and Eastern Railroad (CFER) is a Class 3 railroad that parallels US 30 from Fort Wayne to Chicago on track owned by CSX and leased to CFER. Between two and six trains use this line daily, with additional trains serving only Steel Dynamics. Commodities carried include grain, fertilizer, scrap, steel products, railroad rail, and lumber.

Class 1 Norfolk Southern runs across the County, largely parallel to County Road 500 South. There are up to 25 trains daily, most of which are "through freight" destined for points outside of the County. Locally, there are currently spurs for four grain elevators and fertilizer distributors.

Whitley County does not host any public airports, but several private airfields are located throughout the County. Public airports within a 30-minute drive include Fort Wayne International, Smith Field, Huntington Municipal Airport, Warsaw Municipal Airport, DeKalb County Airport, and Kendalville Municipal Airport.

## THE PEOPLE

### POPULATION CHANGE

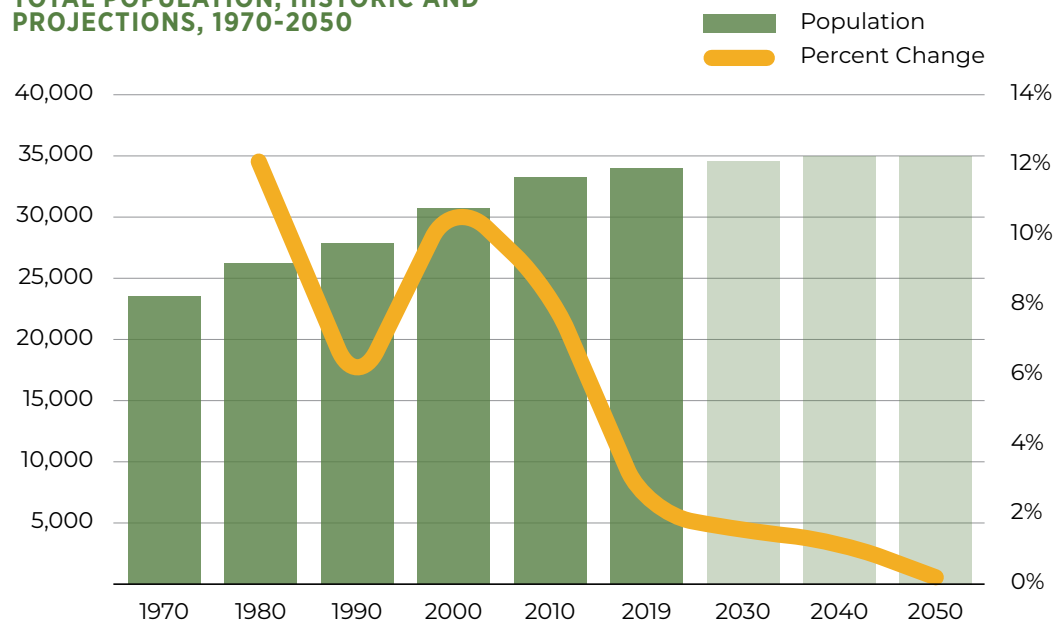
In 2019, Whitley County's population was estimated to be 33,964. Since 2010, the County has experienced a 2.0 percent (2.0%) increase in population. This is a much smaller increase than that experienced during the previous decade, but still notable in comparison to most nearby counties. Whitley County has had a growth rate greater than Huntington, Noble and Wabash Counties, consistent with Kosciusko County, and less than Allen County. Whitley County's increase was less than the State of Indiana's 3.8 percent (3.8%) population increase over the same period.<sup>1,2</sup>

In 2030, Whitley County's population is projected to be 34,513.<sup>3</sup> This represents a 1.6 percent (1.6%) increase from the 2019 population. Population growth is expected to slow over the coming decades compared to that seen during the late 20th century.

### ABOUT DATA SOURCES

The data in this section is from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Stats Indiana. In most cases, data is rounded for ease of comprehension. All data describing currency (e.g., wages, median household income, median home value) are nominal and are not adjusted for inflation. (More specific data source information can be found in the Appendix C, Data Sources.)

### TOTAL POPULATION, HISTORIC AND PROJECTIONS, 1970-2050



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Population Division, STATS Indiana

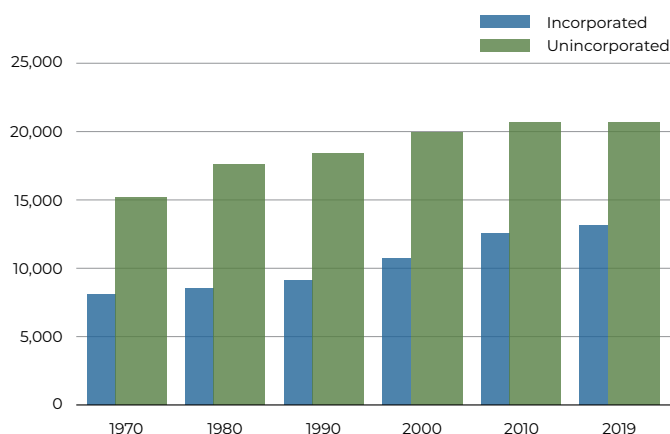


## INCORPORATED AND UNINCORPORATED POPULATION

Approximately 39.0 percent (39.0%) of Whitley County's population, roughly 13,238 people, lived in the County's incorporated cities and towns (Churubusco, Columbia City, Larwill, and South Whitley) in 2019. This represents an increase of 1.2 percentage points compared to 2010 Decennial Census data. This is smaller than the intercensal change seen between previous decades: 2.0 percentage points between 1990 and 2000 and 2.6 percentage points between 2000 and 2010.<sup>1,4</sup>

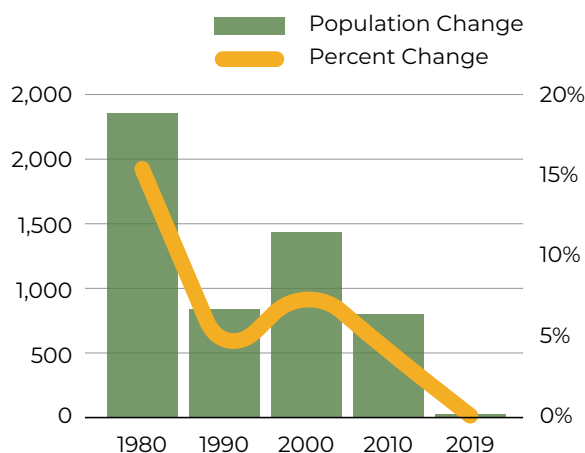
The unincorporated areas of Whitley County witnessed considerably less growth between 2010 and 2019 as compared to intercensal change since 1970.

## INCORPORATED AND UNINCORPORATED POPULATIONS, 1970-2019



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division; Author's calculations

## UNINCORPORATED POPULATION CHANGE, 1980-2019



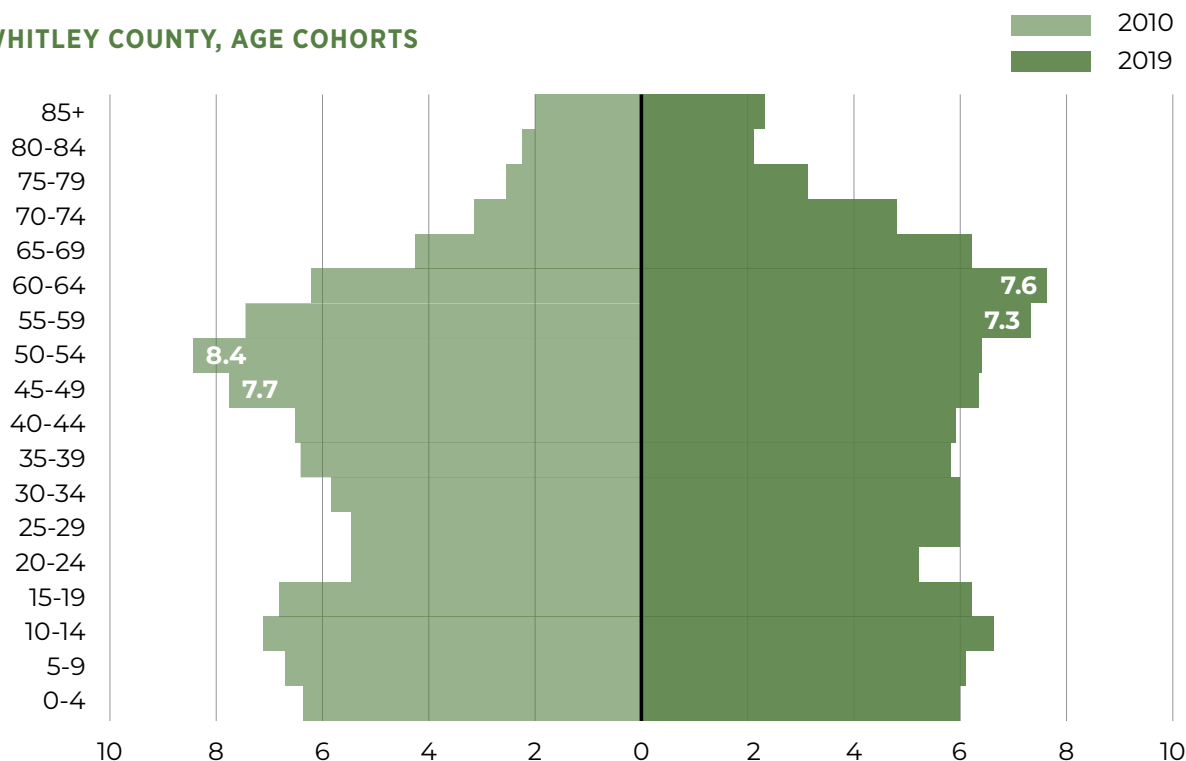
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division; Author's calculations

## AGE

Whitley County's two largest age cohorts in 2019 were persons aged 60-64 years and those aged 55-59 years, representing 7.6 percent (7.6%) and 7.3 percent (7.3%), respectively, of the County's total population. From 2010-2019, the cohort composed of those aged 70-74 years increased by 57.1 percent (57.1%). Those aged 65-69 years increased by 52.5 percent (52.5%) during the same period.<sup>5</sup> The upward movement of the bulge in the population pyramid found below demonstrates the aging of the population.



## WHITLEY COUNTY, AGE COHORTS



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division



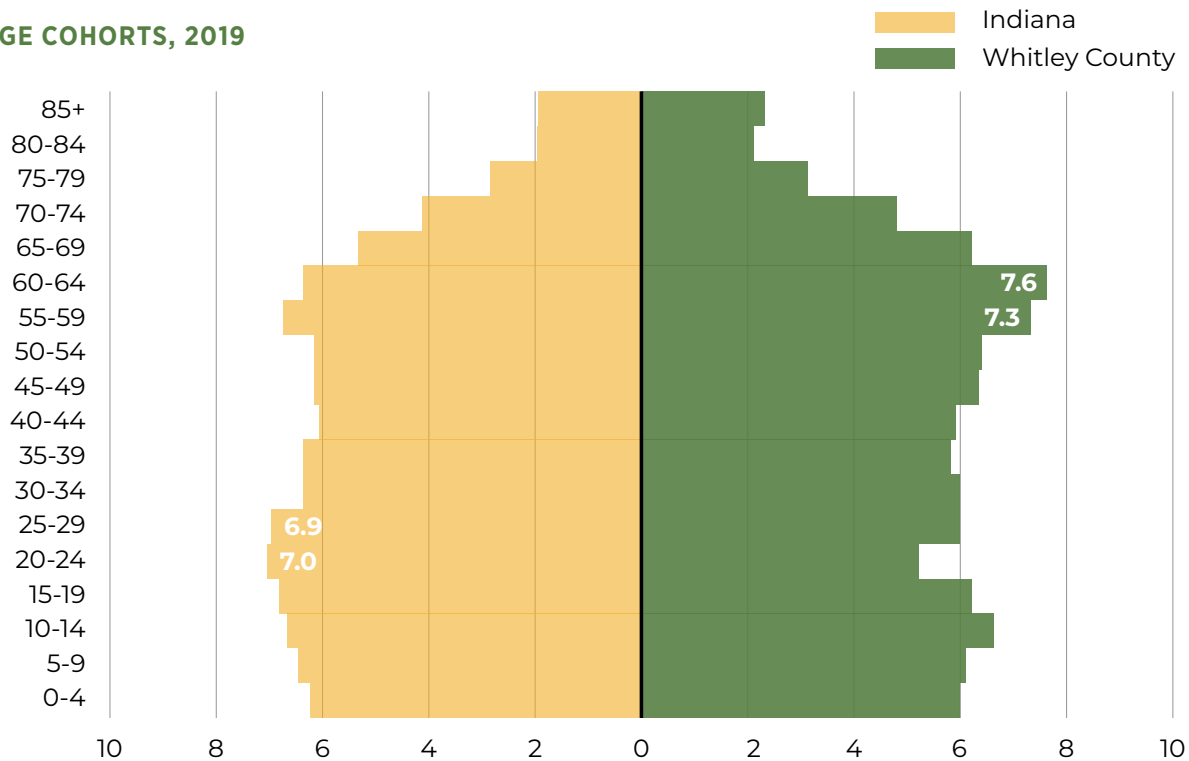
In comparison, Indiana's two largest age cohorts in 2019 were persons aged 20-24 years and those aged 25-29 years, representing 7.0 percent (7.0%) and 6.9 percent (6.9%), respectively, of the state's total population.<sup>6</sup>

Indiana's two largest growing cohorts were the same as that of Whitley County. These cohorts, however, did not increase as significantly in the State as they did in Whitley County: persons aged 70-74 years increased by 44.0 percent (44.0%) and those ages 65-69 increased by 38.4 percent (38.4%).<sup>4</sup>

The median age increased during the same period in both Whitley County and the State. In Whitley County, the median age increased from 40.1 years to 41.8 years, and from 37.0 years to 37.9 years in Indiana.<sup>3,4</sup>

The relatively large growth in the share of those over 65 years of age in Whitley County could represent a potential increased demand for housing and services for older adults in the coming decade.

## AGE COHORTS, 2019



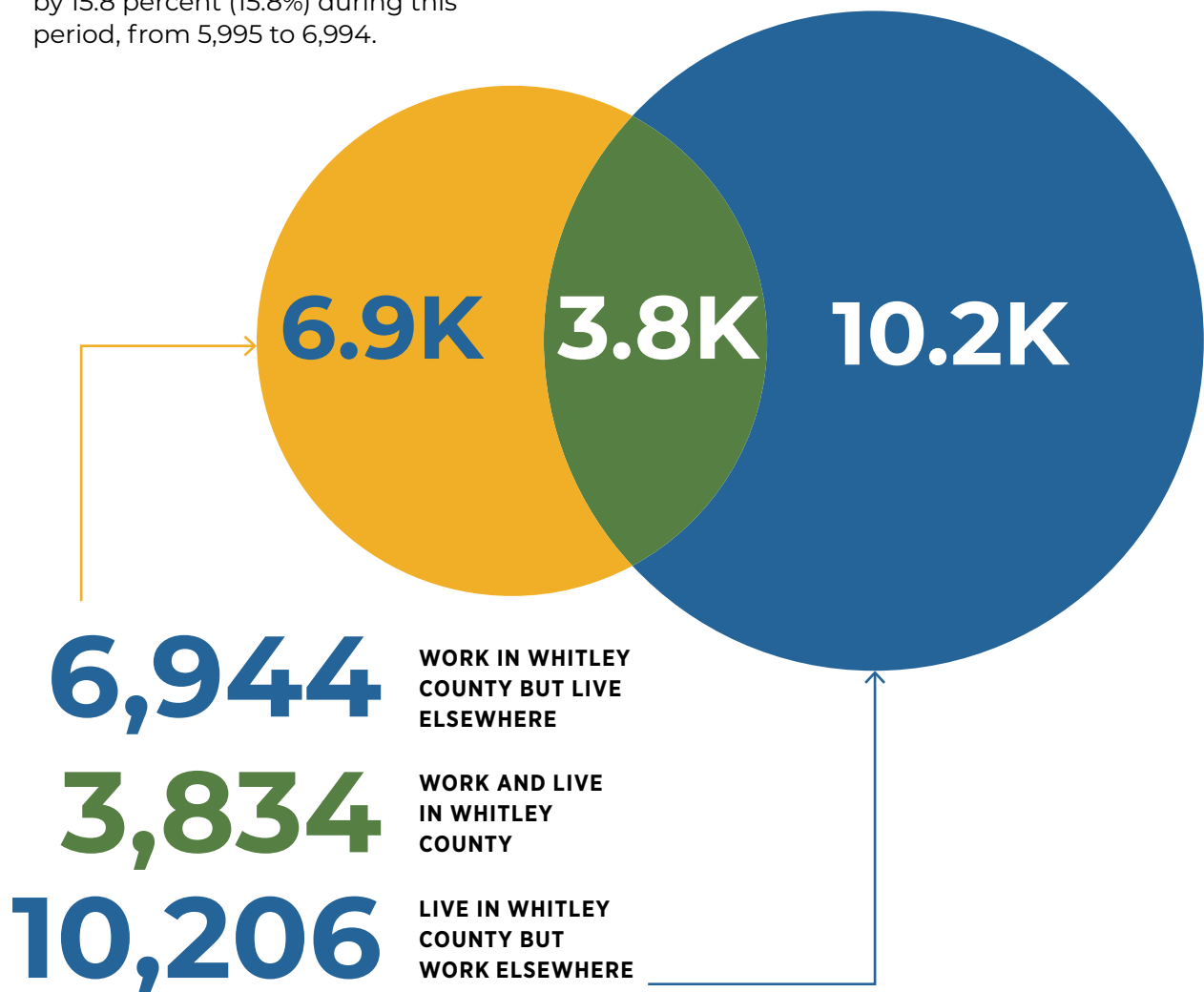
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

## THE ECONOMY

### INFLOW/OUTFLOW OF WORKERS

Inflow/outflow analysis of worker commuting patterns into and out of Whitley County demonstrates that many people who live within the County work elsewhere. Between 2008 and 2018, the number of Whitley County residents leaving the County to commute to work increased by 19.0 percent (19.0%), from 8,576 to 10,206. Commuters into the County increased by 15.8 percent (15.8%) during this period, from 5,995 to 6,994.

