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# REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

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INSPIRING PEOPLE TO LOVE ELKHART COUNTY

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## VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

[VibrantElkhartCounty.org](http://VibrantElkhartCounty.org)

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**SPRING 2019**

*Process sponsored by:*

Community Foundation of Elkhart County  
Elkhart County, IN Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.



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# A WELCOME LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

This is a pivotal time for the Vibrant Communities movement. Over past three years, we have spent a lot of time and energy helping people understand the importance of quality of place and generating ideas about what “Vibrant Community” means in Elkhart County, Indiana. County residents today have a better understanding of quality of place principles and its importance for shaping our communities’ future talent attraction and retention, and economic development.



The mission of the Vibrant Communities movement is simple. We want to “inspire people to love Elkhart County.” We want this to be a place where people come to live, work, play and learn. We see the county as vibrant and attractive. We want to be known for authenticity, energy and pride.

Quality of place has become part of the vocabulary of elected officials, business leaders and others. Greater attention is being paid to the importance of placemaking. This is evident not only in the number of major projects that are underway or soon to be started. It can also be seen in how we are thinking about existing assets such as our streets, parks, libraries and cultural venues. We are doing more with what we have. We are building new places. We are creating new spaces. We want to offer even more for us to see and do.

One thing we have learned is that placemaking never stops. We have momentum throughout Elkhart County. The importance of our Vibrant Communities movement is no longer in getting things started. The value of the movement now is to take the momentum we have and make it stronger.

We thank you for your interest. We will continue to hear your voice. Please stay with us and keep moving forward.

**Arvis Dawson**  
Co-Chair

**Suzie Weirick**  
Co-Chair

# WHO'S INVOLVED

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## Special Thanks to:

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And the 1,000+ participants  
who shared their time,  
energy and ideas!

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# INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

The words “vibrant” and “community” can inspire a wide range of impressions. People will interpret the phrase differently. Different people – residents, tourists, entrepreneurs, telecommuters, business managers – all have a distinct perspective and measure it based on that point of view.

It is with rare exception, however, that a vibrant community is seen as anything but positive. Each of the two words is optimistic, welcoming and friendly. Vibrancy expresses liveliness and enthusiasm. And community implies a sense of connectedness and sharing. Of course, it is not enough to just talk about it. Making a community vibrant requires action.

The Vibrant Communities movement in Elkhart County has been sustained by the interest and involvement of many individuals and entities. We have involved thousands of people along the way and we are not done.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Vibrant Communities conducted an exhaustive process in 2016 to gather ideas and feedback about what residents wanted to see in Elkhart County. This was one of several critical steps early on to make sure things happened collaboratively and cohesively. These efforts led to the creation of a comprehensive Action Agenda. That plan featured 77 recommendations for policies, projects and programs that would be implemented throughout the county.

In the summer and early fall of 2018, a group of involved citizens conducted an audit of the Action Agenda. As you will see in this report, we have done a lot and we have learned a lot. There were two reasons for the audit. The first was to review and report on progress. That assessment was called for when the Action Agenda was introduced. It is important to know what has been achieved and what is yet to be done.

A second reason for conducting the audit was to see what resources might now be available for other quality of place projects. A summary of the audit and its findings and recommendations are part of this report.

You will also find several write-ups that highlight Elkhart County cities and towns and some of the more ambitious projects that are underway.

A lot of things are happening in this place we call home. It is an exciting time to live, work, play and learn in Elkhart County.



# PLACEMAKING: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

One of the aims of placemaking is to build social infrastructure. Placemaking is both a philosophy and a process. As such, placemaking is neither linear or clearly progresses step-by-step. Rather, placemaking is cyclical, iterative and has several facets. In some ways, it never stops.

## VIBRANT COMMUNITIES PROCESS



There are four distinct phases in the placemaking process: Ideation, Production, Implementation and Evaluation. Each phase provides different “points of entry” that make it possible for people with distinctive interests, skills and resources to get involved at different times and in varying ways. In this way, placemaking creates a lattice of relationships that strengthen a community.

Most often placemaking begins by recognizing both an opportunity and a problem. Something is not right and that actions can be taken to make things better. With an understanding what is happening and empathy for those who are impacted, needs can be defined, ideas can be generated and discussed, decisions can be made. This is the Ideation phase of placemaking.

This is how the development of the Aquatics Center in Elkhart got started. The building that was once the YMCA was in disrepair. That, combined with lagging membership in what had become The Center, forced its Board to close the facility. At the same time,

it was known that the Elkhart high schools needed a new pool. Through a collaborative effort involving government, not-for-profit organizations, the Community Foundation and private citizens, a regional, state-of-the-art combined fitness and aquatic competition center will be opened in June 2019. Through determination and cooperation, problems are not only being solved, needs will be met and new and exciting possibilities are on the horizon.

Not all placemaking activities are on the grand scale of the Aquatics Center nor is there always a need for such a comprehensive and diverse group of collaborators. The fundamental approach, however, can be the same and, so too, many of the potential benefits.

Production is the physical building and financial phase of the placemaking process. It is when resources are pulled together, funds are raised and the actual making happens. The phase also includes initial planning for use and the design for programming starts.

