



Owen County

Our **Indiana** Home

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

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CHAPTER 01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Designed by residents and leaders, this plan serves as the foundation for Owen County's future. It focuses on improving the quality of place for residents, highlighting the county's unique features and strengths, and promoting the county as an attractive place that values the health and prosperity of current and future generations.

This plan, informed by current data and local stakeholders, will guide elected officials, nonprofits, schools, entrepreneurs, creative professionals, employers, and residents as they lead the community.

It will also provide another important function: creating the foundation for an update to the county's zoning map and ordinances.

FIGURE 1.1: LOCATION OF OWEN COUNTY, INDIANA



SCOPE OF THE PLAN

Owen County has the power to make planning and zoning decisions only within its boundaries. However, to ensure compatibility of future growth and land use changes, representatives from the two incorporated communities were consulted during this process.

The plan takes a long-range view to guide land use decisions, prepare capital improvement programs, and determine the rate, timing, and location of future growth. It establishes a vision, goals, and objectives that direct investment and development in Owen County. It also examines the inter-relationships between land use, transportation, utilities and the local economy.

The comprehensive plan is not an ordinance and does not stipulate specific instructions with the rule of law, but it is a policy document to help guide decision making related to land use, growth, public investments, and economic development. County Commissioners, the Plan Commission, County Council, and staff should interpret the goals and objectives as a long-term reflection of the community's values.

The spirit of this plan should be remembered when reviewing development and policy proposals. For example, when a new rezone, subdivision, or site plan review request is filed with the county, it should be reviewed and evaluated against the comprehensive plan and the county's other plans and ordinances.

The implementation tables and action steps are intended to direct the day-to-day decisions concerning more specific activities. Interpreting the plan in this way will enable members of both commissions to justify approval, or denial, of any proposed development or redevelopment projects or policy initiatives introduced.

PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

Planning is a continuous process. It was underway in Owen County before this plan and will continue after its adoption. In the last several years the county completed a workforce attraction plan and economic development strategy. The process to update the zoning map and ordinances was launched concurrently with this project and will continue after it's completed.

This Owen County Comprehensive Plan was funded through a grant from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs and developed with the assistance of consultants SB Research & Planning, HWC Engineering, and The Planning Workshop.

This new comprehensive plan is the result of a detailed process that brought residents and stakeholders together to identify existing conditions throughout the county, recognize potential issues and opportunities, and ultimately create recommendations for the future.

The plan was developed over ten months with oversight from the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) which included representatives from the County Commission, County Council, Plan Commission and other community leaders. The CPC met five times during the process.

Meeting details – including PowerPoint presentations - and other components of this planning process were posted to the website <https://owencountycompplan.com/>. The site was regularly updated.

Results of the public input process can be found in detail in Chap. 3: Comprehensive Planning Committee, but the process itself included five Comprehensive Planning Committee meetings, two Plan Commission meetings, a public survey with 500 responses, a stakeholders' meeting, a public meeting, and a public hearing.

2022 Owen County Comprehensive Plan

Planning the future of Sweet Owen County



A screenshot from the Owen County Comprehensive Plan website.

PLAN SUMMARY

After years of sluggish growth, local leaders were confronted by new and competing demands for development, including large subdivisions, a solid waste transfer station, and a national chain discount store.

County officials did not have the tools to encourage the development they wanted or deny the petitions they didn't. "Opportunities are passing us by, but problems are not," one Plan Commissioner said.

Their first thought was to immediately start rewriting the existing code and zoning map, but they then realized the comprehensive plan was eleven years old and had to be updated first.

But the Plan Commission was troubled by the time it would take to update the comprehensive plan and worried that, when the comprehensive planning process was finished, the community would lose momentum before tackling the new ordinances.

To save time, Owen County launched both processes at once. Running concurrently with the comprehensive plan update, they hired another consultant to review existing code, meet with the Plan Commission and set the stage for new ordinances. After the comprehensive plan has been completed and adopted, the ordinance renewal process can continue seamlessly.

To differentiate the two planning processes, the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) emphasized that the comprehensive plan is about the future. A long-term vision of how and where the city will grow and change over the next twenty years to accommodate expected population growth. The zoning code is about what is allowed today (i.e., how land can be used and what can be built, including maximum heights, setbacks from property lines, etc.).

Next, the CPC created a working premise to share with the public during the planning process:

- Owen County is facing growth pressures as local and outside investors have decided that the community has development potential.
- Initial interest is in the Spencer area, but that town is hemmed in by topography and the river.
- As roads, sewer, and broadband are improved around Spencer, the possibility of growth in new areas will increase.
- The community must act now to decide and direct the type(s) of growth it wants. We must work with developers now to create a desirable future, something accomplished through land use planning and zoning regulations.
- This will take political courage and fortitude.

Using results from research, previous plans, public input and their own discussions, the CPC listed their top priorities for the comprehensive plan:

- **Ordinance Updates:** A key goal for this update will be to prepare the county to implement updates to the development ordinances.
- **Housing:** About 47% of Owen County residents surveyed said the lack of affordable housing is the biggest threat to the county’s future, according to the 2019 Owen County Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan.
- **Budget/fiscal stability:** Recent deficits in the county budget and subsequent tax increases have left many residents requesting more accountability and transparency with elected officials.
- **Roads and public safety:** The condition of many local roads was a loudly voiced complaint in the public survey and meetings.
- **Broadband:** Fast, affordable, reliable broadband access has joined the list of vital economic development tools, right alongside safe highways and good school systems.
- **Infrastructure and property improvement:** 81% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed new water, sewer, and broadband utilities should be extended to encourage new development.

- **S.R. 46 Corridor:** This state road offers one of Owen County’s quickest paths to positive future growth. About 2,165 residents use it daily to commute but an improved highway could also pull new residents into the community.
- **Business/small business opportunities:** Along with new housing, residents want additional shopping and dining options.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee also spent a lot of time anticipating how to overcome expected challenges to a new comprehensive plan and ordinances. They focused on the following three challenges:

1. Resistance to change, including a lack of political will from some elected officials.
2. Conflicting vision and priorities (growth vs. no growth).
3. Financial resources.

To address these concerns, a website was created and updated with news regarding the planning process. Announcements about the planning process and meetings also appeared on two social media sites that featured vigorous discussion on local issues.

Even with these measures, there is no doubt it will be an uphill struggle to complete this process, especially an ordinance update that features restrictions and enforcement procedures.

Sometimes citizens rise up and demand more land use protection from their elected leaders. This usually occurs after some new development goes in that angers or disrupts large neighborhoods. In most cases, though, leaders must make the case to their constituents about why additional protections are needed, or why it is important to evenhandedly enforce existing rules.

With millions of dollars being invested in new growth and a Plan Commission that admits it doesn't have the tools it needs, community leaders can confidently push this message:

Owen County is facing some exciting projects, but also some scary challenges.

Much-needed new housing and other economic projects are coming, but we don't have everything we need in place yet. This includes water and sewer lines as well as guidelines for directing growth.

We must work with developers now to create the future we all want, and we do that with land use planning and zoning regulations.

They can also rely on this plan, which is organized around twelve subject matter chapters:

- Land Use
- Government & Fiscal Capacity
- Public Facilities & Services
- Placemaking
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Transportation
- Agriculture
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Historic & Archaeological Resources
- Hazard Mitigation

Each chapter includes a discussion of the existing conditions related to that subject, a vision statement, key goals, and implementation strategies.

KEY GOALS, STRATEGIES AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

LAND USE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Floodplains, steep topography and other obstacles limit Owen County's potential for growth. It is time for us to take a careful look at the types of development we want and do not want, and to install the planning tools needed to achieve those goals.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Current Ordinance Replacement.
- Goal 2: Preserve and protect agricultural land.
- Goal 3: Grow quality housing opportunities in Owen County.
- Goal 4: Protect the County and property owners from undesirable nonconforming uses.
- Goal 5: Preserve rural character and the County's natural resources.

GOVERNMENT AND FISCAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Trust in government is crucial in protecting lives and livelihoods. Distrust can be expensive because government officials then must invest resources to obtain cooperation. With this in mind, we will build and maintain the drivers of public governance: reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity and fairness

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Build and maintain trust and communication with the public.
- Goal 2: As demand for services and budget allows, consider hiring professional staff for key positions.
- Goal 3: Begin community discussions on the importance of code enforcement.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES DEVELOPMENT POLICY

As a rural community with limited resources and a sparse population, developing and maintaining public facilities and services throughout Owen County will continue to be a challenge for county leaders. Owen County must strategically invest in facilities and services to ensure a stable and quality level of service is provided to residents and business owners.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Improve communication between government agencies and the public.
- Goal 2: Review emergency services as needed in response to development.
- Goal 3: Continue efforts to expand sanitary sewer throughout Owen County.

PLACEMAKING DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Placemaking unlocks the potential of spaces and creates a more inviting area for all residents. Our goal of making Owen County an even more desirable place to live comes with challenges that are solvable, but not simple. Fortunately, investing in placemaking helps bring people in the community together.

KEY GOALS

- Goal 1: Increase recreational tourism by creating new experiences.
- Goal 2: Take tangible steps to improve health and wellness in Owen County.
- Goal 3: Strengthen the quality of place in small community centers such as Patricksburg, Freedom, Whitehall, Coal City, Cunot and Cataract.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County has more opportunities for economic development than we previously realized, as shown by local investments by our largest employers and the growth of local businesses. Now we must lay the groundwork to promote the type of development we want and redirect the growth we do not.

KEY GOALS

- Goal 1: Promote business retention and expansion and small business development.
- Goal 2: Encourage workforce attraction.
- Goal 3: Explore development of employer sites.
- Goal 4: Stay informed on trends in regional planning.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT POLICY

A lack of safe and affordable housing has hindered Owen County's prosperity and quality of life. Even residents who "don't want anything to change" recognize the need for more options and places to live. We must work with local neighborhoods and developers to prepare for and incentivize the types of housing we want.

KEY GOALS

- Goal 1: Update zoning map and building code.
- Goal 2: Explore the possibility of a county housing department.
- Goal 3: Study the creation of new building sites.
- Goal 4: Promote preferred housing types.
- Goal 5: Improve the stock of existing housing.

TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County is poised to take advantage of the completion of the Interstate 69 Corridor through southwest Indiana. With the southeast portion of Owen County within a short distance of the interstate, growth and development is most likely to occur in these areas first, and Owen County should be prepared to guide this growth.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Conduct a review of County documents and ordinances to ensure leadership has the tools needed to develop the transportation network in Owen County.
- Goal 2: Complete a road inventory and develop an asset management plan that allows the County to be fiscally responsible when maintaining the transportation network.
- Goal 3: Work with INDOT regarding future State Road 46 improvements.
- Goal 4: Do not support the addition of new highways in Owen County.

AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Agriculture remains an integral part of Owen County's culture, rural identity, and local economy. Although the average size of farms decreased slightly between 2012 and 2017, the total number of farms increased between 2012 and 2017 based on USDA Census of Agriculture statistics. To help

promote and retain the agricultural character of the county, county officials should encourage growth and development adjacent to existing communities such as Gosport and Spencer and be mindful of compatible land uses adjacent to agricultural land.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Retain and support agricultural operations.
- Goal 2: Support and promote agricultural best management practices.

NATURAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The natural beauty of Owen County is not confined to its state parks and nature preserves. The county's abundance of high-quality natural resources is one of the reasons people have been drawn to, and remain, in Owen County today. It is important to develop policies that balance the protection of woodlands and other natural features with Owen County's desire for future growth and development.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Implement steps to protect the White River.
- Goal 2: Capitalize on the natural assets of Owen County.
- Goal 3: Connect and educate Owen County residents on the importance of the natural environment.
- Goal 4: Expand and incentivize businesses that support recreational activities.

PARKS & RECREATION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Although the county is comprised of rich and varied natural settings, Owen County currently does not have a Parks and Recreation Department or Parks Board. Whereas the previous plan focused primarily on capitalizing on existing State-owned parks and recreational areas, the intent of this comprehensive plan is to develop a more local park system accessible to a wider segment of Owen County residents.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Establish a County Parks and Recreation Department.
- Goal 2: Expand MYPATH.

HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County's historic and archaeological resources – namely the downtowns of Spencer and Gosport – represent historic and cultural connections for residents to the county's collective past. In addition to these communities, the historic resources in McCormick's Creek State Park and Cataract Falls SRA add to the rich history Owen County has to offer residents and visitors. This plan outlines a series of recommendations to strengthen these local destinations through preservation and adaptive re-use to make them vibrant (and relevant) contributors to Owen County's quality of life.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Support strategies to improve the municipal downtowns in Owen County.
- Goal 2: Support and highlight State-owned historic resources.

HAZARD MITIGATION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County must be prepared to quickly respond to emergencies, whether it is a heavy rain event causing flash floods, a tornado, extreme heat, or damaging winds. According to the Disaster Recovery Branch of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (DHS), every Indiana county experienced at least four combined disaster and emergency declarations between 1998 to 2018 resulting in millions of dollars in damage. Given climate trends, Owen County residents and infrastructure will be at risk in the future.

KEY GOALS:

- Goal 1: Develop an Owen County Resiliency Plan.
- Goal 2: Train Owen County staff on how to respond in common emergency situations.
- Goal 3: Ensure all governmental facilities are safe for public and staff use.



CHAPTER 02

GENERAL BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW

Owen County, in southwest Indiana, is a rural community comprised of 385 square miles. Our geologic history left us with idyllic landscapes admired by residents and tourists. We have everything from rural vistas to Indiana’s largest waterfall, Cataract Falls.

But Owen’s landscape does not provide for easy living. Poor drainage and flooding restrict development in the valleys. Karst features make land susceptible to sinkholes. Hilly landscapes make it costly to pump water around the county. Additionally, a “hard pan” and “periglacial loess” layer, both produced by glacier melt, makes it difficult to farm and for septic tanks to filter wastewater.

As a result, we have remained a quiet, relatively undiscovered county – until now. Steady improvements to our quality of life, local infrastructure investments, and changes to the national economy have resulted in a boom of interest.

As a result, there’s more economic growth happening now than in decades. This activity, in part, is due to completing two key goals of the 2010 Comprehensive Land Use Plan: Making new sites ready for development and strengthening the county’s economic development efforts. As a result, the county is facing unaccustomed growth pressures and is striving to set up its planning and economic tools to take advantage of all the prospects.

The main goal of the 2010 comprehensive plan was to lay the foundation for growth. Now that’s it’s arriving, the key aim of this 2022 update is to prepare for and direct that growth.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The following graphics offer a brief overview of Owen County residents. All the information was taken from The U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

POPULATION



21,446

2020 Population



-0.6%

Population Change
from 2010-2020



8,830

Total Households

AGE STRUCTURE



45.3

Median Age



20.9%

Children
Under 18 Years Old



19.5%

Aging Population
65+ Years Old

HOUSING



77.6%

Owner Occupied



22.4%

Renter Occupied



13.7%

Vacancy Rate (All Units)

EDUCATION & INCOME



85.3%

of Residents Having Earned a High School Degree or Higher



14.7%

of Residents Having Earned a Bachelor's Degree or Higher



\$52,204

Median Household Income

EMPLOYMENT



41.3%

Percentage of Residents Working in Owen County



32 MIN

Average Travel Time to Work



3%

2020 Unemployment Rate

INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN



10,348

Civilian Labor Force



21%

of the Labor Force Works in the Manufacturing Industry



18.3%

of the Labor Force Works in Educational Services, Health Care, & Social Assistance

Not shown in the graphics, but important to discuss, is the fact that Owen County lags behind Indiana in many key economic indicators.

For instance, the county's:

- per capita income is 11% lower than the state average of \$58,236.
- poverty rate of 14.5% is higher than Indiana's 12.9%.
- percent of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is 14.7%, compared to Indiana's 27.2%.

Some of this is offset by the lower cost of living in Owen County. For example, the local median home value is \$131,800, compared to \$229,800 for the Indiana average.

Additionally, the community's high rate of retirees speaks to its affordability and quality of life. 20% of Owen County's population is 65 or over compared to the Indiana average of 15%.

These statistics reflect the county's rural past but also contain warning signs about its future. Local leaders must make sure the county's workforce is prepared to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new housing and jobs. Otherwise, those homes and positions may simply be filled by new residents from elsewhere, further stranding the local population that's already behind in income and education levels.

ECONOMIC BASE

Owen County's has a labor force of 9,156 people, according to 2020 figures by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The biggest job sector - at 21% - is manufacturing, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. These jobs also had the highest average salaries - \$79,700. Agriculture and farm-related jobs are significant to the county's past and culture but play a much smaller role in the economy. The average wage for all jobs was \$44,653 in 2002.

The following graph shows Owen County's major employers. The two largest manufacturers - Boston Scientific and Cook Urological - hire more workers than the next eight firms combined. That noteworthy concentration underscores the importance of ensuring those medical device manufacturers have everything they need to flourish locally. Additionally, all companies on the list are in Spencer, indicating how focused economic activity is on one corner of the county.

In addition to the 10 biggest employers, other important job producers include the rest of the school system, McCormick's Creek State Park, Owen County Public Library and the other state recreational sites. Spencer-Owen Community Schools, for instance, employs more than 370 teachers, administrator, custodians, bus drivers, etc.

| 10 Largest Employers in Owen County | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| Company | Product | Employed |
| Boston Scientific Corp. | Physicians & Surgeons Equip. | 1,001 |
| Cook Urological Inc. | Physicians & Surgeons Equip. | 420 |
| Owen County Government | Government | 150 |
| Owen Valley High School | School | 150 |
| Spencer Elementary School | School | 125 |
| Trilogy | Health Services | 100 |
| Babb's Supermarket | Grocers-Retail | 100 |
| Canyon Inn | Hotels & Motels | 90 |
| Walmart | Department Store | 90 |
| World Arts Inc. | Graphic Designers | 90 |

Source: Hoosiers by the Numbers

ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

Anchor institutions play a vital role in the county's economy and help uplift community conditions.

Owen County does not have a hospital, so many residents travel to Bloomington for their medical needs. The community also doesn't have a college, although Indiana University and Ivy Tech both have campuses in nearby Monroe County. The following are longstanding establishments invested in keeping the community vibrant.

OWEN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND OWEN COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.

These organizations work hand-in-hand to facilitate growth and improvement. The chamber promotes the interests of local businesses in their day-to-day operations while economic development focuses on longer-term economic growth. These organizations are key drivers in almost all local community development projects.

OWEN COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The foundation is a linchpin of the county's growth efforts, including the MYPath Trail System, the community's first riverfront path. They are a steward of more than 230 funds, including over 50 scholarship funds. In 2021, the foundation invested more than \$555,000 in grants and scholarships back into Owen County.

SPENCER MAIN STREET

This group is dedicated to preserving and revitalizing downtown Spencer, but their events draw people from throughout the county and beyond. These include the annual Tailgate Sale on the Square, Apple Butter Festival, Spencer PRIDE Festival, Farm-to-Table Dinner and Christmas at the Square.

OWEN COUNTY HERITAGE & CULTURE CENTER

A nonprofit organization housed in the historic Spencer Carnegie Library building, the center includes a museum, reference/research library collection, coffee shoppe and a gift shop. They work with the Owen County Historical & Genealogical Society is to preserve county history.

SPENCER-OWEN COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORP.

The corporation oversees four elementary schools, the middle school, and high school. There were 3,156 school-aged children in the county in 2020.

OWEN COUNTY-PURDUE EXTENSION OFFICE

Supported by Purdue University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the extension office based in Spencer provides practical, research-based information/solutions to address local issues. This focus centers on issues related to agriculture, natural resources, human and health sciences, community development, and 4-H youth development.



CHAPTER 03

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING COMMITTEE (CPC)

OVERVIEW

To maximize involvement, local leaders took an expansive view of forming the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC).

Starting with a 15-person core, they then had members “bring a friend” to meetings throughout the process. This resulted in an unusually diverse group, not only with age and experience, but across generations. For example, there were mother-and-daughter and mother-and-son pairs. The group included seasoned local leaders such as a county commissioner and residents who had never taken part in community development planning before.

To get the word out, the Chamber of Commerce printed “Ask Me About Owen County’s Comprehensive Plan” t-shirts for members to wear while out in the community.



A t-shirt promoting the comprehensive plan. The shirt reads, “Ask me about Owen County’s Comprehensive Plan!”

ROLE OF THE CPC



A t-shirt promoting Owen County's Comprehensive Plan.

The committee provided project guidance as well as specific recommendations for projects. They served as the liaison between the consultant team and elected leaders, residents, and business owners.

The process was designed so committee members could carry on implementing the goals and objectives after the plan's adoption. At each meeting the steering committee reviewed its role in the process:

- Represent broad community interests.
- Provide guidance through the process (~5 meetings).
- Identify issues and concerns during the process.
- Advise consultants in reviewing data in addition to developing and reviewing goals, policies, and draft documents.
- Provide comment and input during project phases and civic engagement meetings.
- Encourage community consensus and encourage stakeholder participation during civic engagement events.
- Promote awareness, participation, and the mission of the project.
- Stick with it and provide continuous support to the planning process.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The committee met six times to set community priorities, study demographic information, and review draft recommendations. As indicated by their “Ask Me About Owen County’s Comprehensive Plan” t-shirts, members were dedicated to spreading the word about the importance of the comprehensive plan and worked particularly hard on building community engagement. The results can be seen in the 500 residents who completed the online survey.

After a draft of the plan was released to the public, objections were made that the steering committee did not fully represent the county. For example, it had no members of the agricultural community. Seven new members were added, including farmers and other landowners, and they attended the last two meetings to edit the draft and take part in the public meetings.

The core committee consisted of:

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Cassie Abrell | Resident |
| Corbin Abrell | Resident |
| Grant Beaman | Boston Scientific |
| Linda Bertram | Resident |
| Dwight Brooks | McCormick’s Creek State Park |
| Gary Burton | Owen County Commissioner |
| Matt Cazzell | Administrator, Spencer-Owen Schools |
| Steve Fox | Resident |
| Sean Huss | Owen County Soil & Water Conserv. Dist. |
| Aaron LaGrange | Ast. Principal, Owen Valley Middle School |
| Anton Neff | Owen County Council |
| Kristen Portteus | Teacher, Owen Valley High School |
| Kurt Rosenburger | President, Home Financial Bancorp |
| Larken Seymour | Owen County Civic Theatre |
| Kathryn Shumate | Resident |
| Mary Skinner | Resident |
| Clint Sturgeon | Resident |
| Colin Sturgeon | Resident |
| Norm Warner | Owen County Plan Commission |

COMMITTEE'S WORK & MEETINGS

This section outlines the CPC's work on the plan including all meetings and public events. Meeting details - including PowerPoint presentations - and other components of this planning process were posted to the website <https://owencountycompplan.com/>. The site was regularly updated.

The CPC meetings included:

NOV. 8, 2021: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 1

This project kickoff and coordination event was held at the Owen County Family YMCA. The first meeting focused on introductions and a review of the comprehensive planning process.

Time was spent elaborating on the difference between a comprehensive plan, which is an advisory document, and a zoning and ordinance update, which is enforceable local law. Owen County has launched both projects simultaneously in order to empower local leaders with planning tools as soon as possible.

JAN. 12, 2022: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 2

Held at the YMCA, this meeting was dedicated to committee members exploring local priorities and anticipating what obstacles might lay ahead for the planning process.

FEB. 9, 2022: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 3

Held at the YMCA, this meeting delved deep into preparing to counter possible opposition to the new comprehensive plan and especially the zoning and ordinance update. The group created and rehearsed an elevator speech to address these concerns:

"Owen County is facing some exciting projects, but also some scary challenges. Much-needed new housing and other economic projects are coming, but we don't have everything we need in place yet. This includes water and sewer lines as well as guidelines for directing growth. We must work with developers now to create the future we all want, and we do that with land use planning and zoning regulations."

FEB. 15, 2022: PLAN COMMISSION TRAINING SESSION 1

K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, a FAICP-certified planner with The Planning Workshop, led the Plan Commission in a training session at the Owen County Commissioners Chambers in Spencer. K.K., who is writing an assessment of the county's current zoning and subdivision ordinances, prepared the commission for their role in updating the zoning map and ordinances. These updates will take place immediately after the comprehensive plan is completed. She covered topics such as subdivision criteria, rezoning, and variances.

APRIL 20, 2022: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 4

Held at McCormick’s Creek Elementary School, the goal of this meeting was to review results of the public survey and discuss the preliminary Future Land Use Map and key zoning issues.

JULY 26, 2022: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 5

The newly expanded committee recommended changes to the future land use map and the requirements for mobile and manufactured homes.

OCT. 6, 2022: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 6

The committee reviewed changes to the draft before the next meeting of the plan commission.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Local leaders faced two challenges to public participation during this planning process. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic, which after 2½ years had trained many people not to leave home unless absolutely necessary. County leaders, especially the Chamber of Commerce, overcame this obstacle by recruiting dedicated committee members and providing safe, spacious meeting places.

The second challenge was addressing suspicion about local government and planning, a view held by a small but vocal population in many communities, including Owen County. Robust and sometimes heated discussions on the subject took place on two local social media Facebook sites, “Owen County Chatter” with 10,600 members, and “Owen County Budget, Roads and Government” with 487 members, run by Victor Vaillette.

Announcements about the planning process and meetings appeared on both sites, and Mr. Vaillette attend the training workshop and public meeting. He filmed both events and posted them on his website.

Following his posts, there were comments from readers that ranged from questions about the need for planning to support of ‘common sense’ planning to strong opposition, such as this post: “I moved here over 30 years ago to get away from this very same thing in Indianapolis ... loved the FREEDOM. Now all the neighborhood organizations and the

zoning Nazis from other places are coming home to roost here in what used to be a virgin county.”

Put simply, there are strong divisions about the need for planning in the community, a challenge that will likely continue as the county moves to update its zoning and ordinances.

A summary of the public input includes:

PROJECT WEBSITE

The site, <https://owencountycompplan.com/>, regularly updated, helped keep the community informed on the planning process. It also gave them a chance to post questions and comments. There were notes from every meeting and announcements about upcoming events. There were 213 total visitors to the website with 509 total views.

The website tabs included:

- About Comp Plans
- Resources
- The Planning Process
- Contact Us

MARCH 1, 2022: PUBLIC SURVEY

500 people answered the on-line survey, which was promoted through fliers and local websites such as the Chamber of Commerce site. There was a good mix of respondents, including 30% between the ages 25-40 and 37% between 41-56.

The 18 questions covered residents' view of the current state of the community, specific needs the county should address, and their vision for the future.

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE:

- 75% agreed or strongly agreed Owen County is a great place to raise a family.
- 62% agreed or strongly agreed there is a strong sense of community pride in Owen County.
- 60% agreed or strongly agreed Owen County is a great place to retire.

LESS POSITIVE FINDINGS INCLUDED:

- There are broad suspicions about local government after it was revealed the county was nearly \$2 million in debt in 2021. Additionally, an Owen County commissioner was charged with official misconduct, conflict of interest and theft in 2021 (the case is pending).
- The condition of county roads was perhaps the most cited problem in written comments: 86% disagreed or strongly disagreed county roads are generally in good condition. One person wrote, "The conditions of our roads have become a danger rather than just an inconvenience." Another simply wrote, "Where to even start ..."
- Only 12% agreed or strongly agreed there is ample entertainment activities for Gen Z (ages 9 - 24).
- Only 18% agreed or strongly agreed the overall housing stock is well-maintained.
- Only 26% agreed or strongly agreed high-speed internet options in Owen County are reliable.
- Only 31% agreed or strongly agreed there are enough jobs available in Owen County.

With so many responses, it's not surprising that residents expressed a wide range of opinions, many of them colorful. It is the goal of this planning process to build a more nuanced and balanced look at growth and planning, and for that reason the follow survey comment was particularly gratifying:

"Like anything, you get out of it, what you put into it. The citizens of Owen County need to decide what they 'need' and what they 'want.' Then, if that requires more resources, the citizens must decide if they are willing to put more into it (taxes, volunteering, etc.). Too many are quick to blame the local government and elected officials. There are some folks who could and should step up, but I suspect they opt to not do so because of the hassles and criticisms that seem to occur regularly."

PUBLIC MEETINGS & FOCUS GROUPS

MISCELLANEOUS: STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

The consultant team met with an Indiana Department of Transportation representative to discuss S.R. 46 and other local issues. They also met with several developers who have large subdivisions planned for the county.

MAY 27, 2022: STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP

Representatives from economic development, housing, natural resources/parks, and local government groups were invited to hear about the plan's progress and to review the future land use map and ordinance review. They made recommendations on land use categories for key growth areas and discussed the need for local infrastructure investment.

JUNE 1, 2022: PUBLIC MEETING

The widely publicized event was held at McCormick's Creek Elementary and drew about thirty people. After hearing a summary of the planning process and draft recommendations, the audience had a mix of reactions. Some supported the need for Owen County to "take the next steps needed to grow up" and face development issues, while others said new ordinances and regulations won't work locally because they won't be enforced and will make life even harder for struggling residents.

Other highlights of the meeting included:

- Overall, participants recognized there is resistance to change in Owen County.
- There were several comments in regard to violations: How will code enforcement work?
- Violations are an issue, but the cost of legal fees for violations has been a burden in Owen County.
- Invasive species (like poison hemlock) are an issue throughout the county.
- There should be more communication between Spencer and the county to ensure future plans are cohesive.
- The land around Owen Camp/SR 43/SR 46 is a karst area and future development should be aware/mindful of this.

The host of the “Owen County Budget, Roads and Government” Facebook site attended and filmed the meeting. He posted the video on his site, where the discussion continued in a similar vein.



A flyer for the June 1, 2022 Public Meeting at McCormick’s Creek Elementary School.

JUNE 30, 2022: RELEASE OF DRAFT REPORT

Copies of the draft plan were posted on the project website. The draft plan was promoted on social media and in a postcard mailed county-wide. Hard copies were left for review at the Owen County Public Library and Owen County Extension Office. Additionally, residents took it upon themselves to place hard copies at various places around the county.

JULY 7, 2022: PUBLIC MAILING

A county-wide mailing was sent as a postcard inviting the public to review the draft comprehensive plan online and to attend the upcoming public meeting.

PLEASE ATTEND THE OWEN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC MEETING **Thursday, August 25th at 6:30PM**

DEAR OWEN COUNTY RESIDENT

We want your opinion on a draft copy of the Owen County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which will be used to help direct growth and change in our community.

An electronic draft can be found at (owencountycompplan.com) You can also email your comments on that site.

A hard copy can be found at the reference desk of the Owen County Public Library at 10 S Montgomery St, Spencer & Purdue Extension-Owen County 180 S Washington St, Spencer



You can also email your comments to scott@sbresearchandplanning.com

A postcard encouraging the public to review the draft comprehensive plan.

JULY 19, 2022: PLAN COMMISSION MEETING

At a review of the draft plan, about 75 people crowded the courthouse chamber to voice concerns about how the comprehensive plan – particularly the future land use map – might affect the agricultural community. They also asked for additions to the steering committee, particularly for people involved in farming and forestry.

AUGUST 16, 2022: PLAN COMMISSION MEETING

Another large crowd attended the meeting to hear consultants review changes to the future land use map, mobile homes regulations and the proposed Mid-States Corridor.

AUGUST 25, 2022: PUBLIC MEETING

About 240 people attended the meeting at Owen Valley High School to hear a presentation of changes to the draft plan and ask questions during the 2-hour session.

OCTOBER 18, 2022: PLAN COMMISSION MEETING

Approximately 10 members of the public attended the public hearing for the comprehensive plan during the Plan Commission meeting at Owen Valley High School. Consultants reviewed the major changes made to the document over the past three months and final revisions were requested by the Plan Commission. The Commission voted to table a recommendation until the November meeting.



Attendees at the Public Meeting on August 25th.



CHAPTER 04

WHY WE PLAN

WHY WE PLAN

Most plans aren't plans, they're just a collection of ideas or a wish list.

For that reason, many comprehensive land use plans can be found in pristine condition, untouched atop of filing cabinets. But this plan aims for a long and vigorous life. Special care was taken to ensure that it's not just a checklist of everything the community lacks.

Other sections of this report detail how to carry out land use planning. This section talks about why. It makes the case for the importance of planning, especially as it concerns key ideas of the comprehensive plan.

In this age of government cynicism and bare-bone budgets, it is common to hear someone ask, "Why does the county need this plan?" But consider this question: Is Owen County more likely to achieve its goals and allow its residents to prosper with or without a plan for the future?

Skeptical citizens would be right to question the need for "just another plan" if local government were unable to prove that anything ever came of them. Ideas and projects are easy to start, but it's the finishing that counts and Owen County has a demonstrated record of following through.

For example, the two key goals of the 2010 comprehensive plan were both accomplished: Making new sites ready for development and strengthening the county's economic development efforts. Successful projects completed after the previous plan set up the community for its ongoing stage of growth.

What if you don't want growth or change? Unfortunately, that's not among the options. Many areas of Owen County are not being developed right now, but every part is changing. It is inevitable: roads degrade, houses are built, new businesses begin, and old ones close. Over time, sometimes too slowly to attract attention, these changes can alter a community's character.

Comprehensive plans can keep a community on course through the unpredictable changes of the economy, politics, and natural disasters.

Why do we plan? Because we can show that well-considered, incremental planning leads to a higher quality of life for Owen County's residents and visitors. It is through planning and – just as important – implementation that the community can achieve its vision for the future in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

WHY COMPREHENSIVE PLANS FAIL

Owen doesn't have that luxury of creating a plan that's just a set of high-level ideas. Decisions need to be made now about investments in the future. The obstacles that get mentioned most when a community plan doesn't deliver include:

POOR COMMUNICATION

Some communities do little or nothing to distribute their plans, not even making them available on a public website. This means that citizens are not sufficiently informed about the process, do not participate in decisions, or don't identify with the goals.

Creators of the new plan must get out enough information for people to understand what is being proposed. In a related failure, expectations about the plan are not shared openly or effectively.

To tackle this problem, a specific person – or better yet – specific group must be assigned to spread the word and generate momentum through a communication plan. Steps were taken during this process to create a team of promoters, including recruiting new members to the Comprehensive Planning Committee, providing them with training, and even giving them “Ask Me About Owen County's Comprehensive Plan” t-shirts.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Many planning initiatives fail because the people responsible for implementing them are not convinced of their value. More effort is needed to help people understand how getting behind the community's goals can support their personal goals. This solution leads back to communication and education.

NO MONEY

There's rarely enough money to get everything done, and in tough times even the most worthy and desirable projects get delayed.

The first step – and one that must be revisited constantly – is setting priorities. Prioritizing means you choose one task over another based on its urgency. If you plan your tasks according to their urgency, it becomes easier to complete them.

The priorities of this plan are listed in the goals section of each chapter, and further detailed in the corresponding implementation charts. These goals, and the resources needed to complete them, should be revisited yearly by the Plan Commission and other community leaders.

LACK OF CAPACITY

This bedeviling circumstance is similar to lack of money, but it's wider ranging. Capacity refers to a community's skills and experience to carry out a project, including:

- Technical (someone with expertise)
- Managerial (someone to oversee)
- Funding
- Political Will

The first two bulleted items could be covered by a staff member or a volunteer of heroic proportions. The third bullet might include tools such as tax increment financing, redevelopment commissions, and brownfield development. The fourth bullet is the most difficult to quantify but easy to spot.

Local resources should be considered before determining future planning. For example, a solution which requires an extensive staff would not be appropriate for a community with few or no planning staff. However, a community facing growth pressure cannot put off forever the expensive decision to add professional staff.

Figure 4.1 is a checklist that can help a community gauge their planning capacity. Planning capacity is determined by the highest level that has all or the most items checked in the table below. A preliminary checklist for Owen County might look like the following table, with a designation of Level 2.

Once the community has determined its capacity level, it can better judge its ability to implement regulations, studies, etc.

FIGURE 4.1: LOCAL PLANNING CAPACITY

| Local Planning Capacity | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Planning capacity is determined by the highest level that has all or the most items checked. | | | |
| Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> We have thought about planning but do not have a plan commission. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We do not have any planning staff. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have no financial resources dedicated to planning projects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have a plan commission and a board of zoning appeals with rules of procedure. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a building commissioner/planner on staff. <input type="checkbox"/> We rarely designate financial resources to planning projects. <input type="checkbox"/> We have someone who focuses part of their time on economic development or redevelopment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have no or limited inspections. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have zoning and subdivision regulations. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have a comprehensive plan. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have a redevelopment commission. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> We have a plan commission and a board of zoning appeals that consistently follow rules of procedure. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a professional full-time planner. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We occasionally designate financial resources for community planning projects. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have a full-time staff member who is dedicated to economic development or redevelopment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We have limited inspections and enforcement personnel. <input type="checkbox"/> We regularly update our comprehensive plan and development codes. <input type="checkbox"/> We have additional ordinances such as architectural review, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> We have a plan commission and a board of zoning appeals that consistently follow rules of procedure and annual training. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a professional full-time staff of planners and other trained technical staff. <input type="checkbox"/> We annually designate financial resources for community planning projects. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a full-time staff member who is dedicated to economic development or redevelopment in addition to other trained technical economic development staff. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a full range of inspections and full-time enforcement personnel. <input type="checkbox"/> We have additional ordinances such as historic preservation, etc. |

PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO PLANNING

Some residents hold such deep beliefs about the sacrosanct rights of landowners that they are unlikely to change their minds. In fact, no amount of discussion will get them to see any benefit to formal planning.