The number of people who both live and work in the County decreased by 10.4 percent (-10.4%) from 4,280 to 3,834 over the same period. The County had a net outflow (-3,262) of workers in 2018, indicating that it is more of a labor force provider than a labor force hub. This is an increase from the net outflow (-2,581) of workers the County exhibited in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

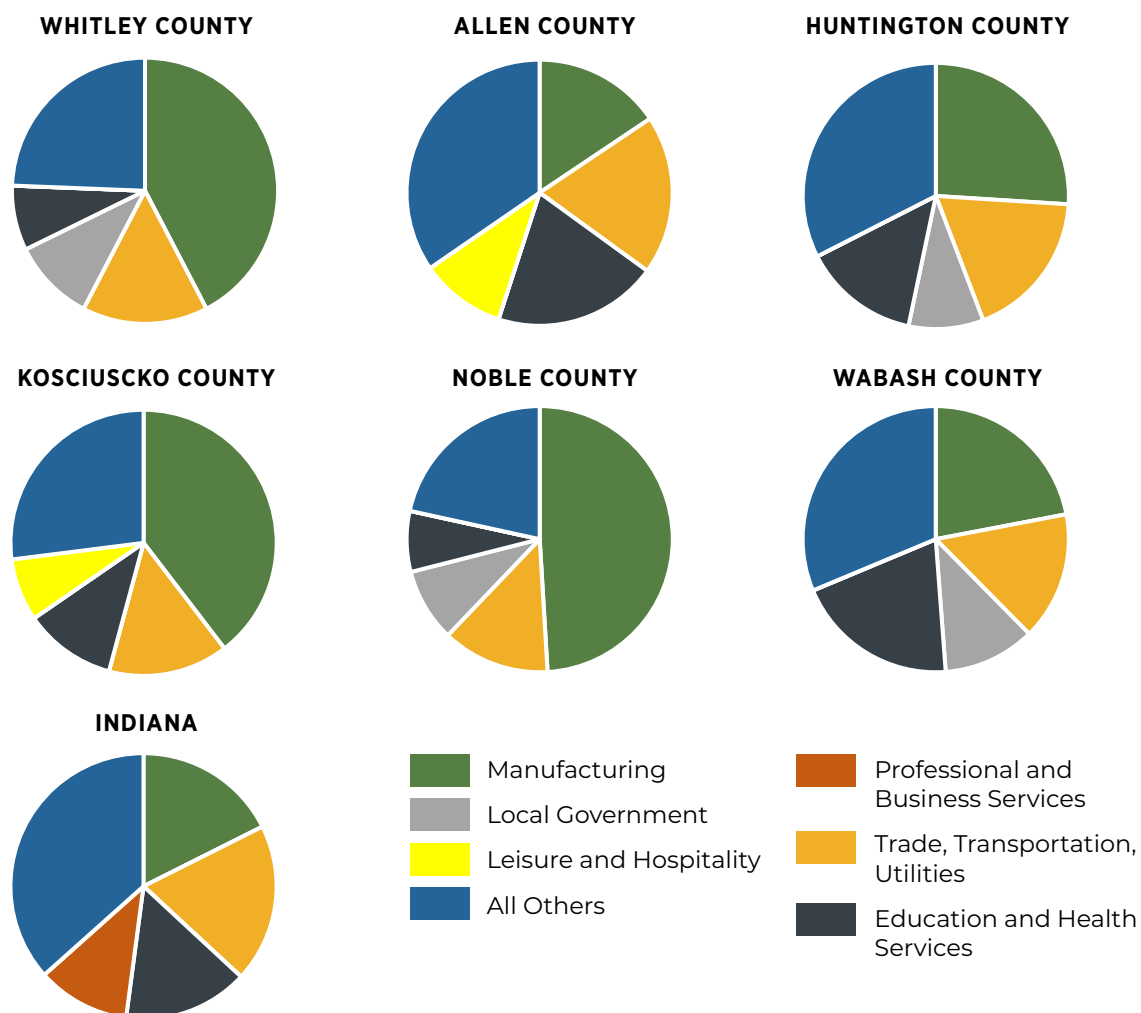


## KEY INDUSTRIES

Roughly 42.4 percent (42.4%) of Whitley County jobs are in Manufacturing. This is well above most of the benchmark geographies,

including the state and surrounding counties. The only geographies that have a similar percentage of jobs in Manufacturing are Noble County (49.1%) and Kosciusko County (39.6%).

## EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

From 2010 to 2019, Whitley County gained 1,567 jobs in Manufacturing, an increase of 39.6 percent (39.6%). During this period, the share of total jobs in Manufacturing grew from 36.8 percent (36.8%) in 2010 to 42.4 percent (42.4%) in 2019. Comparatively, over the same period, Noble County gained 1,800 jobs in Manufacturing, an increase of 24.5 percent (24.5%), resulting in a 49.1 percent (49.1%) share of all jobs in 2019. Similarly, Kosciusko County gained 1,897 Manufacturing jobs, an increase of 14.0 percent (14.0%), and a resultant 39.6 percent (39.6%) share of total jobs in 2019. Unlike Whitley, Kosciusko, and Noble Counties, the industry mixes of the state, Allen, Huntington, and Wabash Counties are substantially more diverse.

A high concentration of jobs in a particular industry can present opportunities and threats. It can present opportunities by providing available workforce with the knowledge and training requisite for an industry. This can result in clustering (e.g., medical device manufacturers in and around Warsaw). Over-reliance on a particular industry can also present threats to a community if an economic downturn negatively impacts the industry (e.g., the impact of the Great Recession on the recreational vehicle industry in and around Elkhart). Therefore, while Whitley County's strength in manufacturing is an asset, diversification of industry types is also valuable.

In 2019, jobs in Whitley County paid on average \$44,112 in annual wages for all jobs, while the average annual wage of a Manufacturing job in Whitley County was \$56,881. Both of these are less than the wages in Allen and Kosciusko Counties, and the state, but greater than Noble, Huntington, and Wabash Counties.



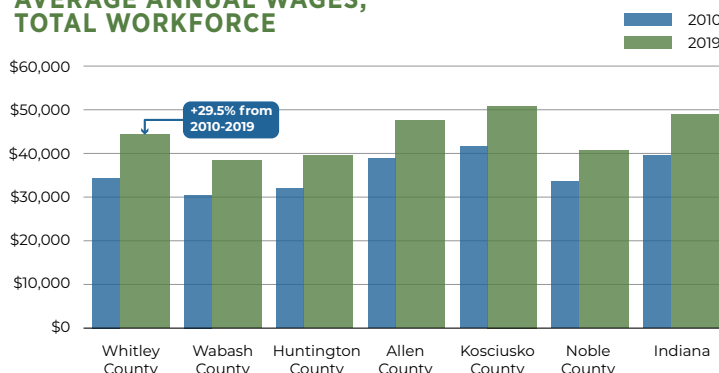
## WAGES

Average annual wages across all industries in Whitley County demonstrated substantial growth between 2010 and 2019. During this period, the average annual wage in Whitley County increased from \$34,075 to \$44,112, an increase of \$10,037 or 29.5 percent (29.5%). This was a greater percentage increase than all other benchmark geographies.

Whitley County average annual wages in Manufacturing also displayed substantial growth over the same period. From 2010 to 2019, the average annual wage in Manufacturing grew from \$44,053 to \$56,881, an increase of \$12,828 or 29.1 percent (29.1%). Only Wabash County experienced greater growth of Manufacturing wages during this period.<sup>8</sup>

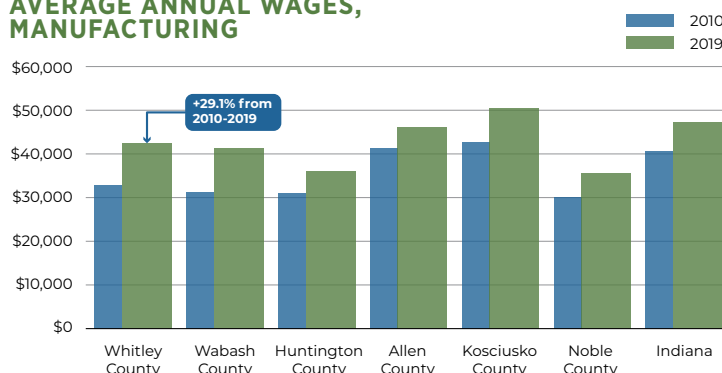
Although Whitley County's median household income (MHI) fell slightly from 2018 to 2019, it is greater than all benchmark geographies.<sup>9</sup>

### AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES, TOTAL WORKFORCE



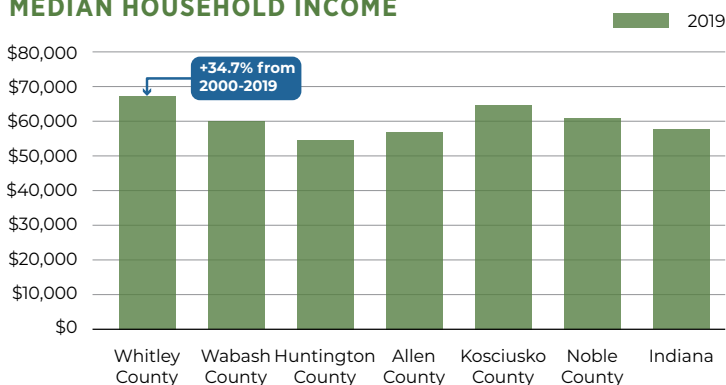
Source: U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

### AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES, MANUFACTURING



Source: U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



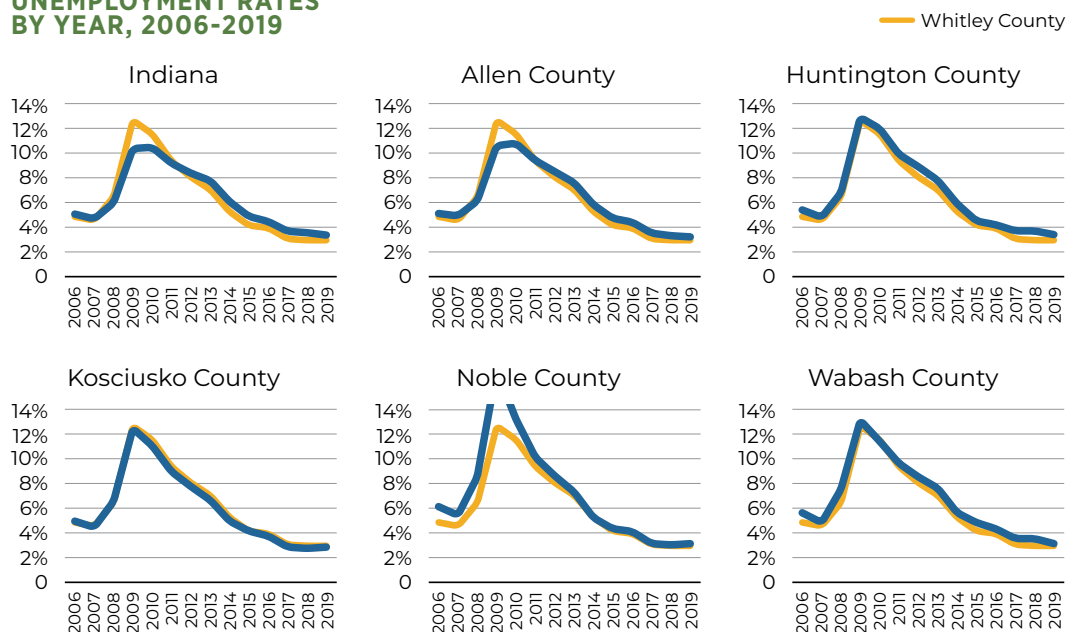
Source: US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates

## COMPARATIVE UNEMPLOYMENT

Whitley County's unemployment rate rebounded quickly from the highs of the Great Recession. From 2006 to 2019, the County's highest average annual unemployment rate was 12.6 percent (12.6%) in 2009 and the lowest was 2.9 percent (2.9%) in 2019. The annual unemployment

rate in Whitley County has been consistently lower than all benchmark geographies except Kosciusko County. This comparison can be helpful in understanding how Whitley County compares (favorably) to the region.

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY YEAR, 2006-2019

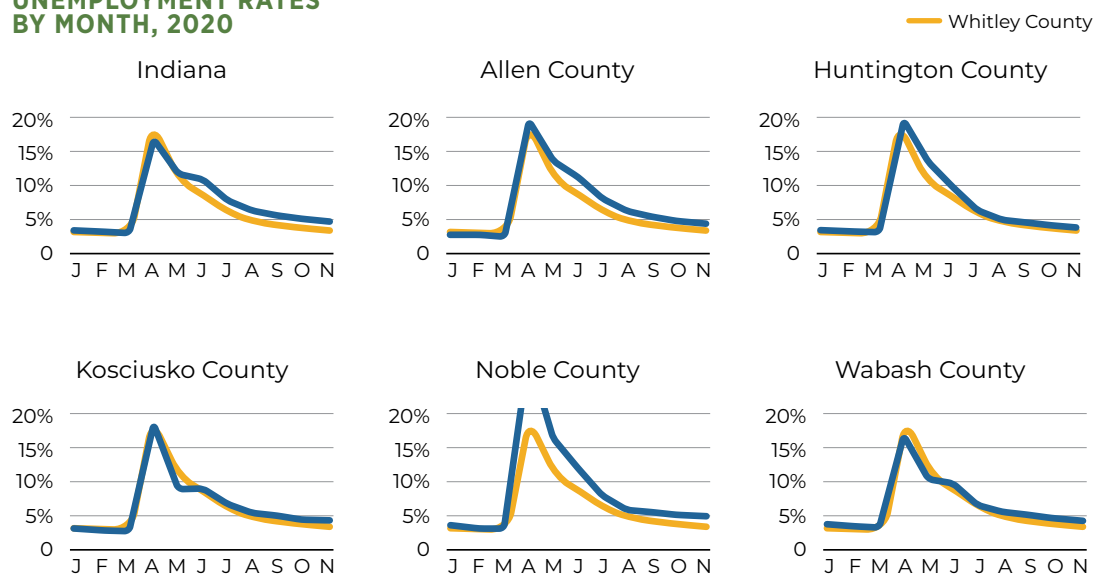


Source: U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics,  
Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Whitley County's monthly unemployment rates in 2020 fell back to pre-COVID-19 lockdown levels more quickly than any of the other benchmark geographies. It fell below 9 percent (9%) in June. This was prior to any other geography reaching this

level. Although the County's monthly rate was higher than that of Kosciusko County before the statewide lockdown went into effect on March 25, it was lower than Kosciusko County's from June through November.<sup>10</sup>

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY MONTH, 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

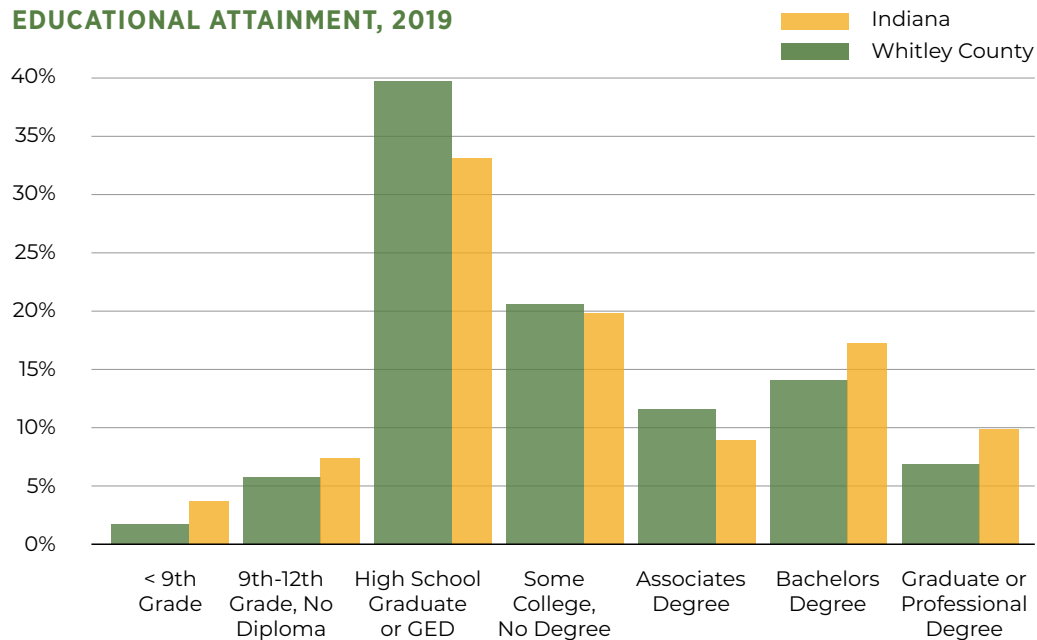


## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The percent of the population 25 years and over who had completed a high school diploma (or equivalent) or higher in Whitley County grew by 1.6 percentage points between 2010 and 2019. This represents the third lowest growth during this period among the benchmark geographies.

The percent of the population 25 years and over who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher in Whitley County increased by 4.1 percentage points between 2010 and 2019. This ties with Allen County for the second highest growth during this period among the benchmark geographies.<sup>11</sup>

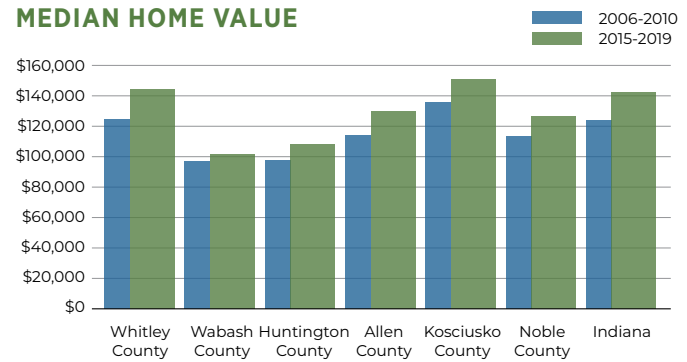
### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

The median value of owner-occupied homes in Whitley County in 2019 was second highest among benchmark geographies, being only lower than Kosciusko County. The median home value in Whitley County increased by 15.9 percent (15.9%) from 2010 to 2019. This represents the largest increase by percent among benchmark geographies during this period.<sup>12</sup>

### MEDIAN HOME VALUE



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

## AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The market value of agricultural products sold by Whitley County farms in 2017 was \$120.9 million, an increase of 20.7 percent (20.7%) from the \$100.2 million sold in 2012. Crop sales accounted for 65.3 percent (65.3%), or roughly \$78.9 million, of all agricultural products sold in 2017. In 2012, crop sales accounted for 75.9 percent (75.9%), or roughly \$76.1 million, of all agricultural products sold. Although the value of crop sales increased from 2012 to 2017, crop sales as a share of all agricultural products sold decreased by 10.6 percentage points. Whitley County livestock sales in 2012 were approximately \$24.2 million, representing roughly 24.1 percent (24.1%) of all agricultural product sales. In 2017, livestock sales increased by 73.8 percent (73.8%) to nearly \$42.0 million. This represented 34.7 percent of all agricultural product sales.<sup>13,14</sup>

Generally, the County's agricultural makeup was similar to that of the state as a whole in both 2012 and 2017.<sup>15</sup>

**"I was born here. I stayed because of the rural character, community support, and quality of life."**

-Form Whitley County Participant

The number of farms in Whitley County decreased by 2.0 percent (-2.0%) from 710 in 2012 to 696 in 2017. Although the number of farms decreased, the number of acres farmed increased from 140,099 acres in 2012 to 176,255 acres in 2017 (roughly the same acreage farmed as in 2002). These factors resulted in an increase in the average farm size from 197 acres in 2012 to 253 acres in 2017. During the same period, the number of farms in Indiana decreased by 3.5 percent (-3.5%), total acreage farmed increased by 1.7 percent (1.7%), and the average farm size increased by 5.2 percent (5.2%).<sup>13,14,15</sup>

The average age of the principal operator or producer of a farm in Whitley County in 2012 was 55.2 years. This increased to 56.9 years in 2017. In comparison, the average age of the principal operator or producer of a farm in Indiana was 55.8 in 2012 and increased to 56.7 in 2017.<sup>13,16,17</sup>

Overall, Whitley County's agricultural sector is comparable to Indiana on average. The amount of farmed land in the County varies from year to year, but the number of farms has been consistently decreasing while the size of each farm is increasing. The upward shift in operator age can be concerning if it indicates that a younger generation is not available as farmers retire.



# Part 2

# GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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# GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Five Goals were identified as part of the previous comprehensive plan. They were assessed and as part of this update and determined to still be fundamentally appropriate. The Goals are over-arching in nature, adopt a long-term view and are intended to give broad guidance to future decisions. The Goals are not site specific, nor do they anticipate all the special situations that may apply to a particular development project. Recommendations have been identified to advance each goal, which include implementable programs, projects and policies that should be pursued. It is important to note that while many recommendations will be the responsibility of County Government, specifically the Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department, other recommendations will require leadership from a range of government departments, civic and nonprofit groups and others.

## GOALS

The goals are as follows:

- A. Focus Growth
- B. Foster Safe and Convenient Circulation
- C. Nurture the Environment
- D. Advance Economic Development
- E. Enhance Quality of Life

When evaluating a particular development for compliance with the Comprehensive Plan, decision-makers should recognize that determining compliance will not always be a black and white issue. Some development projects will comply with some Goals and Recommendations, contradict others, and be unrelated to others. Judgment will be needed in determining alignment with the plan.

## STRUCTURE OF PART 2

For each Goal the following information is provided

- A short introduction that explains and characterizes the Goal.
- Conditions and trends highlights that provide foundation for the Goal.
- Benefits of implementing the Recommendations that fall under each Goal.
- A series of Recommendations that further the implementation of the Goal. Some of these Recommendations are carried over from the previous plan, some have been modified from the previous plan and others have been added. Some Recommendations are higher level objectives and some are more specific actions.

# ICONS

Icons are used after each recommendation. They are used to describe the recommendation's type, degree of importance, and relative cost.

## TYPE ICONS

To illustrate the means for implementation, the following icons are used.