## PLACEMAKING (Cont.)

Programming is what fosters community around a physical location. It makes the place that has been built a part of the community's social infrastructure. Ongoing programming provides an endless opportunity to make places more dynamic, more interesting and more enjoyable. It sustains continued use. Programming also provides a low-cost/no-cost way for ordinary folks to participate in a vital part of the placemaking process.

The placemaking process does not end when construction is complete. The Implementation phase begins as programming is developed and delivered. Through programming, a place becomes alive. Those participating in activities tell others and popularity grows. New ideas about how to use the place take shape and that may attract even more people.

After programming is implemented, evaluation begins. This is done to determine the impact of the place. There are two important aspects to the evaluation process. The first is the assessment. This appraises what is going well and where improvements may be needed. The second part, reflection, provides those involved a chance to consider how well they worked together. It is a way to identify "lessons learned" and how to use that knowledge in the future.

A third part of the Evaluation phase, however, is often ignored. That is, the results of the assessment and reflection are not shared. As a part of setting goals, the organizing team engaged Indiana University to guide the development of vibrancy metrics and begin measuring community engagement

and strengthen areas that need more focus. Communicating what has been learned can help others involved in other placemaking efforts avoid setbacks and benefit from what has been successfully tried before.

Placemaking provides a hands-on way of improving neighborhoods, cities or regions. While often it is applied to public spaces, it can also play a valuable role in making non-public spaces popular. The "making" builds connections, empowers people and gets them involved. It gives meaning to what they do. The value of relationships that grow out of the process are equal to, if not greater than the places that result.

According to the Project for Public Spaces, when effective placemaking capitalizes on a community's assets, inspiration and potential, it results in the creation of quality places that contribute to people's health, happiness and well-being.

Effective placemaking is central to having a hearty social infrastructure. It inspires people to come together and imagine what a place can be. It strengthens the connections between people and the places they share. "The community knows best" is a key principle of placemaking.

Over the past several years, placemakers throughout Elkhart County have been more conscious of ensuring their efforts are collaborative and engage prospective users and others who may have a stake in what is being done. This leads to not only better ideas, but increases the likelihood of making places that will have greater use and become integral parts of our social infrastructure.

# ENFOCUS COMES TO ELKHART COUNTY | BY LEX DENNIS



Beginning in summer of 2017, enFocus has become actively involved in the Vibrant Communities movement.

At enFocus, our mission is to empower talent to build better communities. We recruit recent graduates and develop them into the next generation of community leaders. This is consistent with one of the underlying reasons for Vibrant Communities in Elkhart County. enFocus Fellows work alongside experienced mentors to discover, design, and implement innovative solutions across industries. To date, enFocus has engaged over 500

young professionals to work across Northern Indiana on over 100 projects for sponsor organizations.

Fellows and interns are matched with local businesses, public organizations and nonprofits to work on projects designed to find cost savings, enhance efficiency and build organizational strength within these sponsoring entities. The projects range from implementing new technologies to studying the market feasibility of a new venture. After the project is complete, employers often look to retain Fellows as full-time employees to continue the cycle of innovation and impact.

## ENTREPRENEURIAL AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Fellows and Interns are also given the chance to execute projects of their own design. This includes launching startups, creating social ventures or piloting programs to address

needs in the community. As an example, one of our Fellows helped to convene and lead a group of local decision-makers to enhance and promote waterways within Elkhart County.

## IMPACT IN ELKHART COUNTY

During the 2017-18 Fellowship Year, we created the following outcomes:

- ▶ 21 fellows, interns and staff members working in Elkhart County
- ▶ \$365,000 in total revenue from project fee income and philanthropic support
- ▶ 7 sponsored projects for various Elkhart County-based entities
- ▶ 7 Elkhart County board members recruited

We are excited to work collaboratively with community partners to further grow our unique “entrepreneurial focus” to help address Elkhart County’s toughest challenges.



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# PROCESS







# WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE

Elkhart County’s residents have always taken pride in what it makes by hand, how they use ingenuity, creativity and work ethic to create all manner of products that stand the test of time. What hasn’t always existed is our ability to recognize that and harness its narrative power.

Effectively communicating Elkhart County’s distinctive attributes requires stakeholders to possess a firm understanding of the area’s identity. This identity speaks to a community’s underlying DNA, an element that does not change but is consistent over time.

The Vibrant Communities process revealed that Elkhart County residents understood the critical need for a shared communications message. Participants identified the inherent need and named it in multiple ways in the Action Agenda

At the same time, the process also specified the need for a consistency in communications messages and highlighted gaps that possessed the potential to dilute shared identity.

The Elkhart County, IN Convention & Visitors Bureau (ECCVB) took leadership and engaged with Destination Think!, a global marketing consultant and research firm, to engage in an exhaustive discovery period, drawing information from a wide diversity of residents as well as a broad cross-section of existing communications.

That the research revealed Elkhart County as a community of makers is not surprising, but was powerful in its ability to distill our history, heritage and identity into a compelling identity.

The makers identity captures Elkhart County’s past, present and future, including the fact that the people

of Elkhart County are changing. Our population is diversifying. This is most evident by the growing number of Hispanic-oriented businesses. Diversity brings opportunities to experience new things and appreciate various nationalities and ethnicities.

There is one thing that that has not changed, however: our values. This means a lot, because our values serve as a consistent thread between our past, what Elkhart County is today and our future.

