

DRAFT 12.06.2024



Community
Foundation
OF HANCOCK COUNTY



Quality of Place Plan for Hancock County



Completed:
January 2025

Acknowledgments

Prepared for:

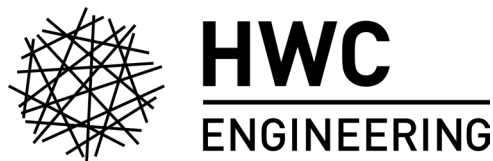
Community Foundation of Hancock County (CFHC)



Hancock (IN) Economic Development Council (HEDC)



Prepared by:



CFHC Board of Directors:

Willie McKinney – Chair

Kathy Locke – Vice-Chair

Susan Bennett – Secretary

Rick Wittgren – Treasurer

Mark Anderson

Rex Brattain

Susie Broome

Ethan Elsbury

Tonya Galbraith

Troy Griesmeyer

Laura Haeberle

Kellie Johnson

Tom Joyner

Brian McKinney

Katie Molinder

Dr. Harold Olin

Megan Ritter

Natalie Schilling

David Spencer

Lindsay Swindell

Dr. Lori Wean

CFHC Staff:

Mary Gible – President/CEO

Marie Felver – Vice President of Finance & Operations

Katie Ottinger – Community Investment & Grants Officer

Emily Wilson – Advancement Officer

Laura Parker – Communications Manager

Shelley Haney – Executive Administrative Associate

Carol Reynolds – Finance and Programming Associate



HEDC Executive Officers:

Harold Olin – HEDC President, Greenfield-Central School Corp.

David Spencer – HEDC Vice President, NineStar Connect

Jon Miller – HEDC Treasurer, Hancock Health

Dan Riley – HEDC Secretary, City of Greenfield

Matt Brauer – The Peterson Company

Jim Shelby – Hancock County

Jeffrey Somers – GBC Bank

HEDC Staff:

Randy Sorrell – Executive Director

Erica Boswell – Community Development Manager

Anna Voorhis – Operations Manager

Mitchell Kirk – Communications Director

Steering Committee:

Dave Beatson – Fortville Action

Sharon Beatson – Fortville Action

Erica Boswell – Hancock Economic Development Council

Becky Brannon – Hancock County Arts Council

Kayla Brooks – Hancock County

Heather Condra – Greenfield Main Street

Brigitte Cook-Jones – Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center

Andy Ebbert – Shirley Community Visionaries

Joanie Fitzwater – City of Greenfield

Tonya Galbraith – Community Foundation of Hancock County

Alice Hedden – Hancock County Arts Council

Ellen Kuker – Greenfield Parks & Recreation

Renee Oldham – Mt. Vernon Education Foundation

Christine Owens – Town of Cumberland

Jim Robinson – Town of New Palestine

Brianne Schneckenberger – McCordsville Plan Commission

Miriam Shoaff-Rolles – Hancock County Parks & Recreation Board

Bob Sterrett – Fortville Action

Milda Sterrett – Fortville Action

Adam Zaklikowski – Town of Fortville

Table of Contents

1	Executive Summary	
	Background	6
	Vision	6
	Recommendations	7
2	Plan Purpose + Need	
	What is Quality of Place?	14
	Plan Purpose.....	14
	Study Area	14
	Past Planning Efforts	15
3	Community Overview	
	Introduction	20
	Demographic & Economic Overview	20
	Asset Mapping	25
	Peer Community	32
4	Plan Process + Outcomes	
	Plan Process.....	36
	Steering Committee.....	37
	Public Engagement	39
5	Strategic Investment Plan	
	Introduction	46
	Vision	46
	Foundational Tools	47
	Quality of Place Strategies	53
6	Appendix	
	Implementation Table	76
	Hancock County Assets	88
	Public Engagement Report	96



Executive Summary

Background

As of 2023, Hancock County is the fastest growing county in Indiana, according to Indiana University's Indiana Business Research Center. Growth comes with great opportunities, as well as considerable challenges. In the next decade, as development occurs, Hancock County must balance growth pressures, such as sprawl and the consumption of undeveloped land, with the need to foster excellent quality of place.

Quality of place refers to the elements of a community that make it a distinct, vibrant place to live, work, and play. Communities that possess excellent quality of place do so by carefully balancing growth with other community needs. For example, they concentrate growth in and around neighborhoods or districts, creating spaces with appropriate density, great walkability, and ample amenities. Communities with great quality of place discourage the spread of sprawling commercial corridors, and suburban neighborhoods with little to no character. Farmland and natural spaces are thoughtfully preserved for future generations to enjoy. This plan seeks to guide Hancock County down this path.

This plan functions as an advisory document intended for use by public, private, and non-profit entities in Hancock County, and is a product of the ongoing partnership between the Community Foundation of Hancock County and the Hancock Economic Development Council. Through the foundational tools and quality of place strategies outlined within, this plan serves as a playbook for improving quality of place across the county. The plan was built on a foundation of community insight and, through feedback collected in the engagement process, captures the diverse perspectives of community members. For the plan to succeed, it requires commitment from community advocates and leaders across sectors and municipal boundaries. Responsible parties must be engaged, and motivated to implement the outlined goals, objectives, and suggested projects. For maximum benefit, implementation should be carefully monitored, and progress should be reported periodically to create accountability.

Vision

Hancock County's vision statement builds on the county's strengths and provides a lens through which to focus future efforts. The vision statement serves as a foundation for the plan's goals and objectives. Articulated clearly, the vision statement is an identity that the county can rally around and strive towards over the next five to ten years.

Homegrown Healthy Living in Hancock County

Hancock County and its distinct communities are united by a commitment to health and wellness for all. Building off existing assets, Hancock County fosters outstanding quality of place through a dedication to healthy living – physically, mentally, spiritually, socially, and environmentally. This includes, but is not limited to, active investment in the following areas:

- Indoor and Outdoor Recreation
- Community Gatherings and Events
- Arts and Culture Enrichment
- Access to Healthy Food and Diverse Restaurants
- Healthcare Facilities and Services
- Schools and Educational Programming
- Captivating Places to Visit

Recommendations

Recommendations are broken down into two principal components: foundational tools and quality of place strategies. Foundational tools are the fundamental components needed to plan for, implement, and oversee projects and programs. Hancock County should focus on developing a robust set of foundational tools to help support implementation of the quality of place strategies. Quality of place strategies are the key areas of improvement which may catalyze continued growth and private investment. The plan's recommendations are outlined in Chapter Five: Strategic Investment Plan.

Foundational Tools

Foundational Tool 1: Collaboration

Goal 1: Share ideas and leverage resources across sectors.

- **Objective 1.1:** Appoint an implementation team to champion the Quality of Place Plan. This team will be responsible for promoting the plan, tracking its progress, and periodically reporting the status of the plan's goals and objectives.
- **Objective 1.2:** Host an annual or bi-annual Quality of Place Summit to share progress on accomplishing the plan's goals, facilitate idea sharing, and generate excitement for things to come.
- **Objective 1.3:** Connect with community representatives from Oldham County, Kentucky to share best practices for enhancing quality of place. Arrange an educational trip to Oldham County for the Quality of Place Plan's implementation team.
- **Objective 1.4:** Enrich the Community Foundation of Hancock County's Talent Pathway to educate on and forward the vision, goals, and objectives of the Quality of Place Plan.

- **Objective 1.5:** Promote collaboration among stakeholders invested in the future of downtown districts in Hancock County. This can be accomplished through semi-annual meetings to share resources and celebrate successes.
- **Objective 1.6:** Establish a liaison within the Hancock Economic Development Council to promote local amenities to area employers. This may include arranging special packages for employees and their families or coordinating corporate events and team-building experiences.

Foundational Tool 2: Communication

Goal 1: Create a distinct, compelling brand for Hancock County.

- **Objective 1.1:** Hire a professional marketing firm to guide Hancock County through a formal process to establish a distinct, polished brand.
- **Objective 1.2:** Follow brand standards when creating promotional content to establish a recognizable brand for Hancock County.

Goal 2: Designate a county marketing coordinator to promote county assets and amenities.

- **Objective 2.1:** Coordinate with county government, municipalities, community organizations, and local businesses to obtain the latest information on events, programs, and investments in Hancock County.
- **Objective 2.2:** Create attractive promotional materials to generate excitement around Hancock County's unique events, destinations, and other amenities.
- **Objective 2.3:** Leverage the talents and perspectives of high school and college students through internship opportunities in county marketing and tourism.

Foundational Tool 3: Capacity

Goal 1: Hire additional paid staff for integral organizations. Work with each organization to develop a feasible staff funding strategy.

- **Objective 1.1:** Recruit experienced professionals to join the team at the Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center. Support the differentiation of responsibilities to accommodate more focused work in marketing and destination development, amongst other key areas.
- **Objective 1.2:** Ensure that downtown development organizations in Hancock County, including Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, and Shirley Community Visionaries, have sufficient paid staff respective to their community size and associated responsibilities.
- **Objective 1.3:** Consider recruiting an additional paid staff member to the Hancock County 4-H Ag Association, Inc. to help manage the Hancock County Fairgrounds.
- **Objective 1.4:** Consider hiring additional staff at the Hancock County Arts Council to support their mission of promoting and celebrating the arts in Hancock County.
- **Objective 1.5:** Evaluate the need for additional staff to enhance the capacity of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce.

Foundational Tool 4: Funding

Goal 1: Diversify funding sources to support transformative initiatives.

- **Objective 1.1:** Continue to coordinate with state and federal agencies for grant funding opportunities.
- **Objective 1.2:** Continue to coordinate with the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority (CIRDA) to pursue funding, such as READI and LEI funds, for quality of place projects in Hancock County.
- **Objective 1.3:** Evaluate the use of TIF districts in Hancock County. Ensure that TIF districts are strategically placed to fund quality of place initiatives in growing areas.
- **Objective 1.4:** Continue working to implement a park impact fee on the county level to fund parks and recreation improvements in Hancock County.
- **Objective 1.5:** Support the implementation of park impact fees in Hancock County communities where one does not currently exist to fund local parks and recreation improvements.

Foundational Tool 5: Engagement

Goal 1: Continue to engage residents as proposed projects and programs enter their respective planning and implementation phases.

- **Objective 1.1:** Incorporate diverse perspectives in project planning committees. Maximize the effectiveness of these committees by educating members on formal planning processes.
- **Objective 1.2:** Host open house events to share project progress with community members, when appropriate.
- **Objective 1.3:** Share key project updates on social media.

Goal 2: Leverage community members as an invaluable resource for improving quality of place by encouraging volunteerism in boards, commissions, and civic groups.

- **Objective 1.1:** Establish dedicated civic groups for volunteers interested in community development in Cumberland and McCordsville.
- **Objective 1.2:** Expand the annual Volunteer Fair at the Thrive Center to include civic groups in Hancock County.
- **Objective 1.3:** Facilitate open houses for boards and commissions at the municipal and county level to increase familiarity with these groups, and to recruit qualified volunteers.
- **Objective 1.4:** Revamp Hello Hancock as a one-stop-shop for non-profit and civic volunteerism in Hancock County.



The Volunteer Fair at the Thrive Center helps connect community members to volunteer opportunities with local non-profit organizations.

Image Source: Community Foundation of Hancock County



Offices along the Mount Comfort Corridor, one of Hancock County's emerging districts.

Image Source: MCC Coalition

Quality of Place Strategies

Strategy 1: Encourage District Development

Goal 1: Support the development of vibrant districts within Hancock County which feature great community character, high walkability, and an abundance of amenities.

- **Objective 1.1:** Coordinate with Hancock County communities to create a distinct brand for each of their districts, which complements the county brand.
- **Objective 1.2:** Beautify core districts in Hancock County through gateway improvements, wayfinding signage, public art, streetscape design, and clean-up days.
- **Objective 1.3:** Support the development of a collaborative arts alliance and an arts district in downtown Greenfield by implementing the recommendations of the Arts District Plan.

Goal 2: Preserve Hancock County's charming character through appropriate development standards and the adaptive reuse of existing structures.

- **Objective 2.1:** Review and strengthen existing overlay districts along Hancock County's key corridors to promote attractive, high-quality development that reflects community character.
- **Objective 2.2:** Encourage communities to introduce measures for the historic preservation of qualifying buildings and structures.
- **Objective 2.3:** Encourage the adaptive reuse of properties with character to create an inviting, lived-in feeling to Hancock County's core districts, even as growth occurs.

Strategy 2: Enhance Recreation

Goal 1: Support high-quality, interconnected parks and recreation facilities to serve Hancock County's growing population.

- **Objective 1.1:** Envision a county-level parks and recreation system, and open the door to additional state funding, through a formalized parks planning process.
- **Objective 1.2:** Support the creation and implementation of municipal park plans in Hancock County to encourage the development of local park systems.
- **Objective 1.3:** Establish a Parks and Recreation Symposium to serve as a periodic convening of parks boards, parks departments, trail organizations, and related groups in Hancock County.
- **Objective 1.4:** Aim to provide 20 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents to keep up with the level of service recommended by the Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
- **Objective 1.5:** Diversify parks programming to engage residents and attract visitors.

Strategy 3: Attract Unique Destinations

Goal 1: Attract unique destinations to Hancock County that appeal to residents and visitors alike.

- **Objective 1.1:** Encourage the development of a regional tourist attraction.
- **Objective 1.2:** Support the vibrancy of Hancock County's core districts by attracting standout businesses to vacant and underutilized properties.

Goal 2: Support existing businesses in Hancock County as they enhance visitor experience through physical and programmatic improvements.

- **Objective 2.1:** Connect local businesses to support organizations that can provide resources and assistance, as needed, to navigate through growth and change.
- **Objective 2.2:** Ensure adequate buffers exist between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to support agritourism in Hancock County. In addition to buffers, encourage the use of other elements, such as trails and public art, to soften the transition between uses.



Daniel's Vineyard in McCordsville attracts visitors from across the region.

Image Source: Daniel's Vineyard

Strategy 4: Foster Connectivity

Goal 1: Expand the trail network in Hancock County to boost the connectivity of assets and amenities, and to encourage more active lifestyles among residents and visitors.

- **Objective 1.1:** Update the Hancock County Trails Plan to identify priority routes for future development.
- **Objective 1.2:** Complete the Pennsy Trail across Hancock County and pursue other priority routes identified in the revised Hancock County Trails Plan.

Goal 2: Advocate for trail-oriented development in Hancock County.

- **Objective 2.1:** Incentivize developers to locate new commercial and residential developments near trails, possibly through grants or reduced permitting fees.
- **Objective 2.2:** Create visually appealing trail environments with landscaping, public art, and interpretive signage.
- **Objective 2.3:** Design or upgrade trailheads with adequate parking and amenities, such as restrooms and water fountains.



Signage installed along the Pennsy Trail contributes to trail aesthetics and accessibility.

Image Source: Tom Russo for the Daily Reporter

Martini-Drinking Pink Elephant in Fortville, Indiana

Image Source: Visit Indiana



Plan Purpose
+ Need

What is Quality of Place?

Quality of place refers to the elements of a community that make it a distinct, vibrant place to live, work, and play. These elements vary by community, but may include the quality of architecture, transportation, housing, neighborhoods, cultural amenities, recreation venues, and tourism features. Although quality of place is primarily focused on the built environment, natural assets, from well-preserved woodlands to an iconic waterfall, may add to quality of place. Quality of place can also extend beyond physical elements to include programming, events, and key organizations.

Quality of place is directly tied to an individual's sense of place, the emotional connection and attachment that people have to specific locations and environments. Strong quality of place can foster strong sense of place, helping residents and visitors feel happier, healthier, and more comfortable in a given community. Quality of place also contributes to quality of life, which refers to the overall well-being of a population. Lastly, quality of place has been shown to promote economic growth by helping attract, develop, and retain a talented workforce and well-paying businesses.

Plan Purpose

In 2023, Hancock County's population increased by 3.7% - the largest percentage gain of any of Indiana's 92 counties, according to the Indiana Business Research Center. Although many communities aspire towards growth, it comes with unique challenges. Going forward, Hancock County must be careful to avoid sprawl, maintain a satisfactory level of service, and preserve community character. Quality of place stands out as a clear theme linking these challenges.

Communities that foster strong quality of place carefully balance growth with other community needs. These communities concentrate growth in and around districts, creating spaces with appropriate density, excellent walkability, and ample amenities. Communities with great quality of place are free from sprawling commercial corridors, and suburban neighborhoods with little to no character. Farmland and natural spaces are thoughtfully preserved for future generations to enjoy. This plan seeks to guide Hancock County down this path.

Taken at face value, this plan is an advisory document intended for use by public, private, and non-profit entities in Hancock County. Yet, at its core, this plan is a playbook for improving quality of place across the county through meaningful collaboration. By amplifying existing gems and pursuing new opportunities, this plan outlines a compelling future for Hancock County, one which will enhance the daily lives of residents, attract and retain talent, and strengthen the county's tourism base. For this plan to succeed, it requires commitment from community leaders across sectors and town boundaries.

Study Area

The study area for this plan includes all of Hancock County. Hancock County is home to the following eight cities and towns, as well as several unincorporated communities:

- City of Greenfield
- Town of Cumberland
- Town of Fortville
- Town of McCordsville
- Town of New Palestine
- Town of Shirley
- Town of Spring Lake
- Town of Wilkinson

Past Planning Efforts

Hancock County and its communities have participated in a variety of planning efforts over the years, from park plans to comprehensive plans. The project team reviewed several of these plans and studies, and the most influential of which are summarized in this section. Each plan provides unique insight into existing conditions in Hancock County, including key metrics, shared goals, community assets, and future opportunities.

Future Hancock Comprehensive Plan 2023

The comprehensive plan outlines a vision for Hancock County's future growth and development and includes goals and policies to achieve this vision. The comprehensive plan addresses the county's most pressing issues and offers actionable steps to shape Hancock County into the community it aspires to be.

Key Takeaways:

- Hancock County 2042 Vision: Hancock County is Central Indiana's community of choice and recognized leader in proactively managing growth to balance and promote its agricultural resources with targeted economic opportunities. Strengthened by their welcoming residents, Hancock County's vibrant communities, towns, and city offer a range of living and employment opportunities and are united by their outstanding public schools, quality development, quiet neighborhoods, rural landscape, high-value amenities, and excellent public infrastructure and services.
- As of 2020, the population of Hancock County was 79,840. This represents an increase of 44% since 2000. Over the last decade, Hancock County's growth (14%) has outpaced the average growth rate for all counties in the Indianapolis metro region (9%).

- Many Hancock residents enjoy a high quality of life due to its community character, small-town feel, and accessibility within the Indianapolis metro area. Even so, stakeholders acknowledge a need for more amenities as growth and development occurs.
- Hancock County's livability goals include (1) continuing to build on and improve quality of life for residents, (2) establishing Hancock County as a community of choice in the region that provides a range of attractive amenities, and (3) proactively advancing public health through planning, regional collaboration, targeted policies, and initiatives.

