

COLUMBIA CITY/WHITLEY COUNTY  
JOINT PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2022

## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

This is the Annual Report of the:

Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department  
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Cover image:

Construction of an addition to DOT America's facility in Columbia City, August.

Photos by Department staff unless noted

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# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

### MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

2022 was defined by backup generators. The derecho that blew through the county in mid-June knocked out power to some areas for five days. Especially hard-hit was the Tri-Lakes area, coming at the beginning of the summer getaway season. This devastation spurred an upsurge in backup generator installations that lasted through the rest of the year. 117 generator permits were issued within the year, almost a tenfold increase over the annual average, and constituting 12.6% of all permits issued. With this influx, 2022 was another (post-2008) record-setting year.

Meanwhile, new single-family dwelling permits fell to the lowest number since 2015, and commercial projects rebounded from having an off year in 2021. Still, the total value of construction was high, buoyed by higher value homes, the commercial permits, and many personal investment projects—remodels, pole buildings, decks, etc. Inflation and interest rates were constant topics, but investment continued.

The planning side was not quiet, with 110 Plan Commission and BZA petitions filed. That was the highest number of petitions filed since 2004. In addition to the petitions, the County refined its Comprehensive Plan update and tackled writing new regulations on solar energy collection systems, the City initiated changes to its extraterritorial jurisdiction, and all the municipalities adopted updated Rules of Procedure. All of which happened in an average of 4.3 meetings per month.

With the past few years of missed predictions as a guide, it seems likely that permits and petitions will continue to be filed with little regard to interest rates, inflation, storms, and other outside influences. The rate that they come may be faster or slower, but they will continue. We just hope that we can keep up with the changes.

*-Nathan Bilger, AICP, Executive Director*



*An example of storm damage documented following the June 13<sup>th</sup> derecho, Thorncreek Twp.*

**DEPARTMENT INFORMATION**

**STAFF**

- Executive Director ..... Nathan Bilger, AICP  
*Oversees department operations, administration, and planning activities for all jurisdictions*
- Chief Building Inspector ..... Craig W. Wagner, CBI  
*Conducts building and code inspections, plan reviews, and unsafe building determinations*
- Planner II/Office Manager..... Amanda Thompson  
*Responsible for three jurisdictions and administers office functions*
- Planner I ..... Brent Bockelman  
*Administers one jurisdiction and redevelopment commission activities*
- Building Inspector ..... Ernest Little  
*Conducts building and code inspections*
- Planning & Permitting Technician ..... Michelle Sturtevant  
*Processes permits and handles administrative procedures*
- Administrative Assistant (part-time) ..... Devyn Gaff *through June*  
*Provides customer service and assists daily operations..... Erin Hiss August-November*
- Building Inspector (part-time)..... Daniel Bishop, CBI  
*Performs building inspections as needed*
- Intern (unpaid, part-time)..... Griffin Plaehn *September-November*  
*Aided in general administrative work and specific projects*

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 who has served as an Indiana Association of Building Officials officer and a code instructor. The other building inspectors are also certified or are working to be so. Nathan Bilger is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. Other staff members take part in training throughout the year, through both formal opportunities and internal practices.

**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.

## DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

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 2022, the members were:

Jim Argerbright, Chair	County Council
Theresa Baysinger	County Commissioner
Ryan Daniel	Mayor
Kim Kurtz-Seslar	County Plan Commission
Don Langeloh, Vice chair	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 2022, the Board met on February 28<sup>th</sup> and May 4<sup>th</sup>.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2022

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 workshops to review and refine the Whitley County Comprehensive Plan update that was begun in 2020, resulting in final adoption by the County Commissioners in October
- Worked with the County Plan Commission to craft an ordinance regulating solar energy collection systems in the County that was adopted in October
- Drafted a zoning ordinance amendment for South Whitley to allow light manufacturing in the GB district, promoting flexibility in reusing commercial buildings
- Worked with the Larwill and Churubusco to demolish a total of four unsafe structures; enforced an order to repair a structure that was appealed to the County Commissioners
- Provided assistance to Churubusco in developing a housing TIF district
- Presented information and concept plan to a developer interested in a potential South Whitley housing TIF
- Performed storm damage surveys together with state and local emergency officials following the June 13<sup>th</sup> derecho that devastated the northeast half of the county with 60-90 mph winds
- Worked with state officials and owner association representatives to approve proposed repairs to the collapsed Blue Lake control structure
- Held Development Plan and Technical Review meetings for commercial projects and residential subdivisions in Columbia City and the County
- Presented the local US 30 upgrade plan to INDOT officials and consultants as part of starting their two-year *ProPEL 30* study
- Worked with a petitioner to establish the first Planned Unit Development zoning district in the County
- In March, Nathan Bilger presented to the Indiana Association of Municipal Clerk-Treasurers on the process and purpose of updating comprehensive plans
- In November, Brent Bockelman, Amanda Thompson, and Nathan Bilger led two classes at Eagle Tech Academy, introducing students to the functions of land development and building codes



*Brent Bockelman discusses a hypothetical building site with students from Eagle Tech Academy, November*

## DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

- Craig Wagner served as the Indiana Association of Building Officials (IABO) District 4 director and on its by-laws committee
- Nathan Bilger attended the Indiana Chapter of the American Planning Association spring professional development conference in March
- Dan Bishop and Craig Wagner attended the annual IABO conference in October
- The office staff participated in two webinars on floodplain regulations and enforcement
- Hosted eight District 4 IABO monthly meetings
- Took delivery of a new vehicle, a 2022 Ford Maverick hybrid pickup. Over the year, this reduced Department fuel costs by \$600 relative to the costs for the Department's conventional Ford Escape.



*Demolition underway of an unsafe dwelling that had been severely burned earlier in the year. Churubusco, September.*

### ON-GOING PROJECTS

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

- Actively participated in the Northeast Indiana Planning Excellence Coalition, formerly known as the Permitting Excellence Coalition, which has been an on-going endeavor since 2013. In December, the Department hosted the group's quarterly meeting.
- 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	808	New single-family permits	86
Inspections completed	3,225	New commercial building permits	21
Building department vehicle mileage	39,321	Demolition permits	18
Unsafe building violation notices	7	Unsafe building orders	3
Improvement location permits issued	560	Mobile home renewals	0
Pond permits issued	8	Permit/code violation notices	6
Plan Commission applications	52	BZA applications	58
Planning meetings held	52	Redevelopment Commission meetings	23
Total fees collected	\$ 181,781.52	Total operating expenses	\$ 395,510.42

POPULATION

The population for Whitley County was estimated by the U.S. Census as 34,430 as of July 1, 2021, the most recent estimate available, a growth of 3.4% above the 2010 Census count. Except for Larwill, each jurisdiction saw a population increase over the decade. The general trend in these population estimates does correlate with the rise in new home construction over the same time period.