But it's unknown what percentage of the local population opposes all planning efforts. Or, what percentage is open to dialogue about some planning. In land planning - as in many public policy debates - opponents are often the most vocal but not necessarily the majority.

The public survey during this planning process had responses running the range from pro-growth to "don't change a thing." But, as shown in the land use chapter, a clear majority favored more active planning and investment for the future.

Why would locally elected officials tell property owners what they can or cannot do? What are the benefits? One summary of the reasons for land use planning in rural communities was captured in a paper entitled "Land Evaluation" by David Rossiter, of Cornell University's College of Agriculture & Life Sciences. It stated:

"To prevent or solve conflicts between individuals or with [the] needs and values of society as a whole...

It is not practical to allow landowners to do whatever they want with their land, for several reasons:"

1. Possible direct effects on other land owners or resource users; the classic example is discharge of waters into a stream that is then used by others.

2. Possible indirect and/or delayed effects on other land owners or resource users; a good example is aquifer depletion following excessive water use.

3. Possible direct effects on the resource base, e.g. water pollution.

4. Society may have a collective interest in discouraging certain land uses and promoting others.

5. Different land uses have different infrastructure requirements (roads, schools) which the state may or may not be prepared to meet, e.g., an industrial park will certainly require the government to build new roads.

Community planning is based upon a concept of the public interest. Some flexibility in the use of individual land is given up in exchange for creating a community in which the interests of all are considered.

Readers who cannot accept that concept have probably come to the end of what they will agree with in this comprehensive plan. On the other hand, readers who believe that the concept is useful in discussing land use planning in Owen County will find additional information on why it is necessary and how it might benefit their community.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive land use plan is Owen County's guide to the future. It answers fundamental questions such as: What do we want to change? What do we want to protect?

It also addresses another question that may arise during the process: Why does the county need this plan? That question is best answered in reverse: What happens without a plan?

Make no mistake, the planning process is not about telling a farmer what type of corn he can grow or what color his barn must be. The planning process is about determining the community's priorities and mapping a route toward its goals.



A banner celebrating Owen County's Bicentennial.



CHAPTER 05

LAND USE

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Floodplains, steep topography and other obstacles limit Owen County's potential for growth. It is time for us to take a careful look at the types of development we want and do not want, and to install the planning tools needed to achieve those goals.

OVERVIEW

This Comprehensive Land Use Plan depicts the future pattern of public and private uses of land in unincorporated Owen County. It describes how land is being used for a particular purpose, such as agricultural land for farming, residential land for homes, or industrial land for manufacturing.

It also serves as a guide for zoning, land use, and development-related decisions. This plan does not rezone property or create new regulations, although county officials will be considering those steps in the future.

This chapter explains land use types and is illustrated by the Future Land Use Map, which provides guidance to local officials on the quality and character of land preservation and development likely to take place in the next 20 years.

UPDATES SINCE THE 2010 COMP PLAN

"We've missed opportunities, but not problems," is how one county official described the last few years of trying to use existing zoning maps and regulations to balance development requests against what the community wants.

Decades of very slow growth have come to an end as planning officials review projects for hundreds of new homes in the southeast corner of the county. These petitions triggered a sense of urgency in local leaders. In fact, it is likely that some large subdivisions will be decided upon before this comprehensive plan and review of existing code is complete. Nonetheless, the Plan Commission and others have asked for updated maps and regulations to prepare for the future.

WHY THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN NEEDS UPDATING

Local leaders such as the plan commission have faced complicated proposals for new housing subdivisions, landfill transfer stations and other projects. In these cases, clear rules are needed to discourage the types of growth Owen County doesn't want and to encourage the growth it does.

The previous plan is 12 years old and no longer effective for guiding decisions, so the county's plan commission and others asked for an update. In summary, parts of Owen County are growing, but local leaders don't have the regulations and tools needed to direct that growth.

Additionally, the county's planning and zoning ordinances need to be updated to manage ongoing development proposals and to meet state requirements, and this process starts with a comprehensive plan.

The new comprehensive plan, as an advisory document, will provide guidance to local government (plan commission, BZA, county commissioners, etc.) and other organizations (INDOT, utilities, etc.) as they consider land use decisions. It will also indicate to developers where the community wants new growth to occur.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANS & ZONING ORDINANCES

Both the county's comprehensive plan and its set of ordinances are outdated, but updating them involves two separate processes. The comprehensive plan is about the future. The plan is a long-term vision of how and where the community will grow and change over next 20 years. It is an advisory document, and one of the factors that local leaders consider when making decisions.

The zoning code is about how land can be used and what can be built today. Zoning codes are more specific and establish rules, such as maximum heights, setbacks from property lines, etc.

Because the comprehensive plan is an advisory document, it does not have the power to change zoning maps or local ordinances. However, an updated comprehensive plan is needed in order to update zoning regulations, and the plan commission and others can pursue those updates after the comprehensive plan is completed.

ZONING ORDINANCE REVIEW

As stated, an ordinance update is a separate process from a comprehensive plan revision. That said, because local planning officials are facing increasingly complicated decisions and are eager to get new planning tools, it was decided that Owen County should prepare for a possible ordinance update by reviewing the current rules during this initial comprehensive planning process.

K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, who is president of The Planning Workshop and certified by the American Planning Association, reviewed Owen County's existing planning ordinances.

Her complete review, which is planning guidance and not legal advice, can be found in the Appendix of this report. In summary, she concluded that the existing ordinances are so outdated that it would probably be easier to drop them and start over by creating a new Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

A UDO is a document in which traditional zoning and subdivision regulations are combined with other desired county regulations, such as design guidelines and water management regulations, in a single document.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Owen County's 246,514 acres of land is its most precious resource. Agriculture and low-density residential areas comprise the majority of Owen County's land use.

Figure 5.1 describes how land in Owen County is currently being used for farm cultivation, personal residence, or commercial business and provides an overview of the county's land portfolio.

PAST LAND USE MAPS

The Future Land Use Map in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan has served as a guide for land use decisions over the past decade. Overall, most of the county is designated as an agricultural use with pockets of commercial use along major road corridors.

The 2010 map also emphasizes a rural residential land use in the following areas:

- The west-central part of the county near Patricksburg and Vandalia.
- The area south of Spencer.
- The southern part of the county near Freedom and the county line.

Looking at Figure 5.2, Owen County's Existing Zoning Map, there is not a strong correlation to the 2010 Future Land Use Map. The Existing Zoning Map and the Zoning Ordinance establish five major zoning districts that define what uses are allowed on the land in Owen County today. The Zoning Map shows residentially-zoned parcels scattered throughout the county, without focused development areas.

FIGURE 5.1: 2010 FUTURE LAND USE MAP

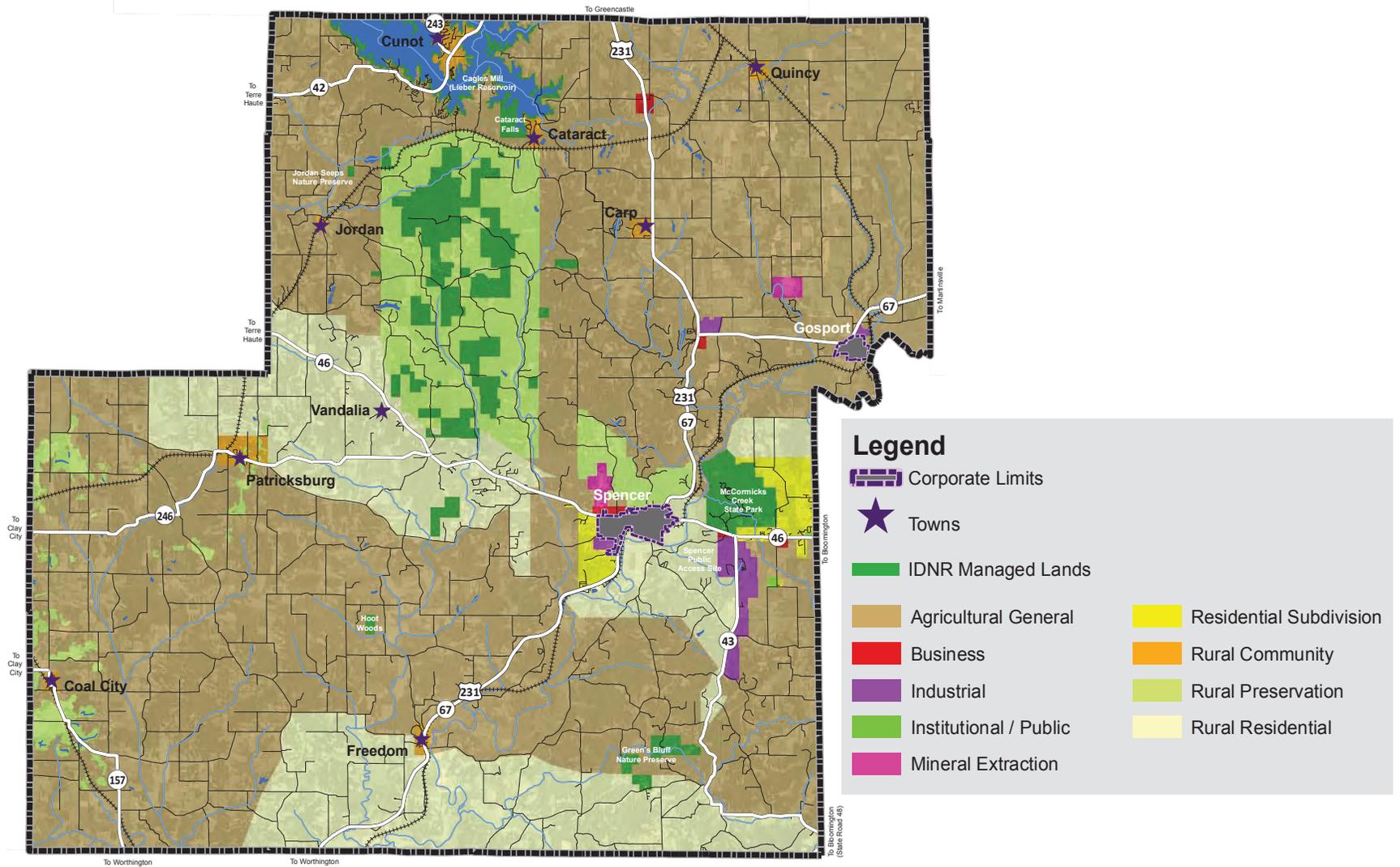
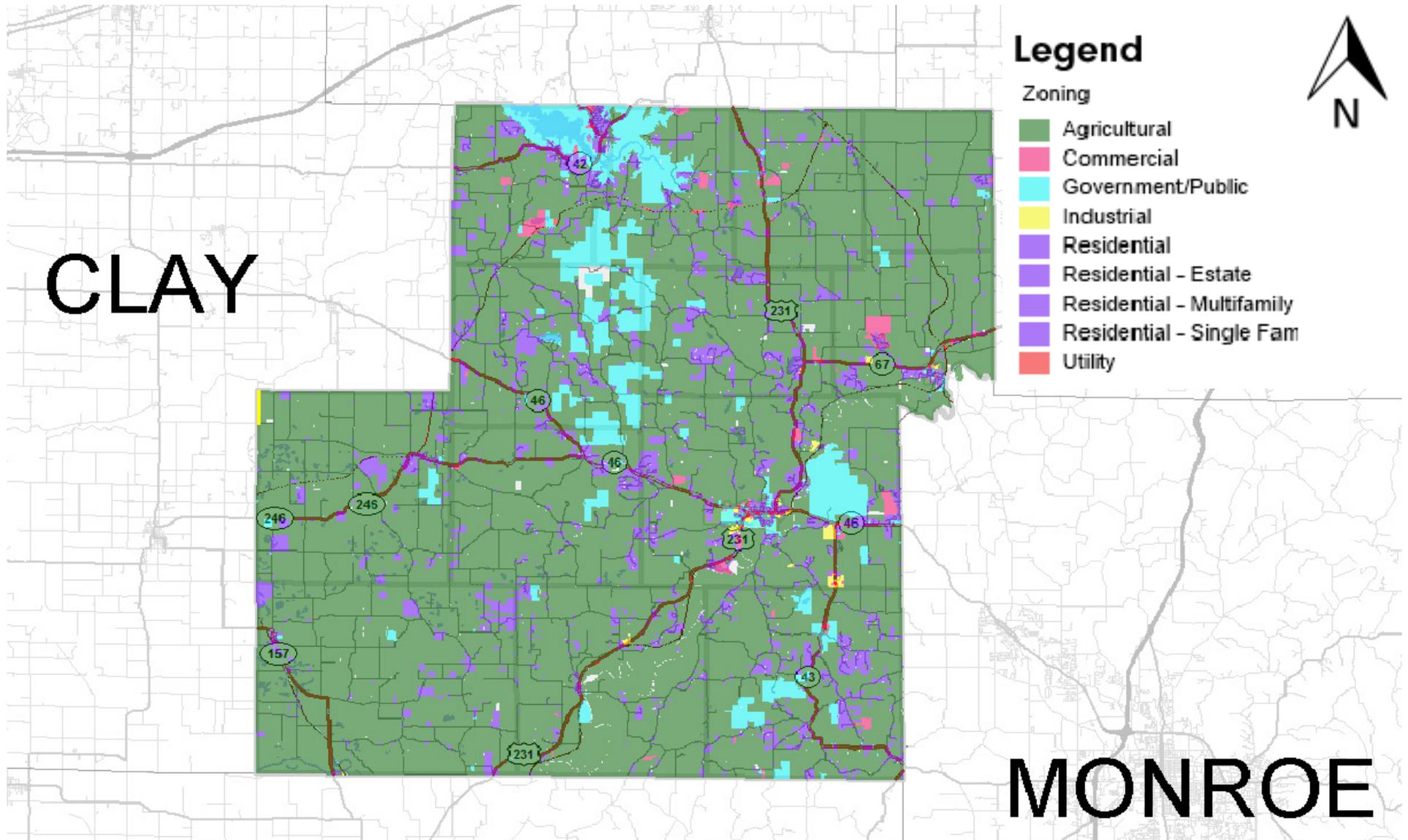


FIGURE 5.2: EXISTING ZONING MAP



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

“We need to maintain our agricultural land. It is a shrinking commodity.”

This opinion was reinforced through the public input survey, where over 87% of respondents agreed that agriculture is an important component to Owen County’s economy.

However, there was also strong support for promoting development in parts of the county, and improving infrastructure overall, according to the public survey that drew 500 responses. For example:

- 89% agreed or strongly agreed existing water, sewer and broadband utilities should be upgraded to maintain existing development.
- 82% agreed or strongly agreed new water, sewer, and broadband utilities should be extended to encourage new development.

There was particularly strong support for doing the work necessary to bring new housing to the county:

- 81% agreed or strongly agreed access to water and sewer is needed to support new housing.
- 78% agreed or strongly agreed new housing construction in Owen County is important to growing the population.
- 61% agreed or strongly agreed more buildable lots are needed in Owen County.

There was also strong support for local leaders to do more to protect property values:

- 83% agreed or strongly agreed Owen County needs to address abandoned properties.
- 76% agreed or strongly agreed access Owen County needs to address inadequate/failing septic systems.
- 65% agreed or strongly code enforcement is needed to maintain Owen County’s residential properties.

FUTURE LAND USE

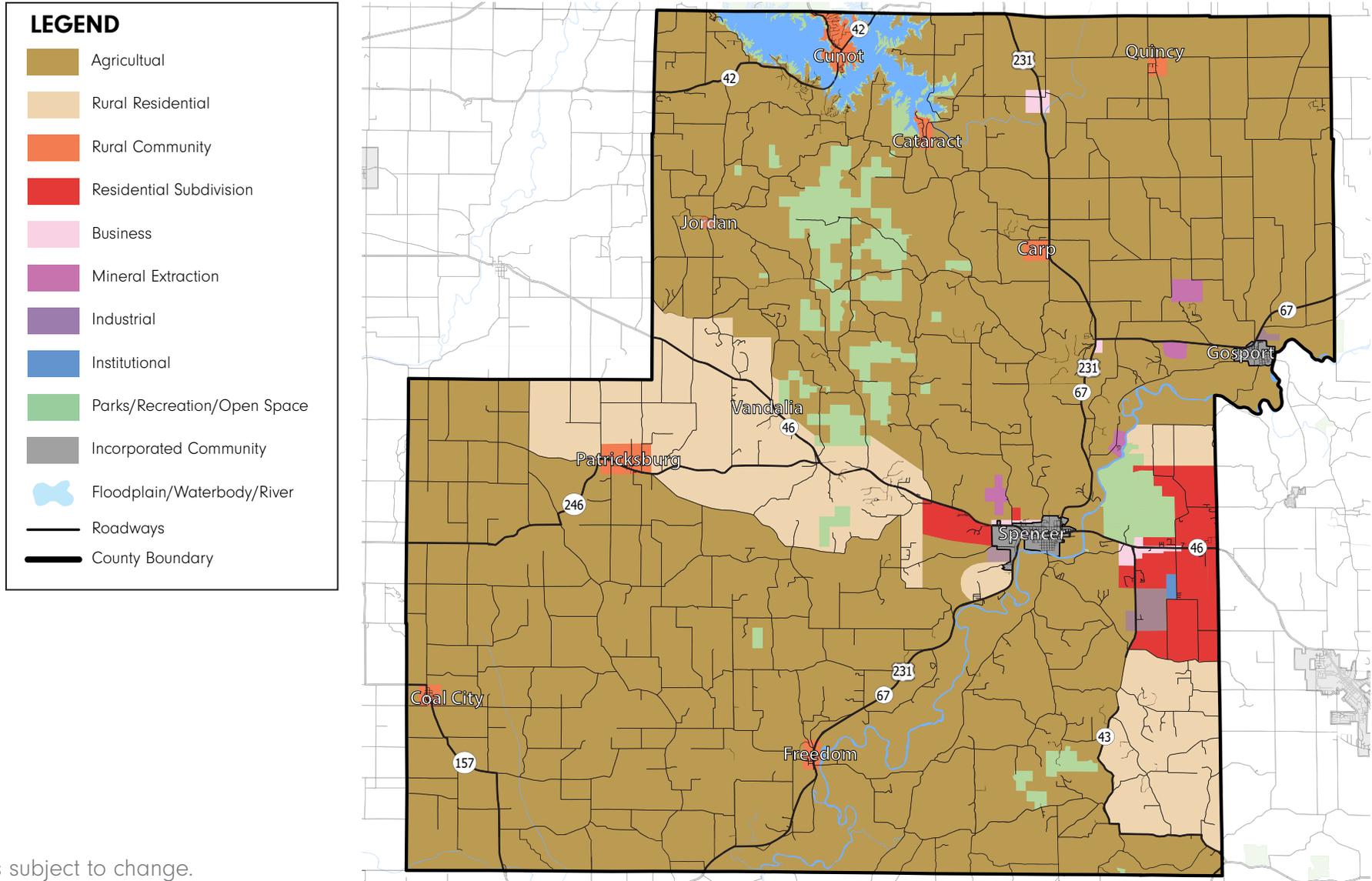
Future land use in Owen County is more about establishing predictable and compatible types of uses than planning for widespread growth. For instance, the county's population of 21,446 in 2021 was -0.6% smaller than in the 2010 Census. The county could lose up to 10% of its population by 2050, according to a 2018 study by the Indiana Business Research Center.

However, strategic planning for housing development sites may prevent or slow this trend. The Future Land Use Map developed for this plan aims to bring modest growth to strategic areas while respecting the agricultural heritage and rural identity of Owen County. For example, Owen County has the opportunity to invest along the State Road 46 Corridor, which is seeing residential and commercial growth due to close proximity to Ellettsville and Bloomington.



The Future Land Use Map for this comprehensive plan aims to respect Owen County's agricultural heritage while allowing for residential and commercial growth in the county.

FIGURE 5.3: FUTURE LAND USE MAP



Map is subject to change.

FUTURE LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

Owen County has developed ten distinct future land use classifications which are defined in the following table.

| Type | Land Use Category | Definition |
|--------------|-------------------|--|
| Agricultural | Agricultural | <p>The Agricultural classification is intended to preserve, protect, and support the unique, rural landscape of Owen County. Areas with this classification are suitable for agriculture, can be used for agricultural activities, and support family farms and the continuation of such.</p> <p>This classification does not restrict landowners from farming crops, raising livestock, or from timber production/harvesting activities. This classification supports larger lots, discourages subdivisions, and encourages existing agricultural land uses to continue. Areas that have this classification may also include floodplain areas around rivers or other bodies of waters, distinct topographical areas, or wooded areas. Connections to utilities, such as water and sewer, may not be feasible in this district.</p> |

| | | |
|-------------|-------------------------|---|
| Residential | Rural Residential | The Rural Residential classification designates appropriate locations for the development of low-density, single-family development that prioritizes the protection of the natural environment. Typically, these lands are served or have plans to be served by utilities. These areas are intended to be adjacent to the Agricultural classification, provide a transition between Residential and Agricultural lands. |
| | Rural Community | The Rural Community classification denotes the unincorporated communities within Owen County. These areas may have some resources and capacity for community development. Single and low-density multi-family is appropriate in these areas. |
| | Residential Subdivision | The Residential Subdivision classification provides appropriate locations for low density, single-family residential subdivisions and some low-density multi-family uses. These lands are served or have plans to be served by utilities. These areas are intended to provide a transition between Business/Commercial areas and Rural Residential lands. |

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Business/Industrial | Business/ Commercial | The Business/Commercial classification provides appropriate locations for small to medium-scaled business establishments. Commercial areas typically serve as a transitional use between lower intensity areas, such as residential, and higher intensity areas, such as business parks and/or light industrial uses. The purpose of this land use classification is to provide a full range of commercial retail, office, and service uses for residents, businesses, and visitors. This applies to commercial activities with direct contact with customers ranging from neighborhood convenience stores to regional specialty stores with longer business hours and moderate to high traffic generation. These areas are intended to accommodate both wholesale and retail sales and site design incorporating shared parking areas and shared points of access to adjacent roadways. |
| | Mineral Extraction | The Mineral Extraction classification designates areas in the county that have conditions appropriate for the excavation and recuperation of rock or other minerals from the earth. These areas are typically surrounded by Agricultural lands or Rural Preservation Lands. |
| | Industrial | The Industrial classification provides for a full range of traditional light or medium industrial uses including manufacturing, processing, distribution, and storage. |

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Institutional/Parks | Institutional | The Institutional land use classification sets aside land for buildings for government, institutional, or civic uses such as schools, churches, hospitals, and utility facilities. These areas should be located adjacent to developed areas for the convenience of residents, accessible by multiple forms of transportation, and highly visible from public rights-of-way. |
| | Parks/ Recreation/ Open Space | The Parks/Recreation/Open Space classification includes areas that provide recreation and leisure opportunities for residents and preserves open space and natural features. This classification also includes the state-owned lands that are controlled by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. As Owen County continues to grow, additional parks and open space areas should be incorporated into mixed use areas and residential areas. |

CRITICAL SUB AREAS

Critical sub areas (CSA) are lands requiring special attention or those that are likely to develop in the short-term. Plan commissioners and county commissioners can use the plans while making land use decisions, while members of the public can see the community's desired future.

The following CSAs are:

- **CSA1:** Owen Camp, State Road 43, and State Road 46
- **CSA2:** Texas Pike & MYPath

SPECIAL RESOURCE AREAS

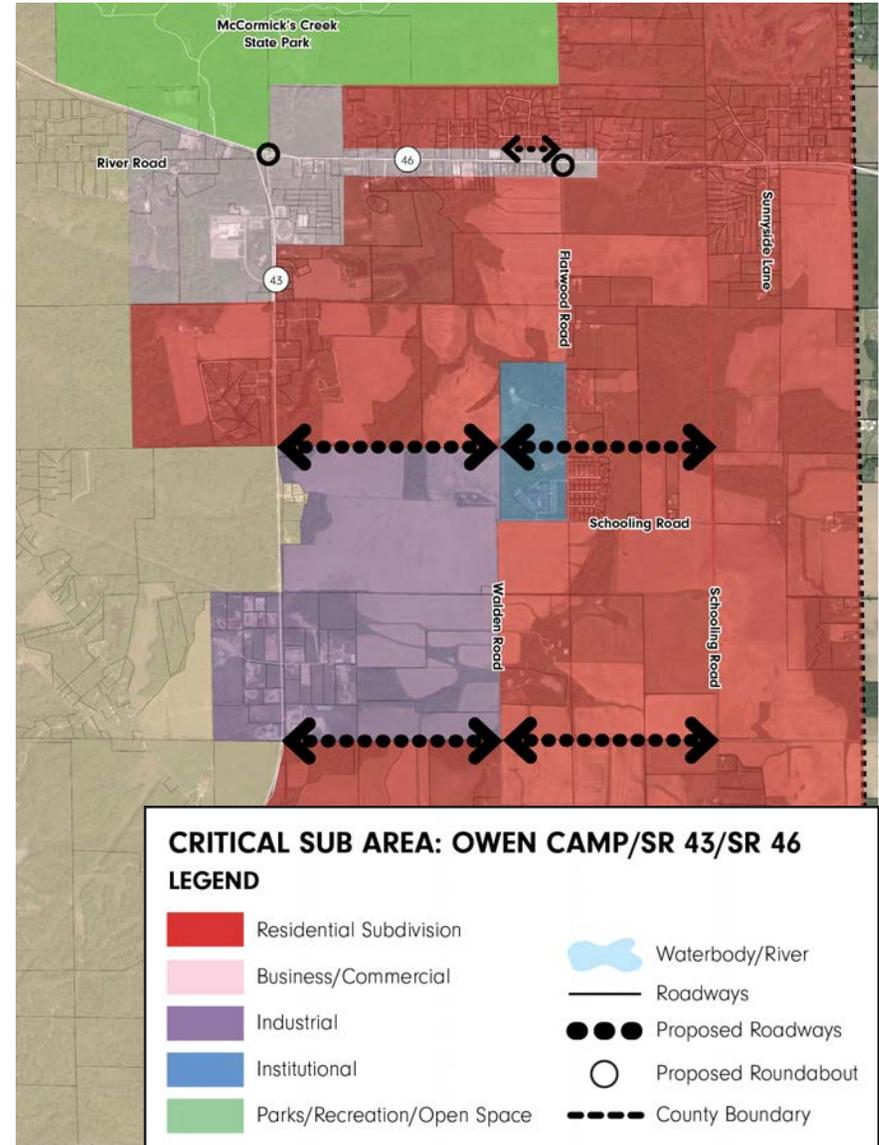
Special resource areas are regions determined by the county to be valuable because they preserve important features, which could include cultural amenities, wetlands and visual/scenic resources. As Owen County evolves and grows, plan commission members should be mindful of how these areas develop.

As shown in the maps on page 58, the SRAs are:

- **SRA1:** Cataract and Cunot
- **SRA2:** Freedom & US 231

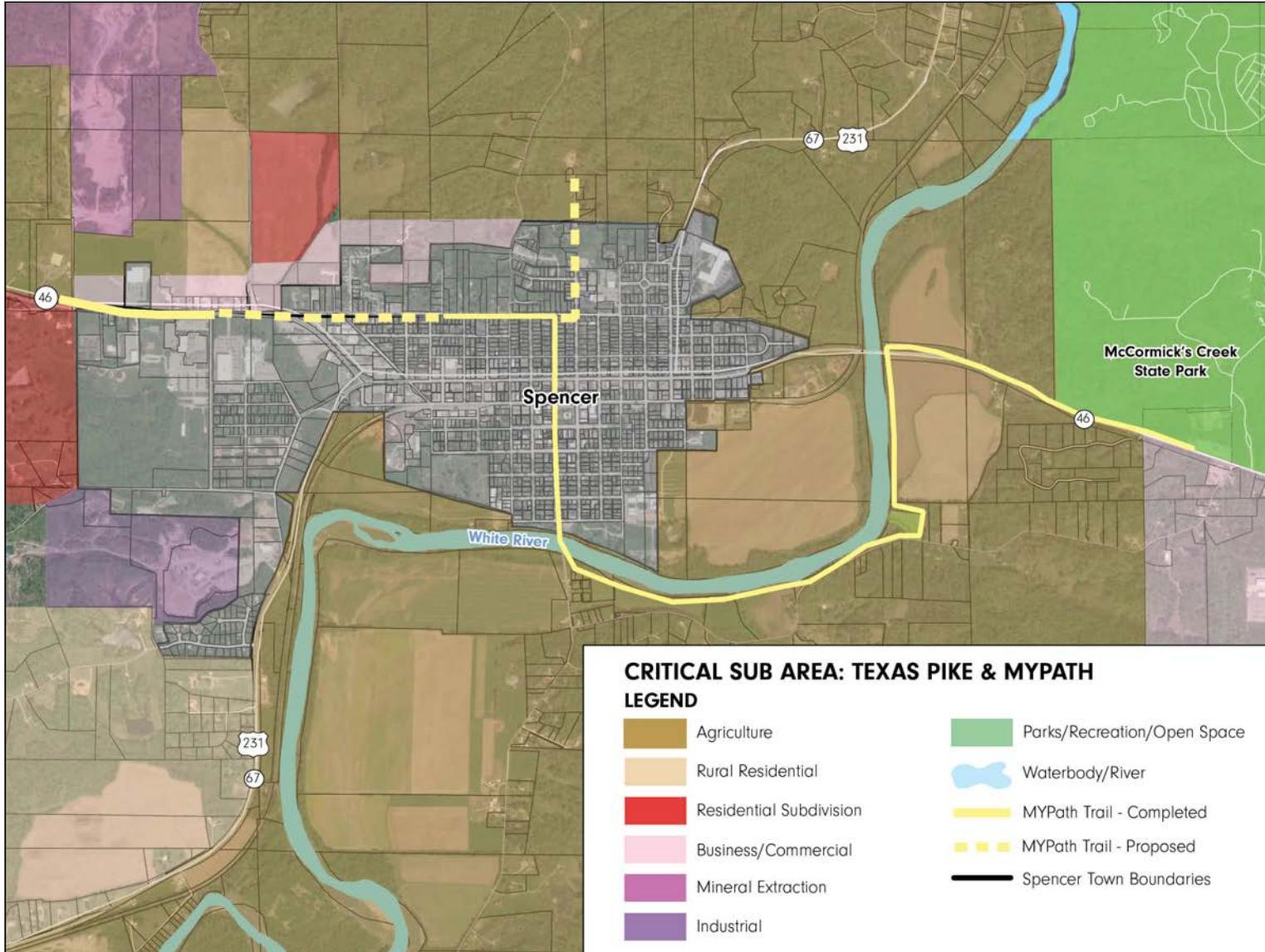
Although both these areas have attractive natural features, there are many challenges to their development, including

FIGURE 5.4: CSA1: OWEN CAMP/SR 43/SR 46



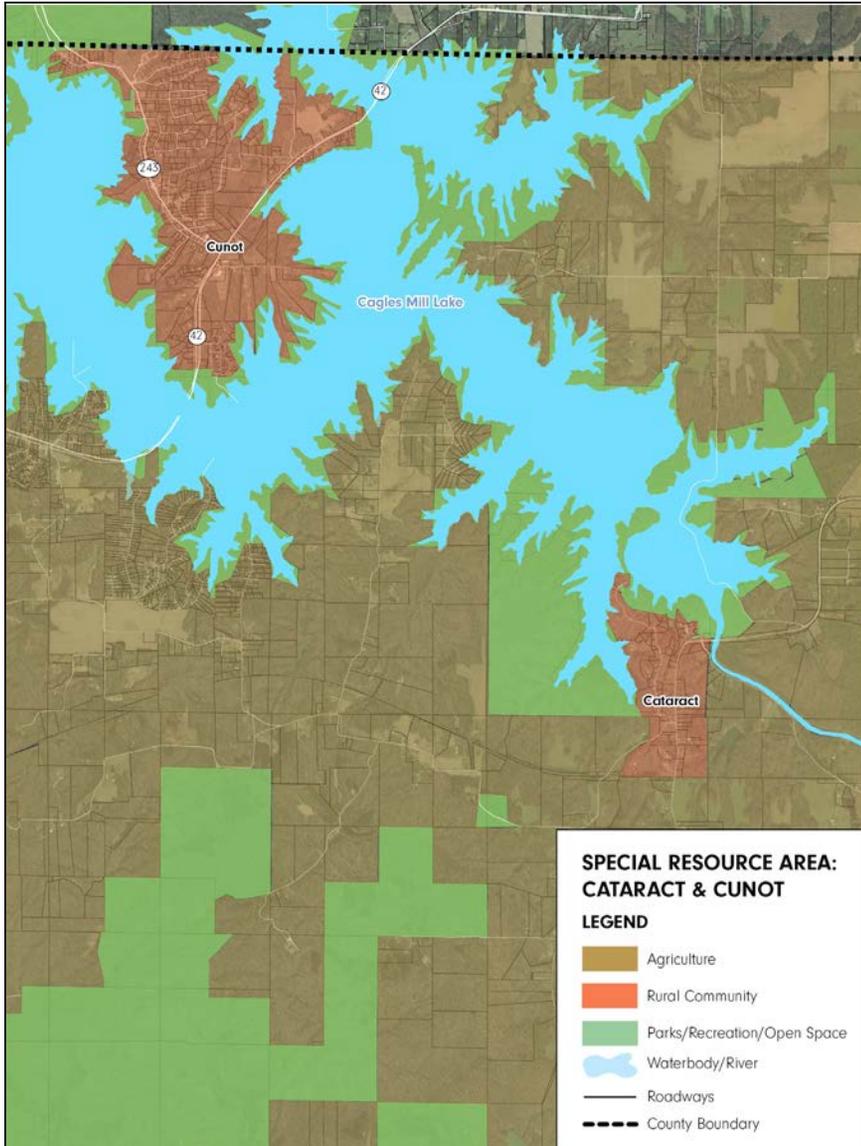
Map is subject to change.

FIGURE 5.5: CSA2: TEXAS PIKE & MYPATH



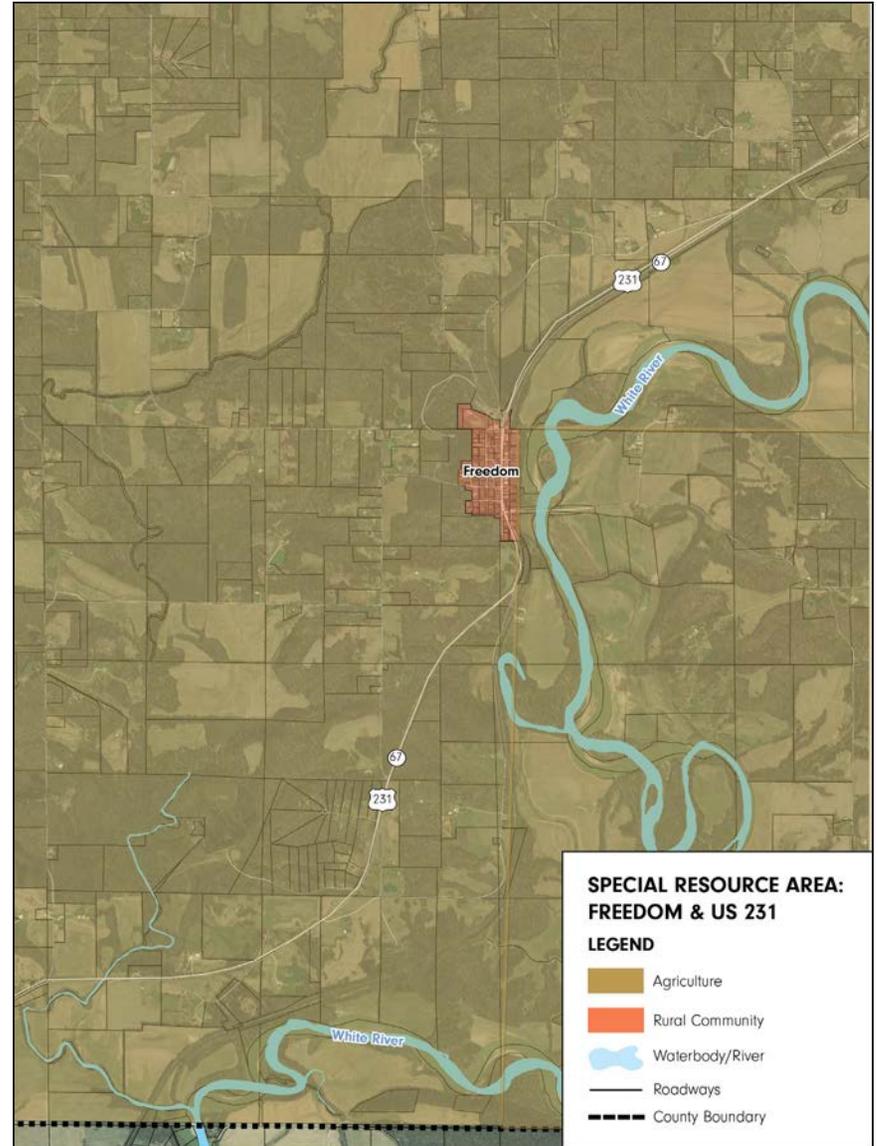
Map is subject to change.

FIGURE 5.6: SRA1: CATARACT & CUNOT



Map is subject to change.

FIGURE 5.7: SRA2: FREEDOM & US 231



Map is subject to change.

the lack of infrastructure such as sewer lines that would promote steady growth. Until residents support those improvements (and the tax increases that accompany them), there is unlikely to be much widespread growth in the areas.