We care about family, friends and neighbors. We have faith in ourselves, each other and a higher power. We are resourceful and resilient. We are confident that no matter what gets thrown our way, we will come out OK.

The opportunity that lies before us is to join how we speak about ourselves to each other with how we share our story with those who should be drawn to Elkhart County to live, work, play and learn.

Outsiders see Elkhart County as a region that’s in the heart of Amish Country. They know us for our Quilt Gardens and Murals, the Heritage Trail and the many festivals and events. They recognize our arts scene and the variety of places to drink and dine. They may be ambivalent about our place as the RV Capital of the World.

(cont)



## WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE (Cont.)

Residents of Elkhart County recognize that we live in a place that is both urban and rural. We like that our cities are surrounded by countryside. We appreciate our rivers, lakes, woodlands and parks and we take advantage of them. We work hard, but we also like to play.

Elkhart County has a strong industrial base and we are proud of that heritage. We have a distinctive entrepreneurial spirit. We also have an appreciation for skilled workmanship. We believe we can make anything here and do it well.

We also think that Elkhart County is a good place to live and work. We place high regard on getting along with others. We have an optimistic view of human nature. We see ourselves as considerate and kind. We are there to help, often generously so, if help is needed.

These traits are anchored in our values.

We need to make Elkhart County a place where younger people with skills and talents want to live. Investment and jobs go where the talent is. As financier Michael Bloomberg has said, "Talent attracts capital more than capital attracts talent." We know we need to ramp up our efforts to get young people to Elkhart County and we are doing just that. Adam Savage, one of those guys on the TV show "MythBusters," said it in a very eloquent way: "Humans do two things that make us unique from all other animals; we use tools and we tell stories. And when you make something, you're doing both at once."

We make things. We have a good story to tell, a very good story. We just need to get the word out.









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# COMMUNITY UPDATES



# ELKHART | From Mayor Tim Neese



The Vibrant Communities movement has inspired us to think creatively about how we engage with the people and places around us. In a short period of time, the social activities occurring in downtown Elkhart have grown exponentially, welcoming a cross-section of residents and visitors to the heart of our City.

When we have an event, there are tangible economic benefits to our downtown merchants. The intangibles, however, are just as important. As I meet new people at these events, I am reminded that in that moment, they could choose to be anywhere in the world, but they have chosen to be in Elkhart. Their excitement is palpable, and you can sense the pride they feel in being a part of something new and fun in the community they love. That is what makes these events so special.

Another area where we are seeing a measurable increase in community pride is through volunteer engagement. This year alone, over 700 people have donated their time to keeping our parks beautiful, maintaining and enhancing the Elkhart Environmental Center, and facilitating the successful operation of the Lerner Theatre. This equates to nearly 13,000 service hours and is a strong indicator that residents are taking ownership of these shared assets and feel they have a vested interest in their continued success.

This level of engagement should make all of us proud and should inspire us to continue the positive momentum. Collaboration amongst all levels will be key to Elkhart's continued success, and I personally want to extend an open invitation to anyone who wishes to be a part of our vibrant future.

# GOSHEN | From Mayor Jeremy Stutsman



Having won Indiana's 2017 Community of the Year award, Goshen is becoming widely recognized for its economic vitality and cultural vibrancy. We have a flourishing retail district, a thriving business community fueled by more than \$100 million in private investment during 2017, and we are rapidly becoming a popular tourism destination throughout the Midwest. In fact, special events like the Elkhart County Fair, First Fridays, River Bend Film Festival, Freedom Fest and the Goshen Triathlon brought in an excess of 350,000 visitors last year alone.

Back in 2008, the local economy in Goshen was one of the hardest hit by the recession, which caused high unemployment and vacated residential properties and industrial buildings. In the last three to five years, we have created new place-making initiatives, forged public-private partnerships and boosted businesses to improve the economy and quality of life in the city.

The redevelopment of several industrial buildings on identified brownfields along the Millrace Canal has led to a unique transformation, with some of the properties becoming sought-after residential spaces and the opening of businesses and events that bring a multitude of residents and visitors from around the region.

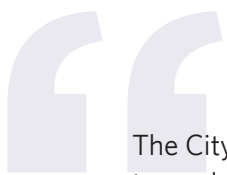
With its 33-mile trail system, Goshen has connections throughout the city for residents

who prefer an alternative mode of transportation. The Pumpkinvine Trail, which connects to Middlebury and Shipshewana, is host to numerous organized rides throughout the year and is popular among cyclists from all corners of the country. We also created an Arts Council, which works with talented artists from all backgrounds to increase exposure and build a more arts-friendly community. We recognize that artists are entrepreneurs that help drive our economy as well as help improve quality of place.

Most importantly, by embracing diversity in our community, we've opened the doors of our hometown to all. We created the Latino Advisory Committee to help represent and give a voice to Latinos, who make up close to 35% of the population in Goshen. As Goshen builds its community, it is important that all people from all cultures, backgrounds and perspectives feel welcome.

I am so proud of the residents of this city. It takes everyone to make his or her community vibrant, and in Goshen this has been the case in every step of the way. I invite you to come see our beautiful parks or have a bite in one of our many diverse restaurants; but most importantly, to come meet the people who make this community great.