2024 Community Foundation of Hancock County Quality of Life Survey

The Community Foundation of Hancock County conducted this survey in the spring of 2024 to assess the perceived quality of life of county residents and generate ideas for future improvements. The survey garnered over 500 responses from residents throughout the county, from Cumberland to Wilkinson.

Key Takeaways:

- The typical survey respondent has lived in Hancock County for more than 25 years.
- Respondents continue to live in Hancock County because of their proximity to family/friends, safety, an easy commute, and the county's natural/rural setting.
- Respondents were most interested in having more parks, trails, outdoor markets, attractive landscaping, and libraries in Hancock County.
- Concern about suburban sprawl, an attachment to the county's rural character, and a feeling of disempowerment are all prevalent mindsets that make it hard for new things to happen in Hancock County.

2023 Hancock County, Indiana Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey Findings Report

ETC Institute administered a survey for residents of Hancock County in the winter of 2023. The purpose of the survey was to collect input and feedback from residents to help shape the future of the county parks system. The findings report summarizes the results of the survey.

Key Takeaways:

- The following parks and recreation facilities/amenities were rated as priorities for investment: multi-use paved trails, indoor walking/jogging track, indoor aquatic center, multi-use unpaved trails, and large community parks.
- The following Hancock County programs were rated as high priorities for investment: farmers market, adult fitness and wellness programs, community special events, and senior fitness and wellness programs.

2023 Greenfield Parks and Recreation Master Plan Community Survey

An online survey was distributed to capture community insight on parks and recreation in Greenfield. Most participants found out about the survey from the Greenfield Parks Facebook page, or via email. Approximately 89% of respondents were Greenfield residents.

Key Takeaways:

- Depot Street Park, Pennsy Trail, Riley Park, and Beckenholdt Park are the most frequently visited parks/facilities in Greenfield.
- The majority (58.2%) of respondents agreed that maintenance, capital improvements, or amenities/facilities were needed in Greenfield parks.
- When asked what prevents them from using Greenfield parks more often, respondents identified a lack of time, lack of familiarity with offerings, insufficient security, and facilities lacking the right equipment as the top reasons.
- Concerts and performing arts, farmers markets, before/after-school programs, and parent/child activities were identified as the most important programs or services to have in Greenfield.
- There is an average rating of 4/5 for the overall value that households receive from Greenfield Parks and Recreation Department.

Mount Comfort Corridor: A Vision for a Developing Rural Corridor – 2019

During their participation in the Stellar Communities program, the towns of McCordsville, Cumberland, and New Palestine envisioned the Mount Comfort Corridor as a “Corridor of the Future” in Hancock County. The ULI Advisory Services panel was asked to build on this vision to develop an economic development strategy and growth plan for a model corridor that could improve the region’s competitive position while also enhancing the region’s image and quality of place.

Key Takeaways:

- The Mount Comfort Corridor is located one mile east of Indianapolis in western Hancock County and is bisected (east and west) by Interstate 70.
- Recommendations focus on economic development, infrastructure, placemaking and design, land use and planning, as well as organization and implementation.
- Use placemaking strategies and quality of life amenities to attract labor and talent.
- Leverage the I-70 interchange and Hancock Health’s facilities to attract higher-quality business amenities such as a hotel, conference center, and sit-down restaurants.
- Continue to invest in and expand the trail system and develop pedestrian infrastructure in key locations.
- Develop consistent design standards for the Mount Comfort Road corridor, including high-quality lighting, landscaping, signage, setbacks, drainage, and trails.
- Beautify and improve town, county, and corridor gateways. First impressions matter, and landscaping, public art, and attractive, high-quality signage can make a difference.
- Encourage a mix of housing types to attract a broader range of residents and talent.
- Connect the Buck Creek Trail to the Hancock Health property at I-70.
- Explore a mechanism for creating additional publicly accessible parks and trails in Hancock County and in the Mount Comfort Corridor.

2018 IN Stellar Health & Heritage Regional Development Plan

In 2017, Greenfield, Fortville, Shirley, and Hancock County teamed up to pursue the Stellar Communities grant administered by the Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs. After an extensive planning effort, the collaborative, which dubbed itself the Health & Heritage Region, secured its Stellar Designation and won \$15 million to support projects across the county.

The region's proposal theme included projects focused on "health, heritage, and heart." Each of these focus areas is defined below, along with sample projects.

'Health' refers to a commitment to "increase health and wellness in [the] region through physical improvements, awareness, and programming." Stellar Communities projects include increasing trail miles, installing activity stations along trails, piloting substance abuse support programs, providing safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists, and enhancing recreation opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities.

'Heritage' refers a dedication to "maintain [the region's] heritage and identity with growth and development, and [to enhance] cultural assets." 'Heritage' projects include investing in the future of downtown areas, expanding housing opportunities, funding the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties, and leveraging history for projects like the Riley Literary Trail.

'Heart' refers to a resolve to "improve and connect the heart of [the region's] individual communities, while increasing pride and developing [the region's] people assets." 'Heart' plans to enhance collaboration across the region by celebrating one another's achievements, and supporting one another's innovative ideas. This includes strengthening partnerships among the region's nonprofit organizations and pooling resources to maximize efficiency.



The logo for the Heritage & Health Region from the 2018 Stellar plan.

Image Source: Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs

Key Takeaways:

- The Stellar plan sets a goal to preserve the region's heritage while providing opportunity districts with access to cultural amenities, jobs, and housing.
- The plan outlines a commitment to nurturing community health through infrastructure and amenities for people of all ages and abilities.
- The Pennsy Trail Connector is identified as a priority project. This would involve closing the gap in the trail between Greenfield and Cumberland. Hancock County Trail Segments is a complementary project which involves developing additional segments from the Hancock County Trail Plan.
- The plan outlines dozens of additional projects, from facade enhancements to museum expansions, in Hancock County.

DRAFT 12.06.2024

Jane Ross Reeves Octagon House in Shirley, Indiana

Image Source: Jane Ross Reeves Octagon House



Community Overview

Introduction

Hancock County, located in central Indiana, is just east of Marion County within the Indianapolis–Carmel–Greenwood metro area. The City of Greenfield serves as the county seat. Other incorporated communities in Hancock County include Cumberland, Fortville, McCordsville, New Palestine, Shirley, Spring Lake, and Wilkinson.

Hancock County is the ancestral homeland of the Myammia (Miami), Kaskaskia (Peoria), and Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) people – the original stewards of the land. After these tribes ceded present-day Hancock County to the United States in a series of treaties, settlers quickly moved in. The earliest farmsteads were established around 1818 by the families of Andrew Evans, John Montgomery, and Montgomery McCall along the Blue River. The county itself was not created until 1828 when it was set off from Madison County. The county is named after John Hancock, American Founding Father and notable signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Since its humble beginnings, Hancock County has changed significantly, with more growth on the horizon. In 2023, Hancock County's population grew by 3.7%, making it the fastest growing of the state's 92 counties. As of 2022, the county had a population of 80,170. This represents a staggering 14.9% increase (or 10,392 residents) over the course of a decade. Hancock County residents are interested in the opportunities that growth can provide; but at the same time, many want to ensure that the county remains a safe, inviting community with distinct character and enriching amenities.

Demographic & Economic Overview

Population Characteristics

In 2022, Hancock County had a population of approximately 80,170 people, according to the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. This indicates population growth of 14.9% (or 10,392 people) from 2012 to 2022. On an annual basis, Hancock County is growing faster than any other county in Indiana. Neighboring counties are experiencing a spectrum of population growth. Over the last decade, Hamilton County has grown by 26.6%, while Rush County's population shrunk by 3.6%. Most of the growth in Hancock County is occurring in communities on the west side of the county, including Fortville, McCordsville, New Palestine, and Cumberland. Growth is expected to continue in these areas as new single-family subdivisions and multi-family complexes are developed to house future residents.

From 2012 to 2022, Hancock County's median age increased by a mere 1.5%, indicating that the age distribution remains stable. Although the median age increased only slightly, the proportion of the population under the age of 18 also increased. In 2012, children made up 19.9% of the population. Today, they make up 23.1% of Hancock County's residents. The county's high-quality schools and relatively affordable housing are a major incentive for young families looking to relocate. This trend is expected to continue as Hancock County grows, indicating a need for family-friendly amenities, like quality schools and career centers.

Hancock County outpaces the state and most neighboring counties in terms of educational attainment. In 2022, 32.8% (nearly one in three) residents over the age of 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 28.2% for Indiana. Hancock County falls just short of Marion County (33.2%) and Hamilton County (60.8%) in this metric. Approximately 93.3% of Hancock County residents have a high school diploma or higher, and 10.4% report having a graduate or professional degree.

Hancock County's high educational attainment can be attributed to its stellar school system. According to the Hancock Economic Development Council, the county hosts four consistently top-ranked K-12 school districts: Greenfield-Central Community School Corporation, Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation, the Community School Corporation of Southern Hancock County, and the Community School Corporation of Eastern Hancock County. Despite challenges faced during and after the pandemic, including remote learning, learning disruptions and loss, and mental health concerns, each district is committed to providing quality education and connections to invaluable resources, preparing students for both college and career.

Hancock County is committed to continued investment in education. Opening in 2026, Amplify Hancock is an innovation and education facility planned at CR 300 N and CR 200 W in Hancock County. The vision behind Amplify Hancock is to create an integrated 9-16+ age workforce development ecosystem at a world-class, multi-use learning and innovation center fusing education, private industry, and the community. Currently, students in Hancock County must travel outside of the county for career and technical education. Amplify Hancock will provide students with local access and resources to high-quality education to develop the next generation of talent. Notable programs being considered for Amplify Hancock include advanced manufacturing, information technology, health science, construction and building trades, welding, and electric.

Housing Characteristics

According to the 2022 American Community Survey, Hancock County has approximately 32,477 housing units, 96.8% of which are occupied. The county has a staggeringly low vacancy rate at 3.2%, compared to 9.5% for Indiana. Of the neighboring counties, Hamilton County is the only one that comes close with a vacancy rate of 4.9%. Low vacancy indicates that there is great demand for housing in the county, and low supply.

Out of the occupied units in Hancock County, 80.4% are owner-occupied and just 19.6% are renter-occupied. The owner-occupancy rate indicates greater homeownership in Hancock County than is typical in the state and region. This may be a byproduct of housing affordability. The median home value in Hancock County, reported by the 2022 American Community Survey, is \$235,500, which falls just short of Johnson County (\$240,700) and well below Hamilton County (\$350,900). Although homeownership is beneficial, contributing to wealth generation, social connection, and community character, it may make Hancock County less accessible. Going forward, there may be a need for diverse housing products to accommodate certain populations, such as young professionals and retirees.

Aging housing stock is not a significant issue in Hancock County. In fact, only 40.1% of housing units were constructed before 1980. By comparison, approximately 31.9% of housing units could be considered new builds and were constructed after 1999. New housing projects are already in development and others plan to break ground in the coming years, especially in communities on the west side of the county, to keep up with growing demand.

Economic Characteristics

The largest industry in Hancock County is educational services, health care, and social assistance, which employs approximately 22.2% of the civilian population aged 16 years and over. Other notable industries include manufacturing (12.3%), and professional, scientific, management, and administrative services (11.6%). Many of Hancock County's major employers, several of which happen to be important anchor institutions, fall within these industries, including Hancock Health, the county's four public school corporations, Hitachi Astemo, Indiana Automotive Fasteners, Avery Dennison, and Labcorp, among others. The median household income in Hancock County is \$85,262, far above the state at just \$67,173. Unemployment in Hancock County is also low at 2.7%, compared to 4.5% for Indiana.

According to the 2022 American Community Survey, the mean travel time to work for Hancock County residents is approximately 26.6 minutes. Most workers (85.3%) commute via car, truck, or van. Only 1.1% walk, and 0.2% bike. This indicates that there is an opportunity to connect homes to workplaces via multi-use paths and other facilities, encouraging more active lifestyles. It is also important to note that a growing number of workers (12.7%) are remote. Although these individuals will not use the transportation network to commute, they may desire multi-modal transportation for recreation, and to access other community amenities.

According to 2021 data from the U.S. Census OnTheMap, 16% of Hancock County residents live in and are employed in the county, compared to 84% who leave the county for work. Each day, there is an inflow of approximately 14,708 workers from other counties, and an outflow of approximately 28,829 workers to neighboring counties. A decade ago, 18.9% of residents lived and worked in Hancock County. This demonstrates that Hancock County is becoming even more of a bedroom community. As the county seeks to foster quality of place, there is an opportunity to reverse this trend, attracting employers (and talent) and building a more robust local economy.



Hancock Health is a major employer in the county.

Image Source: CSO

Demographic Snapshot



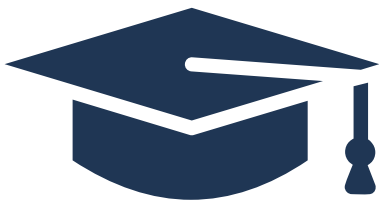
80,170
2022 Population



14.9% growth
Population Change from
2012 to 2022



39.6 years
2022 Median Age



93.3%
2022 Population with a
High School Degree or Higher



32.8%
2022 Population with a
Bachelors Degree or Higher



\$85,262
2022 Median
Household Income

Demographic Snapshot



32,477

2022 Housing Units



3.2%

2022 Vacancy Rate



80.4%

2022 Owner-Occupancy Rate



19.6%

2022 Renter-Occupancy Rate



22.2%

2022 Population Employed in Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance



26.6 minutes

2022 Mean Travel Time to Work



12.7%

2022 Civilian Employed Population Working Remote

Asset Mapping

Over the course of the planning process, the project team prepared an asset map. Early phases of the asset mapping exercise involved surveying Steering Committee members about their own community, and the broader county. From their responses, the project team produced a graphic to visualize the relationship between Hancock County's assets. The project team also mapped the location of assets to identify geographic trends. Then, the project team asked similar questions to the public in a separate online survey. The results of this survey, supplemented by takeaways from focus group discussions, were used to verify findings and produce a final asset map. Overall, the intent of this exercise was to identify strengths to build upon, as well as missing services and amenities related to quality of place. The project team examined a broad range of topics, from recreation to cultural resources. The results of the asset mapping exercise are presented on the following pages. Findings have also been incorporated into the recommendations of the Strategic Investment Plan.

The asset mapping exercise found that quality of place assets in Hancock County are interrelated. If the concept of 'quality of place' is a tree, each category is a branch, and each individual asset is a leaf. The entire tree can thrive together or die together. If the leaves on one branch are yellowing, it could indicate that the health of the whole tree is at risk. Alternatively, if all the tree's branches are full of leaves, then the tree can absorb more sunlight and continue to grow. See Figure 3.1 for a depiction of this relationship.

When mapped out, it becomes clear that Hancock County's assets are concentrated in and around districts. Districts include downtowns, the Mount Comfort Corridor, and the Greenfield Arts District. This is a natural conclusion given that districts are population centers in the county, and often have been for decades. As Hancock County continues to grow, the Strategic Investment Plan recommends directing development towards these districts, creating vibrant spaces with ample amenities. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of assets in Hancock County. A key to this map is available in the Appendix.

Hancock County's assets fall within the following categories: anchor institutions, recreation amenities, tourism assets, events and programs, arts and entertainment, cultural resources, downtown assets, and community character. Each of these categories, described on the following pages, plays an important role in contributing to overall quality of place.



Figure 3.1: Relationship Between Quality of Place Assets

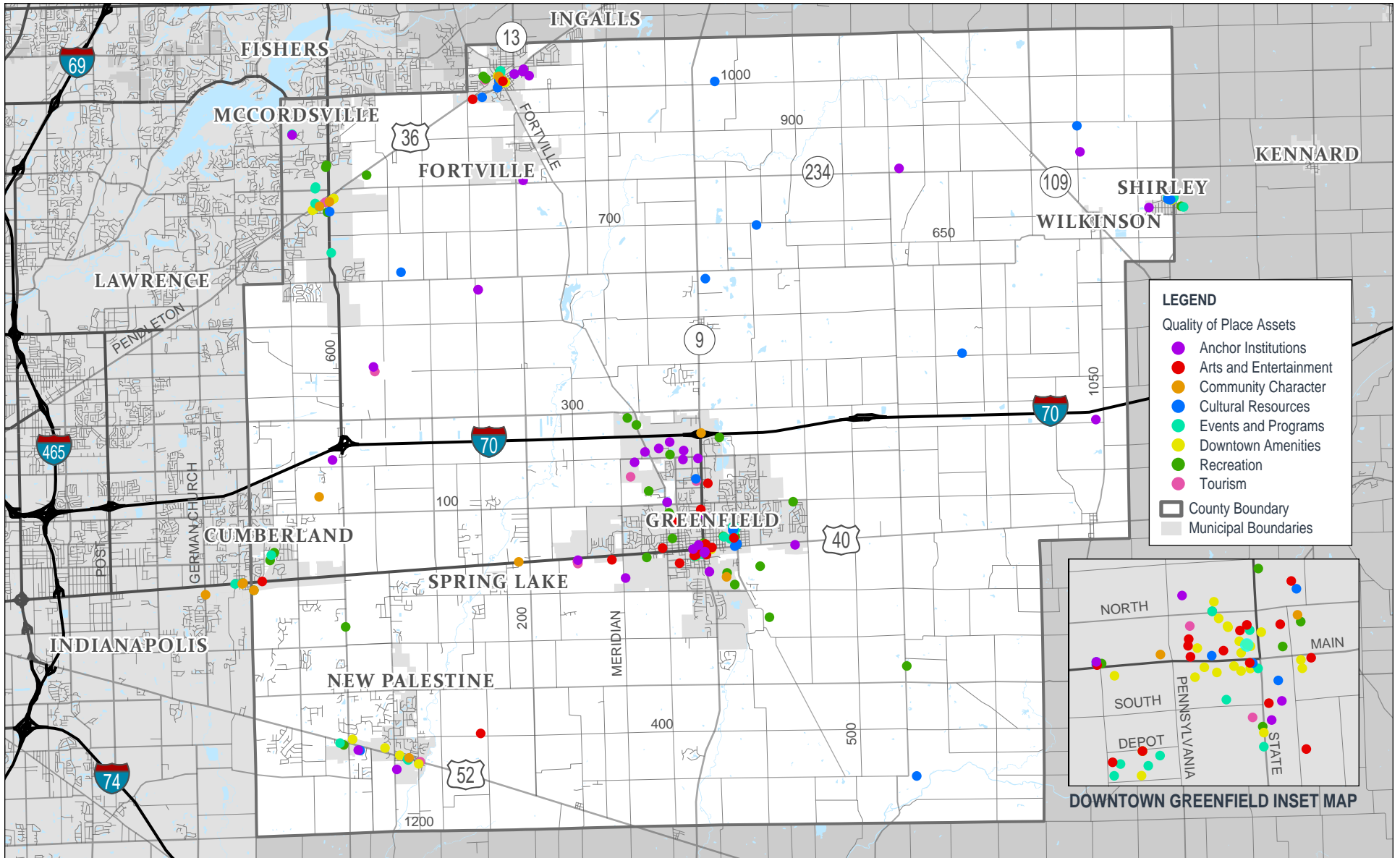


Figure 3.2: 2024 Asset Map of Hancock County

Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions are entities within the community that play an important role in defining the community's identity and shaping its overall success. Anchor institutions can contribute to quality of place by helping implement catalyzing projects. Community members identified 32 anchor institutions throughout Hancock County. Anchor institutions include Hancock Health, a regional healthcare provider, NineStar Connect, a utility cooperative, local manufacturers, the Indianapolis Regional Airport, Tuttle Orchards, a family-owned and operated farm, Daniel's Vineyard, a family vineyard and winery, the Community Foundation of Hancock County, and the county's four public school districts. Several of these organizations have participated in the planning process and have shown interest in partnering on future initiatives. Other anchor institutions, which may be valuable partners, are listed in the Appendix.