ANNEXATION

Annexation is the process by which a city or town extends its boundaries into formerly unincorporated county lands. It is a primary means by which cities grow.

Cities annex territory to provide urbanizing areas with municipal services and to exercise regulatory authority. It also ensures that current and future residents and businesses outside a city's corporate limits who benefit from access to the city's facilities and services share the tax burden associated with those amenities.

Annexation can provide cities with a way to increase their revenue streams. However, annexations cost cities money when the infrastructure services they provide to the annexed area ends up costing more than the tax revenue the city takes in from the annexed area.

Cities or towns can expand their limits by voluntary or involuntary annexation. Voluntary annexation is generally requested by the developer at the time of subdividing to ensure city services are provided to their subdivision as it is built.

Involuntary annexation is annexation that is initiated by the local government and not the property owners, who may be opposed to the action and challenge it in court.

Annexation has become increasingly difficult in Indiana due to the legislature tightening state law, even if the annexation is voluntary. However, an Indiana Supreme Court decision in 2020 struck down a law passed by the state legislature that attempted to block Bloomington from annexing 10,000 acres. Suffice it to say annexation has become more complicated in Indiana and requires expert legal and financial advice.

Plans for a new subdivision along Texas Pike were underway during this planning process. Although the property is now on county land, it borders the town of Spencer and town officials have said they will annex it.

Because the Texas Pike land is currently undeveloped, both Spencer and the county will see their tax revenues go up.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

LAND USE VISION

We choose to live in Owen County because of its rural character, but we recognize it will take community effort to manage those things we value for the future.

Development pressures are finally reaching parts of the community and it's time for us to decide how we want to manage growth in some areas while protecting others from development.

This might mean signaling developers that we expect high quality, aesthetically appealing homes and subdivisions, while discouraging mixed uses in prime agricultural land.

We are committed to experimenting with regulations to achieve our vision, because it's easier to change rules later than it is to un-construct a new set of undesirable and misplaced buildings.

GOAL 1: Current Ordinance Replacement.

A detailed ordinance review conducted during this planning process (included in the appendix) concluded that a complete overhaul of current code is needed. The sheer number of edits and reorganization needed to update the current ordinances are considerable, so it would be less expensive to start over by preparing a new ordinance.

It also recommended that zoning and subdivision ordinances be combined into a single unified development ordinance (UDO). UDOS are recommended because they are more user-friendly and easier to keep updated than separate zoning and subdivision ordinances.

GOAL 2: Preserve and protect agricultural lands.

With agriculture being part of our heritage and identity, we should treat agriculture as a permanent land use that Owen County preserves and protects – not just as a placeholder for future land uses.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 3: Grow quality housing opportunities in Owen County.

Just as we grow quality crops in Owen County, we need to grow quality housing for our current and future residents. Owen County should provide more housing options for all types of households. These housing options should include all phases of housing and homeownership, from starter homes and apartments to homes for families and retirees. These housing options should be of quality construction and be mindful of public infrastructure.

GOAL 4: Protect the County and property owners from undesirable nonconforming uses.

To help protect and preserve all the things that make Sweet Owen County a desirable place to live, updates to the County's Zoning and Subdivision ordinance should be made. These updates will help Owen County minimize the impacts of undesirable uses and help keep all the best things about Owen County intact.

GOAL 5: Preserve rural character and the County's natural resources.

Owen County is unique in that it has a rural landscape along with forested areas that help make up some of Indiana's best natural areas. The State has invested heavily in Owen County to preserve some of these unique landscape features, such as the Cataract Falls area and McCormick's Creek. Owen County should provide resources and incentives to property owners who help preserve and enhance this rural character and the County's natural resources.

IMPLEMENTATION

LAND USE

| Goal 1: Current Ordinance Replacement. | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Re-do and update the existing zoning and subdivision ordinances and combine them into an easier-to-use unified development ordinance. | Plan Commission, certified consultant |
| Goal 2: Preserve and protect agricultural lands. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Adopt multiple Agricultural Zoning Districts (refer to the State of Indiana’s Model Ordinance). | Plan Commission |
| Prohibit subdivisions from developing in Agricultural Zoning Districts. | Plan Commission |
| Limit the use of Administrative Subdivisions so they do not cumulatively result in a subdivision. | Plan Commission/Planning Staff |

IMPLEMENTATION

| Goal 3: Grow quality housing opportunities in Owen County. | |
|---|-------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Revise current residential zoning districts to allow smaller lots and higher density when community systems, such as water and sewer, are available versus well and septic. | Plan Commission |
| Allow duplexes or two-family residential homes in the Single-family Residential District, like almost all Indiana communities do. | Plan Commission |
| Introduce “Missing Middle Housing” in the zoning code with a separate low-density, small-scale multi-family district for triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses, etc. | Plan Commission |
| Permit accessory apartments in all single-family dwellings and as mixed-use with commercial if minimal ordinance standards are met. | Plan Commission |
| Introduce conservation subdivisions, which allow homes to be built on smaller lots to preserve common open space. | Plan Commission |
| Re-evaluate if mobile homes should be permitted on individual lots, and under what conditions. | Plan Commission |
| Develop standards for new Mobile Home Parks that, at a minimum, meet State of Indiana Standards. | Plan Commission |
| Ensure that before individual mobile homes are placed on single lots, they first receive all required permits and certificates from the County, ensuring compliance with health and safety issues, including adequate septic systems and foundations. | Plan Commission |
| Develop standards for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU’s) which are additional living quarters on single-family lots that are independent of the primary dwelling unit. | Plan Commission |
| Strengthen flood regulations beyond what is in the State’s Model Flood Ordinance (for example, require subdivision roads be above 100-year flood level). | Plan Commission |

IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 4: Protect the county and property owners from undesirable nonconforming uses.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|-------------------|
| Complete a full update of the County's Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance. Consider combining these documents into one cohesive document called a Unified Development Ordinance. | Plan Commission |
| Require rezoning to occur to more intensive districts (such as Heavy Industrial or Intensive Agricultural) for some high-impact uses. | Plan Commission |
| Stop allowing intensive land uses to occur by right. Require a public hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals so they can evaluate if the site is appropriate and have the opportunity to impose needed conditions, such as additional setbacks, screens, reclamation plans, financial guarantees, etc. | Plan Commission |
| Develop detailed minimum requirements in the ordinance for each of Owen County's NIMBY/LULU uses (setbacks, screening, hours, etc.). | Plan Commission |
| Tighten code enforcement to ensure compliance of zoning ordinances. | Plan Commission |
| Revise nonconforming standards to discourage nonconforming uses from lingering by clearly identifying when compliance with new zoning standards is required (X% expansion, addition of parking lot, etc.). | Plan Commission |
| Require the Plan Commission do a Development (Site) Plan approval, as allowed by state law. | Plan Commission |
| On petitions that require a public hearing, require a pre-hearing meeting for surrounding property owners. | Plan Commission |

IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 5: Preserve rural character and the County’s natural resources.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|-------------------|
| Add a voluntary Conservation Zoning District that prohibits development. | Plan Commission |
| Provide a credit to developers for preserving existing woodlands. | Plan Commission |
| Prohibit subdivisions from developing in agricultural areas. | Plan Commission |
| Reward historic preservation and matching infill development by reducing other ordinance requirements (such as the amount of required parking). | Plan Commission |
| Make it more difficult to receive a variance or waiver from County standards by adding stricter criteria, as allowed by State law. | Plan Commission |
| Encourage new development around already developed areas when water and sewer are available and other infrastructure improvements can be cumulative and coordinated. | Plan Commission |
| Adopt Overlay Zoning Districts in unique areas to include special standards, such as landscaping along key road corridors. | Plan Commission |



CHAPTER 06

GOVERNMENT & FISCAL CAPACITY

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Trust in government is crucial in protecting lives and livelihoods, and distrust can be expensive because government officials then must invest resources to obtain cooperation. With this in mind, we will build and maintain the drivers of public governance: reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity and fairness.

INTRODUCTION

Owen County's elected officials consist of a three-member board of commissioners, seven-member county council, assessor, auditor, clerk, coroner, judges, prosecutor, recorder, sheriff, surveyor and treasurer.

The elected officials manage a variety of departments, including Building, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Health, Highway, Maintenance, Security Center, and Sheriff. Most offices are housed in the county courthouse at 60 S. Main Street in Spencer.

The county employs approximately 150 full-time staff and dozens of part-time workers throughout the year. The 2022 combined budgets were \$16.4 million.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The last several years have been turbulent for Owen County government.

- In 2021, the county learned it was nearly \$2 million in debt. Accounting irregularities were discovered which changed Owen County government's financial position for the worse. With less resources available than thought, expenses exceeding revenue, and depleted reserves, actions were taken to rebuild budgets with both cuts to expenses and increases in revenue.
- To rebuild the budget, a 20% cut was ordered for most county departments.
- In 2021, an income tax increase went into effect, raising the rate from 1.6% to 2.5%. The money will fund jail repairs and plans to build a new facility to house prisoners.
- As of June 2022, significant financial improvements have been realized with now-positive operating balances, growing reserves, and additional resources to address continued pressures on government services.
- In May 2022, a judge ruled that an Owen County commissioner will have to face corruption charges filed against him, including official misconduct, conflict of interest and misdemeanor theft. The commissioner later pleaded guilty to some charges and resigned from his position.

These circumstances have created distrust in local government, as shown in the public survey. Additionally, the county has limited fiscal capacity and must be creative in funding capital improvement projects. Because of the low assessed value of property and structures, there are limited opportunities to obtain general obligation bonds. The county does, however, use tax increment financing (TIF) funds and tax abatements as tools, when appropriate.

Growing revenue is dependent on expanding the county's tax base. This can be accomplished by attracting new development or encouraging redevelopment of existing land. For example, new subdivisions being planned would result in several hundred new homes.

However, it is important that the county maintain a balance of land uses. Property taxes for single-family residential development are capped at 1% of the assessed value, thus residential development may consume more services than it pays for with tax revenue.

Commercial and industrial development is taxed at 3% of assessed value and is usually tax positive, in that the taxes these companies pay more than covers the services they receive. It is important for the community and local leaders to understand the fiscal impacts of new development to make informed decisions regarding growth and infrastructure improvements.



Developing vacant land would help expand the county's tax base.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

An online public survey that drew 500 responses was conducted as part of this planning process.

The following table shows the most common citizen responses to government and fiscal capacity issues:

- The condition of county roads was perhaps the most cited problem in written comments: 86% disagreed or strongly disagreed county roads are generally in good condition. One person wrote, "The conditions of our roads have become a danger rather than just an inconvenience." Another simply wrote, "Where to even start ..."
- Only 27% agreed or strongly agreed that county government works closely with communities like Spencer and Gosport.
- Only 30% agreed or strongly agreed that the Owen County website is effective and communicates important information.

- Only 33% agreed or strongly agreed that Owen County officials effectively communicate information to the public.
- Only 42% agreed or strongly agreed that Owen County welcomes citizen engagement and participation.

In the comments section, the most blistering notes were about the condition of local roads and the county's financial problems. The issue of code enforcement was a common topic at Comprehensive Planning Committee and stakeholder meetings. Many see the lack of code enforcement as a pressing issue that serves as a deterrent to new housing, families, and businesses moving to the county.

EMS and the sheriff's department got generally positive comments, though many said they were underfunded.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOVERNMENT VISION

Building and maintaining the public’s trust is the cornerstone of democracy and good government. With this in mind, Owen County will build and maintain the drivers of public governance: reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity and fairness.

GOAL 1: Build and maintain trust and communication with the public.

Trust in local government depends as much on the perceptions of citizens as the capabilities of government. That is, governments must increase perceptions of its trustworthiness as well as the organizational capabilities to actually deliver services, products, and experiences worthy of trust. Communication is especially important because local elected officials have the unenviable job of addressing pressing problems with insufficient resources.

Under such pressure, it’s common for many elected officials, especially those who receive little or no training for their low-paying jobs, to simply shut down communication. When that happens, it opens the door to rampant growth in misinformation and disinformation on social media by an angry public. This circle can continue to spin and grow until making changes or even simple governing become very difficult.

Countering this cycle requires focusing on four key points for communication, according to the national consulting firm Deloitte:

- **Humanity** addresses the perception that the government genuinely cares for its constituents’ experience and well-being by demonstrating empathy, kindness and fairness.
- **Transparency** indicates that the government openly shares information, motives, and choices related to policy, budget, and program decisions in straightforward language.
- **Capability** reflects the belief that the government can create high-quality programs and services and has the ability to meet expectations effectively.
- **Reliability** shows that the government can consistently and dependably deliver high-quality programs, services, and experiences to constituents across platforms and geographies.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 2: As demand for services and budget allows, consider hiring professional staff for key positions.

Owen County government is in a tough spot. On one hand, it has not recovered fully from budget problems and the population is not growing. Yet, it's facing many of the challenges and tough decisions about expanding infrastructure and balancing growth that face bigger communities.

A short-term fix would be helping elected and appointed leaders obtain more training. For example, every four years Accelerate Indiana Municipalities (AIM) in Indianapolis conducts Newly Elected Officials Training to provide basic information and tools for officials. This training can benefit both newcomers and veterans. Some assistance was also provided during this planning process, as the Planning Workshop conducted background and skills sessions with the plan commission.

Eventually, though, the county should consider adding professional staff. Done right, the up-front costs of new salaries will be offset by more efficient government. One position hire for might be a trained planner, which could oversee many issues including housing, enforcement, and the creation of new zoning regulations.

Eventually, the county might want to explore a county administrator or county manager position. Working for the county commissioners, the county administrator/manager is typically responsible for most of the day-to-day administrative operations of the county.

GOAL 3: Begin community discussions on the importance of code enforcement.

The public survey and meetings conducted during this process all featured complaints about the terrible condition of some homes and properties. Code enforcement is used to enhance property values through effective enforcement of property standards, while working to keep aging buildings, homes, and properties from deteriorating and becoming "eyesores" to the community.

Other than what is budgeted for the Building/Planning Department, Owen County doesn't have resources specifically identified for code enforcement. Generally, enforcement issues are handled by the plan commission administrator, building inspector, and county attorney.

The first step in beefing up code enforcement is to ensure the political will exists to pursue it. This can be done when the county updates its regulations immediately after completing this comprehensive plan. Eventually, the county could create a position for code enforcement officer.

IMPLEMENTATION

GOVERNMENT AND FISCAL CAPACITY

| Goal 1: Build and maintain trust and communication with the public. | |
|--|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Improve county website, requiring more frequent department updates. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Create a customer interface on website, where taxpayers/residents can make inquiries, send information, report issues, etc. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| To compensate for decline in local newspaper coverage, promote county YouTube channel where public meetings are broadcast live and recorded for future viewing. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Acknowledge low civic engagement and directly tackle the hurdles stopping people from participating. For example, increase education efforts to connect students to local government. Host field trips to government centers and meetings with elected officials. Increase number of internships for students. | County Commission, County Council, department heads, school corporation |
| Have one department representative every week at the farmers market with rotating departments each week. Department representatives will discuss with residents' issues they face. | County Commission, County Council, department heads, school corporation |
| Create a Citizens' Academy. These academies teach residents about how local governments works and how they can get involved. A former program run by the now closed Owen County Learning Network had some success. | County Commission, County Council, OCCC/OCEDC |

IMPLEMENTATION

| Goal 2: As demand for services and budget allows, consider hiring professional staff for key positions. | |
|---|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Sign up for training provided by Accelerate Indiana Municipalities (AIM). | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Engage all elected officials and department heads in creating new zoning map and ordinances. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Goal 3: Begin community discussions on the importance of code enforcement. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Local leaders must have an open discussion about where code enforcement fits into their priorities. For example, more funding will be required to enforce priority issues. It is certainly on the mind of some residents, so the public should be included. This conversation should take place during the zoning map and ordinance update. | County Commission, County Council, Plan Commission |



CHAPTER 07

PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

As a rural community with limited resources and a sparse population, developing and maintaining public facilities and services throughout Owen County will continue to be a challenge for county leaders. Owen County must strategically invest in facilities and services to ensure a stable and quality level of service is provided to residents and business owners.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

The previous plan noted the importance of ensuring rural areas are served by reliable water service and that existing septic systems are functioning properly.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

From fire and police protection to the utilities needed for daily living, Owen County residents rely on county, township, and town governments for a wide variety of services. Due to the county's limited financial resources, county governments rely on a combination of paid staff and volunteers to provide governmental services to residents.

As noted by survey respondents, government buildings in Owen County are generally in good condition. The current collection of public utilities and services have generally served county residents and businesses well in recent years. Listed later in this chapter are the various public and semi-public utilities and safety services serving Owen County's population.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

OWEN COUNTY SECURITY CENTER

The Owen County Security Center (OCSC) is located at 291 Vandalia Avenue in Spencer and was constructed in 1987. This structure houses the Owen County Sheriff's Department and employs 31 total employees, including nine deputies, nine jailers, and one courthouse security officer. There is also an administrative staff of eleven people. In addition to these regular, full-time personnel there are also fifteen reserve deputies. The department patrols approximately 712 lane miles of county roads and highways, along with its other duties investigating traffic accidents, crimes, and serving warrants.

In addition to the Sheriff's Department, the OCSC is home to a 66-bed detention facility. This facility is a medium-security detention center for adult inmates.

FIRE DEPARTMENTS

There are several volunteer fire departments in Owen County. These departments include the following:

- Cataract Volunteer Fire Department (Cataract)
- Coal City Community Fire Department (Coal City)
- Gosport Volunteer Fire Department (Gosport)

- Patricksburg Volunteer Fire Department (Patrickburg)
- Clay Township, Owen County Fire Department (Spencer)
- Franklin Township Volunteer Fire Department (Freedom)
- Owen Valley Volunteer Firefighters, Inc. (Spencer)

WATER AND SEWER

BEAN BLOSSOM-PATRICKSBURG WATER

Bean Blossom-Patrickburg Water serves approximately 4,000 customers from three wells that are located along the White River south of Spencer. These three wells, along with a new treatment plant, were installed in 2008. The utility's service area includes Owen County, eastern Clay County, and western Monroe County. In Owen County, the utility serves the communities of Spencer and Patrickburg.

The utility also has two backup wells west of Spencer. The treatment capacity of the plant is approximately 2.0 million gallons per day (MGD), though typical usage is only 1.25 MGD. Storage in the Bean Blossom-Patrickburg system is provided by eight storage tanks with a total storage capacity of 3.0 million gallons. Due to this storage and the three booster stations in the system, the utility says they have adequate pressure in the system.

EASTERN HEIGHTS UTILITIES

Although Eastern Heights Utilities operates mostly in Greene County, it does provide service in some southern sections of Owen County. These areas include Freedom, Whitehall, and near Arney. There are approximately 90 customers in Freedom and there is a 150,000 gallon tank in the town. Whitehall has approximately 50 customers and the nearest storage tank is at the Owen County / Greene County line. Service extends south of Arney, but not fully into town because of low pressure. An elevated storage tank or booster station would be needed to serve the town. Approximately 33 customers are served in the area south of Arney. Eastern Heights has three different wellfields in Greene County and has a treatment capacity of 2.0 MGD with average daily usage at approximately 1.4 MGD. There are currently no plans to extend any main lines in Owen County in the near future.

GOSPORT WATER

The Town of Gosport serves approximately 390 customers with drinking water. Because the system dates as far back as the 1920s, the Town has made improvements periodically over the years to bring this infrastructure up-to-date. The system currently consists of three wells, treatment by gravity filters, a 150,000 gallon elevated tank, and a distribution system of mostly cast iron pipe. Usage averages about 62,000 gallons of water per day. The capacity of the treatment plant is more than double what the average usage is.

REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL SEWER

There are few entities providing sewer services to Owen County. The South Central Regional Sewer District, formerly the Monroe County Regional Sewer District, was established in 1973. The District is dedicated to providing wastewater collection and treatment services. Although the District does not currently provide collection and sewage treatment for Owen County, Owen County is now within their service area and opportunity for sewer service extensions may be possible in the future. The Town of Spencer has a municipal Sewer Department that serves properties located within Spencer.

SEPTIC

The majority of Owen County does not have access to sanitary sewer services and relies on septic for sanitary waste. This means many of the private homeowners in Owen County are in full control of their sanitary wastewater systems. Septic permits are issued by the Owen County Health Department.

BROADBAND

Access to broadband will prove vital to retaining and attracting jobs and talent in Owen County, according to the 2022 Owen County Broadband Assessment. For example, the report stresses the importance of increasing broadband capacity to support the county's largest job sector - manufacturing - which is rapidly digitizing.

Additionally, amidst remote work, hybrid educational models and online programs, broadband access to households is vital to supporting educational attainment in the county.

Fortunately, Owen County is developing an innovative plan to streamline broadband access for all citizens by 2023. Owen County received a \$4.5 million grant through the state's Next Level Connection grants in early 2021 to continue broadband build-outs. Every Owen County citizen will have access to high-speed internet due to the collaborative effort of local broadband providers. The county received its Broadband Ready Community designation from the State in 2020.

For now, existing service in the county appears inadequate in the center and center-south regions, with additional underserved areas scattered throughout, according to the report.

However, state and federal programs will fund new broadband buildout for a large portion of these unserved and underserved areas. These projects are scheduled to take place on various timelines over the next several years.



In 2021, Owen County received a \$4.5 million grant from Indiana's Next Level Connections program to support broadband build-out.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Throughout this planning process, there was general agreement among residents and stakeholders that there could be improved, and more transparent, communication efforts between local government agencies and residents. In fact, according to public survey results, 54% of respondents “disagreed or strongly disagreed” (and 11% were “uncertain”) that Owen County officials effectively communicate information to the general public. In addition, only 30% felt the Owen County website was effective at communicating important information.



Firefighting training with the Owen Valley Fire Department.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES VISION

Providing adequate government services and schools are crucial to the long-term viability of Owen County. The following Public Facilities and Services goals identify how Owen County government agencies can maintain and strengthen the services and utilities that county residents and businesses rely upon. These goals outline specific strategies that can be taken to improve government services for current and future development in Owen County.

GOAL 1: Improve communication between government agencies and the public.

In rural communities across the country, local media/news outlets are dwindling, and Owen County residents are faced with the same challenge. The Spencer Evening World publishes a weekly newspaper and the Owen Gazette Facebook page provides an online resource for local events and news with highlights of national news. With limited news outlets, residents must rely on county officials and departments to communicate information in a timely manner. To ensure Owen County residents are well-informed and can participate in local government processes, county leaders should set expectations for the level of communications they are able to provide, and then consider adding communication staff responsible for executing that plan.

GOAL 2: Review emergency services as needed in response to development.

Currently, a small number of first responders are tasked with covering Owen County's large footprint and serving residents that reside in all corners of the county. The county will need to reassess emergency services to ensure that new development can be quickly serviced by first responders. Now is the time to develop plans for future emergency services.

GOAL 3: Continue efforts to expand sanitary sewer throughout Owen County.

County officials should continue to educate the public about the negative effects of failing or inadequate septic systems in residential areas. The county should aggressively work to provide sanitary sewer systems to areas without adequate septic systems, and work to improve enforcement of development standards for new septic systems.

IMPLEMENTATION

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

| Goal 1: Improve communication between government agencies and the public. | |
|---|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Review County departments and rules of procedures for boards and commissions to ensure public notifications are handled consistently and according to Indiana Code. | County Commissioners |
| Consider developing and implementing a Public Participation Plan that describes strategies and techniques to inform and engage the public in county-wide issues with the purpose of maximizing participation and effectiveness. | County Commissioners |
| Consider establishing a Public Relations Department to spearhead responsibilities of communicating with the public, media, and/or coordinating with other agencies. | County Commissioners |
| Goal 2: Review emergency services as needed in response to development. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Ensure the Unified Development Ordinance update includes emergency services in the review process for new developments. | Plan Commission |
| Update or develop a capital improvements plan for the expansion of emergency services facilities based on the Future Land Use Map. | Department Heads, Plan Commission, County Commissioners, County Council |
| Goal 3: Continue efforts to expand sanitary sewer through Owen County. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Develop a relationship with the South Central Regional Sewer District and support plans to expand capacity through Owen County. | County Commissioners |
| Ensure the Unified Development Ordinance update addresses minimum standards for lots with septic. | Plan Commission |



CHAPTER 08

PLACEMAKING

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Placemaking unlocks the potential of spaces and creates a more inviting area for all residents. Our goal of making Owen County an even more desirable place to live comes with challenges that are solvable, but not simple. Fortunately, investing in placemaking helps bring people in the community together.

INTRODUCTION

Placemaking is a means to an end: creating quality places. What are quality places? They could be a building, location, or space that people want to be in.

Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design, and management of those public spaces. Done correctly, it allows people to make improvements, big and small, in their communities, according to the Project for Public Spaces (<https://www.pps.org/>).

When a space becomes more than the sum of its parts, it becomes a place. For example, a park with a fountain, a playground, and a spot for parents to sit in the shade is likely to attract people who will stay for more than a few minutes. If a nearby library features an outdoor storytelling area for kids and exhibits on local history, people would likely return.

Placemaking principles are mostly applied and easier done in cities, but rural townships are vital to a region's identity.

One way to think about rural placemaking is regionally, according to a University of Michigan study. Just the presence of rural areas with distinct identities surrounding more densely populated areas adds appeal and can attract people and economic development. Think about the 640,000 people annually who come from all over to visit McCormick's Creek State Park.

A useful strategy for rural governments is to identify, protect, enhance, and promote that identity in a regional context. Another strategy is to identify unique, publicly accessible places that draw visitors and residents for notable experiences. Cataract Falls, for example, almost certainly has the potential to attract more visitors.

Finally, many placemaking efforts focus on urban areas, but creating connectivity between those locations can be a valuable rural placemaking strategy. For instance, leaders in Lower Michigan recognized the beauty and uniqueness of County Road 48, which connects several communities. They branded the route "The Breezeway," added signage and actively promote events along the path. These strategies enhance the sense that this rural area is a place worth visiting.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Overall health and well-being can improve community identity and sense of place. Community wellness is a public health approach based on the assumption that the community itself contains many solutions to its own health needs and already has techniques to encourage resilience and wellness.

The services Owen County offers are limited, however, so most residents travel to Bloomington, Terre Haute, or elsewhere for healthcare. The county is underserved for primary care physicians, with a resident/physician ratio of 10,420:1, according to the Area Health Resource File at www.Countyhealthrankings.org. The Indiana average is 1,510:1. Besides private practices, the county has Southern Indiana Physicians Family & Internal Medicine clinic and IU Health Rehabilitation & Sports Medicine Center, both in Spencer.

The 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment from IU Health Bloomington, which covers Owen County, identified the following needs as the most significant for the community:

- Elderly needs and an aging population
- Housing shortages and affordability
- Mental health and access to affordable mental healthcare
- Education about and navigation of available community resources

- Substance abuse
- Social connectivity
- Support for caregivers

Like most of the healthcare world, the Owen County Health Department focused the last few years on COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. They also offer services such as a youth vaccine clinic and mobile mammograms.

About 11% of county residents do not have health insurance, which mirrors the country, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Health Insurance Estimates program.

In connection to wellness and quality of life, the lack of healthcare options may be a contributing factor to the 32% of county adults who are obese. To get people moving outside, Owen County offers the MYPATH Trail System, a planned network of safe sidewalks and multi-use trails in and around Spencer.

CULTURE

As part of another study, the *2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan*, residents inventoried quality of place assets in Owen County. Among these are many treasures, as shown below.

Please note that this list is mostly for events and features, and that county leaders say their real strength lies in organizations such as their churches, the YMCA, Owen County Chamber & EDC, Owen County Community Foundation, and others.

Quality of place assets and events include:

- Arts in the Park
- Apple Butter Festival
- Cagles Mill Lake
- Cataract Falls State Recreation Area
- Cataract Lake Cabins
- Coal City Festival
- County Fair
- Farm-to-Table Dinner
- Gosport Lazy Days
- Green's Bluff Nature Preserve
- Historic Spencer Courthouse Square
- Lieber State Recreation Area

- McCormick's Creek State Park
- MYPATH Trail System
- Owen County Art Guild
- Owen County Heritage and Culture Center
- Patriot Festival
- Spencer Pride Festival
- State Forest Pumpkins in the Park
- Steels Campground
- Tivoli Theater Owen-Putnam
- Uplands PEAK Sanctuary
- White River Public Access Point
- Vandalia Strawberry Festival
- Agricultural assets such as the White River Poultry Club



Signage at a MYPATH Trail System trailhead.



The 2012 Apple Butter Queen at Owen County's annual Apple Butter Festival.

Residents are justly proud of the county's buildings of cultural significance dating back to the 1800s. Sites listed on National Register of Historic Places include:

- Cataract Covered Bridge
- CCC Recreation Building-Nature Museum at McCormick's Creek State Park
- Ennis Archaeological Site (12 OW 229) in Clay Township
- McCormick's Creek State Park Entrance and Gatehouse
- Secrest Ferry Bridge over the West Fork of the White River
- Secrest-Wampler House in Washington Township
- Stone Arch Bridge over McCormick's Creek
- Vandalia Methodist Episcopal Church and Vandalia School

EDUCATION

Spencer-Owen Community Schools Corp. served 2,214 students from kindergarten through 12th grade in the 2020-2021 school year, according to the Indiana Department of Education. About 48% of those students are economically disadvantaged and 23% have disabilities, according to the state agency.

Due to the widespread impact of COVID-19, the U.S. Department of Education granted Indiana a waiver from annual assessment and accountability requirements for the 2019-2020 school year, so no grades are available for the individual schools. However, residents are aware of how important having top-ranked schools are to recruiting new residents, and are always working to improve the local school system.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

An online public survey that drew 500 responses was conducted as part of this planning process.

The following table shows the most common citizen responses to placemaking issues:

- 71% agreed or strongly agreed there is a strong sense of community pride in Owen County.
- 57% agreed or strongly agreed Owen County schools offer quality education for students.
- 56% agreed or strongly agreed Owen County is welcoming to outsiders/newcomers.
- Only 40% agreed or strongly agreed there are enough community events for families.
- Only 38% agreed or strongly agreed healthy lifestyle and food choices are available.
- Only 27% agreed or strongly agreed there are sufficient resources/activities for aging adults.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

PLACEMAKING VISION

National studies show that rural communities tend to have stronger economies when they are near growing cities, according to a 2018 Brookings Institution study entitled “Why Rural America Needs Cities.” For instance, “micropolitan areas” – rural communities with small urban centers that are adjacent to bigger cities – have more economic opportunities and fare better than remote counties.

Private investment flows to places with dense clusters of prized assets, according to the same study, and Owen County benefits from Bloomington’s amenities while offering their own. Developers of the planned housing subdivisions in the southeast corner of the county are banking on people who want to live in a rural community but be a 20-minute drive from Bloomington.

To further the idea of building a micropolitan community, leaders are working to bring broadband to the entire county. Besides getting in sync with the modern economy, this amenity will open opportunities for work-from-anywhere entrepreneurs and small businesses.

In an era when the average U.S. commuter spends 42 hours in traffic per year and loses \$1,400 idling away gas, according to the INRIX 2018 Global Traffic Scorecard, the micropolitan lifestyle is likely to become increasingly attractive.



A local art gallery in Spencer, Indiana.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 1: Increase recreational tourism by creating new experiences.

Besides McCormick’s Creek, Owen’s landscape has many other lures for lovers of the outdoors including Owen-Putnam State Forest, Cataract Falls State Recreation Area, Lieber State Recreation Area, and private sites.

One possibility that would connect county land to the incorporated towns is a water trail (also known as blueways) along the White River. Both Gosport and Spencer have made improvements to their river access points. Local water trails can have significant economic benefits; however, these benefits are only realized when communities actively focus on and financially invest in a robust river trail.

Other tourism assets are already developed, including the \$1-million Christmas light show at the county fairgrounds and Arts, Blues & BBQ at McCormick’s Creek State Park.

GOAL 2: Take tangible steps to improve health and wellness in Owen County.

Building community pride is easier when families are healthy, but some of the basic building blocks to improve health and wellness need to be further developed in the county. In line with the top priorities listed in the *2021 IU Health Bloomington Community Health Needs Assessment*,

the county should focus on elderly needs, mental health, substance abuse, access to affordable mental healthcare, and navigation of available community resources.

GOAL 3: Strengthen the quality of place in small community centers such as Patricksburg, Freedom, Whitehall, Coal City, Cunot, and Cataract.

Develop cohesive branding in all communities to establish a stronger sense of history and place throughout Owen County. Most of the unincorporated communities do not have dense development, but still possess assets such as historic buildings, which can be promoted as part of overall life in Owen County. This branding can be used to create historic tours and community pride.

A NOTE ABOUT FUNDING:

The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) in conjunction with Patronicity.com facilitates “CreatINg Places,” a place-based crowdfunding grant program. Citizens actively support projects and activities through web-based donations which, if the fundraising goal is reached within a set time, are matched by the state. This program was successfully used in Spencer to build new public restrooms. It has also been used throughout Indiana to build pavilions, playgrounds, boat launches, and many other public projects.

IMPLEMENTATION

PLACEMAKING

| Goal 1: Increase recreational tourism by creating new experiences. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Create a Water Trail Strategy Plan including river signage and take-out points at Gosport, Spencer, Ramona and Freedom. This could grow into a regional plan involving communities in Morgan County. | OCED/OCCC, OCCF, local governments, Sweet Owen CVB, water trail stakeholders |
| Promote the founding of a river recreation rental business to take advantage of the new infrastructure and provide rental services in the community. | OCED/OCCC |
| Upkeep and expansion of parks and natural areas: Owen County has public parks, forests and recreation areas throughout the county; however, some sites are underfunded. Create streams of revenue or grants for specific projects to help with capital improvements. Owen County should become the premier area for natural amenities in the Uplands Region. | Community, Foundation, Sweet Owen CVB, ROI, OCED/OCCC |
| Goal 2: Take tangible steps to improve health and wellness in Owen County. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Strategic Plan for Seniors: This plan will create an environment for educational opportunities that promote physical and social health, enhance collaborations to address senior housing needs, promote independence and inclusion for seniors. | OCED/OCCC, OCCF, local governments, Sweet Owen CVB, water trail stakeholders |
| Exercise programs for senior citizens: Programs similar to Silver Sneakers and aerobics are enjoyable, encourage healthy activity and prevent social isolation among seniors. | YMCA, MYPath Trail System |

IMPLEMENTATION

| Goal 3: Strengthen the quality of place in small community centers. | |
|---|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Historic Building Maps: Conduct mapping of historic locations, anchor institutions and community specific destinations. | Owen County Heritage & Culture Center, Sweet Owen CVB, Community Foundation |
| Annual Historic Tours: Create annual historic tours connecting visitors with historians who can show and explain the unique history of Owen County. | Owen County Heritage & Culture Center, Sweet Owen CVB, Community Foundation |
| Story Collections: Incorporate significant features of Owen County’s history into projects to showcase unique events, heritage of the county’s residents, and preserve the ongoing story of Owen County. Create a website for these stories to be collected, archived and publicly accessible. | Owen County Heritage & Culture Center, Sweet Owen CVB, Community Foundation |
| Develop community banners or signage: Communities should build signage and banners around the county to show gateways, upcoming events, etc. | OCED/OCCC, Sweet Owen CVB |
| Host annual Arts Festival: The county’s arts community should be further promoted. A festival offers a quick financial boon for local artists and shows young adults that an art career is lucrative. | Owen County Art Guild, OCED/OCCC |
| “Gap Filler” program: Patricksburg, Freedom, Whitehall, Coal City, Cunot and Cataract all have unused vacant spaces. A Gap Filler program combines student arts and creative stakeholders to produce temporary installations in vacant units focused on bringing people together to experiment with the space. Furthermore, it allows unrented spaces to gain broader attention, while making a unique downtown attraction and pride among community members. | Arts Guild, Building Owners, OCCC, Community Foundation |



CHAPTER 09

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County has more opportunities for economic development than we previously realized, as shown by local investments by our largest employers and the growth of local businesses. Now we must lay the groundwork to promote the type of development we want and redirect the growth we do not.

UPDATES SINCE THE 2010 COMP PLAN

Owen County had an extraordinary decade, with more new economic growth happening in the last ten years than in the previous forty.

For example, the two key goals of the 2010 comprehensive plan were both accomplished: Making new sites ready for development and strengthening the county's economic development efforts. Details are provided in this chapter.

What's more, local investments in infrastructure and community capacity have paved the way for continued development. In fact, the county is facing unaccustomed growth pressures and is striving to set up its economic tools to take advantage of all the prospects.



Main Street Coffee in Spencer, IN.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Despite the recession that took place during the last comprehensive plan and the 2½-year disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, Owen County is a shining example of a do-it-yourself economic revitalization project.

As mentioned, local leaders achieved both primary economic goals of the 2010 comprehensive plan. The first was the creation of sites for new business recruitment. Galvanized by the growth potential revealed during the previous planning process, the community worked to extend sanitary sewer to the S.R. 43 corridor, making sites in the eastern portion of the county feasible for development for the first time.

This area is generally framed by S.R. 43, S.R. 46, County Line Road, and extends south to McCormick’s Creek Elementary School. After landing Hoosier Energy as the first employer for this corridor, the county went on to achieve shovel-ready status for the Owen Camp site. This 50-acre property is one-half mile south of S.R. 46.

The second accomplishment was boosting the county’s economic development efforts, which it did with the creation of redevelopment commissions (RDC) for Owen County and the Town of Spencer, including new tax increment financing (TIF) districts for both. The Owen County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corp. have also grown in capacity and is working on many projects including the community’s first business incubator.

