

**COLUMBIA CITY/WHITLEY COUNTY
JOINT PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT**



**ANNUAL REPORT
2021**

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

This is the Annual Report of the:

Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department
220 West Van Buren Street, Suite 204
Columbia City, IN 46725
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Date of publication: February 18, 2022

Cover image:

Indiana Municipal Power Agency's new solar facility in Columbia City, which went into operation in May.

Photos by Department staff unless noted

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

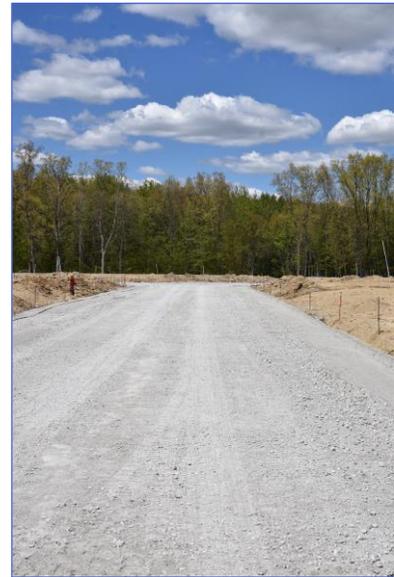
Looking back, 2021 was comprised of highs and lows. New single-family homes rebounded to the trend established prior to 2020; however, the number of new commercial buildings was about 60% of the average from the past few years. The 99 Plan Commission and BZA petitions filed in the year tied the number filed in 2018, and the total number of their meetings averaged almost 5 per month. Even so, one of the boards met only once during the year. Total permits issued represented nearly 900 projects, the highest number since before 2008, but permit fee revenue was virtually unchanged from the previous two years (and fell significantly when adjusted for inflation). The Department hired employees for two new positions, while an existing position had a replacement hired.

Broader community factors had similar contrasts. School enrollments reflected a return to in-school teaching, but one district's student population continued its decline. Unemployment in the County also returned to pre-COVID numbers, a point of pride for this county that many others did not match; but, with a rate of less than 2% by the end of the year, that is a matter of concern going into 2022.

So, overall, between the highs and lows, 2021 might be an "average" year and generally consistent with the longer-term trends in the community.

Optimistically, the upward trends in permitting and development will continue in the next year, but realistically, our county is a part of the larger world, and that world has been becoming more volatile each week since the new year. What impact that volatility will have on Whitley County, and what we will do to accommodate or react to it, will almost certainly be a major topic in 2022.

-Nathan Bilger, AICP, Executive Director



Development of the Timbers Edge subdivision, Columbia City

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

STAFF

- Executive DirectorNathan Bilger, AICP
Oversees department operations, administration, and planning activities for all jurisdictions
- Chief Building InspectorCraig W. Wagner, CBI
Conducts building and code inspections, plan reviews, and unsafe building determinations
- Planner II/Office Manager.....Amanda Thompson
Senior planner, is staff for three jurisdictions and administers office functions
- Planner IMark Cullnane *through August*
Junior planner, staffs one jurisdiction and redevelopment commissions.....Brent Bockelman beginning September
- Building InspectorErnest Little *beginning July*
Conducts building and code inspections
- Planning & Permitting TechnicianMichelle Sturtevant
Processes permits and handles administrative procedures
- Administrative Assistant (part-time)Devyn Gaff *beginning June*
Provides customer service and assists daily operations
- Building Inspector (part-time).....Daniel Bishop
Performs building inspections as needed

The Joint Planning and Building Department’s eight-member staff fills the positions shown above. Collectively, the staff has several decades of experience in land use, community development, and construction practice.

Continuing education, training, and certifications are essential for maintaining the stature of the Department with new and upcoming trends and changes. Notably, Craig Wagner is a Certified Building Inspector and has a statewide reputation teaching building code classes; he also served as an officer for the Indiana Association of Building Officials. The other building inspectors are also certified or eligible. Nathan Bilger is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and serves on the Indiana planning association’s legislative committee. Staff members participate in training throughout the year, though the continuing pandemic again reduced many typically available training opportunities.



Columbia City’s Aldi grocery was closed for most of the year while undergoing a major remodel.

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Columbia City established its first Plan Commission in 1947 and adopted its first zoning code and master plan in 1955. Whitley County created its first Plan Commission in 1965, with the first Comprehensive Plan being approved in 1969, and a zoning ordinance following in 1972. To benefit from not employing its own planning staff, the Town of Churubusco contracted with the County for planning services in the late 1960s.

In 1987, the Joint Planning and Building Department was created, combining the staff and offices of the Columbia City and Whitley County Plan Commissions, but still retaining separate Commissions, plans, and ordinances. In 2002, the Joint Department contracted with South Whitley for administration of their codes, thus making the Department the authority for planning and building throughout all of Whitley County.

The Joint Department also started to provide staff to the Whitley County and South Whitley Redevelopment Commissions in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Thus, the Department can be involved from a business or developer's initial inquiries and concept design, through the land entitlement process and building construction, all the way to their opening to the public.

Current responsibilities of the office, having planning/zoning/building jurisdiction over the City of Columbia City, unincorporated County, and the Towns of Churubusco, Larwill, and South Whitley, are:

- review all rezoning, special exception, variance, and subdivision applications that are filed - prepare staff reports, attend board and commission meetings to provide advice and recommendations
- prepare amendments to codes and ordinances to maintain compliance with state law, to expedite review of development proposals, and to improve the quality of life in the county
- review and issue building permits, schedule and complete inspections, prepare violation notices, complete re-inspections
- conduct unsafe building inspections, file orders, and enforce through the courts
- review development plan applications for all new commercial and industrial projects
- provide administrative support to the Whitley County and South Whitley Redevelopment Commissions
- assist Whitley County Economic Development on economic development activities
- administer the floodplain management program for the County and municipalities
- maintain files of all building permits, petitions, meeting minutes, and other Department records
- assist citizens, developers, attorneys, realtors on planning/zoning/building/development matters

JOINT ADVISORY BOARD

In creating the Joint Planning and Building Department in 1987, a Joint Budgetary Board was established to oversee the Department's budget and its activities. Since that time, the Board was renamed the Joint Advisory Board, but it continues as the managing body for the Department.

The Board is made of seven members representing Columbia City and Whitley County. In 2021, the members were:

Jim Argerbright, Chair	County Council
Chad Banks, Vice chair	County Commissioner

Ryan Daniel	Mayor
Brent Emerick	County Plan Commission
Don Langeloh	City Plan Commission
Jenny Middleton	City Council
Kim Wheeler	County Council

The Board must meet at least twice per year: first to review the annual report and later to review the proposed budget. In 2021, the Board met on March 2nd and May 4th. The second meeting having been moved up from the typical June due to an earlier annual budget deadline.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2021

In addition to the accomplishments of the Commissions and Boards listed elsewhere herein, some of the notable achievements of the Department in the year included:

- Held public input sessions and concluded production of the Whitley County Comprehensive Plan update and began finalization of the document with the Plan Commission
- In March, worked with Health Department to prevent re-occupation of an uncompleted dwelling that was being lived in and housing numerous dogs
- Worked with the County Commissioners to demolish a repetitively unsafe structure on State Road 5 south of Larwill
- Began the unsafe building process for two structures within Larwill
- Advertised and hired for two new positions: a second full-time building inspector and a part-time administrative assistant
- Hired a new Planner I when the previous staff member moved to another agency
- In conjunction with the Health Department, began set up of Geopermitting, an online permit submission and tracking software, which is expected to go public by mid-2022
- Provided assistance to Churubusco in developing an economic development plan for their first TIF district
- Drafted a zoning ordinance amendment for Columbia City to clarify certain standards in the infrequently-used LB district
- Held Development Plan and Technical Review meetings for commercial projects and residential subdivisions in Columbia City and the County
- Worked with several petitioners throughout the year in their rezoning requests to commercial, industrial, and agricultural production zoning districts in the County and City
- Craig Wagner served as Interim Director for the Indiana Association of Building Officials (IABO)