# NAPPANEE | From Mayor Phil Jenkins



The City of Nappanee is making solid progress toward a more vibrant community. In March of 2018, we launched our new and improved website. It includes a fresh new look, community calendar, and a user-friendly interface. We continue to work on our communication among the various community organizations to better share our events and progress.

Small, deliberate public investments in our downtown have led to many new and existing businesses expanding and renovating the downtown buildings. Ruhe@152, a locally owned brewery and restaurant, will be opening within the year. The Pretty Cakery and C&C Breakfast Co. have recently opened. Main Street Coffee House has expanded to create more meeting space and seating. The old Hartman building is being transformed into luxury, upscale apartments that will soon be ready for occupancy. We are excited to witness the revitalization of our downtown and look forward to partnering with the merchants to keep improving.

The Community of WaNee Vision 2020 Capital Campaign is in full swing. This transformational, multi-agency project will reshape social services in the community.

This \$5,750,000 project is fully funded and construction has begun. We recently broke ground on Phase II of the project for the new Boys and Girls Club. Phase I, a new high school/club soccer complex at Wellfield Park, is scheduled to be completed this October. Phase III, Family Christian Development Center (FCDC) relocating to the current Boys & Girls Club, and Phase IV, expanded Elder Haus Senior Center, is scheduled to begin in mid-2019 and completed in 2020.

We have also seen major investments from several local businesses. Aluminum Trailer Company (ATC) built a cutting-edge production facility. Newmar, a locally owned luxury motor coach company, completed a state-of-the-art service center and campground for their customers. Kountry Wood Products also built a brand-new event center, Sammlung Platz.

We continue to work toward our Vibrant Communities Action Agenda items. Working with Wakarusa, we hope to begin planning for our bike path. We will also look for ways to develop additional housing and related amenities to attract and retain a quality workforce and support strong families.



# WAKARUSA | Jeff Troxel, Town Manager



The Wa-Nee Vision 20/20 Project was a collaboration between Wakarusa, Nappanee, Wa-Nee Schools, Nappanee Boys & Girls Club, Family Christian Development Center and Elder Haus of Nappanee. The first project was a pro-style soccer field that will be used by the Nappanee Soccer Club as well as the NorthWood High School Soccer Team. Tournaments can be held there bringing people to the Wa-Nee Community. That project is finishing up now.

A new Boys & Girls Club facility will be built in old soccer field location. Work began on that in October 2018 and hopefully be finished by the beginning of next school year. The land will be leased to the Boys & Girls Club by the Wa-Nee School System.

Once the new Club is built, FCDC will move from their current building to the old Boys & Girls Club. With some slight remodeling, they will be able to serve more people efficiently. Elder Haus, which occupies part of the building next to the old Boys & Girls Club will expand, using the kitchen and dining areas to serve their members better.

These projects reach people of all ages in the Wa-Nee Community from babies, to children, to the elderly. The Capital Campaign for this project was \$5.7 million dollars. A total of \$5.8 million was raised by the Wa-Nee Community proving this is a special place to live.

# MIDDLEBURY | Mary Cripe, Town Manager



The town of Middlebury continues to build their vibrant community efforts on the foundation of being “Grown from Tradition.” Middlebury’s “Grown from Tradition” brand and logo was developed from a Vibrant Communities Focus Group, Research Report and now appears on official letterheads as well as town signage.

Middlebury is the hometown of many annual favorite traditions such as the Middlebury Summer Festival that showcases one of the state’s largest festival parades; the Middlebury Fall Festival that features a varied selection of homegrown produce, hometown cooking, and homemade treasures; and the Mini-Golf event held in the community library. The Mini-Golf event is organized by the Middlebury Community Enrichment Council (MCEC), a non-profit formed to preserve our community’s unique quality of life by sponsoring projects that enrich Middlebury’s heritage and is the result of a Vibrant Community Focus Group.

The Then & Now Committee was formed to organize and host many different events ranging from movies in the park during the summer, pumpkin races in the fall and Christmas tree lighting and gingerbread house contest in the winter months as well as historical walking tours.

A new visitor’s center was shaped as part of

the Middlebury Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center, co-locating in a more prominent location at 201 S. Main Street, which now includes a welcome lobby that is accessible 24/7. Visitors from all across the nation are able to relax in a living room-like setting, grab a cup of coffee and get their questions answered by chamber staff and/or volunteers.

As a part of Middlebury’s Action Agenda Priority Items, the town completed the planning and installation of wayfinding signage. As a result, the gateways are more welcoming and the town is easier to navigate.

One of the top priorities of our Action Agenda was to provide high speed, affordable internet to all in our area. The town is currently working towards the construction of fiber optic lines to improve the delivery of more affordable, high-speed internet to the incorporated areas along with the surrounding rural areas.

It is an exciting, energetic time in the town of Middlebury. Middlebury has been fortunate to be part of the Vibrant Communities journey. Vibrant efforts continue to surface and cultivate in Middlebury with each new event, each new economic development project, seeing our community through visitors’ eyes and with pure homegrown traditions!