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 was finalized in 2022, which reset the estimates' bases; because of this, the 2012-2019 estimates shown in the table below cannot be compared to the 2020 and 2021 estimates.

POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES

	April 1		July 1								Percent Change		
	Censuses		Population Estimates*										
	2010	2020	2012*	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017*	2018*	2019*	2020	2021	10-21
Whitley Co.	33,292	34,191	33,351	33,357	33,336	33,287	33,449	33,451	33,479	33,732	34,316	34,430	3.3%
Columbia City	8,750	9,901	8,810	8,865	8,864	8,842	8,884	8,911	8,917	9,069	9,953	9,990	14.2%
Churubusco	1,796	1,867	1,867	1,863	1,860	1,850	1,852	1,857	1,871	1,878	1,872	1,868	4.0%
South Whitley	1,751	1,818	1,784	1,774	1,768	1,762	1,759	1,749	1,746	1,743	1,821	1,816	3.7%
Larwill**	283	271	284	285	282	283	285	284	285	285	271	273	-3.5%

\* The 2012-19 estimates are shown for general reference only and will not align with the 2020 and later estimates

\*\* 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.

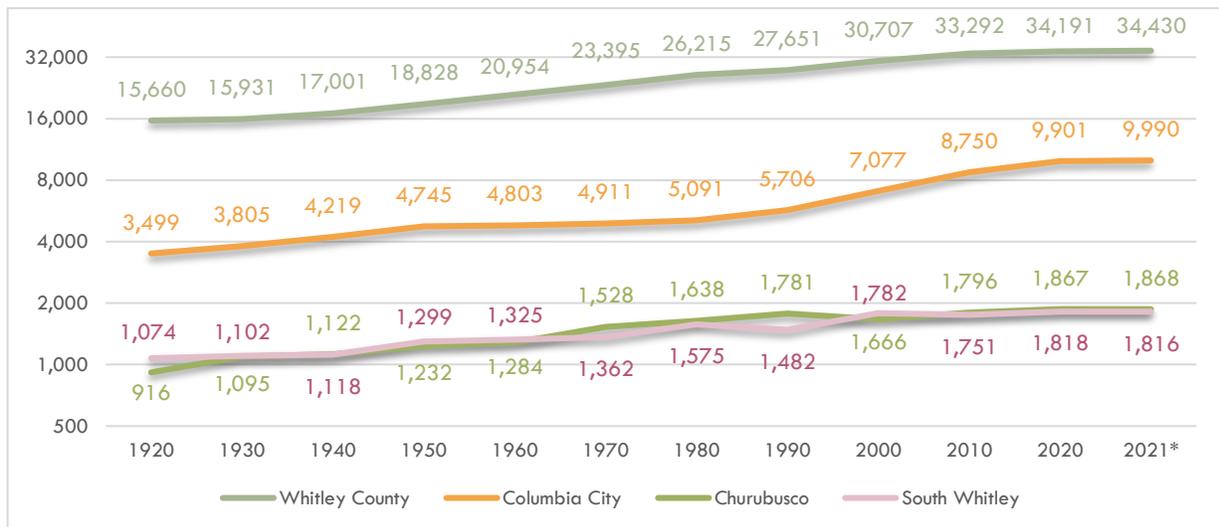
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As discussed in prior reports, the population growth rates in the 2010s, and now the 2020s, are lower than those in each decade of the previous century. 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.

## COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

Columbia City did have a large uptick in population over the last three years of the 2010s, countering the stagnation of the first six years, although it was still the community's slowest growth since the 1970s.

### POPULATION GROWTH SINCE 1920



\* 2021 estimate

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As stated in previous reports, the overall growth for all of Whitley County for this past decade was 2.7%, making it the slowest decade since 1920-30 (1.7%). The 0.3% growth between 2020 and 2021 seems to be a continuation of that rate.

### SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

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

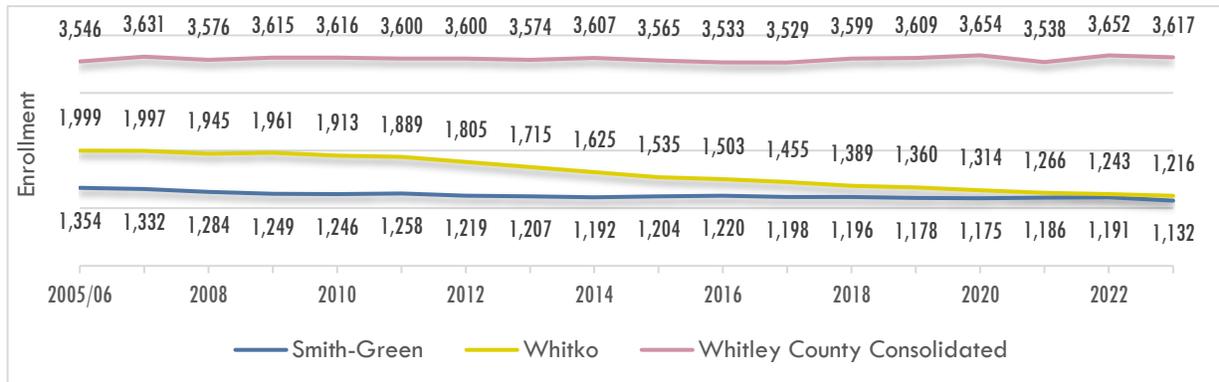
Two of the three public school corporations in Whitley County have faced falling enrollment since at least the 2005/06 school year. At the beginning of the 2022/23 school year, Whitko Community Schools and Smith-Green Community Schools were at 60.8% and 83% of their 2005 enrollments, respectively. Meanwhile, Whitley County Consolidated Schools has been on a statistical plateau, with annual enrollments consistently staying around 3,600 students with a few deviations. Two years since the opening of the new high school, there does not seem to have been an influx of students as some had thought possible.

Looking at just the more recent past, since 2014 the enrollment for Smith-Green has leveled off, although there was a 4.9% decrease this past year. Whitko's numbers fell by more than 33% since 2014, and the annual decrease was again more than 2%, despite the popularity of the Career Academy.

Whitley County's only independent alternative school, TROY Center, had a continual increase in enrollment from 13 students in 2012 to a peak of 46 in 2019-20. Since then, the number of students has varied from 32 to 39 to 33 for the 2022/23 school year. 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 has been 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 seems to be a crucial matter.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate is an important statistic for the Department and communities to utilize in planning efforts. In November 2022, the most recent data available, the County unemployment rate stood at a seasonally unadjusted 2.2%. Throughout the year, the rate fluctuated between 1.8 and 2.7%, up from the 1.0% in December 2021. The increase in unemployment rates may not be a large negative, as the labor force (those working and looking for work) grew by 3% over the year. Unlike 2021, which saw a summer increase in unemployment, the rate never exceeded 2.7% in 2022. A similar consistently low rate had not occurred since the 1997-2000 period. This can mean that businesses are absorbing new workers as they join the labor force, although many companies are certainly not at full employment.