Demolition of an unsafe building on State Road 5 in December

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

- Ernie Little and Craig Wagner attended the annual IABO conference in October
- Nathan Bilger attended the Indiana Chapter of the American Planning Association spring professional development conference
- Michelle Sturtevant attended a building/floodplain regulations and enforcement class
- Arranged attendance for a County Plan Commission member to attend two Fundamental for Citizen Planners courses
- Hosted nine District 4 IABO monthly meetings
- Ordered a new department vehicle, a 2022 Ford Maverick hybrid pickup (delivered in January 2022)

ON-GOING PROJECTS

Additionally, some projects, either by their scale or longevity, are on-going efforts that span multiple years. Currently, these include:

- Actively participated in the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and the Permitting Excellence Coalition, which was an on-going endeavor since 2013. In 2021, the group was transformed into the Planning Excellence Coalition, a group of planners in the region with a similar purpose.
- Assistance in implementation and tracking of Comprehensive Plan recommendations and goals for each jurisdiction
- Assisting in downtown improvement, historic preservation, and revitalization efforts for each municipality
- Continuing training of staff in current codes, best practices, and new trends and technologies
- Close coordination with county and municipal departments and utilities on proposed projects and plans
- Collaboration with other departments in the Parcel Committee to collectively review proposed property changes throughout the County for code compliance and acceptability
- Annual review of procedures, fees, and business operations
- Cooperation with the Whitley County Economic Development Corporation in business attraction and retention
- Participating in U.S. 30 planning efforts with Columbia City, County, and INDOT officials

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT STATISTICS

Building permits issued	782	New single-family permits	112
Inspections completed	3,063	New commercial building permits	5
Building department vehicle mileage	36,959	Demolition permits	16
Unsafe building violation notices	13	Unsafe building orders	3
Improvement location permits issued	583	Mobile home renewals	0
Pond permits issued	6	Permit/code violation notices	16
Plan Commission hearing applications	50	BZA hearing applications	49
Planning meetings held	57	Redevelopment Commission meetings	28
Total fees collected	\$ 170,447.20	Total operating expenses	\$ 367,812.50

POPULATION

The population for Whitley County was estimated by the U.S. Census as 34,378 as of July 1, 2020, the most recent estimate available, a growth of 3.3% above the 2010 Census count. Except for South Whitley and Larwill, each jurisdiction saw a population increase over the decade. The general trend in these population estimates correlates with the rise in permitting mentioned in recent annual reports.

Due to the methodology used by the U.S. Census Bureau, each annual estimate also revises the preceding years, so comparisons can only be made when looking at the series in one estimate. In other words, these numbers do not match those in past reports. The 2020 Decennial Census, the final results of which were planned to be released in 2021, has not yet been completed as of January 2022. When the final numbers are released, it should check the annual estimates and reset the estimates' base figure.

POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES

	Census		Population Estimates										Change '10-20
	2010	2020*	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Whitley Co.	33,292	34,238	33,287	33,351	33,357	33,336	33,287	33,449	33,451	33,479	33,732	34,378	3.3%
Columbia City	8,750	9,362	8,781	8,810	8,865	8,864	8,842	8,884	8,911	8,917	9,069	9,416	7.6%
Churubusco	1,796	1,992	1,855	1,867	1,863	1,860	1,850	1,852	1,857	1,871	1,878	1,999	11.3%
South Whitley	1,751	1,741	1,782	1,784	1,774	1,768	1,762	1,759	1,749	1,746	1,743	1,745	-0.3%
Larwill**	283	287	284	284	285	282	283	285	284	285	285	288	1.8%

* Due to delays in finalizing data, the 2020 Decennial Census data is still considered an estimate

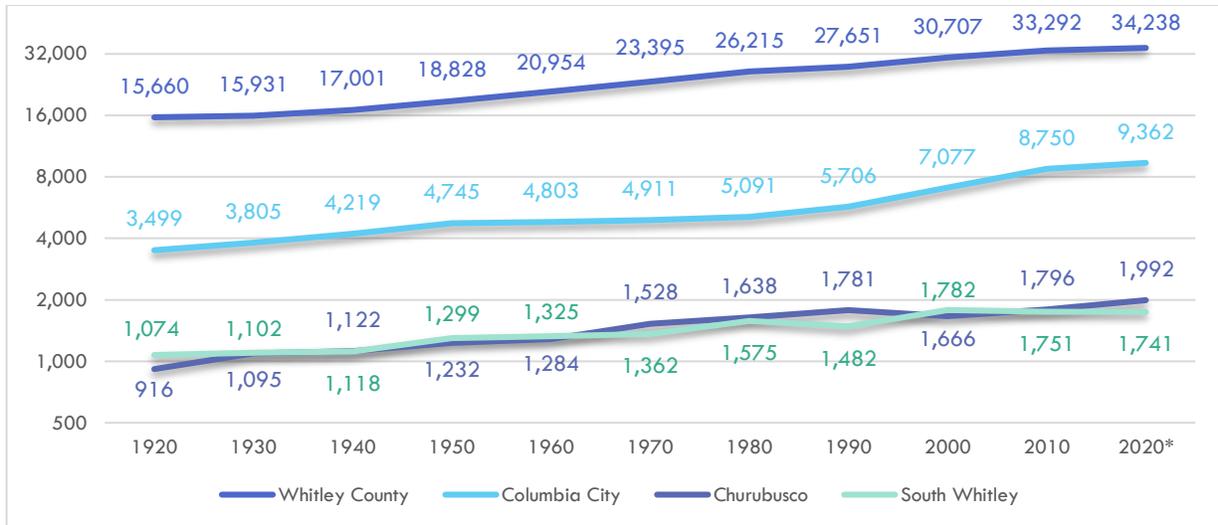
** Larwill is an incorporated town and so is included here for reference. Because the Town lacks its own Plan Commission, it is contained in County figures elsewhere in this report.

As discussed in prior reports, the population growth rates in the 2010s are lower than in previous decades. For reference, from 1930 to 2010, the County had fairly steady population growth of around 10% per decade. Columbia City had a period of substantial growth from the late 1980s up to 2010, growing by some 50%. The towns of South Whitley and Churubusco have not had any periods of major increases over the past 25 years, although both have had decades that exceeded 10% growth, including Churubusco for 2010-20.

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

Columbia City had a large uptick in population over the last three years of this decade, countering the stagnation of the first six years; although at 7.0%, it was still the community's slowest growth since the 1970s.

POPULATION GROWTH SINCE 1920



* 2020 Decennial Census estimate
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As stated in previous reports, the overall growth for all of Whitley County for this past decade was 2.8%, making it the slowest decade since 1920-30 (1.7%).

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrollment is an important factor to consider in planning as it can be another indicator of the long-term vitality of our communities.