**Policy.** A policy to be implemented by resolution, ordinance, or directive.



**Program.** A program to be implemented by County staff, community leaders, or local organizations.



**Project.** A construction or other type of project with a defined start and end date.

## PRIORITY ICONS

To illustrate the level of priority, the following icons are used.



**High Priority.** Highest priority recommendation. It will have the greatest impact on achieving the Goal.



**Medium Priority.** Moderate priority recommendation. It will have a significant impact on achieving the Goal.



**Low Priority.** Low priority recommendation. While less important than others, it is still important for achieving the Goal.

## COST ICONS

To illustrate the level of resources necessary to implement the recommendation, the following icons are used.



**High Cost.** Requires significant resources; for example, a high percentage of staff time and/or funding typically beyond normal budgets.



**Moderate Cost.** Requires moderate resources; for example, a moderate amount of staff time and/or a notable amount of funding that may still be accommodated by normal budgets or may require limited additional funding.



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



## GOAL 1: FOCUS GROWTH

The Goal of focusing growth is to promote development where and when it is:

**Feasible:** Growth that is market-supported, based on a sound financial plan.

**Suitable:** Growth that is located where there are transportation, public and environmental facilities and services.

**Advantageous:** Growth that provides benefit to the surrounding areas.

**Consistent with the Land Use Strategy:** Growth that adheres to desired geographic placement and is compatible within the context of surrounding area.

**Supported by the Community's Aspirations:** Growth that meets the public's expectations, needs, and desires.

### BENEFITS

- Minimizes land use conflicts
- Reduces cost to provide public utilities and services
- Preserves intended character
- Supports the agricultural industry
- Provides residents with predictability
- Allows protection of environmentally sensitive areas
- Reduces costs to maintain roads
- Reduces energy consumption
- Improves water quality
- Keeps lake communities from becoming overbuilt

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1.1** Encourage growth in municipalities, adjacent to municipalities, near municipalities, or in areas with existing public utilities, using water and/or sewer capacity as a criterion in evaluating new development.



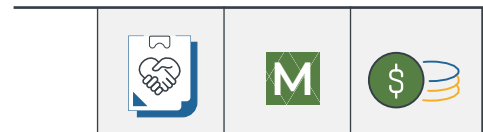
**1.2** Pay "reasonable regard" (as used in Indiana Code) to this Plan, especially the Future Character and Land Use Plan, in zoning decisions.



- 1.3** Minimize land use conflicts by strengthening requirements for modifying the scale and character of development at the edges of areas with different land uses and considering open space, landscaping or separations between areas. (See Appropriate Adjacent Land Classification Table in Part 3.)



- 1.4** Recommend standards and locations for alternative energy generation facilities.



- 1.5** Protect rural character and agricultural land from development that has a suburban or urban character.



## FOUNDATION

- ▶ Since 2010, the County has seen a modest (2%) increase in population.
- ▶ From 2016 to 2020, the average size of a newly recorded residential lot in the unincorporated area was 4.19 acres.
- ▶ As of 2020, an estimated 94.5% of the County's planning jurisdiction is zoned for agricultural purposes, not including incorporated areas.
- ▶ Soil composition in Whitley County is conducive to agriculture and structural integrity, but not ideal for typical septic systems.
- ▶ The current zoning and subdivision control ordinances only accommodate a standard subdivision.
- ▶ Conflicting viewpoints among land owners concerning appropriate land uses in various parts of the County has led to increased attention on 'focused growth' countywide.



- 1.6** Support farming activities and evolving agricultural uses that conform to the recommended character types as specified in the Future Character and Land Use Plan and mitigate potentially incompatible effects through development standards and certainty of location.



- 1.7** Strengthen and enforce “anti-funneling” regulations\* in the Whitley County Zoning Ordinance to minimize congestion and overcrowding of lakefront.

\* See Key Terms in Appendices



- 1.8** Take action to address lake-specific issues in a detailed plan and update regulations of the Zoning Ordinance to minimize the number of variances for lake properties.



- 1.9** Incorporate provisions into the approval and permitting process for new developments and new homes that protect existing agricultural operations and work with builders, realtors, and other organizations to educate new rural residents about living in agricultural areas.



- 1.10** Every 3-5 years, evaluate the consistency of the Future Character and Land Use Plan with desired growth patterns, community character, and changing market forces, and address inconsistencies by modifying decisions or updating the Plan.



- 1.11** Amend the Whitley County Zoning Ordinance and Zone Map, Subdivision Code, and/or other regulations allowing for community input and supporting these Goals and Recommendations.



- 1.12** Consider alternative development regulations and tools as they've been applied in similar communities and assess effectiveness for Whitley County; may include evaluation of performance zoning, Transfer of Development Rights, Form-Based Codes, etc.\*



\* See Key Terms in Appendices

- 1.13** Prepare a housing study that includes both market analysis and qualitative input by government officials, real estate agents, builders, developers, and other community members to assess needs and opportunities for new housing in the County, especially middle-income housing units.



- 1.14** Encourage industrial and business park development along US 30 where designated on the Character and Land Use Map with design and landscaping that minimizes visual impacts to surrounding areas.



## GOAL 2: FOSTER SAFE AND CONVENIENT TRANSPORTATION

The Goal of fostering safe and convenient circulation is to provide a road network that is:

**Efficient:** maximizing value while minimizing construction and maintenance cost.

**Effective:** conveying vehicles utilizing arterials, collectors, and local roads.

**Safe:** widths, alignments, intersections, and road signs support safe movement of vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.

**High Quality:** processes and materials result in longevity.

### **Compatible with the Land Use**

**Strategy:** network supports existing density and intensity of land uses, desired development around the County; arterials connect core commerce and employment districts.

### **BENEFITS**

- Improves accessibility
- Improves travel safety
- Improves road quality
- Lessens congestion
- Creates predictability
- Enhances quality of life
- Reduces energy consumption
- Educates the public

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** Maintain the five-year asset management plan and develop a comprehensive approach to maintenance and upgrades.



- 2.2** Identify possible alternative funding resources for road maintenance and implement strategies that reduce maintenance expenses and other ongoing costs.



- 2.3** Be prepared to capitalize on opportunities to acquire additional right-of-way as part of development and during improvement projects.



- 2.4** Refer to the Transportation Plan Map, in conjunction with the Future Character and Land Use Map, when approving new development and update it regularly as development occurs.



- 2.5** Work with enforcement agencies and officials to determine needed regulations for transportation throughout the County and to enforce them consistently.



## FOUNDATION

- Soil type, topography, and inadequate drainage complicate road maintenance.
- During the planning process, many participants recognized the need to maintain and improve County road conditions.
- County residents and emergency responders consistently include US 30 in their answers when asked about dangerous segments of roadway or dangerous intersections.
- There is some interest in improvement for pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the County, with some reservations about costs and locations.
- A vehicular circulation network consists of arterial, collector, and local roads. Each classification of road plays a role in the network.
- Many participants in the planning process focused on existing transportation infrastructure and were less concerned about public transit infrastructure.

**2.6** Utilize the asset management plan to systematically make improvements to the County's roadways and bridges.



**2.7** Advocate for conversion of US 30 to a freeway-level highway and incorporate its design in the Transportation Plan Map.



**2.8** Ensure accessibility and connectivity for police, fire, and emergency services.



**2.9** Revise the Whitley County Zoning Ordinance, and other regulations, to include stricter standards for structures and vegetation in the intersection vision clearance triangle, including field crops.



**2.10** Continue to support the Whitley Transit System.



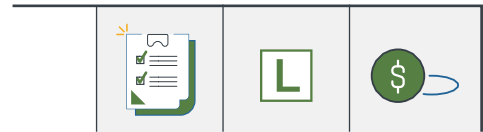
**2.11** Develop an alternate transportation network plan to designate trails and paths, routes, and right-of-way improvements that will better serve pedestrians, non-motorized vehicles, and non-conventional vehicles.



**2.12** Plan conceptually for additions to the network of collector roads and require upgrades to existing roads as more or new development occurs; consider implementing a road impact fee.



**2.13** Require connectivity between and among developments.



**"I'm encouraged and excited by the improvements being discussed and the potential the county has for well-planned growth."**

-Form Whitley County Participant



## GOAL 3: NURTURE THE ENVIRONMENT

The Goal of nurturing the environment seeks to improve its:

### **Environmental Resources:**

changes that conserve, preserve, and/or minimize impacts.

### **Energy Consumption:**

changes that reduce energy consumption.

### **Public Health and Safety:**

changes that reduce risks from natural disasters.

**Sustainability:** awareness and long-term preservation of valued built and natural features.

### **BENEFITS**

- Maintains resources for future generations
- Minimizes flooding and resultant property losses
- Reduces energy consumption
- Improves water quality
- Provides alternative energy sources
- Reduces waste
- Minimizes land use conflicts
- Provides opportunities for environmental education
- Creates recreational benefits

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1** Prohibit development in the floodway and encourage education about floodplains, especially in lake areas.



- 3.2** Develop and implement a countywide storm water management and erosion control ordinance.





- 3.3** Include incentives for conservation and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas in the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Control Ordinance, such as development credits for environmental-friendly design.



- 3.4** Amend the Whitley County Zoning Ordinance to regulate alternative energy facilities, both small- and utility-scale, to mitigate negative effects to surrounding properties while recognizing the emerging importance of alternative energy sources.



## FOUNDATION

- Many participants in the planning process recognized the County's abundance of natural resources as important to enhancing their quality of life.
- Whitley County's environmental resources include habitats for a variety of species of plants and animals.
- Over 100 of Whitley County's lakes and stream segments are listed on Indiana's 303(d) list of impaired water bodies.
- The Whitley County Solid Waste Management agency operates a county-wide curb side recycling program.
- Many participants in the planning process were concerned about existing and future plans for lakefront development in the County.
- Whitley County lake communities where sanitary sewer systems have been installed have experienced improved water quality.
- The system of tile drains in Whitley County was designed to accommodate flow from undeveloped land.

**3.5** Continue to closely regulate septic systems. Explore allowing alternative types of on-site treatment systems where soils are not ideal for conventional systems.



**3.6** Monitor Indiana's list of impaired waterbodies for Whitley County to identify changes and examine possible causes.



**3.7** Strengthen the countywide recycling program through service enhancements such as increasing the types of materials that can be recycled, enhancing the household hazardous waste drive-up system, and finding users for re-usable materials.



**3.8** Identify and inventory environmental features that are unique, large in size, irreplaceable, or contain a rich diversity of species.



**3.9** Target identified environmental features for conservation and/or preservation.



**3.10** Attract environmentally-conscious businesses and encourage construction of buildings and neighborhoods that are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified/certifiable.



**3.11** Research and publish a local directory of environmental organizations and existing lake associations that have programs to conserve, sustain, and restore natural areas.



**3.12** Encourage healthy soil conservation practices to reduce drainage runoff and sedimentation.



**“We stay in Whitley County because of the small town, rural community feel that allows us to live a slow paced life while also giving us access to nearby communities which provide a unique variety of opportunities.”**

-Form Whitley County Participant



## GOAL 4: ADVANCE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Goal of advancing economic development promotes commerce, jobs, and overall vitality that is:

**Consistent with the Economic Strategy:** targets appropriate industrial sectors, promotes quality infrastructure, improves quality of life amenities, and supports a qualified workforce.

**Beneficial County-wide:** creates employment opportunities, lifestyle sustaining incomes for workers, and tax revenues for Whitley County.

**Diverse and Inspiring:** broadens sectors of employment and promotes new business investment and entrepreneurship.

**Consistent with the Land Use Strategy:** supports quality places, and helps shape desirable development that is focused on appropriate locations.

### BENEFITS

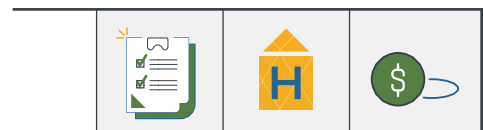
- Adds income to the local community
- Increases employment opportunities
- Becomes a source of community pride
- Creates predictability
- Provides clientele for local service-oriented businesses
- Increases local tax base

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**4.1** Continue to support the Whitley County Economic Development Corporation and other local economic development programs.



**4.2** Continue to work with the State of Indiana and other regional economic development agencies.



**4.3** Support the business of agriculture, including intense uses when developed in harmony with residential development.



**4.4** Support residential development in appropriate locations to attract and retain residents in the local workforce.



**4.5** Encourage businesses and industries to locate in areas with sufficient transportation and utility infrastructure and to focus on infill and redevelopment of underutilized sites.



**4.6** Modify the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Control Ordinance to minimize or mitigate adverse effects associated with business and industrial areas.



## FOUNDATION

- The Whitley County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is a leader in Northeast Indiana and partners with other regional economic development agencies.
- The Whitley County EDC has successfully implemented programs and strategies and continues to refine its approach.
- Major industrial areas include the Park 30 Industrial Park, the Rail Connect Business Park, and industries located in nodes throughout the County.
- Many participants in the planning process feel that commercial and industrial uses should continue to be located along US 30, including near Larwill.
- Whitley County has added manufacturing employment over the last decade while most counties have had losses in the same.
- Many of the participants involved in the planning process wanted to see the County expand workforce development initiatives as part of a broader economic development strategy.

**4.7** Utilize existing resources (e.g. Whitko Career Academy, Eagle Tech, WorkOne, etc.) to advance workforce development.

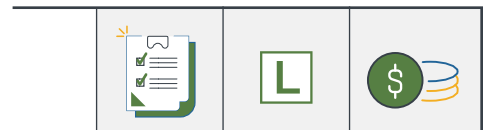


**4.8** Be proactive in developing affordable and widely available broadband internet connectivity throughout the County for both businesses and residents.\*



\* See Key Terms in Appendices

**4.9** Survey employees and employers and research businesses' strategic plans to identify and prioritize quality of life improvements (also see Goal 5) that attract and retain businesses and workers, and prepare an implementation plan for making priority improvements.



**4.10** Continue to utilize Tax Increment Financing and other economic development tools to develop new and well-advantaged business and, where applicable, housing sites.



**"We love the ability to stretch out and enjoy our rural life while still being close to our jobs in Huntington County and activities in Columbia City and Fort Wayne."**

-Form Whitley County Participant



**4.11** Study commercial real estate market in light of changing industry preferences and demands, including but not limited to emerging work-from-home trends.



**4.12** Study emerging work-from-home trends, both nationally and locally, to better understand whether and how the County stands to benefit by providing support for at-home workers.



**4.13** Conduct a countywide assessment of childcare and preschool needs to better understand gaps in affordable options for working families.



## GOAL 5: ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE

The Goal of enhancing quality of life focuses on improving the lives of the people of Whitley County through:

**Opportunities:** meeting or exceeding needs for personal advancement, enrichment, fitness, and social connection.

**Quality Service:** providing essential services, utilities and infrastructure, and leadership.

**Sense of Place:** supporting the community's values and increasing pride.

**Communication:** keeping people involved and connected.

**Predictability:** creating outcomes that are consistent and reliable.

### BENEFITS

- Improves lives of residents
- Helps retain residents
- Encourages younger generations to stay or return
- Attracts new residents
- Attracts new desired businesses

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**5.1** Develop and maintain strong partnerships between and among various levels of government, quasi-public and non-profit agencies, and private enterprise to ensure the most efficient use of resources to the public benefit.



**5.2** Coordinate regular meetings among appropriate leaders and personnel from applicable jurisdictions and/or agencies, along with knowledgeable residents and business leaders.



- 5.3** Provide timely information to the public about upcoming projects and events by utilizing social media and the Whitley County website and by creating a mobile app; consider creating an information manager position.



- 5.4** Encourage and support Emergency Management Agency's severe weather education and preparedness efforts.



- 5.5** Develop and implement a consistent addressing and numbering policy and adopt an address signage ordinance.



- 5.6** Encourage outdoor recreation and leisure opportunities, including trails, parks and preserves, boating, etc., and partner with organizations to provide ongoing maintenance.



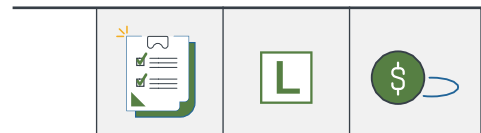
## FOUNDATION

- Residents, county-wide, show interest in focusing development in existing communities, including Churubusco, Columbia City, and South Whitley.
- A lack of Internet/broadband access countywide was identified as one of the most critical limitations to increasing quality of life in the County.
- Whitley County has an approved Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan that is updated regularly.
- A new Columbia City High School has been built, which has been identified as a major asset for the County.
- There are concerns about interactions with government and public notices.

**5.7** Support local festivals and fairs, farmers' markets, agritourism, and other public interest events at well-located sites and venues because of the role these events play in enhancing quality of life.



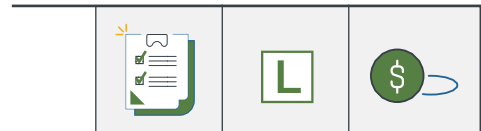
**5.8** Recognize the importance of unification of library services and promote the availability of existing services.



**5.9** Support age-friendly initiatives, including an assessment of the need for and encouragement of additional child day care and senior care facilities.



**5.10** Evaluate the potential for local designations of Native American properties and support preservation efforts of historic sites.



**5.11** Recognize the importance of providing accessibility for the disabled and strive for compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act standards.



**5.12** Identify areas of the County that are not served with adequate broadband internet connectivity and be proactive in working with service providers to provide such service.



# Part 3

# CHARACTER AND LAND USE PLAN

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# INTRODUCTION

The following definitions are intended to provide more detailed information regarding the character and land uses depicted in the Draft Character and Land Use Plan.

## UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND LAND USE

Traditionally, future land use plans have narrowly focused on specific uses that should be encouraged and/or allowed in different parts of a community; this was what included in the 2011 plan. Over the past decade, however, it has become more common for such plans to also include descriptions of community character. Community character refers to the overall look and feel of a place—the impression it makes on residents and visitors and the qualities of buildings and spaces that make it different from other places.

Note: Areas not in County jurisdiction are grayed out on the following maps.

Community character can describe built/urban form (the relationships among streets, blocks, lots, buildings, etc.) as well as natural features (terrain, vegetation, wildlife, water bodies and man-made features like parks). Demographics can also impact community character.

The character and land use plan developed for the Form Whitley County comprehensive plan update describes community character in an effort to help guide growth and change to support places that are attractive, draw people to want to spend time there and are compatible with adjacent areas, without be overly specific to every parcel's individual land use. (Source: American Planning Association PAS QuickNotes No. 72, Measuring Community Character)





## ABOUT THE DESCRIPTIONS

### TITLE

The title for each character type is a descriptive name that should evoke the type's general nature, and in some cases also conveys where it should be found.