Recreation Amenities

Recreation amenities are indoor and outdoor facilities, as well as fitness-focused events, that promote active lifestyles in Hancock County. Recreation amenities include Depot Street Park (Greenfield), Riley Park (Greenfield), Jacob Schramm Nature Preserve (unincorporated county), Hancock Wellness Centers (Greenfield, New Palestine, McCordsville), the Pennsy Trail (multiple jurisdictions), and the Hancock Flat 50 (multiple jurisdictions), among others. Hancock County has a strong foundation in recreation, and, with the establishment of the Parks Board, more is expected in the coming years. Recreation has a clear and direct tie to Hancock County's vision of health and wellness, and improvements in this area are sure to benefit the county's residents and visitors.



Depot Street Park in downtown Greenfield is a popular recreation amenity.

Image Source: The Daily Reporter



Weihnachtsmarkt in Cumberland celebrates the town's German heritage.

Image Source: *Indy's Child Magazine*

Tourism Assets

Tourist assets are the destinations and other amenities designed to attract visitors to Hancock County. Attractions range from natural features, historic sites, amusement parks, agritourism, museums, art galleries, sports facilities, and special events. In Hancock County, popular attractions include the James Whitcomb Riley Boyhood Home and Museum (Greenfield), the Jane Ross Reeves Octagon House (Shirley), Daniel's Vineyard (McCordsville), and Tuttle Orchards (unincorporated county). Wayfinding signage and tourism organizations also fall within this category. The Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center in Greenfield is a great resource dedicated to promoting the county's unique assets.

Events and Programs

This category encompasses a wide range of events and programs, including festivals, cultural events, sporting events, and educational programs (workshops, seminars, classes), all of which can be found in communities across Hancock County. In Cumberland, Weihnachtsmarkt celebrates the town's early German settlers with artisan vendors, traditional food and beer, kids' activities, holiday entertainment, and more. In Fortville, people gather far and wide for Kammy's Kause, an all-day musical festival to raise funds and awareness for families effected by 4p- syndrome. Each year, Greenfield is the site of the Hancock County 4-H Fair, Hancock Flat 50, Pennsy Trail Art Fair and Music Festival, Riley Festival, and more. Other events in the county include the Market in McCordsville, New Pal Summer Fest, and Shirley Strawberry Festival. No matter the season, there is something to do in Hancock County.



A statue of James Whitcomb Riley outside of the Riley Boyhood Home and Museum.

Image Source: James Whitcomb Riley Boyhood Home and Museum

Arts and Entertainment

This category includes performing arts venues (indoors and outdoors), performance groups, art galleries, and public art. Most of Hancock County's large performing arts venues are in Greenfield. These venues include the H.J. Ricks Centre for the Arts, Depot Street Park, and the new, 1,400-seat Greenfield-Central High School Auditorium. Performance groups in the county include the Dulcimer Connection, Greenfield Community Choir, Hancock County Children's Choir, Hancock County Children's Theater, Ricks-Weil Theatre Company, Wilkerson Dance Studio, and Hearts Ablaze Studio. Public art, such as murals and statues, can be found throughout the county, often in downtown areas or along multi-use trails. The Hancock County Arts Council, founded in 1996, seeks to promote art in Hancock County. The group hosts classes, workshops, community events, and art exhibitions at the TwentyNorth Gallery in downtown Greenfield. For decades, the Arts Council has partnered with the City of Greenfield and other groups to develop the arts community in Hancock County.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources, such as libraries, museums, historic sites, and even farms, are spaces which preserve a community's culture, facilitate learning, and allow visitors to connect with something bigger than themselves. These spaces often offer exhibits and other resources, including books, artifacts, and landscapes. Hancock County's cultural resources include its public libraries in Fortville, Greenfield, and New Palestine. Other key cultural sites include the James Whitcomb Riley Boyhood Home and Museum, and the Old Log Jail Museum in Greenfield. The Hancock County 4-H Agricultural Association and Hancock County Historical Society both preserve local culture.

Downtown Assets

Downtown assets refer to the amenities which enhance a community's downtown district. In Hancock County, most downtown assets are small businesses, but activated alleyways, plazas, and parks can also be found in this category. For example, downtown assets in Fortville include Denver's Garage Pizza and Brews and Jennifer's Flower Boutique, as well as the Alley and the Patio. In Greenfield, downtown assets include, but are not limited to, Lincoln Square Pancake House, Wooden Bear Brewing Co., Courthouse Plaza, and Depot Street Park. Organizations focused on downtown development can also be considered downtown assets. In Hancock County, this includes Fortville Action, Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, and Shirley Visionaries.

Community Character

Community character refers to the distinct identity of a place, or the impression that it has on residents and visitors. Gateways, signage, landmarks, and streetscapes all contribute to community character. In McCordsville, community members highlighted Coffee at the Crossing, a train themed coffee shop on the Mt. Comfort Corridor, as a structure that enhances community character. Cumberland residents noted the importance of iconic National Road signs, which add to community character by calling attention to and celebrating the area's history. Other examples include the Progress Pillars at I-70 in Greenfield, the Main Street streetscape in Fortville, and the creeks that wind through Hancock County, including Buck Creek and Brandywine Creek.

From a quantitative or numerical approach, the project team found that the arts and entertainment, tourism, and community character categories were most lacking in terms of assets. However, when supplemented with qualitative information, or the public's beliefs and attitudes regarding quality of place, it quickly became apparent that Hancock County should prioritize recreation, tourism, downtowns, and community character when selecting future projects. These categories were identified as weaknesses in Hancock County, compared to anchor institutions and cultural resources, which were viewed as strengths. As the planning process continued, these four categories became the foundation for the Strategic Investment Plan, which establishes a commitment to (1) encourage district development, (2) enhance recreation, (3) attract unique destinations, and (4) foster connectivity.



Coffee at the Crossing, a train themed coffee shop, contributes to community character in downtown McCordsville.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

Peer Community

After multiple rounds of analysis, followed by voting from Steering Committee members, Oldham County, Kentucky was selected as Hancock County's peer community. Oldham County is in north-central Kentucky on the Kentucky-Indiana border. The county is part of the Louisville metropolitan area, commonly referred to as Kentuckiana by locals. La Grange is the county seat. Other cities in Oldham County include Crestwood, Goshen, Orchard Grass Hills, Pewee Valley, Prospect, and River Bluff. Like Hancock County, Oldham County has experienced considerable population growth in recent years. In 2022, Oldham County had a population of 67,997, indicating 12.7% growth since 2012. Hancock County experienced 14.9% population growth in the same period. In terms of income and education, Oldham County's metrics are outpacing Hancock County. As of 2022, Oldham County's median household income was \$117,334, compared to \$85,262 for Hancock County. Approximately 45.4% of Oldham County residents 25 years and older hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 32.8% for Hancock County.

Oldham County is a community on the rise. In 2024, Niche ranked Oldham County the best county to live in Kentucky. In the same year, Oldham County was ranked the 36th healthiest community in the U.S., according to U.S. World & News Report. Hancock County ranked 117th on the same list. Residents are drawn to Oldham County for its peaceful lifestyle, charming downtowns, beautiful landscapes, top-rated schools, ample housing, and opportunities for healthy living, from outdoor recreation to farmers markets with fresh food. As Hancock County aspires to balance growth with outstanding quality of place, there are opportunities to learn from its peers, applying another Oldham County's best practices for success at home.



Niche ranked Oldham County the best county to live in Kentucky in 2024.

Image Source: Oldham County Kentucky Tourism and Conventions

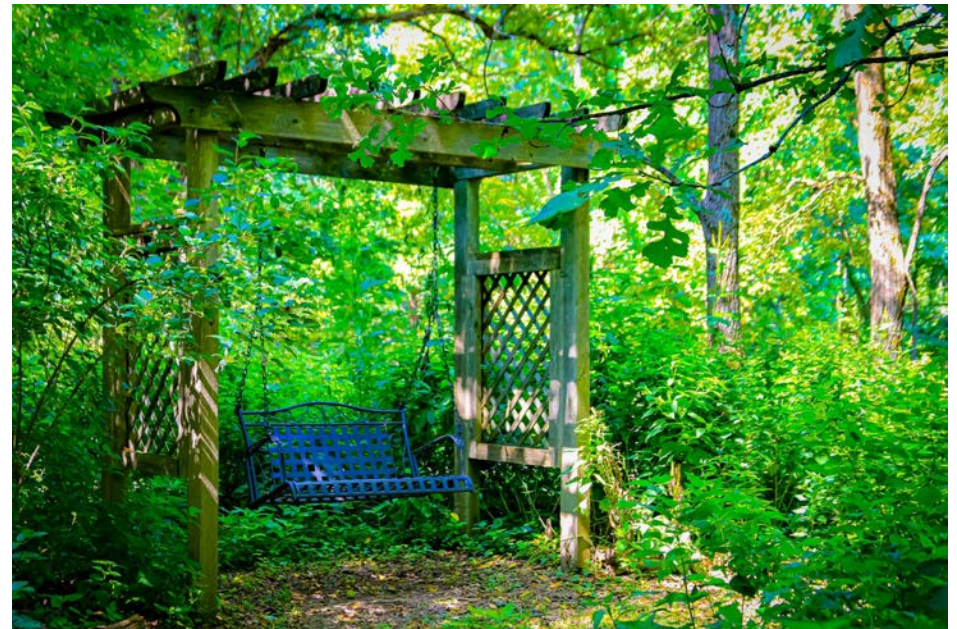
Oldham County residents benefit from excellent parks and recreation facilities. The county has its own parks and recreation department, which owns and operates six county parks and an aquatic center. In addition to great facilities, from an archery range to softball fields, the county parks department hosts seasonal races, youth sports programs, and family-friendly festivals. Municipalities in Oldham County also offer their own parks and recreation amenities. The City of La Grange has a community center, five parks, and a golf course. Their newest park, Springs Park, features unique playground structures, a splash pad, walking path, and pavilion. Concerts, fireworks, and an End of School Bash are held in the park.



The Yew Dell Botanical Gardens are a popular attraction in Oldham County.

Image Source: Oldham County Kentucky Tourism and Conventions

For those seeking a more relaxing, nature-oriented experience, Oldham County is home to the Morgan Conservation Park (county-owned), the Yew Dell Botanical Gardens in Crestwood, and the Creasy Mahan Nature Preserve in Goshen. The Creasy Mahan Nature Preserve offers nine miles of wooded trails that weave through open grasslands, springs, waterfalls, a frog pond, and a garden. The preserve also offers a nature center with interactive exhibits, the region's first nature-based preschool, and rental spaces for weddings and other events. Programming includes guided hikes, summer camps, a haunted hike in October, and the Butterfly Ball charity gala in May. Best practices applied in Oldham County, regarding parks and recreation, include (1) establishing a county park authority and (2) developing parks throughout the county with unique features and facilities.



The Creasy Mahan Nature Preserve in Goshen is a tranquil retreat in Oldham County.

Image Source: Ricky Holcomb

Oldham County supports a healthy tourism base. From farm tours to bourbon distilleries, Oldham County offers a range of activities which appeal to a broad population. Oldham County Kentucky Tourism and Conventions attracts visitors by spreading the word about these upcoming events and must-see destinations via their website, social media accounts, and printed visitor guide. The tourism bureau works to promote the county's distinct brand: "All Things Kentucky in One Cool Place." This brand reinforces the county's unique identity, cementing Oldham County as a one-of-a-kind place to visit. The tourism bureau's website is easy to navigate and visually appealing with trip ideas, an events calendar, and links to additional resources for trip planning. Best practices applied here include (1) establishing a distinct brand and (2) clearly and effectively promoting local assets through a variety of platforms.



Residents attend the weekly Farmers Market at Springs Park in La Grange, Kentucky.

Image Source: La Grange Kentucky Main Street



A freight train runs along Main Street in downtown La Grange, Kentucky.

Image Source: Oldham County Kentucky Tourism and Conventions

Oldham County Kentucky Tourism & Conventions helps promote the county's historic downtowns, including downtown La Grange, Kentucky. La Grange is the only town in the U.S. with a freight train running on its Main Street. The train draws visitors in, and other amenities encourage them to stay. Visitors can shop for arts and craft supplies, home accessories and décor, gifts, toys, antiques, designer clothing, consignments, wedding dresses, and flowers on Main Street. The town is also supported by the La Grange Kentucky Main Street Program. This non-profit organization is committed to preserving and nurturing the district's history and cultural heritage, fostering economic growth by creating a welcoming downtown. The organization supports downtown businesses and facilitates a range of annual events, such as the Arts Fest, Trackside Tunes Concert Series, Farmers Market, and the Spirits of La Grange Ghost Tour. Best practices applied here include (1) leveraging a unique feature of the community to attract visitors, (2) supporting small businesses to create a thriving network of amenities, (3) and adding vibrancy to downtown districts through regularly scheduled events.

Pennsy Trail in Hancock County, Indiana

Image Source: Hancock County Trails

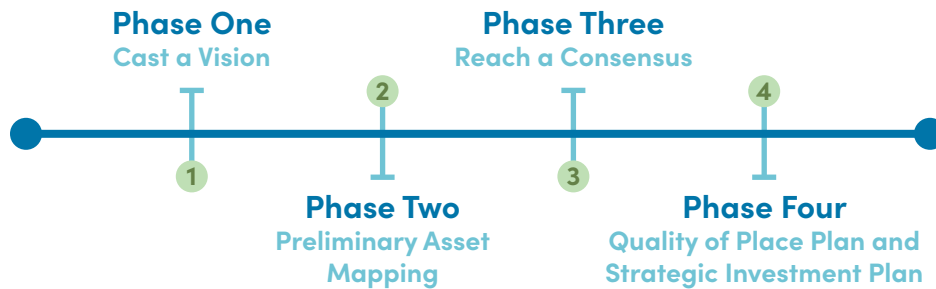


Plan Process + Outcomes



Plan Process

The planning process kicked off in April 2024 and concluded in December 2024 with a public presentation of the Quality of Place Plan. The planning process was informed by feedback from community members throughout Hancock County, including local leaders, non-profit representatives, residents, employers, and business owners. The planning process consisted of four distinct phases. Each phase is outlined below.



Phase One - Cast a Vision

In the first phase, the project team focused on building a strong relationship with the Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock Economic Development Council, and the Steering Committee. The project team established procedures for communication and finalized the project schedule. This phase involved initial research and data collection on Hancock County and its municipalities. Major events during this phase included the Initial Coordination Visit and Steering Committee Workshop #1.

Phase Two - Preliminary Asset Mapping

The second phase of the planning process centered around a preliminary asset mapping exercise. Steering Committee members were asked to complete a survey to help identify strengths, weaknesses, assets, and needs related to quality of place in Hancock County.

The intent of the exercise was to identify strengths to build around, as well as missing services and amenities. The preliminary asset map examined a broad range of topics, including anchor institutions, tourism, parks and recreation, downtowns, community character, and related sectors. More information about asset mapping is available in Chapter Three: Community Overview.

After collecting data from the Steering Committee, the project team mapped the assets. The results of the preliminary asset mapping exercise were presented in Steering Committee Workshop #2.

Phase Three - Reach a Consensus

In the third phase, the project team facilitated an engagement process to solicit input from elected officials, business/industry leaders, school representatives, philanthropic leaders, and the public on quality of place opportunities in Hancock County. The engagement process included hosting focus group meetings, an online survey, and community workshops. The results of the public engagement process were presented in Steering Committee #3. A refined asset map and draft priorities were also presented for review at this meeting.

Phase Four - Quality of Place Plan and Strategic Investment Plan

During the final phase of the planning process, the project team produced a draft Strategic Investment Plan. This plan, which eventually became Chapter Five of this document, is intended to break down Hancock County's place-based vision into a series of projects and programs. The Strategic Investment Plan was reviewed by Steering Committee members at Steering Committee Workshop #4 and community members at Community Open Houses in September and October. After edits were made to the Strategic Investment Plan, the Quality of Place Plan was assembled. The final plan was presented to the community in December 2024.

Steering Committee



The Steering Committee, a team of dedicated community stakeholders, provided support throughout the planning process. Steering Committee members included representatives from municipalities, county government, the Community Foundation of Hancock County, the Mt. Vernon Education Foundation, the Hancock County Arts Council, the Hancock Economic Development Council, the Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center, and downtown development organizations. Members participated in committee and community meetings, providing direction on the plan's vision, goals, and objectives. As drafted materials were released, Steering Committee members reviewed them to ensure they properly reflected Hancock County's needs and desires. The Steering Committee kept the plan on track and encouraged community members to participate in public engagement opportunities.

Steering Committee Meetings

The following section summarizes each Steering Committee meeting over the course of the planning process.

Steering Committee Workshop #1

The project team conducted a kick-off meeting with the newly formed Steering Committee on April 2nd, 2024. The meeting included an introduction to the planning process and a review of the public participation strategy. A summary of the demographic and economic analysis for Hancock County was presented, and participants were asked to complete a survey to vote for their choice of peer community. Steering Committee members were also encouraged to help identify quality of place amenities by participating in the preliminary asset mapping exercise, which took the form of a second survey.

Steering Committee Workshop #2

The project team met with the Steering Committee on May 14th, 2024 to review and refine the preliminary asset map, and for another discussion on peer communities.

Steering Committee Workshop #3

On July 16th, 2024, the project team reviewed the results of the public engagement process with the Steering Committee. A refined asset map was also presented, along with draft priorities for the Quality of Place Plan. These draft priorities were divided into foundational tools and quality of place strategies. This structure would remain the same for the remainder of the planning process. At this meeting, the project team collected feedback from Steering Committee members on draft priorities, and later incorporated their suggestions into the Strategic Investment Plan.