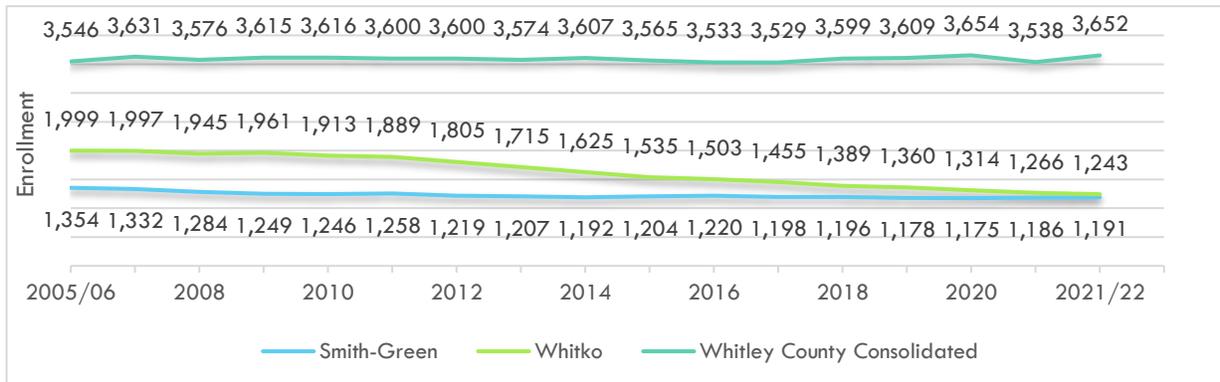
For two of the three public school corporations in Whitley County, enrollment has fallen since at least the 2005/06 school year. In 2021/22, Whitko Community Schools and Smith-Green Community Schools were at 62% and 88% of their 2005 enrollments. Meanwhile, Whitley County Consolidated Schools was on a statistical plateau, with enrollments staying around 3,600 students for the past sixteen years.

Looking at just the more recent past, since 2014 the enrollment for Smith-Green has also leveled off, while over the same time, Whitko's numbers fell by 31%. Comparing 2021/22 to 2020/21, Whitko continued to decrease despite the return to in-person classes and the opening of the Career Academy; although, at 1.8%, it was a slightly slower decline than previous annual losses of 2% to 5%.

Whitley County's only independent alternative school, TROY Center, had a continual increase in enrollment from 13 students in 2012 to 46 in 2019-20. The number of students fell to 32 for the 2020-21 year though, likely related to the pandemic, but rebounded to 39 in the fall of 2021. This school's emphasis on specialized,

individual-focused learning and vocational training shows the importance that our community places on diversification of education for all students.

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT SINCE 2006



Source: Indiana Department of Education

As mentioned in previous reports, it will be important for the communities and school corporations in the County to cooperate in finding ways to offset the decrease in students or otherwise stabilize the education systems. Planning longer-term, comprehensive solutions would be an ideal goal for all involved. For the Whitko area, it is a crucial matter.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate is an important statistic for the Department and communities to utilize in planning efforts. In November 2021, the most recent data available, the County unemployment rate stood at a seasonally unadjusted 1.5%, the lowest monthly rate since 1990. This was only the fourth time the unemployment rate fell below 2% over that period; the third time was October 2021 (the first two instances were in 1998). Over the entire year, the rate never exceeded 4.0%, which mirrored the pre-pandemic levels of 2017-19.

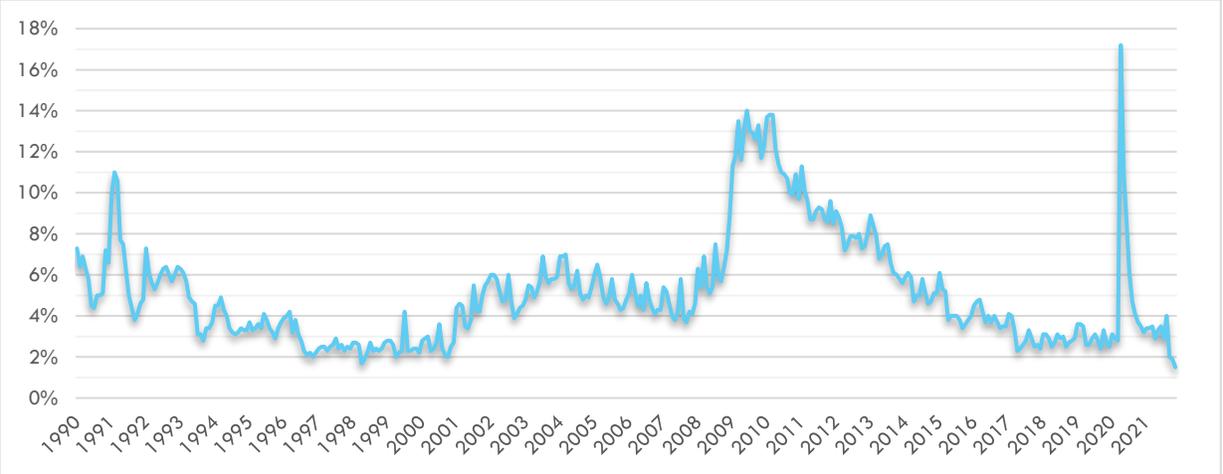
Comparatively, the unemployment rate for every county in the northeast Indiana region was also at or below 2.0% that month, with expectations that it would continue to fall over winter. This is partially attributable to a contracting overall labor force, with each county seeing declines from previous year. For Kosciusko and Noble Counties, available labor fell by 3-4%, and so, that seems likely to be the primary cause of their falling unemployment. For the other counties of the region, including Whitley, the labor force decrease was far less significant, suggesting that unfilled job openings and/or increasing employee retention were major factors.

As has been noted before, extended low unemployment below 3% could have drastic effects on the attractiveness of the community for new businesses to locate here and may deter expansions of existing businesses. However, the ready availability of jobs can be an attraction for new residents.

Low unemployment rates at the state and national levels further complicates the picture. By the end of 2021, Indiana was tied for the 10th lowest unemployment at 2.7%, while the national average of 3.9% was the one of lowest since 1945.

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

WHITLEY COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SINCE 1990



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, through November 2021

Rather than directly courting new businesses or residents, improving the “quality of life” for current residents and working to address the needs of existing businesses may be the highest priorities in planning for the future. The concept of “quality of life” has been a constant refrain over the past decade or more, but it is becoming even more important as other means of differentiating our community from others are becoming less effective. Instead of it being a matter of working to make people happy to *come* here, the goal will be working to make people happy to *stay* here.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

CHURUBUSCO

PETITIONS CONSIDERED

Rezoning	0	Subdivision plat	1	Variance	2
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	1	Appeal	0
Development plan	0	Special exception	1	Other	0

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
<i>Paula Grawcock</i>	<i>ETJ</i>	<i>Co. Commissioners</i>	<i>1/1/2025 (resigned, March)</i>
Jeremy Hart	Official	Town Council	Employee
Brandon Johnson	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025 (appointed, April)
Wayne Krider	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2024
Mark Pepple	Official	Town Council	Elected official
Vivian Sade	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2022
Madalyn Sade-Bartl, President	Official	Town Council	Elected official
Brenda Saggars, Vice president	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2022
Pat Stanford	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2022
Ashley Wagner	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2024

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Churubusco Plan Commission held 3 meetings in 2021, in which the Commission considered two subdivision requests.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Jason Bartl, Chair	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2024
<i>Paula Grawcock</i>	<i>PC-ETJ</i>	<i>Plan Commission</i>	<i>Biennial appointment (resigned, March)</i>
Brandon Johnson	PC-ETJ	Plan Commission	Biennial appointment (appointed, April)
Alan Malcolm	Citizen	Town Council	1/1/2023
Brenda Saggars, Vice chair	PC	Council President	1/1/2024
Miles Wilson	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023

Summary of BZA actions

The Churubusco Board of Zoning Appeals held 3 meetings in 2021 and considered cases for a dog grooming business special exception, garage height variance, and front setback variance.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

COLUMBIA CITY

PETITIONS CONSIDERED

Rezoning	3	Subdivision plat	2	Variance	9
Zoning text amendment	1	Subdivision replat	2	Appeal	0
Development plan	3	Special exception	5	Other	1