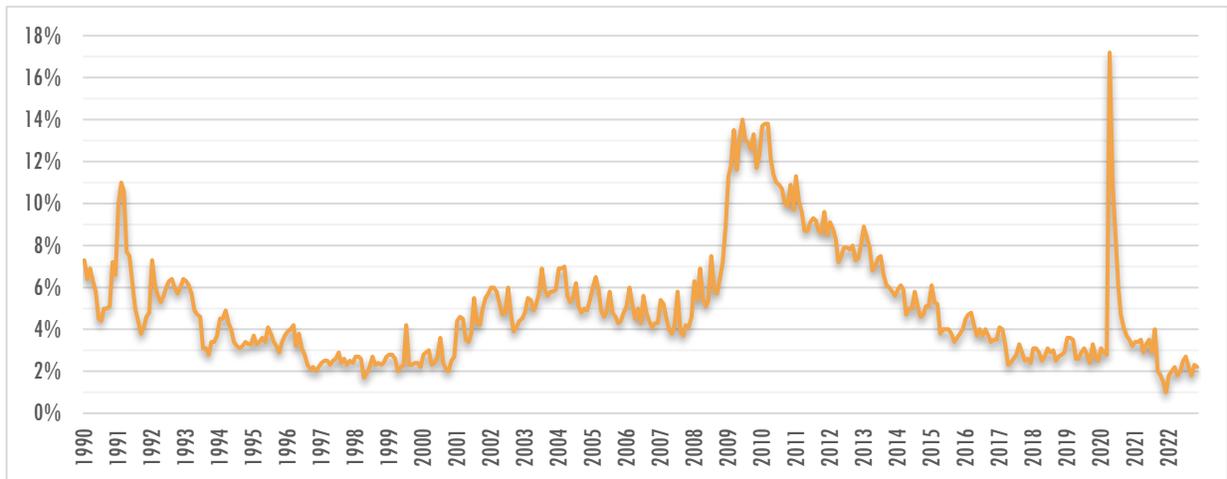
Comparatively, the unemployment rate for the counties in the northeast Indiana region also had relatively consistent low employment rates, though only two counties had rates varying less than one percentage point. As for the county, this may also be a good sign for businesses in the region that have been struggling to find workers for several years.

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 complicate the picture. By the end of 2022, Indiana was tied for the 14<sup>th</sup> lowest unemployment at 3.0%, while the national average of 3.5% continuing a downward trend started in 2021, being some of the lowest unemployment figures since 1945.

## COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

### WHITLEY COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SINCE 1990



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, through November 2022

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

#### PLAN COMMISSION

##### Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Wayne Krider	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2024
Vivian Sade	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2026
Brenda Saggars, Vice president	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2026
Pat Stanford	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2026
Brandon Johnson	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025
Ashley Wagner	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2024
<i>Jeremy Hart</i>	<i>Official</i>	<i>Town Council</i>	<i>Employee (resigned, February)</i>
Devin Keener	Official	Town Council	Elected official (appointed, February)
Mark Pepple	Official	Town Council	Elected official
Madalyn Sade-Bartl, President	Official	Town Council	Elected official

##### Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Churubusco Plan Commission held 4 meetings in 2022, in which the Commission considered two subdivision requests, two rezonings, two TIF districts, and new rules of procedure.

#### 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
Alan Malcolm	Citizen	Town Council	1/1/2023
Miles Wilson	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023
Brandon Johnson	PC-ETJ	Plan Commission	Biennial appointment
Brenda Saggars, Vice chair	PC	Council President	1/1/2024

##### Summary of BZA actions

The Churubusco Board of Zoning Appeals held 2 meetings in 2022 and considered cases for a concrete recycling plant, a setback variance, and new rules of procedure. One variance was withdrawn.

# PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

## COLUMBIA CITY

### PETITIONS CONSIDERED

Rezoning	5	Subdivision plat	0	Variance	8
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	2	Appeal	0
Development plan	7	Special exception	6	Other	1

### PLAN COMMISSION

#### Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Don Langeloh	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2023
Dennis Warnick	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2024
Larry Weiss, President	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2025
Patrick Zickgraf, Vice president	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2026
Doug Graft	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023
Jon Kissinger	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025
Walt Crowder	Official	City Council	Elected official
Chip Hill	Official	City Council	Employee
Dan Weigold	Official	City Council	Elected official

#### Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Columbia City Plan Commission held 8 meetings in 2022. The Commission considered development plans for Culver's, Bowen Center, Whitley County Community Foundation, and others; two minor replats; and five rezonings. They also recommended a comprehensive plan update regarding the extraterritorial jurisdiction and adopted new rules of procedure.

### BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

#### Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Cathy Gardner	Citizen	City Council	1/1/2023
Dwayne Knott	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2025
Anthony Romano, Vice chair	Citizen	Mayor	1/1/2026
Jon Kissinger, Chair	PC-ETJ	Plan Commission	Annual appointment
Dennis Warnick	PC	Mayor	1/1/2025

#### Summary of BZA actions

The Columbia City Board of Zoning Appeals held 8 meetings in 2022. The Board considered variances for signs, setbacks, and lot width; and special exceptions for the county detention center, a home occupation, an educational facility, outdoor storage/display, and an apartment.

# PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

## SOUTH WHITLEY

### PETITIONS CONSIDERED

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

### PLAN COMMISSION

#### Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Braylynn Anderson	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2026 (appointed, October)
Wendy Bills, President	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2025
<i>Taylor Kessie</i>	<i>Citizen</i>	<i>Council President</i>	<i>1/1/2023 (resigned, March)</i>
Jenna Reiff	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023 (appointed, October)
Anna Simmons	Citizen	Council President	1/1/2023
Sherri Ayres	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023
Timothy Gable	ETJ	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2024
Randy Cokl	Official	Town Council	Elected official
<i>Les Hoffman</i>	<i>Official</i>	<i>Town Council</i>	<i>Elected official (resigned, November)</i>
Brock Waterson, Vice president	Official	Town Council	Elected official

#### Summary of Plan Commission actions

The South Whitley Plan Commission held 4 meetings in 2022. The Commission approved a zoning text amendment related to R-2 and GB uses and standards and adopted new rules of procedure.

### BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

#### Membership

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

#### Summary of BZA actions

The South Whitley Board of Zoning Appeals held 2 meetings in 2022. The Board considered a special exception for light manufacturing in GB and adopted new rules of procedure.

# PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

## WHITLEY COUNTY

### PETITIONS CONSIDERED

Rezoning	9	Subdivision plat	12	Variance	27
Zoning text amendment	1	Subdivision replat	4	Appeal	0
Development plan	1	Special exception	13	Other	2

### PLAN COMMISSION

#### Membership

	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Jack Green	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025 (appointed, September)
Mark Johnson	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2026
Kim Kurtz-Seslar	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2026
Troy Joe Wolf, Secretary	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2026
Doug Wright	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2025 (resigned December 31)
Dane Drew	County Surveyor		Duration of Office
Thor Hodges, President	County Council member		Annual appointment
George Schrupf	County Commissioner member		Annual appointment
Brent Emerick, Vice president	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 13 meetings in 2022. The Commission approved 12 primary plats and four replats, including one major subdivision; made recommendations on nine rezoning requests; adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan; and recommended a zoning code amendment dealing with solar energy collection systems.

### BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

#### Membership

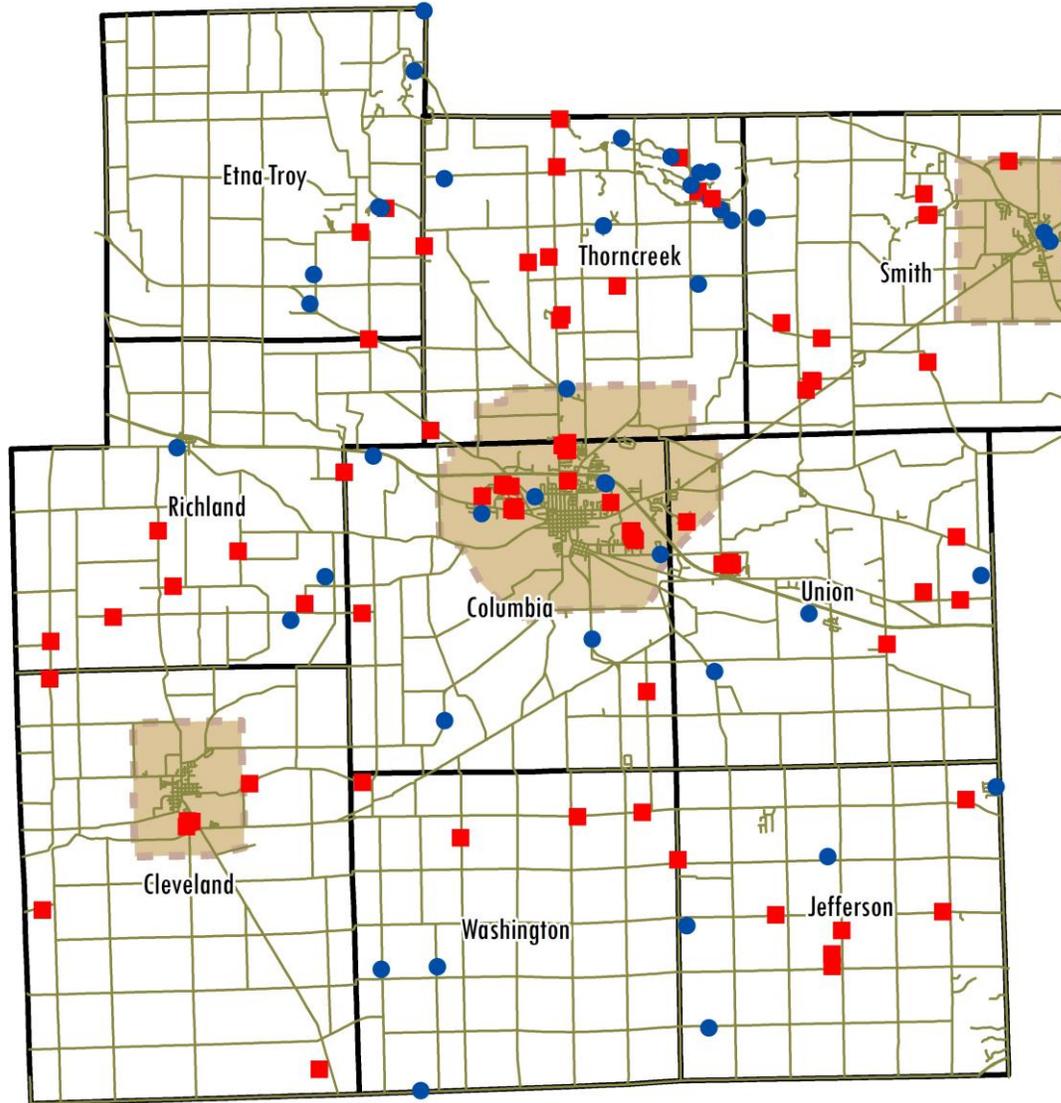
	<u>Seat</u>	<u>Appointing Body</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>	<u>Alternate</u>
Tim Denihan	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Sarah Lopez, Vice chair	Citizen	Co. Council	1/1/2023	Kelley Sheiss
Danny Wilkinson, Chair	Citizen	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Troy Joe Wolf	PC	Co. Commissioners	1/1/2024	
Doug Wright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

#### Summary of BZA actions

The County Board of Zoning Appeals held 11 meetings in 2022. Among the cases the Board considered were variances for setbacks, residential land use, and an EMC; special exceptions for secondary dwelling units, a banquet hall, a Class 2 CFO revision, and home occupations.

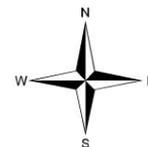
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