As a result of these and other efforts, downtown Spencer in 2022 would be unrecognizable to residents in 2010, when it consisted mostly of darkened storefronts and crumbling building facades. Today, there is a gorgeously restored movie theatre, microbrewery, expanding coffee shop, along with new restaurants and art galleries. People now live downtown in renovated historic buildings.

Although Spencer does not fall under the purview of this planning document, it is the economic engine of the county and their fates are deeply intertwined. For example, along the outskirts of town, developers are planning subdivisions that will result in hundreds of new homes. This growth will benefit both governments but also require joint cooperation and planning.

Although maintaining our own identity is vital to Owen County residents, it’s an undeniable fact the community is part of the Bloomington Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which is home to more than 169,000 people. MSAs are regions consisting of a densely populated urban core (Bloomington) and less populated surrounding territories, sharing industry, infrastructure and housing (Owen County). The area’s population is projected to grow to 184,000 by 2030.

Local leaders have no ambition to “be like Bloomington,” but realize their fortunes and economies are linked. In fact, that connection has grown. For instance, to be included

in the MSA, Owen County must have at least 25% of its residents working in the core area of Bloomington. This tie is not guaranteed; Greene County used to be in the MSA but dropped below the 25%, according to staff from the Indiana Business Research Center.

We are a commuter community. As shown in Figures 9.1 and 9.2, almost three times as many workers leave Owen County for their jobs every day than come in. By far the largest amount – 2,258 – go to Monroe County, according to 2019 figures by STATS Indiana.

These maps capture the main commuting patterns but there are many things they do not show. For example, Owen County’s biggest companies, including Cook and Boston Scientific, draw employees from more than 15 counties. Businesses that originally started in Bloomington have relocated or expanded to Owen County. The development of I-69 and improvements to other roadways (i.e. S.R. 46) have strengthened Owen County’s connection to its neighbors, creating new opportunities.

With changes to the national economy brought on by things like COVID-19, telecommuting and the expanding availability of broadband, people can relocate to Owen County and work from home, where they would benefit from lower housing costs, lower crime rate, less congestion, etc. The county could build on a “live here-work here” plan.

FIGURE 9.1: COMMUTING OUT OF OWEN

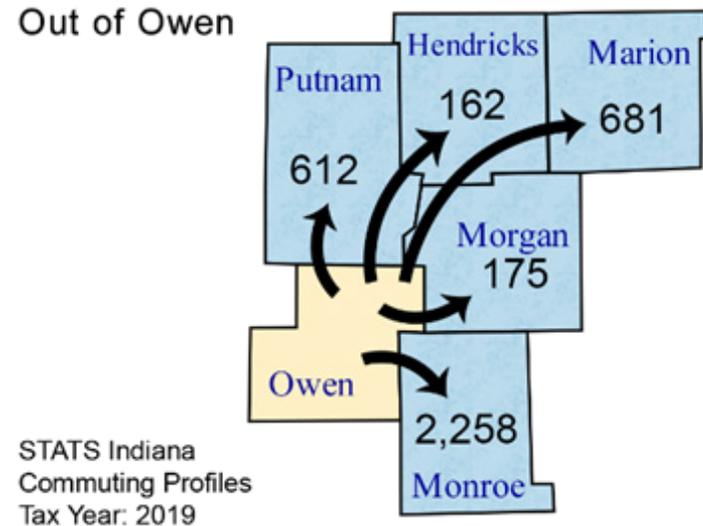
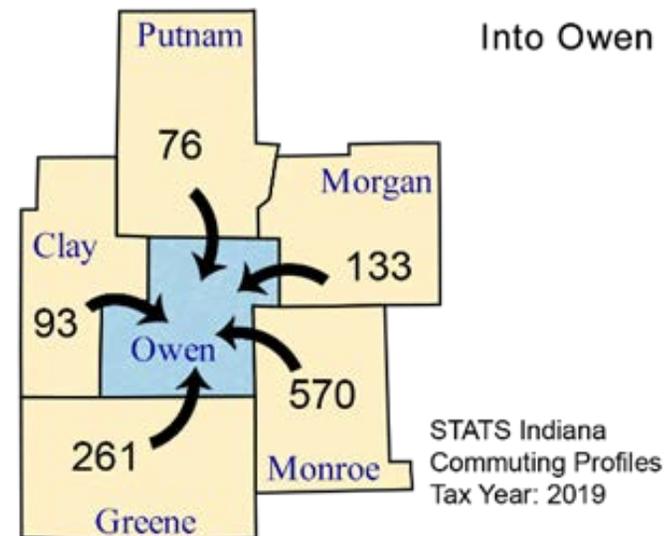


FIGURE 9.2: COMMUTING INTO OWEN



THE EVERYDAY OWEN COUNTY RESIDENT

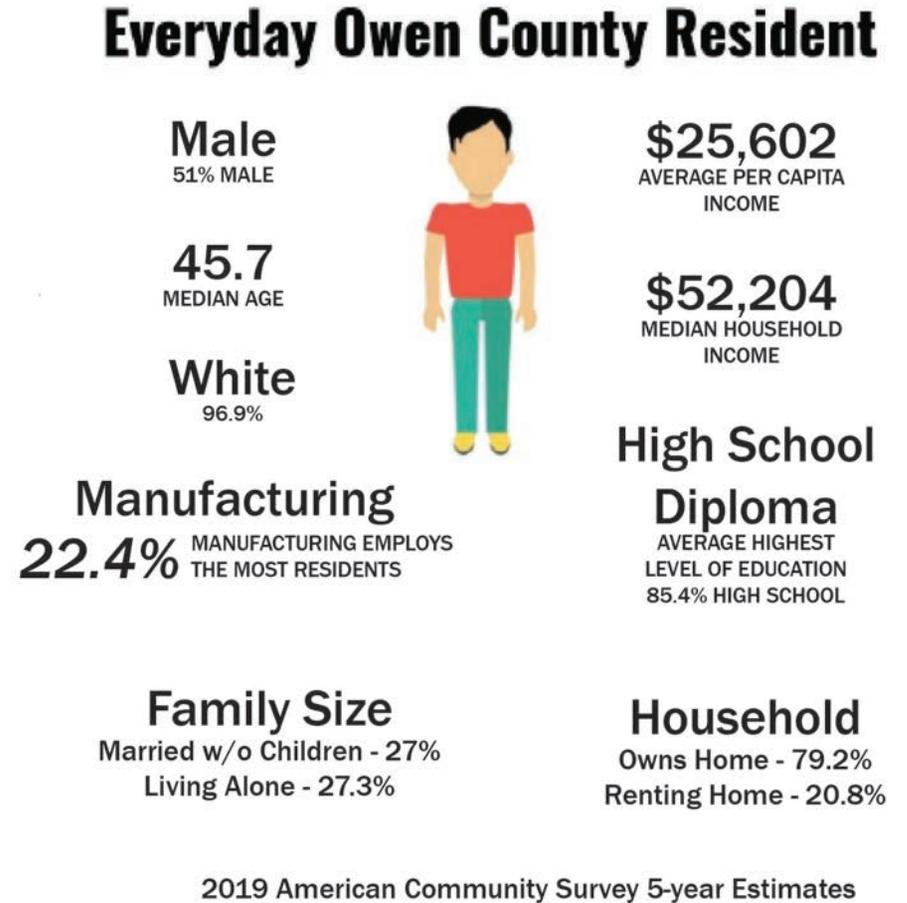
The first question in a comprehensive plan is: Who's future are we planning? Who is the 'average' Owen County resident?

To truly plan for the future, local leaders must attempt to experience what life is like for all residents. To do that, they must put themselves in the work boots of the county's typical resident, who is a 45-year-old white male with a high school diploma earning about \$25,600. The following graphic depicts the "average" Owen County resident using the most current data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

What does the graphic tell us? The good news is that manufacturing – which has higher-paying jobs - is the largest employment sector. The bad news is that U.S. manufacturing jobs face serious threats, including automation, tariff wars, and supply chain disruptions. The relatively low amount of residents with a college education is also concerning, in that these workers may have less access to other types of high-paying jobs.

Other demographic data can be found in Chap. 2: General Background.

FIGURE 9.3: EVERYDAY OWEN COUNTY RESIDENT



FACTS SHAPING OWEN COUNTY'S ECONOMY

One place to start looking at a county's economy is gross domestic product (GDP), which measures the market value of goods and services produced by all industries within a county.

Owen County's GDP was \$581,977 in 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. That number was up from \$562,920 the previous year. For comparison, Greene County's GDP for 2020 was \$652,190 and Monroe County's was \$7.3 million.

Looking at jobs data, employment in Owen County grew 2.89%, from 9,410 employees to 9,680 from 2018 to 2019.

The most common job groups, by number of people living in the county, are Production Occupations (1,283 people), Construction & Extraction Occupations (1,003 people), and Office & Administrative Support Occupations (981 people), according to U.S. Census Bureau information provided by Data USA.

The highest paid jobs held by county residents, by median earnings, are Health Diagnosing & Treating Practitioners & Other Technical Occupations (\$94,531), Legal Occupations (\$67,917), and Computer & Mathematical Occupations (\$61,500), according to Data USA.

Another part of assessing Owen County's economy is the total assessed value of its residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial property. Trends in this area are important because property tax is the major funder of local government.

In 2021 the county's net assessed value was:

- \$284,763,473 for residential land.
- \$293,325,540 for agricultural land.
- \$188,758,445 for commercial/industrial land.

Because commercial and industrial properties are taxed at a higher rate than residential, increasing the amount of those two land uses will raise more money for the county and help relieve the tax burden of homeowners.



Boston Scientific is the largest employer in Owen County.

EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS INVENTORY

There are 545 business establishments in Owen County, according to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. These include 28 manufacturers, 83 retail trade, and 19 restaurants.

It is worth noting the top ten largest employers are in Spencer.

| 10 Largest Employers in Owen County | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| Company | Product | Employed |
| Boston Scientific Corp. | Physicians & Surgeons Equip. | 1,001 |
| Cook Urological Inc. | Physicians & Surgeons Equip. | 420 |
| Owen Valley High School | School | 150 |
| Spencer Elementary School | School | 125 |
| Trilogy | Health Services | 100 |
| Babb's Supermarket | Grocers-Retail | 100 |
| Canyon Inn | Hotels & Motels | 90 |
| Walmart | Department Store | 90 |
| World Arts Inc. | Graphic Designers | 90 |
| McDonald's | Limited-Service Restaurant | 72 |

Source: Hoosiers by the Numbers

AGRICULTURE IN THE ECONOMY

Although manufacturing is Owen County's biggest job sector, the local role and tradition of farming cannot be ignored. The county has 649 farms with a median size of 60 acres, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2017 Census of Agriculture. That's a total of 111,931 acres.

The number of farms and total acreage increased since the 2012 agricultural census, when there were 549 farms with a total of 95,527 acres.

Agriculture, including everything from crops to cattle to hardwood, is a vital part of the county's economy. Agriculture makes up 30% of the land in Owen County, forest and wetlands make up 62%, developed land makes up 6%, and 'Other' makes up 2%, including rivers and waterways, according to a 2021 report from the Indiana Department of Agriculture.

However, very few county residents have full-time jobs in agriculture or forestry. In fact, only 17 full-time jobs were listed in 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The average annual wage was \$32,763. Compare that to 2,232 manufacturing jobs with an average wage of \$56,089.

The Owen County Fairgrounds are another under-recognized economic asset. Mostly associated with the annual fair, the 40-acre, privately-owned facility, run by a board, attracts

visitors throughout the year with rodeos, Apple Butter Weekend, The Moving Wall Vietnam Veterans Memorial and farm shows. Events by the White River Poultry Club, for example, can draw 1,500 people from around the country.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

A community of Owen County's size needs every available resource in its toolbelt.

Some of the county's economic development partners include:

- Owen County Chamber of Commerce/ Economic Development Corp.
- Owen County Redevelopment Commission
- Town of Spencer Redevelopment Commission
- Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Spencer Main Street
- Regional Opportunity Initiatives
- Southwest Indiana Regional Development Commission

The chamber, housed with the Owen County Economic Development Corp., has a hand in many local initiatives, including:

- A revolving loan fund to provide low-interest loans of up

to \$25,000 for start-up or expansion toward equipment, machinery, fixed assets, or structure construction for small businesses.

- Assistance in applying for a tax abatement for a new business or an existing business wanting to expand.
- A tax increment financing (TIF) district, which reallocates funds from property taxes to encourage investment within the district.
- Ongoing construction of Overstreet, the county's first business incubator.

RECENT GRANTS

Awards and projects that county organizations are engaged in include the following:

- In January 2020, the Town of Spencer was awarded a \$700,000 federal grant from the Community Development Block Grant Fund to help fund essential sewer improvements.
- Indiana Community Crossings Grants for essential road improvements were awarded to Owen County for \$787,000 and the Town of Spencer for \$70,000.
- A Duke Energy Grant was awarded to Owen County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development to increase visibility of the community's economic development efforts.
- Owen County Libraries received a grant from Duke

Energy to support the expansion of courses in Microsoft training, graphic design, 3D printing and laser cutting to boost workforce skills in the region.

- Spencer received a state grant award to upgrade downtown streets and sidewalks to improve quality of life and transportation safety.
- The County received a state grant for the MYPath trail system, a special project brought to life by a diverse collaboration of community and state organizations (YMCA, Community Foundation, Town, County, McCormick’s Creek State Park).

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a financial tool used by local governments to fund economic development. Though the basic concept of TIF is straightforward - to allow local governments to finance development projects with the revenue generated by the development - its implementation can differ in each county and town where it is used.

TIF is based on the theory that development can pay for itself, according to the Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis. The basic idea is that public investment in an area, often in the form of infrastructure, induces property value growth which increases property tax revenue. The revenue increase is, in turn, used to pay for the initial investment. This

results in TIF being labeled as “self-financing,” due to the use of future revenue to pay current costs.

Owen County can further explore how TIF might work to help pay for infrastructure in an area where housing developments are going. The revenue stream from that TIF could serve to fund long-term payment of bonds or other financing as an effective tool. To be effective, local appointed and elected leaders need to be kept current on the potential benefits and limitations of TIF.

DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYER SITES

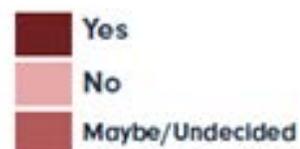
Since the Owen Camp site has been designated for residential development, the county does not have property secured where an existing business could relocate/expand or a new business could be established.

Because there are limited places in the county with suitable infrastructure for development, residential and industrial uses compete for available land. To be able to meet both needs in the short and long term, this plan establishes recommendations for future land use plans in key areas of the county. It is advised the county use these plans as a guide to secure future employer sites, and plan for their development. Specific information, including maps of critical sub areas, can be found in Chap. 5: Land Use.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Local leaders gathered public input on economic development in the *2020 Owen County Economic Development Strategy* and the *2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan*. For this 2022 plan, additional feedback was obtained via a survey.

Relevant findings from the 2019 survey include:



Does Owen County provide what I need to succeed in my job?



What should Owen County focus on for the next two years?

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| 01 Infrastructure | 24% | 06 Healthcare | 05% |
| 02 Housing | 15% | 07 School | 04% |
| 03 Community | 09% | 08 Transportation | 02% |
| 04 Jobs Beautification | 08% | 09 Environment | 01% |
| 05 Shops Internet | 06% | | |

During this planning process, Comprehensive Planning Committee members also completed a survey on priorities, with similar results. Their vision for the future emphasized “Growth” and “Revitalization.”

The group summed up their concerns for future growth by agreeing:

“There is both a fear of growth and a lack of understanding about community development issues among some residents. These problems, combined with the fact that there’s not enough two-way communication on this issue, could lead to unplanned growth that harms our community.”

The public survey conducted during this planning process drew 500 responses. The following are the most common citizen responses to quality of life and economic development issues.

QUALITY OF LIFE:

- Strong sense of community pride.
- OC is a great place to raise a family.
- OC needs more attractive jobs and opportunities for young professionals.
- More entertainment activities needed for the young.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Agriculture is important component of economy.
- New sewer, water, and broadband utilities should be extended to encourage new development.
- Existing sewer, water, and broadband utilities should be upgraded to maintain existing development.
- Incentives are needed to support small businesses.
- More restaurants, shopping, and grocery options are needed in OC.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION

The county's workforce attraction efforts will create opportunities for people already living and working here as well as for people who might consider moving for new jobs.

Owen County will develop a healthy, productive workforce by providing life's basic necessities and promoting the unique opportunities of the area. Workforce stability is developed when people can live, work, play, and grow in their own community.

As we have learned from experience, such as the S.R. 46/S.R. 43 project, investments in infrastructure are often needed to attract new development.

GOAL 1: Promote business retention and expansion and small business development.

As a small rural community, Owen County leaders recognize their strongest economic development opportunities come from working with existing employers to help them grow or stay competitive in their marketplace.

While business retention and expansion should be a priority, Owen County should also continue to recruit new basic employers that have compatible values to the community.

Recruitment efforts should increase after additional economic development sites have been secured. Businesses that value Owen County's rural, small-town quality of life should be emphasized.

Although Spencer remains the economic engine of the county, it is tucked in just one corner of the community. Non-incorporated areas have some potential for growth, but that development must be cultivated with marketing, incentives, etc.

For small business development, Owen County leaders recognize that support of small local businesses is absolutely vital to future growth. The Owen County Economic Development Corp. will continue to partner with the Owen County Chamber of Commerce to implement networking and training programs for small businesses. This effort will take a large step forward with completion of the business incubator/co-op work space being developed in Spencer to provide office space, business equipment, and mentorship programming to start-up businesses. Businesses born in this incubator can serve the entire county.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 2: Encourage workforce attraction.

The *2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan* identifies key projects and programming intended to improve the quality of life for Owen County residents. The Owen County Economic Development Corp. will continue to support implementation of that plan's recommendations. This effort must move in lockstep with plans to create more affordable housing in the county.

GOAL 3: Explore development of employer sites.

Because there are limited places in the county with suitable infrastructure for development, residential and industrial uses will compete for available land. To be able to meet both needs in the short and long term, this plan and the *2020 Economic Development Strategy* establishes recommendations for future land use plans in key areas of the county, as shown in the Land Use Chapter of this report. It is recommended that the county use these plans as a guide to secure future employer sites, and plan for their development.

GOAL 4: Stay informed on trends in regional planning.

Concerns were expressed during this planning process that regional planning – working with other governments on joint projects – could lead to a loss of local sovereignty. This concern can be thoroughly addressed during a project in a memorandum of understanding with the partnering government or agency. It is worthwhile to keep this option open because of recent trends in funding.

As shown by the \$500 million put into Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) grants in 2021, the State of Indiana is dedicated to heavily promoting planning among different local governments.

This program and others, such as the regionally-based Stellar Communities, encourage communities to work together to develop long-term, sustainable strategies that complemented the collective strengths of the region.

It is vital to work with neighboring communities and counties to promote economic development initiatives that could be mutually beneficial. That is also a lot to be gained from working together to respond to undesirable regional development patterns, such as the lack of workforce housing. Owen County has natural partners in Ellettsville and Monroe County to the east for housing and Morgan and Putnam counties for tourism.

IMPLEMENTATION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

| Goal 1: Promote business retention and expansion and small business development. | |
|---|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Create co-work space/business incubator. Plans for an incubator have run into a catch and could use a boost. Although this will likely be based in Spencer, the site has the potential to help sprout businesses throughout the county. | Local governments, OCED, Main Street, RDC |
| Promote women and minorities in businesses. Women and minorities populations owning businesses are important to Owen County, but these populations face different hurdles than male-owned businesses. Promoting women and minority populations in business will create a supportive environment for leaders and future businesses. For instance, Hold an Annual Women and Minorities Business Conference. | OC Businesses, OCED/OCCC |
| Offer short course for high school students and young adults on starting a business. An entrepreneurial short course will provide resources and basic insights on starting and operating a business. These short courses should work in connection with existing OVHS programs and connect with other resources like IU-Bloomington Business School and WorkOne. Tie it to the existing high school entrepreneurship program and school TED-style talks about economic development. | Spencer-Owen Community School Corp., OCCC/OCED, Local Businesses |
| Goal 2: Encourage workforce attraction. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Publicize WorkOne Express Services. WorkOne should become more well known throughout the county as a resource for workers to increase their skills and advance their careers. | WorkOne, OCED/OCCC |
| Use the state's HIRE program to reduce recidivism for ex-drug offenders. The Indiana Department of Workforce Development's Hoosier Initiative for Re-Entry (HIRE) program has been recognized as a national model for reintegrating ex-offenders into the workforce and keeping them out of prison. | DWD, OCED/OCCC |

IMPLEMENTATION

| Goal 3: Explore development of employer sites. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Secure land for future employer sites in the S.R. 43/Flatwoods area. An option to purchase or development agreement should be secured for sites recommended in the Land Use Chapter of this plan. | County RDC, OCED/OCCC |
| Develop a master plan for employer sites. This should include lot layouts, roadway plans and infrastructure extension plans. A master plan should also identify steps needed to make the sites shovel-ready. | County RDC, OCED/OCCC |
| Goal 4: Stay informed on trends in regional planning. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Continue working with regional agencies and organizations, such as Regional Opportunity Initiatives and their READI plan, to advance the quality of life and economic development projects. | Town and County elected officials, OCED/OCCC |
| Partner with major employers and other regional stakeholders to collaboratively pursue economic development opportunities and other quality of life initiatives that strengthen employment opportunities for current and future residents. | Town and County elected officials, OCED/OCCC |



CHAPTER 10

HOUSING

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

A lack of safe and affordable housing has hindered Owen County's prosperity and quality of life. Even residents who "don't want anything to change" recognize the need for more options and places to live. We must work with local neighborhoods and developers to prepare for and incentivize the types of housing we want.

UPDATES SINCE THE 2010 COMP PLAN

The previous comprehensive plan's goal was to attract companies, which in turn would trigger the building of new homes. As it's turned out, the reverse happened - the demand for housing is outpacing business and other forms of growth. After decades of an anemic housing market, plans are underway for hundreds of new homes in the southeast corner of the county. In fact, local leaders' concerns about managing this growth were major catalysts for this comprehensive plan update.

This is a testament not only to higher prices in nearby Monroe County, but also Owen County's quality of life.



A home built in 2018 outside of Spencer, Indiana.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

FACTS SHAPING OWEN COUNTY'S ECONOMY

Owen County has much to offer but sits at a critical juncture. The county's topography, thin population density, and lack of economic opportunities have left pockets of homeowners without adequate clean water and sanitation or local opportunities for new housing.

That situation is changing in one corner of the county, but the remainder faces bigger challenges. Developers have not shown interest in the smaller communities and local residents in those unincorporated areas rejected the tax-based investments in water and sewer lines that would be needed to attract new development.

Until that stalemate is broken, growth will likely continue in the Spencer area, although that town is constrained by topography and the river. However, as roads, sewer, and broadband are improved around Spencer, the possibility of growth in new areas will increase.

CURRENT HOUSING MARKET

There are 9,795 housing units in Owen County, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures for 2019. Owen County's homeownership rate - 79% - is 10 points higher than the Indiana average. On the other hand, the rate may simply reflect the lack of local rental units.

The median property value in Owen County was \$117,600 in 2019, less than half the national average of \$240,500.

Only a handful of homes are for sale in the county, a reflection of the tight national real estate market. The following table shows a snapshot of housing sales for 2022 as of February 2022, including detached single-family homes, condos, and townhomes.

| Owen County Housing Market Year to Date | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Closed Sales 2021 | Closed Sales 2022 | +/- | Median Price 2021 | Median Price 2022 | +/- |
| 15 | 10 | -33.3% | \$230,000 | \$232,450 | +1.1% |

For comparison, in the much bigger market in Monroe County, 114 homes sold for a median price of \$232,450, an 8.5% increase.

It is worth noting that years after the recession formally ended, 122 properties in Owen County were still listed as foreclosure, bankruptcy, or tax lien sales in March 2022. Housing condition is also important in a market, and almost 60% of county renters live in homes at least forty years old.

HOUSING DEMAND

According to the 2019 Indiana Uplands Regional Housing Study, approximately 1,282 housing units need to be developed in Owen County by 2030. This equates to 114-120 units per year.

Over the last five years, 45-77 building permits have been issued per year, indicating that an increase in housing construction will be needed to meet demand. The forecast recommends a demand of 49-53 homes per year above what the current market is providing.

As mentioned, both local and outside developers have noted this gap and are actively planning new construction. Cook Inc., one of the county's biggest employers, plans to build a subdivision on Texas Pike, just outside Spencer's town limits. Another developer bought the Owen Camp site off S.R. 43 with plans for a large subdivision. Trillium Woods LLC, a local company, has already revitalized apartments downtown and in-fill housing projects around Spencer with plans for more units.

The community is unaccustomed to this much interest from builders, so local leaders are getting a crash course in the negotiations and partnership-building needed to steer growth. Additionally, the county's zoning and building regulations are out-of-date and lack the detail needed to guide the Plan Commission and others in reviewing development plans.

It is likely that some of the subdivision plans mentioned earlier will be completed before the county can update its comprehensive plan and regulations, but elected and appointed planning officials are moving to update their tools.

LOCAL HOUSING RESOURCES

The county does not have a housing authority or housing department, so much of the county-wide housing projects are handled by local elected officials and the Owen County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corp.

DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING SITES

Because there are limited places in the county with suitable infrastructure for development, residential and industrial uses will compete for available land. Large tracts of land near S.R. 43 that were originally envisioned for employment sites have instead been claimed for new housing construction.

To be able to meet needs in the short and long term, this plan establishes recommendations for future land use plans in key areas of the county. It is advised that the county use these plans as a guide to secure future employer sites, and prepare for their development. The Land Use Chapter of this report contains maps and descriptions of critical subareas appropriate for housing.



A home in Coal City, Indiana.

DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING TYPES

Owen County has a range of housing opportunities available to residents. This includes historic homes in small towns, upstairs lofts in revitalized downtowns, and rural homes with acreage. To meet the future housing need for the county, a similar range of new housing is needed. A summary of housing types and key considerations for each follows.

RURAL HOUSING:

This category includes individual large lot housing development. Very few rural areas in Owen County have both public water and sanitary sewer service, meaning that homes need to be on a minimum of a two-acre lot to accommodate an on-site septic system. Overall density for this area is likely to be 0.2 to 0.5 units per acre.

RURAL SUBDIVISIONS:

Density in this area is likely to be 0.5 to 3 units per acre to accommodate mid-size housing and lots. Larger lots are required to accommodate septic systems when public utilities are not available.

URBAN/SUBURBAN HOUSING:

Traditional housing subdivisions should be located within or close to urban areas and have a density of 3 to 5 units per acre. Water and sewer utilities should be required for this density of housing.

MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING:

Multi-family housing developments should be located in areas where neighborhood services are located in walkable distance from the housing. Multi-family housing can include duplexes, triplexes, attached/detached garden homes, townhomes, condominiums, and apartments. A density of 4-8 units per acre is typical. Water and sewer utilities should be required.

INFILL HOUSING:

Infill development takes vacant or undeveloped sites within an urban form and transforms those lots to development that mimics the surrounding environment. Density can vary widely based on existing conditions.

REDEVELOPMENT:

Redevelopment takes underutilized or underdeveloped sites, usually in downtown or urban areas, and revitalizes the area with new development that fits the context of the surrounding area. Redevelopment is not limited to housing and can include retail or business uses. Density also varies considerably based on existing conditions.

MANUFACTURED AND MOBILE HOMES

As Owen County moves forward with a Subdivision and Zoning Ordinance Update, further discussion will need to be had about manufactured homes and mobile homes. Owen County has many options on how to regulate where new manufactured or mobile homes will be permitted within the County. Here is a brief breakdown of the differences between manufactured and mobile homes and the options Owen County will need to consider in the future.

Manufactured Homes: A dwelling unit, designed and built in a factory, which bears a seal certifying that it was built in compliance with the federal Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Law of 1974.

- Manufactured homes constructed after January 1, 1981 and exceed nine hundred fifty (950) square feet of occupied space may be installed as a permanent

residence on any lot on which any other type of dwelling unit may be placed.

- Manufactured homes constructed after January 1, 1981 and are less than nine hundred fifty (950) square feet of occupied space: A jurisdiction (like Owen County) may choose to keep out of residential zoning, except in a mobile home park.

Mobile Homes: A dwelling unit, designed and built in a factory, that may or may not be built in compliance with the federal Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Law of 1974.

- Pre-1974 mobile homes with no federal seal: A jurisdiction (like Owen County) may choose to keep out of residential zoning, except in a mobile home park.
- Federally sealed mobile homes built between 1974 – 1980: A jurisdiction (like Owen County) may choose to keep out of residential zoning, except in a mobile home park.

A summary of the land required for each type of housing is identified below.

| Land Area Requirements by Housing Type | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Description | Housing Density (Units per Acre) | Acres Required to Achieve 1,268 Units by 2030 |
| Single Family - Rural (without water/sewer) | 0.2 to 0.5 | 2,536 to 6,340 |
| Single Family - Suburban (with utilities) | 1-3 | 422 to 1,268 acres |
| Single Family - Urban | 3-5 | 254 to 423 acres |
| Multi-Family | 4-8 | 159 to 317 acres |

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The need for more housing options was the top priority identified by steering committee members in a survey. This is in keeping with virtually every other public poll taken in the community recently. For example, housing, along with infrastructure, was identified as a top priority in the *2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan*.

The public survey conducted during this planning process drew 500 responses. The following are the most common citizen responses to housing issues:

- New housing construction in OC is important to growing the population.
- Access to sewer and water is need to support new housing.
- More entry-level housing is needed.
- OC needs to address inadequate/failing septic systems.
- OC needs to address abandoned properties.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

HOUSING VISION:

Local investments in infrastructure combined with common sense planning regulations will enable the community to keep working with developers to provide the range of housing Owen County needs. This combination will be especially important as leaders work to ensure that all corners of the community share in the development.

GOAL 1: Update zoning map and building code.

After completion of the comprehensive land use plan, move immediately to update the zoning map and regulations. In fact, the Plan Commission has been working with consultants in a parallel process to accelerate those updates. A review of existing ordinances and recommendations for an extensive update are included in the Land Use Chapter.

GOAL 2: Explore the possibility of a county housing department.

At least since 2007, local reports have detailed the need for some sort of organized, county-wide response to pressing housing issues. Initially, the biggest need was to attract developers and new units. Now, at least in parts of the county, the most pressing issue is managing ongoing subdivisions.

Originally, the call was for a local housing task force. However, it is time for the county to consider moving to the next step: formation of a county housing department.

Working with the Plan Commission, the department would be responsible for the planning, administration, and operation of all county housing programs and projects. Its overall goal would be providing for the development of decent housing, suitable living environments and expanding economic opportunities.

This is, without doubt, a big step. But to even begin addressing the need for the 1,200-plus new housing units identified in the Ready Communities and to bring relief to the all-volunteer Plan Commission, a discussion about the viability of creating a housing department would be very useful.

GOAL 3: Study the creation of new building sites.

To meet housing needs in the short and long term, this plan establishes recommendations for future land use plans in key areas of the county. The county should use these plans as a guide to secure future housing sites, and plan for their development. The Land Use Chapter of this report contains maps and descriptions of critical subareas appropriate for housing.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 4: Promote preferred housing types.

As county officials have already learned, many developers have pre-set ideas about the types and amount of units they want to build. However, those ideas may not be in sync with county priorities, such as increasing housing options for young families and senior citizens.

For that reason, one of the first jobs of the housing department is to work with the private market to build a full range of homes. These negotiations often involve incentives from local government, such as tax abatements or infrastructure work, so county and town officials will need to be involved.

GOAL 5: Improve the stock of existing housing.

A discussion of housing strategies in Owen County would not be complete without emphasizing that the deterioration of aging housing stock is and will continue to be an issue. Owen County has approximately 10,117 housing units with the average age of almost 40 years, according to the ESRI Housing Summary.

Investments in new housing must be completed along with neighborhood and housing reinvestment strategies. Without parallel investments in existing housing stock, the demand for new housing will continue to grow as deteriorated homes fall too far into disrepair.

Owen County must commit to improving older housing stock, increasing affordable housing options, and expanding housing options for residents to age-in-place.



Greenbriar Senior Apartments in Spencer, Indiana.

IMPLEMENTATION

HOUSING

| Goal 1: Update zoning map and zoning ordinance. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Preparation for updating the ordinances and zoning map were launched concurrently with the comprehensive plan update to ensure that no time or momentum is lost. Secure a scope of work and budget with a certified planner to continue this process. | County Commission, Plan Commission, County Council, OCC/OCED |
| Goal 2: Explore the possibility of a county housing department. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Creating this new department will take careful consideration. For instance, the county could decide to instead direct these responsibilities to a newly created and staffed Planning Department. In either case, it is vital that full-time, professional staff are available to help the otherwise volunteer plan commission. | County Commission, Plan Commission, County Council |
| Goal 3: Study the creation of new building sites. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Large-scale housing growth will be concentrated in Spencer, Gosport and the S.R. 43 corridor until water and sanitary sewer infrastructure are extended to other areas. In the meantime, revise county zoning maps to make clear they types of housing the county needs and where it should be located on the existing sites. | County Commission, Plan Commission, County Council, OCC/OCED |

IMPLEMENTATION

| Goal 4: Promote preferred housing types. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Incentivize new housing developments through public infrastructure investments. | Plan Commission, County Commission, County Council, RDC |
| Provide developer incentives that result in a mix of new rental housing types such as duplexes, fourplexes and apartments for residents of all income levels. | Plan Commission, County Commission, County Council, RDC |
| Develop a toolkit of local housing incentives to encourage entry-level housing types, such as patio homes or townhomes, as a way for young couples and first-time home buyers to penetrate Owen County's housing market. | Plan Commission, OCC/OCED |
| Goal 5: Improve the stock of existing housing. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Implement and enforce existing building codes to restore or eliminate blighted properties in the community. | Plan Commission, County Commission |
| Develop a program that offers technical and/or financial assistance for qualified homeowners interested in restoring older homes. | Plan Commission, County Commission, County Council, OCC/OCED |



CHAPTER 11

TRANSPORTATION

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County is poised to take advantage of the completion of the Interstate 69 Corridor through southwest Indiana. With the southeast portion of Owen County within a short distance of the interstate, growth and development is most likely to occur in these areas first and Owen County should be prepared to guide this growth.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

Since the last comprehensive plan update, the Interstate 69 corridor has been completed in the neighboring Greene, Monroe, and Morgan (just north of Martinsville) counties. Although Owen County did not experience direct impacts from this major transportation project, there have been indirect impacts. The Town of Spencer is now approximately fourteen miles from the Interstate 69 Exit 120 in Bloomington, which makes the State Road 46 corridor through Owen County more desirable for development. This major transportation improvement will continue to influence future development in Owen County.



Finalizing construction along Interstate 69.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The principal roadways in Owen County include US 231, a 28.4 mile north/south corridor, and State Road 46, the primary east/west corridor extending approximately 16.6 miles through the county. Other important transportation corridors include State Road 42, State Road 43, State Road 67, State Road 157, State Road 243, and State Road 264.

Owen County has a variety of functionally classified roadways that create a hierarchy of streets comprising the county's transportation network. This classification system was created by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and used by INDOT to evaluate how roadways function within a given transportation network. Classifications include interstates/freeways/expressways, principal arterials, minor arterials, major and minor collectors, and local streets. Figure 11.1 depicts the functional classification map for Owen County.

COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

The Owen County Highway Department is responsible for maintaining and preserving the quality and safety over approximately 632 miles of roads in the county.