Steering Committee Workshop #4

During the final meeting on August 20th, 2024, the project team reviewed the first draft of the Strategic Implementation Plan with the Steering Committee. The purpose of the meeting was to establish clear direction for desired edits prior to the open houses.

TABLE 4.1: STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dave Beatson	Fortville Action, Secretary
Sharon Beatson	Fortville Action, Member
Erica Boswell	Hancock Economic Development Council, Community Development Manager
Becky Brannon	Hancock County Arts Council, Member
Kayla Brooks	Hancock County, Planning Director
Heather Condra	Greenfield Main Street, Director
Brigette Cook-Jones	Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center, Executive Director
Andy Ebbert	Shirley Community Visionaries, Member
Joanie Fitzwater	City of Greenfield, Planning Director
Tonya Galbraith	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Thrive Committee
Alice Hedden	Hancock County Arts Council, President
Ellen Kuker	Greenfield Parks & Recreation, Superintendent
Renee Oldham	Mt. Vernon Education Foundation, Executive Director
Christine Owens	Town of Cumberland, Assistant Town Manager
Jim Robinson	Town of New Palestine, Town Manager
Brianne Schneckenberger	Town of McCordsville, Vice President of the Plan Commission
Miriam Shoaff-Rolles	Hancock County, Administrator
Bob Sterrett	Fortville Action, Member
Milda Sterrett	Fortville Action, Member
Adam Zaklikowski	Town of Fortville, Planning Director



The Steering Committee learns about potential peer communities at Workshop #1.

Image Source: HWC Engineering



Participants attend Steering Committee Workshop #2.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

Public Engagement

From June to October of 2024, the project team gathered insight from community leaders, residents, business owners, visitors, and other interested parties through online and in-person engagement opportunities. In total, over 380 voices were heard through focus group meetings with stakeholders, community workshops, community open houses, and an online survey.

Focus Groups with Stakeholders

From June 25th to June 27th, 2024, the project team met with stakeholders with experience, local knowledge, and/or special interest in quality of place in Hancock County. Focus group meetings covered a variety of topics and utilized the diverse perspectives of participants to identify existing assets, barriers to success, as well as desired projects, programs, and policies in the county. In total, there were seven meetings at the Thrive Center with 38 participants.

Meetings covered the following five topics:

- Mt. Comfort Corridor
- Recreation
- Arts, Culture, and Entertainment
- Downtown Development
- Community Character

The project team also hosted special focus group meetings with the Hancock Economic Development Council and the Steering Committee.

Meetings began with a brief overview of the planning process. The project team explained the purpose of the plan, reviewed the anticipated timeline, and identified other ongoing planning initiatives in Hancock County. To center the discussion, the project team reviewed the plan's definition of 'quality of place.' Discussions followed about the topic at hand as participants identified existing assets, barriers to success, and potential opportunities in Hancock County.

Key Findings:

Mount Comfort Corridor

- The Mt. Comfort Corridor is a major north-south connector and gateway to Hancock County. Although there are projects underway to transform the corridor, stakeholders noted that it currently lacks a defined identity.
- Stakeholders suggested improvements to enhance the corridor, including public art at roundabouts, the addition of parks and greenspaces, and attractive branding for communities along the corridor.

Recreation

- Current recreational offerings in Hancock County include parks and trails (e.g., Depot Street Park, Pennsy Trail), the Hancock Health Wellness Centers, and the occasional event or program.
- Barriers to outstanding recreation in Hancock County include limited capacity (e.g., reliance on volunteers), poor communication (e.g., no comprehensive activity guide), low investment, and underutilization of park impact fees.

Arts, Culture, and Entertainment

- Hancock County is home to a vibrant entertainment scene with live music performances, theater groups, and dance studios. Stakeholders noted that the Hancock County Arts Council (HCAC) is a key organization which promotes arts, culture, and entertainment in the county.
- Stakeholders highlighted funding, limited staff capacity, and lengthy processes (i.e., red tape) as key barriers to arts, culture, and entertainment in Hancock County. Other barriers include the accessibility of performing arts venues and museums, the availability of liquor licenses, and challenges associated with downtown development (e.g., parking, costly redevelopment and maintenance, and truck traffic).

Downtown Development

- Downtowns in Hancock County may struggle to preserve their identity while growth occurs. To help overcome this challenge, stakeholders suggested more collaboration amongst downtown organizations. Collaboration can be difficult when organizations struggle with internal stability and reliance on volunteers.
- To improve downtowns across Hancock County, stakeholders advocated for increased funding and capacity building, enhance connectivity via trails and other pedestrian amenities, and mixed-use development to increase downtown density.

Community Character

- Community dynamics in Hancock County are evolving. As development continues, Hancock County should balance the expectations of legacy residents and newer arrivals, aiming for cohesion and sustainable growth.
- Opportunities lie in adaptive reuse, fostering unique community districts, and enhancing nature-based recreation.

Big Picture Discussion (with Steering Committee)

- Hancock County excels in terms of its anchor institutions (i.e., Hancock Health), community events, trail connectivity and planning, and overall dedication to health and wellness.
- Stakeholders felt that tourism destinations, activities and attractions (especially for young adults), recreation amenities, and a diversity of restaurants were missing in Hancock County.

Hancock Economic Development Council

- There is strong collaboration amongst Hancock County's four school districts. These districts are working together to establish the Hancock County Career Center (HC3) at Amplify Hancock.
- Barriers to excellent quality of place and quality of life in Hancock County include limited activities for teenagers and enriching experiences for adults, lack of basic needs for diverse populations (e.g., transportation and language services), and communication gaps.

Community Workshops

From June 18th to June 27th, 2024, the project team hosted four community workshops across Hancock County to gather insight from the public. Workshops were held at the Hancock Health Wellness Center in New Palestine, the Hancock Health Wellness Center in McCordsville, the Thrive Center in Greenfield, and the Eastern Hancock High School near Charlottesville. There were 22 participants at these meetings. Following a brief presentation about the planning process, facilitators led a series of small group activities. These activities included a visioning exercise, asset identification exercise, and a brainstorming exercise in which participants generated ideas for new projects and programs in Hancock County.

Key Findings:

- Health and wellness are key strengths for Hancock County and should be the focus of future initiatives. Hancock Health is an important anchor institution which provides accessible healthcare and wellness facilities. To continue to enhance community health, workshop participants want to see the development of more trails, parks, and outdoor recreation areas. Participants would also like to see more grocery stores and community gardens in the county to promote healthy eating habits.
- Hancock County should remain an inclusive community for people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and lifestyles. This involves providing opportunities and amenities for children and young families.
- Workshop participants are proud of Hancock County's commitment to education and workforce training, demonstrated through the development of Amplify Hancock. Hancock County should continue to be a business-friendly environment and should seek to provide a diversity of job opportunities.
- Hancock County should continue to develop quality amenities such as performing arts venues, galleries, restaurants, and retail. These amenities should be supported by strong infrastructure, including roads, water, sewer, and public transportation.

- From Shirley to Fortville, workshop participants appreciate the unique identities of each Hancock County community. At the same time, there is a need to develop an overarching identity which connects these individual stories. Workshop participants highlighted the importance of downtown revitalization and adaptive reuse as tools for preserving community character.



Participants identify local assets at a community workshop at the Thrive Center.

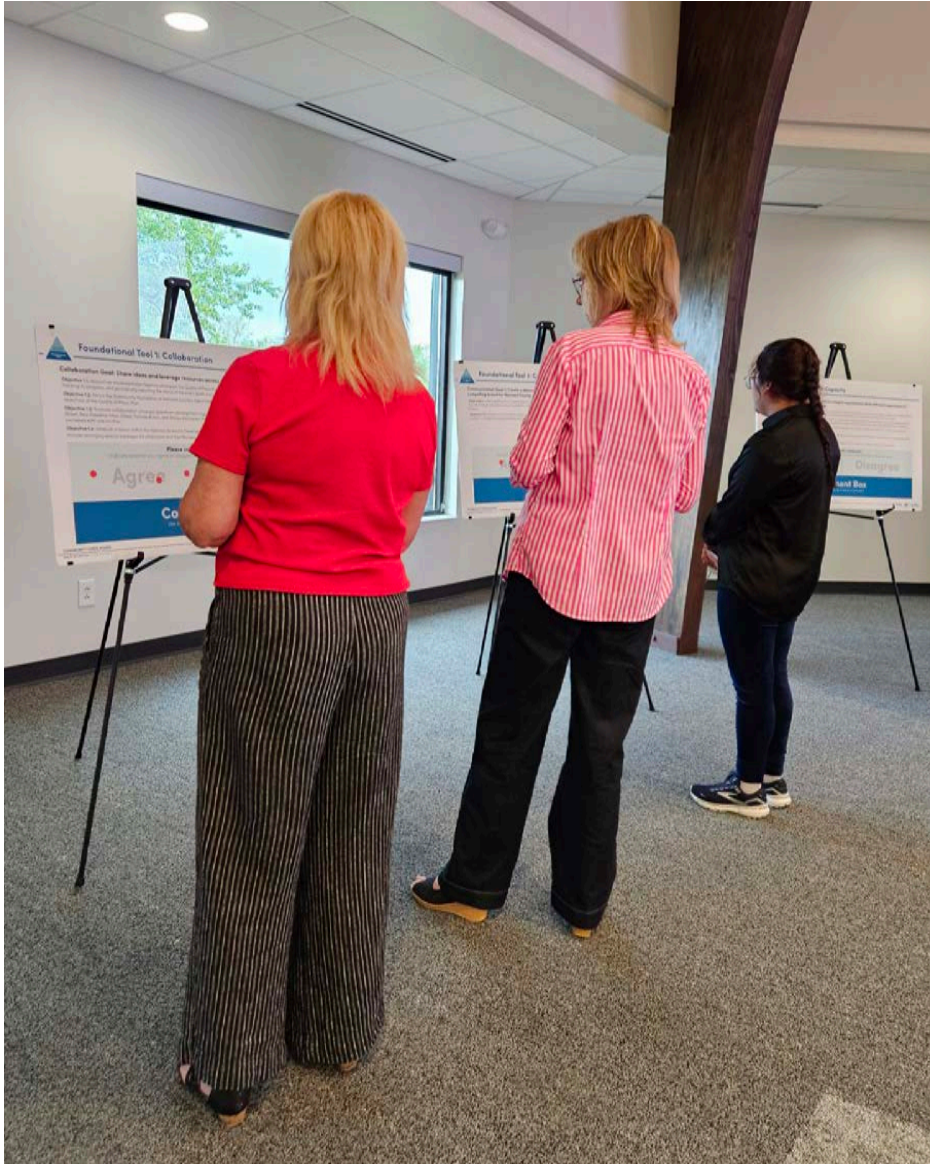
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Online Survey

From June 3rd to July 8th, 2024, the online survey collected feedback from 305 respondents. The survey assessed overall perceptions of quality of place and satisfaction with different components of quality of place, from recreation to community character. The survey also provided an opportunity for residents to highlight the things they love about Hancock County and to identify missing amenities and experiences.

Key Findings:

- Survey respondents rated overall quality of place in Hancock County at 3.37 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is considered 'Excellent.' This neutral rating indicates that respondents were neither wholly satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of place in their community.
- Respondents were highly satisfied with anchor institutions, recreation, cultural resources, and community character in Hancock County. Some of the most highly rated components within these categories include libraries (75.9% satisfied or very satisfied), hospitals and clinics (74.1%), public schools (74.1%), gyms and fitness centers (70.0%), farms (68.3%), and trails (66.0%).
- Respondents were less satisfied with tourism, arts and entertainment, and downtown amenities. Some of the lowest rated components in these categories include retail (61.7% unsatisfied or very unsatisfied), restaurants (55.3%), tourist attractions (50.5%), and indoor performing arts venues (48.2%).
- Survey respondents see Hancock County today as a growing rural community. It is a community that is safe, friendly, and family-oriented. The top word associated with Hancock County is 'growing,' which was selected by 81.7% of respondents.
- Survey respondents did not associate Hancock County with words like sophisticated, unique, culturally rich, fun, innovative, or honest. None of the respondents (0.0%) selected 'sophisticated' when asked to describe Hancock County.
- Hancock County stands out from other communities due to its small-town feel, sense of community, and rural/agricultural character. The county is peaceful and quiet with beautiful scenery, preserved historic buildings, and a thriving natural environment. Residents value the county's affordability, proximity to Indianapolis, and the availability of community amenities.
- There is a need for more parks and recreation amenities, trail connections, restaurants, retail, and unique attractions in Hancock County. These amenities would benefit residents while also appealing to tourists.
- Survey respondents are concerned about over-development and loss of rural character, environmental impacts, lack of diversity (ethnic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic), and local government (accountability, transparency, and responsiveness) in Hancock County.



Participants provide feedback on the plan's recommendations at an open house.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

Community Open Houses

On September 24th and October 9th, 2024, the project team hosted community open houses, one at the Thrive Center in Greenfield and the other at the Mt. Vernon Alumni Center in Fortville. Approximately 23 community members attended the open houses. Following a brief presentation on the planning process, community members were encouraged to visit stations around the room to review draft recommendations. At each station, participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the information presented and were given the opportunity to leave comments. The project team incorporated the feedback received into the final draft of the Quality of Place Plan.

Key Findings:

- Recommendations were viewed favorably by community members. There was resounding support for the foundational tools and quality of place strategies presented, and community members are excited to see the plan implemented.
- Community members suggested adjusting the wording for the vision statement. They felt that 'Healthy Hancock' didn't quite fit and was too similar to 'Hancock Health.' They agreed with the core ideas behind the vision statement but wanted it to better reflect the county's more rural, holistic way of life.
- Community members want to ensure that branding and marketing efforts recommended in Foundational Tool 2: Communication feel natural and are not duplicative.
- Community members suggested that Foundational Tool 3: Capacity be expanded to include visioning and strategic planning for key organizations in Hancock County. This is beyond the scope of the Quality of Place Plan but should be considered an important next step.

Page Intentionally Left Blank

U-Cut Flower Garden at Tuttle Orchards in Hancock County, Indiana

Image Source: Tuttle Orchards



Strategic Investment Plan

Introduction

This Strategic Investment Plan is built on a foundation of community engagement. The shared vision outlined in the plan is informed by feedback from local leaders, community stakeholders, and members of the public gathered through Steering Committee meetings, focus group discussions, community workshops, and an online survey. This vision, which strives for a healthy Hancock County, is broken down into two principal components: foundational tools and quality of place strategies. Foundational tools are the fundamental tools needed to plan for, implement, and oversee projects and programs. Foundational tools include collaboration, communication, capacity, funding, and engagement. Hancock County should focus on developing a robust set of foundational tools before moving on to quality of place strategies. Quality of place strategies are the key areas of improvement which may catalyze continued growth and private investment. The vision, foundational tools, and quality of place strategies are described in further detail throughout this Strategic Investment Plan.

Vision

Homegrown Healthy Living in Hancock County

Hancock County and its distinct communities are united by a commitment to health and wellness for all. Building off existing assets, Hancock County fosters outstanding quality of place through a dedication to healthy living – physically, mentally, spiritually, socially, and environmentally. This includes, but is not limited to, active investment in the following areas:

- Indoor and Outdoor Recreation
- Community Gatherings and Events
- Arts and Culture Enrichment
- Access to Healthy Food and Diverse Restaurants
- Healthcare Facilities and Services
- Schools and Educational Programming
- Captivating Places to Visit

Foundational Tools

Successful implementation is dependent on getting the basics right. This means supporting projects and programs through collaboration, communication, capacity, funding, and engagement.

Foundational Tool 1: Collaboration

Successful projects stem from whole-hearted collaboration. Whether within sectors or across sectors, sharing ideas and supporting one another is a sure path towards the sustainability of existing assets and the development of new, innovative projects. Hancock County can forward this Quality of Place Plan, and the projects and programs it outlines, by appointing an implementation team. The implementation team would be responsible for promoting the plan, tracking its progress, and periodically sharing the plan's status through quarterly reports and a Quality of Place Summit. This team may begin as a group of volunteers, each representing different entities and interests in the community. Over time, this role may evolve into an official position within the Community Foundation of Hancock County, or another organization. The implementation team, or coordinator, would be encouraged to develop a strong relationship with, and to visit, Hancock County's peer community: Oldham County, Kentucky.

The Quality of Place Plan can also be forwarded through the Community Foundation's Talent Pathway program. This program is designed to teach the concepts and skills needed for successful civic involvement and is tailored to a range of experience levels. By enriching the Talent Pathway, Hancock County can inspire current and future community leaders to build upon the concepts of the Quality of Place Plan well into the future.

Many individuals and organizations are invested in the future of downtown districts in Hancock County, and are trying their best to strengthen these core neighborhoods. Enhancing districts efficiently and effectively, rather than duplicating efforts, requires strong collaboration among stakeholders. In this case, stakeholders include volunteers, staff, and elected officials from Main Street organizations, civic volunteer groups, local government, and related organizations. For many of these organizations, time, capacity, and resources are limited; but by working together, stakeholders can leverage one another's skills and expertise to strengthen their approach to downtown revitalization.

Finally, in a more innovative approach, collaboration could mean building connections between employers and local amenities. A community liaison, potentially part of the Hancock Economic Development Council, may arrange special packages for employees and their families (e.g., gym memberships), or organize corporate events and team-building experiences. This approach encourages employers to patronize local businesses, elevating support to an unprecedented level and keeping employer dollars in the county.

Goal and Objectives

Goal 1: Share ideas and leverage resources across sectors.

Objective 1.1: *Appoint an implementation team to champion the Quality of Place Plan. This team will be responsible for promoting the plan, tracking its progress, and periodically reporting the status of the plan's goals and objectives.*

Objective 1.2: *Host an annual or bi-annual Quality of Place Summit to share progress on accomplishing the plan's goals, facilitate idea sharing, and generate excitement for things to come.*

Objective 1.3: Connect with community representatives from Oldham County, Kentucky to share best practices for enhancing quality of place. Arrange an educational trip to Oldham County for the Quality of Place Plan's implementation team.

Objective 1.4: Enrich the Community Foundation of Hancock County's Talent Pathway to educate on and forward the vision, goals, and objectives of the Quality of Place Plan.

Objective 1.5: Promote collaboration among stakeholders invested in the future of downtown districts in Hancock County. This can be accomplished through semi-annual meetings to share resources and celebrate successes.

Objective 1.6: Establish a liaison within the Hancock Economic Development Council to promote local amenities to area employers. This may include arranging special packages for employees and their families or coordinating corporate events and team-building experiences.

Oldham County's Tourism and Visitor Center sits in a quaint building in Maples Park in Crestwood, Kentucky.

Image Sources: Yelp



Crestwood hosts an annual Up, Up, and Away festival at Maples Park. During the festival, community members are invited to take a free hot air balloon ride.