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Walt Crowder	Official	City Council	Elected official
Doug Graft	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023
Jon Kissinger	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025
Don Langeloh	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2023
Chip Hill	Official	City Council	Employee
Dennis Warnick	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2024
Dan Weigold	Official	City Council	Elected official
Larry Weiss, President	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2025
Patrick Zickgraf, Vice president	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2022

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Columbia City Plan Commission held 9 meetings in 2021. The Commission approved development plans for Schrader Real Estate and Starbucks; one major subdivision and three minor plats/replats; and three rezonings. They also recommended a zoning code update clarifying building area in the LB district.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Cathy Gardner	Citizen	City Council	1/1/2023
Jon Kissinger, Chair	PC-ETJ	Plan Commission	Annual appointment
Dwayne Knott	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2025
Anthony Romano, Vice chair	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2022
Dennis Warnick	PC	Mayor	1/1/2025

Summary of BZA actions

The Columbia City Board of Zoning Appeals held 11 meetings in 2021. The Board considered variances for a sign, setbacks, gravel parking, and lot width; and special exceptions for a home occupation, an educational facility, outdoor storage/display, and a fire department training facility.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

SOUTH WHITLEY

PETITIONS CONSIDERED

Rezoning	0	Subdivision plat	1	Variance	2
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	0	Appeal	0
Development plan	0	Special exception	0	Other	0

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Sherri Ayres	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023
Wendy Bills, President	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2025
<i>Dawn Boggs</i>	<i>Citizen</i>	<i>Council President</i>	<i>1/1/2022 (moved from town, July)</i>
Randy Cokl	Official	Town Council	Elected official
Timothy Gable	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2024
Les Hoffman	Official	Town Council	Elected official
Taylor Kessie	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023
Anna Simmons	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023
Brock Waterson, Vice president	Official	Town Council	Elected official

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The South Whitley Plan Commission held 1 meeting in 2021. The Commission approved a two-lot plat.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Sherri Ayres, Vice chair	PC-ETJ	Plan Commission	Annual appointment
Frank Baldrige	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023
Rod Hardesty	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2025
Taylor Kessie	PC	Council President	1/1/2024
Doug Morrissey, Chair	Citizen	Town Council	1/1/2023

Summary of BZA actions

The South Whitley Board of Zoning Appeals held 2 meetings in 2021. The Board considered a variance of front setback and one for the installation of an electronic message center sign.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

WHITLEY COUNTY

PETITIONS CONSIDERED

Rezoning	6	Subdivision plat	21	Variance	22
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	4	Appeal	0
Development plan	3	Special exception	7	Other	2

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
<i>Michael Bemis</i>	<i>Citizen</i>	<i>Co. Commissioners</i>	<i>1/1/2025 (resigned, December)</i>
Kim Kurtz-Seslar, Vice president	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2022
Troy Joe Wolf, Secretary	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2022
Brad Wolfe	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2022
Doug Wright	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025
Thor Hodges, President	County Council member		Annual appointment
Dane Drew	County Surveyor		Duration of Office
Theresa Green	County Commissioner member		Annual appointment
Brent Emerick	Co. Ag. Ed. Representative		Annual appointment
John Woodmansee, nonvoting	County Agricultural Educator		Duration of Office

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Whitley County Plan Commission held 15 meetings in 2021. The Commission approved 21 primary plats and four replats; made recommendations on six rezoning requests; and deliberated on an update to the Comprehensive Plan.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

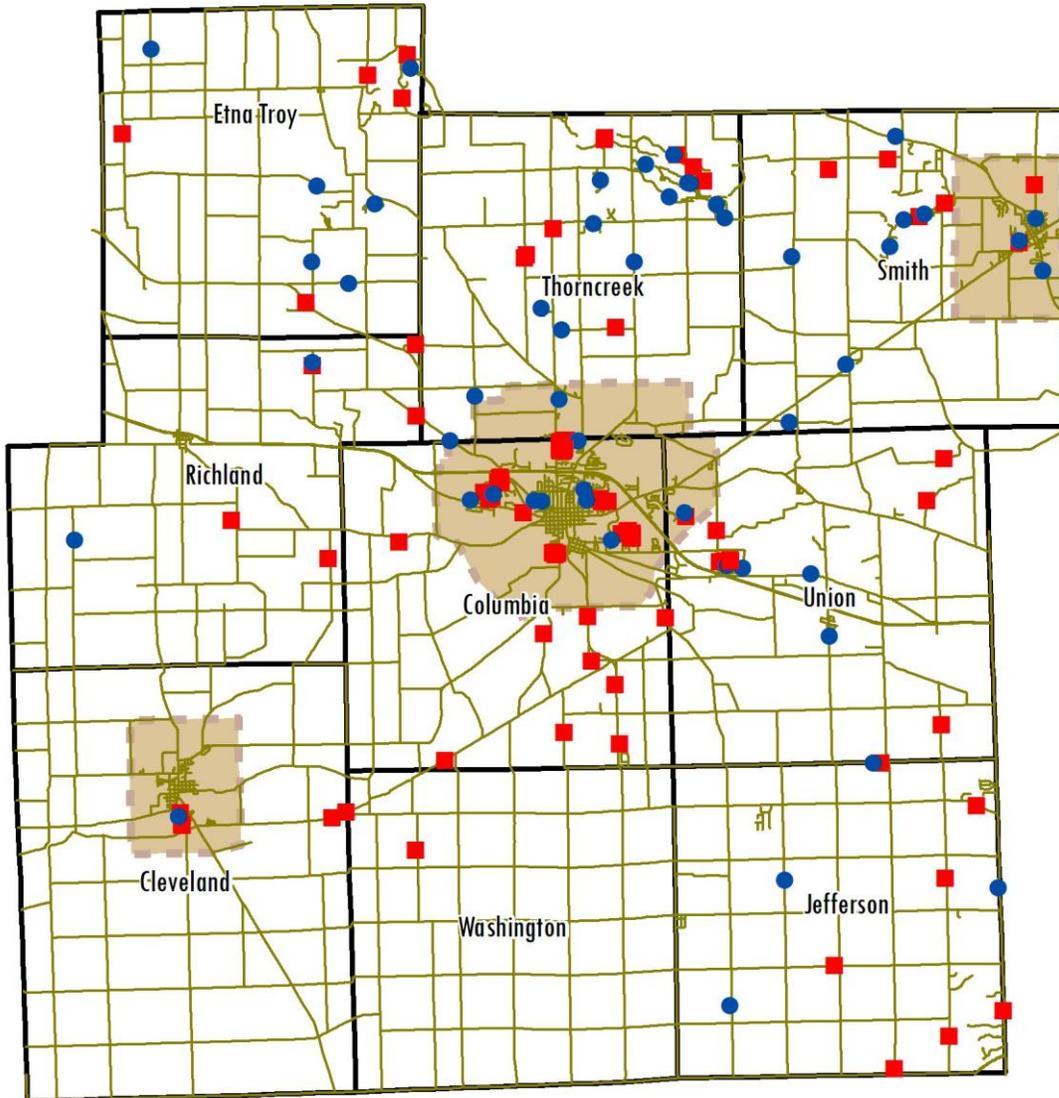
	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>	<u>Alternate</u>
Tim Denihan	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Sarah Lopez, Vice chair	Citizen	Co. Council	1/1/2023	Kelley Sheiss
Danny Wilkinson, Chair	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Troy Joe Wolf	PC	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2024	
Doug Wright	PC	Plan Commission	Annual appointment	

Summary of BZA actions

The County Board of Zoning Appeals held 12 meetings in 2021. Among the cases the Board considered were variances for setbacks, industrial buffering, and an EMC; special exceptions for secondary dwelling units, a Class 2 CFO, and a home occupation.