INDOT PROJECTS

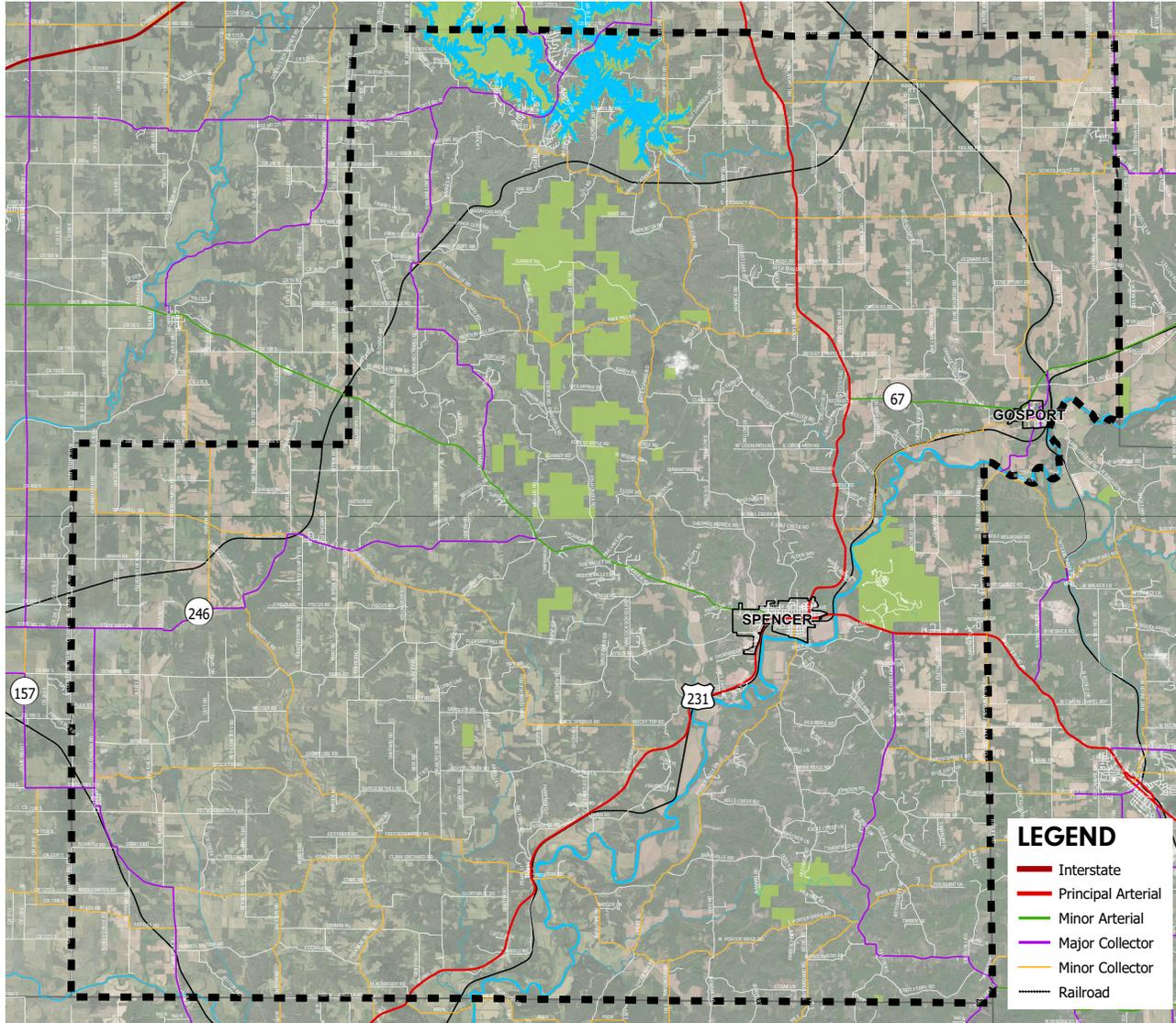
Owen County is served by both the Crawfordsville and Seymour INDOT District offices. According to INDOT's State Transportation and Improvement Program (STIP) for fiscal

years 2022-2026, INDOT has earmarked approximately \$36 million in projects for Owen County's roads and bridges, not including local projects in Spencer. Notable projects including intersection improvements and a roundabout at SR 46/SR 43 (2023), a bridge deck replacement along SR 67 over Little Indian Creek (2024), and intersection improvements with added turn lanes at SR 46/County Rd 350 E (2026).

MID-STATES CORRIDOR

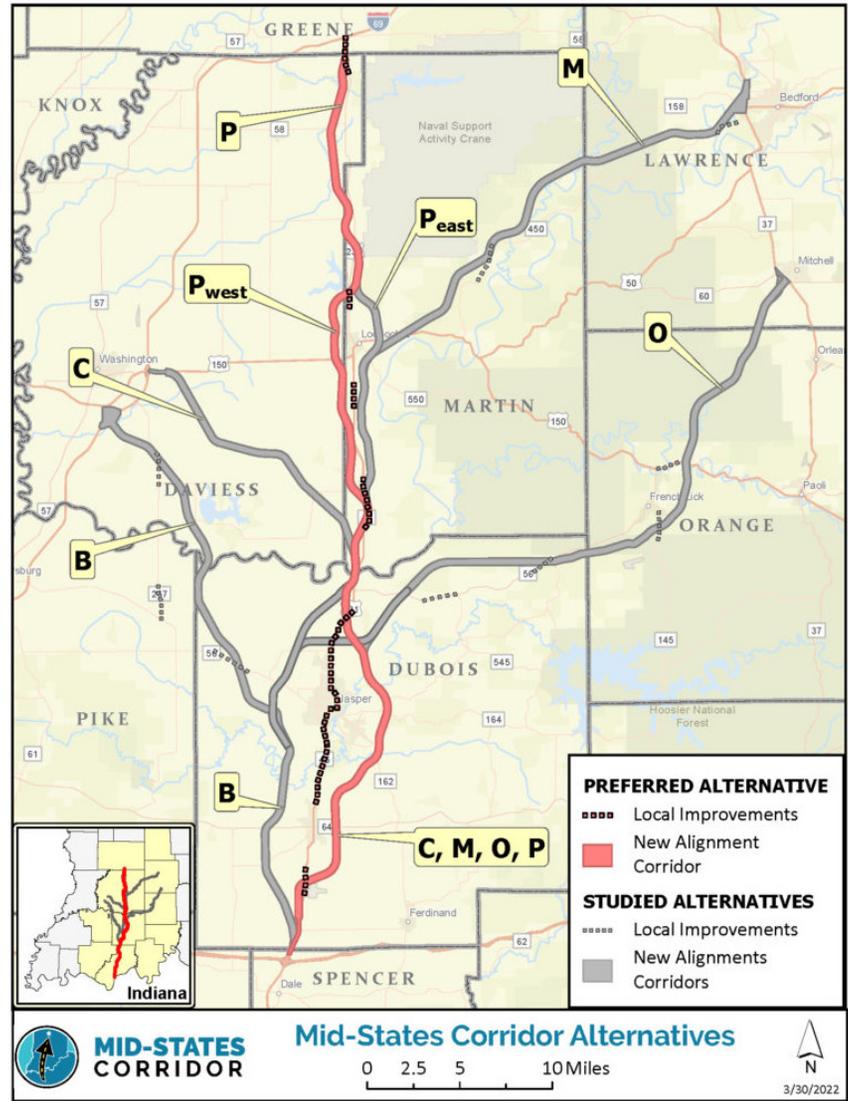
During the planning process, Owen County leadership and residents raised questions about the proposed Mid-States Corridor Project. The Mid-States Corridor Project examines an improved highway connection in Southern Indiana. According to the Mid-States Corridor Regional Development Authority, the project's purpose is to provide an improved transportation link between US 231/Natcher Bridge and Interstate 69 to facilitate business and personal regional connectivity in Dubois County and Southern Indiana. The project will also improve highway connections to existing multimodal locations in Southern Indiana. The project was commissioned by the Mid-States Corridor Regional Development Authority (RDA). At this time, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) does not have this project as part of their future plans. There are no short- or long-term plans to extend the project into Owen County, as shown in Figure 11.2.

FIGURE 11.1: FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION MAP



Source: INDOT Functional Classifications

FIGURE 11.2: MID-STATES CORRIDOR PROJECT



Source: Mid-States Corridor Regional Development Authority

RAILROADS

There is one active railroad in Owen County: the Indiana Southern Railroad. This rail line connects Indianapolis to Evansville and passes through the Owen County communities of Spencer and Gosport. The Indiana Southern Railroad hauls mostly coal and grain products.

The “life expectancy” of the Indiana Southern Railroad may be limited, as evidenced by many similar lines across the country. Community leaders would be prudent to think about potential uses of this property in the event the railroad ceases operations and the rail line becomes abandoned.

There are several abandoned rail lines that cut through various parts of Owen County. On the northeast side, an abandoned line connected Cloverdale in Putnam County to Ellettsville in Monroe County and passed through the Owen County community of Gosport. In the northern part of the county, an abandoned rail line connected Wallace Junction in Owen County to Clay City in Clay County. Another abandoned line in the southwest portion of Owen County connected Clay City in Clay County to Worthington in Greene County but passed through the Owen County communities of Coal City and Johnstown. These corridors may hold future potential as rail-to-trail projects.

SIDEWALKS AND TRAILS

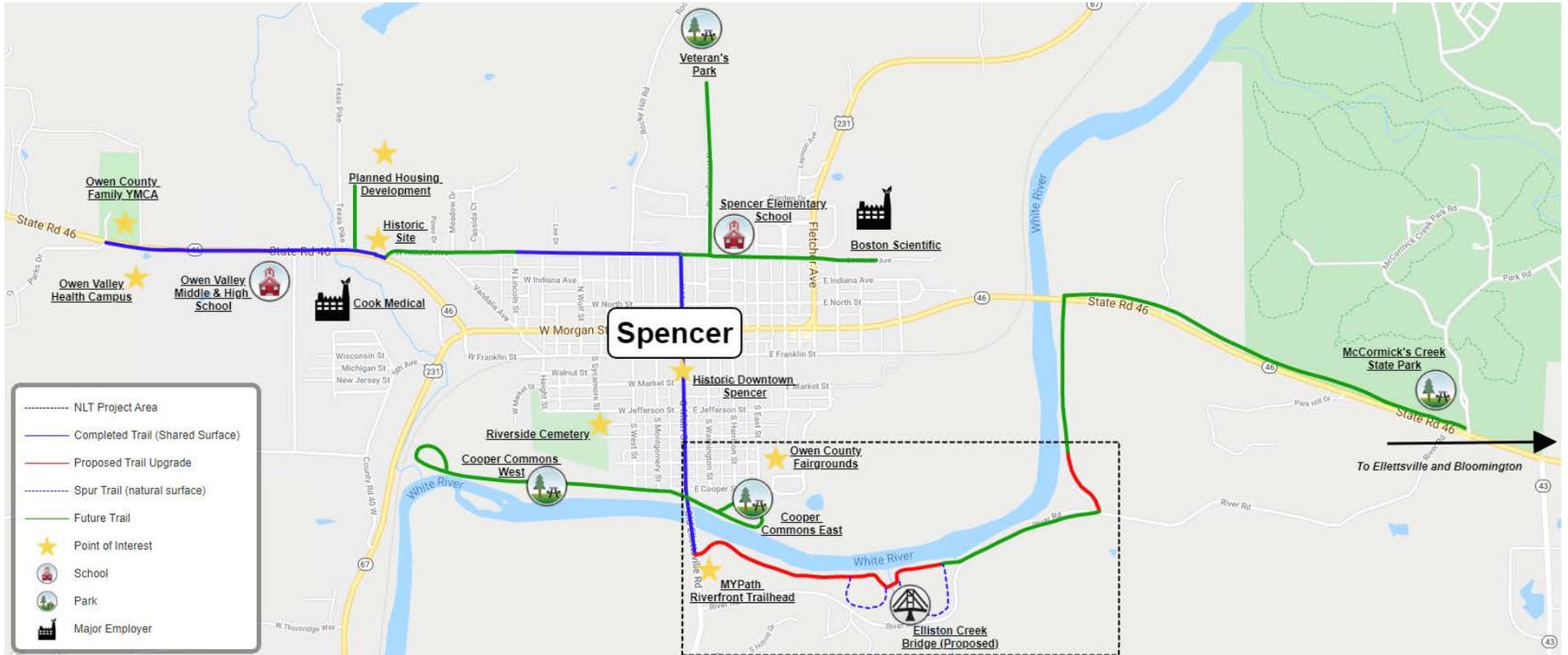
Owen County is home to the MYPath Trail System, which is a planned network of safe sidewalks and multi-use trails in and around Spencer, Indiana. This project broke ground in 2014 through local start-up grants. The first phase of this network is comprised of a multi-use trail that parallels the White River and connects Spencer to McCormick’s Creek State Park. The larger trail system will eventually connect to Monroe County to the east and the Owen County YMCA to the west.

In addition to the MYPath Trail System, Owen County is home to robust trail networks found within the state recreation sites in the county, including over ten miles of trails in McCormick’s Creek State Park, Cataract Falls State Recreation Area, the Owen-Putnam State Forest, and Green’s Bluff Nature Preserve.

RURAL TRANSIT

Area 10 Agency on Aging offers Rural Transit, a demand-response bus service that serves Owen, Monroe, Lawrence, and Putnam Counties. Anyone can ride regardless of age or disability. Annually, the agency provides 200,000 rides.

FIGURE 11.3: MYPATH TRAIL SYSTEM



Source: Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District



A railroad depot in Spencer, Indiana circa 1880.



A mural promoting the MYPath Trail System in Owen County.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

In general, Owen County's vehicular and pedestrian transportation network received poor marks based on public input. According to public survey result only 11% of respondents "agreed or strongly agreed" that Owen County's roads are generally in good condition, and only 26% felt the county had an appropriate road network to support growth. However, slightly more than 41% of respondents "agreed or strongly agreed" there are adequate walking and biking opportunities throughout the county. Based on public input and Steering Committee feedback, improved circulation should be a top priority of Owen County officials.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

TRANSPORTATION VISION:

Owen County's local roads and highways are utilized daily by residents traveling to and from work or school, by farmers pulling large equipment or hauling grain, and by local retailers shipping goods to and from their businesses. Ensuring the county's roadways and bridges meet these demands, and the desire for multi-modal transportation options in the county is key to ensuring that Owen County can grow its population and local economy, as well as enhance the overall quality of life of its residents.

The county's size and limited budget creates challenges to addressing all of the critical transportation investment needed across the county. The goal of the transportation chapter is to outline strategic transportation goals and objectives that will enable Owen County to improve its most important transportation corridors to keep its residents and businesses moving forward.

GOAL 1: Conduct a review of County documents and ordinances to ensure leadership has the tools needed to develop the transportation network in Owen County.

As growth and development occurs in Owen County, it will be important to equip County staff with the tools needed to properly implement projects to protect current and future transportation corridors.

GOAL 2: Complete a road inventory and develop an asset management plan that allows the County to be fiscally responsible when maintaining the transportation network.

County officials and the County Highway Department should work together to inventory, prioritize, and fund needed improvements to the county's roads and bridges. For the safety and convenience of all residents, farmers, businesses, and visitors, Owen County's bridges and roadways must be part of an asset management plan to ensure these facilities are properly maintained and improved when necessary.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 3: Work with INDOT regarding future State Road 46 improvements.

With the completion of Interstate 69 through Morgan County, the critical role State Road 46 provides in connecting Owen County to the region will only become more important. The county should continue to work with INDOT officials to make the necessary improvements along this high-profile corridor for all users of the highway. This should include safety measures for any future bike/pedestrian crossings around the McCormick’s Creek State Park/Spencer area.

With the completion of Interstate 69 through Morgan County, the critical role State Road 46 provides in connecting Owen County to the region will only become more important. The county should continue to work with INDOT officials to make the necessary improvements along this high-profile corridor for all users of the highway. Improvements may include supporting policy including an access management and control ordinance to limit driveway cuts and shared frontage roads. Safety measures for any future bike/pedestrian crossings around the McCormick’s Creek State Park/Spencer area should also be taken into consideration and encouraged.

GOAL 4: Do not support the addition of new highways in Owen County.

Throughout the planning process, residents and leadership provided clear input that new highways are not wanted in Owen County. In particular, an extension of the Mid-States Corridor Project through Owen County is not supported by Owen County.

IMPLEMENTATION

TRANSPORTATION

| Goal 1: Conduct a review of County documents and ordinances to ensure leadership has the tools needed to develop the transportation network in Owen County. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Review the County's Roadway Classification Map to ensure the roadway designations are up-to-date and meet the needs of Owen County. | County Engineer, Planning Director/Plan Commission |
| Review the County's road standards to ensure street, sidewalk, and trail standards are up-to-date and meet the transportation needs of the County. | County Engineer |
| Include provisions in the new Unified Development Ordinance that require new developments to complete a traffic study that outlines improvements needed to be made as part of the impact of the new development. | Planning Department/Plan Commission |
| Develop and adopt an Access Management and Control Ordinance that addresses access management along key transportation corridors in the County, including the State Road 46 Corridor and State Road 43 Corridor. | County Engineer/Plan Commission/County Commissioners |
| Develop and adopt a Right-of-Way Dedication Ordinance that meets the needs of Owen County and is easy to implement. | County Engineer/County Commissioners |
| Goal 2: Complete a road inventory and develop an asset management plan that allows the County to be fiscally responsible when maintaining the transportation network. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Work to remain eligible to receive Community Crossing Matching Funds from the Indiana Department of Transportation. | County Engineer/Highway Department |
| Continue updating the Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER) study on County roads to maintain an inventory of current roadway conditions. | County Engineer/Highway Department |

IMPLEMENTATION

| Goal 3: Work with INDOT regarding future State Road 46 improvements. | |
|---|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Continue developing Owen County's relationship with INDOT and maintain open communication on desired future improvements to the State Road 46 Corridor. | County Engineer/County Commissioners |
| Develop an Access Management and Control Ordinance that addresses access management along the State Road 46 Corridor. | County Engineer/Plan Commission/County Commissioners |
| Work with INDOT to establish a frontage road that parallels State Road 46 west of Concord Road near the Dollar General. | County Engineer |
| Work with INDOT to develop a plan for key intersections along the State Road 46 Corridor, including State Road 43 and Flatwoods Road. | County Engineer/Plan Commission |
| Goal 4: Do not support the addition of new highways in Owen County. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Designate an Owen County representative (staff or elected official) to track progress on the Mid-States Corridor Project. Have this representative report findings back to County Commissioners on a regular basis. | County Commissioners |
| To help guide future INDOT decisions, develop a county-wide Thoroughfare Plan. In order to be officially considered for planning decision-making, the thoroughfare plan must eventually be adopted as a component of this comprehensive plan. | County Engineer/County Commissioners |



CHAPTER 12

AGRICULTURE

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Agriculture remains an integral part of Owen County’s culture, rural identity, and local economy. Although the average size of farms decreased slightly between 2012 and 2017, the total number of farms increased between 2012 and 2017 based on USDA Census of Agriculture statistics. To help promote and retain the agricultural character of the county, county officials should encourage growth and development adjacent to existing communities such as Gosport and Spencer and be mindful of compatible land uses adjacent to agricultural land.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

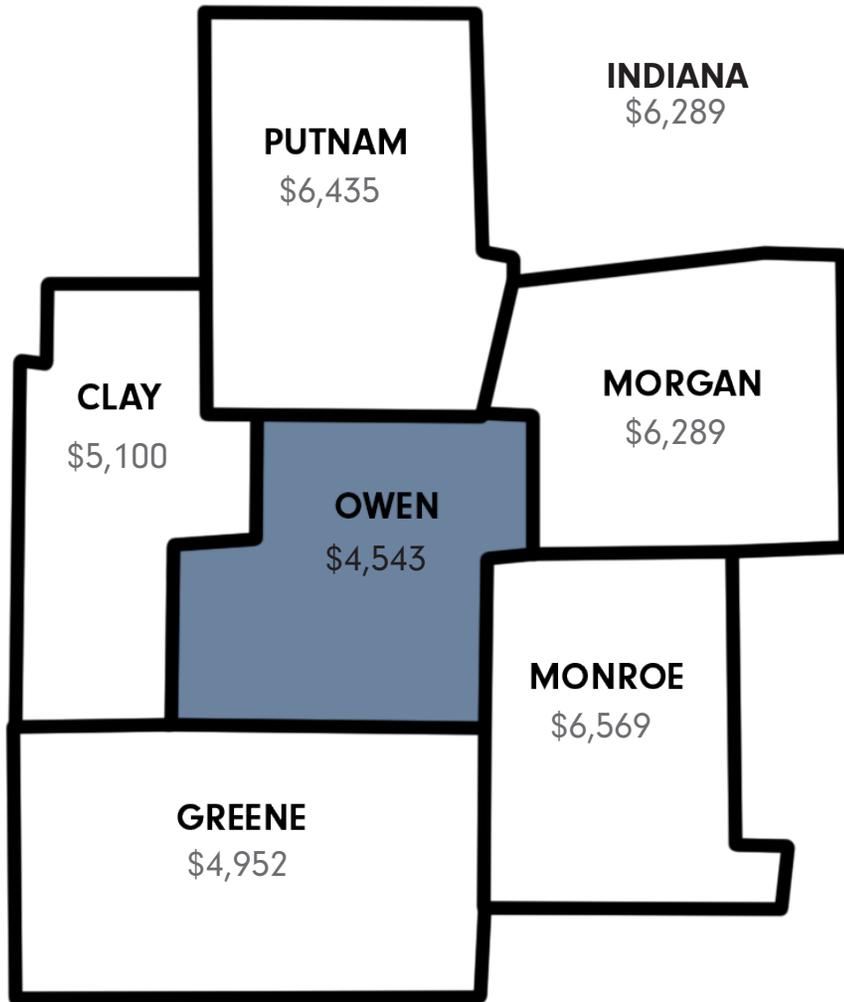
Other than the areas surrounding Spencer and Gosport, much of Owen County remains rural in nature. Efforts to promote and protect the county’s productive farmland continues to be an important component of this plan.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are approximately 111,931 acres of agricultural land in Owen County. This represents approximately 45.5% of Owen County’s total land area of approximately 246,000 acres. Surprisingly, this percentage has increased by 17% since 2012. While there has been an increase of agricultural land use, the percentage of acreage cultivated is a relatively low percentage when compared to other Indiana counties, but those areas nonetheless represent the core of Owen County’s agricultural activities. Approximately 66% of the agricultural land (73,571 acres) in Owen County is cultivated for crops and 29% is uncultivated (i.e. pastureland) or covered in woodlands. From an economic perspective, the average net cash income per Owen County farm in 2017 was only \$11,493 compared to the State average of \$50,171.

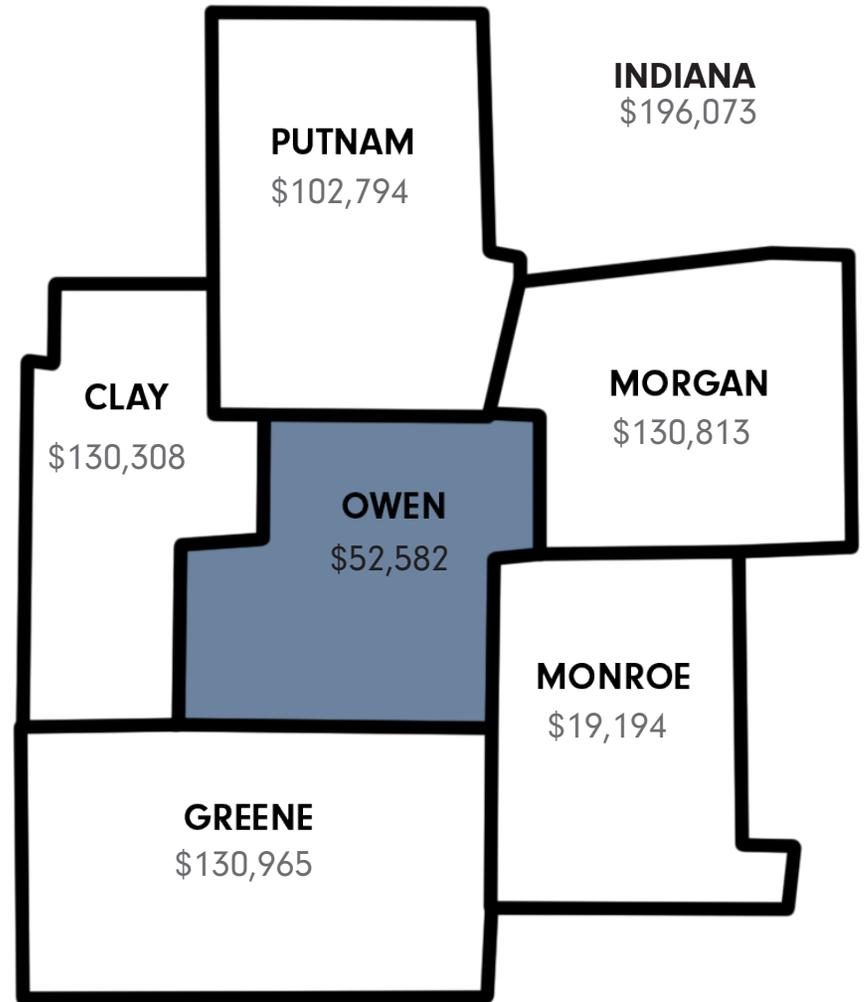
| | 2007 | 2012 | 2017 |
|--|------|------|------|
| # of Owen County Farms | 570 | 549 | 649 |
| Ave. Size of Owen County Farms (acres) | 154 | 174 | 172 |
| Ave. Size of Farms in Indiana (acres) | 242 | 251 | 264 |

FIGURE 12.1: 2017 ESTIMATED AVERAGE MARKET VALUE OF LAND & BUILDINGS (PER ACRE)



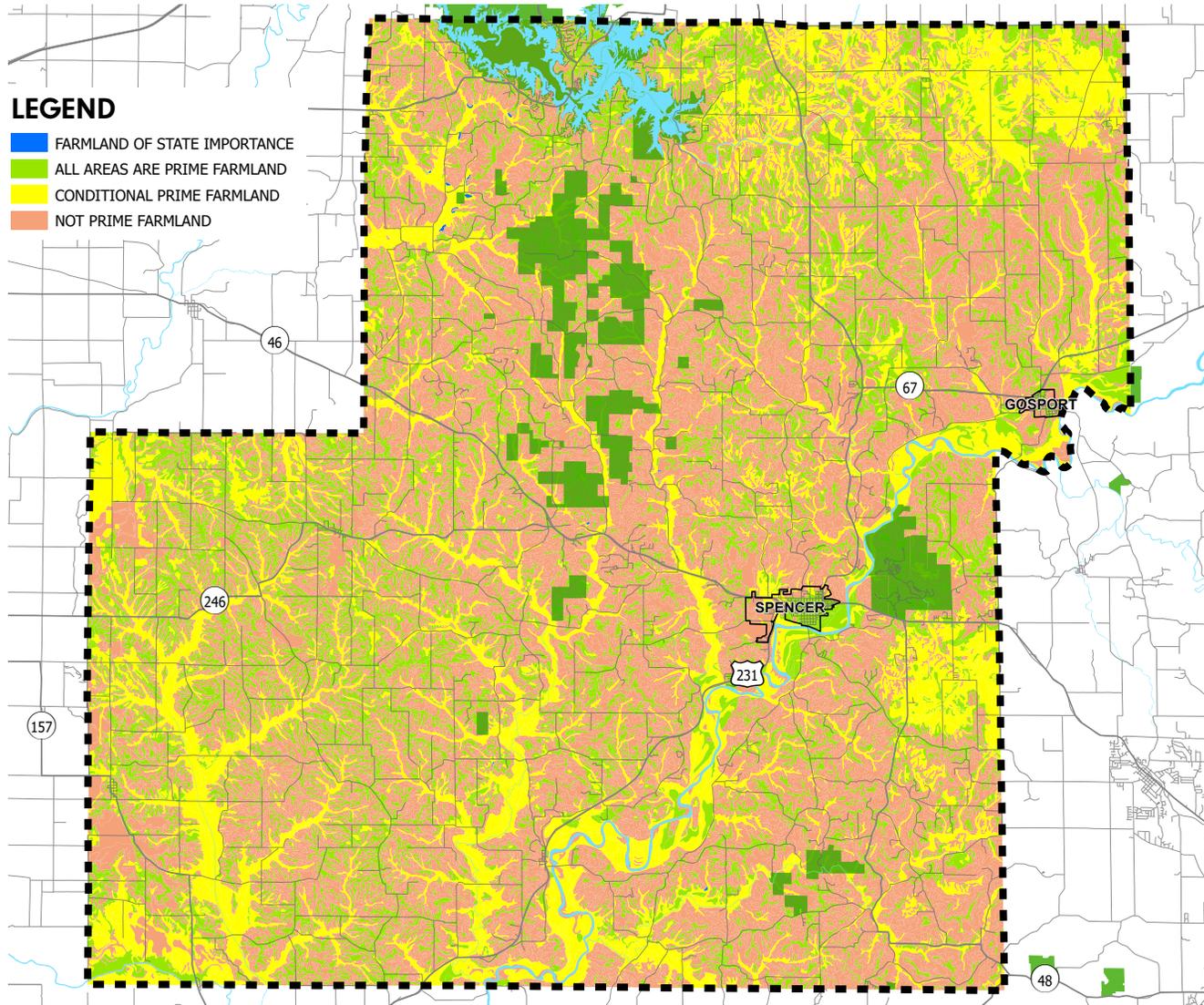
Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

FIGURE 12.2: 2017 AVERAGE MARKET VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD (PER FARM)



Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

FIGURE 12.3: PRIME FARMLAND IN OWEN COUNTY

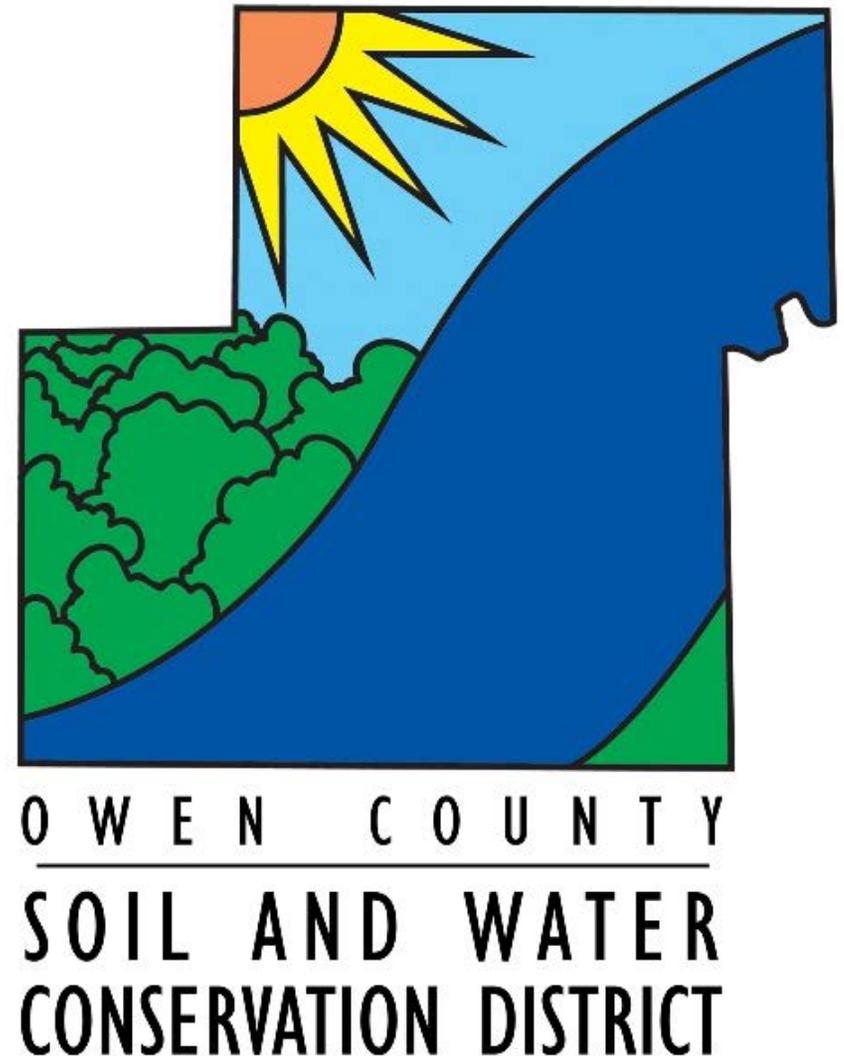


Source: USDA Web Soil Survey - Farmland Classification

OWEN COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Established in 1946, the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has been a reliable resource for Owen County landowners and farmers seeking to reduce soil loss and increase soil, water, and woodland quality. The mission of the Owen County SWCD is to provide educational, technical, and financial assistance regarding the proper use and management of soil, water, and related natural resources for citizens in Owen County. The SWCD was also one of the founding partners of the MYPATH Trail System.

According to its website, one of the programs offered to local farmers by the Owen County SWCD is the Soil Health Restore (SHR) program. The program is a Clean Water Indiana funded project for row crop farmers in Owen and Morgan Counties focused on building soil health and ultimately enhancing the productivity of cropland and improving water quality. The goal is to reduce soil tillage and plant cover crops over the fall and winter (between cash crops) to build the beneficial soil microbes needed for successful crops. Minimizing or eliminating soil tillage also reduces soil erosion that can ultimately be washed into nearby waterways, thus reducing overall water quality in Owen County.



Logo for the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

As noted previously, Owen County's rural and agricultural setting remains an important part of its identity. According to survey respondents nearly 50% believed Owen County does a good job of protecting agricultural/farming practices. Conversely, 44% were "uncertain" if the agriculture industry is being used to its fullest potential. To paraphrase one survey respondent, Owen County is beautiful for both its natural features and the farming community. The workforce behind the farming industry should be respected and the county's natural setting should be protected. Both are vital to the prosperity of businesses in the county.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

AGRICULTURE VISION:

County residents and leaders agree that protecting agricultural land is important to preserving the county's rural character and economic diversity. As Owen County seeks to manage future development and growth, one of the key strategies to retaining its identity will center on maintaining its rural/agricultural heritage.

GOAL 1: Retain and support agricultural operations.

Traditionally, agriculture has been a part of the identity of Owen County. It is important to preserve and protect prime/productive farmland that provides both economic value and a sense of place for the county.

GOAL 2: Support and promote agricultural best management practices.

Maintaining and sustaining long-term agricultural operations also entails proper stewardship of Owen County's natural resources. Owen County officials should continue to partner with the Owen County SWCD to educate and support landowners to institute proper farming practices that protect county waterways and woodlands and improve soil productivity.

IMPLEMENTATION

AGRICULTURE

| Goal 1: Retain and support agricultural operations. | |
|--|----------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Ensure the Unified Development Ordinance is updated to ensure definitions, permitted uses, and regulations on Agricultural zoned properties are still relevant and appropriate. | Plan Commission |
| Ensure language in the Unified Development Ordinance supports the newest trends in agriculture, including farmer’s markets, hobby farms, conservation areas, roadside agricultural stands. | Plan Commission |
| Goal 2: Support and promote agricultural best management practices. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Engage with the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District to ensure Owen County is taking advantage of opportunities that are available to the County and private property owners. | County Commissioners |



CHAPTER 13

NATURAL RESOURCES

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The natural beauty of Owen County is not confined to its state parks and nature preserves. The county's abundance of high-quality natural resources is one of the reasons people have been drawn to, and remain, in Owen County today. It is important to develop policies that balance the protection of woodlands and other natural features with Owen County's desire for future growth and development.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

The previous comprehensive plan noted the impacts of flood events and the need to introduce land use policies that mitigate future flood events. These initiatives included policies that directed development away from floodplains and supporting the Town of Spencer's efforts to limit development in watersheds surrounding the community. The plan also stressed the importance of limiting new residential development in areas not suitable for septic systems.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The landscape of Owen County is comprised of several intact natural areas that highlight South Central Indiana's diverse landscape. These areas include Indiana's first state park, McCormick's Creek State Park, the Owen-Putnam State Forest, and the Cataract Falls State Recreation Area. Together, these areas set aside or protect roughly 12,000 acres of natural beauty in Owen County. For additional information about these State parks refer to Chapter 14 – Parks and Recreation. The White River is also a primary natural feature of the county offering a scenic setting and recreational opportunity for residents and visitors alike.

Although Owen County remains relatively rural in nature with abundant woodlands and other natural areas, steps should be taken to protect and preserve these features for future generations. In fact, according to the USDA's Forest Service, an estimated 6,000 acres of open space are converted daily to other uses in the United States. Uncontrolled growth and suburban expansion often results in the loss of woodlands, grasslands, and other natural areas.

THE WHITE RIVER

Approximately 33 miles of the White River wind through Owen County and can be credited with the early settlements of Gosport and Spencer along its bank. Collectively, the White River, its associated floodplain and riparian areas not only represent fertile habitat for plants and animals, but also offers Owen County residents a scenic amenity worth protecting. Much of Owen County is in the Lower White River Watershed, or more specifically the West Fork White River-Owen County Watershed. According to a 2007 Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) report, the watershed includes the counties of Owen (80.3%), Greene (13.8%) and Monroe (5.9%) and encompasses a drainage area of 172,800 acres. Approximately 90.9% of the land in the Owen County tributary watershed is forested.

In recent years the White River has become more of a recreational destination for river enthusiasts for Owen County and surrounding county residents. For those wanting to canoe/kayak, there are several access points along the river within Owen County. In Gosport, there is an access point near North Street and the railroad tracks. In Spencer, access is at the state-owned Spencer Public Fishing Site off of River Road east of Town across the White River bridge.



Views of the White River outside of Spencer, IN.



The forest at McCormick's Creek State Park is similar to other thriving woodlands in Owen County.

KARST FEATURES

Like much of South Central Indiana, Owen County contains a number of karst features. This is especially true in the eastern portion of the county around Gosport and Spencer. As noted in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, Owen County is home to 107 caves with 114 mapped and known entrances.

WOODLANDS AND TIMBER SALES

Well-managed, healthy woodlands can provide environmental, recreational, and economic benefits to local communities. The DNR's Division of Forestry allocates 15% of timber-sale revenue from state forests to counties in which harvests occur. DNR forestry management practices are based on the best science and nationally accepted standards and conducted in a certified sustainable manner that earns continued approval from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the Forest Stewardship Council.

Each county shares the funds it receives with rural and volunteer fire departments that maintain a cooperative agreement with the DNR's Fire Control Headquarters. Fire departments are encouraged to use the funds to improve their wildland firefighting capability. Owen County gets a portion of timber sales from lumber cut/culled from state-managed properties. In 2016, Owen County received just over \$18,000 from timber sales in the county.