Image Sources: Oldham Family Fun

Foundational Tool 2: Communication

Throughout the public engagement process, community members remarked on the lack of communication across Hancock County. The county is rich in assets, but many are underappreciated and underutilized due to a lack of promotion. Additionally, assets feel disconnected and are not tied to an overarching theme or identity. To remedy this issue, Hancock County may consider enhancing its branding and marketing, making it more robust and memorable.

Establishing a compelling brand begins by uniting the county around a shared identity, such as health and wellness. Once a strong brand with clear standards is established, the county may designate a staff member to promote existing assets to residents and visitors. In other communities, this position is typically housed in the tourism bureau. This individual would be responsible for producing a consistent stream of promotional content for distribution on social media, websites, and for print. Some communities have successfully recruited interns to support this marketing function by helping produce content that appeals to teenagers and young adults, as well as the broader population.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Create a distinct, compelling brand for Hancock County.

Objective 1.1: Hire a professional marketing firm to guide Hancock County through a formal process to establish a distinct, polished brand.

Objective 1.2: Follow brand standards when creating promotional content to establish a recognizable brand for Hancock County.

Goal 2: Designate a county marketing coordinator to promote county assets and amenities.

Objective 2.1: Coordinate with county government, municipalities, community organizations, and local businesses to obtain the latest information on events, programs, and investments in Hancock County.

Objective 2.2: Create attractive promotional materials to generate excitement around Hancock County's unique events, destinations, and other amenities.

Objective 2.3: Leverage the talents and perspectives of high school and college students through internship opportunities in county marketing and tourism.



Oldham County's brand ("All Things Kentucky in One Cool Place") helps tie together the county's unique assets, contributing to its distinct identity and sense of place.

Image Source: Oldham County Kentucky Tourism and Conventions

Foundational Tool 3: Capacity

Proper staff capacity is needed to see projects through from start to finish. Currently, several of Hancock County's quality-of-place organizations, from the Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center to Greenfield Main Street, are served by just one or two paid staff members. Out of necessity, these organizations often rely on volunteers to carry out tasks associated with project implementation. This arrangement limits the number of projects that can be pursued at any given time, and often creates inefficiencies. Hancock County should consider supporting these integral organizations by hiring additional paid professionals. In more robust county tourism agencies, for instance, there may be upwards of ten full-time staff members responsible for administration, marketing, destination development, sales, visitor experience, and operations. One person simply cannot handle this workload in a growing community.

As needed, the Community Foundation of Hancock County and the Hancock Economic Development Council could help organizations develop a funding strategy to achieve optimal staff capacity. This process may involve determining staffing needs and identifying funding sources. Some organizations may be able to reconfigure their existing budget to achieve capacity goals, while others will need to acquire additional funding sources. Depending on the organization, funding sources will range from tax revenue to grants and sponsorships.

Goal and Objectives

Goal 1: Hire additional paid staff for integral organizations. Work with each organization to develop a feasible staff funding strategy.

Objective 1.1: *Recruit experienced professionals to join the team at the Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center. Support the differentiation of responsibilities to accommodate more focused work in marketing and destination development, amongst other key areas.*

Objective 1.2: *Ensure that downtown development organizations in Hancock County, including Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, and Shirley Community Visionaries, have sufficient paid staff respective to their community size and associated responsibilities.*

Objective 1.3: *Consider recruiting an additional paid staff member to the Hancock County 4-H Ag Association, Inc. to help manage the Hancock County Fairgrounds.*

Objective 1.4: *Consider hiring additional staff at the Hancock County Arts Council to support their mission of promoting and celebrating the arts in Hancock County.*

Objective 1.5: *Evaluate the need for additional staff to enhance the capacity of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce.*

Foundational Tool 4: Funding

Without proper funding, projects and programs will struggle to get off the ground. Hancock County can support catalyzing initiatives by leveraging diverse funding sources. These funding sources include state and federal programs, grants, Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts, and impact fees. In Indiana, grants to enhance quality of life and quality of place are available through organizations like the Office of Community and Rural Affairs, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Health, and Department of Transportation.

Additional funding opportunities are available through regionalism. Hancock County and its communities are part of the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority (CIRDA). In early 2024, CIRDA was awarded \$45 million through the Indiana Economic Development Corporation's (IEDC's) Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) to fund transformative initiatives across Central Indiana. Additional READI funding will be awarded in 2025, thanks to a generous gift from Lilly Endowment Inc. (LEI). Approximately \$250 million will be distributed to regions across the state to fund arts and culture and blight reduction projects. Although the READI program may change or be replaced over time as transitions occur in state administration, regionalism is a lasting concept capable of funding catalyzing projects for decades to come.

Goal and Objectives

Goal 1: Diversify funding sources to support transformative initiatives.

Objective 1.1: *Continue to coordinate with state and federal agencies for grant funding opportunities.*

Objective 1.2: *Continue to coordinate with the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority (CIRDA) to pursue funding, such as READI and LEI funds, for quality of place projects in Hancock County.*

Objective 1.3: *Evaluate the use of TIF districts in Hancock County. Ensure that TIF districts are strategically placed to fund quality of place initiatives in growing areas.*

Objective 1.4: *Continue working to implement a park impact fee on the county level to fund parks and recreation improvements in Hancock County.*

Objective 1.5: *Support the implementation of park impact fees in Hancock County communities where one does not currently exist to fund local parks and recreation improvements.*



Hancock County's participation in the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority (CIRDA) opens the door to regional funding opportunities.

Image Sources: Central Indiana Regional Development Authority

Foundational Tool 5: Engagement

Community members have important lived experience that makes them experts in their town, city, or county. This Quality of Place Plan was informed by feedback from community members across Hancock County, from Shirley to Cumberland. As specific projects move forward with planning and implementation, it is important that Hancock County continues to educate and engage community members. Their insight can ensure that projects move in the right direction, and that decisions are made with respect to the needs and desires of residents. Community buy-in is highly valuable and can make or break a project. With proper buy-in, projects benefit from streamlined approval processes and boosted morale, which translates to a feeling of momentum in the greater community.

Even once projects are successfully implemented, continued civic engagement is needed. Civic engagement refers to any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern, and is the backbone of many vibrant, thriving communities. Examples of civic engagement include voting, contacting elected officials, serving on a board or commission, or volunteering for a civic group. Community leaders in Hancock County stressed the need for all forms of civic engagement, but especially the latter two. Many communities in Hancock County struggle to recruit qualified volunteers, often because eligible individuals are unaware of the opportunity to participate. To ensure that boards, commissions, and civic groups operate efficiently and effectively, through the support of knowledgeable community representatives, there is a need for innovative approaches to spread awareness and increase participation.

Goal and Objectives

Goal 1: Continue to engage residents as proposed projects and programs enter their respective planning and implementation phases.

Objective 1.1: *Incorporate diverse perspectives in project planning committees. Maximize the effectiveness of these committees by educating members on formal planning processes.*

Objective 1.2: *Host open house events to share project progress with community members, when appropriate.*

Objective 1.3: *Share key project updates on social media.*

Goal 2: Leverage community members as an invaluable resource for improving quality of place by encouraging volunteerism in boards, commissions, and civic groups.

Objective 1.1: *Establish dedicated civic groups for volunteers interested in community development in Cumberland and McCordsville.*

Objective 1.2: *Expand the annual Volunteer Fair at the Thrive Center to include civic groups in Hancock County.*

Objective 1.3: *Facilitate open houses for boards and commissions at the municipal and county level to increase familiarity with these groups, and to recruit qualified volunteers.*

Objective 1.4: *Revamp Hello Hancock as a one-stop-shop for non-profit and civic volunteerism in Hancock County.*

Quality of Place Strategies

Equipped with foundational tools, Hancock County can manifest continued growth and investment by pursuing quality of place strategies. The strategies outlined in this plan include the following: encourage district development, enhance recreation, attract unique destinations, and foster connectivity. Each strategy is described in further detail in this section, and is supplemented with goals, objectives, and projects.

Strategy 1: Encourage District Development

To promote healthy, happy communities in Hancock County, development should be concentrated in and around interconnected districts. A 'district' is a term used in urban planning to refer to a defined geographic area, often with underlying patterns of development, consistent design and landscaping, and a discernible sense of place. The most vibrant districts are walkable, thriving places with a concentration of amenities, from parks to restaurants. Districts accommodate higher density development and, consequently, mitigate sprawl, which separates community members from amenities, and isolates them from each other. This district-based approach helps preserve agricultural land and natural spaces, while encouraging the development of tight-knit communities with a focus on healthy living. Core districts in the county include, but are not limited to, downtown historic districts, arts districts, and districts centered around major thoroughfares.

As Hancock County grows, municipal and county government should leverage development standards, rules and guidelines that dictate the design and construction of new buildings, and historic preservation initiatives as integral tools for district development. Both can help preserve community character and ensure that districts remain charming, attractive places to live in and visit. Development standards already exist for the county and its incorporated areas, but planning staff should review these ordinances periodically to promote desired development. Historic preservation initiatives only exist in some communities, and should be implemented in others whenever possible.

Adaptive reuse is another promising tool for preserving community character. Adaptive reuse is the process of repurposing unused buildings, instead of opting for demolition. Hancock County can encourage adaptive reuse of unique structures by forming a Character Enhancement Committee and establishing an adaptive reuse fund.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Support the development of vibrant districts within Hancock County which feature great community character, high walkability, and an abundance of amenities.

Objective 1.1: *Coordinate with Hancock County communities to create a distinct brand for each of their districts, which complements the county brand.*

Hancock County can support district development by crafting a strong identity for each district. Some districts are already well-established, like the Mount Comfort Corridor, McCords Square, and the Greenfield Arts District, but others need to be identified, and their boundaries and character defined by community leaders and members of the public. Each district's brand should feel authentic, reflecting the character and amenities of its respective community while tying into the county-wide brand. Communities can promote their district's identity through public art and other place-based improvements, per the next objective.

Hancock County District Brand Identification

Collaborate with municipalities in Hancock County to develop distinct brands for each district. This exercise may be completed alongside the county brand identification process, or separately. District brands should be developed with feedback from community members, and should feel genuine, rather than forced or artificial. Brands should build off of what makes a community unique or special.

Objective 1.2: Beautify core districts in Hancock County through gateway improvements, wayfinding signage, public art, streetscape design, and clean-up days.

During focus group meetings, stakeholders shared their first impressions of Hancock County's existing districts, with a focus on the Mount Comfort Corridor. From these discussions, it became clear that residents are interested in efforts to beautify these spaces, whether through landscaping, public art, or other improvements. Similarly, on the online survey, although participants responded positively to questions about community character, they indicated a need for improved community gateways, signage, landmarks, and streetscapes. Fortunately, beautification and brand reinforcement go hand in hand, and both goals can be forwarded with a single investment. For the greatest impact, improvements should focus on highly visible areas, like gateways, key corridors, and public plazas. As communities plan for catalyzing beautification projects, simple improvements can be made. For example, periodic clean-up days, in which volunteers remove trash, plant flowers, and paint curbs, can do a lot to enhance core districts.

District Planning Efforts

Communities should outline their vision for core districts within their comprehensive plans. These planning efforts should complement district brand identification and help identify future projects within the district boundaries. By identifying these projects in an official planning document, communities can help leverage funding sources and streamline collaboration with other entities. This is especially important for districts featuring state and national highways, since improvements to these roadways require collaboration with the Indiana Department of Transportation.

Mount Comfort Corridor Public Art Program

This program would fund the acquisition of public art in highly visible locations along the Mount Comfort Corridor. If successful, this program could be expanded to other districts in Hancock County, including downtown districts, to enhance quality of place.



Deer statues in a roundabout along Mt. Comfort Corridor at CR 600 W and CR 200 S.

Image Source: Hancock County Government

Objective 1.3: Support the development of a collaborative arts alliance and an arts district in downtown Greenfield by implementing the recommendations of the Arts District Plan.

The Arts District in downtown Greenfield is an emerging district in Hancock County. This district builds upon Greenfield's rich heritage of art and culture, celebrated today through public art, exhibits at the Twenty North Gallery, and programming from the Hancock County Arts Council. To support the development of this district, the City of Greenfield and partner organizations from across the county should seek to implement the projects and programs outlined in the district plan.



Chalk Fest is an annual event in downtown Greenfield which encourages creativity for all ages and skill levels. Founded by local artist Sandy Hall in 2009, the event is facilitated by the Hancock County Arts Council.

Image Source: Daily Reporter



The "Tall Tales" mural in downtown Greenfield is meant to "capture the farming roots that run deep in Hancock County," according to muralist Pam Bliss.

Image Source: City of Greenfield



A rendering showing a vibrant arts district in downtown Greenfield with landscaping, public art, wayfinding signage, parklets, and pedestrian amenities.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

Goal 2: Preserve Hancock County's charming character through appropriate development standards and the adaptive reuse of existing structures.

Objective 2.1: *Review and strengthen existing overlay districts along Hancock County's key corridors to promote attractive, high-quality development that reflects community character.*

Hancock County's key corridors, including main thoroughfares like Mount Comfort Road and U.S. 40 (National Road), connect residents and visitors to individual communities. Often, these corridors contribute to first impressions of a town or city, while providing a general feel for the character of the unincorporated county. As growth occurs, development will be drawn to these corridors due to ease of travel and proximity to amenities. Local government at the municipal and county level can ensure that corridors develop in a way that contributes to, rather than subtracts from, community character by strengthening overlay districts.

An overlay district is a zoning tool that adds a layer of regulations to an existing district or districts. Overlay districts can be used to manage development or protect specific areas in a community. In the context of corridor development, overlay districts can be used along specific thoroughfares to improve aesthetics and help achieve targeted development goals, such as preventing sprawl, promoting walkability, or prioritizing high-quality design.

Mount Comfort – Overlay District Update

Mount Comfort Road is one of Hancock County's most well-traveled thoroughfares, providing a north-south connection from U.S. 36 down to U.S. 52. Current development along the corridor is varied, and includes residential neighborhoods, schools, parks, commercial businesses, and industrial sites. As the corridor continues to grow and develop, existing overlay district standards, adopted in 2022 by Hancock County, Cumberland, and McCordsville, should be strengthened. These standards already serve as the first line of defense against undesirable development and, pending an update, can continue to help the different sections of Mount Comfort Corridor maintain their distinct character.

U.S. 40 (National Road) – Overlay District Update

U.S. Route 40, also known as Indiana's Historic National Road, is a major east-west thoroughfare that crosses 12 states, from the Mid-Atlantic States to the Mountain States. In Indiana, the National Road passes through Wayne, Henry, Hancock, Marion, Hendricks, Putnam, Clay, and Vigo County. Indiana's section of the National Road was designated a State Scenic Byway in 1996, and a National Scenic Byway in 1998. In 2002, Indiana's section, along with routes in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, were given an "All-American" Road designation in recognition of the road's role in westward expansion of the nation in the 1800s.

Since 1994, the Indiana National Road Association has been working to preserve, protect, and promote the National Road across the Hoosier state. Hancock County and its communities have also taken steps to protect the character of the National Road. Hancock County has established a Corridor Overlay District, Greenfield has a National Road Gateway District, and Cumberland has a National Road Overlay District, all of which are intended to guide development along the corridor. As growth and development occurs, these district standards should be reviewed to ensure they remain enforceable for local staff and Plan Commissions.

Objective 2.2: *Encourage communities to introduce measures for the historic preservation of qualifying buildings and structures.*

While some jurisdictions in Hancock County have taken steps to protect local historic resources from the threat of change or demolition, others have not. As growth and development occurs, each jurisdiction should evaluate what tools are available for historic preservation, and determine whether additional resources are needed. Communities should also evaluate the level of public support for historic preservation initiatives. Communities with high levels of support and volunteer capacity may consider establishing their own historic preservation commission, while other communities may consider implementing historic preservation guidelines. Any small towns interested in a commission, but lacking sufficient volunteer capacity, may also consider collaborating with county government to establish a Hancock County Historic Preservation Commission (or Board of Review) capable of serving multiple jurisdictions.



The Hancock County Courthouse in Greenfield, depicted in this postcard, is one of the county's most iconic historic buildings.

Image Source: Ebay

Objective 2.3: *Encourage the adaptive reuse of properties with character to create an inviting, lived-in feeling to Hancock County's core districts, even as growth occurs.*

Adaptive reuse allows communities to preserve unique structures, sharing their history for generations to come while also accommodating modern uses. Adaptive reuse has already been leveraged successfully in one of Hancock County's most iconic destinations – the Depot Restaurant. The Depot Restaurant operates within a 1906 grain elevator in downtown Greenfield. The restaurant neighbors Depot Street Park, a 1.3-acre park located off the Pennsy Trail with an amphitheater for concerts and events. Together, these amenities have contributed to the district's vibrancy, encouraging additional stores and restaurants to open nearby, including Three Bears Bakery and Libby's Ice Cream. Hancock County should encourage adaptive reuse throughout its communities as opportunities arise.



Concertgoers at Depot Street Park with the Depot Restaurant and its outdoor patio pictured in the background.

Image Source: Hancock County Government

Character Enhancement Committee

Establish a committee that will promote the sustainable re-use of buildings with unique character in Hancock County. The role of the committee will be to support, encourage, inform, and educate the public for the purpose of preserving and enhancing community character. Activities may include identifying and acquiring properties, matching properties with committed redevelopers, sharing resources on adaptive re-use, and hosting events.

Adaptive Reuse Fund

This grant fund, managed by the Character Enhancement Committee, would support adaptive reuse projects in Hancock County. The fund would be used for physical improvements to eligible properties, from façade renovations to structural repairs.



Diners enjoy a meal at the Depot Restaurant, a converted 1906 grain elevator.

Image Source: Tom Russo for Indianapolis Monthly



A suspension bridge crossing Little Brandywine Creek at Thornwood Preserve.

Image Source: Hancock County Trails

Strategy 2: Enhance Recreation

Hancock County is making great strides in terms of park planning and investment. In 2024, Hancock County passed an ordinance establishing its own Parks and Recreation Board. The primary objective of this board is to provide safe and enriching recreation for all county residents. The board will identify potential parkland and oversee the development of new parks with special consideration for accessibility and unique experiences. Recreation investments were by far the most desired investment identified in the Quality of Place Plan's online survey and the Community Foundation of Hancock County's quality of life survey, which was open to the public from April 16th to May 16th, 2024. These investments will promote active lifestyles, encourage social connection, and attract visitors from outside of the county.

Goal and Objectives

Goal 1: Support high-quality, interconnected parks and recreation facilities to serve Hancock County's growing population.

Objective 1.1: *Envision a county-level parks and recreation system, and open the door to additional state funding, through a formalized parks planning process.*

Developing a strong parks and recreation system in Hancock County will require thoughtful planning. Participating in a formalized planning process would help create consensus around the future of Hancock County's parks and increase the county's eligibility for grant funding.