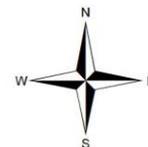
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

MAP OF RESIDENTIAL PERMITS



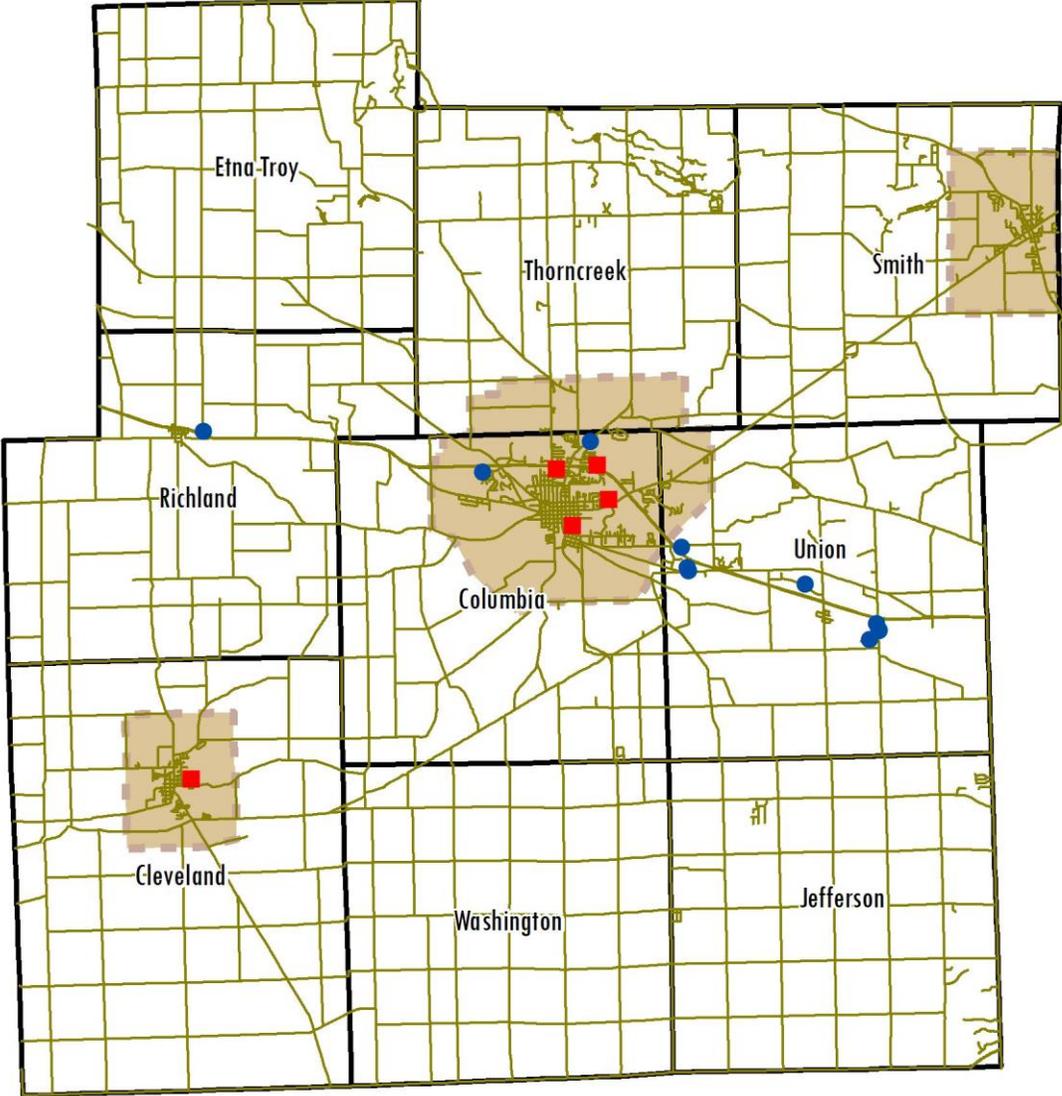
■ *New construction*
Includes single-family, two-family, modular, etc.
Does not include multi-family.

● *Additions*
Room or garage additions, adding stories, etc.
Does not include decks or remodels.



CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

MAP OF COMMERCIAL PERMITS



■ *New construction*
Includes commercial, industrial, multi-family, and institutional uses.

● *Additions*
Additions to existing commercial, industrial, multi-family or institutional uses. Does not include remodels.



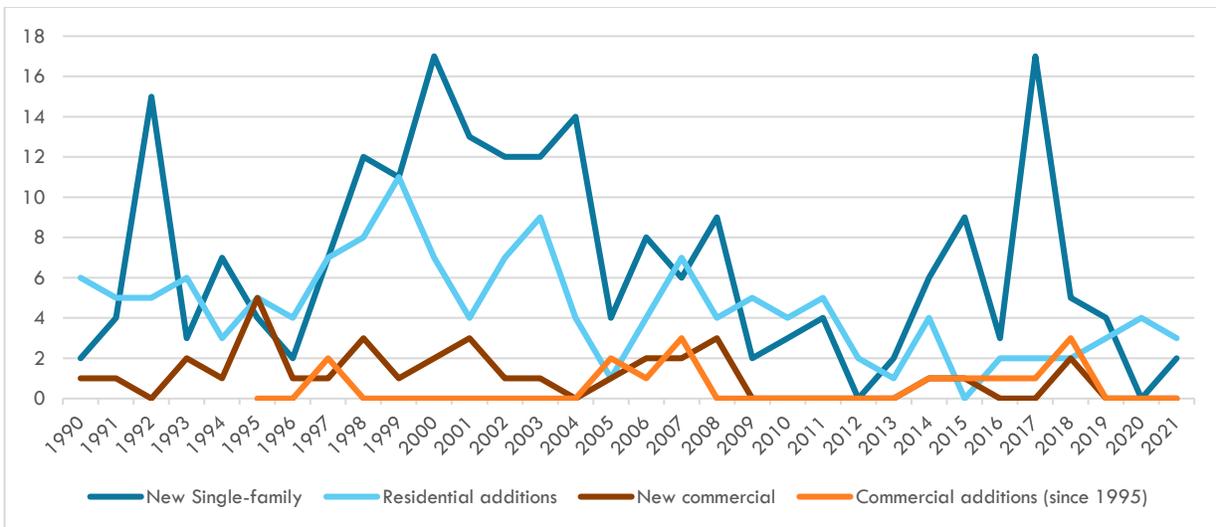
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

CHURUBUSCO

2021 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	2	\$ 524,900
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	0	-
Residential additions	3	114,420
Residential accessory buildings	9	264,000
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	0	-
Commercial/industrial additions	0	-
Institutional	0	-
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	28	412,539
TOTAL	42	\$ 1,315,859

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Single-family residence	\$ 324,900	Pole building	\$ 78,500
Single-family residence	200,000	Residential solar array	71,600