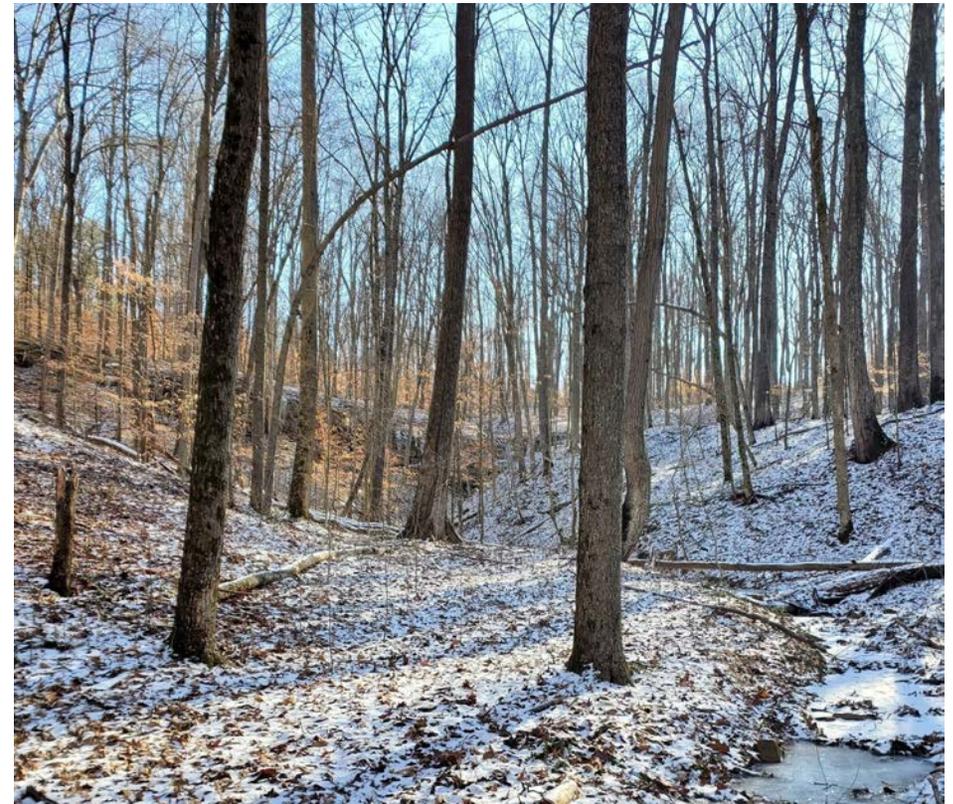
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Based on feedback throughout this planning process, the Steering Committee, stakeholders and residents understood and appreciated the importance of Owen County's natural features. According to public survey results, nearly 54% of respondents "agreed or strongly agreed" that Owen County does a good job protecting its woodlands and natural spaces. However, only 41% of respondents "agreed or strongly agreed" that Owen County does a good job protecting its waterways.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

NATURAL RESOURCES VISION:

The unique natural resources throughout the county should be utilized in a responsible manner for public use that also highlight and celebrate the richness the county's landscape has to offer. Owen County's natural resources should not be viewed as a limitation for development but as an opportunity to enhance the county's identity and quality of life.



The Owen-Putnam State Forest in winter.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

GOAL 1: Implement steps to protect the White River.

The White River and the natural areas that buffer it from development collectively form an important community amenity through Owen County. The river offers a peaceful natural setting for residents and serves an important functional role: a critical habitat for animals and plants and helps to mitigate heavy rain events by absorbing stormwater and recharging the groundwater system.

GOAL 2: Capitalize on the natural assets of Owen County.

The variety and amount of public land and natural features in the county provide residents with outstanding access to parks and natural resources. These natural areas are a key contributor to the community's quality of life. This plan recommends county officials continue to partner with State officials to capitalize on these natural assets in a sustainable manner for current and future residents.

GOAL 3: Connect and educate Owen County residents on the importance of the natural environment.

One of the most effective ways to protect the county's natural environment and unique amenities is to make it a part of residents' everyday life and highlight the beneficial role it provides. The county could partner with like-minded organizations like the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District, Owen County Community Foundation, or the school corporation to develop educational programs highlighting the inter-connectedness between the built environment, local waterways, and other natural systems.

GOAL 4: Expand and incentivize businesses that support recreational activities.

Many outdoor activities, like kayaking, require expensive equipment. Currently, residents and visitors must purchase their own equipment from a retailer outside of Owen County, or borrow equipment from a friend, due to a lack of equipment retailers in the county. Expanding businesses that sell or rent equipment in support of outdoor recreational activities, will ensure residents and visitors can enjoy Owen County's natural resources while spurring additional economic activity. Owen County should identify and recruit businesses that support natural resource activities.

IMPLEMENTATION

NATURAL RESOURCES

| Goal 1: Implement steps to protect the White River. | |
|---|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Consider adopting an overlay district that preserves and protects natural areas along the White River Corridor. Involve adjacent landowners in these discussions and ensure that these protections do not restrict property rights. | Plan Commission |
| Goal 2: Capitalize on the natural assets of Owen County. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Partner and collaborate with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to support their efforts in preserving natural areas. | County Commissioners |
| Collaborate and support the Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau in promoting the County's natural assets. | County Commissioners/Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau |
| Goal 3: Connect and educate Owen County residents on the importance of the natural environment. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Partner with and support like-minded organizations, such as the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District, Owen County Community Foundation, or the school corporation to develop educational programs highlighting the inter-connectedness between the built environment, local waterways, and other natural systems. | County Commissioners |
| Goal 4: Expand and incentivize businesses that support recreational activities. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Recruit and incentivize businesses that complement and support the natural resources component of Owen County. | Owen County Chamber of Commerce |



CHAPTER 14

PARKS & RECREATION

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Although the county is comprised of rich and varied natural settings, Owen County currently does not have a Parks and Recreation Department or Parks Board. Whereas the previous plan focused primarily on capitalizing on existing State-owned parks and recreational areas, the intent of this comprehensive plan is to develop a more local park system accessible to a wider segment of Owen County residents.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

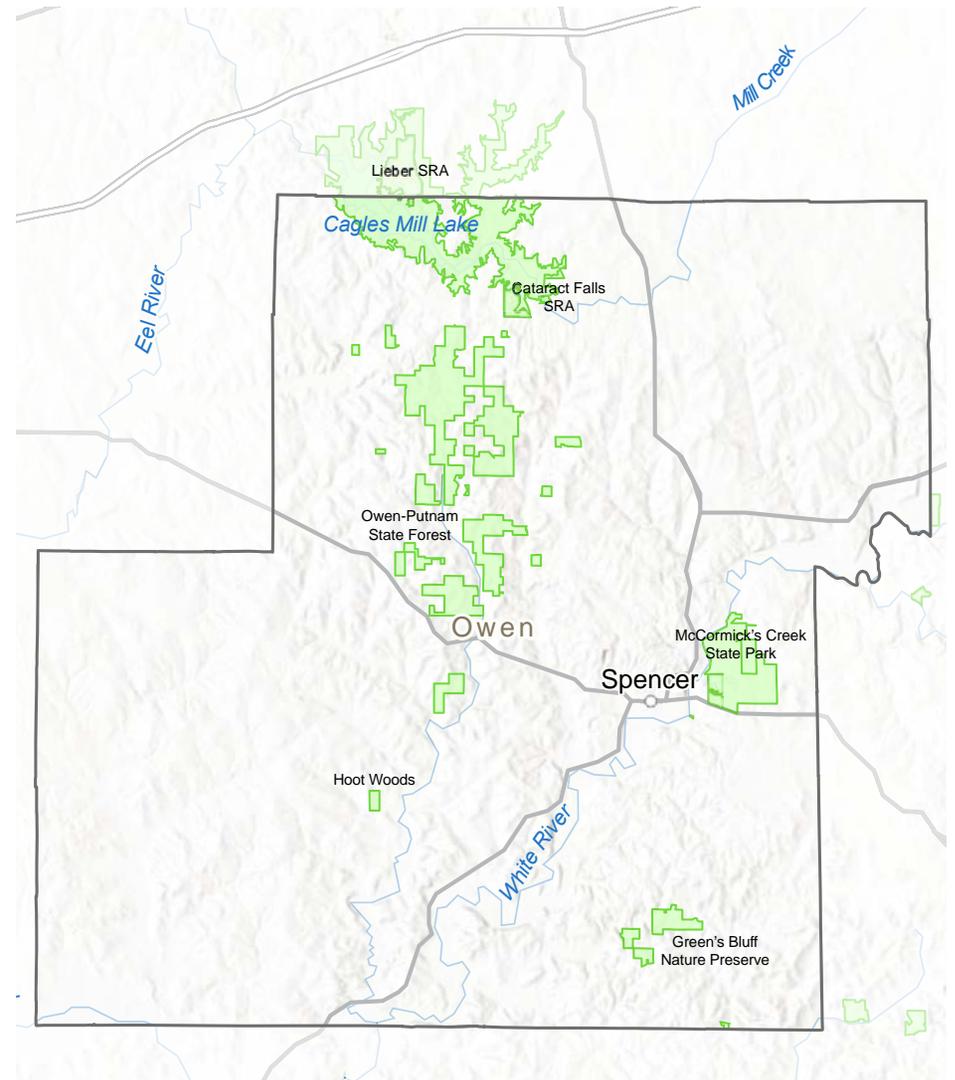
The previous comprehensive plan had a limited focus on the role of parks and recreation. One of the goals under Community Facilities section was to *“Protect and connect state forest and park properties in the county.”*

Strategies to achieving this centered on:

- Create a park master plan and use it to review and coordinate possible trail connections with State officials.
- Secure funding for trail connections. Grant applications will require an approved parks master plan.

The construction and popularity of the MYPATH multi-use trail since the completion of the previous comprehensive plan has revealed the importance of creating quality of life amenities for residents. This plan expands on this popular attraction with the goal of expanding recreational opportunities throughout the county.

FIGURE 14.1: PARKS & RECREATION MAP



Source: IDNR Managed Lands (2020)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Owen County is home to over 10,000 acres of parks and recreational areas, primarily in the form of State Parks and State Recreational Areas. Collectively, these park areas could serve as the foundation for community leaders seeking to expand recreational opportunities for Owen County residents. There are also efforts underway to link these assets. For example, MYPath is a network of safe sidewalks and multi-use trails that seeks to connect the YMCA on the west side of Spencer, Indiana with McCormick’s Creek State Park on the east side. Efforts to develop and enhance recreational opportunities are limited, however, because the county is currently operating without a parks and recreation department. Listed below are some of the primary destinations and nature preserves comprising a large percentage of Owen County’s acreage.

RICHARD LIEBER STATE RECREATIONAL AREA

This 8,500-acre SRA straddles Owen and Putnam counties and can be accessed via State Road 243. It includes a playground, campgrounds, picnic areas, an aquatic center, and approximately 1.25 miles of trails. The recreational area also has a marina on Cagles Mill Lake offering concessions, seasonal mooring, fuel, boat rental, and fishing supplies.

CATARACT FALLS STATE RECREATION AREA

Cataract Falls SRA is part of the larger Lieber SRA. Cataract Falls is comprised of two waterfalls along Mill Creek at the southern end of the 1,400-acre Cagles Mill Lake which was built in 1952 as Indiana’s first flood control reservoir. Cataract Falls is the largest waterfall by volume in Indiana. The Cataract Falls SRA includes a playground, picnic areas, the half-mile Ed Dailey Nature Trail, and the Cataract Falls Bridge – the only covered bridge in Owen County. The historic bridge was built in 1876, restored in 1995, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.



Cataract Falls, a valuable natural resource for Owen County.



Wolf Cave at McCormick's Creek State Park.

MCCORMICK'S CREEK STATE PARK

Land that now comprises McCormick's Creek State Park was purchased from the estate of Dr. Fred Denkwalter following his death in 1914. McCormick's Creek State Park became Indiana's first state park in 1916 and remains one of the state's most popular parks attracting approximately one million visitors annually. Originally only 350 acres along the West Fork of the White River, McCormick's Creek has grown to over 1,900 acres today. It includes ten different trails totaling 10.7 miles, horse trails, family and group campgrounds, cabins, swimming pool, and the 76-room Canyon Inn. The original inn was a former sanatorium built by Dr. Denkwalter as a place for rest and relaxation for visitors. Because of the park's long history, several structures were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 including the entrance gatehouse, original nature center, and the stone bridge over McCormick's Creek.

OWEN-PUTNAM STATE FOREST

The 6,563-acre Owen-Putnam State Forest is located north of State Road 46 northwest of Spencer. This state forest consists of several land parcels scattered in a north-south orientation between State Roads 46 and 42. From the hardwood forests to sandstone bluffs, this natural setting offers a variety of camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, and other recreational opportunities. There are about 14 miles of trails for horses that include a moderately difficult 9-mile trail for mountain bikers.

GREEN'S BLUFF NATURE PRESERVE

Owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy, this 1,134-acre preserve was established in 1985. It is comprised of two separate properties located south of Spencer along Raccoon Creek. Its creekside location is comprised of several steep, rocky slopes and cliffs, along with forested hills, a rookery, and remnants of an old grist mill. The 1.2-mile North Loop Trail is a loop trail through the northern section of Green's Bluff, and Raccoon Woods Trail is a 1.4-mile trail traversing the newer southern section of Green's Bluff Nature Preserve. Both trails have small gravel trailheads for hikers, and both trails include interpretive signage compliments of the Duke Energy Foundation.

OTHER RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

The MYPath Trail is envisioned as a network of sidewalks and multi-use trails that will connect Spencer with McCormick's Creek State Park. The Riverfront Trail is the first phase of the trail network and is comprised of a 1-mile loop that extends from the YMCA in Spencer, across the White River along the Pottersville Road bridge, then east along the White River. Future trail extensions will continue along the White River, cross State Road 46, and continue east to McCormick's Creek State Park. A number of community organizations, local business and residents have donated time and money to make the trail a reality.

The Rolling Meadows Golf Course is an 18-hole private golf course located east of Spencer along the Owen-Monroe County line. There are also public access points to the White River at Spencer and Gosport.

Other destinations in the county include:

- Amazon Lake
- Camp Otto Lake
- Paradise Lake
- Ernie Pyle Island
- Gosport and Jones Quarries
- Hollybrook Lake
- Jordan Seeps Nature Preserve (28 acres)
- Greybrook Lake
- Wolf and Boone Caves
- Hoot Woods



The Cataract Falls Bridge - Owen County's only covered bridge.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

According to public survey results, 51% of respondents “agreed or strongly agreed” that Owen County needs a parks and recreation department. Respondents also acknowledged that although the county contains a variety of recreational destinations and activities, what the county is lacking are the connections between these destinations. In fact, nearly 61% of respondents “agreed or strongly agreed” that Owen County needs a trail system that provides an alternative means for traveling around the county.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

PARKS & RECREATION VISION:

Owen County should continue to strengthen and connect its offering of outdoor recreational assets to enhance residents’ quality of life and attract new residents/visitors to the county. The county should continue to protect and capitalize on its offering of parks and outdoor activities and expand its trail network linking key destination throughout the county.

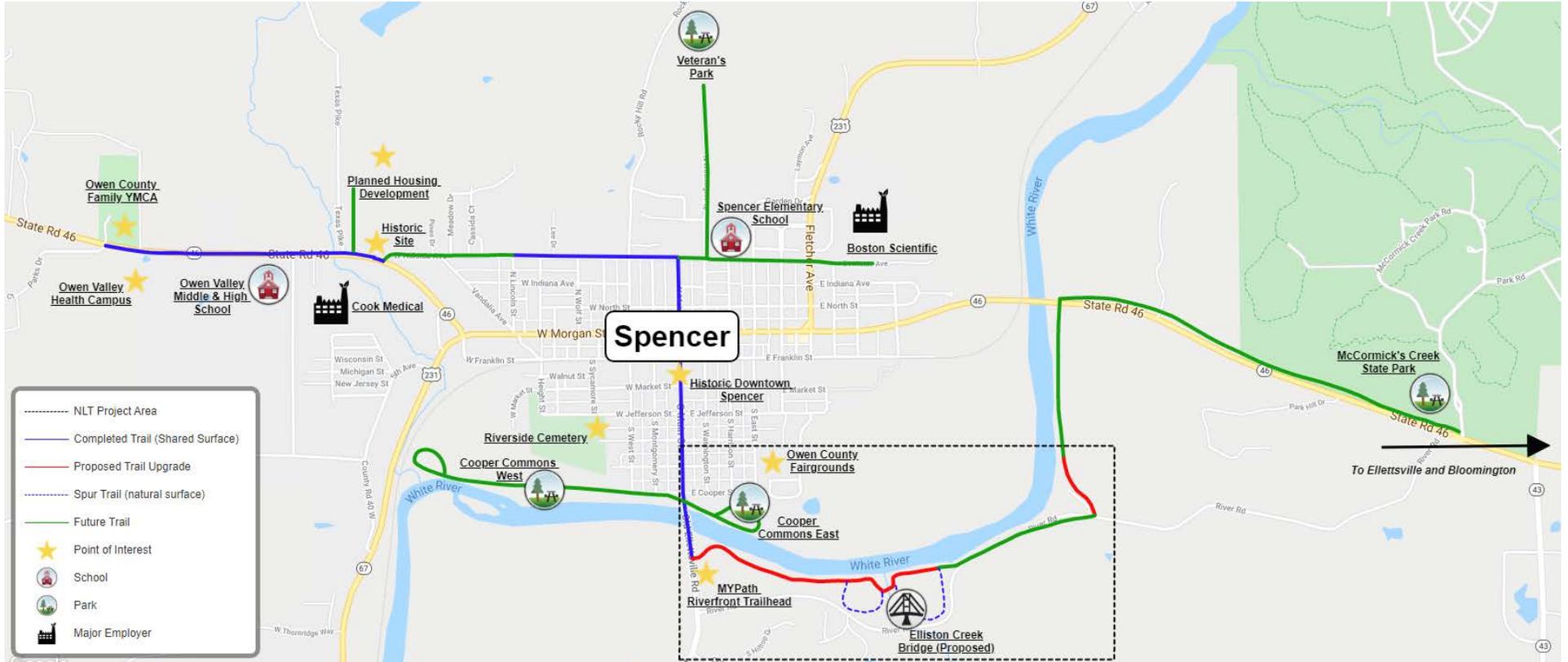
GOAL 1: Establish a County Parks and Recreation Department.

As noted previously, Owen County is rich in natural amenities and recreational opportunities, but currently lacks a parks and recreation department. We recommend county officials pursue efforts to create and sustainably fund a county parks and recreation department.

GOAL 2: Expand MYPATH.

The success and popularity of the MYPATH Trail in Spencer and along the White River has shown that there is a strong desire among Owen County residents to take advantage of new recreational opportunities. It is important Owen County partner with like-minded organizations to build on the success of the MYPATH Trail and expand the multi-use trail network to connect residents to amenities and local destinations within the county.

FIGURE 14.2: MYPATH OVERVIEW



Source: Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District

FIGURE 14.3: MYPATH PROJECT AREA



Source: Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District

IMPLEMENTATION

PARKS & RECREATION

| Goal 1: Establish a County Parks and Recreation Department. | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Develop and adopt a County Parks and Recreation Ordinance that establishes a County Park Board. | County Commissioners |
| Identify a funding source, develop a budget, and appropriate funds to the County Park Board. | County Commissioners |
| Develop and adopt a Five-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plan that meets standards set forth by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. In order to be officially considered for planning decision-making, the parks plan must eventually be adopted as a component of this comprehensive plan. | Parks Board |
| Goal 2: Expand MYPath. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Work with the Owen County Community Foundation to develop a Master Trails Plan that expands MYPath throughout Owen County. | OCCF, County Commissioners |
| Work to secure funding to implement trails (through grants, donations, or budgets). | OCCF, County Commissioners |



CHAPTER 15

HISTORIC & ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

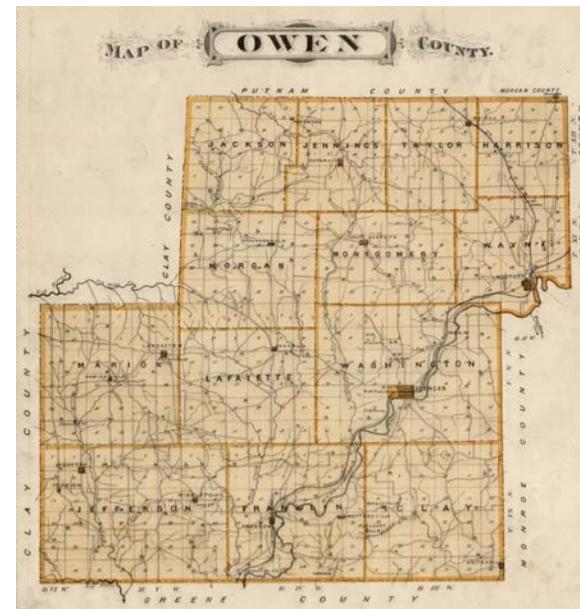
Owen County's historic and archaeological resources – namely the downtowns of Spencer and Gosport – represent historic and cultural connections for residents to the county's collective past. In addition to these communities, the historic resources in McCormick's Creek State Park and Cataract Falls SRA add to the rich history Owen County has to offer residents and visitors. This plan outlines a series of recommendations to strengthen these local destinations through preservation and adaptive re-use to make them vibrant (and relevant) contributors to Owen County's quality of life.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

The previous comprehensive plan primarily looked at historic resources from the perspective of economic development opportunities in the traditional downtowns of Spencer and Gosport.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

According to the *1994 Owen County Interim Report*, Owen County was initially settled in 1816, and officially organized in 1818 from sections of Daviess and Sullivan counties. The county seat of Spencer was laid out soon after in 1820. As the primary mode of transportation during Owen County's early settlement, the West Fork of the White River shaped the development of Gosport and Spencer. The introduction of several railroads through the county in the 1850's opened Owen County to outside markets and represented the beginning of a long period of economic growth. Today, Owen County retains a number of historic buildings and districts representing its early days of growth and prosperity.



Map of Owen County from the 1876 Atlas of Indiana.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Although Owen County does not have any locally-designated historic districts, it is home to two districts in the National Register of Historic Places.

These districts include:

SPENCER COURTHOUSE SQUARE HISTORIC DISTRICT (NR-2589)

The Spencer Courthouse Square Historic District is comprised of a 9-block commercial area centered around the Owen County Courthouse. The historic district was listed in the National Register in August of 2020. The district contains 31 contributing buildings including the Owen County Courthouse which was built in 1910-1911 and individually listed in the National Register in 1994. The Spencer Town Hall and Fire Station are also within the district and were listed in the National Register in 1982.

GOSPORT HISTORIC DISTRICT (NR-2289)

The Gosport Historic District encompasses seven square blocks in the center of Gosport and includes 40 contributing buildings. The district's core is comprised of brick commercial buildings with traditional 19th century storefronts with traditional residences surrounding this commercial center. The district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in June of 2013.



A building in the Gosport Historic District.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES

In addition to the two historic districts described above, there are also several structures in Owen County listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

These include:

- Allison-Robinson House (Spencer)
- David Enoch, Beem House (Spencer)
- Dr. H.G. Osgood House (Gosport)
- Ennis Archaeological site
- Moffett-Ralston House (Patrickburg vicinity)
- New Albany and Salem Railroad Station (Gosport)
- Spencer Town Hall and Fire Station (Spencer)
- Spencer Presbyterian Church and Manse (Spencer)
- Spencer Public Library (Spencer)
- Secrest Ferry Bridge (Gosport)
- Secrest-Wampler House (Gosport vicinity)
- Vandalia Methodist Church and Vandalia School (Spencer)
- Several structures at McCormick's Creek State Park, including the park's entrance and gatehouse, the CCC Recreation Building/Nature Museum, and the Stone Arch Bridge
- Old Town Cemetery (Laurimore) and other cemeteries dating back to the early 19th century

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Feedback gathered throughout this planning process revealed residents understood and appreciated the importance of Owen County's historic sites and downtown areas. Approximately 75% of respondents to the public survey "agreed or strongly agreed" that historic sites and structures are important to Owen County's culture. However, although slightly more than 83% believed the historic downtowns in the county's communities are important, only 32% "agreed or strongly agreed" the historic buildings that make up these same downtowns are in good condition.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

HISTORIC RESOURCES VISION:

Owen County's historic resources not only tell the story of its history, but also serve as the foundation for the county's sense of place and represent economic and redevelopment opportunities. This mindset is an important consideration as we set out to reinvest in and reinvigorate all of Owen County's existing resources.



Dr. H.G. Osgood House in Gosport, Indiana.

GOAL 1: Support strategies to improve the municipal downtowns in Owen County.

Vibrant and active downtowns depend on a combination of a healthy business environment, quality outdoor spaces, and successful community events. In addition, having residents living in downtown areas can generate new business opportunities, and/or allow existing businesses to expand their hours of operation. County and economic development leaders should support municipal strategies to improve the vibrancy of Owen County's downtowns and preserve their historic integrity.

GOAL 2: Support and highlight State-owned historic resources.

As noted previously, the various historic and archaeological resources located on State-owned properties add to the rich heritage of Owen County. When feasible, county officials and/or organizations should partner with State agencies to celebrate and integrate these historic sites into educational and promotional materials that tell the story of Owen County.

IMPLEMENTATION

HISTORIC RESOURCES

| Goal 1: Support strategies to improve the municipal downtowns in Owen County. | |
|---|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Meet with Spencer and Gosport to review their downtown strategies and determine if Owen County can support them in their efforts. | County Commissioners |
| Goal 2: Support and highlight State-owned historic resources. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Partner with State agencies to celebrate and promote the historic sites that help tell the story of Owen County. | Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau |



CHAPTER 16

HAZARD MITIGATION

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Owen County must be prepared to quickly respond to emergencies, whether it is a heavy rain event causing flash floods, a tornado, extreme heat, or damaging winds. According to the Disaster Recovery Branch of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (DHS), every Indiana county experienced at least four combined disaster and emergency declarations between 1998 to 2018 resulting in millions of dollars in damage. Given climate trends, Owen County residents and infrastructure will be at risk in the future.

UPDATES FROM THE 2010 COMP PLAN

The topic of hazard mitigation and community sustainability is a relatively new topic of discussion for Owen County and was not highlighted in the 2010 plan. We need to ensure we are a community that not only plans for growth and development, but also for detrimental events, such as natural disasters.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Where and how growth occurs, in both the short and long term, can have a major impact as Owen County prepares for and recovers from natural disasters.

Especially important is the linkage between hazard mitigation and community planning in the context of building sustainable communities. Sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainability can focus on the built environment, water systems, ecosystems, agriculture, energy creation and consumption, materials, and toxics.

As part of the Midwest, Owen County in the coming decades is expected to experience extreme heat, heavy downpours, and flooding. Those conditions will impact infrastructure, human health, agricultural production, forestry, transportation, air quality, and water quality.

Of particular interest to Owen County are projections for increases in the frequency and intensity of storms. These storms can lead to extreme flooding, increased stormwater runoff, and other impacts that can overwhelm or damage water infrastructure, cause significant property damage, disrupt local communities, and adversely impact public health and safety.

The Midwest experienced a 42% increase in heavy precipitation from 1958–2016, according to *The Fourth National Climate Assessment*, conducted by the U.S. Global Change Research Program.

Locally, the Town of Spencer and areas along the White River have experienced severe flooding, most notably in 1913, 2005, 2008, and 2021. The river reached a peak stage of 26.8 feet in the 2008 flood, according to the U.S. Geological Survey report, *Flood-Inundation Maps for the White River at Spencer, Indiana*. In 2021, Fox59 news reported that 23 culverts were washed out and two bridges suffering significant damage. Over 30 roads were closed.

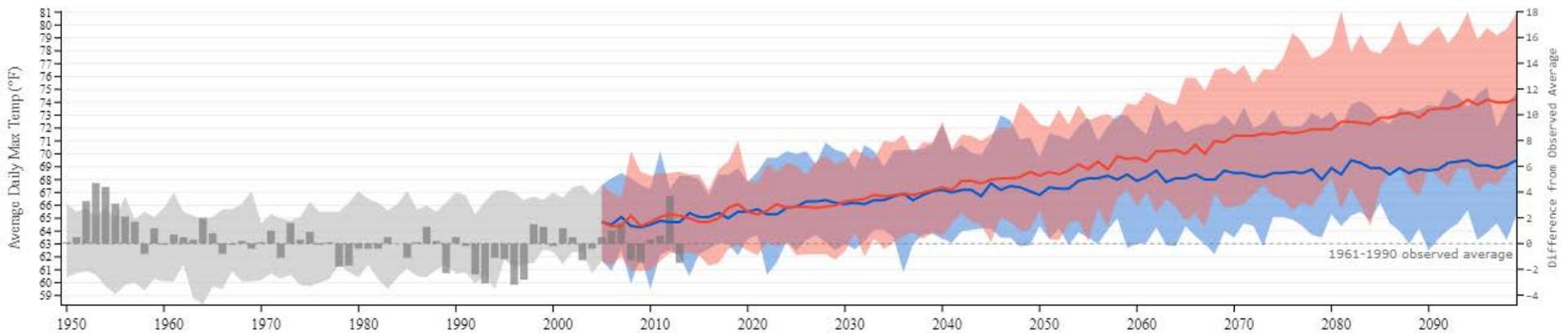
Another concern is heat. When people are exposed to extreme heat, they can suffer from potentially deadly illnesses, such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Heat is

the leading weather-related killer in the United States, even though most heat-related deaths are preventable through outreach and intervention.

The average daily temperature for Owen County was 61.6 degrees in 2013. That could increase to 69 degrees or as high as 73 degrees by 2090, according to the website, the [Climate Explorer](#), created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.

In Figure 16.1, the blue band shows projections for 2006–2100 based on a future in which humans stop increasing global emissions of heat-trapping gases by 2040 and then dramatically reduce them through 2100. The red band shows projections for 2006–2100 based on a future in which global emissions of heat-trapping gases continue increasing through 2100.

FIGURE 16.1: OWEN COUNTY ANNUAL MAX TEMPERATURE



Hazard mitigation, in summary, is any sustainable action that reduces or eliminates long-term risk to people and property from future disasters. Mitigation planning breaks the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.

Local resources such as The Environmental Resilience Institute at Indiana University collaborates with Hoosiers to better prepare Indiana and the Midwest for environmental changes that affect individuals, communities, businesses, and natural systems. More information can be found at eri.iu.edu.

OWEN COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Currently, there are some resources in place for Owen County in the event of a public crisis. The Owen County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) provides assistance to Owen County and Owen County municipalities by providing guidance and assistance for a wide range of emergencies.

Like all counties, Owen County has unique natural features, structures, and facilities that could generate a public crisis. Although the likelihood of an emergency to happen may be rare, it is still important to identify potential issues and to have a response plan. Some features in Owen County to be mindful of include the following: Karst features, the White River, Cagles Mill Lake, state roads, and highways.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

According to comments left on the public survey, Owen County residents are primarily concerned about flood hazards. This is understandable given that Owen County experienced a severe flooding event in 2021.

Residents argued that “further development in flood plains should be restricted.” They were particularly concerned about future housing development in flood zones and encouraged planners and developers to exercise caution.

Residents also noted that parks in the area regularly flooded during storms, posing a risk to residents using these spaces recreationally.

VISION AND KEY GOALS

HAZARD MITIGATION AND COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY VISION

Our vision for hazard mitigation and community sustainability is two-fold – to be prepared for hazards and to be proactive to minimize potential events. Having a plan and being proactive will reduce the loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of disasters.

GOAL 1: Develop an Owen County Resiliency Plan.

To reduce future disaster-related response and recovery costs, Owen County should develop a resiliency plan or audit to fully understand the policies, programs, and actions that can be taken across county agencies to improve Owen County’s resiliency to hazards and changing conditions.

GOAL 2: Train Owen County staff on how to respond in common emergency situations.

Owen County should ensure that all county staff have a basic knowledge of public crisis protocols. This could range from active shooter response training to how to keep the public safe during a tornado or fire at the Owen County Courthouse.

GOAL 3: Ensure all governmental facilities are safe for public and staff use.

All public facilities should be evaluated to ensure state codes are being met for public safety elements, such as appropriately located smoke detectors and appropriate ingress/egress points.



A resiliency plan could help Owen County prepare for severe weather events like the flood pictured above from 2021.

IMPLEMENTATION

HAZARD MITIGATION & COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

| Goal 1: Develop an Owen County Resiliency Plan. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Develop a resiliency taskforce to lead the charge of developing a county-wide resiliency plan. | County Commissioners, Owen County EMA |
| Goal 2: Train Owen County staff on how to respond in common emergency situations. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Coordinate with the Sheriff’s Department and the Fire Department to organize training for county staff on common emergency situations. | Owen County Human Resources Department |
| Goal 3: Ensure all governmental facilities are safe for public and staff use. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Designate a county employee to spearhead an inventory and evaluation of governmental facilities to ensure structures meet state code for public safety elements. | County Commissioners |
| Develop a plan and identify funding sources to address the findings of the inventory and evaluation. | County Commissioners |



CHAPTER 17

IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTATION

Plans are never intended to simply exist as a binder that sits forever on a shelf. They are brought to life by an implementation strategy. The following table will inform the development of recommended strategies, initiatives and actions for implementing this comp plan.