Parks and Recreation Master Plan Project

This project involves developing a five-year parks master plan for Hancock County. Through this planning process, the county can establish a vision for parks facilities and programming. In alignment with this vision, the master plan identifies and prioritizes new park development and improvements.

Objective 1.2: *Support the creation and implementation of municipal park plans in Hancock County to encourage the development of local park systems.*

In addition to planning for county parks, Hancock County should encourage park planning at the local level. As communities like Fortville, McCordsville, Cumberland, and New Palestine grow, more robust parks and recreation facilities will be needed to provide a consistent level of service. Park plans provide guidance and help secure funding for parks-based improvements. To support the creation and implementation of these plans, parks boards and parks departments throughout Hancock County should share resources and best practices with one another. This collaboration will further ensure that plans across the county are cohesive, and that plans build upon one another.

Objective 1.3: *Establish a Parks and Recreation Symposium to serve as a periodic convening of parks boards, parks departments, trail organizations, and related groups in Hancock County.*

Collaboration is needed to ensure the development of a high-quality parks and recreation network in Hancock County. Through periodic meetings of the Parks and Recreation Symposium, community representatives throughout Hancock County would be encouraged to build connections with one another, share success stories, and track progress at a county level. This meeting could be held a couple of times each year to give more people the opportunity to connect, and to allow for discussions regarding seasonal programming.



Landmark Park is an urban park near Main Street in Fortville.

Image Source: Hancock County Trails

Objective 1.4: *Aim to provide 20 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents to keep up with the level of service recommended by the Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).*

As Hancock County grows, it is important to ensure that all residents have access to parkland for passive and active recreation. The Indiana SCORP recommends 20 acres of local parkland per 1,000 residents. Local parkland includes land owned by municipal, township, and county governments, as well as land privately owned but open for public use. In 2018, Hancock County had a population of 76,351 residents. The Indiana SCORP recommended 1,527 acres of parkland to serve this population, but the county only had 510 acres at the time. Today, the county's population has grown to 80,170, according to 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. This indicates that a total of 1,603 acres of local parkland is needed to serve the population, or approximately 1,093 acres more than the county currently has.

County Park Development

To better align with the level of service recommended by the Indiana SCORP, this project involves Hancock County developing a series of county parks. Parks should be developed near established districts, whenever possible, and should be connected via multi-use trails. Acquiring parkland on the west side of the county should be a priority, given the increasing property value of land in this growing region. If parkland is not preserved on this side of the county now, it may be challenging to acquire it later.

The Parks and Recreation Board is already in the process of planning four new county parks. The development of these parks could help satisfy the goals of this Quality of Place Plan and meet the level of service recommendations from the Indiana SCORP.

- Wilderness Urban Nature Park: This park will offer ADA-compliant paths, interconnected bike routes, nature trails, a wildlife habitat with native plant gardens, water features, and a kayak launch.
- Regional Park: This park will feature a sports field, picnicking, and other community spaces.
- Linear Park: This park will offer greenway trails and a canoe/kayak launch site with a scenic pathway along a natural corridor.
- Primitive Camping Park: This park will feature camping sites for an unplugged, nature-focused experience.



A kayak launch provides access to the Deer Creek Water Trail in Hartford County, Maryland. A similar launch could be used at Brandywine Creek in Hancock County.
Image Source: Hartford County Government



Families can learn about and explore native prairies at the Indian Creek Nature Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Hancock County could offer a similar experience at the proposed Wilderness Urban Nature Park.
Image Source: Indian Creek Nature Center

Objective 1.5: *Diversify parks programming to engage residents and attract visitors.*

Park visitors, from parents with kids to young adults with time on their hands, are increasingly seeking engaging programming. Hancock County and its communities can help meet this demand by diversifying recreation opportunities at parks and other flexible greenspaces. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, recreation programs that are hot in 2024 include family engagement nights, seasonal festivals, fitness programming, holiday karaoke, “eldertainment,” games and activities for “kidults,” and partnerships with libraries. Many of these programs were called out, either directly or indirectly, by stakeholders during focus group discussions. For example, participants expressed their interest in wintertime activities (skating, sledding, holiday festivals) and yoga in the park. Residents are also interested in nature-based experiences, such as guided hikes and critter chats, at local parks.



Fortville's Parks and Recreation Department spreads holiday cheer by helping facilitate the town's annual Winterfest celebration.

Image Source: Town of Fortville Parks

Strategy 3: Develop Unique Destinations

Attractions form the heart of a district, drawing people in. Whether a museum or a theatre or an agritourism destination, attractions support (and are supported by) a network of other standout businesses, from restaurants to boutiques. A visitor might go to downtown Greenfield for a performance, but they stay afterwards for dinner, or to pick up a gift for a loved one. Hancock County needs both regional attractions, as well as small businesses, to bring visitors in and encourage them to stay. Developing unique destinations strengthens the county's tourism base, providing important tax dollars. Residents also benefit by getting to enjoy these amenities without leaving Hancock County.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Attract unique destinations to Hancock County that appeal to residents and visitors alike.

Objective 1.1: *Encourage the development of a regional tourist attraction.*

Regional attractions can take many forms, from a music venue to an amusement park. Hancock County can encourage the development of regional attractions by identifying potential sites and marketing these sites to prospective developers, or by building an attraction themselves. Either way, coordination between local planners and residents is necessary to ensure the location is an appropriate fit for the intended use and to minimize negative externalities, such as noise, trash, and traffic.

Hancock County Regional Agricultural District and Park

This is a concept for a one-of-a-kind district with regional appeal. The property would operate as a county park, with opportunities for private development on adjacent land over time. The park would feature a welcome center, agricultural science center, museum, and county fairgrounds. The park would showcase Hancock County's agricultural heritage with gardens, farm machinery and exhibits, wagon rides, horseback riding, livestock barn, stables, arena, and farm-themed playground. The park would also have a natural component with wooded nature trails, fishing pond, and spring house. The district park would connect to other communities via the Pennsy Trail for multi-modal access. A variety of events could be hosted at this venue, ranging from concerts to the county fair to farmers markets.



The Emma Prusch Farm Playground in San Jose, California is a great example of the farm-themed playground that could be featured at Hancock County's regional park..

Image Source: Earthscape



A rendering of the proposed Hancock County Regional Agricultural District and Park featuring a welcome center, fairgrounds, playground, and natural areas.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

Objective 1.2: *Support the vibrancy of Hancock County's core districts by attracting small businesses that align with the quality of place vision for homegrown healthy living.*

Survey respondents and workshop participants expressed interest in attracting restaurants, retail, and entertainment venues to Hancock County. In other words, respondents expressed a need for more third spaces. Third spaces are social settings separate from home and work where people can exchange ideas, have fun, and build relationships. Respondents called for more ethnic restaurants, high-end restaurants, farm-to-table restaurants and groceries, cocktail lounges, bookstores, arcades, comedy clubs, and other unique establishments. These small businesses would have a catalyzing effect in core districts, such as historic downtowns or arts districts, where they can join a network of other establishments.

To provide adequate support for these businesses, Hancock County should consider launching a small business development program with associated funding opportunities. Businesses with the potential to enhance quality of place should be incentivized to open a storefront in core districts, especially in vacant or underutilized buildings.

Hancock County Small Business Development Program

This program, operated by the Hancock Economic Development Council (HEDC), would provide mentorship, resources, and funding opportunities for eligible entrepreneurs. The HEDC, and any partner organizations, would need to develop a strategy to determine how the program would run, and to identify a consistent source of funding.

Quality of Place Business Incentive Program

Housed within the HEDC's Small Business Development Program, the Quality of Place Incentive Program would offer financial incentives to entrepreneurs interested in launching a qualifying 'quality of place business' in Hancock County. These businesses should have a positive, direct impact on quality of place. Examples include a new restaurant in McCord Square or a bookstore in downtown Cumberland. The HEDC would need to determine available incentives (e.g., tax credits, grants) and define criteria for a 'quality of place business.'



Small businesses are the heart of Hancock County's communities, including Fortville, pictured here.

Image Source: Livabl

Goal 2: Support existing businesses in Hancock County as they enhance visitor experience through physical and programmatic improvements.

Objective 2.1: *Connect local businesses to support organizations that can provide resources and assistance, as needed, to navigate through growth and change.*

Hancock County is already home to outstanding local businesses and regional attractions. Some businesses, like Tuttle Orchards, have resided in Hancock County for decades, and others, like Daniel's Vineyard, are much newer, but growing fast. To ensure that these businesses continue to thrive, steps should be taken to connect businesses to support organizations, such as the Hancock Economic Development Council and the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce. As needed, these organizations can advocate for local businesses, provide assistance, and share resources, including best practices and funding opportunities. Staff at support organizations should continue to foster their relationship with local businesses, and should use promotional materials to spread awareness of their organization's mission and services.



Established in 1928, Tuttle Orchards has been serving Hancock County residents and visitors for nearly a hundred years.

Image Source: Tuttle Orchards

Objective 2.2: *Ensure adequate buffers exist between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to support agritourism in Hancock County. In addition to buffers, encourage the use of other elements, such as trails and public art, to soften the transition between uses.*

Hancock County has a rich agricultural heritage, and that heritage is shared with residents and visitors through agritourism. Given its rural nature, however, agritourism may sometimes be at odds with growth and development, especially in rapidly urbanizing areas on Hancock County's west side. To ensure that current agritourism operations are allowed to persist and that others may arise, Hancock County should ensure that local ordinances provide adequate buffers between agricultural and non-agricultural uses. Buffers may take the form of landscaping, berms, or fencing to preserve rural character and minimize disturbance. In addition to buffers, Hancock County should encourage the use of other elements, such as tree-lined trails and public art, to soften the transition between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.



Landscaping can be used to buffer a non-agricultural site, like a logistics warehouse, from an agricultural site.

Image Source: Boston Globe

Strategy 4: Foster Connectivity

Connectivity is a valuable tool capable of enhancing both quality of place and quality of life. In the last decade, Hancock County has demonstrated the importance of connectivity through a commitment to trail development. Trails, and other bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, provide high-quality transportation and recreation options to residents and visitors, allowing them to navigate their community with ease, all while staying active. When thoughtfully planned with insight from community members, trails can help connect existing neighborhoods, schools, parks, and other destinations. At the same time, trail development can attract housing developers and businesses looking to leverage multi-modal access. Ultimately, connectivity feeds into and supports the other strategies identified in this plan, helping to develop districts, enhance recreation, and attract unique destinations.



A mural along the Buck Creek Trail in Cumberland.

Image Source: Hancock County Trails

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Expand the trail network in Hancock County to boost the connectivity of assets and amenities, and to encourage more active lifestyles among residents and visitors.

Objective 1.1: *Update the Hancock County Trails Plan to identify priority routes for future development.*

The 2018 Hancock County Trails Plan was developed through collaboration between the City of Greenfield, Town of Cumberland, Town of New Palestine, Town of McCordsville, Town of Fortville, Town of Shirley, and Town of Wilkinson, in conjunction with Hancock County. The plan was made possible through a grant from the Hancock County Community Foundation, funded by Hancock Health, who came on board as the fiscal sponsor of the grant to further their goal of fostering the healthiest county in the Hoosier state. Effectively serving as a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan for the entire county, the trails plan aspired to improve non-motorized accessibility, promote safety for bicyclists and pedestrians, and make Hancock County's communities more enjoyable places to live and visit. During conversations with stakeholders, the need for an update to the Hancock County Trails Plan became apparent.

Hancock County Trails Plan Update

This project focuses on updating the 2018 Hancock County Trails Plan. Several projects identified in the plan have already been completed, or are nearing completion. Using current data and feedback from community members, the update would help identify priority projects to focus on in the coming years. The plan could also identify opportunities to enhance existing trails and trailheads with public art, signage, restrooms, water fountains, repair stations, picnic areas, and other amenities.

Objective 1.2: *Complete the Pennsy Trail across Hancock County and pursue other priority routes identified in the revised Hancock County Trails Plan.*

Hancock County is home to a growing trails network. The most prominent trail is the Pennsy Trail, which is part of the envisioned 150-mile National Road Heritage Trail from Terre Haute to Richmond. Other notable trails include the Buck Creek Trail and the Shirley Heritage Trail. Many established trails wind through Hancock County's most scenic areas along rail routes and waterways, and some are furnished with public art and benches. While these trails provide a pleasant journey, the best trails also connect key destinations within and between communities.

Using the revised Hancock County Trails Plan, the trails network should be expanded with a focus on improving connectivity. During the quality of place planning process, community members remarked that many trails seemingly go nowhere. Although enjoyable to walk, jog, or ride on, these trails are not efficient. To encourage regular trail use, and support district development, trail connections are needed to facilitate travel. Community members should be able to use trails to access amenities, or to connect to other trails in the network.

Figure 5.1 overlays the existing and planned trails network, per the 2018 Hancock County Trails Plan, over a map of county assets. This map helps demonstrate the need for trail connections in Hancock County.

Pennsy Trail Connection

This project focuses on completing the Pennsy Trail in Hancock County, effectively connecting Marion County to Henry County. Currently, there is a 2.65-mile gap in the trail from CR 400 W to CR 150 W, which will soon be filled. This is the only missing connection between Cumberland and Greenfield. Once this connection is made, Hancock County should extend the Pennsy Trail to the east from Greenfield to Henry County. Eventually, trail-side facilities should also be added, including restrooms and water stations.



The Pennsy Trail in Hancock County.

Image Source: Hancock County Trails

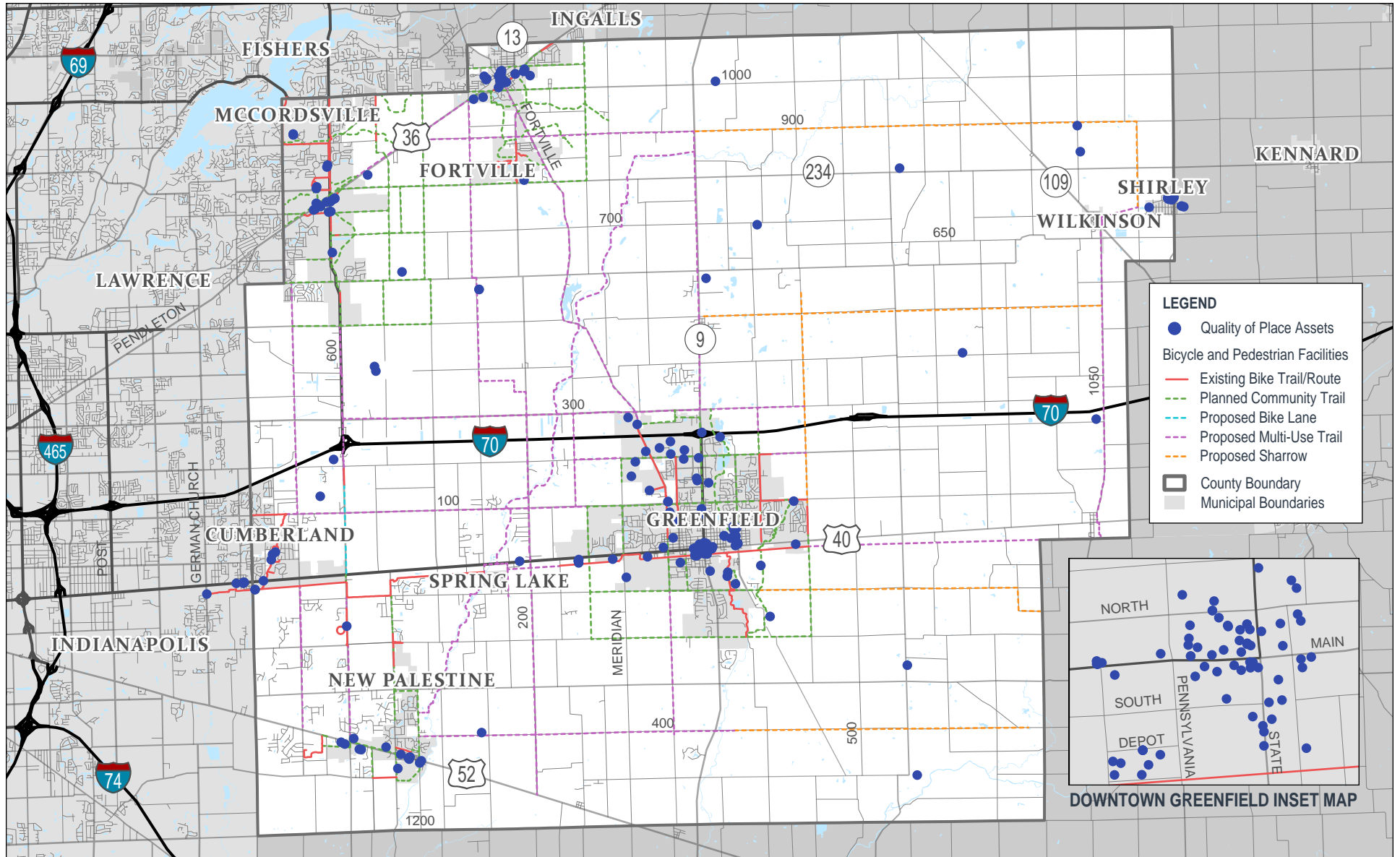


Figure 5.1: 2024 Trails Network in Relation to Hancock County Assets

Goal 2: Advocate for trail-oriented development in Hancock County.

Objective 2.1: *Incentivize developers to locate new commercial and residential developments near trails, possibly through grants or reduced permitting fees.*

Trail-oriented development can activate communities, and connect residents and visitors to key destinations. Active transportation infrastructure, on its own, can catalyze real estate development by making both commercial and residential development more accessible, and therefore more desirable. But to kick-off trail-oriented development in Hancock County, it can be beneficial to incentivize developers, whether through grants or reduced permitting fees to locate new developments along or near trails. The concentration of amenities near trail routes can help encourage healthier lifestyles, and promote upwards mobility by connecting residents to education and job opportunities, even without access to a personal vehicle.

Objective 2.2: *Create visually appealing trail environments with landscaping, public art, and interpretive signage.*

People are drawn to visually appealing trail environments, whether beautified through landscaping, public art, or interpretive signage. Although connectivity is arguably most important for a trail system, the county and its municipalities should consider investing in beautification as a next step in trail development. Already, the Pennsy Trail is being adorned with signage to help reinforce its brand. An attractive trail system can, in itself, be a destination for visitors, including runners and cyclists training for their next race, or tourists exploring all that Hancock County has to offer.

What is trail-oriented development?

Trail-oriented development refers to a planning and design framework which capitalizes on trails as community amenities and leverages the placemaking and development potential adjacent to trails.



Signage along the Pennsy Trail helps improve the aesthetics of the trail environment.

Image Source: Tom Russo for the Daily Reporter



A rendering depicting a thriving trail-oriented development with an abundance of users. Homes are oriented to face the trail route.