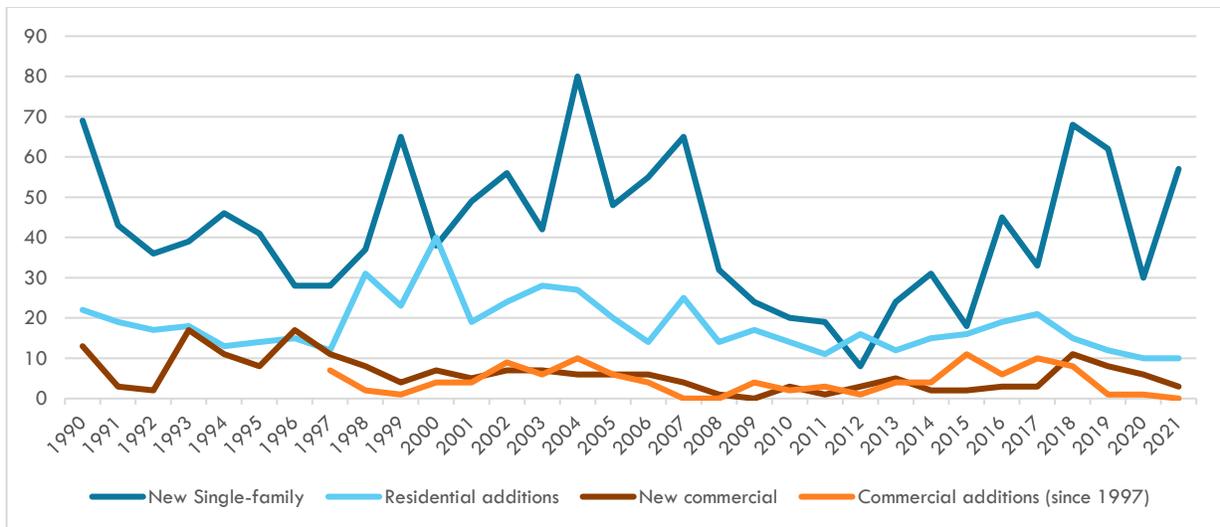
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

COLUMBIA CITY

2021 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	57	\$ 16,271,217
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	1	10,500
Residential additions	10	477,573
Residential accessory buildings	29	557,842
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	3	1,401,246
Commercial/industrial additions	0	-
Institutional	2	535,000
Institutional additions	1	85,000
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	193	6,227,297
TOTAL	296	\$ 25,565,675

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Clugston Hotel, remodel	\$ 2,055,700	Batis Midstates, coffee shop (Starbucks)	\$ 1,026,246
Aldi, remodel	1,600,000	Single-family residence	528,850

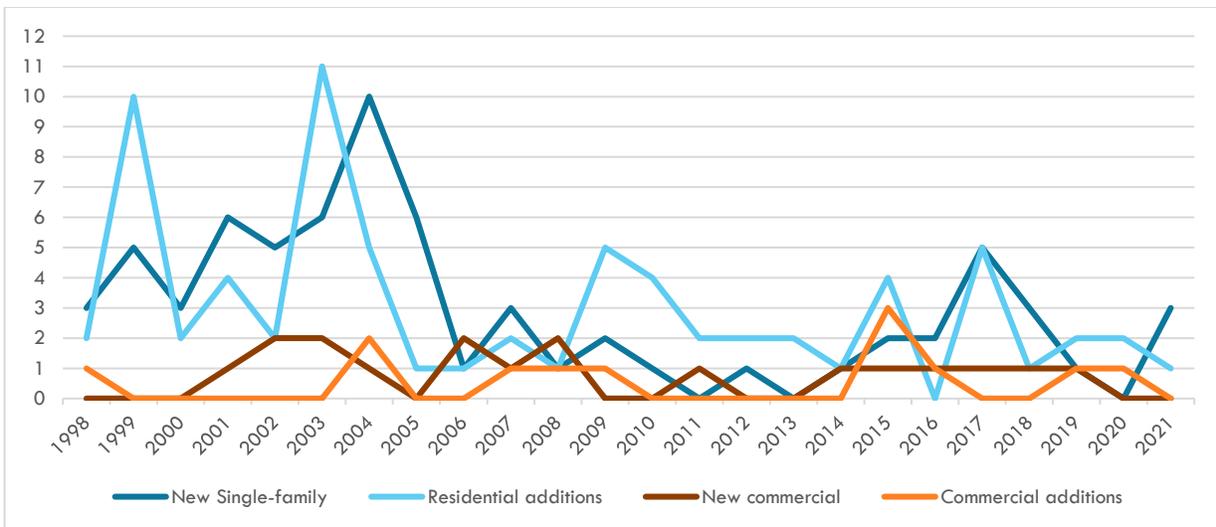
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

SOUTH WHITLEY

2021 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	3	\$ 708,943
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	6	100,936
Residential additions	1	30,000
Residential accessory buildings	2	31,500
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	0	-
Commercial/industrial additions	0	-
Institutional	1	43,232
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	18	357,439
TOTAL	31	\$ 1,272,050

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1998*



*Tracking for building permits started in 1998. The town fully joined the Department in 2002.

HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Single-family residence	\$ 310,143	Single-family residence	\$ 155,000
Single-family residence	243,800	204 S. State St., remodel	75,000

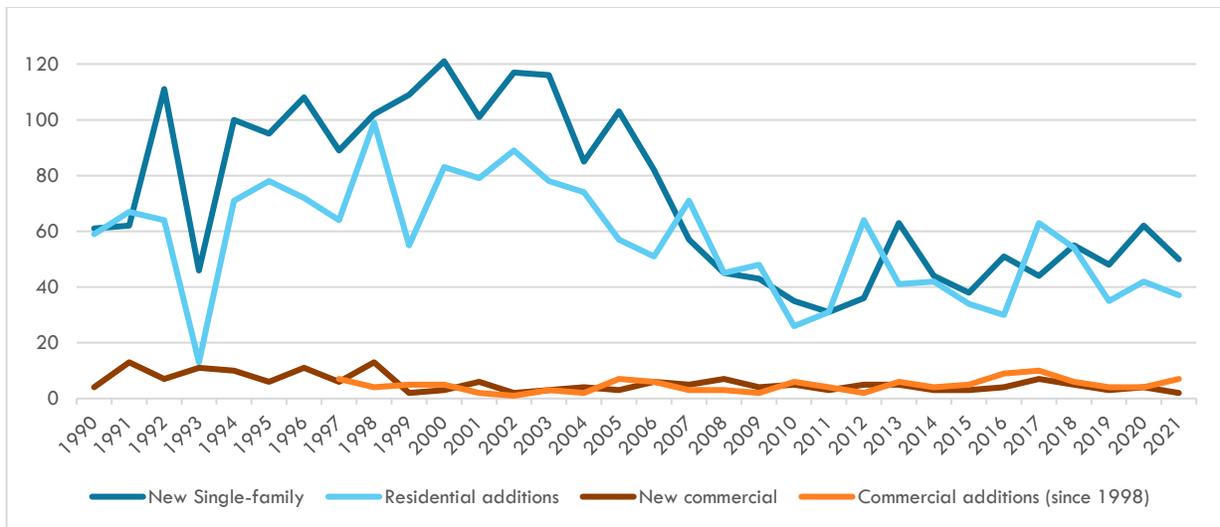
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

WHITLEY COUNTY

2021 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	54	\$ 17,561,414
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	7	415,500
Residential additions	37	2,522,110
Residential accessory buildings	122	4,376,504
Agricultural buildings	37	2,548,900
Commercial/industrial	2	475,000
Commercial/industrial additions	7	4,954,273
Institutional	0	-
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	256	5,600,526
TOTAL	522	\$ 38,454,227

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Sailrite Enterprises, addition	\$ 2,250,000	Impact CNC, solar array	\$ 997,551
Mach Medical, addition	1,534,273	T. Hinen, CFO barn	700,000

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

FEES COLLECTED

The Department primarily collects fees for building permits and for petitions to the Plan Commissions and BZAs. Building and Improvement Location permits make up nearly all of the building fees collected. Planning fees include petition filing fees, reimbursements for legal notices, and fees for providing contractual services to South Whitley, Churubusco, and the Economic Development Corporation.

These are considered user fees, and they partially offset the time and expenses of performing the requested service (e.g. inspections, reviews, etc.). Owing to the joint nature of the Department, all fees are uniform throughout the County, which provides consistency for residents and businesses in any of the jurisdictions.