MAP OF RESIDENTIAL PERMITS



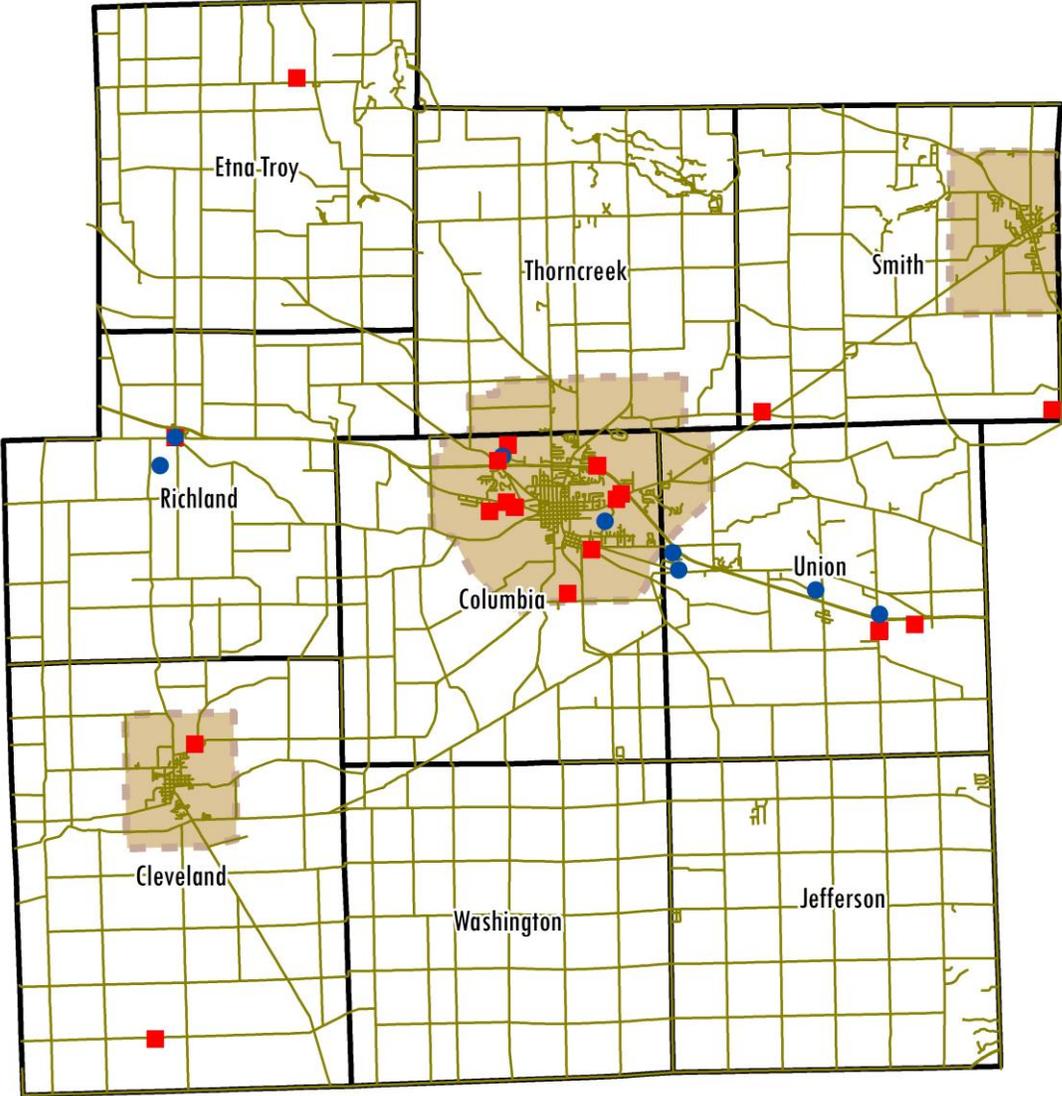
■ *New construction*  
*Includes single-family, two-family, modular, etc.*  
*Does not include multi-family.*

● *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.*



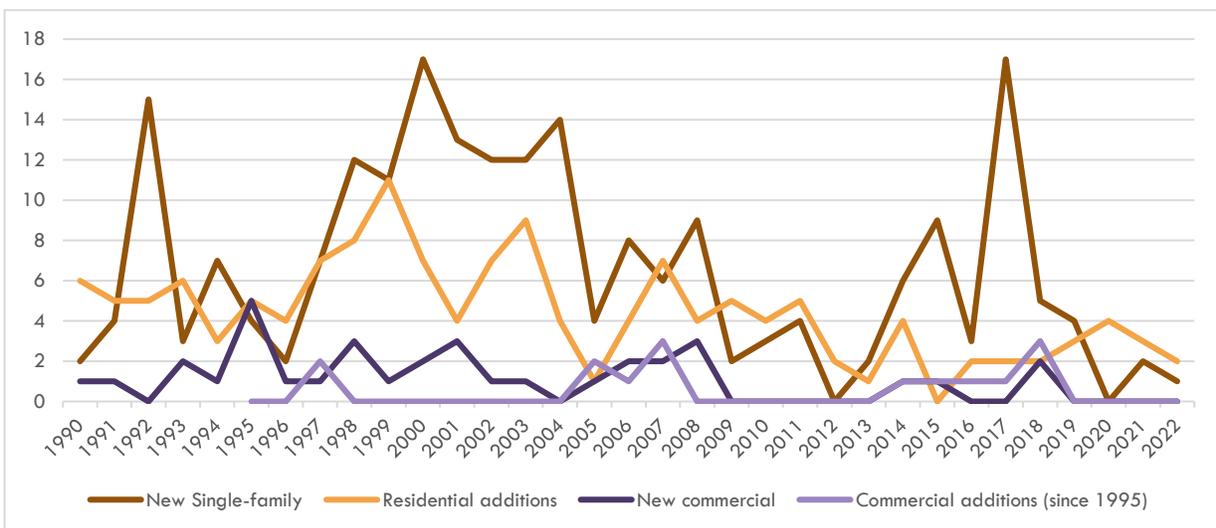
# CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

## CHURUBUSCO

### 2022 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	1	\$ 633,000
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	0	-
Residential additions	2	61,904
Residential accessory buildings	7	105,240
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	0	-
Commercial/industrial additions	0	-
Institutional	1	4,894
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	41	357,166
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>\$ 1,162,204</b>

### PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



### HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Single-family residence	\$ 633,000	Pole building	\$ 50,000
Residential solar array	63,830	Sunroom addition	48,904

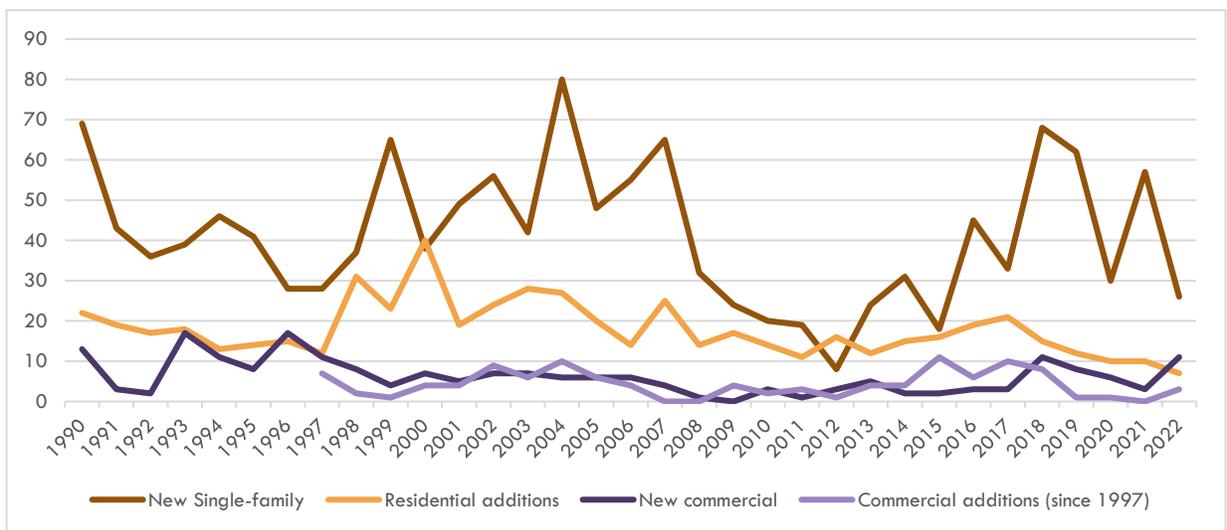
# CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