### CHARACTER INTENSITY

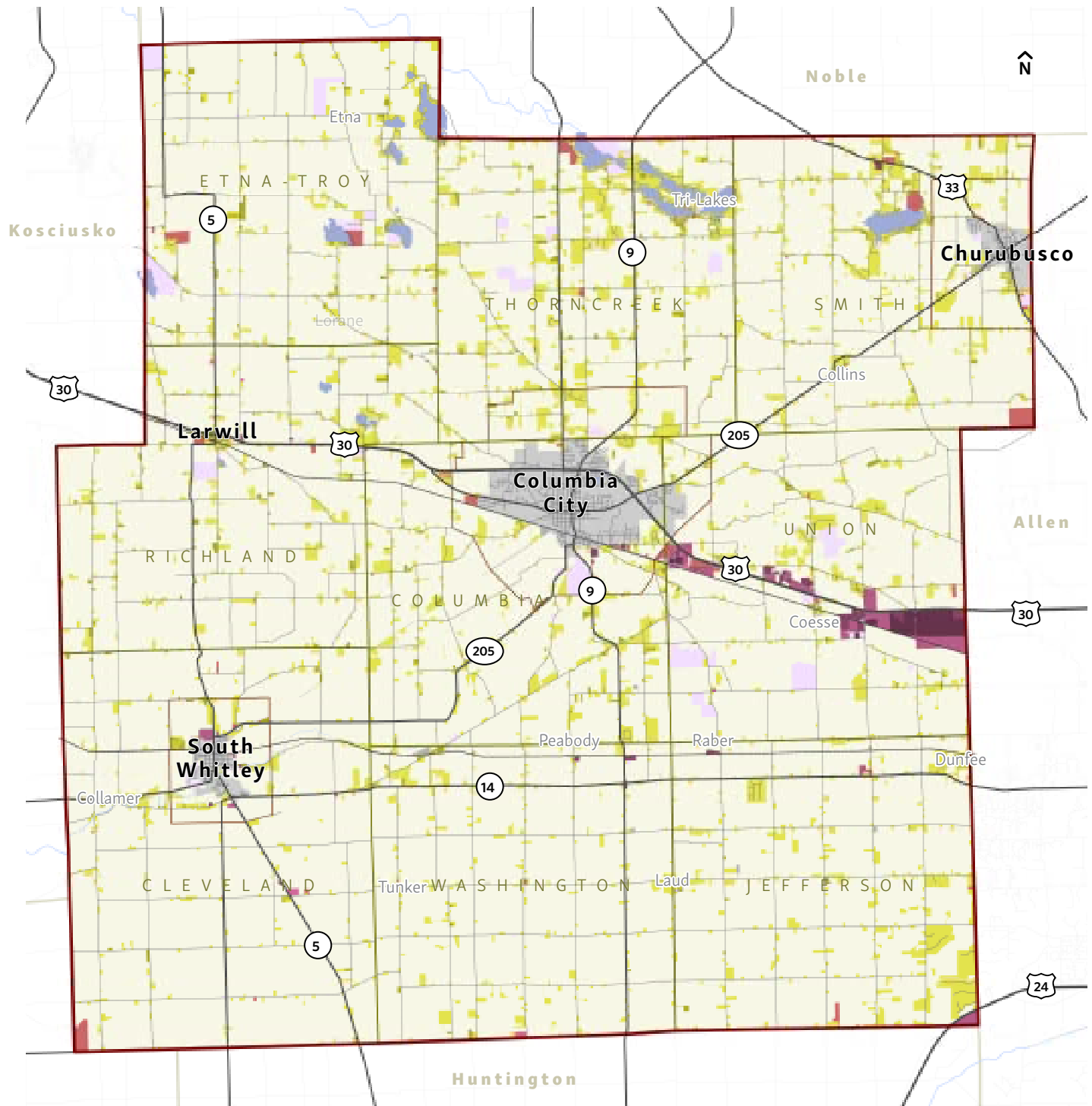
Following the title is a number indicating the "Character Intensity" or CI. This value represents the relative intensity of development throughout the character type. The scale ranges from 1, land that is nearly completely natural such as a nature preserve, to 5, land that is intensely developed such as an urban downtown. The graduation of the Character Intensity also indicates the general compatibility of each character type with others. A type with a CI of 5 is often not outright compatible with one with a CI of 2, and so care should be taken to address possible incompatibility issues. A sixth Character Intensity, labelled Special Character (SC), is used for unique properties where the intensity should always be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

### PHYSICAL CHARACTER, INTENT AND LAND USES











The expected use and physical character of the land for each character type is described, in text and images. Many of the character types have a development pattern envisioned of either a traditional or conventional nature. Traditional development is usually found in historic areas and is typically defined by reduced reliance on automobile transportation. Features often found in traditional development are smaller lots, greater lot coverage, sidewalks, mixed uses, and farms of varying sizes. Conventional development patterns depend more on automobile transportation for their success and have been the norm in development since the 1950s. Hallmarks of conventional development are moderate- to large-lots, wide streets, homogenous uses per development, and non-farm residences scattered through agricultural areas.

It should be noted that in most areas if an existing land use does not align with the indicated character type, one can assume that existing land uses may continue. It is expected that a progression toward the planned character will be made as opportunities become available.

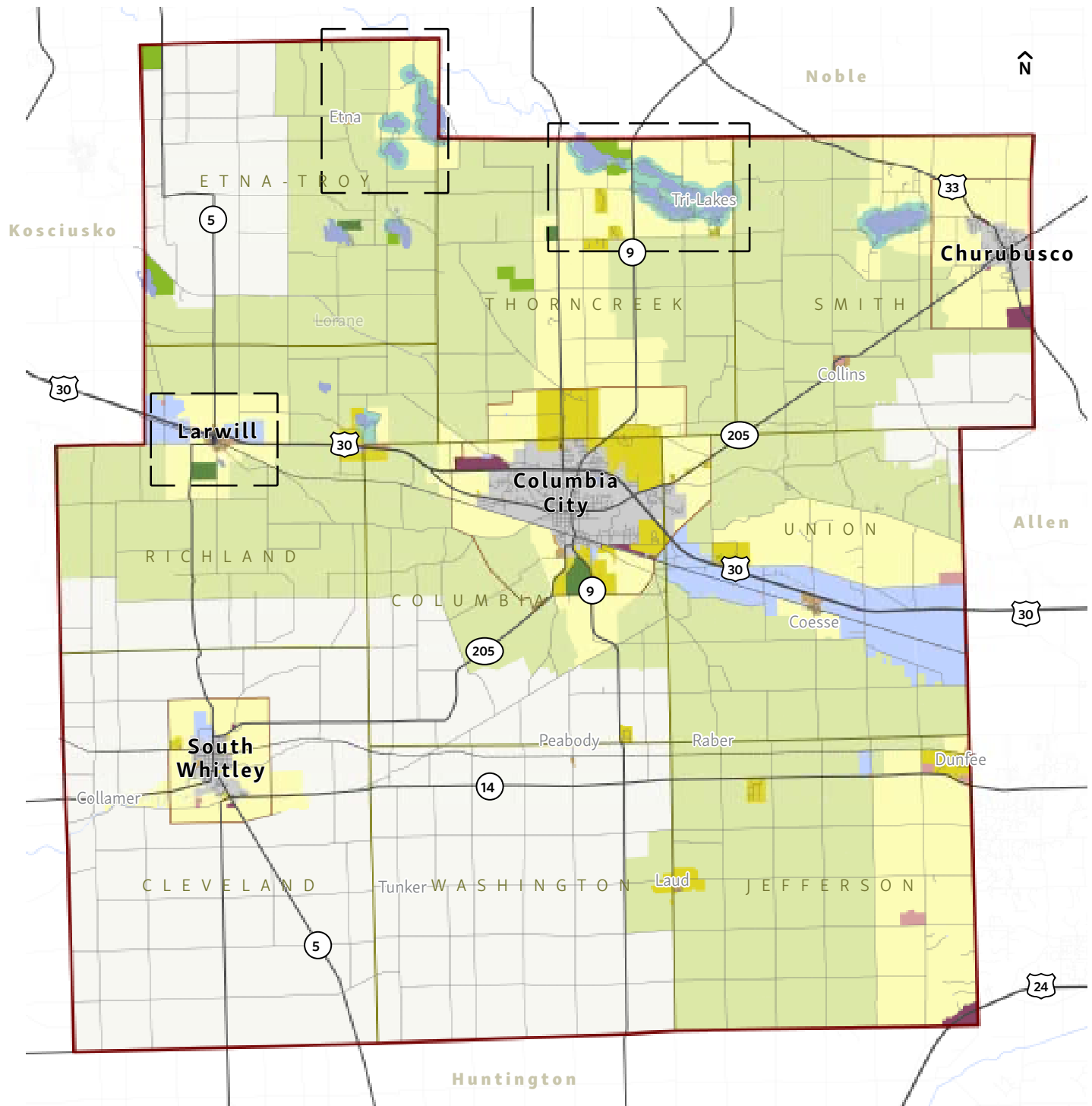
## EXISTING LAND USE



### LEGEND

Agriculture		Commercial		Other	
	General		General		Open Water
Residential		Industrial			Tax Exempt
	Single-family		Light / Medium		Incorporated Areas
	Duplex / Mobile homes		Heavy		
	Multi-family				

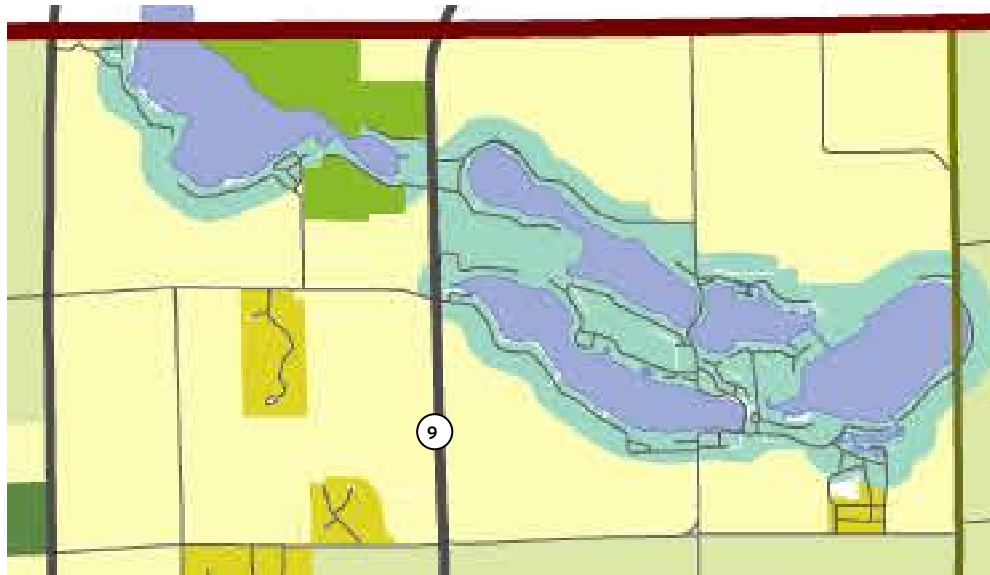
## FUTURE CHARACTER AND LAND USE PLAN



### LEGEND

	Commercial Center		Open Space and Conservation		Lake Village
	Town Enhancement		Traditional Neighborhood		Conventional Rural
	Employment Center		Suburban Living		Traditional Rural
	Institutional Campus		Mixed Rural		Incorporated Areas

### TRI-LAKES INSET



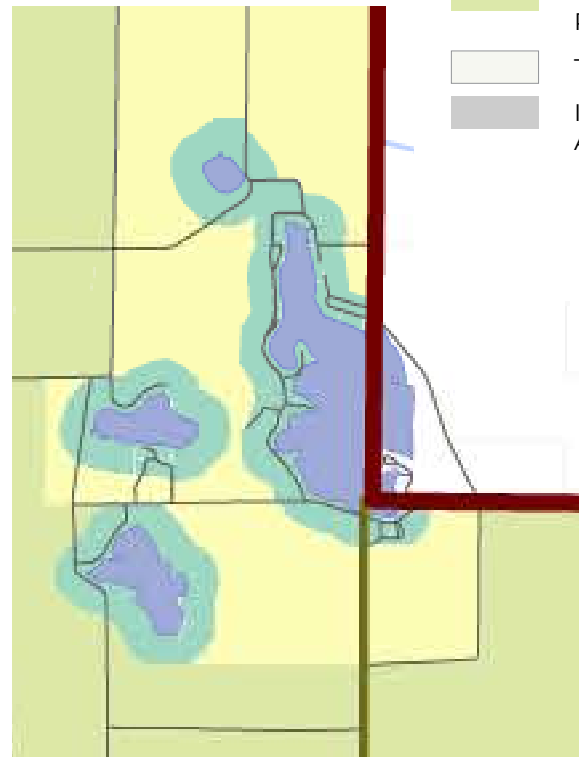
### LEGEND

- Commercial Center
- Town Enhancement
- Employment Center
- Institutional Campus
- Open Space and Conservation
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Suburban Living
- Mixed Rural
- Lake Village
- Conventional Rural
- Traditional Rural
- Incorporated Areas

### LARWILL INSET



### LOON LAKE INSET



## APPROPRIATE ADJACENT LAND CLASSIFICATION TABLE

B	Best Fit
C	Conditional Fit
	Not Normally Compatible

	Commercial Center	Town Enhancement	Employment Center	Institutional Campus	Open Space and Conservation	Traditional Neighborhood	Suburban Living	Lake Village	Mixed Rural	Conventional Rural	Traditional Rural
Commercial Center	B	C	B	B	C	C	NC	B	NC	C	NC
Town Enhancement		B	C	B	B	B	C	B	B	C	C
Employment Center			B	C	B	C	C	NC	B	C	C
Institutional Campus				B	B	C	C	C	C	C	C
Open Space and Conservation					B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Traditional Neighborhood						B	B	B	B	C	C
Suburban Living							B	B	B	C	NC
Lake Village								B	B	C	NC
Mixed Rural									B	B	C
Conventional Rural										B	B
Traditional Rural											B

The table above depicts character types that could be appropriately located adjacent to others. It is important to note that because the character type descriptions suggest the qualities of built form of areas, not just land uses, a determination of compatibility should be made on a case-by-case basis and may depend largely on edge conditions

between areas. However, the table can be used as a guide to help in understanding character types that may warrant special consideration (those marked as Conditional Fit) to ensure compatibility. It can also be used as a guide to interpreting the map in case of imprecision or when amendments are proposed.

## COMMERCIAL CENTER

### CI: 4-5

Commercial and retail development on or along major roadway corridors serving a regional market. Main buildings are usually a “big-box” architecture, and development may be anchored by a large commercial use or employer. Surface parking lots are predominant, often with existing buildings located behind the parking. There should be provision for landscape features and amenities that improve the aesthetics of the development. Existing development patterns should evolve to raise design quality, improve connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods, and become more walkable with sidewalks, shorter blocks, buildings near streets and shared parking.

### 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

### PRIMARY USES

- Regional Scale Commercial / Retail
- Mixed-use
- Office

### SECONDARY USES

- Civic / Institutional
- Multi-family Residential
- Commercial Recreation



*Top: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Middle and bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*



## TOWN ENHANCEMENT

### CI: 3.5-4.5

Traditional activity centers with a mix of smaller-scale commercial, residential, and institutional or public uses that form a cohesive area. These are usually the core of incorporated and unincorporated towns, and in some cases may be the entire town. Commercial development should serve residents in surrounding neighborhoods and supply day-to-day goods and services, although specialty businesses and low-intensity manufacturing may also be compatible. Over time, areas can benefit from intensification, provided that the overall scale and character of the area is respected.

#### INTENT

- Encourage investment in existing structures where possible
- Encourage infill development that is compatible with the existing scale and character
- Encourage streetscape improvements that knit the area together and provide an appealing, walkable environment
- Reduce/consolidate surface parking

#### PRIMARY USES

- Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)
- Office
- Commercial/Retail
- Single- and Two-family residential

#### SECONDARY USES

- Multi-family residential
- Civic / Institutional
- Maker Space / Cottage Industry
- Parks and open space



*Top: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Middle and bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*

## EMPLOYMENT CENTER

### CI: 3.5-4.5

Employment-oriented areas that are characterized by light-industrial and office uses typically located in a conventional “business park” setting. Commercial uses, both service and retail, and more intense industrial, including heavy industrial, can be appropriate in certain circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Large footprint structures should offer flexible space to accommodate market demand for various users over time. Buildings should be oriented to the street and be adapted to support different uses such as light manufacturing, high-tech industries, and research and development. New multi-family and other housing types can be appropriate as supporting uses when properly located. Plazas and pocket parks should serve as amenities for employees. When possible, restaurants and services should be integrated to create a multifunctional campus-like environment.

### INTENT

- Promote opportunities for larger employers to locate and conduct business, and the clustering of businesses
- Ensure adequate utilities and transportation to support activities
- Encourage physical connections to adjacent areas

### PRIMARY USES

- Commercial (Office)
- Light Industrial

### SECONDARY USES

- Commercial (Retail)
- Intense Industrial
- Civic / Institutional
- Multi-family residential
- Parks and open space



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*

## INSTITUTIONAL CAMPUS

### CI: SC

Academic, governmental, and medical (hospital) campuses, religious centers and retreats, including a range of building types and accessory uses that reflect their unique functions. The core of the campus area may cluster buildings in a walkable pattern with some limitations to vehicular access. Related facilities and parking areas are located at the edges. Many of these uses can be appropriate within other character types, so this character should apply when there is significant differentiation between these uses and 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 is 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
- Multi-family residential
- Parks and open space



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other community.*



*Example character pattern.*



## SUBURBAN LIVING

### CI: 3

Comprised of residential uses, the majority of which are single-family homes, arranged along wide, curvilinear streets with minimal intersections based on hierarchical road classification to ease vehicular movement. Developments typically contain some shared open spaces and common amenities for use by property owners. Lots may range in size and residences may vary in scale and value, but they tend to be relatively homogenous within any particular development. Supporting non-residential uses, such as small retail and service commercial, may be appropriate at certain locations, but direct connectivity between residential areas and non-residential uses is not tightly integrated. New development should be served by public utilities, but some larger-lot neighborhoods may utilize on-site water and septic systems.

### INTENT

- Provide better pedestrian and vehicular connectivity between residential developments
- Improve streetscape features such as consistent sidewalks, lighting and street trees

### PRIMARY USES

- Single-family detached residential (small to large lot)
- Attached residential (townhomes)

### SECONDARY USES

- Multifamily residential
- Local Scale Commercial (Retail)
- Civic / Institutional
- Two-family residential



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*

## TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD

### CI: 4

Primarily residential areas that feature a mix of residence types on smaller lots, generally with a consistent appearance that is largely single-family. These may be historic residential areas of towns or new neo-traditional developments. Traditional neighborhoods should have a street network of small blocks with alleys, a defined center and edges, and integration with surrounding development, even those of differing land uses. These neighborhoods can include integrated nodes of small-scale retail, service, and office uses, or mixed commercial-residential uses. Complementary uses like parks, schools, and community facilities should be within walking distance. New development should be served by public utilities, and historic traditional neighborhoods not currently served with sanitary sewers should be priorities for service extensions.

### INTENT

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

### PRIMARY USES

- Single-family residential (small lot)
- Attached residential (townhomes)
- Two-family residential

### SECONDARY USES

- Local Scale Commercial (Retail)
- Accessory Dwelling Units
- Parks and Open Spaces



*Top: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Middle and bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*

## LAKE VILLAGE

### CI: 3-4.5

Primarily residential areas consisting of small lots adjacent to and near the County's lakes. Many neighborhoods were historically developed as fishing or summer resorts with closely-spaced small cottages on narrow, often winding, access roads. Conversion of historic cottages to large floor area houses is occurring, resulting in large homes with small setbacks and high lot coverages. This type has similarities with both the Suburban Living and Traditional Neighborhood types but is distinct due to the unique conditions around the lakes. Environmentally sensitive land dictates the scale and pattern of development. Homes are focused on lakes and similar natural features. These areas should include appropriately located nodes of small-scale retail, office and/or institutional uses, feature a mix of housing types, and include complementary uses such as parks and amenities within walking distance.

### INTENT

- Encourage redevelopment that is harmonious with the unique historic and environmental character
- Allow for residential and other supporting development / amenities
- Preserve the aesthetic quality of the lake, lakefront and surrounding areas
- Promote recreational opportunities on the public lake that are sensitive to the surrounding residential and natural areas

### PRIMARY USES

- Single-family residential (small lot)
- Attached residential
- Two-family residential

### SECONDARY USES

- Local scale Commercial / Retail
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Institutional



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other communities. Photo Credit for bottom photo: Wikimedia Commons.*



*Example character pattern.*



## MIXED RURAL

### CI: 2.5-3

Areas that are primarily agricultural at present but already include single-family residential and will face residential growth pressure from nearby urban areas. The character in this area is expected to continue to be recognizably rural throughout the timeframe of the Plan, but over time, farms may be further blended with non-farm residential development. New or expanded CFOs, beyond what exists currently, would be out of character. This type can also include appropriately-located small-scale commercial that meets the immediate local needs. Public sewer and water are not necessary, but where they are available, development should be anticipated. New buildings are closer to the roadway, eventually resulting in a more intense development pattern than the Rural characters below but still less intense overall than the Suburban Living character.

### INTENT

- Expect existing agricultural operations will continue as residential development occurs
- Allow for contextually-sensitive new residential development
- Allow the division of land for subdivisions

### PRIMARY USES

- Agricultural (New CFOs not expected)
- Single- and Two-family residential

### SECONDARY USES

- Local scale Commercial / Retail
- Institutional / Civic



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*

## CONVENTIONAL RURAL CI: 2

Areas that are primarily agricultural but also include non-farm single-family residential. The historic rural agricultural aesthetic is maintained over the planning timeframe, but this area can include larger scale farming or smaller scale supporting commercial operations, as well as scattered non-farm residences. Buildings are generally set far back from the roadway on large lots (over two acres). These areas are not typically served by municipal water and sewer utilities, and even where those may be available, new development should occur only where adjacent to existing development. New non-farm residences are generally discouraged.