FEES COLLECTED, BY JURISDICTION

Jurisdiction	Planning fees	Building fees	Total	Share
Churubusco	\$ 7,096.80	\$ 4,119.00	\$ 11,215.80	6.58 %
Columbia City	5,205.24	36,951.00	42,156.24	24.73 %
South Whitley	6,489.35	2,879.00	9,368.35	5.50 %
County	37,271.80	70,435.00	107,706.80	63.19 %
TOTALS	\$ 56,063.19	\$ 114,384.00	\$ 170,447.20	

Court or attorney fees collected, joint expense reimbursements, and permit fee refunds are not shown on this table. Contract fees are included.

OPERATING EXPENSES

The tables below show the original approved budget, final appropriation after transfers and any additional appropriations, and the actual cash expenditures for 2021.

EXPENDITURES

Shared expenses	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
Salaries	\$ 327,746.00	\$ 303,971.00	\$ 296,633.28	89.8 %
Contracted services	38,588.00	38,088.00	29,880.00	77.4 %
Travel & auto maintenance	7,000.00	7,000.00	5,917.54	84.5 %
Equipment	12,500.00	30,500.00	7,645.12	61.2 %
Supplies	2,900.00	2,900.00	1,901.07	65.6 %
Training	2,000.00	2,000.00	371.07	18.6 %
Printing	1,050.00	1,550.00	1,167.56	111.2 %
Memberships	1,350.00	1,350.00	838.40	62.1 %
Dues & subscriptions	450.00	450.00	132.50	29.4 %
Telephone	500.00	500.00	315.76	63.2 %
Subtotal	\$ 394,084.00	\$ 388,309.00	\$ 344,802.30	87.5 %

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

Jurisdiction-specific expenses *	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
County PC/BZA member stipends	11,700.00	15,075.00	12,600.00	107.7 %
Professional services	11,000.00	13,400.00	10,098.75	91.8 %
Refunds	1,000.00	1,000.00	311.45	31.1 %
Subtotal	\$ 23,700.00	\$ 29,475.00	\$ 23,010.20	97.1 %
GRAND TOTAL	\$ 417,784.00	\$ 417,784.00	\$ 367,812.50	88.0 %

* These items are costs that are appropriated in the Department annual budget but are not operating expenses shared between the City and County. They are charged directly to the jurisdiction to which they apply.

For the most part, expenditures in 2021 were within the original budget appropriations, being 88% of the original appropriations overall. Some highlights and notes:

- The hiring of a full-time inspector and a part-time assistant did not occur until mid-year, which allowed some funds to be reappropriated (and then encumbered to 2022) to the equipment budget to outfit the Government Center meeting room with new video equipment for improved webcasts.
- The County Plan Commission and BZA member stipends budget was exceeded because of the three special meetings the Plan Commission held in addition to the 24 regular meetings of both boards. This overage was unprecedented as the Commission typically has a few meetings cancelled each year that can be balanced with workshops or special meetings. For the next budget year, it may be prudent to account for holding additional meetings, especially given the public's concern about the education level of Commission members.
- Travel and auto expenses started to go up in 2021 from 2020. This was likely due to a combination of rebounding fuel prices and a handful of larger vehicle maintenance and repair items. The acquisition of a new hybrid vehicle in 2022 should help to offset rising fuel costs as well as reduce wear and tear on the existing vehicles.
- Training was again well below budget due to fewer in-person opportunities in 2021, as well as lengthy delays in billing for attending IABO classes.
- Because of stocking up while some prices were lower in 2020, the supplies expenditures were lower than typical. With forecasted rising costs, this underspending is not likely to occur again.
- The contracted services line item was for the one-time implementation of new permitting software, which will not be seen in future budgets.

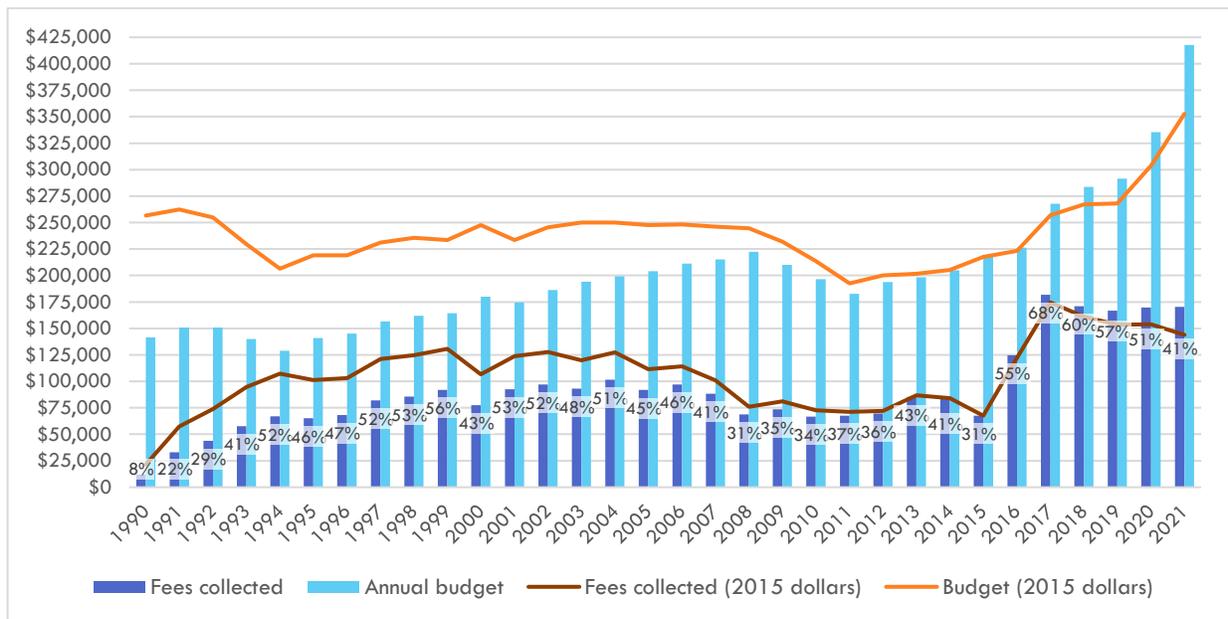
FEE REVENUES VS. EXPENSES

The Department is not a self-supporting agency. Its annual budget is supported by the two joint member jurisdictions, with Columbia City contributing \$32,733.37 toward the 2021 expenses. However, as mentioned above, building permit application fees, petition filing fees, service contracts, and so on are user fees intended to offset the cost of the Department to provide those services and products. These funds are received and deposited in the Department's own bank account, and then transferred each month to the County's General Fund to help defray the expenses of the Department.

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

It is a standing goal of the Department to have fee revenues cover approximately fifty percent of expenses, while maintaining affordability relative to the region. For this year, the year-end operating ratio of revenues collected to actual expenses was 46.3%, or revenue to original budget of 40.8% (this is the figure used for annual comparisons in the graph below). This ratio has been going down since the peak in 2017, which reflects stagnant revenues and increasing operating costs. With the fifty percent goal having not been achieved for the year, a reevaluation of fees in 2022 must be performed.

FEES COLLECTED AS PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET



As seen in the chart above, the total fee revenue in 2021 was about \$700 higher than in 2020, ranking the year third after 2017 and 2018 in absolute figures. When factored for inflation, however, the year falls in rank to fifth behind 2019 and 2020. This is a result of both a flat revenue stream and an increased inflation rate.

The continually rising budget, when factored for inflation, may be concerning if there is not an accompanying rationale. Ever-increasing salaries and additional personnel needed to handle increasing permit volume and broadening planning, quality of life, and economic development goals (versus simply administrating permits and petitions) will result in budget increases. The value of these services cannot be considered merely in monetary terms.