# BRISTOL | From Michael "Mitch" Mitchell, Town Manager



The Town of Bristol has continued to be a leader in economic development with multiple industries expanding and adding jobs to our bustling community. The new Town Municipal Complex is slated to begin construction in December 2018 with a projected completion of October 2019. This facility will include the Council Chambers, the offices of the Clerk/Treasurer, the office of the Town Manager, the Police Department and will include full ADA access which the former structure lacked.

Bristol has also been working steadily on a new alternate business route to relieve traffic along SR 120 and CR 15. Projected completion is spring of 2019.

The Bristol on the River group has been working on an Indiana Main Street application after receiving its 501(C)3 status this year. The Park Board has done major improvements to the Hermance Park pavilion that was affected by the floods from earlier this year. Bristol has showcased a number of volunteer events and activities that have been very successful in bringing the community together. The annual Homecoming event was very well attended and brings people from hours away to spend

time catching up with friends and enjoying the events. The Fall Harvest Party also drew thousands of visitors to experience the famous Bristol haunted house and haunted hay ride. The town is going to host the Santa Stroll for the first time in many years and we look forward to having runners and walkers come to the town tree lighting the night before and the races the following day.

Area churches and organizations have baked cookies, created and organized games, helped with parade route traffic, cleaned cemetery headstones and provided hours of volunteer work for the Town, the Fire Department and many area groups and organizations. The Bristol Library has added a performance venue that has hosted an outdoor concert and will add to our cultural amenities.

Bristol youth have really shined this year in their efforts to give back to the community and to volunteer their time and energy to make their hometown proud. Team Bristol continues to draw strength from each other and will continue to strive to reach new heights of community efforts. If 2018 is any indication, 2019 will be even more exciting for Bristol.



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# **ACTION AGENDA AUDIT**



## ABOUT THE ACTION AGENDA AUDIT

Broad expectations were established by the Steering Committee during the initial planning phase. These were used to inform and guide the establishment of the Action Agenda.

- ▶ A review and evaluation of past placemaking projects, including those that were successful and others that were not.
- ▶ Gaps and opportunities were identified. Emphasis was placed on those that were not being addressed, and showed high potential benefits.
- ▶ Make specific suggestions that would provide clear direction to community leaders and influence investment in placemaking.

The Vibrant Communities Action Agenda was the result of a six-month process involving hundreds of Elkhart County residents. The agenda focused on important assets, opportunities and priorities. It was produced with the intention that it would serve Elkhart County in three ways:

1. As evidence of thoughtful and inclusive contributions
2. To be a guide for decision makers
3. To inspire continued action.

Each item required different resources, sources of funding and timing. Therefore, execution of Action Agenda items was the responsibility of those best suited to achieve the desired results.

There was no single entity required to coordinate activities.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION AGENDA

The Action Agenda was described as “a path to achieve the community’s vision of a vibrant place.” To ensure execution and follow-through, groups of various make up and size took shape to tackle various Action Agenda recommendations. Some were more formally structured; others came together holistically. There was no central coordinating function.

For the most part, this approach to implementation has worked well. As you will see from the audit results on the next several pages, most of the items that should have been completed have been. For those items that were to take longer to get done, most are well along the way. Only a few have fallen behind. Those have been noted and discussions are underway to determine what should be done.

# THE AUDIT PROCESS

In the fall of 2018, working with a team from enFocus, we conducted a process for evaluating progress on the Action Agenda. The purpose of this audit was to determine the value of the Action Agenda as a guide for changes.

In order to complete the update, enFocus fellows spoke with many of the individuals and groups that were involved in the creation of the original agenda. They also sought input from some groups that were not initially involved but have played a role in implementation. Primary contacts included the Vibrant Communities Organizing Team, local municipal bodies and departments, the

Elkhart County, IN Convention & Visitors Bureau (ECCVB) and the county's Chambers of Commerce. We also included champions and stakeholders for specific agenda items.

By doing the audit, we have been able to assess progress, foster information sharing, celebrate projects underway and establish the current status of each. In some instances, we have been able to recognize where timing has fallen behind; in others we have seen there is little or no momentum to move forward. We have also taken the liberty to make recommendations for follow-up when we thought that was appropriate.



# ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – COUNTYWIDE

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>C1</b>	<b>Exhibit countywide ownership and pride</b>	Continue current efforts. If you would like to learn more, or get involved, you can find more information at <a href="http://vibrantelkhartcounty.org">vibrantelkhartcounty.org</a> .	VC Organizing Group	Ongoing	In progress
<b>C2</b>	<b>Improve communication between organizations, local governments and other community sectors</b>	Continue current efforts.	Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, VC Organizing Group	Ongoing	In progress
<b>C3</b>	<b>Maintain an entrepreneurial and organizational leadership training ecosystem</b>	The biggest challenge for entrepreneurs in Elkhart County is locating funding, especially for endeavors with local (smaller) markets. Locating funding to encourage small businesses would help this effort.	Chambers, enFocus	Ongoing	In progress
<b>C4</b>	<b>Strategize and improve countywide broadband</b>		Elkhart County Commissioners	Mid-term	In progress
<b>C5</b>	<b>Activate a multimodal loop countywide, and connect regionally</b>	Ensure that planning for expanded transportation happens in a manner that is comprehensive and addresses high needs groups.		Ongoing	In progress
<b>C6</b>	<b>Improve regulatory efficiency in granting building and other development permits</b>	Business leaders feel that regulatory efficiency is not a significant barrier to development, although additional improvements could be warranted.		Mid-term	Inactive

## Status - narrative

The Vibrant Communities organizing group has been meeting on a bi-weekly schedule to identify and implement ways to foster community pride. These efforts have included continued advocacy through avenues such as the Community Champions Roundtable, event engagements, and communications activities through website content, social media promotion and monthly emails. Meanwhile, the Elkhart County RDC has contributed to this goal by using TIFs to put a focus on "Gateways" as worthwhile entry points into the county, requiring developers who ask for TIF incentives to meet a higher standard of buildings and landscaping, and assisting with collaborative projects when they arise (including tire clean up, median landscaping, and input on various designs).