### INTENT

- Preserve existing agricultural land and limit development
- Protect and enhance natural scenic areas

### PRIMARY USES

- Agricultural, lower building intensity (including new small-sized CFOs)
- Single-family residential

### SECONDARY USES

- Agricultural, moderate building intensity (including new mid-sized CFOs)
- Commercial / Retail (small scale)
- Institutional
- Two-family residential



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*

## TRADITIONAL RURAL

### CI: 2

Areas that contain agricultural land and varying sizes of farms, with limited non-farm residences. Traditional agricultural aesthetic is required, and farming is the primary activity. Appropriately located larger-scale intense farming operations can be expected, and agricultural uses are to be continued well beyond the timeframe of this Plan. These areas are rarely served by municipal water and sewer utilities, and even where those may be available, new development should not occur. New residential development of any size is staunchly discouraged.

### INTENT

- Maintain a rural / agricultural aesthetic that is generally in keeping with current character
- Support agricultural activities and minimize incompatible land uses
- Promote economic development in the county, while preserving its rural character
- Allow for local businesses to co-locate to provide opportunities for growth

### PRIMARY USES

- Agricultural, moderate building intensity (including new mid-sized CFOs)

### SECONDARY USES

- Agricultural, higher building intensity (including new larger-sized CFOs)
- Commercial
- Civic / Institutional
- Single-family residential (existing)

Note: The term “traditional” as used relative to this character type refers to the more traditional road patterns and building and development forms found in these areas. It is not intended to convey that any agricultural or other land uses are to be limited only to those traditional/historical in nature.



*Top and middle: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



*Example character pattern.*



## OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION

### CI: 1

These areas include large tracts of parks, open spaces, and undeveloped natural areas of enough significance that they are set apart from the other character types. They may serve recreational or conservation purposes and are unlikely to be subjected to extensive development. These areas may be improved with amenities and other enhancements based on community desire.

#### INTENT

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

#### PRIMARY USES

- Parks and Open Spaces

#### SECONDARY USES

- Institutional
- Commercial Recreation



*Top: Example built form existing in Whitley County. Middle and bottom: Example built form from other communities.*



# Part 4 **TRANSPORTATION**

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# INTRODUCTION

This section looks specifically at the vehicular network in Whitley County. Due to the nature of transportation networks, roadways within local municipalities are also considered. This section primarily looks at the future roadway needs and is not necessarily reflective of existing conditions or current demands. Information in this section was developed for the 2011 Comprehensive Plan and minor modifications have been made for the 2021 Update. Photos and diagrams on pages 72-77 are from the 2011 Plan.

The Transportation Plan utilizes the Indiana Department of Transportation's functional road classification system for rural areas and applies them to the road network within Whitley County. The Transportation Plan Map on page 51 includes the following road classifications:

- Principal Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Collector
- Local Road



*Some community members involved in Form Whitley County saw value in maintaining gravel or dirt roads 'as is' throughout the County, while others preferred to have rural roads, including gravel or dirt roads, paved.*



*As new development takes place along US 30, community members made clear that improving the safety of the road should be a priority.*



## ROAD CLASSIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION

Each of the road classifications listed above has a page dedicated to describing it. The intent is to use the descriptions as a guide for projects, either construction of new roads or improvement of existing roads. They are not necessarily descriptive of existing roads.

**General Description:** This section gives a brief description of the road classification, why it has been established, and its potential to be developed in the future.

**Road Features:** This section conveys the primary design features that make each road classification unique. The features include minimum right-of-way, maximum number of lanes, and minimum lane width.

**Typical Cross Section:** This section illustrates the typical cross section for the road classification in rural areas and developed areas. The illustration is intended to portray the “ideal” version of the road with the understanding that when applied in the real world, variations in design are often necessary.

**Design Priorities:** This section communicates the design priorities for each road classification.

**Traffic Management Options:** This section describes vehicular traffic management options to consider when improving a road. The options are intended to identify the most appropriate means for intersections, slow traffic when appropriate, increase traffic efficiency when appropriate, and improve safety.

**Image Examples:** Images of each road classification are included. The images are intended to portray examples available in Whitley County or in another Indiana community. The images may not represent the purest intent of the road classification. When applied in the real world, variations in design may be necessary.

# PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL

A principal arterial is designed to carry very heavy volumes of traffic to major destinations in, out, or through the County. In Whitley County, principal arterials are limited to US Highway 30, US Highway 33, and US Highway 24.

Whitley County will likely not see additional principal arterials developed within the timeframe of this plan.

## ROAD FEATURES

- Minimum Right-of-way: 100 feet
- Maximum Number of Lanes: 4 lanes with turn lanes at major intersections
- Minimum Lane Width: 12 feet

## TYPICAL CROSS SECTION

- See illustration below

## DESIGN PRIORITIES

- Limited access
- Intersection design
- Sensitivity to context

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

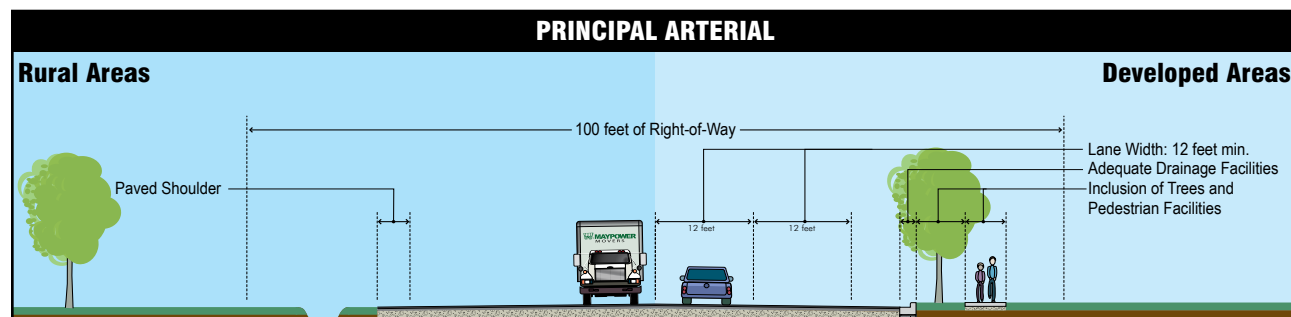
- Acceleration and deceleration lanes
- Defined turn lanes at intersections
- Stop lights, flashers, and signage



*US Highway 30 is a principal arterial.*



*US Highway 33 is a principal arterial.*



# MINOR ARTERIAL

A minor arterial is designed to carry heavy volumes of traffic to major destinations inside and outside of the County. Minor arterials primarily connect collectors with principal arterials. Indiana State Road 9 and portions of Business 30 are examples of existing minor arterials in Whitley County.

Although new minor arterial segments are shown on the map, the implementation of these roadways is not expected within the timeframe of this plan.

## ROAD FEATURES

- Minimum Right-of-way: 90 feet
- Maximum Number of Lanes: 2 lanes with turn lanes at major intersections
- Minimum Lane Width: 12 feet

## TYPICAL CROSS SECTION

- See illustration below

## DESIGN PRIORITIES

- Intersection design
- Sensitivity to context
- Width of travel lanes

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

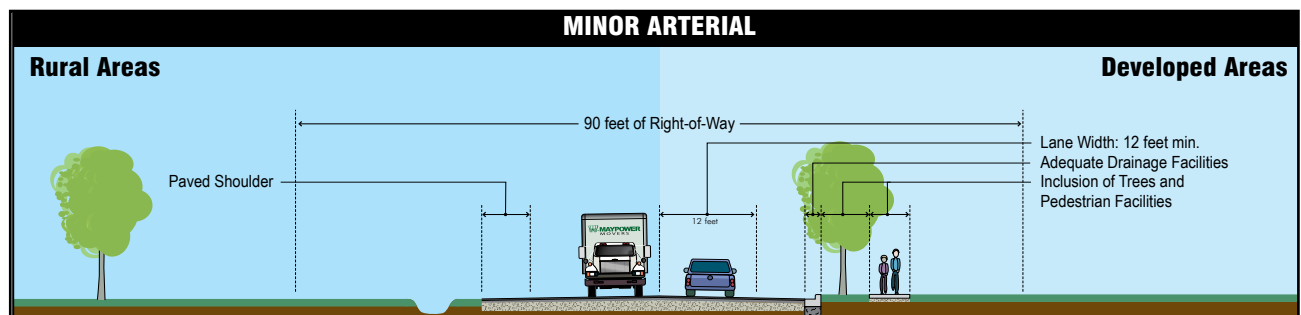
- Acceleration and deceleration lanes
- Defined turn lanes at intersections
- Stop lights, flashers, and signage



*Indiana State Road 9 is a minor arterial.*



*South County Road 800 East is a future minor arterial.*



# MAJOR COLLECTOR

A major collector is designed primarily to provide access to destinations within the County. Driveway cuts should be limited with preference given to local roads accessing entire subdivisions. Major collectors primarily connect minor collectors to principal arterials and minor arterials; and local roads to principal arterials and minor arterials.

New major collectors will likely be developed through both new construction and upgrading of minor collectors within the timeframe of this plan.

## ROAD FEATURES

- Minimum Right-of-way: 80 feet
- Maximum Number of Lanes: 2 lanes with turn lanes at major intersections
- Minimum Lane Width: 12 feet

## TYPICAL CROSS SECTION

- See illustration below

## DESIGN PRIORITIES

- Adequate drainage facilities
- Sensitivity to context
- Inclusion of street trees and pedestrian facilities within developed areas

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

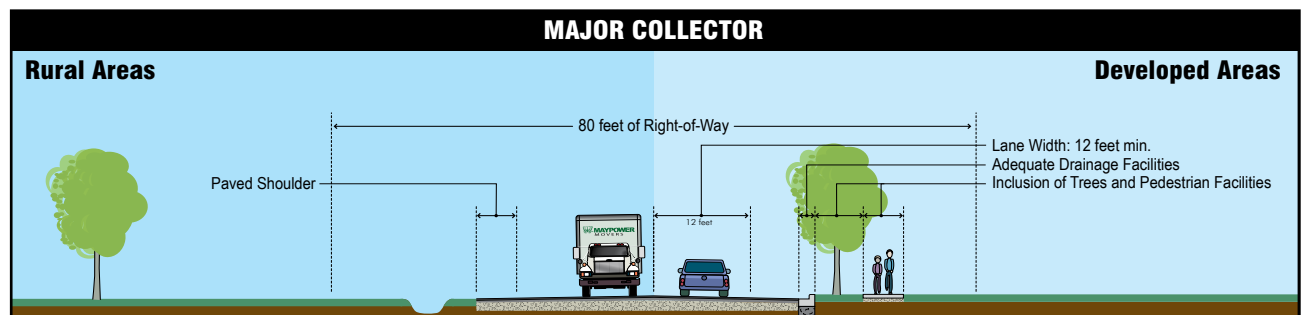
- Narrower lane widths
- Roundabouts
- Signage



*Indiana State Road 5 is one of many major collectors in Whitley County.*



*Indiana State Road 14 is one of many major collectors in Whitley County.*



# MINOR COLLECTOR

A minor collector is designed primarily to provide access to platted subdivisions and to allow on-street parking when deemed safe. Driveway cuts should be limited with preference given to local roads accessing entire subdivisions. Minor collectors connect to other minor collectors and major collectors; and connect local roads with the rest of the vehicular network.

Upgrading of some local streets, and the construction of some new minor collectors will likely be necessary within the timeframe of this plan.

## ROAD FEATURES

- Minimum Right-of-way: 70 feet
- Maximum Number of Lanes: 2 lanes with turn lanes at major intersections
- Minimum Lane Width: 11 feet

## TYPICAL CROSS SECTION

- See illustration below

## DESIGN PRIORITIES

- Adequate drainage facilities
- Sensitivity to context
- Inclusion of street trees and pedestrian facilities in developed area

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

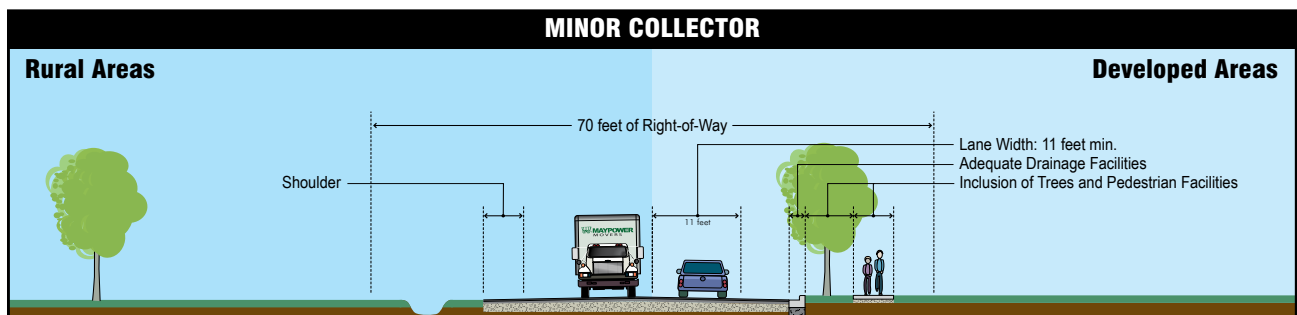
- Narrower lane widths
- On-street parking
- Roundabouts
- Signage



*South Washington Road is an example of a minor collector in Whitley County.*



*South County Road 950 West is an example of a minor collector in Whitley County.*



# LOCAL ROAD

A local road is designed primarily to provide access to platted residential lots and other individual properties. These roads generally connect with minor and major collectors and other local roads. Local roads may include non-through roads.

The construction of new local roads will likely be necessary within the timeframe of this plan. However, these roads should predominantly, if not exclusively, be constructed at the cost of developers.

## ROAD FEATURES

- Minimum Right-of-way: 60 feet
- Maximum Number of Lanes: 2 lanes
- Minimum Lane Width: 11 feet

## TYPICAL CROSS SECTION

- See illustration below

## DESIGN PRIORITIES

- Access to properties
- Adequate drainage facilities
- Sensitivity to context
- Inclusion of street trees and pedestrian facilities

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

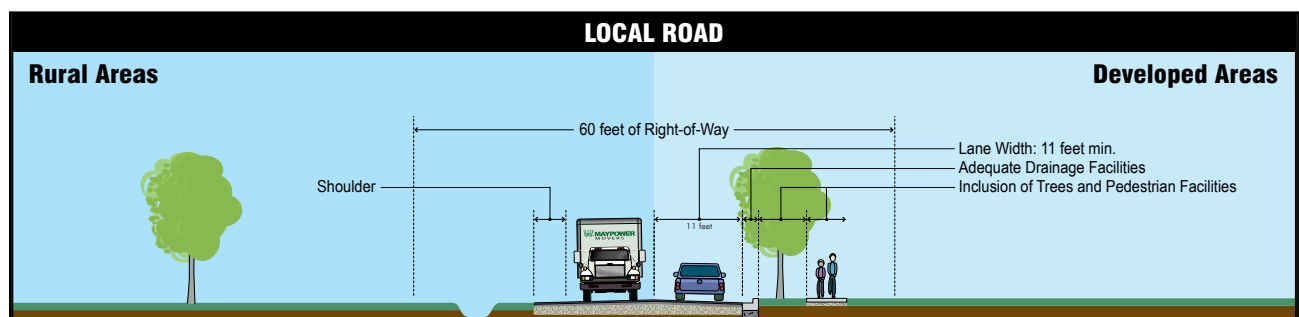
- Narrower lane widths
- On-street parking
- Roundabouts
- Signage



*South County Road 300 West is an example of a local road.*



*Sherman Street (in the Lincoln Pointe Subdivision) is an example of a local road.*



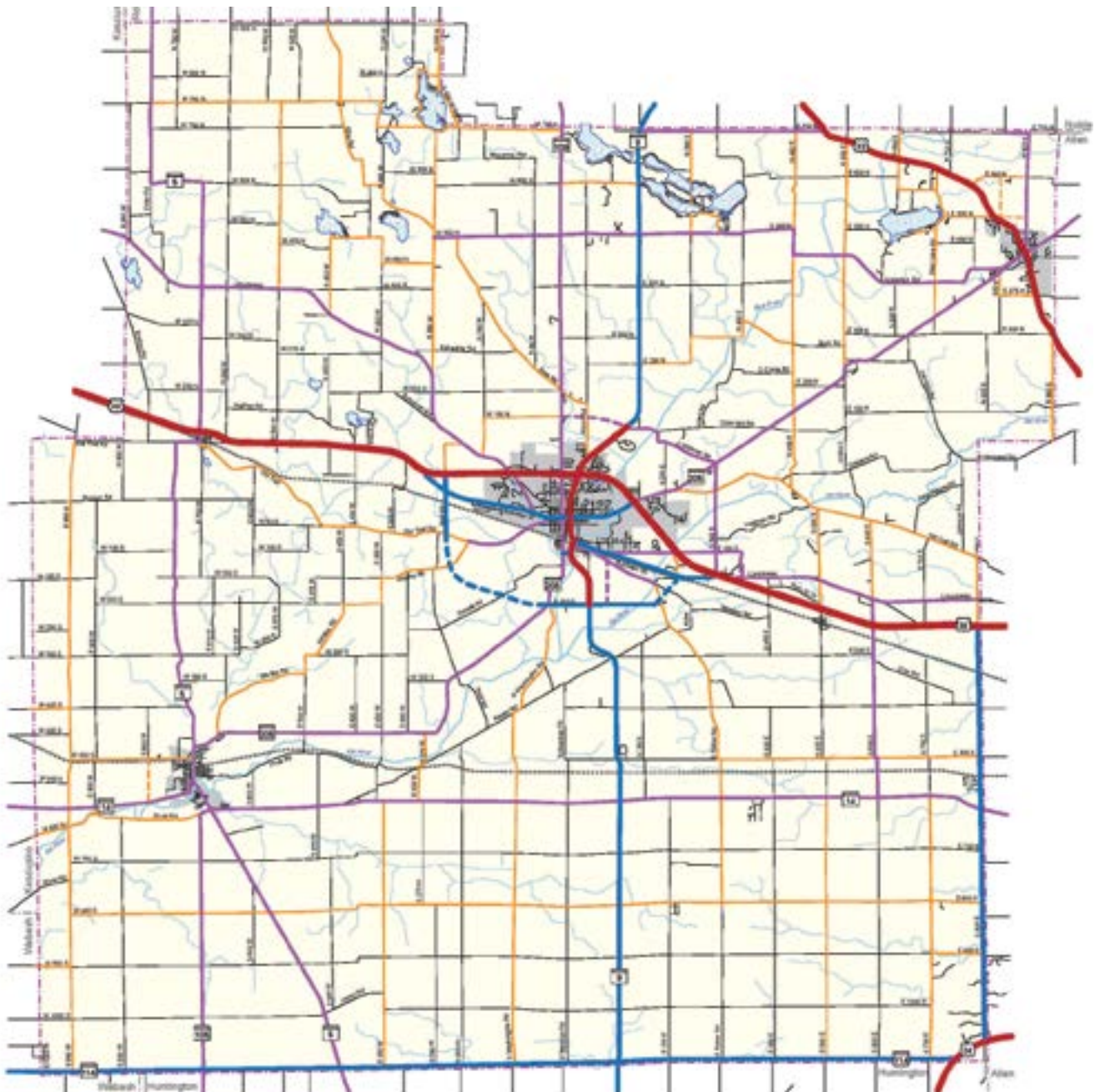



## TRANSPORTATION PLAN MAP DESCRIPTION

The Transportation Plan Map on the following page applies a road classification to each road in Whitley County's planning jurisdiction. The applied road classification represents what the road will evolve to over the course of 20 years, not as it currently exists.

The Transportation Plan Map also denotes where new roads are needed to fulfill the policies and objectives within the Whitley County Comprehensive Plan. These new roads should be viewed as mandatory when land is being developed adjacent to or inclusive of the new roadway's proposed alignment. See Recommendation 2.7 for more information.

## TRANSPORTATION MAP





# Part 5 APPENDICES

# INTRODUCTION

There are four parts to the Appendices. These items are provided to supplement the information presented in the plan.