## COLUMBIA CITY

### 2022 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	28	\$ 9,243,603
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	2	114,000
Residential additions	7	242,000
Residential accessory buildings	18	186,748
Agricultural buildings	2	62,600
Commercial/industrial	11	11,915,542
Commercial/industrial additions	3	3,489,500
Institutional	1	73,000
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	184	2,910,102
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>\$ 28,237,095</b>

### PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



### HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Bowen Center, medical facility	\$ 6,000,000	Community Foundation of Whitley County, office	\$ 2,100,000
DOT America, addition	3,400,000	Culver's, restaurant	1,800,000

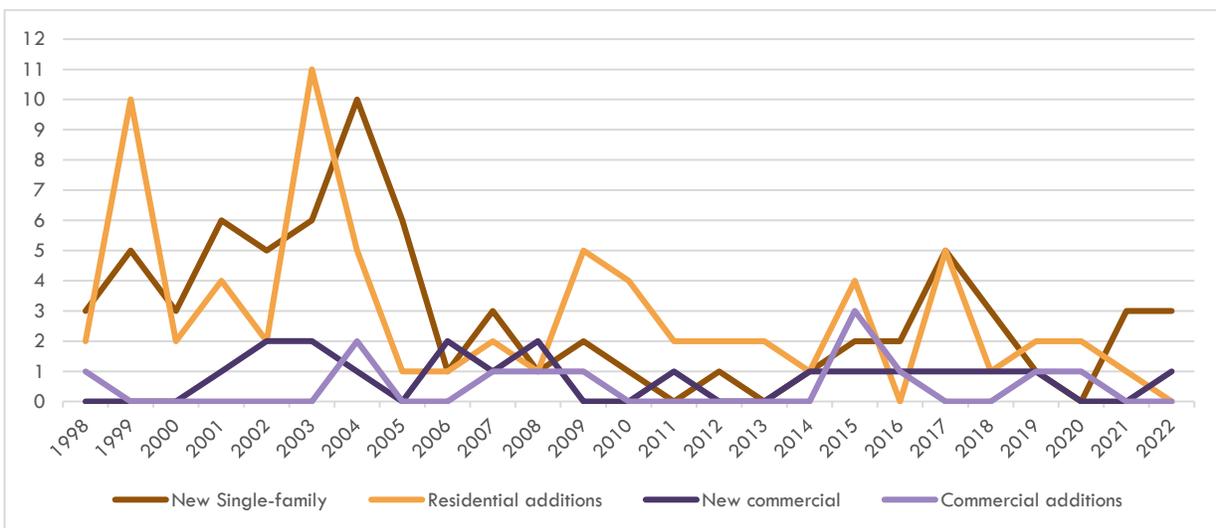
# CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

## SOUTH WHITLEY

### 2022 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	3	\$ 818,073
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	0	-
Residential additions	0	-
Residential accessory buildings	5	94,640
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	1	125,000
Commercial/industrial additions	0	-
Institutional	0	-
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	32	419,795
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>\$ 1,457,508</b>

### 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	\$ 475,838	Single-family residence	\$ 150,000
Single-family residence	192,235	South Whitley Storage, self-storage facility	125,000

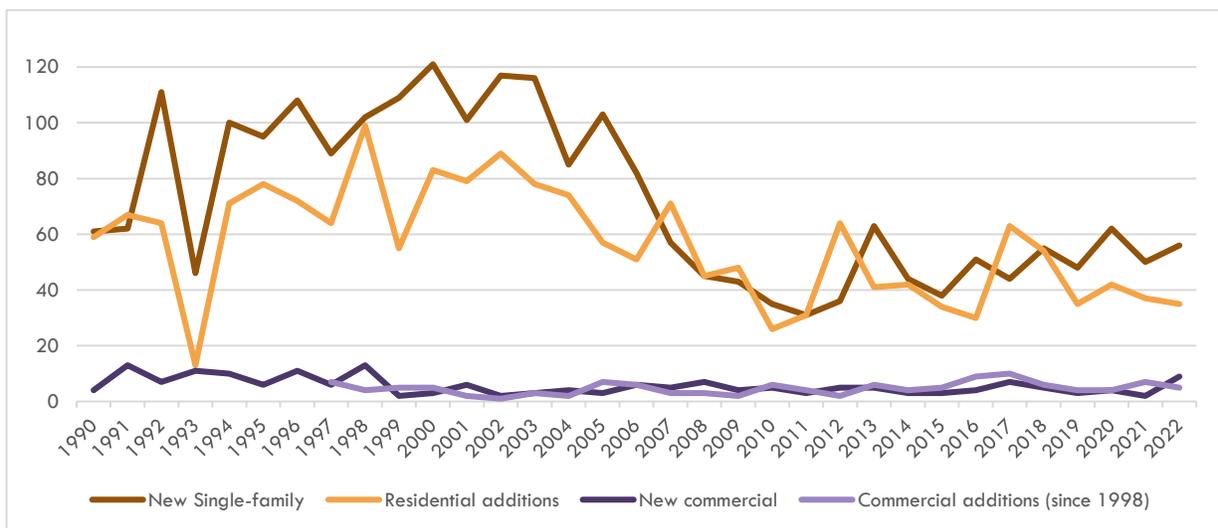
# CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

## WHITLEY COUNTY

### 2022 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	58	\$ 20,298,346
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	16	173,000
Residential additions	35	2,486,399
Residential accessory buildings	127	5,697,392
Agricultural buildings	32	3,379,900
Commercial/industrial	9	1,858,000
Commercial/industrial additions	5	766,090
Institutional	1	38,000
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	287	5,453,873
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>\$ 40,579,685</b>

### PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



### HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
K. Laux, CFO barn	\$ 1,400,000	Single-family residence	\$ 785,000
Single-family residence	1,000,000	Single-family residence	668,930

## 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	\$ 9,157.71	\$ 4,062.00	\$ 13,219.71	7.27 %
Columbia City	6,504.70	32,915.80	39,420.50	21.69 %
South Whitley	6,394.45	3,795.00	10,189.45	5.61 %
County	36,575.81	82,376.05	118,951.86	65.44 %
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$ 58,632.67</b>	<b>\$ 123,148.85</b>	<b>\$ 181,781.52</b>	

*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 2022.