\* The Vibrant Communities organizing group has facilitated bi-monthly meetings of a Community Champions Roundtable which brings together community leaders from different sectors and from across the county. \* Elkhart County holds an Inter-Governmental Forum as needed for interlocal agreement types of discussions; these forums involve the Mayors, a Commissioner, and a County Council member. \* Elkhart County holds quarterly County-Cities Forums, that are open to the public and discuss important community issues. Recent County-Cities Forum meetings have discussed waste management, county fiber, and employer and employee needs. \* The creation of organizations such as the Elkhart County Food Council, Elkhart County Waterways Alliance, and MACOG Brownfields Working group are signs that our area is making additional and worthwhile interconnections to meet our area goals.

The Chambers of Commerce in the individual communities of Elkhart County have committed themselves to providing support for entrepreneurs and organizations in Elkhart County. Additionally, the Community Foundation of Elkhart County and Ivy Tech Elkhart Campus have also been strong leaders working toward this action item. Finally, RDC is able to leverage up to 15% of TIF dollars toward work training / re-education purposes, and meetings are scheduled to talk about possible projects concerning this in 2019/2020.

RDC has shown strong support for expanding fiber across the county, approving over \$350,000 in TIF dollars to go towards various fiber projects in 2018 alone. While Elkhart County Highway Dept. has acted as the main point of contact and organizer of fiber plans as the existing fiber connects and operates our street lights, RDC staff has also played a supportive role in moving projects with Maple Net forward. A tentative map of planned fiber projects available online and a cohesive action plan for projects is in the works. MapleNet and the county have worked hard to help bring some larger players into the system like local schools, Middlebury Municipal, and Goshen Health. One of the main objectives is to connect with a data portal in South Bend, which will open up the fiber network to a host of possibilities.

Several trail projects such as the Pumpkinvine and Quaker Trace trails have made incremental progress on connecting Elkhart County. Additionally, as Goshen and Elkhart have just adopted city-wide bike path plans this year, and the county will be working with both cities' planning departments and with other smaller communities in the county to create a comprehensive county cycling plan based on MACOG's Active Transportation Plan and Elkhart County Parks 2018 Master Plan. The 40 mile loop remains a core piece of this vision and will continue to move forward as elected officials start the ground work for the Bristol-Middlebury connection, and "Friends of the Quaker trace" continue to build community and monetary support for the Elkhart-Bristol connection. In the realm of public transportation, MACOG has expanded bus service of the inter-urban trolley to connect South Bend, Mishawaka, Elkhart and Goshen.

The county has reduced the time it takes to receive a permit by one week.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – COUNTYWIDE (Cont.)

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>C7</b>	<b>Establish a 2.5-acre riverside park</b>	Continue current efforts.	Elkhart County Parks, Redevelopment Commission, Elkhart County Commissioners, Elkhart Community Schools	Short-term	In progress
<b>C8</b>	<b>Help meet demand for single family homes in the \$130-250k range</b>	Continue current efforts, which includes soliciting feedback and ideas from the public.	SBERP	Long-term	To be started
<b>C9</b>	<b>Build the RV Capital Event Center and Rally Facility</b>	The RV Hall of Fame is currently seeking to raise the \$10 million needed to complete the project.	RV Hall of Fame	Long-term	To be started
<b>C10</b>	<b>Establish a countywide innovation strategy</b>	Continue current efforts. If you would like to learn more please contact your local chamber of commerce.	EDC, Chambers, enFocus	Mid-term	In progress
<b>C11</b>	<b>Evaluate and improve workforce readiness</b>	Continue current efforts.	HEA, Chambers, EDC, WorkOne	Long-term	In progress
<b>C12</b>	<b>Develop proactive strategies to respond to a cyclical marketplace</b>	Continue current efforts.	Chambers of Commerce	Ongoing	To be started
<b>C13</b>	<b>Cultivate adaptable and transferable expertise</b>	Continue current efforts.	HEA	Ongoing	In progress
<b>C14</b>	<b>Evaluate community entryways</b>			Short-term	In progress

#### Status - narrative

Elkhart County Parks, Elkhart County Redevelopment Commission, Elkhart County Commissioners and others are partnering to create riverside greenspace in addition to the existing boat launch south of the Six Span Bridge in Elkhart. A plan is presently being compiled by Lehman and Lehman and will include an accessible canoe and kayak launch, pavilion, and picnic areas. In addition, the Elkhart Community Schools is seeking an area for their soon to be formed rowing team to launch. These facilities will give even more users access to the waterway of the St. Joseph River. The project is expected to begin development in 2019. Additionally, there is the possibility that a launch could be installed near Ash and Old U.S. 20 along the St. Joseph River in the next couple of years.