Finally, while it may be tempting, due to the volatility of the construction and development industries, and the moderate size of Whitley County, the Department should not strive to be self-sufficient based entirely on fee revenues. Nor should its expenses be permitted to outpace revenues unnecessarily. Rather, the Department should be expected to continue its history of reasonable expenditures, while striving to balance the workload required by our communities with corresponding fee revenues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022

Based on the review of 2021 and future expectations, the following are recommendations for major goals for the Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department in the coming year.

BALANCE GROWTH

As was first mentioned in the 2015 Annual Report, and repeated every year since, the continued slow population growth among all the jurisdictions over the past decade can lead to broader adverse community impacts. While we have seen a boost in permits and population since 2015, and the population is growing more rapidly when compared to some adjacent counties, this decade still had the slowest growth since the Depression years.

New subdivisions in Columbia City were developed in 2021, and two major subdivisions are expected to be developed in the County in 2022, so those available lots should accommodate new residents for the next few years. A major topic in the current County Comprehensive Plan, and strengthened in the pending update, is to provide for growth around municipalities while generally limiting major developments in most of the unincorporated areas. This means that municipal Plan Commissions must, in the capacity that they have, be proactive in encouraging development in their jurisdictional areas. This also requires cooperation with officials and utilities to ensure a high level of standards.

While residential development is not an absolute requirement for a well-functioning community, especially at the County level, it must be accounted for in planning and community development efforts. If the sales of existing homes remain the same, and new home supply remains tight with demand continuing to grow, should we prepare for higher and higher property values and home prices? Will that then make “affordable housing” a crucial community problem—or will the demand shift to places outside our county that have adequate supply, further stagnating our situation? Should our communities be actively recruiting builders and developers to encourage building residences? How should development of rental housing units, often disregarded in housing discussions, be recruited to supplement the overall housing stock?

As stated in previous reports, to the extent that it is possible, the Department should continue to assist the jurisdictions in preparing for and encouraging a diversity of quality residential developments. With the slowly but steadily increasing population, this is an even more crucial goal for both the Department and communities than ever before.

PLAN AND CODE CHANGES

Adopting zoning regulations to address solar installations is a top priority for all jurisdictions. Utility-scale solar is being investigated in the area, and it is important that each jurisdiction have regulations to protect both surrounding property owners and our communities long-term.

The County should be concluding a large Comprehensive Plan update by mid-2022. Depending on the resulting recommendations of the updated Plan, zoning code and zone map changes to bring the Plan and regulations into alignment will be proposed yet in the year or in 2023.

Columbia City is embarking on an expansion of their extraterritorial jurisdiction, which has been virtually unchanged for at least 43 years. Additional subdivision and zoning code changes may also be expected.

Churubusco has discussed undertaking a revalidation of their Comprehensive Plan to address OCRA requirements. Doing so may yield some code changes. They have already discussed a new downtown-specific zoning district, which may work in conjunction with their new downtown TIF district.

South Whitley continues to work to leverage their TIF districts to encourage residential development. To achieve the level of diversity desired, this could be best served by creating the Town's first PUD and related code amendments.

Any code updates or revisions of course will require the diligence of the Department, committees, Plan Commissions, legislative bodies, and citizens to develop, revise, and adopt.

ADAPTABILITY

This Department has had a long history of adaptability to changing situations and making use of available resources to achieve our mission. If 2022 continues the upward trend in permitting and planning, even with the new staff hired in 2021, personnel will be stretched thin during the peak months, so maintaining a continuity of service will be important. Conversely, if 2022 brings us a major recession, we will need to be prepared to address the implications such a downturn would bring to the Department and to help our communities to continue to be great as well.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: COUNTY-WIDE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY COMPARISON

	2020		2021	
	Permits*	Est. Value	Permits*	Est. Value
Single-family dwellings	93	\$ 26,922,826	112	\$ 34,316,406
Two-family	0	-	4	750,068
Multi-family	0	-	0	-
Manufactured homes	1	25,000	4	334,500
Mobile homes	7	140,000	10	192,436
Residential additions	59	3,731,065	51	3,144,103
Residential accessory buildings	156	4,408,092	162	5,229,846
Agricultural buildings	37	3,615,928	37	2,548,900
Commercial/industrial	10	15,749,000	5	1,876,246
Commercial/industrial additions	6	6,927,751	7	4,954,273
Institutional	3	1,373,000	3	578,232
Institutional additions	0	-	1	85,000
Miscellaneous/ILP only/Pond/other	495	6,885,880	501	12,706,801
TOTAL	867	\$ 69,778,542	897	\$ 66,716,811

*Note that this table includes both building permits and improvement location permits. Many projects have both, so totals do not match those below.

APPENDIX B: YEARLY COMPARISONS

Building Permits	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco	33	25	48	37	35	57	40	36	33	35
Columbia City	151	149	179	138	188	186	214	221	198	229
South Whitley	36	19	25	30	40	45	29	33	24	28
County	399	428	395	398	407	431	342	402	480	490
Total	621	622	647	603	670	719	625	693	735	782

Improvement Location Permits	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco	19	12	28	31	22	41	42	36	29	22
Columbia City	96	111	158	112	166	154	195	189	193	198
South Whitley	20	10	19	22	24	38	23	29	22	14
County	293	331	289	301	300	327	258	298	350	349
Total	428	464	494	466	512	560	518	552	594	583

Receipts Written	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	737	634	749	784	842	792	882	986	876	895	993	1,025

APPENDICES

Inspections	2012*	2013*	2014*	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco				190	123	229	180	109	130	87
Columbia City				704	1,036	982	1,116	1,142	942	913
South Whitley				140	111	181	127	86	129	82
County				1,935	1,774	1,841	1,641	1,697	2,443	1,981
Total	2,734	2,973	3,004	2,969	3,044	3,233	3,064	3,034	3,644	3,063

*Inspections per jurisdiction were not tracked prior to 2015

New Single-Family Dwelling Permits	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco	0	2	7	9	3	17	5	4	0	2
Columbia City	9	23	37	18	44	33	67	62	30	57
South Whitley	2	0	1	2	1	5	3	1	0	3
County	35	65	43	40	53	45	53	49	62	50
Total	46	90	88	69	101	100	128	116	92	112

Median Single-Family Dwelling Const. Cost	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco	NA	\$163,000	\$168,000	\$167,000	\$150,000	\$179,000	\$201,500	\$188,750	NA	\$262,450
Columbia City	\$170,000	\$152,000	\$163,500	\$160,500	\$170,000	\$191,800	\$174,000	\$199,053	\$264,900	\$285,000
South Whitley	\$248,000	NA	\$350,000	\$105,000	\$121,500	\$162,000	\$80,000	\$150,000	NA	\$243,800
County	\$220,500	\$218,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	\$190,000	\$250,000	\$275,000	\$284,190	\$264,866	\$356,063
Overall	\$217,000	\$181,250	\$173,500	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$203,448	\$206,500	\$221,000	\$264,900	\$291,161

Floodplain Permits*	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Columbia City	0	2	0	0	2	2	2	7	12	14
South Whitley	2	0	0	0	3	2	5	6	3	3
County	17	11	12	3	9	24	20	44	52	74
Total	19	13	12	3	14	28	27	58	67	91

* Counted if any part of the parcel is located in regulatory floodplain; frequently the permitted improvement itself is not in the floodplain

** In 2019, DNR flood maps became available; these are more extensive than the FEMA flood maps adopted in 2015

Land Use Petitions	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Churubusco	6	2	3	4	3	5	8	6	5	5
Columbia City	10	10	10	10	18	22	33	16	22	26
South Whitley	0	1	1	5	4	9	6	3	3	3
County	46	40	45	44	53	74	50	60	50	65
Total	62	53	59	63	78	110	97	85	80	99