#### EXPENDITURES

Shared expenses	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
Salaries	\$333,118.00	\$342,554.00	\$337,702.97	101.4 %
Travel & auto maintenance	6,500.00	7,300.00	6,616.60	101.8 %
Equipment	12,500.00	28,440.00	27,138.99	217.1 %
Supplies	2,950.00	2,950.00	1,800.04	61.0 %
Training	1,500.00	1,260.00	1,213.79	80.9 %
Printing	1,100.00	1,360.00	1,357.26	123.4 %
Memberships	850.00	890.00	883.00	103.9 %
Dues & subscriptions	200.00	200.00	170.50	85.3 %
Telephone	500.00	500.00	361.27	72.3 %
Subtotal	\$359,218.00	\$385,454.00	\$377,244.42	105.0 %

## REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

Jurisdiction-specific expenses *	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
County PC/BZA member stipends	11,700.00	11,700.00	9,750.00	83.3 %
Professional services	11,000.00	10,200.00	7,816.00	71.1 %
Refunds	-	1,000.00	700.00	N/A
Subtotal	\$22,700.00	\$22,900.00	\$18,266.00	80.5 %
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$381,918.00</b>	<b>\$408,354.00</b>	<b>\$395,510.42</b>	<b>103.6 %</b>

\* 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.

As seen in the above tables, actual expenditures in 2022 exceeded the original budget appropriation by 3.6%. However, if one were to discount a single expense of \$15,712.33, which was encumbered from 2021's unexpended appropriations, the annual expenses would again fall under the original appropriation, despite other additional increases. Here are some highlights and notes:

- The \$15,712.33 expense mentioned above was used to outfit the Government Center meeting room used for City and County meetings with new video equipment. This has improved the quality of webcast meetings for the public wishing to stay informed. The publication of video recordings for public viewing has further increased the transparency of the public processes.
- Base salaries for two positions were increased in 2022. The job description of the Planning & Permitting Technician was revised to make it consistent with comparable positions in other departments, resulting in a higher classification. Similarly, the part-time Building Inspector position's hourly rate was raised to be on par with the full-time Building Inspector position.
- While they had a very active year, the County Plan Commission and BZA both held fewer meetings in 2022 than 2021, which left funds in their stipends budget. For 2023, that budget has been increased to allow scheduling of 3 training sessions throughout the year, addressing a recurrent concern among members and the public.
- Travel and auto expenses increased in 2022 from 2021 by about 12%. This was largely due to increased fuel expenses—for example, July 2022 fuel costs were 30% higher than July 2021. The acquisition of the hybrid Maverick did significantly reduce the fuel cost compared to what it could have been, but even that was not able to counter the higher prices.
- Spending on training increased in 2022, reflecting increased education opportunities again as COVID concerns diminished. Annual conference registrations were the largest line items.
- The supplies expenditures were quite a bit lower than the original budget, despite increased costs. This suggested that a moderate reduction in the 2023 appropriation may be warranted.
- Most Department fees were increased as of October 5<sup>th</sup>. The most recent increase prior to that was in 2016, so the changes were relatively modest. However, since inflation is expected to continue to rise, more frequent revisions may be necessary.

### FEE REVENUES VS. EXPENSES

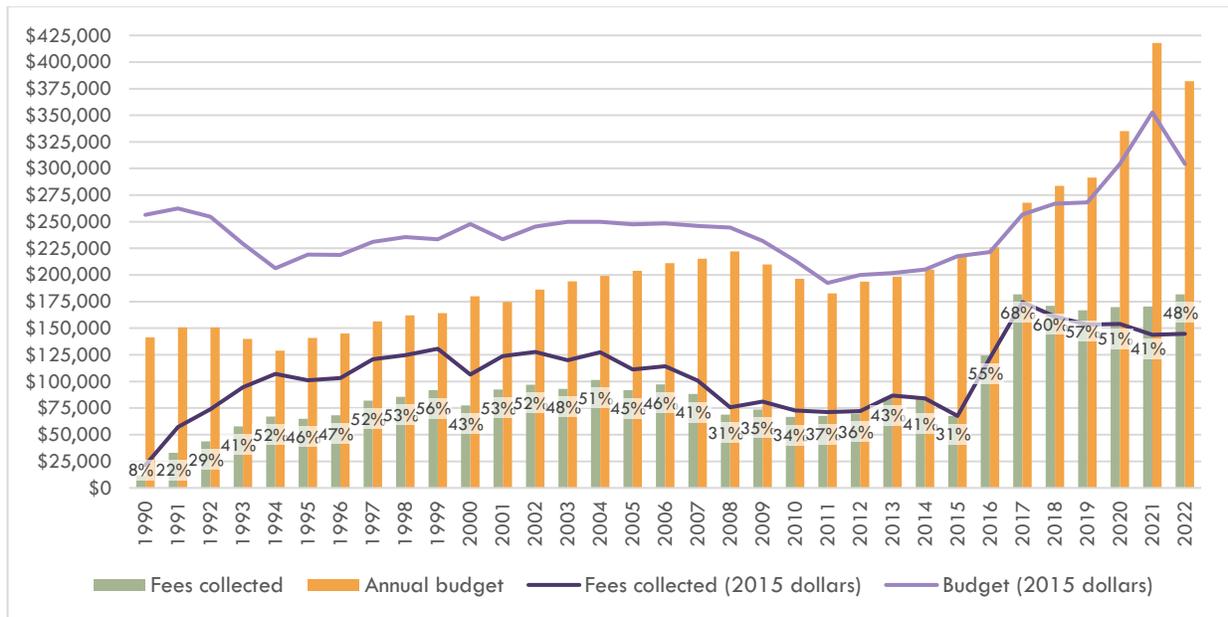
The Department is not a self-supporting agency. Its annual budget is supported by the two joint member jurisdictions, with Columbia City contributing \$42,432.48 directly to the County to defray some of the

## REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

annual 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 pay the expenses of the Department.

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 46.0%, or revenue to original budget of 47.6% (this is the figure used for annual comparisons in the graph below). This ratio had been sliding since the peak in 2017, reflecting stagnant revenues and increasing operating costs. The fee increases implemented in October should help to balance revenues to expenses going into 2023.

### FEES COLLECTED AS PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET



As seen in the chart above, the total fee revenue in 2022 was only \$103 behind 2017’s all-time peak revenue, at least in absolute figures. When factored for inflation, however, the year falls to rank fifth. This is a result of both the flat revenue stream since 2017 and an increasing inflation rate.