A. Key Terms

B. Relevant Plans and Studies

C. Data Sources

D. Public Engagement Summaries

Note: All participant comments collected via the public engagement activities were made available to the general public, in participants' own words, on the project web page, as of the finalization of this plan at [www.FormWhitleyCounty.com](http://www.FormWhitleyCounty.com).

**"I was fortunate to become a part of the active community and felt like a valued community member."**

-Form Whitley County Participant



## A. KEY TERMS

Key terms that appear in this plan are included for reference on the following pages.

### **Alternative energy**

Alternative energy refers to energy sources other than fossil fuels (such as coal, natural gas, and petroleum). These energy sources can include solar, wind, water, biofuels, and potentially others in the future, such as nuclear.

### **Annexation**

The process by which a property becomes part of a city or town, subject to municipal regulations and taxes while benefiting from its utilities and services.

### **Anti-funneling regulations (Zoning)**

Regulations that prevent the overdevelopment of lakes by requiring a minimum length of lakeshore per residence or similar standard.

### **Asset Management Plan**

A plan for maintaining, upgrading, and operating physical assets cost-effectively, based on a continuous physical inventory and condition assessment.

### **Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA)**

A government board that primarily reviews requested modifications (“variances”) of zoning standards and evaluates proposed uses that are permissible in a zoning district but only with special review (“special exceptions”). This is related to, but not the same as, Plan Commission.

### **Broadband**

Internet access that is always on and meets minimum transfer speed standards. As of 2020, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband as service with at least a download speed of 25Mbps and upload speed of 3Mbps. In the County, this currently includes DSL, coaxial cable, fixed wireless, and fiber optic. There may be other technologies developed in the future.

### **CFO/CAFO**

Confined Feeding Operation/ Concentrated Agricultural Feeding Operation. Livestock operations that keep a certain number of farm animals within a building for the majority of a year. Some health and environmental aspects are regulated by the EPA and IDEM, while locations are currently regulated locally.

### **CFO, sizing**

As used in this document, CFO size references roughly correspond to Classes defined in the current Zoning Code. Small CFOs generally correspond to the Zoning Code Class 1; medium CFOs to Class 2; and large CFOs to Class 3. This document does not reference Class 4 CFOs as such operations would be typically out of the recommended characters without special consideration.

**Comprehensive Plan**

A long-term guide that expresses the values and aspirations of a community for its future development. In Indiana, it is not law by itself, but it should be used to guide governmental decisions and ordinances and to encourage community-based projects and programs.

**County Commissioners**

The three elected members of the Board of County Commissioners who are the legislative and executive branches of County government. They enact ordinances, handle daily business matters, and make appointments to boards such as the Plan Commission, among many other functions.

**Development**

As used in this Plan, the physical extension and/or construction of urban or suburban land uses.

**Extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ)**

An area outside the corporate boundaries of a city or town over which its own Plan Commission has zoning authority. Also known as a “2-mile jurisdiction” since the area can be as wide as two miles from the corporate limits.

**Freeway**

Also known as an “interstate-level” highway. As defined by the Federal Highway Administration, a divided highway facility with full control of access and two or more lanes for the exclusive use of through traffic in each direction. No direct access, such as driveways or intersections, is permitted whatsoever. (See also Limited access highway).

**Greenfield encroachment**

New development that is sited in previously minimally developed rural and/or agricultural areas.

**Impact fee**

A regulatory fee on a new development project that compensates for some or all of the cost of providing certain public services (e.g. roads, sewers, parks) to the new development.

**Impaired waterbody**

Water bodies that do not meet the US EPA’s water quality standards for one or more pollutions pursuant to Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act.



### **Industrial/business park development**

An area that is zoned and designed for industrial and some commercial uses. Industrial parks often contain manufacturers, warehouses, distribution centers, and offices. By locating industries in a “park” location, special needs for industry may be better met, such as construction of heavy-duty roads and higher utility capacities, while any negative effects may be better mitigated by use of collective measures.

### **Infill and Redevelopment**

Infill is building upon vacant and/or underutilized lots in areas where there is existing development in close proximity. Redevelopment is re-using existing structures for new purposes in areas where there is existing development in close proximity. Infill and redevelopment differ from greenfield development, which is development in areas that are previously undeveloped and where there is not existing development in close proximity.

### **Land use**

The characterization of land based on what is built upon it and what it is, or can be, used for.

### **LEED certified**

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the most widely used green building rating system in the world, managed by the US Green Building Council. Available for both residential and commercial buildings and neighborhoods, LEED provides a framework for healthy, highly efficient, and cost-saving “green” buildings and developments.

### **Limited access highway**

A highway onto which no direct access (such as a driveway or local road) is permitted without special permission. US 30 is a limited access highway as of 2020. (See also Freeway).

### **Performance zoning**

Performance zoning specifies the intensity of land use that is acceptable, based on how it impacts surrounding areas, rather than only specifying a permitted land use.

### **Plan Commission (Whitley County Advisory Plan commission)**

A group of appointed residents and elected officials charged with the responsibility of guiding the development of the county by: preparing a comprehensive plan including a land use plan; enforcing land use zoning and subdivision regulation ordinances; reviewing and approving subdivision plats; and advising the County Commissioners on zoning map and ordinance amendments. The Commission conducts public hearings for zoning and subdivision applications.

### **Quasi-public organization**

An organization that provides services for the public good that overlap those often provided by government organizations; frequently are supported by government funding. Examples include utility companies and some non-profit organizations.

### **Septic systems**

Also known as on-site sewer systems. Treats human wastewater by decomposing the solids and filtering the liquids into the soil on the same property as its source. Technology used in septic systems varies, depending on soil type, available land area, and other factors.

### **Spot zoning**

Zoning of a particular property solely to the benefit of its property owner without regard to the conditions of the site or surrounding property, the Comprehensive Plan, or without applying the same zoning to essentially similar properties. This differs greatly from zoning that does consider specific conditions on a property-by-property basis and so yields a fine-grained zoning map.

### **Sprawl**

Low-density land-use patterns that are automobile-dependent and land consumptive, use relatively high energy, and require a very high ratio of road length to development area served.

### **Subdivision Control Ordinance**

Regulations that control the development and dividing of land for sale. They are intended to resolve potential issues generated by uncontrolled growth and development.

### **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**

A TIF is a financing tool utilized by local governments to fund economic development and investment in infrastructure. As new development is incentivized in a designated area, a TIF will capture the additional property taxes generated from the new development and reinvest the funds within the area.

### **Thoroughfare Plan**

A plan for transportation that involves a greater level of detail and design than that included in the Comprehensive Plan transportation component. It often includes recommended or anticipated projects, time and cost projections for construction, etc.

### **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)**

A system that allows greater development in an area more desirable for growth by acquiring development rights from areas where development is not as desirable.

**Variance**

As used in zoning, a variance is an exception to a required standard that is granted on a case-by-case basis to account for a site-specific condition.

**Zoning**

Regulations that are primarily organized based on districts (“zones”) of similar existing or desired land uses. Zoning ordinances are the main regulatory method of controlling development and land usage. Comprehensive Plans can provide a foundation for zoning updates, but they do not substitute for zoning.

## B. RELEVANT PLANS AND STUDIES

Relevant plans and studies were reviewed in preparation of this plan are listed below.

Indiana Renewable Energy Guide:  
A Guide for Local Governments,  
December 2020

An Analysis of Residential Market  
Potential, for the Northeast Indiana  
Region (Excluding Allen County),  
March 2019

Larwill Economic Development Plan,  
2019

Measuring Community Character,  
American Planning Association PAS  
QuickNotes No. 72, 2018

A Concept for a U.S. 30 Freeway  
across Whitley County, Indiana,  
January 2017

Columbia City Comprehensive Plan,  
2015

Churubusco Comprehensive Plan,  
2014

South Whitley Comprehensive Plan,  
2014

Whitley County Comprehensive Plan,  
2011

Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan: Whitley  
County, 2010

Whitley County Zoning Code, 2006  
(as amended)

Whitley County Comprehensive Plan,  
1993

Whitley County Highway  
Specifications, 1992

Whitley County Subdivision  
Regulations, 1971 (as amended)

Whitley County Master Plan, 1970

## C. DATA SOURCES

The references below pertain to the data presented in Part 1 of this plan.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties in Indiana: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (CO-EST2019-ANNRES-18)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (NST-EST2019-01)

<sup>3</sup> STATS Indiana, using data from the Indiana Business Research Center, IU Kelley School of Business

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places in Indiana: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (SUB-IP-EST2019-ANNRES-18)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual County and Resident Population Estimates by Selected Age Groups and Sex: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (CC-EST2019-AGESEX-18)

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for Indiana: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (SC-EST2019-AGESEX-18)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2018 (LODES Data Version 20201117\_1559)

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2010 5-Year Estimates (Table S1501); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 5-Year Estimates (Table S1501)

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2010 5-Year Estimates (Table B25077); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 5-Year Estimates (Table B25077)

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2012). 2012 Census of Agriculture County Profile: Whitley County, Indiana

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2017). 2017 Census of Agriculture County Profile: Whitley County, Indiana

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2017). 2017 Census of Agriculture Volume 1, Chapter 1: State Level Data. Table 1. Historical Highlights: 2017 and Earlier Census Years

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2017). 2017 Census of Agriculture Volume 1, Chapter 2: County Level Data. Table 45. Selected Operation and Producer Characteristics: 2017

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2017). 2017 Census of Agriculture Volume 1, Chapter 1: State Level Data. Table 52. Selected Producer Characteristics: 2017 and 2012



## D. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARIES

Following are summaries of public engagement conducted as part of the Form Whitley County process. (Note, Page numbering in this Appendix reflects the page numbers of each, respective document.)

## **Stakeholder Interviews**

### **List of Participants**

This list is intended to identify the 27 stakeholder interviews conducted virtually between September 16 and 23, 2020. The following list of contacts and their respected affiliations are those who participated in the stakeholder interview sessions:

- Becky Salaway, Whitley County Council on Aging
- Brandon Forrester, Whitley County Highway/Engineer
- Brandon Penrod, Whitko School Corp
- Brian Emerick, Micropulse
- Brooks Langeloh, Orizon Real Estate
- Chad Nix, Whitley County Regional Water and Sewer District
- Dale Buuck, Whitley County EDC
- Dan Avery, NIRCC
- Dane Drew, Whitley County Farm Bureau
- Daniel Hile, Smith-Green School Corp
- Don Amber, Whitley County Commissioners
- Heather Palan, Tri-Lakes Regional Sewer District
- Jason Kaiser, INDOT
- Jason Kissel, Acres Land Trust
- Jennifer Romano, Whitley County Chamber of Commerce
- John Woodmansee, Whitley County-Purdue Extension Office
- Kevan Biggs, Ideal Suburban Homes
- Kyle Quandt, Northeast Indiana Water Trails
- Lori Heuer, Whitley County Consolidated School Corp
- Mary Hartman, Peabody Library
- Matt Grant, Sailrite
- Mike Barnhill, American LandMaster
- Patricia O'Connor, Whitley County Consolidated School Corp
- Renee Sills, Town of Larwill
- Ryan Daniel, Columbia City Mayor
- Scott Wagner, Whitley County Health Department
- Todd Geiger, Whitley County 4H



## MEMORANDUM

October 16, 2020

To: Form Whitley County Steering Committee  
From: Brian Ashworth, PLA and Sarah Kelly, AICP, planning NEXT  
Re: Stakeholder Interviews  
CC: Nathan Bilger, AICP and Mark Cullnane, Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning & Building Dept.

This memorandum is intended to provide a summary of interviews with 27 stakeholders conducted virtually between September 16 and 23, 2020 as well as follow-up comments submitted via email by some who could not attend. The meetings had representation from various interest groups throughout the County, including agriculture, economic development, education, environmental resources, local government, land developers, transportation and utility sectors.

The interviews were conducted in a for a similar purpose as interviews that were conducted as part of the previous (2011) plan with “people with interests and knowledge in specific aspects of the County.” Interviews will inform the work going forward and are supplementary to the feedback that will be gathered through the first round of public engagement that will be held in in late-October and early November.

The memorandum is divided into the following categories:

1. Background
2. What is working well?
3. What is not working well?
4. Vision for the future

### 1. Background

Interviewees were asked to share information about themselves and their perspective on planning issues, including familiarity with the existing Whitley County Comprehensive Plan.

- Many were aware that the comprehensive plan existed but knew little about it.
- Of those who referenced the comprehensive plan, most were focused on the land use portions and stated their belief that there are several areas where it is very general and therefore limited in effectiveness.
- There was some confusion about the respective city comprehensive plans and a county plan and how those differing documents may complement one another or work in coordination.
- There was a feeling from many that there is a fine balance between growth and preserving the County’s agricultural heritage. Many made clear to point out that it is not

their perspective that nothing should change, but development which does occur in the County should be thoughtfully considered.

## 2. What is working well?

Interviewees were asked “What is working well in the County?” Responses are organized into categories.

### Agriculture

- Agricultural land values have been maintained or increased in recent years.
- Despite broader trends toward farm consolidation, within Whitley County many farms (estimated by some as roughly half) are still 50 acres or fewer.
- There is an effective process for farmers to transition uses when needed, compared to other neighboring counties (traditional agriculture to agriculture production, for example).
- The composition of crop farms has remained the same.
- Individuals with responsibility for monitoring water quality in the County stated that farmers are doing a great job at limiting water contamination.

### Land Use

- The current plan has been effective in balancing agriculture and development.
- Infill development is challenging to encourage but there are a few state tools that have made it a little more feasible in recent years.
- Development of industrial parks and larger scale buildings/properties along the major thoroughfare (US30) has been critical to recent economic growth.
- It has been 30 years since there has been a city-driven annexation. The last annexation was Quail Ridge, which is now filled with houses and apartments and was previously just hay fields.
- There does not seem to be animosity from the County about Columbia City’s annexation policies.

### Infrastructure

- The County has well water ordinance, which is unique to this region (1997). Wells must be 50 feet from septic.
- The regional sewer district is trying to reach township centers to encourage thoughtful growth. There is good coverage from utility service providers. When development is proposed, the County is set up well to accommodate it.
- AQUA’s sewer territory is well setup for growth. They anticipate growth and just recently saw a mile boundary expansion.
- The County has high density clay soils. This is great for foundations but terrible for septic systems.
- The County has a great recycling system but could promote it a little more to cut down on the burning of trash.

- The emergency management system has been very impactful. Users feel the system is reliable. It was good in the past and even better now with COVID.
- The County does a good job maintaining roads but recognizes that rural roads don't always meet the profile needed for modern street design requests, such as pavement width.
- County leadership has done their due diligence in assisting with the US30 corridor planning effort and have been proactive. They've promoted their preferred alternatives to INDOT.
- The road program has come a long way in the last five years. There is good communication at the top of the department and integration of GIS tools. There has been an increase of fuel tax and community crossings programs have been beneficial.
- The Health Department has aggressive septic system regulations to promote quality of life. All but two lakes now have sanitary sewer. One of the best things for Tri-Lakes was when the sewer district was created. The regional sewer district is another big step in the right direction and is imperative for growth and protection of the environment in the future.

#### Quality of Life

- The community has been working hard on quality of life initiatives. People want to visit and then find a reason to stay.
- It is an attractive community (lakes, agriculture, attractive and walkable Columbia City).
- Several companies relocated to Whitley County as they wanted to be closer to the talent pool but also to amenities for their employees. There is a strong work ethic in the community.
- Community pride is strong with many civic events such as First Fridays and 4-H groups. The community has been strong especially through COVID. "People just step up!"
- The lakes are a strong quality of life amenity.
- The city park system is a centralized system the benefits the County.
- Most people moving to Columbia City are coming from other counties.

#### Economic Development

- Whitley County "punches above its weight class" when it comes to economic development.
- Current and recent past leadership are doing a great job for the EDC. Accessibility and communication are easy. Business owners noted that the County is a business-friendly place. They also believe that the EDC is genuinely interested in how the companies are doing.
- The workforce that currently exists in the County is rock solid. A strong work ethic exists in the region with several companies noting that when you find loyal workers in the County, they often stick around a long time.
- Many residents have a full-time job and a farm; they "know the value of a buck."
- Whitley County is the envy of the region in terms of how quickly they move to take advantage of opportunities and what is offered to community members.
- The County has done a good job with economic development along US30 in sewer and water access. Many other areas were envious of what the County was able to pull off.



- Several industries have seen massive booms during COVID and are having a hard time keeping up with demand. EDC has been proactive in helping companies seek out expansion opportunities.
- There is strong government leadership with commissions that move at the speed of business. The same cannot be said for the rest of the region. Leadership is in a progressive mode with commercial development, TIFs and attracting businesses to the County with high paying jobs.
- There are many viable career paths for community members. Community businesses are great at opening their doors for internship and similar opportunities.
- The recent economic growth helps to attract people.

#### Education

- All three school systems are very good. While they somewhat compete for students, they all do a great job with education.
- The school districts turn out students who can find jobs in the County and remain living there.
- Columbia City is diverse and the school does a good job at meeting students where they are and matching their skill sets to opportunities.
- The new Career Center in the western portion County will be great for the community.
- Schools have good-to-great facilities and dedicated teachers and staff in all three districts.
- The new school in Columbia City is a wonderful asset for the County and the public rallied behind it.
- The school district to the north just passed a referendum as well (operating) and has strong public support.
- The school system and facilities have improved which has helped to make the County more attractive to residents and businesses.
- The juvenile justice system does a nice job to support students who have made bad decisions.

#### Collaboration/Leadership

- The County does a great job with all key players being collaborative. The setup could easily pit people against each other but there is great communication throughout the County.
- Leadership is truly trying to make the County better for their residents. There is appreciation of the work being put in.
- Leadership worked hard and proactively on US30.
- Columbia City works collaboratively with developers for mutual wins (annexation and development).
- Dedicated law enforcement is appreciated by school systems and has kept pace with population growth
- County officials do a great job of advocating for what Counties need and conducting planning.
- Leaders are good at communicating the long-term goals of the County.

- Communication between County staff and utility organizations has improved over the past few years and has improved efficiency, etc.

### 3. What is not working well?

Interviewees were asked “What is working well in the County?” Responses are organized into categories.

#### Planning Communication

- Some people think the comprehensive plan is the law. It should be better presented as a guiding document.
- Some would like to see more communication outside of public meetings. County officials recently gave an update on the progress since the last comprehensive plan, which was great, but people had to be there in person to get the information. Negativity can spur from a lack of communication.
- Some would like to see a bit better communication between the City and County as it relates to growth. The new County land use plan should be complementary to the City’s.
- Actions need to match the attitude from County leadership around the topic of adding housing. Developers are not seeing the same level of collaboration that businesses are seeing but the businesses will not continue to locate here without more housing.
- There could be better communication when development is going to occur so that INDOT and county engineers could help improve transportation circulation. Eagle Glen is a good example as there have been no improvements to the intersection.

#### Land Use

- Balancing land use and maintaining community character needs to be done intelligently. Growth can and should happen but will need to take place strategically near centers and limit greenfield encroachment.
- The diversity of land uses in the County is a challenge (balancing lakes, industrial community, large scale farming, hobby farming).
- Land use planning will be a challenge as farms are split up.
- There is plenty of frustration from both the residential and agriculture communities on land control and property rights. It is hard for some to understand the folks that don’t want agricultural development (CFOs or similar) but also don’t want residential development.
- Erosion control is a major environmental hazard and residential construction is one of the largest contributors. Farmers are generally compliant on drainage areas and want to keep their soil, not lose it to the creeks.
- There is a lot of pushback and controversy between farmers and residents about sewage runoff. However, recent data shows that environmental issues have been tied to human waste.
- US30 will have direct ties to how the County grows. Interchanges are likely to attract a certain type of land use. It will be important to know where interchanges are planned in the future in order to be proactive about land uses.