Image Source: MIBOR BLC (Base Photo), HWC Engineering (Rendering)

Objective 2.3: Design or upgrade trailheads with adequate parking and amenities, such as restrooms and water fountains.

If possible, trails should be designed with user amenities in mind, such as restrooms, water fountains, picnic tables, benches, and pet waste facilities. However, since some of these investments may be cost-prohibitive, especially in the early phases of trail development, communities may instead choose to add amenities over time as improvements to an established trail system. As trails gain a more robust user base, amenities are important to retain users, and to ensure clean, safe facilities. These improvements should be concentrated at trailheads, where most users begin or end their journeys.



A trailhead for the Vandalia Trail in Hendricks County features restrooms, water fountains, bicycle parking, trash cans, and pet waste facilities.

Image Source: Hendricks County Parks and Recreation



Facilities along the Pennsy Trail include Eagle Station, which offers sheltered benches, picnic areas, a bicycle repair station, and interpretive signage.

Image Source: Pennsy Trails of Hancock County

McCord Square Apartments in McCordsville, Indiana

Image Source: McCords Square



Appendix

Implementation Table

FOUNDATIONAL TOOL 1: COLLABORATION

GOAL 1: SHARE IDEAS AND LEVERAGE RESOURCES ACROSS SECTORS.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Appoint an implementation team to champion the Quality of Place Plan. This team will be responsible for promoting the plan, tracking its progress, and periodically reporting the status of the plan's goals and objectives.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, County Government, City/Town Government, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center, Hancock Economic Development Council, Hancock County Chamber of Commerce, Hancock Health, County Parks Board, Parks Departments, Hancock County Arts Council	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.2: Host an annual or bi-annual Quality of Place Summit to share progress on accomplishing the plan's goals, facilitate idea sharing, and generate excitements for things to come.	Quality of Place Plan Implementation Team, Community Foundation of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.3: Connect with community representatives from Oldham County, Kentucky to share best practices for enhancing quality of place. Arrange an educational trip to Oldham County for the Quality of Place Plan's implementation team.	Quality of Place Plan Implementation Team, Community Foundation of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.4: Enrich the Community Foundation of Hancock County's Talent Pathway to educate on and forward the vision, goals, and objectives of the Quality of Place Plan.	Community Foundation of Hancock County	Medium (2-5 Years)
Objective 1.5: Promote collaboration among stakeholders invested in the future of downtown districts in Hancock County. This can be accomplished through semi-annual meetings to share resources and celebrate successes.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, Shirley Community Visionaries, Town of Cumberland, Town of McCordsville, Hancock County Arts Council	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.6: Establish a liaison within the Hancock Economic Development Council to promote local amenities to area employers. This may include arranging special packages for employees and their families or coordinating corporate events and team-building experiences.	Community Foundation of Hancock County	Low (5+ Years)

FOUNDATIONAL TOOL 2: COMMUNICATION

GOAL 1: CREATE A DISTINCT, COMPELLING BRAND FOR HANCOCK COUNTY.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Hire a professional marketing firm to guide Hancock County through a formal process to establish a distinct, polished brand.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.2: Follow brand standards when creating promotional content to establish a recognizable brand for Hancock County.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center, County Marketing Coordinator	Medium (2-5 Years)

GOAL 2: DESIGNATE A COUNTY MARKETING COORDINATOR TO PROMOTE COUNTY ASSETS AND AMENITIES.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 2.1: Coordinate with county government, municipalities, community organizations, and local businesses to obtain the latest information on events, programs, and investments in Hancock County.	County Marketing Coordinator, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.2: Create attractive promotional materials to generate excitement around Hancock County's unique events, destinations, and other amenities.	County Marketing Coordinator, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.3: Leverage the talents and perspectives of high school and college students through internship opportunities in county marketing and tourism.	County Marketing Coordinator, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center	Medium (2-5 Years)

FOUNDATIONAL TOOL 3: CAPACITY

GOAL 1: HIRE ADDITIONAL PAID STAFF FOR INTEGRAL ORGANIZATIONS. WORK WITH EACH ORGANIZATION TO DEVELOP A FEASIBLE STAFF FUNDING STRATEGY.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Recruit experienced professionals to join the team at the Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center. Support the differentiation of responsibilities to accommodate more focused work in marketing and destination development, amongst other key areas.	Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.2: Ensure that downtown development organizations in Hancock County, including Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, and Shirley Community Visionaries, have sufficient paid staff respective to their community size and associated responsibilities.	Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, Shirley Community Visionaries	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.3: Consider recruiting an additional paid staff member to the Hancock County 4-H Ag Association, Inc. to help manage the Hancock County Fairgrounds.	Hancock County 4-H Ag Association	Medium (2-5 Years)
Objective 1.4: Consider hiring additional staff at the Hancock County Arts Council to support their mission of promoting and celebrating the arts in Hancock County.	Hancock County Arts Council	Medium (2-5 Years)
Objective 1.5: Evaluate the need for additional staff to enhance the capacity of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce.	Hancock County Chamber of Commerce	Medium (2-5 Years)

FOUNDATIONAL TOOL 4: FUNDING

GOAL 1: DIVERSIFY FUNDING SOURCES TO SUPPORT TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVES.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Continue to coordinate with state and federal agencies for grant funding opportunities.	County Government, City/Town Government	Ongoing
Objective 1.2: Continue to coordinate with the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority (CIRDA) to pursue funding, such as READI and LEI funds, for quality of place projects in Hancock County.	County Government, City/Town Government, Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock Economic Development Council	Ongoing
Objective 1.3: Evaluate the use of TIF districts in Hancock County. Ensure that TIF districts are strategically placed to fund quality of place initiatives in growing areas.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.4: Continue working to implement a park impact fee on the county level to fund parks and recreation improvements in Hancock County.	Hancock County Parks Board	Ongoing
Objective 1.5: Support the implementation of park impact fees in Hancock County communities where one does not currently exist to fund local parks and recreation improvements.	City/Town Parks Departments	High (0-2 Years)

FOUNDATIONAL TOOL 5: ENGAGEMENT

GOAL 1: CONTINUE TO ENGAGE RESIDENTS AS PROPOSED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS ENTER THEIR RESPECTIVE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PHASES.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Incorporate diverse perspectives in project planning committees. Maximize the effectiveness of these committees by educating members on formal planning processes.	County Government, City/Town Government, Community Foundation of Hancock County	Ongoing
Objective 1.2: Host open house events to share project progress with community members, when appropriate.	County Government, City/Town Government, Community Foundation of Hancock County	Ongoing
Objective 1.3: Share key project updates on social media.	County Government, City/Town Government, Community Foundation of Hancock County	Ongoing

GOAL 2: LEVERAGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF PLACE BY ENCOURAGING VOLUNTEERISM IN BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND CIVIC GROUPS.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 2.1: Establish dedicated civic groups for volunteers interested in community development in Cumberland and McCordsville.	Town of Cumberland, Town of McCordsville	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.2: Expand the annual Volunteer Fair at the Thrive Center to include civic groups in Hancock County.	Community Foundation of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.3: Facilitate open houses for boards and commissions at the municipal and county level to increase familiarity with these groups, and to recruit qualified volunteers.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.4: Revamp Hello Hancock as a one-stop-shop for non-profit and civic volunteerism in Hancock County.	Community Foundation of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 1: ENCOURAGE DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 1: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIBRANT DISTRICTS WITHIN HANCOCK COUNTY WHICH FEATURE GREAT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, HIGH WALKABILITY, AND AN ABUNDANCE OF AMENITIES.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Coordinate with Hancock County communities to create a distinct brand for each of their districts, which complements the county brand.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, City/Town Government, Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, Shirley Community Visionaries	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.2: Beautify core districts in Hancock County through gateway improvements, wayfinding signage, public art, streetscape design, and clean-up days.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, City/Town Government, Greenfield Main Street, New Palestine Main Street, Fortville Action, Shirley Community Visionaries	Medium (2-5 Years)
Objective 1.3: Support the development of a collaborative arts alliance and an arts district in downtown Greenfield by implementing the recommendations of the Arts District Plan.	Hancock County Arts Council, Community Foundation of Hancock County	Ongoing
Project	Responsible Parties	Priority
Hancock County District Brand Identification: Collaborate with municipalities in Hancock County to develop distinct brands for each district. District brands should be developed with feedback from community members, and should feel genuine, rather than forced or artificial.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
District Planning Efforts: Communities should outline their vision for core districts within their comprehensive plans. By identifying these projects in an official planning document, communities can help leverage funding sources and streamline collaboration with other entities.	City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Mount Comfort Corridor Public Art Program: This program would fund the acquisition of public art in highly visible locations along the Mount Comfort Corridor. If successful, this program could be expanded to other districts in Hancock County, including downtown districts, to enhance quality of place.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center, Hancock County Arts Council	High (0-2 Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 1: ENCOURAGE DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

GOAL 2: PRESERVE HANCOCK COUNTY'S CHARMING CHARACTER THROUGH APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AND THE ADAPTIVE REUSE OF EXISTING STRUCTURES.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 2.1: Review and strengthen existing overlay districts along Hancock County's key corridors to promote attractive, high-quality development that reflects community character.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.2: Encourage communities to introduce measures for the historic preservation of qualifying buildings and structures.	City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.3: Encourage the adaptive reuse of properties with character to create an inviting, lived-in feeling to Hancock County's core districts, even as growth occurs.	County Government, City/Town Government, Character Enhancement Committee	Ongoing
Project	Responsible Parties	Priority
Mount Comfort Corridor – Overlay District Update: Mount Comfort Road is one of Hancock County's most well-traveled thoroughfares, providing a north-south connection from U.S. 36 down to U.S. 52. As the corridor continues to grow and develop, existing overlay district standards, adopted in 2022 by Hancock County, Cumberland, and McCordsville, should be strengthened.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
U.S. 40 (National Road): U.S. Route 40, also known as Indiana's Historic National Road, is a major east-west thoroughfare through Hancock County. District standards intended to guide development along the corridor should be reviewed to ensure they remain enforceable.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Character Enhancement Committee: Establish a committee that will promote the sustainable re-use of buildings with unique character in Hancock County. The role of the committee will be to support, encourage, inform, and educate the public for the purpose of preserving and enhancing community character.	Community Foundation of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Adaptive Reuse Fund: This grant fund, managed by the Character Enhancement Committee, would support adaptive reuse projects in Hancock County. The fund would be used for physical improvements to eligible properties, from façade renovations to structural repairs.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Character Enhancement Committee	Medium (2-5 Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 2: ENHANCE RECREATION

GOAL 1: SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY, INTERCONNECTED PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES TO SERVE HANCOCK COUNTY'S GROWING POPULATION.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Envision a county-level parks and recreation system, and open the door to additional state funding, through a formalized parks planning process.	County Parks Board	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.2: Support the creation and implementation of municipal park plans in Hancock County to encourage the development of local park systems.	City/Town Parks Boards, City/Town Parks Departments	Ongoing
Objective 1.3: Establish a Parks and Recreation Symposium to serve as a periodic convening of parks boards, parks departments, and trail organizations in Hancock County.	County Parks Board, City/Town Parks Boards, City/Town Parks Departments, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County, Hancock County 4-H Ag Association	Medium (2-5 Years)
Objective 1.4: Aim to provide 20 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents to keep up with the level of service recommended by the Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).	County Parks Board, City/Town Parks Boards, City/Town Parks Departments	Ongoing
Objective 1.5: Diversify parks programming to engage residents and attract visitors.	County Parks Board, City/Town Parks Boards, City/Town Parks Departments	Ongoing
Project	Responsible Parties	Priority
Parks and Recreation Master Plan Project: This project involves developing a five-year parks master plan for Hancock County. Through this planning process, the county can establish a vision for parks facilities and programming.	County Parks Board	High (0-2 Years)
County Park Development: This project involves Hancock County developing a series of county parks. Parks should be developed near established districts, whenever possible, and should be connected via multi-use trails. Acquiring parkland on the west side of the county should be a priority, given the increasing property value of land in this growing region.	County Parks Board	Low (5+ Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 3: ATTRACT UNIQUE DESTINATIONS

GOAL 1: ATTRACT UNIQUE DESTINATIONS TO HANCOCK COUNTY THAT APPEAL TO RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Encourage the development of a regional tourist attraction.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, Hancock County Economic Development Council, County Parks Board	Low (5+ Years)
Objective 1.2: Support the vibrancy of Hancock County's core districts by attracting small businesses that align with the quality of place vision for homegrown healthy living.	Hancock County Economic Development Council	Low (5+ Years)
Project	Responsible Parties	Priority
Hancock County Regional Agricultural District and Park: This is a concept for a one-of-a-kind district with regional appeal. The property would operate as a county park, with opportunities for private development on adjacent land over time. The park would feature a welcome center, agricultural science center, museum, and county fairgrounds, among other amenities. A variety of events could be hosted at this venue, ranging from concerts to the county fair to farmers markets.	County Parks Board, Community Foundation of Hancock County	Low (5+ Years)
Hancock County Small Business Development Program: This program, operated by the Hancock Economic Development Council (HEDC), would provide mentorship, resources, and funding opportunities for eligible entrepreneurs.	Hancock County Economic Development Council	Low (5+ Years)
Quality of Place Business Incentive Program: Housed within the HEDC's Small Business Development Program, the Quality of Place Incentive Program would offer financial incentives to entrepreneurs interested in launching a qualifying 'quality of place business' in Hancock County. These businesses should have a positive, direct impact on quality of place.	Hancock County Economic Development Council	Low (5+ Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 3: ATTRACT UNIQUE DESTINATIONS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 2: SUPPORT EXISTING BUSINESSES IN HANCOCK COUNTY AS THEY ENHANCE VISITOR EXPERIENCE THROUGH PHYSICAL AND PROGRAMMATIC IMPROVEMENTS.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 2.1: Connect local businesses to support organizations that can provide resources and assistance, as needed, to navigate through growth and change.	Hancock County Chamber of Commerce, Hancock County Economic Development Council	Ongoing
Objective 2.2: Ensure adequate buffers exist between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to support agritourism in Hancock County. In addition to buffers, encourage the use of other elements, such as trails and public art, to soften the transition between uses.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 4: FOSTER CONNECTIVITY

GOAL 1: EXPAND THE TRAIL NETWORK IN HANCOCK COUNTY TO BOOST THE CONNECTIVITY OF ASSETS AND AMENITIES, AND TO ENCOURAGE MORE ACTIVE LIFESTYLES AMONG RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 1.1: Update the Hancock County Trails Plan to identify priority routes for future development.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, County Government, City/Town Government, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 1.2: Complete the Pennsy Trail across Hancock County and pursue other priority routes identified in the revised Hancock County Trails Plan.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, County Government, City/Town Government, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Project	Responsible Parties	Priority
Hancock County Trails Plan Update: This project focuses on updating the 2018 Hancock County Trails Plan. Several projects identified in the plan have already been completed, or are nearing completion. Using current data and feedback from community members, the update would help identify priority projects to focus on in the coming years.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, County Government, City/Town Government, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County	High (0-2 Years)
Pennsy Trail Connection: This project focuses on completing the Pennsy Trail in Hancock County, effectively connecting Marion County to Henry County. Currently, there is a 2.65-mile gap in the trail from CR 400 W to CR 150 W, which will soon be filled. This is the only missing connection between Cumberland and Greenfield. Once this connection is made, Hancock County should extend the Pennsy Trail to the east from Greenfield to Henry County.	Community Foundation of Hancock County, County Government, City/Town Government, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County	Medium (2-5 Years)

QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGY 4: FOSTER CONNECTIVITY (CONTINUED)

GOAL 2: ADVOCATE FOR TRAIL-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IN HANCOCK COUNTY.

Objective	Responsible Parties	Priority
Objective 2.1: Incentivize developers to locate new commercial and residential developments near trails, possibly through grants or reduced permitting fees.	County Government, City/Town Government	High (0-2 Years)
Objective 2.2: Create visually appealing trail environments with landscaping, public art, and interpretive signage.	County Government, City/Town Government, Community Foundation of Hancock County, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County, Hancock County Arts Council	Ongoing
Objective 2.3: Design or upgrade trailheads with adequate parking and amenities, such as restrooms and water fountains.	County Government, City/Town Government, Community Foundation of Hancock County, Pennsy Trails of Hancock County	Ongoing

Hancock County Assets

ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS	
Name	Location
Fortville Feeders	Fortville
Genesis Plastics Welding	Fortville
Thursday Pools LLC	Fortville
Vernon Township Public Library	Fortville
Avery Dennison	Greenfield
Community Foundation of Hancock County	Greenfield
Hancock County Public Library – Central Library, Greenfield	Greenfield
Hancock Regional Hospital	Greenfield
Hitachi Astemo Indiana, Inc.	Greenfield
Indiana Automotive Fasteners	Greenfield
Indiana Box	Greenfield
James Whitcomb Riley Boyhood Home and Museum	Greenfield
Labcorp	Greenfield
NineStar Connect	Greenfield
Photon Automation	Greenfield
Shares, Inc.	Greenfield
Sonicu	Greenfield

Yamaha Marine Precision Propellers	Greenfield
Daniel's Vineyard	McCordsville
Hancock County Public Library – Sugar Creek Branch, New Palestine	New Palestine
Tech Castings	Shirley
Community School Corporation of Southern Hancock County	Multiple Jurisdictions
Greenfield–Central Community School Corporation	Multiple Jurisdictions
Hancock County Chamber of Commerce	Multiple Jurisdictions
Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation	Multiple Jurisdictions
Eastern Hancock Community School Corporation	Unincorporated Hancock County
Hancock Gateway	Unincorporated Hancock County
Indianapolis Regional Airport	Unincorporated Hancock County
Keystone Cooperative Junction	Unincorporated Hancock County
Swindell Farm Equipment	Unincorporated Hancock County
Tuttle Orchards	Unincorporated Hancock County

RECREATION AMENITIES	
Name	Location
Buck Creek Trail	Cumberland
Lions Park	Cumberland
Fortville Community Center	Fortville
Landmark Park	Fortville
Memorial Park	Fortville
Beckenholdt Park	Greenfield
Boys & Girls Clubs of Hancock County	Greenfield
Brandywine Connector	Greenfield
Brandywine Park	Greenfield
Commons Park	Greenfield
Depot Street Park	Greenfield
Franklin Street Trail	Greenfield
Greenfield Baseball Park	Greenfield
Greenfield Fitness	Greenfield
Hancock Flat 50	Greenfield
Hancock Wellness Center – Greenfield	Greenfield
Henry B. Wilson Park	Greenfield
Highsmith Guns (Range and Archery)	Greenfield
Kathy Dowling Aquatic Center	Greenfield