The continually rising budget, when adjusted for inflation, may be concerning. Ever-increasing salaries and personnel who are needed to pursue building, planning, quality of life, and economic development goals will mean escalating budgets, but the value of these services should not be considered merely in monetary terms.

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

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023

Based on the review of 2022 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.

A major recommendation that was reaffirmed in the newly updated County Comprehensive Plan 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. Expansion of jurisdictional areas may also help, but this also requires cooperation with officials and utilities to ensure a high level of standards throughout both incorporated and unincorporated areas.

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. “Affordable housing” is a term being spoken more and more frequently, as the cost of new homes and of rent continue to escalate due to shortening supply meeting less and less of the demand. Both South Whitley and Churubusco have taken proactive efforts to recruit residential developers over the past two years, but the fruit from these efforts are yet to come sometime in the future, if at all.

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 a crucial goal for both the Department and communities.

### PLAN AND CODE CHANGES

The County adopted zoning regulations to address utility-scale solar installations in late 2022. The first application for commercial solar has been filed, so the application of that code could show the need for refinements in standards. Complementary code revisions for the municipalities should then be expected to form a consistent set of regulations for projects that could easily cross jurisdictional lines.

Columbia City started an expansion of their extraterritorial jurisdiction, which has been virtually unchanged since 1970, and that should be finished in 2023. Changes to the parking code are also underway, and additional subdivision and zoning code changes may also be expected.

Churubusco has discussed a new downtown-specific zoning district, which may work in conjunction with their new downtown TIF district, as well as business park zoning.

South Whitley continues to work to leverage their TIF districts to encourage residential development, which yielded a code revision in 2022. This should encourage the mid-level builders that the town hopes to attract, although the continued availability of land in Allen County seems to deter interest in developing in the town. Several downtown revitalization projects have started, and there may be opportunities to tweak codes to better boost those efforts.

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

As has been discussed before, this Department has had a long history of adaptability to changing situations and making use of available resources to achieve our mission. 2022 was a record year for both permits and petitions, the pressure of which was felt by every staff member. If this repeats in 2023, personnel will be stretched thin during the peak months, so maintaining a continuity of service will be important. Conversely, if the year 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.



*Chief Inspector Craig Wagner does a consultation on a potential renovation of an upper floor of a downtown building, Columbia City.*



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: COUNTY-WIDE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY COMPARISON

	2020		2021		2022	
	Permits*	Est. Value	Permits*	Est. Value	Permits*	Est. Value
Single-family dwellings	93	\$ 26,922,826	112	\$ 34,316,406	86	\$ 30,393,022
Two-family	0	-	4	750,068	4	1,028,685
Multi-family	0	-	0	-	0	-
Manufactured homes	1	25,000	4	334,500	3	157,000
Mobile homes	7	140,000	10	192,436	15	130,000
Residential additions	59	3,731,065	51	3,144,103	44	2,790,303
Residential accessory buildings	156	4,408,092	162	5,229,846	157	6,084,020
Agricultural buildings	37	3,615,928	37	2,548,900	34	3,442,500
Commercial/industrial	10	15,749,000	5	1,876,246	21	13,898,542
Commercial/industrial additions	6	6,927,751	7	4,954,273	8	4,255,590
Institutional	3	1,373,000	3	578,232	3	115,894
Institutional additions	0	-	1	85,000	0	-
Miscellaneous/ILP only/Pond/other	495	6,885,880	501	12,706,801	552	9,286,086
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>\$ 69,778,542</b>	<b>897</b>	<b>\$ 66,716,811</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>\$ 71,581,642</b>

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

## APPENDIX B: YEARLY COMPARISONS

Building Permits	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Churubusco	25	48	37	35	57	40	36	33	35	42
Columbia City	149	179	138	188	186	214	221	198	229	203
South Whitley	19	25	30	40	45	29	33	24	28	32
County	428	395	398	407	431	342	402	480	490	531
<b>Total</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>719</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>808</b>

Improvement Location Permits	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Churubusco	12	28	31	22	41	42	36	29	22	28
Columbia City	111	158	112	166	154	195	189	193	198	159
South Whitley	10	19	22	24	38	23	29	22	14	23
County	331	289	301	300	327	258	298	350	349	350
<b>Total</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>560</b>

Receipts Written	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>842</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>895</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>1,058</b>

Inspections	2013*	2014*	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Churubusco			190	123	229	180	109	130	87	83
Columbia City			704	1,036	982	1,116	1,142	942	913	993
South Whitley			140	111	181	127	86	129	82	116
County			1,935	1,774	1,841	1,641	1,697	2,443	1,981	2,033
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,973</b>	<b>3,004</b>	<b>2,969</b>	<b>3,044</b>	<b>3,233</b>	<b>3,064</b>	<b>3,034</b>	<b>3,644</b>	<b>3,063</b>	<b>3,225</b>

\*Inspections per jurisdiction were not tracked prior to 2015

# APPENDICES

<b>New Single-Family Dwelling Permits</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Churubusco	2	7	9	3	17	5	4	0	2	1
Columbia City	23	37	18	44	33	67	62	30	57	26
South Whitley	0	1	2	1	5	3	1	0	3	3
County	65	43	40	53	45	53	49	62	50	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>86</b>

<b>Median Single-Family Dwelling Const. Cost</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Churubusco	\$163,000	\$168,000	\$167,000	\$150,000	\$179,000	\$201,500	\$188,750	NA	\$262,450	\$633,000
Columbia City	\$152,000	\$163,500	\$160,500	\$170,000	\$191,800	\$174,000	\$199,053	\$264,900	\$285,000	\$323,024
South Whitley	NA	\$350,000	\$105,000	\$121,500	\$162,000	\$80,000	\$150,000	NA	\$243,800	\$192,235
County	\$218,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	\$190,000	\$250,000	\$275,000	\$284,190	\$264,866	\$356,063	\$348,753
<b>Overall</b>	<b>\$181,250</b>	<b>\$173,500</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>	<b>\$203,448</b>	<b>\$206,500</b>	<b>\$221,000</b>	<b>\$264,900</b>	<b>\$291,161</b>	<b>\$329,000</b>

<b>Floodplain Permits*</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019**</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Churubusco	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Columbia City	2	0	0	2	2	2	7	12	14	13
South Whitley	0	0	0	3	2	5	6	3	3	4
County	11	12	3	9	24	20	44	52	74	77
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>94</b>

\* 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

<b>Land Use Petitions</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Churubusco	2	3	4	3	5	8	6	5	5	10
Columbia City	10	10	10	18	22	33	16	22	26	29
South Whitley	1	1	5	4	9	6	3	3	3	2
County	40	45	44	53	74	50	60	50	65	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>110</b>