LAND USE

| Land Use Goal 1: Current Ordinance Replacement. | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Re-do and update the existing zoning and subdivision ordinances and combine them into an easier-to-use unified development ordinance. | Plan Commission, certified consultant |
| Land Use Goal 2: Preserve and protect agricultural lands. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Adopt multiple Agricultural Zoning Districts (refer to the State of Indiana’s Model Ordinance). | Plan Commission |
| Prohibit subdivisions from developing in Agricultural Zoning Districts. | Plan Commission |
| Limit the use of Administrative Subdivisions so they do not cumulatively result in a subdivision. | Plan Commission/Planning Staff |

Land Use Goal 3: Grow quality housing opportunities in Owen County.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|---|-------------------|
| Revise current residential zoning districts to allow smaller lots and higher density when community systems, such as water and sewer, are available versus well and septic. | Plan Commission |
| Allow duplexes or two-family residential homes in the Single-family Residential District, like almost all Indiana communities do. | Plan Commission |
| Introduce “Missing Middle Housing” in the zoning code with a separate low-density, small-scale multi-family district for triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses, etc. | Plan Commission |
| Permit accessory apartments in all single-family dwellings and as mixed-use with commercial if minimal ordinance standards are met. | Plan Commission |
| Introduce conservation subdivisions, which allow homes to be built on smaller lots to preserve common open space. | Plan Commission |
| Re-evaluate if mobile homes should be permitted on individual lots, and under what conditions. | Plan Commission |
| Develop standards for new Mobile Home Parks that, at a minimum, meet State of Indiana Standards. | Plan Commission |
| Ensure that before individual mobile homes are placed on single lots, they first receive all required permits and certificates from the County, ensuring compliance with health and safety issues, including adequate septic systems and foundations. | Plan Commission |
| Develop standards for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU’s) which are additional living quarters on single-family lots that are independent of the primary dwelling unit. | Plan Commission |
| Strengthen flood regulations beyond what is in the State’s Model Flood Ordinance (for example, require subdivision roads be above 100-year flood level). | Plan Commission |

Land Use Goal 4: Protect the county and property owners from undesirable nonconforming uses.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|-------------------|
| Complete a full update of the County's Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance. Consider combining these documents into one cohesive document called a Unified Development Ordinance. | Plan Commission |
| Require rezoning to occur to more intensive districts (such as Heavy Industrial or Intensive Agricultural) for some high-impact uses. | Plan Commission |
| Stop allowing intensive land uses to occur by right. Require a public hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals so they can evaluate if the site is appropriate and have the opportunity to impose needed conditions, such as additional setbacks, screens, reclamation plans, financial guarantees, etc. | Plan Commission |
| Develop detailed minimum requirements in the ordinance for each of Owen County's NIMBY/LULU uses (setbacks, screening, hours, etc.). | Plan Commission |
| Tighten code enforcement to ensure compliance of zoning ordinances. | Plan Commission |
| Revise nonconforming standards to discourage nonconforming uses from lingering by clearly identifying when compliance with new zoning standards is required (X% expansion, addition of parking lot, etc.). | Plan Commission |
| Require the Plan Commission do a Development (Site) Plan approval, as allowed by state law. | Plan Commission |
| On petitions that require a public hearing, require a pre-hearing meeting for surrounding property owners. | Plan Commission |

Land Use Goal 5: Preserve rural character and the County's natural resources.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|-------------------|
| Add a voluntary Conservation Zoning District that prohibits development. | Plan Commission |
| Provide a credit to developers for preserving existing woodlands. | Plan Commission |
| Prohibit subdivisions from developing in agricultural areas. | Plan Commission |
| Reward historic preservation and matching infill development by reducing other ordinance requirements (such as the amount of required parking). | Plan Commission |
| Make it more difficult to receive a variance or waiver from County standards by adding stricter criteria, as allowed by State law. | Plan Commission |
| Encourage new development around already developed areas when water and sewer are available and other infrastructure improvements can be cumulative and coordinated. | Plan Commission |
| Adopt Overlay Zoning Districts in unique areas to include special standards, such as landscaping along key road corridors. | Plan Commission |

GOVERNMENT AND FISCAL CAPACITY

| Government and Fiscal Capacity Goal 1: Build and maintain trust and communication with the public. | |
|--|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Improve county website, requiring more frequent department updates. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Create a customer interface on website, where taxpayers/residents can make inquiries, send information, report issues, etc. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| To compensate for decline in local newspaper coverage, promote county YouTube channel where public meetings are broadcast live and recorded for future viewing. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Acknowledge low civic engagement and directly tackle the hurdles stopping people from participating. For example, increase education efforts to connect students to local government. Host field trips to government centers and meetings with elected officials. Increase number of internships for students. | County Commission, County Council, department heads, school corporation |
| Have one department representative every week at the farmers market with rotating departments each week. Department representatives will discuss with residents' issues they face. | County Commission, County Council, department heads, school corporation |
| Create a Citizens' Academy. These academies teach residents about how local governments works and how they can get involved. A former program run by the now closed Owen County Learning Network had some success. | County Commission, County Council, OCCC/OCEDC |

Government and Fiscal Capacity Goal 2: As demand for services and budget allows, consider hiring professional staff for key positions.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|---|
| Sign up for training provided by Accelerate Indiana Municipalities (AIM). | County Commission, County Council, department heads |
| Engage all elected officials and department heads in creating new zoning map and ordinances. | County Commission, County Council, department heads |

Government and Fiscal Capacity Goal 3: Begin community discussions on the importance of code enforcement.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|---|--|
| Local leaders must have an open discussion about where code enforcement fits into their priorities. For example, more funding will be required to enforce priority issues. It is certainly on the mind of some residents, so the public should be included. This conversation should take place during the zoning map and ordinance update. | County Commission, County Council, Plan Commission |

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

| Public Facilities and Services Goal 1: Improve communication between government agencies and the public. | |
|---|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Review County departments and rules of procedures for boards and commissions to ensure public notifications are handled consistently and according to Indiana Code. | County Commissioners |
| Consider developing and implementing a Public Participation Plan that describes strategies and techniques to inform and engage the public in county-wide issues with the purpose of maximizing participation and effectiveness. | County Commissioners |
| Consider establishing a Public Relations Department to spearhead responsibilities of communicating with the public, media, and/or coordinating with other agencies. | County Commissioners |
| Public Facilities and Services Goal 2: Review emergency services as needed in response to development. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Ensure the Unified Development Ordinance update includes emergency services in the review process for new developments. | Plan Commission |
| Update or develop a capital improvements plan for the expansion of emergency services facilities based on the Future Land Use Map. | Department Heads, Plan Commission, County Commissioners, County Council |
| Public Facilities and Services Goal 3: Continue efforts to expand sanitary sewer through Owen County. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Develop a relationship with the South Central Regional Sewer District and support plans to expand capacity through Owen County. | County Commissioners |
| Ensure the Unified Development Ordinance update addresses minimum standards for lots with septic. | Plan Commission |

PLACEMAKING

Placemaking Goal 1: Increase recreational tourism by creating new experiences.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|--|
| Create a Water Trail Strategy Plan including river signage and take-out points at Gosport, Spencer, Ramona and Freedom. This could grow into a regional plan involving communities in Morgan County. | OCED/OCCC, OCCF, local governments, Sweet Owen CVB, water trail stakeholders |
| Promote the founding of a river recreation rental business to take advantage of the new infrastructure and provide rental services in the community. | OCED/OCCC |
| Upkeep and expansion of parks and natural areas: Owen County has public parks, forests and recreation areas throughout the county; however, some sites are underfunded. Create streams of revenue or grants for specific projects to help with capital improvements. Owen County should become the premier area for natural amenities in the Uplands Region. | Community, Foundation, Sweet Owen CVB, ROI, OCED/OCCC |

Placemaking Goal 2: Take tangible steps to improve health and wellness in Owen County.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|---|--|
| Strategic Plan for Seniors: This plan will create an environment for educational opportunities that promote physical and social health, enhance collaborations to address senior housing needs, promote independence and inclusion for seniors. | OCED/OCCC, OCCF, local governments, Sweet Owen CVB, water trail stakeholders |
| Exercise programs for senior citizens: Programs similar to Silver Sneakers and aerobics are enjoyable, encourage healthy activity and prevent social isolation among seniors. | YMCA, MYPath Trail System |

Placemaking Goal 3: Strengthen the quality of place in small community centers.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|---|---|
| Historic Building Maps: Conduct mapping of historic locations, anchor institutions and community specific destinations. | Owen County Heritage & Culture Center, Sweet Owen CVB, Community Foundation |
| Annual Historic Tours: Create annual historic tours connecting visitors with historians who can show and explain the unique history of Owen County. | Owen County Heritage & Culture Center, Sweet Owen CVB, Community Foundation |
| Story Collections: Incorporate significant features of Owen County’s history into projects to showcase unique events, heritage of the county’s residents, and preserve the ongoing story of Owen County. Create a website for these stories to be collected, archived and publicly accessible. | Owen County Heritage & Culture Center, Sweet Owen CVB, Community Foundation |
| Develop community banners or signage: Communities should build signage and banners around the county to show gateways, upcoming events, etc. | OCED/OCCC, Sweet Owen CVB |
| Host annual Arts Festival: The county’s arts community should be further promoted. A festival offers a quick financial boon for local artists and shows young adults that an art career is lucrative. | Owen County Art Guild, OCED/OCCC |
| “Gap Filler” program: Patricksburg, Freedom, Whitehall, Coal City, Cunot and Cataract all have unused vacant spaces. A Gap Filler program combines student arts and creative stakeholders to produce temporary installations in vacant units focused on bringing people together to experiment with the space. Furthermore, it allows unrented spaces to gain broader attention, while making a unique downtown attraction and pride among community members. | Arts Guild, Building Owners, OCCC, Community Foundation |

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

| Economic Development Goal 1: Promote business retention and expansion and small business development. | |
|---|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Create co-work space/business incubator. Plans for an incubator have run into a catch and could use a boost. Although this will likely be based in Spencer, the site has the potential to help sprout businesses throughout the county. | Local governments, OCED, Main Street, RDC |
| Promote women and minorities in businesses. Women and minorities populations owning businesses are important to Owen County, but these populations face different hurdles than male-owned businesses. Promoting women and minority populations in business will create a supportive environment for leaders and future businesses. For instance, Hold an Annual Women and Minorities Business Conference. | OC Businesses, OCED/OCCC |
| Offer short course for high school students and young adults on starting a business. An entrepreneurial short course will provide resources and basic insights on starting and operating a business. These short courses should work in connection with existing OVHS programs and connect with other resources like IU-Bloomington Business School and WorkOne. Tie it to the existing high school entrepreneurship program and school TED-style talks about economic development. | Spencer-Owen Community School Corp., OCCC/OCED, Local Businesses |
| Economic Development Goal 2: Encourage workforce attraction. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Publicize WorkOne Express Services. WorkOne should become more well known throughout the county as a resource for workers to increase their skills and advance their careers. | WorkOne, OCED/OCCC |
| Use the state's HIRE program to reduce recidivism for ex-drug offenders. The Indiana Department of Workforce Development's Hoosier Initiative for Re-Entry (HIRE) program has been recognized as a national model for reintegrating ex-offenders into the workforce and keeping them out of prison. | DWD, OCED/OCCC |

Economic Development Goal 3: Explore development of employer sites.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|-----------------------|
| Secure land for future employer sites in the S.R. 43/Flatwoods area. An option to purchase or development agreement should be secured for sites recommended in the Land Use Chapter of this plan. | County RDC, OCED/OCCC |
| Develop a master plan for employer sites. This should include lot layouts, roadway plans and infrastructure extension plans. A master plan should also identify steps needed to make the sites shovel-ready. | County RDC, OCED/OCCC |

Economic Development Goal 4: Stay informed on trends in regional planning.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|--|
| Continue working with regional agencies and organizations, such as Regional Opportunity Initiatives and their READI plan, to advance the quality of life and economic development projects. | Town and County elected officials, OCED/OCCC |
| Partner with major employers and other regional stakeholders to collaboratively pursue economic development opportunities and other quality of life initiatives that strengthen employment opportunities for current and future residents. | Town and County elected officials, OCED/OCCC |

HOUSING

| Housing Goal 1: Update zoning map and zoning ordinance. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Preparation for updating the ordinances and zoning map were launched concurrently with the comprehensive plan update to ensure that no time or momentum is lost. Secure a scope of work and budget with a certified planner to continue this process. | County Commission, Plan Commission, County Council, OCC/OCED |
| Housing Goal 2: Explore the possibility of a county housing department. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Creating this new department will take careful consideration. For instance, the county could decide to instead direct these responsibilities to a newly created and staffed Planning Department. In either case, it is vital that full-time, professional staff are available to help the otherwise volunteer plan commission. | County Commission, Plan Commission, County Council |
| Housing Goal 3: Study the creation of new building sites. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Large-scale housing growth will be concentrated in Spencer, Gosport and the S.R. 43 corridor until water and sanitary sewer infrastructure are extended to other areas. In the meantime, revise county zoning maps to make clear they types of housing the county needs and where it should be located on the existing sites. | County Commission, Plan Commission, County Council, OCC/OCED |

| Housing Goal 4: Promote preferred housing types. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Incentivize new housing developments through public infrastructure investments. | Plan Commission, County Commission, County Council, RDC |
| Provide developer incentives that result in a mix of new rental housing types such as duplexes, fourplexes and apartments for residents of all income levels. | Plan Commission, County Commission, County Council, RDC |
| Develop a toolkit of local housing incentives to encourage entry-level housing types, such as patio homes or townhomes, as a way for young couples and first-time home buyers to penetrate Owen County’s housing market. | Plan Commission, OCC/OCED |
| Housing Goal 5: Improve the stock of existing housing. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Implement and enforce existing building codes to restore or eliminate blighted properties in the community. | Plan Commission, County Commission |
| Develop a program that offers technical and/or financial assistance for qualified homeowners interested in restoring older homes. | Plan Commission, County Commission, County Council, OCC/OCED |

TRANSPORTATION

| Transportation Goal 1: Conduct a review of County documents and ordinances to ensure leadership has the tools needed to develop the transportation network in Owen County. | |
|--|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Review the County's Roadway Classification Map to ensure the roadway designations are up-to-date and meet the needs of Owen County. | County Engineer, Planning Director/Plan Commission |
| Review the County's road standards to ensure street, sidewalk, and trail standards are up-to-date and meet the transportation needs of the County. | County Engineer |
| Include provisions in the new Unified Development Ordinance that require new developments to complete a traffic study that outlines improvements needed to be made as part of the impact of the new development. | Planning Department/Plan Commission |
| Develop and adopt an Access Management and Control Ordinance that addresses access management along key transportation corridors in the County, including the State Road 46 Corridor and State Road 43 Corridor. | County Engineer/Plan Commission/County Commissioners |
| Develop and adopt a Right-of-Way Dedication Ordinance that meets the needs of Owen County and is easy to implement. | County Engineer/County Commissioners |
| Transportation Goal 2: Complete a road inventory and develop an asset management plan that allows the County to be fiscally responsible when maintaining the transportation network. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Work to remain eligible to receive Community Crossing Matching Funds from the Indiana Department of Transportation. | County Engineer/Highway Department |
| Continue updating the Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER) study on County roads to maintain an inventory of current roadway conditions. | County Engineer/Highway Department |

Transportation Goal 3: Work with INDOT regarding future State Road 46 improvements.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|---|--|
| Continue developing Owen County’s relationship with INDOT and maintain open communication on desired future improvements to the State Road 46 Corridor. | County Engineer/County Commissioners |
| Develop an Access Management and Control Ordinance that addresses access management along the State Road 46 Corridor. | County Engineer/Plan Commission/County Commissioners |
| Work with INDOT to establish a frontage road that parallels State Road 46 west of Concord Road near the Dollar General. | County Engineer |
| Work with INDOT to develop a plan for key intersections along the State Road 46 Corridor, including State Road 43 and Flatwoods Road. | County Engineer/Plan Commission |

Transportation Goal 4: Do not support the addition of new highways in Owen County.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Designate an Owen County representative (staff or elected official) to track progress on the Mid-States Corridor Project. Have this representative report findings back to County Commissioners on a regular basis. | County Commissioners |
| To help guide future INDOT decisions, develop a county-wide Thoroughfare Plan. In order to be officially considered for planning decision-making, the thoroughfare plan must eventually be adopted as a component of this comprehensive plan. | County Engineer/County Commissioners |

AGRICULTURE

| Agriculture Goal 1: Retain and support agricultural operations. | |
|--|----------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Ensure the Unified Development Ordinance is updated to ensure definitions, permitted uses, and regulations on Agricultural zoned properties are still relevant and appropriate. | Plan Commission |
| Ensure language in the Unified Development Ordinance supports the newest trends in agriculture, including farmer’s markets, hobby farms, conservation areas, roadside agricultural stands. | Plan Commission |
| Agriculture Goal 2: Support and promote agricultural best management practices. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Engage with the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District to ensure Owen County is taking advantage of opportunities that are available to the County and private property owners. | County Commissioners |

NATURAL RESOURCES

| Natural Resources Goal 1: Implement steps to protect the White River. | |
|---|---|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Consider adopting an overlay district that preserves and protects natural areas along the White River Corridor. Involve adjacent landowners in these discussions and ensure that these protections do not restrict property rights. | Plan Commission |
| Natural Resources Goal 2: Capitalize on the natural assets of Owen County. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Partner and collaborate with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to support their efforts in preserving natural areas. | County Commissioners |
| Collaborate and support the Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau in promoting the County's natural assets. | County Commissioners/Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau |
| Natural Resources Goal 3: Connect and educate Owen County residents on the importance of the natural environment. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Partner with and support like-minded organizations, such as the Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District, Owen County Community Foundation, or the school corporation to develop educational programs highlighting the inter-connectedness between the built environment, local waterways, and other natural systems. | County Commissioners |
| Natural Resources Goal 4: Expand and incentivize businesses that support recreational activities. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Recruit and incentivize businesses that complement and support the natural resources component of Owen County. | Owen County Chamber of Commerce |

PARKS & RECREATION

| Parks and Recreation Goal 1: Establish a County Parks and Recreation Department. | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Develop and adopt a County Parks and Recreation Ordinance that establishes a County Park Board. | County Commissioners |
| Identify a funding source, develop a budget, and appropriate funds to the County Park Board. | County Commissioners |
| Develop and adopt a Five-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plan that meets standards set forth by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. In order to be officially considered for planning decision-making, the parks plan must eventually be adopted as a component of this comprehensive plan. | Parks Board |
| Parks and Recreation Goal 2: Expand MYPath. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Work with the Owen County Community Foundation to develop a Master Trails Plan that expands MYPath throughout Owen County. | OCCF, County Commissioners |
| Work to secure funding to implement trails (through grants, donations, or budgets). | OCCF, County Commissioners |

HISTORIC RESOURCES

| Historic Resources Goal 1: Support strategies to improve the municipal downtowns in Owen County. | |
|---|--|
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Meet with Spencer and Gosport to review their downtown strategies and determine if Owen County can support them in their efforts. | County Commissioners |
| Historic Resources Goal 2: Support and highlight State-owned historic resources. | |
| Action Item | Responsible Party |
| Partner with State agencies to celebrate and promote the historic sites that help tell the story of Owen County. | Sweet Owen County Convention and Visitors Bureau |

HAZARD MITIGATION & COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Hazard Mitigation and Community Sustainability Goal 1: Develop an Owen County Resiliency Plan.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Develop a resiliency taskforce to lead the charge of developing a county-wide resiliency plan. | County Commissioners, Owen County EMA |

Hazard Mitigation and Community Sustainability Goal 2:

Train Owen County staff on how to respond in common emergency situations.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|--|
| Coordinate with the Sheriff's Department and the Fire Department to organize training for county staff on common emergency situations. | Owen County Human Resources Department |

Hazard Mitigation and Community Sustainability Goal 3:

Ensure all governmental facilities are safe for public and staff use.

| Action Item | Responsible Party |
|--|----------------------|
| Designate a county employee to spearhead an inventory and evaluation of governmental facilities to ensure structures meet state code for public safety elements. | County Commissioners |
| Develop a plan and identify funding sources to address the findings of the inventory and evaluation. | County Commissioners |



CHAPTER 18

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

| Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Next Level Trails | Local Government, Non-profit organizations. Must fulfill at least one of the following roles: Own (or acquire) the trail corridor Manage and maintain the trail once developed Oversee and manage trail construction through completion | All non-motorized trails Multi-use trails (consideration) Trails must be open to the public | \$200,000 - \$5,000,000 (20% match can include land value, and in-kind donations) |
| Land and Water Conservation Fund | Parks and Recreation Boards with a current 5-year parks master plan | Primarily acquisition but also funds various park/recreation | \$50,000 - \$250,000 (50% match) |
| Recreational Trails Program | Government agencies, non-profit organizations | Land acquisition and trail development and amenities | \$50,000 - \$200,000 (20% match) |
| Economic Development Administration (EDA) | | | |
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Economic Adjustment Assistance Program | Governments, organizations, non-profit organizations | Construction, planning, technical assistance | \$100,000 - \$3,000,000 |
| Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) | | | |
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Grant Limits |
| Community Crossings Matching Grant | Indiana cities, towns, and county governments | Road reconstruction, resurfacing, preservation, bridge rehabilitation | \$1,000,000 (match requirements based on population) |

| Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) | | | |
|--|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Community Revitalization Enhancement District (CRED) | Taxpayers that invest in redevelopment/rehab of a property located within a revitalization district | Acquisition costs, when necessary for redevelopment or rehabilitation, Consulting fees | Tax Credit |
| Skills Enhancement Fund (SEF) | Businesses, communities, employers | Training Software New Capital Investments | 50% Match |
| Indiana Finance Authority (IFA) | | | |
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| State Revolving Fund (SRF) | Municipalities that have a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) | Water, wastewater, and non-point source projects | Loan |
| Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) | | | |
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan | Communities and non-profits | Plan preparation in house or via consultant | \$10,000 - \$20,000 |
| Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) | | | |
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| CreatiNg Places | Non-profit entities and Local units of government | Streetscape beautification and walkability Art/Public plaza development activation etc. | \$10,000 - \$100,000 (50% match) |
| Community Service Block Grant | Non-profit entities, community organizations, governmental entities | Homes, educational attainment, community organizations | |
| Owner Occupied Rehabilitation Program | Non-profit entities, community organizations, governmental entities | Repairs Maintenance Preservation | \$25,000 (per home) |

| Rural Development (RD) | | | |
|---|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program | Governments, organizations, non-profit organizations | Drinking water sourcing Treatment Storage distribution | Loan |
| Rural Business Development | Towns, state agencies, non-profits, etc. | Support targeted technical assistance training, etc. | \$10,000 - \$500,000 |
| Rural Economic Loan Grant Program | Local utility organizations, local businesses | Establishing revolving loan funds that will create or retain rural jobs | \$300,000 |
| Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant | Public bodies, community based non-profits and federally recognized tribes | Funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas | Loan |
| Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) | | | |
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Blight Clearance Program | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income | Removal of deteriorated or abandoned buildings as well as vacant and unusable industrial sites | \$500,000 (10% match) |
| Planning Grants - Infrastructure | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income | Study of infrastructure | \$35,000 - \$50,000 |
| Planning Grants - Community Planning | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income, or slum and blight designation | Comprehensive Plans Downtown Revitalization Plans Economic Development Plans Public Facilities Plans | \$20,000 - \$40,000 (10% match) |
| NextLevel Connections | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income | Broadband improvements including affordable service and increased reliability in rural communities. | \$60,000 |
| Public Facilities Program | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income | Removal of architectural barriers Community Centers Daycare Centers Emergency Centers | \$500,000 (10% match) |

| Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| Funding Source | Eligibility | Project Types | Limits |
| Stormwater Improvement Program | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income | Flood prevention reduction Environmental protection | \$600,000 (10% match) |
| Wastewater and Drinking Water Program | Non-entitlement communities, Communities with at least 51% low-moderate income | Wastewater improvements Drinking water system improvements | (\$500,000 - \$700,000 20% match) |

APPENDIX B

K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, FAICP

The Planning Workshop, Inc.

Communication + Education = Effective Planning



Owen Co. Zoning & Subdivision Ordinance Review
The Planning Workshop, Inc.
March 23, 2022

MEMO

TO: Suzanne Simmerman, Owen County Planning & Building Director
FROM: K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, President, The Planning Workshop, Inc.
DATE: March 23, 2022
SUBJECT: Owen County Zoning & Subdivision Ordinance Review

Per my contract with Scott Burgins' company for the Owen County Comprehensive Plan, I did a review of Owen County's current Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances. This review is intended to:

- Target key zoning issues for the Comprehensive Plan Focus Groups to address
- Determine the extent of revision or replacement needed for the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances after the new Comprehensive Plan is adopted.

KEY ZONING ISSUES OVERVIEW

Our Comprehensive Plan Update Team asked me to identify the top issues to address in your current ordinances. Following are my recommendations:

1) **Preserve Agricultural** – treat agricultural as a permanent land use that Owen County wants to preserve, not as a transitional use. Possible planning tools:

- Adopt multiple Agricultural Zoning Districts – see State of Indiana's Model Ordinance, https://www.in.gov/isda/files/ILRC_Model_Ordinances_-_Updated_2014.pdf
- Prohibit subdivisions from developing in AG zoning districts
- Limit use of Administrative Subdivisions so they do not cumulatively result in a subdivision

2) **Grow Quality Housing Opportunities** – provide more options for all types of households. Possible planning tools:

- Revise current residential zoning districts to allow smaller lots /higher density when public water and sewer or community systems are available versus well and septic
- Allow duplexes in single family district, like almost all Indiana communities do
- Introduce "Missing Middle Housing" with a separate low density, small scale multi-family district for 3-plexes, 4-plexes, Townhouses, etc.
- Permit accessory apartments in all single-family dwellings and as mixed-use with commercial, if minimal ordinance standards are met
- Introduce conservation subdivisions, which build on smaller lots to preserve common open space

Current Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance Review

- Require mobile homes be located within mobile home parks, with specific standards, not on individual lots
- Strengthen flood regulations beyond what is in the State's Model Flood Ordinance (i.e., require subdivision roads be above 100-year flood level)

3) **Protect the County and surrounding property owners from NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard), LULUs (Locally Unwanted Land Use) & undesirable Nonconforming Uses** - Possible planning tools:

- Require rezoning to more intensive district (Heavy Industrial or Intensive Agricultural) for some high impact uses
- Stop allowing intensive land uses to occur by right – require a public hearing and granting of a conditional use on a case-by-case basis by the BZA, so they can evaluate if the site is appropriate and impose needed conditions, such as additional setbacks, screens, reclamation plans, financial guarantees, etc.
- Develop detailed minimum requirements in the ordinance for each of Owen County's NIMBY/LULU uses (setbacks, screening, hours, etc.).
- Tighten enforcement to ensure compliance
- Revise nonconforming standards to discourage nonconforming uses from lingering, clearly identifying when compliance with new zoning standards is required (X% expansion, addition of parking lot, etc.)
- Require Plan Commission do a Development (site) Plan approval, as allowed by state law
- Require pre-hearing meeting for surrounding property owners.

4) **Preserve rural character and the County's natural resources** - Possible planning tools:

- Add a voluntary Conservation Zoning District that prohibits development
- Provide credit for preserving existing woodlands
- Prohibit subdivisions from developing in agricultural areas
- Reward historic preservation and matching infill by reducing other ordinance requirements (i.e., amount of parking)
- Make it more difficult to receive a variance or waiver from County standards by adding stricter criteria, as allowed by State law
- Encourage new development around already developed areas by offering smaller lot sizes, when water and sewer are available and other infrastructure improvements can be cumulative and coordinated
- Adopt Overlay Zoning Districts (that go on top of existing base zoning) in unique areas to include special standards (i.e., design and/or landscaping on key roadway corridors).

CURRENT ORDINANCE REPLACEMENT

My overall ordinance review recommendation is that a full replacement is needed. Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances should be combined into a single Unified Development Ordinance. The sheer number of edits and reorganization needed to update your current ordinances are so considerable, it would be less expensive to start over by preparing a new ordinance. I support Unified Development Ordinances because they are more user-friendly and easier to keep updated than separate Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances.

As I shared in our training session on February 15, 2022, the Comprehensive Plan is a Policy, not an enforceable law, so we must rely on Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, which are local laws, to implement and enforce the plan. That means we will need to synchronize your ordinances with the goals of the plan. While we do not yet have the detailed Comprehensive Plan recommendations, this review is a first step in that process.

Note that I reviewed your ordinances from a planning standpoint; I am not an attorney, and this was not a legal review. My observations are solely my opinion.

My general recommendations for Owen County’s Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances are as follows:

- **Meet Indiana Code & Federal Case Law** – Several sections of the ordinances do not appear to follow more recent Indiana Code standards, including the process for appeals of decisions. The Supreme Court issued a major ruling on content-neutrality for signs several years ago, and in my planner’s opinion, your sign regulations do not follow the SCOTUS’s ruling (i.e., you have regulations for “real-estate” signs, which means you must read the sign to see what it is, so not content-neutral). Note that I recommend all sign regulations be gathered into in one section of your ordinance, not scattered throughout.
- **Incorporate Best Practices** -- The zoning ordinance is extremely out of date and does not incorporate modern, accepted “best practices”, such as tree preservation credits, etc.
- **Make User-Friendly** -- The zoning ordinance is not user-friendly. Adding charts, illustrations, and tables to replace pages of text will improve understanding for all users. For example, a proper “Land Use Chart” would replace lists of Assessor’s numbers with actual land uses in each zoning district. Many definitions and standards should be illustrated. Flow charts could illustrate each process. More cross-referencing would help ensure content is easier to find.
- **Modernize Uses & Standards** – New land uses emerge constantly that must be addressed in zoning regulations. Technology and societal changes require regular amendments to zoning and subdivision regulations. For example, your ordinance should be updated to include regulations for solar and wind energy before Owen County must address applications.
- **Remove Certain Content from Ordinance** – Ordinances have an involved amendment process. Many things should be completely removed or cross-referenced to ensure they stay up to date. Some things, like membership standards for BZA and Plan Commission are set by state law, and have changed over time, no longer matching your ordinance. It is better to reference Indiana Code than repeat what is currently in it. Other things, like the fee schedule are not required to be in the Zoning Ordinance. Its presence there ensures that it will not be updated with any regularity because of the ordinance amendment process. Instead, the fee schedule should be part of Plan Commission’s Rules, which may be easily and regularly updated.
- **Regulate Similar to other Counties** -- This ordinance does not compare favorably with other Indiana counties I have worked with. Determine who your peers are and compare your standards with theirs.

Note: The following current ordinance review comments are more detailed than what will be provided in the implementation section(s) of the new comprehensive plan:

CHAPTER 1 - GENERAL PROVISIONS – I am not an attorney, but the initial Chapter of the Zoning Ordinance seems generally be compliant. I recommend adding sections on Severability and Statutory Changes for Indiana Code. A new ordinance would be expected to also include a Repealer, Transition Policies and an Effective Date.

CHAPTER 2 – DEFINITIONS - I prefer to see Definitions as a chapter at the end of an ordinance, in a supplemental placement, not as leading content. I recommend adding illustrations to help clarify some of the definitions A definitions section should be synched whenever an ordinance is updated to ensure that the terms match the current zoning and subdivision ordinance content. Typically, the more definitions the better.

CHAPTER 3 - ZONES AND PERMITTED USES: Owen County currently has 10 different zoning districts. The number of zoning districts is slightly low for a County.
Organization & Format -- It is more user-friendly to include all basic standards for each zoning district in one section, (e.g., a purpose statement, lot standards, permitted uses, etc.). This can typically be done in a 2-page layout for each zoning district, with cross-references to standards in other chapters of the zoning ordinance (i.e., landscaping, signs, etc.). The liberal use of graphics (tables, charts, and illustrations) reduces text and helps make regulations more understandable. It is recommended that the format and organization for Chapter 3 be redone.

Section 3.1 - Establishment of Zones

A. **Residential Districts:** While Owen County has 3 different zoning districts, they are very outdated and fail to accommodate a full range of modern housing options. For example, “Missing Middle Housing”, which is very low-density multi-family should be accommodated and encouraged because it appeals to the aging population and the younger generation, providing an option that might encourage both to stay in your community. The society and the courts have recognized that the concept of family has changed, and so updating housing district names are also important (like simply R-1, R-2, R-3, etc.).

1. **Estate** – This 5-acre lot size works for accommodating residential that is reliant on septic and or wells. While it was apparently designed to be within an agricultural area, there may be serious use conflicts between residents and farmers, which could threaten the future of farming in your county. Consider moving this use to an agricultural district, with better restrictions.
2. **Single Family** –The 1-acre minimum lot size is likely based on the idea of relying on private water wells and septic systems, in which case it may not be large enough. A second septic site for poor soils and distance from well often demands more area. Many communities address this dilemma in their zoning ordinances by providing 2 different minimum lot sizes: one for lots with “public” water and sewer and one for private well

and septic. Almost all communities allow duplexes by right in single-family zoning districts and do not classify them as multi-family, like Owen County does. This zoning use restriction drives up housing cost and discourages new housing! As written, this district would also not accommodate other modern “best practices” for development, including AARP supported accessory apartment units and “Conservation Subdivisions”, an appropriate tool for Owen County. For an overview of conservation subdivisions, see: http://www.landchoices.org/conservationsubs/4steps/consubs_4steps_arendt_1.htm

3. **Multi Family** – A density of 1 dwelling unit/acre is extremely unreasonable for multiple dwelling development. I suspect that maximum density is based on the idea of relying on private water wells and septic systems to serve development. I would go so far as to say it discourages all development within this district as written. Also, there are too many types of housing wedged into this single zoning district (note that condominiums are legally a type of ownership, not a land use type). There should be a differentiation between lower density multi-family, like 3-plexes or 4-plexes and townhouses and actual apartment complexes. Do you have specific standards for mobile homes outside of mobile home parks? This single district should be broken into at least 2 different multi-family districts. Again, providing 2 different densities/lot sizes depending on water/sewer source also makes sense for multi-family.

B. **Business (Commercial)** – Most counties have 1 or more business zoning districts, relying on neighboring municipalities to offer more. A more modern approach to regulating commercial uses is by the intensity of its operating characteristics (type of traffic, outside storage, etc.) and size of operation (Big Box etc.), instead of listing uses which quickly become outdated.

C. **Industrial** – Even most municipalities still only have 2 industrial districts, so seeing a third industrial district in Owen County is unexpected.

1. **Light:** This district permits some unusually intense uses for a light industrial district, including a meat packing plant.

2. **Heavy:** I-2 allows extremely intense uses by right (i.e., arsenal, landfill, etc.) when most communities require a conditional use for them in a heavy industrial district.

3. **Mineral Extraction** – This is very unusual to see as a separate zoning district. Most communities treat mineral extraction as a Heavy Industrial Use, with many also requiring a conditional use in HI from the BZA. I am wary of allowing it by right unless there are very specific and extensive requirements in the ordinance.

D. **Agricultural** - Owen County has only 1 agricultural zoning district. Most rural counties in Indiana have moved toward multiple agricultural districts, typically including a general (light) agriculture and an intensive agriculture district for things like CFOs and CAFOs. Some also include a rural estate as an agricultural district, not a residential district. I typically point to the State of Indiana’s Model Ordinance, developed some years ago as a starting point: https://www.in.gov/isda/files/ILRC_Model_Ordinances_-_Updated_2014.pdf

E. **Institutional/Public** – This is a common zoning district in other communities. While it is introduced here, it does not have any associated development standards, etc. It should either be fully developed as a zoning district or removed from the ordinance.

F. **Planned Unit Development** –PUDs, described in Chapter 11, are not listed in this section as a zoning district, but should be.

*Owen County might also consider a **Conservation District**, used by other Hoosier communities to preserve natural areas like parks, land trusts, wetlands, floodways, etc. from development.*

3.2 - Definition of Zones

These “definitions” should be reworked into Purpose Statements and each district should have a unique one. Calling them Definitions is legally confusing since definitions have a different location and function in this ordinance.

3.3 - Permitted Uses In Zones (in addition to other comments for Section 3.1, above)

Cross-reference to Land Use Table, B. Business (15) – This section tries to cross-reference the Permitted Land Use Table but does not give a citation for it. All zoning districts should be properly cross-referenced to the Land Use Table.

Interpretation of Uses, Business (16) – This section states “Other uses approved by the Plan Board that exhibit similar characteristics as the above and are not detrimental to the surrounding land uses.” There is legally no such body as a “Plan Board”. Interpretations should be made by the Administrator (staff) and Indiana Code says they may be appealed to the BZA.

3.4 - Conditional Uses – This section seems to state that all listed conditional use may be granted by the BZA in any and every zoning district. This is extremely unusual and very concerning. Conditional uses are typically assigned to one or a limited number of districts where they are most suitable. This section should be totally reassessed.

3.5 – Non-Permitted Uses – I do not believe you can legally prohibit owners or developers of locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) from applying for a use variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals. My understanding is that this legal process is intended by State Law to be available to all property owners, meaning they have a right to apply for a use variance in your jurisdiction. If you want to discourage junkyards, racetracks, waste incinerators, waste transfer stations, etc. from developing or expanding in Owen County, the best way to do that is tighten your zoning standards:

- Reinforce that these are undesirable uses in your Comprehensive Plan’s Goals and Future Land Use Sections, including justification
- Allow LULUs only within one zoning district (Heavy Industrial), so a rezoning is required; per Indiana Code, the Plan Commission and BZA must refer to the comprehensive plan when considering a rezoning.
- Require an additional detailed review step by setting these as conditional uses within Heavy Industrial Zoning, which require approval from the BZA,
- Adopt tough required use standards in the Zoning Ordinance to go along with LULU uses (extra setbacks, screening, and landscape buffers, etc.).

3.6 – Zone Map: This section is mistitled because it does not discuss the zoning map. Most communities refer to this type of chart as a Land Use Matrix. These land use tables are meant to be a “user-friendly” tool; your table is a confusing exception to that. Owen County’s use of Assessors Numbers to group land uses, with no cross-reference to find out what those numbers mean is a failure. Even if every parcel in Owen County has a “Class Code” from the Owen

County Assessor, there is no easy way to determine what that includes or what land uses are permitted in each district. If you are determined to use that assessor's code, the uses corresponding to the numbers need to be reproduced in this document! This section should be totally reassessed.

CHAPTER 4- RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

A. Introduction – The Introduction paragraphs attempt to define each category of uses (e.g., residential), but do not go far enough. Each zoning district requires a purpose statement that discusses the unique type, scale and characteristics of preservation, development, redevelopment, and infill expected. The unique purpose statement serves as the guide for the regulations developed for each district. As recommended earlier, the purpose statement should be part of the 2-page layout that introduces each zoning district.

B. Permitted Uses -- As recommended earlier, a list of common permitted uses should be part of the 2-page layout that introduces each zoning district, with a cross-reference to the use chart. Note that it is customary to include a list of conditional uses possible in each zoning district.

C. Residential Standards -- It is more user-friendly to incorporate tables to show each zoning district's development standards, including information like minimum lot size, maximum impervious surface area, maximum height, etc. As recommended earlier, these zoning district development standards should be part of the 2-page layout for each zoning district, with a cross-reference to the other more general zoning ordinance development standards (i.e., landscape buffers, parking, signs, etc.).

D. Restrictions for Permitted Uses – This appears to be additional development standards that should be incorporated in the previous recommended table (e.g., additional required side setback) or cross-referenced in another section of the zoning ordinance (i.e., lighting, parking, etc.).

E. Restrictions – This appears to be a use standard for home occupations and should be moved to a separate overall Use Standards section.

F. Residential Development Standards – Sections 1 (Site Design and Community Impact) and 2 (Context and Environmental Impacts) are just lists of beliefs that are not enforceable regulations. Either turn them into regulations or remove from this ordinance. Perhaps they belong in the Comprehensive Plan?

CHAPTER 5- MULTI-FAMILY DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

A. Introduction – Same comments as Chapter 4 (A), above.

B. Permitted Uses -- Same comments as Chapter 4 (B), above.

C. Apartment Standards -- Same comments as Chapter 4 (C), above.

D. Multi-Family Development Standards – Same comments as Chapter 4 (F), above.

CHAPTER 6 - MOBILE HOME PARK DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS – Since there is no Mobile Home Zoning District, this section is more properly located in the separate Use Standards section, except for the following:

C. Definitions - all definitions should be moved to the Definitions Chapter of the Zoning Ordinance.

D. Application Procedure - Mobile Home Parks do not typically contain separate lots for each unit. Do you mean this to be a Mobile Home Subdivision?

CHAPTER 7- RECREATIONAL VEHICLE PARKS -- Since there is no RV Park Zoning District, this section is more properly located in the separate Use Standards section.

CHAPTER 8 - COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

A. Introduction – Same comments as Chapters 4 & 5 (A), above.

B. Permitted Uses -- Same comments as Chapters 4 & 5 (B), above.

C. Commercial Standards -- Same comments as Chapters 4 & 5 (C), above.

D. Special Exceptions– The rest of your ordinance calls these Conditional Uses – be consistent. Special exceptions and conditional uses require approval from the BZA – is that what you intend? These standards should be reviewed.

E. Landscaping and screening regulations should be contained in a separate section of the Zoning Ordinance.

F. Performance Standards – Give a complete cross-reference citation.

G. Commercial Development Standards - Same comments as Chapters 4 & 5 (F), above.

CHAPTER 9 - INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

A. Introduction – Same comments as Chapters 4, 5 & 8 (A), above.

B. Permitted Uses -- Same comments as Chapters 4, 5 & 8 (B), above.

C. Industrial Standards -- Same comments as Chapters 4, 5 & 8 (C), above.

D. Industry Development Standards - Same comments as Chapters 4 & 5 (F) and 8 (G), above.

CHAPTER 10 - AGRICULTURAL LAND

A. Introduction – Same comments as Chapters 4, 5, 8 & 9 (A), above.

B. General Provisions

1. Permitted Uses -- Same comments as Chapters 4, 5, 8 & 9 (B), above.

2. Signs - Sign regulations should be contained in a separate section of the Zoning Ordinance.

3. Visibility at intersections – This should apply to all zoning districts and should be contained in a separate section of the Zoning Ordinance.