#### Employment/Workforce Improvements

- There is a lot of turnover in fulfillment positions. Several large companies draw their workforce regionally and about 30-40% are Whitley County residents. Staffing is an issue at the entry level. Are people looking for a quality place to work or more pay?
- Welding is a difficult position to fill (across the country but also in NE Indiana). Many of these positions are filled by Allen County residents simply because there is a larger population pool.
- There are a lot of open jobs in Whitley County that they can't seem to fill. This may be in part due to a lack of housing.
- Libraries and schools used to get 20 applications for one open position, but now get zero.
- Regional service EMS and fire departments are less reliable than they once were, but this is a trend beyond Whitley County. Fire departments are all volunteer based and seeing shortages (turnover rate has also been reported as high among volunteer fire departments)

#### Growing Pains/Growth Concerns

- We've been successful but it's important to try to manage growth. Many people are looking to expand, and the County has been trying to manage that. The County has taken its foot off the gas a little. Expansion of an industrial center should be a priority.
- There is significant tension between landowners and land users.
- Fort Wayne is "creeping" eastward.
- There is a shortage of available buildings for manufacturing. Most developers want to build just 60,000 sf, but there is demand above that. There is a minimum of a year from the start of a move process, through construction, and move in. Taking the lead on this may be a tool to control development better this way. "If you build it, they will come."
- There is an aversion to growth. Some places in the County don't want a single thing to change. The challenge is to recognize that if we are not growing, we are dying.
- Don't forget the little towns in economic development planning.
- With residential development costs rising, any avenues to keep costs down are really appreciated.
- There are lots of unknowns in transportation planning. Where will residential development occur? What's going to happen along the US30 corridor? Do we need to reserve rights-of-way?
- Lake and Jefferson townships are seeing growth that was not anticipated through the last plan.
- Everyone wants country living but no one wants it right next to certain agricultural uses. There need to be buffers. Smaller family-oriented farms could provide buffers.
- Addressing childhood poverty is important.

#### Access to Internet/Broadband Capabilities

- Infrastructure / high speed internet is needed. This is a major attractor for businesses, residents, and organizations.

- The longer the lack of access goes on, the further the community will be behind. Internet is just as vital as electricity.
- An online presence and portal to residents for permits instead would be better than having to call someone.

#### Transportation Improvements

- US30 is currently treated like an interstate and slated changes would make it safer.
- The US30 planning process has been troublesome, with people from the County wanting to see a much safer roadway and INDOT not being able to financially meet those demands.
- US30 is already pretty treacherous and making it even faster will impact the community. This is a concern for the senior population.
- Many rural roads do not meet current design practices in terms of width and construction. With larger farm equipment the roads are more easily damaged.
- The last four years have been almost solely about repairing roads. Only now are plans for improvements being developed. The lengthy road-permit approval process is also an identified issue.
- INDOT's vision for US30 and the county's vision do not align at the moment. At some point in time one plan or another will go forward. Until there is an additional funding source, they will go the current way they are planning. There is a financing gap that's preventing the improvements some people want.
- The land use policy should drive transportation. At this time, there are so many unknowns that it makes it difficult to do thoroughfare planning.
- If there are changes to US30 and Route 9, there will be ripple effects to the network which will probably fall to Columbia City. Semi-truck traffic on US30 may already be impacting visitors to Columbia City at certain times of the day. People avoid visiting Columbia City at certain times of day because of that.

#### Housing Concerns

- Housing diversity is a concern. The County does well with lower income housing. Market-based housing (150-200k) is lacking throughout the County. In the Whitko area, it's especially a problem.
- Land availability is low with agricultural land values being pushed so high that it's hard to purchase and turn around a housing product that financially works. People are wanting \$20K per acre, "we can maybe pay \$12K."
- Columbia City makes up 30% of the County population which has seen significant growth over last 10-15 years. More and more individuals are wanting to live in Columbia City, but there is not the housing to support people from outside the County moving in.
- There is some frustration from builders with leadership pressuring to develop housing products that don't match the market analysis being conducted in the region.
- There is not a lot of housing at diverse price points. Rent rates are high in the County. Housing should not all be high-end single-family housing.
- Developers get a lot of pushback when proposing different housing products. Specifically, as density of the development goes up, it's directly proportional to the pushback they receive (NIMBY).

- There is a recognition that housing is needed and there is a desire for growth in the community from City and County officials, but not much action in that regard. Home builders are not seeing the same incentives/cooperation to build that large businesses are seeing.
- There are concerns about lack of aging in place options (independent living facilities, nursing homes, senior activity, etc.)
- Larwill specifically doesn't currently have a lot of housing and would like to rehabilitate the housing that they do have.

#### Parks/Recreation

- Currently, natural resources such as the Eel River are not promoted.
- There is not a County parks system currently in place. Acres gets a lot of calls of people wanting to donate land but they don't meet criteria. This leaves unincorporated towns to deal with quality of life items like parks. There is very little promotion through chambers of commerce or cities for water trail systems. Water sports are a multi-billion-dollar industry and Whitley may be missing that opportunity.
- Metea County Park (in Allen County) is nice but the Whitley County parks are woefully underfunded.
- Though our parks have nice amenities for younger crowd, we need to be mindful of seniors and adults at these facilities. (This has become especially apparent during COVID.)

## 4. Vision for the future

Interviewees were asked to consider the big picture about the County and consider key factors that will influence the next 5-10 years. This may include topics that would influence physical development, economic prosperity and/or the quality of life for people who live and work in the County.

#### Growing Pains/Funding

- There must be growth to sustain the population (businesses, industry, residential).
- People need to protect the backbone of the economy: food. Farm bureau members do understand the need diversification, however.
- The new high school will be great for growth in the area.
- TIF districts and similar economic incentive tools are a concern in rural communities. There is concern about drawing in businesses without having the students and becoming a drain.
- The fact that Fort Wayne keeps growing outward must be addressed.
- There needs to be a balance between different kinds of growth (housing, industrial, etc.). There has been a long history in the Country of segmented interest groups. When we look at the County, what would be a balanced plan that would include everyone?
- Providing better access to mental health services and rehabilitation programs for residents will increase quality of life and may increase community safety.



#### Maintain What We've Got/Attractive Place To Be

- Whitley County is an enticing place to be home, attracting kids back to family farms. There are still opportunities to grow family farms in this County.
- The Churubusco student population is up this year, which is a positive sign of growth.
- Residential development will be creeping in from both sides. Can we encourage a natural corridor before it's too late? The County should maintain some natural character and provide habitat that's natural to the County.
- One of the school slogans is "Small town values – world class results." This can be extended to the County as a whole.
- The regional economy is strong, and the County is known as a good place to get a job.

#### Industry Importance

- Agriculture has to be viewed as an important industry. There is a concern that agricultural property will be repurposed for urban or manufacturing use.
- Industrial development along the US30 corridor has been vital to the economic development of the community and cannot be taken for granted. Continued expansion of industrial parks will be impactful and helpful to transportation planners but also help fund US30 improvements. Establishing a job training program for construction trades (electrician, plumbers, brick masons, etc.) was suggested.

#### Housing

- A balance with housing and industry is needed, clustering near cities as much as we can.
- If housing is not kept up at the same pace of economic development, it will stifle the job market for the businesses that people have worked so hard to bring in. The communities that are being more proactive about housing are doing better. Whitley County is somewhat aware of this issue now, but there are not actions to match that awareness yet.
- Where will housing occur? That will determine where people travel and the roads that they travel on.

#### Infrastructure Maintenance/Growth

- Infrastructure of the County (water and sewer) is set up to support development in greenfields but there are several communities with aging facilities that are failing. Upgrading septic systems to state standards and expanding sanitary sewer systems were two recommendations from interviews.
- Emergency services will face difficult questions with consolidation of services in EMS and fire. Considering the need for a county-wide fire department, for future economic, public safety and health planning," if the population continues to grow.
- Expansion of sewer districts will be crucial as more and more investor construction takes place when farms go up for sale.

## **Summary Memo**

### **Round 1 of Public Engagement**

#### **December 10, 2020**

This document summarizes the first round of public engagement for Whitley County, which was conducted between October 26 and November 30, 2020. Input was gathered in the following ways:

- Whitley County Focus on the Future Events (multiple dates, see in section 3); and
- Online activities that mimicked the in-person events

The memo also takes into consideration other correspondence that received from community members during this period.

The memo includes the following:

1. Purpose
2. Outreach and Publicity
3. Approach
4. Results
5. Participation and Satisfaction
6. Next Steps

### **1. Purpose**

Whitley County launched a process to update its comprehensive plan, called Form Whitley County, in July 2020. The County's last comprehensive plan was adopted in 2011. One of the key inputs to the comprehensive plan process is insight from the community. Through the first round of public engagement, multiple opportunities across in-person and online platforms were provided for anyone who cares about the future of Whitley County to help inform the plan. This round of engagement will help to inform development of the plan's preliminary goals, objectives and recommendations.

*"This process is extremely important to the future of our County."*

workshop participant

## 2. Outreach and Publicity

Extensive outreach was conducted to spread the word about the opportunity to participate in Round 1 of the public engagement. The Team capitalized on existing networks through community groups, organizations, churches, educational institutions and local governments for outreach. Outreach and publicity included the following:

- A press release was distributed to local media outlets.
- Interviews with key stakeholder groups were conducted (documented separately) and interviewees were asked to help spread the word.
- 1,000 printed rack cards distributed throughout the County.
- Over 100 groups, organizations or individuals connected to networks of interest were contacted about the opportunity, including schools, nonprofit organizations, interest groups (e.g. Farm Bureau, business groups, etc.), local governments and others.
- Staff met with community members in parts of the County with a high interest in the process and promoted the events and online activities.

## 3. Approach

Form Whitley County's first round of public input included socially distanced engagement at an initial county-wide 'kick-off' event, held on October 26, in addition to seven, small group public engagement sessions from October 26 to November 16.

Below is a list of the completed public engagement sessions and their corresponding locations in the County:

- **Jefferson Township:** Monday, October 26 - 11:00 am - 12:30 pm - 4-H Community Center - 680 W. Squawbuck Road, Columbia City
- **All County:** Monday, October 26 - 3:00 pm - 7:00 pm - 4-H Community Center - 680 W. Squawbuck Road, Columbia City
- **Early Risers (one of two):** Friday, October 30 - 7:30 am - 9:30 am - Whitley County Government Center - Meeting Room A/B (basement) - 220 W. Van Buren Street, Columbia City
- **Larwill:** Saturday, November 7 - 9:00 am - 11:00 am - Larwill Town Hall - 108 N. Center Street, Larwill
- **Lakes Region:** Tuesday, November 10 - 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm - Thorncreek Township Fire Station - 821 E. 500 North, Columbia City
- **Business Focus:** Thursday, November 12 - 11:00 am - 1:00 pm - Whitley County Government Center - Meeting Room C (first floor) - 220 W. Van Buren Street, Columbia City
- **Early Risers (two of two):** Friday, November 13 - 7:30 am - 9:30 am - Whitley County Government Center - Meeting Room A/B (basement) - 220 W. Van Buren Street, Columbia City
- **Southwest:** Monday, November 16 - 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm - South Whitley Town Hall Community Room - 118 S. Front Street, South Whitley
- **Northeast (CANCELED):** Thursday, November 19 - 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm - Churubusco Scout Building - 501 N. John Krieger Drive, Churubusco
  - This event was cancelled due to public health precautions in place due to COVID-19.

The Focus on the Future events featured interactive engagement materials with staff and/or consultant team members on-site to facilitate and to answer any questions. Activities were designed to allow for social distancing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and state-mandated public gathering protocols. The same material was presented at each event. At some events, small group discussion was also incorporated. Online engagement opportunities were made available from October 26 through November 30, which also included the same activities.

Engagement at the workshops and online included two main exercises: a statement-rating exercise and an opportunity-mapping exercise. During the statement-rating exercise, participants were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strong Agree”) and provide any additional comments in response to their statement ratings. The statement prompts corresponded with each of the five County goals, as identified at the start of the activity: Focus Growth; Foster Safe and Convenient Circulation; Nurture the Environment; Advance Economic Development; and Enhance Quality of Life.

The mapping exercise asked participants to identify three key opportunity areas in the county on a map and to explain why these areas were selected. An opportunity area could be places that should be protected or that should be improved / enhanced.

Participants also had the opportunity to offer their assistance as a volunteer, if needed, to support technical work.

## 4. Results

Every comment provided was recorded (in participants’ own words) in a database and has been provided on the Form Whitley County website. Following are key takeaways from the input.

### **Part 1: Statement Rating**

In person or online, participants were asked to view display boards with information on five goals for the County:

- Focus Growth
- Foster Safe and Convenient Circulation
- Nurture the Environment
- Advance Economic Development
- Enhance Quality of Life

Under each of the five topics they were asked to give a series of statements a rating 1 to 5 where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. They were then asked to share any other on each statement or the topic generally.

Following is a summary of reactions to each statement.

## **1. Focus Growth**

### **1A. New development should generally be directed toward areas where there is already more development and existing utilities (cities, towns, corridors, etc.).**

Average Rating: 4.2

Key takeaways from comments include:

- In general, residential growth should be focused in areas that are already served by utilities.
- Farmland preservation should be a priority and is aided by focusing growth in already developed areas.
- Zoning should inform where development takes place.
- Utility improvements may be appropriate in some locations to support development.
- The County should recognize existing trends and consider trying to encourage development in places where it is already taking place.

### **1B. When possible, the impact of more intensive land uses on residential areas should be lessened through physical separation and/or urban design improvements.**

Average Rating: 3.8

Key takeaways from comments include:

- In some parts of the County, residents are very concerned about the environmental impacts of immediately adjacent agricultural uses and agricultural users are concerned about new residential development.
- Setbacks and/or buffer areas between residential and commercial and agricultural uses are desired by some.
- High quality design standards for new development, including requirements for open space and conservation of natural features, are a potential way that some residents see to mitigate impacts of other land uses.
- Conflicts might be addressed in part by focusing new residential development in already developed areas.

### **1C. Industrial and business park development should continue along US 30 in a similar way to how it has been occurring over the past 25 years.**

Average Rating: 4.1

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Industrial and business park development should be supported along this corridor.
- While development is generally logical along US30, safety issues with the roadway must be addressed.
- Landscaping or design improvements should be considered to help reduce the visual impact of some of these developments.
- Other areas of the County, beyond US 30, should also be considered for commercial and industrial development.



**1D. The County would benefit from clearer direction regarding the location of Confined Feeding Operations.**

Average Rating: 3.7

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Significant conflict between landowners/residential property owners and CFO/CAFO owners/operators was expressed, specifically over reported odor problems, consolidated land ownership/control and septic system needs.
- There is a desire on behalf of some residents for more studies on CFO effects on groundwater and the surrounding environment.
- A recommendation for specific zoning for CFOs/CAFOs, as opposed to standardized agricultural zoning, was expressed by some to address potential regulatory needs, while others disagreed about the application of what they consider to be “spot zoning.”
- Some participants saw no further regulations needed for CFO operations as where they are allowed is already “clear” in existing zoning and more “unnecessary regulations” would only be to “appease those who lack understanding of normal farming practices.”
- Some participants questioned the “singling out” of CFOs from other land uses. Some were concerned about the potential for “misinformation” about the impact of CFOs to be shared in responses for this statement prompt.

**1E. More homes that address the needs and desires of residents should be built in the County.**

Average Rating: 3.5

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many participants supported building more residential development in locations where utilities and towns/cities currently exist.
- Other participants questioned “the need” for additional residential development and wondered who decides these “needs and desires.” Some expressed concerns for sprawl.
- The responses to this comment exemplified an “identity crisis” that many in Whitley County pointed to: keep the agricultural/rural way of life ‘as is’ or add more residential development, which could potentially change the character of Whitley County.
- A need to add more middle-income housing units was expressed by some participants.
- Some participants noted the challenges of owning/operating current housing stock.

**2. Foster Safe and Convenient Circulation**

**2A. Dealing with increased traffic on US 30 should be a top priority.**

Average Rating: 4.3

Key takeaways from comments include:

- A desire for or an assumption that US 30 will become a “limited access freeway” was echoed by multiple participants.
- Concerns were voiced that limited development/action can or will be taken in regard to US 30, due to the state’s direct control/involvement.
- Safety concerns for non-semi vehicular traffic were repeated by multiple participants.
- Straying away from the use/deployment of traffic lights was recommended.

**2B. A long-term strategy for the design, upgrade, and maintenance of rural roads is needed.**

Average Rating: 4.2

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Overall, participants found this to be an important consideration for the future of the County.
- Participants expressed a desire for a comprehensive approach to county-wide road improvements, as the current plan for improvements feels more like a “band-aid approach.”
- Some participants expressed that rural roads seem less maintained than town/city roadways.
- Other participants commented that they believe road maintenance has been “acceptable.”
- Some participants saw value in maintaining gravel or dirt roads throughout the County, while others preferred to have all rural roads, including gravel or dirt roads, paved.

**2C. Improvements for people traveling other than car (foot, bicycle, transit, and other) should be made.**

Average Rating: 3.2

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Some participants expressed an interest in more trails (along the lakes and the new high school, for instance).
- Others considered the investments to additional infrastructure as “not a priority,” especially if budgets are constrained.
- Some participants observed that “very few people around here would walk or bicycle to work,” while others noted that additional transportation options may “contribute to quality of life.”

**2D. High speed rail and mass transit should be considered as a future transit option.**

Average Rating: 2.5

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many participants rated this statement lower, compared to other statements in this theme/goal.
- Many participants responded that investments in high-speed rail and mass transit were “not feasible,” “not cost effective,” and without “enough population density to justify.”
- Others liked the idea but admitted that there are “more pressing issues” for the County to address and supported the exploration of alternative transportation methods only if they are “self-sustaining and not subsidized.”

### **3. Nurture the Environment**

#### **3A. Wetland protection policies should be pursued.**

Average Rating: 3.9

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many of the participants who commented on this statement said that they believed the current regulations/policies in place, either locally, or from the State and Federal governments, were sufficient.
- Some participants commented that protecting wetlands is a high priority and may encourage more residents/families while improving quality of life.
- Other participants expressed concern for appropriate identification of wetlands for protection: "Every pool of water is not a wetland."

#### **3B. New development within floodplains, along lakefronts and in other environmentally sensitive areas should be discouraged and existing development restrictions enforced.**

Average Rating: 4.1

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Multiple participants expressed concern that current regulations on lakefront development, specifically, have not been followed or enforced. They see this issue as a primary concern.
- Some participants expressed a strong desire to protect the County's existing natural resources and prevent additional pollution/impacts.
- Other participants saw a need for "common sense" and "clarity" when it comes to development within floodplains and along lakefronts.

#### **3C. Low Impact Development (LID) strategies (swales, rain gardens, etc.) to reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality should be pursued.**

Average Rating: 4.1

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Additional resources and educational materials may need to be provided on details of proposed policy: some participants had mixed views/opinions on what these policy strategies would call for.
- Some participants expressed reduction of stormwater runoff needed in residential, commercial, and industrial areas as well as in areas adjacent to lakes and other waterways.
- Others thought that the current regulatory requirements were sufficient, or that this issue should be addressed at the state or federal level and not at the expense of the individual property owner.

### **3D. The County should further regulate new septic field installations.**

Average Rating: 3.6

This statement was moderately well supported. Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many of the participants who commented on this statement had strong opinions and/or personal examples when it came to septic systems in Whitley County.
- Multiple participants claimed that septic systems are the “worst polluters in the County” and called for more enforcement of current regulations or more restrictions.
- Another group of participants shared similar comments that current septic system regulations are “more than sufficient” and those who are in compliance should be “left alone!”
- Some participants questioned if all septic systems are problematic, or just older septic systems that are “out of code.”

### **3E. Solar power is an important trend that should be encouraged.**

Average Rating: 3.2

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Participants were conflicted when it came to supporting additional solar power in the County.
- Some participants were concerned that solar power from solar panels is “not efficient,” “not environmentally friendly,” and should not be a priority for the County.
- Others expressed cautious optimism about solar power/energy generation and supported solar power over wind turbines/wind energy production.

## **4. Advance Economic Development**

### **4A. Workforce development initiatives should complement existing and future jobs in the County and the skillsets / training of County residents.**

Average Rating: 4.3

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Several participants mentioned Whitko Career Academy as a successful example of a similar initiative.
- Participants stressed employability skills, technology training, and job creation/retention strategies in response to this statement.
- One participant wrote: “Workforce development initiatives should lead not follow.”