The South Bend Elkhart Regional Partnership is conducting a study of the current housing stock and will make recommendations for meeting the demand for homes in Elkhart County. Meanwhile, the Elkhart County RDC staff have been developing deep relationships with Habitat for Humanity and Lacasa, specifically for redevelopment projects in the Prairie Creek Run Neighborhood, an island of un-annexed land under county jurisdiction just north of Bristol St. In Elkhart. If a redevelopment plan is approved to begin this fall, RDC will try their hand at land banking, neighborhood redevelopment, and partner housing project with Habitat and Lacasa. If this project goes well, it is likely that similar activities will continue throughout the county of the next 10+ years as viable project opportunities become clear.

The RV Hall of Fame has proposed an expansion that would include a 4,000 sqft space rally site and 2,000 sqft pavilion in phase one, and a 60,000 sqft event center for phase 2.

While there is not yet a comprehensive innovation strategy, there is a multitude of efforts to foster innovation in Elkhart County.

In 2018 the EDC conducted a laborshed study to investigate the needs of employers and the skills of employees. The HEA, Chambers, WorkOne, and EDC all meet to discuss ways to improve workforce readiness. Current programs include the Certified Production Technician Program run by the HEA, and the high school Governor's Work Ethic Certification that involves all 10 high schools, over 40 local businesses, and 9 "business connectors" from around ELkhart County.

There have been some disparate efforts to address diversification of the economy in Elkhart County, and the Chambers of Commerce and municipalities are currently in discussions to develop a cohesive economic development plan for Elkhart County.

The HEA currently champions and offers programs from early learning to adult pathways to increase adaptable and transferable skills withing the population of Elkhart County. This effort includes networks such as the Lumina Adult Attainment and pilot programs like the HSE and Literacy Programs.

County RDC is working closely with County Highway Department and the City of Elkhart on this topic for a few places around the county. Some notable areas include the Northwest Gateway (CR 6, Old U.S. 20, and Old U.S. 33 on the west border), the Northeast Corridor (CR 17 from 80/90 and southward), and possibly some work with Middlebury and in the Western Gateway (SR 19 heading south of U.S. 20 toward Warsaw). More projects focused on gateways should be expected in the coming years.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – COUNTYWIDE (Cont.)

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>C15</b>	<b>Build Ox Bow Lodge and Natural Interpretive and Recreation Center</b>	Long-term success of the project will be determined through fundraising and grants.	Elkhart County Parks	Mid-term	To be started
<b>C16</b>	<b>Integrate and celebrate demographic diversity in all events possible</b>	Identify champions of this issue in Elkhart County, and connect them to industry leaders and politicians with the influence and willpower to address diversity.	None	Ongoing	To be started
<b>C17</b>	<b>Evaluate local event and calendar resources and promote the most helpful</b>	The Communicators group is currently in the process of evaluating the current state of resources in Elkhart County and will establish a strategy later this year. If you would like to join the Communicators group, email Terry at the ECCVB at <a href="mailto:tmark@eccvb.org">tmark@eccvb.org</a>	Elkhart County Communicators	Short-term	In progress
<b>C18</b>	<b>Create satellite museum and interpretive exhibits</b>	Continue current efforts and connect with other institutions.	Elkhart County Museum Association	Mid-term	To be started
<b>C19</b>	<b>Promote the use of local foods and native plantings</b>	The Elkhart County Food Council is making the next steps to identify particular programs to accomplish their goals. Their current needs include financial support and enthusiastic participants. If you are interested in connecting to the food council or supporting their mission, please contact them here: <a href="https://www.elkhartfood.org/contact">https://www.elkhartfood.org/contact</a> , or if you would like to know more about local food you can subscribe to their mailing list at <a href="https://www.elkhartfood.org/subscribe">https://www.elkhartfood.org/subscribe</a> .	Elkhart County Food Council, Quilt Gardens, Farmers Markets, WEIlfeld Botanic Gardens	Ongoing	In progress
<b>C20</b>	<b>Convene an Elkhart County Arts Alliance</b>	Celebrate! If you would like to get involved with the Arts Alliance, please email: <a href="mailto:info@artsonmain.org">info@artsonmain.org</a> .	Elkhart County Arts Alliance	Short-term	Complete

#### Status - narrative

This initiative is in its beginning planning stages. The interpretive focus of the building has grown larger than originally planned. The Elkhart County Parks staff envision a large discovery museum that would tell the story of Elkhart's natural and local history. We would combine our present historical museum, naturalist and administrative teams into one functioning facility. We envision a 30,000 square foot LEED facility adjacent to Ox Bow County Park with a multifunctional purpose to host events, interpretive and recreation programs, regional meetings, volunteer office, rental space and much more. Interpretive exhibits would focus on our relationship to the land and the development and history of Elkhart County. In the recent Five Year Master Plan survey, 88% of residents supported building such a facility. The Elkhart County Parks' goal is to create a more formalized site plan for this vision in 2019 with cost estimates.

While the topic of diversity has received more attention, there has yet to be a cohesive and serious effort to improve diversity in Elkhart County as a whole. Notable efforts at a more local level include the Latino Advisory Council in Goshen.