4. Fences, Walls and Hedges -- Landscaping and screening regulations should be contained in a separate section of the Zoning Ordinance.

5. Permitted Accessory Uses and Structures – Accessory uses, and structures should be cross-referenced a separate section of the Zoning Ordinance in each zoning district.

6, 7, & 8, Development Standards – It is more user-friendly to incorporate tables to show each zoning district's development standards, including information like minimum

lot size, maximum impervious surface area, maximum height, etc. Zoning district development standards should be part of the 2-page layout for each zoning district, with a cross-reference to the other more general zoning ordinance development standards (i.e., landscape buffers, parking, signs, etc.).

9. This appears to be a use standard for junk vehicles and should be moved to a separate overall Use Standards section.

CHAPTER 11 - PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUDs)

11.1 – Purpose – Having a purpose statement is very important, but this one should be rewritten to reflect the use of PUDs for innovative development, not just mixed-use. Sections A – E should become a section on Minimum PUD Standards, with additional regulations added, such as the actual point system used for evaluation. Also, merge with the minimum project sizes from Section 11.3.

11.2 - Procedure for Approval of a PUD

The procedure for approval of a PUD is not at all the same as the subdivision approval process! Cross-reference and follow Indiana Code for PUDs (1500 SERIES–PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT). IC 36-7-4-1504 (b) requires your county zoning ordinance to meet the requirements of State Law. Also, there is no such group as the “Plan Board”. Depending on what part of the process you are addressing, responsibility would either be assigned to Plan Commission or County Commissioners.

A very basic summary of the PUD process is that the first step is a rezoning to PUD that includes a custom zoning ordinance for the project and a concept plan. As with other rezonings, Plan Commission holds a public hearing and makes a recommendation based on criteria to the County Commissioners, who act on it, again using state law rezoning criteria. The second step is approval of a detailed PUD plan by the Plan Commission (no further review by County Commissioners if delegated). A subdivision plat may be able to fill that second step requirement.

11.3 - Development Standards

Again, no such group as “Plan Board”. Need to define what constitutes a minor change.

CHAPTER 12 - OWEN COUNTY SUBDIVISION CONTROL ORDINANCE - Generally the subdivision regulations are in much better shape than the zoning regulations! Use the proper Indiana Code terms throughout: Replace “Preliminary Plat” with “Primary Plat”, replace “Final Plat” with “Secondary Plat”

12.1 - Title and Definition – in sections(B), (C) & (D), move all definitions to a separate definitions chapter.

12.3 - Predesign Conference – This is a great step in the process! Many communities in Indiana are now requiring pre-submittal conferences for all BZA and Plan Commission applications. This step tends to save applicants time and money they might waste on doing the wrong thing and gets them into the proper process.

12.17 - Administrative Subdivision Procedure – this section may provide a loophole, where multiple 5-acre lots may be created from a parent tract, effectively resulting in the impacts of a subdivision without the needed review and improvements. To prevent this, there should be a cumulative limit to the number of lots that may be created from a parent tract.

12.32 - Standards of Design, requires minimum 1 acre lots (the same requirement is in the residential districts in the Zoning Ordinance) clearly assumes septic and wells, not a public system. Instead, refer to minimum lot sizes in the zoning districts, which should include different standards for public and private systems.

12.42(A) Waiver – this section incorrectly states that it is up to County Commissioners to grant waivers from the County’s subdivision standards, which does not comply with Indiana Code. Rewrite this section to comply with state law. Also, allow Plan Commission to approve waivers before a plat is denied; most Indiana communities allow this to be done simultaneously with the primary plat. Additionally, the County needs to adopt specific subdivision waiver criteria in the ordinance for the Plan Commission to consider.

CHAPTER 13 - OFF STREET PARKING AND LOADING

13.3 E. - General Parking Regulations – reductions in parking would be a variance from BZA. Plan Commission does not have the power to vary a zoning ordinance standard under Indiana Code.

OFF-STREET PARKING REQUIREMENTS TABLE – all tables throughout the ordinance, including this one, must be labeled with a unique number and/or letter or combination. This table should be greatly simplified.

CHAPTER 14-WIRELESS COMMUNICATION FACILITIES – Update these standards and put into a Use Standards Chapter, with other unique uses.

CHAPTER 15 - CONDITIONAL USES

15.2 E.- In addition to a site plan, you may want to require building details, including elevations.

15.3 E. – Investigate using Certificate of Mailing instead of certified mail. It is a cheaper and more effective way to mail public notice.

15.4 – I do not think you want an actual Federal-level Environmental Impact Statement. Change this section to make it clear the BZA can require further information from the applicant, including traffic impact studies, fiscal impact studies, flood studies, etc.

15.7 - Miscellaneous Guidelines – Is there case law to back these up?

15.8 - Specific Criteria for Conditional Use Approvals

A.1. – Update these standards and put into a Use Standards Chapter, with other unique uses. Some may warrant a conditional use approval from BZA, but some should be permitted by right if they meet these additional standards (i.e., drive-throughs).

C. 3. – Check appeal of conditional use; I do not believe it is still by writ of certiorari.

E. Amendments to Conditional Use Permits mentions a Hearing Officer. While allowed by Indiana Code, I do not believe that this has been enabled in Owen County's ordinance, which is required.

15.9 - Conditional Use Approval for Pre-Existing Nonconforming Uses – Why would the County want to do this? Where is the legal ability to do this listed in the State's Planning and Zoning Enabling legislation? Is there case law?

15.10 - Conditional Uses in Permitted Land Use Table – References, "The following Permitted Land Use Table...", but there is not one in the ordinance.

CHAPTER 16 – VARIANCES

16.2 E. - In addition to a site plan, you should require building details, including elevations.

16.3 E. – Investigate using Certificate of Mailing instead of certified mail. It is a cheaper and more effective way to mail public notice.

16.4 – I do not think you want an actual Federal-level Environmental Impact Statement. Change this section to make it clear the BZA can require further information from the applicant, including traffic impact studies, fiscal impact studies, flood studies, etc.

16.5 - Standards for Use Variance Approval– Cross-reference to the use variance criteria listed in Indiana Code (IC 36-7-4-918.4).

16.6 - Standards for Design Variance Approval – The proper term, per Indiana Code is "Development Standards", not "Design Variance". Cross-reference to the use developmental standards criteria listed in Indiana Code (IC 36-7-4-918.5). Take advantage of IC 36-7-4-918.5 (a)(3) that allows you to adopt extra development standards criteria. Popular additional criteria for Developmental Standards, to be added in your local zoning ordinance:

- the variance granted is the minimum necessary
- the variance granted does not correct a hardship caused by a former or current owner of the property.

CHAPTER 17- PRE-EXISTING NONCONFORMING USES – This chapter should be retitled and amended to include non-conforming uses, lots, sites, site features and structures.

CHAPTER 18- BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS – Responsibilities of all planning officials (County Commissioners, Plan Commission, BZA and Administrator) should be contained in a separate Administration Chapter.

18.2 - General Duty of the Board of Commissioners – the opening sentence makes no sense. Need to check and rework the duties with Indiana Code, with special attention to:

F. & G. – These sections are misleading; the County Commissioners do not make all the appointments to the Plan Commission and BZA.

I. – Does Owen County participate in a Joint District Planning and Zoning Commission? If yes, more information is needed, if not, remove this section.

CHAPTER 19 - ADVISORY PLAN COMMISSION – Responsibilities of all planning officials (County Commissioners, Plan Commission, BZA and Administrator) should be contained in a separate Administration Chapter. Check the duties with state law. Most of this section should be moved from this ordinance into the Plan Commission's Rules of Procedure.

19.3 - Qualifications of Citizen Members – This section incorrectly states that plan commission members must be residents of the jurisdictional area. State law was amended in 2011 to allow a certain number of your members to reside anywhere in the County (including a municipality) if they own property within the County's planning jurisdiction.

19.8 - Conflict of Interest – State law was amended to expand conflicts beyond direct or indirect financial interest to include an inability to remain unbiased.

19.18 - Alternate Procedure – This section is part of the state law requirement to enable the use of a Hearing Officer. Is that being done in Owen County? Do your Plan Commission Rules complete the requirements?

CHAPTER 20- ADVISORY BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS – Responsibilities of all planning officials (County Commissioners, Plan Commission, BZA and Administrator) should be contained in a separate Administration Chapter. Check the duties with state law. Most of this section should be moved from this ordinance into the BZA's Rules of Procedure.

20.3 - Qualifications of Citizen Members – This section incorrectly states that BZA members must be residents of the jurisdictional area. State law was amended in 2011 to allow a certain number of your members to reside anywhere in the County (including a municipality) if they own property within the County's planning jurisdiction.

20.15 (C) – It is very important to be consistent with terms. Most of the ordinance calls them Conditional Uses, not Special Exceptions.

20.17 – Commitments – Indiana Code also makes written commitments available for use by Plan Commission and County Commissioners for rezonings and subdivision plats. This section should be moved expanded to include all.

20.18 - Judicial Review – I believe that Indiana Code was amended some years ago, so that BZA decisions are no longer subject to review by certiorari. As with other legal issues I raised, I am not an attorney so your legal counsel should follow up.

CHAPTER 22- PLANNING DEPARTMENT – Responsibilities of all planning officials (County Commissioners, Plan Commission, BZA and Administrator) should be contained in a separate Administration Chapter.

CHAPTER 23 - VIOLATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT – You may want to consider switching to a ticketing enforcement system. It typically works faster and gets more results. Several communities in Indiana use this system.

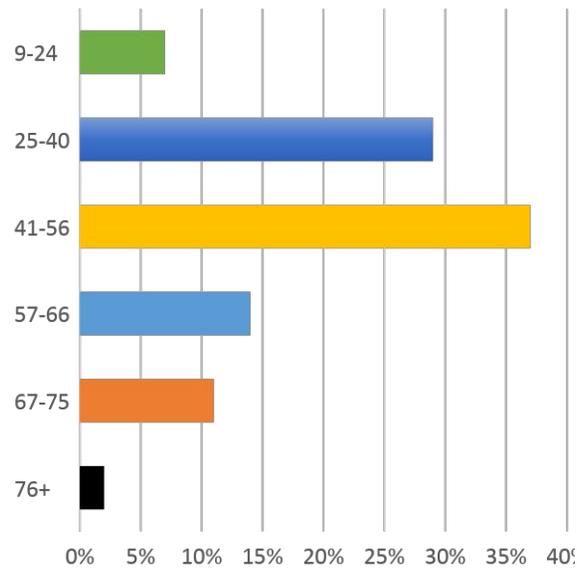
CHAPTER 24 – FEES – Fees may be updated much more easily and regularly if they are part of the Plan Commission's rules and not part of the ordinance.



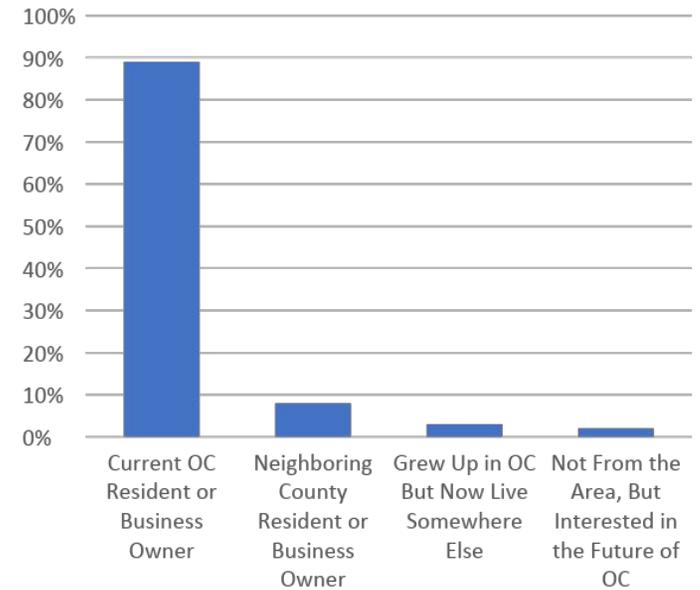
Demographics

500
Participants
Responded!

Age Range of Responses



Relationship to Owen County



Survey Results: Consensus Responses

| Topic | Consensus Responses |
|---|--|
| Government, Public Facilities, and Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheriff’s Department in OC is reliable |
| Placemaking / Quality of Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong sense of community pride • OC is a great place to raise a family • OC needs more attractive jobs and opportunities for young professionals • More entertainment activities are needed for the younger age ranges |
| Historic Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic sites and structures are important to OC’s culture • Historic downtowns in OC communities are important |

Survey Results: Consensus Response

| Topic | Consensus Responses |
|---|--|
| Economic Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture is important component to OC’s economy • New sewer, water, and broadband utilities should be extended to encourage new development • Existing sewer, water, and broadband utilities should be upgraded to maintain existing development • Incentives are need to support small businesses • More restaurants, shopping, and grocery options are needed in OC |
| Utilities and Transportation Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County roads are generally not in good condition |

Survey Results: Consensus Responses

| Topic | Consensus Responses |
|---------|--|
| Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New housing construction in OC is important to growing the population • Access to sewer and water is need to support new housing • More entry-level housing is needed • OC needs to address inadequate/failing septic systems • OC needs to address abandoned properties |

Survey Results: Consensus Still Needed

| Topic | 50% or More Agree... |
|---|---|
| Government, Public Facilities, and Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC does not effectively communicate information to the public • Fire protection in OC is reliable |
| Placemaking / Quality of Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC is welcoming to outsiders/newcomers • OC is a great place to retire • Access to healthcare for OC residents is convenient • Healthy lifestyle and food choices are not available in OC • There are not sufficient resources/activities for aging adults • OC schools offer quality education for students |

Survey Results: Consensus Still Needed

| Topic | 50% or More Agree... |
|---|---|
| Historic Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More resources are needed to rehabilitate historic sites & structures |
| Economic Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are not enough jobs available in OC • OC employers do not offer competitive wages & benefits |
| Utilities and Transportation Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality is generally good • High-speed internet options in OC are not reliable or affordable • OC does not have an appropriate road network to support growth |

Survey Results: Consensus Still Needed

| Topic | 50% or More Agree... |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The overall housing stock is not well-maintained More buildable lots are needed in OC Code enforcement is needed to maintain OC's residential properties |
| Agriculture and Natural Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC does a good job of protecting its woodlands and natural open spaces |
| Parks and Recreational Opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC effectively capitalizes on existing state parks and recreational areas A county parks department is needed in OC A county trail system is needed in OC |

APPENDIX D

Steering Committee Meeting Summaries

Owen County Economic Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee Meeting 1 • Nov. 8, 2021 • Owen County Family YMCA

Overview

- ❑ Owen County received a state grant to update their comprehensive land use plan, which was last completed in 2010.
- ❑ The planning process will be facilitated by consultants and headed by a steering committee of local residents. It will last through summer 2022.

Introductions

• Consultants

- Scott Burgins, SBP&R, scott@sbresearchandplanning.com
- Rachel Christenson, HWC Engineering, rchristenson@hwcengineering.com
- Cory Whitesell, HWC Engineering, cwhitesell@hwcengineering.com
- K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, The Planning Workshop, KK@theplanningworkshop.com

• Steering Committee in attendance

The steering committee was recruited from a broad spectrum of Owen County residents, including not just local leaders who had been involved in previous efforts, but also people new to community planning.

- **Kathryn Shumate** (Gosport): New to area; worked on business brochure for Gosport.
- **Linda Bertram** (Gosport): New to area; worked on business brochure for Gosport.
- **Dylan Heasick** (Spencer): Real estate broker; built home here recently.
- **Grant Beaman** (Spencer): Originally from Martinsville; works for Boston Scientific.
- **Kristin Portteus**: Lived in area since childhood; teacher at the high school; has grant writing experience.
- **Larken Seymour**: Does marketing for Owen County Civic Theatre.
- **Kurt Rosenberger**: Former President and CEO of Our Community Bank in Seymour; Had involvement in the Economic Development Corporation; Served on the YMCA Board; Participated in meetings for the 2010 Comprehensive Plan.
- **Norman Warner**: Tech Coordinator at the schools; Long-time community volunteer and coach; President of the Owen County Plan Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals.
- **Matt Cazzell**: Elementary school principal; lives in Bloomington; would like to relocate to Owen County but cannot find land.
- **Aaron LaGrange**: Assistant principal at elementary school; former police officer and now a reserve officer; Works with Sweet Owen Industries; Is a Chamber Captain.
- **Marcie King**: Executive director for the Chamber of Commerce.

Background

The consultant team introduced the project and described past work that has been done in the community, gave an overview of what a comprehensive plan entails, the role of the steering committee and the public engagement process. The development of a new unified development ordinance was also discussed.

They emphasized that a comp plan update is needed because:

- Owen County is growing, but local leaders don't have the regulations and tools needed to direct that growth.
- The county's planning and zoning ordinances need to be updated.
- Comp plans are a great method to develop new community leaders.

The role of steering committee members will be:

- Represent broad community interests, providing guidance through the entire process (about 5 meetings and eight months).
- Identify issues and concerns during the project development process and advise consultants.
- Encourage community consensus and stakeholder participation.

Questions from the Steering Committee

When should information about this project's progress be shared to the plan commission and board of zoning appeals?

K.K. responded that updates will be given to the plan commission and the board of zoning appeals on a monthly basis. The Project Team will provide the steering committee with agendas, slide decks and meeting minutes that they will forward onto the plan commission and board of zoning appeals. The group discussed making the comprehensive plan a regular item on the monthly meeting agendas until project completion. It was also discussed that engaging these boards in the public input opportunities would be important.

Were subdivision and zoning ordinances updated after the completion of the last comprehensive plan update?

Scott said that ordinances were not updated, but the comprehensive plan laid the foundation for other needed community elements, such as the formation of a redevelopment commission.

Is there anything we can glean from the last planning process to help move this new plan forward?

Scott responded that the plan commission and the county commissioners will be approving the new plan, so having buy-in from these groups would be absolutely vital. Although not a voting entity to approve the plan, it will be helpful to have the county council on board as they are responsible for the county's budget, which may help fund some of the projects identified in this plan.



Questions from the Project Team

What would the Steering Committee like to accomplish with this comprehensive plan update?

Protect small/local/independent businesses.

What concerns does the Steering Committee have about the planning process?

A challenge will be overcoming the mindset that “people come to Sweet Owen County ‘not to be bothered.’ ” Processes and formalizing things make people nervous. This is a positive project, but it could be perceived as a negative. We need to educate the public along the way to say this will help protect us.

Next Steps

- For more information or if you have questions, contact Scott Burgins, SBP&R, scott@sbresearchandplanning.com.
- Steering Committee Meeting #2 to be held Wednesday, **Jan. 12th at 6 p.m.** at the YMCA.

Owen County Economic Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee Meeting 2 • Jan. 12, 2022 • Owen County Family YMCA

Note

Full details of this meeting – including the PowerPoint presentation - and other components of this planning process can be found at <https://owencountycompplan.com/>. The site is regularly updated.

Catching Up

The meeting was facilitated by Scott Burgins, of SB Planning & Research and Rachel Christenson, of HWC Engineering. The committee started by listing their 2022 New Year’s wishes and resolutions for Owen County.

Review of SC Meeting 1

The committee reviewed the basics of the comprehensive plan, its schedule and their role in the planning process. Details can be found in the PowerPoint presentation “Owen County SC 2 1-12-22” on the project website.

Steering Committee Survey

Christenson reviewed the steering committee survey that was taken. Eleven responses were received. [Full survey results](#) are available on the project website and summarized in the meeting [PowerPoint presentation](#).

In summary, the terms that were emphasized the most in responses include “Growth” and “Revitalization.”

Steering Committee Exercises

The Steering Committee broke off into three groups and were asked to discuss the following topics for 7 minutes each and then report back to the group:

1. Liabilities to the county
2. Assets to the county
3. Dreams (Owen County in 12 years)



Items with an * mean they received multiple mentions.

| Liabilities | | |
|--|---|--|
| Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
| *Unplanned growth | *Lack of understanding | *Enforcement of policy and ordinances through reverse thinking |
| *Taking local businesses for granted (like Boston Scientific) | *Fear of growth | Property improvement/clean-up |
| *Entry-level housing and rentals | Disagreeable people, no two-way communication | Age of community (we must increase tax base) |
| Stagnant and aging population | Town-county not working together | |
| No workforce housing | Flood areas | |
| Lack of quality of life amenities (amenities for middle-aged, restaurants) | | |
| Lack of broadband (AT&T in Spencer is problematic) | | |

| Assets | | |
|---|--|--|
| Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
| *Parks and recreation (McCormick's Creek) | *Downtown entrepreneurial opportunities | State park (compare volume to Clifty Falls) |
| *Cost of living | There is a set of doers in the community | Canoe rental (Gosport) |
| *The river (underused asset; may be eligible for Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program Funding; attractive to visitors) | Natural resources | Space on river for festivals (already in a plan) |
| Lack of congestion | Land development | Possible water trail |
| Downtowns are attractive | Cost of living | Multiple county parks? |
| Connection of MYPATH Trail System to the park | Location | |

| Dreams | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
| *Improvements to infrastructure to incentivize housing (like water, sewer, broadband; how do we leverage state and federal funds?) | *A nice housing addition | 10,000 population growth |
| *More diversity in housing | *Apartments | Pre-retirement entertainment |
| *To be fiscally sound; Have the ability to do creative projects | Bike lanes (connectivity) | Broadband |
| Paved path from park to town with transit (like bikes and golf carts) | Bar, bowling | Blight turnover |
| Upgrades/enhancements to State Road 43 | Young people hangout | More industry |
| Capitalize on Clay Township location (proximity to Bloomington/I-69; Owen County taxes; Beautiful area) | HS to Casey's bridge on 46 (MyPath) | |
| Diversity in population (demographics) | Job growth | |

Public Engagement

Christenson reviewed the public engagement strategy, which includes the following:

1. Stakeholder meetings
2. Online public input survey
3. Community open house (online and in-person)
4. Draft Plan presentation (online and in-person)
5. Final Plan presentation (online and in-person)

Public input opportunities will be posted on the project website (www.owencountycompplan.com). The team will be mindful of how COVID may affect public input opportunities will include an online opportunity in addition.

Next Steps

- For more information or if you have questions, contact Scott Burgins, SBP&R, scott@sbresearchandplanning.com.
- Steering Committee Meeting #3 to be held Wednesday, Feb. 9th at 6 p.m. at the YMCA.



Owen County Economic Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee Meeting 3 • Feb. 9, 2022 • Owen County Family YMCA

Note

Full details of this meeting – including the PowerPoint presentation - and other components of this planning process can be found at <https://owencountycompplan.com/>. The site is regularly updated.

Attendees

Lisa Abbott, Grant Beaman, Chris Bault, Linda Bertrum, George Brinson, Matt Cazzell, Aaron LaGrange, Debbie Holcomb, Marce King, Kristen Portteus, Kurt Rosenberger, Larken Seymour, Sonya Seymour, Matt Sword, Norm Warner.

The meeting was facilitated by Scott Burgins, of SB Planning & Research and Rachel Christenson, of HWC Engineering. HWC's Craig Luedeman also attended.

Warm-Up Question

The committee started by answering these questions:

- What's the biggest question you have about the comp plan so far?
- What's the biggest question you anticipate from fellow residents?

They answered:

- How is this going to restrict my rights?
- How does it affect property tax and value?
- What does this mean to me in terms of cost?
- What should we focus on?
- What does this do *for me or to me*?
- Why?
- Are we really going to be able to accomplish this?
- What are the positives and negatives that has come from previous plans?
- What do we experience in Bloomington that we do not want to experience here?

Review of Planning Process

The committee reviewed the basics of the comprehensive plan, its schedule and their role in the planning process. Details can be found in the PowerPoint presentation "Owen County SC 3 2-9-22" on the project website.

Review of Challenges Facing the Comp Plan

Last meeting, the committee discussed what obstacles the comp plan process would have to overcome to be effective. The topics getting the most votes were divided into three groups:

| Civic Engagement | Code & Regulation | Other |
|---|--|---|
| Unplanned growth | Enforcement of policy and ordinances through | Taking local businesses for granted (Boston Scientific, etc.) |
| Fear of growth | Property improvement/clean-up | Entry-level housing and rentals |
| Lack of understanding | | Age of community (we must increase tax base) |
| Disagreeable people, no two-way communication | | |

Exercise: Addressing Challenges to the Comp Plan

The committee then broke into three groups to tackle this problem: "There is both a fear of growth and a lack of understanding about community development issues among some residents. These problems, combined with the fact that there's not enough two-way communication on this issue, could lead to unplanned growth that harms our community."

They groups discussed:

- The root of the problem.
- What other information is needed (stats, etc.) to either to address the root or create a solution.
- Who are the targets of change?
- Who are the agents of change (partners)?
- What are reasonable first few steps?

Their answers for each component:

Root of the Problem

- Owen County residents don't want to "be like Bloomington" -> because they fear too many rules on how to use their property -> because they don't want to be told what to do -> because it could cost them money and cut into their independence.
- People want to live in a small community and don't want to grow because they already have their property and everything they think they need and don't want to pay for anything else.
- People's tax rates have gone up because of the county's fiscal problems and people are worried they will go up more.

What Additional Data do we Need?

- How high are our tax rates in comparison to similar communities?
- Proof that population growth can actually *lower* taxes for everyone (because of property tax caps). This must be in a *very* easy to read format.
- Proof that the comp plan will not eat up prime farmland. Is Owen County primarily agricultural?



- We may have to admit that the comp plan, in and of itself, does not have many teeth because it is an advisory document, not a regulatory one.

Targets of Change (people we need to convince)

- Retirees.
- A very active social media presence on Facebook, particularly “Owen County Chatter” with 10,600 members, run by Crystal Lanham, and “Owen County Budget, Roads and Government” with 487 members, run by Victor Vaillette.
- People who need to be able to access good rental units or other affordable housing, which they can’t get now.
- We need to reach the “middle of the road people,” those who aren’t on either end of the screaming spectrum. They constitute a majority.

Agents of Change (possible partners)

- Directors of the two popular Facebook sites.
- Young people, sons and daughters of residents who might want to stay here or come back one day.
- Business owners who want more residents and visitors.
- “Grumpy old men” who are deeply influential in various sectors of the community.
- Trusted individuals with personal relationships (example: Ryan White) and home-grown celebrities. We must go to them.

First Steps

- Meet with directors of the two popular Facebook sites to make our case.
- Hear from businesses outside Owen County who would like to come to our community, but first need infrastructure, regulatory guidelines, etc. Maybe survey them?
- Local, well-respected **non-political** people willing to say, “Let’s keep an open mind and see if a new comp plan can help us get the community we all want.”
- Introduce the public to benefits/freedoms/opportunities that good planning can bring.
- Find the proverbially “5 grumpy old men” who are deeply influential and make our case to them – show increase in property values, separate myths and fears from facts. Create a running FAQ sheet.
- Have one-on-one meetings with formal and informal ‘influencers’ to strategize on how best to work with groups (approachable, natural conversations). The goal is **listening** and understanding.

Exercise: Elevator Pitch

The groups then studied the elements of an effective elevator pitch – which is a 30-second or so speech they can deliver to other residents.

Committee Member Why a Comp Plan is Needed

- Local leaders, such as the plan commission, have no guidelines on how to make good decisions about growth. As a result, too many projects end up in the hands of lawyers.

- Growth is passing up by, but problems are not.
- Plans for a trash transfer station showed us how little control we actually have over what happens in our county.
- This is the roadmap to our future.

Committee Member State Solutions

- The land along SR 43 is a great place to plan for the type of growth we want.
- We can use zoning and regulations to preserve our own identity, one that is different from Bloomington.
- Planning gives us a say in our future.
- Frame the conversation in a way that emphasizes how we can grow **and yet** still protect what is most important to us.
- How do we know what to do without some sort of agreement or guidelines. What happens if we **don’t** have a plan?
- Give examples from other communities like ours that show the consequences of haphazard development.
- Give examples of rules and regulations from other communities like ours that will be beneficial to residents. Show how it can protect investments.
- Create a benchmark study to show the effects that regulations will have over time.
- People must be told how important it is to participate: “If you don’t have a seat at the table, you’re probably on the menu.”

Example Elevator Pitch from Consultants

Owen County is facing some exciting projects, but also some scary challenges.

Much-needed new housing and other economic projects are coming, but we don’t have everything we need in place yet. This includes water and sewer lines as well as guidelines for directing growth.

We must work with developers now to create the future we all want, and we do that with land use planning and zoning regulations.

We need your opinion about our land use plan. Please take a look at owencountycompplan.com.

Homework: Make the Elevator Pitch

Committee members were assigned the following homework:

- When someone asks, “What’s new?,” present your elevator speech at least twice (at work, church, a neighbors, etc.).
- Secure at least 3 people to complete the on-line survey.



Public Engagement

The online public survey is up and running at [Owen County Comprehensive Plan - Public Input Survey \(surveymonkey.com\)](#).

Stakeholder meetings are being scheduled for March and the community open house (online and in-person) will be in April.

Next Steps

- County planning officials will have their own workshop with K.K. on Feb. 15.
- Consultants work on public input and the existing conditions section of the report.
- Steering Committee complete their elevator pitch homework.
- Steering Committee Meeting #4 on **April 13** @ 6 p.m. at the Family YMCA in Spencer.

For more information or if you have questions, contact Scott Burgins at scott@sbresearchandplanning.com.

Owen County Economic Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee Meeting 4 • April 20, 2022 • McCormick’s Creek Elementary School

Note

Full details of this meeting – including the PowerPoint presentation - and other components of this planning process can be found at <https://owencountycompplan.com/>. The site is regularly updated.

Attendees

Lisa Abbott, Matt Cazzell, Dylan Fluet, Kyle Hannon , Tony Leaderbrand, Anton Neff, Pam Rogers, Kurt Rosenbirger, Larken Seymour, Matt Sward, Norm Warner, Darrel White.

The meeting was facilitated by Scott Burgins, of SB Planning & Research and Rachel Christenson, of HWC Engineering.

Marce distributed “Ask Me About the Comp Plan” T-shirts to committee members.

Review of Planning Process

The committee reviewed the basics of the comprehensive plan, its schedule and their role in the planning process. Details can be found in the PowerPoint presentation “Owen County SC 4 4-20-22” on the project website.

Public Survey Results

Exactly 500 Owen County residents responded to the on-line survey. Here is a very brief summary of key findings. The following table shows topic areas, such as government services or quality of life, and what residents said that most common response to that topic.

| Topic | Consensus Response |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Government, Public Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheriff’s Department in OC is reliable |
| Quality of Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong sense of community pride. • OC is a great place to raise a family. • OC needs more attractive jobs and opportunities for young professionals. • More entertainment activities needed for the young. |
| Economic Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture is important component of economy. • New sewer, water, and broadband utilities should be extended to encourage new development. • Existing sewer, water, and broadband utilities should be upgraded to maintain existing development. • Incentives are need to support small businesses. • More restaurants, shopping, and grocery options are needed in OC. |



| Topic | Consensus Response |
|---|--|
| Utilities and Transportation Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County roads are generally not in good condition. |
| Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New housing construction in OC is important to growing the population Access to sewer and water is need to support new housing More entry-level housing is needed OC needs to address inadequate/failing septic systems OC needs to address abandoned properties |

Future Land Use Map

Rachel showed the Future Land Use Map from the 2010 comprehensive plan and then invited committee members to update it. They discussed what areas of the county they want to protect and where development should be encouraged. The new map is being worked on will be discussed at the public meeting in June.

The group had similar discussions about critical sub areas, such as Owen Camp and Texas Pike. Those new maps will also be presented at the public meeting.

Key Zoning Issues

K.K. Gerhart-Fritz is part of the consulting team reviewing the county’s current planning and zoning regulations. She provided a list of priority topics for updating the regulations, which the group discussed:

1) Preserve Agricultural Land: Treat agricultural as a permanent land use that Owen County wants to preserve, not as a transitional use. Possible planning tools:

- Adopt multiple Agricultural Zoning Districts – see State of Indiana’s Model Ordinance, https://www.in.gov/isda/files/ILRC_Model_Ordinances_-_Updated_2014.pdf.
- Prohibit subdivisions from developing in AG zoning districts.
- Limit use of Administrative Subdivisions so they do not cumulatively result in a subdivision.

2) Grow Quality Housing Opportunities: Provide more options for all types of households.

Possible planning tools:

- Revise current residential zoning districts to allow smaller lots /higher density when public water and sewer or community systems are available versus well and septic.
- Allow duplexes in single family district, like almost all Indiana communities do.
- Introduce “Missing Middle Housing” with a separate low density, small scale multi-family district for 3-plexes, 4-plexes, Townhouses, etc.
- Permit accessory apartments in all single-family dwellings and as mixed-use with commercial, if minimal ordinance standards are met

- Introduce conservation subdivisions, which build on smaller lots to preserve common open space.
- Require mobile homes be located within mobile home parks, with specific standards, not on individual lots.

3) Protect the County and surrounding property owners from NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard), LULUs (Locally Unwanted Land Use) & undesirable Nonconforming Uses: Possible planning tools:

- Require rezoning to more intensive district (Heavy Industrial or Intensive Agricultural) for some high-impact uses.
- Stop allowing intensive land uses to occur by right – require a public hearing and granting of a conditional use on a case-by-case basis by the BZA, so they can evaluate if the site is appropriate and impose needed conditions, such as additional setbacks, screens, reclamation plans, financial guarantees, etc.
- Develop detailed minimum requirements for each of Owen County’s NIMBY/LULU uses (setbacks, screening, hours, etc.).
- Tighten enforcement to ensure compliance.
- Require Plan Commission do a Development (site) Plan approval, as allowed by state law.
- Require pre-hearing meeting for surrounding property owners.

4) Preserve rural character and the County’s natural resources. Possible planning tools:

- Add a voluntary Conservation Zoning District that prohibits development.
- Provide credit for preserving existing woodlands.
- Prohibit subdivisions from developing in agricultural areas.
- Reward historic preservation and matching infill by reducing other ordinance requirements (i.e., amount of parking).
- Make it more difficult to receive a variance or waiver from County standards by adding stricter criteria, as allowed by State law.
- Encourage new development around already developed areas by offering smaller lot sizes, when water and sewer are available and other infrastructure improvements can be cumulative and coordinated.

Next Steps

- Attend the public meeting at **6 p.m. on June 1** at McCormick’s Creek Elementary. **Bring 3 friends.**

For more information or if you have questions, contact Scott Burgins at scott@sbresearchandplanning.com.



Owen County Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Steering Committee Meeting 5 • Aug. 11, 2022 • Owen County Family YMCA

Note

More information on this meeting – including the PowerPoint presentation - and other components of this planning process can be found at <https://owencountycompplan.com/>.

Attendees

Steering Committee Members: Cassie Abrell, Corbin Abrell, Steve Fox, Sean Huss, Marce King, Aaron LaGrange, Anton Neff, Kurt Rosenberger, Larken Seymour, Mary Skinner, Clint Sturgeon, Colin Sturgeon, Matt Sward and Norm Warner.

After objections were made that the steering committee did not include representation from the agricultural community, new members (listed above) were added. In addition, the general public was invited to attend the meeting and some took part in the discussions.

The meeting was facilitated by Scott Burgins, of SB Planning & Research and Rachel Christenson, of HWC Engineering.

Review of Planning Process

The committee reviewed the basics of the comprehensive plan, how it differs from zoning regulations and upcoming events.

Discussion on Rural Preservation

The future land use map on page 50 of the comprehensive plan draft (dated 6-29-2022) has drawn the most comments so far, particularly the land use category called “Rural Preservation.”

- At first the group discussed just cutting the whole category, then discussed clarifying its intent and changing its name (Rural District, Rural Homestead District).
- There were concerns that the local emergency services and the school system was unprepared for all the new houses already approved, but Plan Commission President Warner said that both local emergency service directors and the school corporation superintendent said that they could support the growth.
- **Key concerns:**
 - Plan and map does not include forest, a key product of Owen County.
 - In preservation category, land that wasn't being farmed would lead to eminent domain and the farmer's land being used for parks, river put-ins, etc. Government could connect all that 'underutilized' land and take it away from farmers.
 - Vacant and foreclosed property should be the focus of new development and not allowing large subdivisions.

- *Upset land lady north of Spencer.
- We need definition of 'Protection.'
- We need definition of “grandfathering.”
- New code *must* have requirement to notify adjacent landowners of zoning changes.

• Key Questions:

- Do we need a forest or timber category?
- Do forest-y communities like Brown County have ordinances we can use?
- Is there a federally recognized airstrip west of Spencer in an area we have marked for subdivisions?
- What are these 5-acre lots next to state forest on Fish Creek and Delphi roads? Are they a model for preservation category? Asked by Plan Commissioner Pursell.

- **Final decision:** This is unclear to me. After agreeing to included everything in a well-defined Agricultural District, there was some pushback and confusion that cutting the category would leave the community *less* protected. They asked for clarification through example, scenarios, etc.).

Next Steps

- ☐ Tuesday, Aug. 16 at 6:30 p.m. at the courthouse, plan commission meeting to propose changes to the draft and talk about next steps in the planning process. You're invited to attend.
- ☐ On Thursday, Aug. 25 at 6:30 p.m. at Owen Valley High School, we will hold a public meeting to discuss the plan. For more information or if you have questions, contact Scott Burgins at scott@sbresearchandplanning.com.