**4B. The County should continue to use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts and other incentives to attract new businesses.**

Average Rating: 3.7

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many of the participants were skeptical about TIF district use in the past or remain skeptical about the overall advantages this policy/incentive will present to the County.
- Other participants expressed inadequate information on TIFs and so did not feel strongly about their use in the future.
- Those who were in favor of TIF districts did so with caveats or conditions.

**4C. New strategies to attract and retain workers should be pursued that consider changing preferences, commuting habits and lifestyle choices.**

Average Rating: 3.7

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Participants expressed a desire for “balance” when considering this statement.
- Others believed that it should not be the County government’s goal to “persuade an individual’s habits or lifestyles.”
- Many participants believed that addressing the needs of current residents is more important than courting new residents.
- Participants overall wanted to see the County’s “rural heritage” be preserved and reflected in any future growth strategies.

**4D. The County should seek to increase the number of people who are able to both live and work in the County.**

Average Rating: 3.5\*

Key takeaways from comments include:

- There were mixed sentiments on increasing the number of people who work and live in the County. Many responded simply with “Yes” or “Agree” while others were concerned that with more people, parts of Whitley County would become like the suburbs, which these participants did not want to see.
- Others were indifferent, stating that this aim is “not a government function” but rather a business obligation.

\* Due to a printing error, the rating legend was not visible on this particular statement in the in-person meeting so not all in-person participants gave a rating. Online participants were given the option for a rating. Many participants still wrote in their comments/response to this statement even if they did not give a rating.

**4E. The County should make increasing quality, affordable childcare / pre-school availability a priority.**

Average Rating: 3.3\*

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Some participants expressed a “big need” for more affordable childcare, as this strategy could be used as part of a “broader effort to support families” in Whitley County.
- Other participants expressed discontent with the “over-reach” of government being involved in childcare needs. (“Not the County’s place to do this.”)

\* Due to a printing error, the rating legend was not visible on this particular statement in the in-person meeting so not all in-person participants gave a rating. Online participants were given the option for a rating. Many participants still wrote in their comments/response to this statement even if they did not give a rating.

**5. Enhance Quality of Life**

**5A. A long-term plan and funding strategy should be created for County parks.**

Average Rating: 3.7

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many participants see parks as an asset in their community and a contributor to quality of life.
- Some participants expressed a desire for a county-wide park system.
- Some participants recognized the benefits of parks but would not like to see parks divert resources away from other County funding streams.
- A few people commenting on this response thought the creation of new parks is not necessary, due to rural residential areas having sufficient open, outdoor space for recreation.

**5B. Reliable high-speed internet is needed in the County.**

Average Rating: 4.7

Key takeaways from comments include:

- This statement received the highest average rating among all the other prompts, indicating a strong desire to address reliable internet access across Whitley County. Many participants expressed the “desperate need” for reliable, high-speed internet access across the County – some even commented that this was their “highest priority.”
- Some participants expressed confusion in that they thought internet access had already been deployed county-wide. Some participants cited the example that they’ve not had problems with internet access in their “rural area.”



**5C. Strategies to retain and attract young people to the County that addresses housing, employment, recreation and other quality of life considerations should be developed.**

Average Rating: 4.0

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Overall, most participants expressed a desire to retain young people, particularly young people who will contribute to economic activities like farming and agriculture, and those who want to start families/invest in educational resources.
- Some participants did not want to attract other people from outside the County, instead preferring to retain those who are already in-County.
- Other participants disliked the emphasis on “young people” in the statement, instead preferring to consider the County needs/population as a whole.

**5D. Aging-in-place strategies that support older adults (focusing on quality independent living facilities, senior activities, mixed use neighborhoods, etc.) should be enhanced.**

Average Rating: 3.8

Key takeaways from comments include:

- While this statement received moderately favorable ratings, it did not receive as many written comments as other statements.
- Of those who did respond, many recognized the County’s aging population and saw aging-in-place strategies as something that would benefit the community, as well as mixed-use development in general
- For those who did want to see additional strategies in place, locating services/facilities near existing towns and emergency medical facilities was important.
- Some participants supported the idea, but not at the government’s/taxpayer’s expense.

**5E. Rivers and lakes and preservation areas should be used and promoted for recreational purposes.**

Average Rating: 3.9

Key takeaways from comments include:

- Many expressed that access to nature/recreational opportunities enhances quality of life and that Whitley County has access/opportunities to offer.
- Most participants wanted to see the County approach recreation/conservation from a balanced growth/development approach.
- Some participants thought that the County needs to do more to protect and promote natural areas, while others thought the current availability/protection of resources was adequate.
- Lakefront development’s impact on the natural environment/setting was a repeated theme for many participants.

## **Part 2: Opportunities Mapping**

Below is the summary of key themes that emerged from mapping exercise performed at the “Focus on the Future” workshops and through in the online survey.

- The US 30 Corridor should continue to be a focus for commercial and industrial development, with selected other locations also potentially valuable to consider, including the Larwill TIF.
- Protecting, creating better access to and enhancing recreational opportunities along the rivers are significant opportunities.
- The already developed areas of Columbia City, Churubusco and South Whitley should continue to be focus areas for infill and new development. This could include a mix of residential, commercial and other uses and efforts to promote historic preservation and investment.
- Specifically, housing needs/opportunities were identified in several key areas, including in South Whitley along SR 5 (“critical”), the north side of 205, and the north side of W. Lincolnway.
- Rural character and land uses should generally be protected where they exist, and new development should not encroach in the most valuable agricultural areas.
- Over-development of the lakes should be avoided, although enhanced public access and amenities should be pursued.
- Larwill presents an opportunity for infill, redevelopment and revitalization.
- More residential development is desirable south of Columbia City.
- The eastern portion of Jefferson and Union Townships have seen increased residential development and this trend could be desirable if managed and designed sensitively to the context.
- Portions of Thorncreek Township have been developing with new residential and the Township could be a desirable place for additional development.

## **5. Participation and Satisfaction**

Participation in the workshops and online activities met expectations for the process as conducted with necessary adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with over 150 people participating and approximately 1,500 unique comments collected, including both statement rating and opportunities mapping. (For the previous comprehensive plan 94 people participated in the planning process and the goal for this plan was to build upon that participation.) Participants who attended the public workshops were asked to fill out an exit questionnaire about their experience and themselves. The following insight is based on responses to the questionnaire.

### **Key Takeaways regarding participation and satisfaction**

The following data was taken from exit questionnaires from public events.

- Word of mouth (34%) was the most common way people heard about the “Focus on the Future” workshops, followed by email (24%) and a flyer (10%).
- There was age diversity among participants, with over-representation of people 55 years and older.
- Those with a higher education and higher annual household income were overrepresented relative to the County’s population.

- The vast majority of respondents were residents of Whitley County's townships (approximately 85%).
- Participants varied in the amount of time they lived in the County, with approximately 47% indicating they had lived in the County for 30 years or fewer and 50% indicating they had lived in the County for 30 years or more.
- Approximately 1/3 of respondents said they owned a business in the County.
- Workshop satisfaction rates were very high; 95% of participants in the workshop said they felt comfortable with the activities, and 97% felt that they had the chance to share their thoughts about the future.
- 98% of respondents said they will stay involved with the planning process for Form Whitley County.

## 6. Next Steps

Following from this public input opportunity, analysis in key technical areas will be undertaken to further the planning team's understanding of certain topics of relevance to the update. That work will be considered in combination with community insight in order to inform the future Character and Land Use Plan as well as adjustments to the existing plan's recommendations.

*"We must all get along and build a better, cleaner, safer and prosperous County, not just for us but for the future to come."*

workshop participant

## Summary Memo

### Round 2 of Public Engagement

April 5, 2021

This document summarizes the second round of public engagement for Form Whitley County, which was conducted between March 8 and March 21, 2021. Input was gathered in the following ways:

- Whitley County Community Choices “drop in” event (Saturday, March 13, 11 am-3 pm).
- Online activities that mimicked the in-person event (available March 8-21).

The memo includes the following:

1. Purpose
2. Outreach and Publicity
3. Approach
4. Results
5. Participation
6. Next Steps

### 1. Purpose

Whitley County launched a process to update its comprehensive plan, called Form Whitley County, in July 2020. The County’s last comprehensive plan was adopted in 2011. One of the key inputs to the comprehensive plan process is insight from the community.

Through the first round of public engagement, held in Fall 2020, multiple opportunities across in-person and online platforms were provided for anyone who cares about the future of Whitley County to help inform the plan. This second round of engagement, held in March 2021, was designed to provide an opportunity to comment on the plan’s goals and recommendations, as well as a Draft Future Character and Land Use Plan

*“Overall, I appreciate the time and effort that has gone into developing this plan.”*

Community Choices participant

## 2. Outreach and Publicity

The Team capitalized on the existing networks established during the first round of engagement, including community groups and organizations, for outreach and publicity about the engagement opportunity.

Outreach and publicity included the following:

- A press release was distributed to local media outlets.
- 1,000 printed rack cards were printed and distributed throughout the County.
- Over 100 groups, organizations or individuals connected to networks of interest were contacted about the opportunity, including schools, nonprofit organizations, interest groups (e.g. Farm Bureau, business groups, etc.), local governments and others.
- Individuals who participated in the first round of engagement or who signed up to join the project mailing list were notified.

## 3. Approach

Form Whitley County's second round of public input included a socially distanced, county-wide event, held on Saturday, March 13, in addition to a virtual engagement window, available from Monday, March 8 through Sunday, March 21 on the project web page ([FormWhitleyCounty.com](http://FormWhitleyCounty.com)).

The Community Choices in-person event featured interactive engagement materials with planning staff and consultant team members on-site to answer any questions. Activities were designed to allow for social distancing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and recommended public health guidelines. Online engagement opportunities were made available from March 8 through March 21 and included the same opportunities for input as the in-person event.

Engagement at the workshops and the accompanying online opportunity included three main exercises:

- A set of draft Recommendations for the plan, organized under six goals, with the opportunity for open-ended comment on each.
- A series of questions related to the plan Goals with the opportunity for open-ended responses.
- A draft future Character and Land Use Plan and character type descriptions with the opportunity for comment.

## 4. Results

Every comment provided was recorded (in participants' own words) in a database and has been provided on the Form Whitley County web page. Following are key takeaways from the input.

### Part 1: Draft Plan Recommendations

In person or online, participants were asked to provide feedback for each of the draft plan Recommendations. Based on review, following are comments that may warrant modifications to the draft recommendations. In addition to the comments below, many recommendations received considerable support. If comments are *not* summarized below either commenters were generally supportive or public input is less likely to warrant significant change. (However, changes may still be made based on further planning team and Steering Committee review). The majority of comments

pertained to Goal 1: Focus Growth.

### Goal 1: Focus Growth

*1.1 Encourage growth in municipalities, adjacent to municipalities, near municipalities, or in areas with existing public utilities, using water and/or sewer capacity as a criterion in evaluating new development.*

- Many participants thought that this was an important issue to address, signaling this recommendation could be made a 'high priority.'

*1.2 Pay reasonable regard to this Plan, especially the Future Character and Land Use Plan, in zoning decisions.*

- Some participants did not understand why the term "reasonable regard" was utilized in this recommendation. Providing an explanation to the terminology used may warrant more understanding/support for this recommendation.

*1.3 Minimize land use conflicts by strengthening requirements for modifying the scale and character of development at the edges of areas with different land uses and considering open space, landscaping or separations between areas.*

- Some participants wanted additional clarity in defining this recommendation.

*1.4 Initiate a countywide alternative energy policy and recommend standards for alternative energy generation facilities.*

- Some participants did not agree that this recommendation should be considered a 'high' priority.
- Several participants wanted additional clarity about what this would entail (e.g. what is meant by "standards."

*1.5 Protect rural character and agricultural land from development that has a suburban or urban character, or that erodes farmers' rights to farm.*

- The responses for this recommendation elicited a strong response from some participants with some feeling that agricultural interests are being given more weight than is warranted.
- Some were concerned about the phrase "right to farm," which may need to be clarified or reworded to better describe the overall intent of this recommendation.

*1.11 Amend the Whitley County Zoning Ordinance and Zone Map, Subdivision Code, and/or other regulations to support these Goals and Recommendations.*

- There was some concern from participants that community input won't be prioritized in this process.



*1.12 Assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of alternative development regulations and tools to achieve the Plan recommendations, such as performance zoning, Transfer of Development Rights, Form-Based Codes, etc.*

- Many participants were unfamiliar with several of the specific “tools” mentioned in this recommendation, indicating a need to clarify the exact use and specifics of these tools specifically, or generalize more broadly.

*1.13 Prepare a housing study that includes both market analysis and qualitative input by government officials, real estate agents, builders, developers, and other community members to assess needs and opportunities for new housing in the County, especially middle-income housing units.*

- Many participants indicated strong support for this recommendation, signaling that a change in priority (from ‘low’ to ‘medium’) may be warranted for the final plan.

*1.14 Encourage industrial and business park development along US30 between Columbia City and the Allen County line with design and landscaping that minimizes visual impacts to surrounding areas.*

- Some participants indicated that this recommendation should also include the Larwill TIF District.

## *Goal 2: Foster Safe and Convenient Transportation*

This Goal received mostly favorable and/or neutral comments that do not warrant significant change to recommendations.

## *Goal 3: Nurture the Environment*

*3.2 Develop and implement a countywide storm water management and erosion control ordinance.*

- The scope of this recommendation was unclear to some (for example one participant recommended a change from “countywide” to “City and subdivision,” as many agricultural districts may already have regulations that cover this recommendation).

*3.4 Amend the Whitley County Zoning Ordinance to regulate alternative energy facilities, both small- and utility-scale, to mitigate negative effects to surrounding properties while recognizing the emerging importance of alternative energy sources.*

- Some participants noted that this recommendation may overlap/relate to recommendation 1.4. Providing clarity to both recommendations and solidifying linkages may be warranted.

*3.6 Monitor Indiana’s list of impaired waterbodies for Whitley County to identify changes and examine possible causes.*

- Some participants wanted to see greater clarity with this recommendation, especially what is

meant by “monitoring.”

- Other participants mentioned partnering with environmental organizations in the area to determine more specific County-level actions that can be taken in regards to the goal of this recommendation.

### *3.7 Strengthen the countywide recycling program through service enhancements and by encouraging companies that can use recycled materials.*

- Some participants indicated interest in adding additional specific services to this recommendation (such as hazardous waste pick-up).

### Goal 4: Advance Economic Development

#### *4.4 Support residential development in appropriate locations to attract and retain residents in the local workforce.*

- Some participants indicated a strong desire to make this recommendation a higher priority, as many of the agricultural-related recommendations hold a medium or high priority.

### Goal 5: Enhance Quality of life

This Goal received mostly favorable and/or neutral comments that do not warrant significant change to recommendations.

## **Part 2: Additional Questions**

The following input summaries reflect the “additional questions” section of the engagement material.

*What does “rural character” mean to you? “Suburban character”?*

- Many participants defined “rural” areas as places that are scenic, with expansive land/property lots, including farmland/farms, areas that are more quiet than urban areas with environmental features and wildlife.
- Some participants noted that farms, to them, did not include more industrial forms of agriculture.
- Subsequently, “suburban” areas were indicative of more city-like living, subdivisions with lots of housing close together (“more intense residential development”) and more noise.

*What types of homes and housing do you feel are needed, or would you like to see, in unincorporated Whitley County? (See Recommendation 1.13)*

- Participants had a variety of housing needs that they identified through this question.
- Some participants wanted more single-family homes for low- and moderate-income families clustered together, with open space conserved nearby. Other participants wanted more “farm houses” or only homes built near existing towns/infrastructure.
- Some wanted no additional housing in the County at all.

- Additionally, some participants wanted a focus on senior living/senior care housing options.

*What types of road improvements are needed to improve safety and accessibility in the County?*

- Participants had conflicting views on whether to maintain gravel/dirt roads as is, or pave them as asphalt.
- “Chip and seal” methods for road maintenance were repeatedly named as not sufficient.
- Several participants mentioned safety concerns with US 30 and their desire to see it become an Interstate.

*Are there any “missing” connections in the County road network that you think should be planned to be made? (See Recommendation 2.13)*

- This question was repeatedly skipped or simply written in as “unknown” or “none” for the majority of participants.
- For those who did answer this question, roadway safety was a primary concern.
- No intersections or roadways were specifically named in this answer section.

*Should erosion control / stormwater management be required for small scale (e.g. home on a one acre lot) projects? (See Recommendation 3.2)*

- Many participants were concerned or wanted to see action taken on erosion control/stormwater management, but wanted to see it be “encouraged” and not be made a government regulation, per se.
- Others simply wrote “Yes” in agreement with the question’s suggested outcomes, or simply “no” for not in favor.
- The management of runoff was mentioned by a few participants as being of concern for this question.

*What opinions would you have about a large-scale solar installation if one were to be constructed about a half mile from your home? (See Recommendation 3.4)*

- Some participants encouraged solar installation near their neighborhoods, citing the need to source energy from non-intensive fossil fuel production.
- Others thought a solar energy installation would be “unattractive” and some participants questioned if the benefits would outweigh the costs.
- There were some strongly held opinions against the installation of wind-energy/wind-mills in the area.

*Should the County focus on development and expansion of the existing industrial areas, or are new, different, or additional areas needed? Where? What kind? (See Recommendation 4.5)*

- There was a strong desire to see development take place in existing areas, particularly where utilities are already located.
- For those who were in support of additional development in existing areas, focusing development around US 30 was a repeated theme.
- A few participants wanted to see new industrial areas added to expand the economic development opportunities of the County.
- A few others did not want to see any new development plans at all. (“Enough already.”)

*What, if any, conflicts are there currently between industrial/business uses and residences, or other uses? (See Recommendation 4.6)*

- Participants either had specific conflicts in mind when answering this question, or simply stated “Unknown” or “None that I’m aware of.”
- Some of the conflicts named by participants involved Lakefront property development, more “industrial farming”/CFOs and nearby neighbors, and potential factory expansions near homes.

*Are there any segments of the population (e.g. young people, families, older adults) that would benefit from additional amenities in the County and what kinds of amenities are most needed? (See Recommendations 5.7 and 5.12)*

- Many participants mentioned that parks/trails and “good jobs” would attract families and younger demographics.
- Some participants noted that “everyone” could benefit from more Internet/broadband expansion.
- Public transport, senior facilities, and free library access were also repeated ideas.

*What concerns do you have about being able to live in Whitley County as you (or your children) get older? (See Recommendation 5.9)*

- There were a diverse range of answers for this question. Many participants highlighted key points to address throughout the County over the course of the next few decades.
- Some participants were concerned about the need to provide both senior care facilities and childcare facilities to ensure everyone’s needs are met.
- Others were concerned that the County may be “left behind” either in technological upgrades, economic development advancements, or overall quality of life initiatives.
- Additionally, some participants discussed their concerns that the rural character of the County may be jeopardized as new development takes place.

### Part 3: Future Character and Land Use Mapping Exercise

Below is the summary of key themes that emerged from the future character and land use mapping exercise.

- The majority of comments received centered on where to distinguish between Mixed Rural, Rural-Conventional and Rural-Traditional. For example, specific recommendations were made in Jefferson Township both to increase the amount of Mixed Rural and to decrease it, with differing opinion on where the “line” between character areas should be drawn.
- Making clear distinctions between the character of Suburban Living and Mixed Rural as well as between the different Rural character types was stated by several people as important.
- Some participants pointed out places where existing residential development is not indicated on the map and should be.
- Several people commented about minimizing new development near the lakes.
- Some participants expressed concern about CFOs in certain parts of the County or in general.
- Some people commented that the colors on the map were hard to distinguish for some character types.
- Some participants expressed distrust in County government in taking resident input into consideration and using the character and land use map for decision-making in the future.
- Some participants simply indicated that the map generally looks appropriate to them.
- A few participants commented that they do not want any character or land use map for the County and are concerned about infringement on private property rights.

## 5. Participation

Between the two engagement periods, over 200 people were involved in the planning process with nearly 3,000 unique comments collected. For reference, the previous comprehensive plan process had 94 people who participated and the goal for this plan was to build upon that participation.

## 6. Next Steps

Following this final round of public engagement, the planning team will integrate the public’s comments into a working draft plan. The plan will be released on the project website ([www.FormWhitleyCounty.com](http://www.FormWhitleyCounty.com)) in late-Spring 2021.