Macy Park	Greenfield
Mary Moore Park	Greenfield
Patricia Elmore Senior Center	Greenfield
Riley Literary Trail	Greenfield
Riley Park	Greenfield
Strike Force Lanes	Greenfield
Superhero 5k and Kids’ Dash	Greenfield
Thornwood Preserve	Greenfield
Turkey Day 5K	Greenfield
Hancock Wellness Center – McCordsville	McCordsville
McCordsville Path to Fitness 5k Run/Walk	McCordsville
McCordsville Play Park	McCordsville
McCordsville Sports Park	McCordsville
Hancock Wellness Center – New Palestine	New Palestine
Shirley Community Park	Shirley
Pennsy Trail	Multiple Jurisdictions
Hawk’s Tail Golf Course	Unincorporated Hancock County
Jacob Schramm Nature Preserve	Unincorporated Hancock County
Nameless Creek Youth Camp	Unincorporated Hancock County

TOURISM ASSETS	
Name	Location
Fortville Action	Fortville
Cynthia's Hallmark Shop	Greenfield
Depot Street Park	Greenfield
Greenfield Main Street	Greenfield
H.J. Ricks Centre for the Arts	Greenfield
Hancock County 4-H Fairgrounds	Greenfield
Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center	Greenfield
Hancock County Veterans Park	Greenfield
Hello Hancock	Greenfield
James Whitcomb Riley Boyhood Home and Museum	Greenfield
Lark Ranch	Greenfield
Riley Park	Greenfield
Twenty North Gallery	Greenfield
Coffee at the Crossing	McCordsville
Daniel's Vineyard	McCordsville
Tim's Donuts	McCordsville
New Palestine Main Street	New Palestine

Depot Museum	Shirley
Jane Ross Reeves Octagon House	Shirley
Shirley Visionaries	Shirley
Lost Forty Tree Farm	Unincorporated Hancock County
PV-2 Harpoon at Indianapolis Regional Airport	Unincorporated Hancock County
Tuttle Orchards	Unincorporated Hancock County

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS	
Name	Location
Blues, Beer, & BBQ	Cumberland
Trail & Treat	Cumberland
Weihnachtsmarkt	Cumberland
Fortville Farmers Market	Fortville
Fortville Summerfest	Fortville
Fortville Winterfest	Fortville
Kammy's Kause	Fortville
2nd Friday Artists Reception	Greenfield
Boots & Bourbon	Greenfield
Daddy Daughter Dance	Greenfield
Entertainment @ Depot Street Park	Greenfield
Farmers Market at the Fairgrounds	Greenfield
Four Post 400 Bed Race	Greenfield
Freedom Fest @ The Depot	Greenfield
Glow in the Park	Greenfield
Greater Indianapolis Gem, Mineral, and Fossil Show	Greenfield
Greenfield Christmas Festival and Parade of Lights	Greenfield
Greenfield Parks & Recreation Programming	Greenfield
Hancock County 4-H Fair	Greenfield

Hancock Flat 50	Greenfield
Live @ the Rails	Greenfield
New Year's Eve Firework Countdown and Show	Greenfield
Pennsy Trail Art Fair and Music Festival	Greenfield
Racing to the Heartland JABGA Regional Show	Greenfield
Riley Festival	Greenfield
Line Dancing - Daniel's Vineyard	McCordsville
Lord's Acre Festival	McCordsville
McCordsville Community Day	McCordsville
McCordsville Trunk or Treat	McCordsville
Party in the Park	McCordsville
The Market in McCordsville	McCordsville
Harvest Fest	New Palestine
Healthway Park Farmers Market	New Palestine
Music on Depot	New Palestine
New Pal Summer Fest	New Palestine
Annual Christmas Tree Walk - Shirley Octagon House	Shirley
Downtown Christmas Walk	Shirley
Pumpkins & Peddlers Festival	Shirley
Shirley Strawberry Festival	Shirley

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT	
Name	Location
Buck Creek Trail Mural	Cumberland
Moon Drops Distillery	Fortville
Studio 309	Fortville
"A Barefoot Boy" Mural	Greenfield
"Tall Tales" Mural	Greenfield
Brandywine Wind	Greenfield
Chalk Fest	Greenfield
Clark Ketchum Walking Man Statue	Greenfield
CrazyLake Acting Company	Greenfield
Depot Street Park	Greenfield
Dulcimer Connection – Patricia Elmore Senior Center	Greenfield
Greenfield Community Choir	Greenfield
Greenfield-Central High School Auditorium	Greenfield
H.J. Ricks Centre for the Arts	Greenfield
Hancock County Arts Council	Greenfield
Hancock County Children's Choir	Greenfield
Hancock County Children's Theater	Greenfield
Hometown Comics & Games	Greenfield

Indiana Bison-ennial Statue	Greenfield
James Whitcomb Riley Mural	Greenfield
Reading with Riley Statue	Greenfield
Ricks-Weil Theatre Company	Greenfield
Taste & See Dinner Theatre and Event Center	Greenfield
VIP Legacy 9 Theater	Greenfield
Wilkerson Dance Studio	Greenfield
Will Vawter Juried Art Exhibit	Greenfield
Will Vawter Statue	Greenfield
Hearts Ablaze Studio	Unincorporated Hancock County

CULTURAL RESOURCES	
Name	Location
Fortville American Legion Post 391	Fortville
Pink Elephant	Fortville
Vernon Township Community Garden	Fortville
Vernon Township Public Library	Fortville
VFW Post 6904 Fortville	Fortville
Birthplace James Whitcomb Riley IHB Marker	Greenfield
Birthplace of Democratic Party Rooster IHB Marker	Greenfield
Chapel in the Park Museum	Greenfield
Greenfield Courthouse Square Historic District	Greenfield
Hancock County 4-H Agricultural Association	Greenfield
Hancock County 4-H Fairgrounds	Greenfield
Hancock County Historical Society	Greenfield
Hancock County Public Library - Central Library, Greenfield	Greenfield
Hancock County Veterans Memorial Building	Greenfield
Historic National Road Marker	Greenfield
James Whitcomb Riley Boyhood Home and Museum	Greenfield
John William (Will) Vawter IHB Marker	Greenfield
Old Log Jail Museum	Greenfield

Frank Littleton Round Barn	McCordsville
McCordsville Cemetery	McCordsville
Hancock County Public Library - Sugar Creek Branch, New Palestine	New Palestine
Depot Museum	Shirley
Jane Ross Reeves Octagon House	Shirley
Blue River Natural Foods	Unincorporated Hancock County
Earl Grey Fields - Flower Farm	Unincorporated Hancock County
Harlan Cemetery	Unincorporated Hancock County
Maxwell Gardens	Unincorporated Hancock County
Sunnyside Greenhouses	Unincorporated Hancock County
Tyner Pond Farm	Unincorporated Hancock County
Well Done Beef	Unincorporated Hancock County

DOWNTOWN ASSETS

Name	Location
Wayburn Pocket Park	Cumberland
305 Wine Garage	Fortville
Bonsai Fortville	Fortville
Cortona's Italian Cuisine & Wine Bar	Fortville
Denver's Garage Pizza and Brews	Fortville
DuLit	Fortville
FoxGardin Kitchen & Ale	Fortville
Generations Pie Company	Fortville
Jennifer's Flower Boutique	Fortville
Libby's Ice Cream & Gifts	Fortville
Los Maguelles	Fortville
Maduro on Main	Fortville
Mozzi's Pizza	Fortville
Outre Mercantile	Fortville
PJ's Pink Boutique	Fortville
Rusted Window	Fortville
Taxman Fortville	Fortville
The Alley	Fortville
The Field Women's Provisions	Fortville
The Kitchen on Main	Fortville
The Patio	Fortville
The Retro Sink	Fortville
Bradley Hall Events	Greenfield
Carnegie's A Place to Eat	Greenfield
Courthouse Plaza	Greenfield
Depot Street Park	Greenfield
Ella June's Boutique	Greenfield

Family Bike Chain	Greenfield
Greek's Pizzeria Greenfield	Greenfield
Greenfield Chocolates	Greenfield
Greenfield Historic Board of Review	Greenfield
Greenfield Main Street	Greenfield
Griggsby's Station	Greenfield
J.W. Riley's Emporium	Greenfield
Lincoln Square Pancake House	Greenfield
Living Alley	Greenfield
Los Vaqueros Mexican Restaurant	Greenfield
Organic Robot Designs	Greenfield
Parched	Greenfield
Pizza King Greenfield	Greenfield
Refined Hope Boutique	Greenfield
The Depot	Greenfield
The Gilded Nest	Greenfield
Tour of Italy Café	Greenfield
Udders-N-Suds LLC	Greenfield
Wooden Bear Brewing Co.	Greenfield
Kinsey's Italian Café	McCordsville
Los Agaves	McCordsville
Megumi	McCordsville
Mornings	McCordsville
Scarlet Lane Brewing	McCordsville
Wild Kard Vintage	McCordsville
Frosty Boy	New Palestine
New Palestine Lions Club	New Palestine
The New Pal Pub	New Palestine
Tony D's Restaurant	New Palestine
Ben's Bar	Shirley

COMMUNITY CHARACTER	
Name	Location
Buck Creek	Cumberland
Cumberland Pennsy Trail Solar System Model	Cumberland
Washington Street	Cumberland
Wayburn Pocket Park	Cumberland
Main Street	Fortville
The Alley	Fortville
The Patio	Fortville
Bradley United Methodist Church	Greenfield
Brandywine Creek	Greenfield
Greenfield Christian Church	Greenfield
Pennsy Trail	Greenfield
Philadelphia Hardware	Greenfield
Progress Pillars - SR-9 Exit off of 1-70	Greenfield
Coffee at the Crossing	McCordsville
McCordsville United Methodist Church	McCordsville
Depot Street	New Palestine

Public Engagement Report



HWC
ENGINEERING

Public Engagement Report

Quality of Place Plan for Hancock County
July 9th, 2024

The Quality of Place Plan for Hancock County was built on a foundation of community support and insight. The project team gathered feedback from community leaders, residents, business owners, visitors, and other interested parties through online and in-person engagement opportunities. In total, over 360 voices were heard through focus group meetings with stakeholders, community workshops, and an online survey.

Engagement activities were facilitated by the following staff:

HWC Staff

- Rachel Christenson – Project Manager
- Genevieve Zircher – Planner
- Jackie Servin – Planning Intern

1. Focus Groups with Stakeholders (38 participants)

From June 25th to June 27th, 2024, the project team facilitated meetings with residents, business owners, community leaders, and other stakeholders interested in quality of place in Hancock County. Focus group meetings covered a variety of topics and utilized local expertise to identify existing assets, barriers to success, as well as desired projects, programs, and policies in the county. There were 7 meetings at the Thrive Center with 38 unique participants.

Meetings covered the following five topics:

- Mt. Comfort Corridor
- Recreation
- Arts, Culture, and Entertainment
- Downtown Development
- Community Character

The project team also hosted a special focus group meeting with the Hancock Economic Development Council and the Steering Committee for the Quality of Place Plan.

Each meeting followed the same rough format. Meetings began with introductions of the project team and the stakeholders present, including both online and in-person participants. The project team then provided a brief overview of the planning process by explaining the purpose of the plan, the anticipated timeline, and other ongoing planning initiatives in Hancock County. To center the discuss, the project team defined 'quality of place.' Discussions followed about the pre-determined meeting topic. Meetings concluded with a mention of other engagement opportunities. Stakeholders were encouraged to attend community workshops and take the online survey.

Key Findings:

Mt. Comfort Corridor

- The Mt. Comfort Corridor is a major north-south connector and gateway to Hancock County. Although there are projects underway to transform the corridor, stakeholders noted that it currently lacks a defined identity.
- Stakeholders suggested improvements to enhance the corridor, including public art at roundabouts, the addition of parks and greenspaces, and attractive branding for communities along the corridor.
- Stakeholders acknowledged the importance of clear communication, public engagement, robust development standards, and advisory review to shape the future of the Mt. Comfort Corridor.

Big Picture Discussion

- Hancock County excels in terms of its anchor institutions (i.e., Hancock Health), community events, trail connectivity and planning, and overall dedication to health and wellness.
- Barriers to quality of place in Hancock County include economic challenges, lack of political will and community consensus, capacity, and funding.
- Stakeholders felt that tourism destinations, activities and attractions (especially for young adults), recreation amenities, and a diversity of restaurants were missing in Hancock County.

Recreation

- Current recreational offerings in Hancock County include parks and trails (e.g., Depot Street Park, Pennsy Trail), the Hancock Health Wellness Centers, and the occasional event or program.
- Gaps in recreation include the lack of a county parks department, limited sports facilities, multi-generational programming, and stand-out destinations.
- Barriers to outstanding recreation in Hancock County include limited capacity (e.g., reliance on volunteers), poor communication (e.g., no comprehensive activity guide), low investment, and underutilization of park impact fees.

Hancock Economic Development Council

- There is strong collaboration amongst Hancock County's four school districts. These districts are working together to establish the Hancock County Career Center (HC3) at Amplify Hancock.
- Barriers to excellent quality of place and quality of life in Hancock County include limited activities for teenagers and enriching experiences for adults, lack of basic needs for diverse populations (e.g., transportation and language services), and communication gaps.
- Stakeholders envisioned a Hancock County with walkable downtowns, affordable housing, public transportation, and supportive employers.

Arts, Culture, and Entertainment

- Hancock County is home to a vibrant entertainment scene with live music performances, theater groups, and dance studios. Stakeholders noted that the Hancock County Arts Council (HCAC) is a key organization which promotes arts, culture, and entertainment in the county.

- Stakeholders highlighted funding, limited staff capacity, and lengthy processes (i.e., red tape) as key barriers to arts, culture, and entertainment in Hancock County. Other barriers include the accessibility of performing arts venues and museums, the availability of liquor licenses, and challenges associated with downtown development (e.g., parking, costly redevelopment and maintenance, and truck traffic).
- There is an opportunity to attract a trendy bar or cocktail lounge to Hancock County. The county would also benefit from a larger facility for the Arts Council, which could offer more gallery space and classes.

Downtown Development

- Downtowns in Hancock County may struggle to preserve their identity while growth occurs. To help overcome this challenge, stakeholders suggested more collaboration amongst downtown organizations. Collaboration can be difficult when organizations struggle with internal stability and reliance on volunteers.
- To improve downtowns across Hancock County, stakeholders advocated for increased funding and capacity building, enhanced connectivity via trails and other pedestrian amenities, and mixed-use development to increase downtown density.
- Hancock County's current 'Create Your Story' branding was selected based on feedback from community focus groups. The alternative 'Pure Poetry' did not resonate with all communities.

Community Character

- Community dynamics in Hancock County are evolving. As development continues, Hancock County should balance the expectations of legacy residents and newer arrivals, aiming for cohesion and sustainable growth.
- Limited funding and infrastructure pose challenges, especially in the east side of the county. Maintaining rural appeal while accommodating growth requires strategic planning and investment in trail and utility connections.
- Opportunities lie in adaptive reuse, fostering unique community districts, and enhancing nature-based recreation.

2. Community Workshops (22 participants)

From June 18th to June 27th, 2024, the project team hosted four community workshops across Hancock County to gather insight from the public. Workshops were held at the Hancock Health Wellness Center in New Palestine, the Hancock Health Wellness Center in McCordsville, the Thrive Center near Greenfield, and the Eastern Hancock High School near Charlottesville. There were 22 unique participants at these meetings. Following a brief presentation about the planning process, facilitators led a series of small group activities. These activities included a visioning exercise, asset identification exercise, and a brainstorming exercise in which participants generated ideas for new projects and programs in Hancock County. Workshops concluded with a shoutout to the online survey, which participants were encouraged to take.

Key Findings:

- Health and wellness are key strengths for Hancock County, and a focus for future initiatives. Hancock Health is an important anchor institution which provides accessible healthcare and wellness facilities. To continue to enhance community health, workshop participants want to see the development of more walking and biking trails, parks, and

outdoor recreation areas. They also want to make it easier to make healthy choices by introducing community gardens and new grocery stores.

- Workshop participants want to ensure that Hancock County remains an inclusive community for people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and lifestyles. This involves providing opportunities and amenities for children and young families.
- Workshop participants are proud of Hancock County's commitment to education and workforce training, as demonstrated through the development of Amplify Hancock. In addition to fostering a strong workforce, Hancock County should continue to be a business-friendly environment and should seek to provide a diversity of job opportunities.
- Hancock County should continue to develop quality amenities such as performing arts venues, galleries, restaurants, and retail. These amenities should be supported by strong infrastructure, including roads, water, sewer, and public transportation.
- From Shirley to Fortville, workshop participants appreciate the unique identities of each Hancock County community. At the same time, there is a need to develop an overarching identity which connects these individual stories. Workshop participants highlighted the importance of downtown revitalization and adaptive reuse as tools for preserving community character.

3. Online Survey (305 participants)

From June 3rd to July 8th, the online survey collected feedback from 305 respondents.

Respondents included Hancock County residents, employees, business owners, visitors, and other interested parties. The survey assessed overall perceptions of quality of place and satisfaction with different components of quality of place, from recreation to community character. The survey provided an opportunity for residents to highlight the things they love about Hancock County and to identify missing amenities and experiences. Combined with feedback from community workshops and focus groups, the online survey helped inform the vision, goals, and implementable action items in the quality of place plan.

Key Findings:

- Survey respondents rated overall quality of place in Hancock County at 3.37 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is considered 'Excellent.' This neutral rating indicates that respondents were unsure how to respond. They were neither entirely satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of place in their community.
- Respondents were highly satisfied with anchor institutions, recreation, cultural resources, and community character in Hancock County. Some of the most highly rated components within these categories include libraries (75.9% satisfied or very satisfied), hospitals and clinics (74.1%), public schools (74.1%), gyms and fitness centers (70.0%), farms (68.3%), and trails (66.0%).
- Respondents were less satisfied with tourism, arts and entertainment, and downtown amenities. Some of the lowest rated components in these categories include retail (61.7% unsatisfied or very unsatisfied), restaurants (55.3%), tourist attractions (50.5%), and indoor performing arts venues (48.2%).
- Survey respondents see Hancock County today as a growing, rural community. It is a community that is safe, friendly, and family-oriented. The top word associated with Hancock County is 'growing,' which was selected by 81.7% of respondents.
- Survey respondents did not associate Hancock County with words like sophisticated, unique, culturally rich, fun, innovative, or honest. None of the respondents (0.0%) selected 'sophisticated' when asked to describe Hancock County.

- Hancock County stands out from other communities due to its small-town feel, sense of community, and rural/agricultural character. The county is peaceful and quiet with beautiful scenery, preserved historic buildings, and a thriving natural environment. Residents value the county's affordability, proximity to Indianapolis, and the availability of community amenities.
- There is a need for more parks and recreation amenities, trail connections, restaurants, retail, and unique attractions in Hancock County. These amenities would benefit residents while also appealing to tourists.
- Survey respondents are concerned about overdevelopment and loss of rural character, environmental impacts, lack of diversity (ethnic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic), and local government (accountability, transparency, and responsiveness) in Hancock County.