The Elkhart County Communicators meets on a monthly basis with the goal of developing a unified communications and marketing procedure for the entire county.

The ECMA meets quarterly to discuss the state of museums in Elkhart County, create collaborative programming, and amplify the reach of our local museums. For the past two years, they have collectively hosted a free museum day twice a year that has been well attended by the community. We also collectively maintain two small exhibit cases at INOVA locations and are developing new promotional materials to highlight local museums.

The Elkhart County Food Council has been established and is working to educate the public on local food options.

The Elkhart County Arts Alliance has been founded with the mission to help Elkhart County artists and musicians to become more vibrant, viable, visible and vested in the public realm, by coalescing Elkhart County art and music interests. City-level arts councils have also been established in Middlebury and Nappanee.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – COUNTYWIDE (Cont.)

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>C21</b>	<b>Create a marketing initiative that promotes the waterways</b>	ECWA should continue work in this area, with funding support from partner organizations and local grants. If you would like to support this initiative, connect with us at <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Elkhart-County-Waterways-Alliance-173410066698783/">https://www.facebook.com/Elkhart-County-Waterways-Alliance-173410066698783/</a>	Elkhart County Waterways Alliance	Short-term	In progress
<b>C22</b>	<b>Identify resources to improve curb appeal from Main Street to Main Street</b>			Short-term	In progress
<b>C23</b>	<b>Improve the perception of education</b>	Continue current efforts.	HEA	Ongoing	In progress
<b>C24</b>	<b>Develop a central online hub of community-building resources via social media</b>	Continue current efforts.	Vibrant Communities Organizing Team	Short-term	In progress



**Status - narrative**

The Elkhart County Waterways Alliance intends on promoting the waterways through a resource guide and a Web site, both to be made available in spring 2019. Numerous municipalities, outfitters, nonprofit organizations, and paddling enthusiasts contribute as ECWA members.

RDC is working on several “gateway” initiatives and is working to cultivate better relationships with the smaller municipalities to be more aware of the connectivity that is needed.

The Horizon Educational Alliance has been working to not only improve the perception of education in Elkhart County, but also to foster collaborative efforts to improve the educational system, including career pathways.

The Vibrant Communities Organizing Team has been collecting and distributing community-building resources on the Vibrant Elkhart County website.

# ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – ELKHART

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
E1	<b>Provide more programming and events in parks and community assets</b>			Ongoing	In progress
E2	<b>Create a communications strategy to promote events, activities, quality of life, services, etc.</b>	The Communicators group is currently in the process of evaluating the current state of resources in Elkhart County and will establish a strategy later this year. (This item could be consolidated with C17)	Elkhart County Communicators	Short-term	In progress
E3	<b>Extend after-work hours and launch new weekend events to make Elkhart a 24-hour city</b>	This effort is largely dependent on public demand, which will continue to increase as the economy continues the long recovery.	None	Mid-term	In progress
E4	<b>Create more family-friendly events, venues, restaurants, etc.</b>	There is still a lack of low-budget and regular opportunities for families to enjoy public spaces, especially in winter. However, this problem is related to the distance between housing availability and demand, which may solve part of the issue.	None	Ongoing	In progress
E5	<b>Work with schools and universities to engage young people</b>	Help employers recognize the importance of quality of place for attracting talent. explore programs and activities that could welcome and connect college-age students when they arrive in the South Bend-Elkhart Region.	Chamber YP Groups, Pathways, Pillars of Elkhart, Educational Institutions	Ongoing	In progress
E6	<b>Work with police and public works to create community policing safe neighborhoods</b>			Mid-term	To be started
E7	<b>Provide an incentive program to revitalize, remove or replace dilapidated properties</b>	Establish an Elkhart Land Bank. (Could be combined with E9 & E13)	SBERB	Short-term	To be started
E8	<b>Develop a central aquatics and community center, and support multiple community centers for youth</b>	Celebrate!	Beacon Health System	Short-term	In progress

#### Status - narrative

The number of events in downtown Elkhart has grown dramatically over the last several years, from fewer than ten in 2015 to 35 in 2017 and 30 (and counting!) in 2018.

The Elkhart County Communicators meets on a monthly basis with the goal of developing a unified communications and marketing procedure for the entire county.

There have been an increase in weekend events and evening in Elkhart over the past couple years, including recently the Elkhart Comicon. Also, there have been a number of businesses that have increased evening hours.

There has been an increase in public events and places for families, but there has not yet been a systematic evaluation of the current state, and areas for improvement.

There has been a significant increase in opportunities for young people to become engaged in their community, but employers especially need to recognize the importance of quality of place to draw young talent. Recent highlights include the establishment of groups such as Young Professional groups at the chambers, Pathways, and Pillars of Elkhart.

The City of Elkhart's Police Department is working to fully staff a Community Relations Bureau in 2019.

Although there hasn't been an increase in the incentives to do so, the economic recovery has meant that redevelopment has become easier. The SBERP housing study will likely make recommendations to address the issue of dilapidated housing.

The Central Aquatics and Community Center is currently under construction.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – ELKHART (Cont.)

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>E9</b>	<b>Improve Elkhart's opportunities to age-in-place</b>	Consider this issue when making recommendations after completion of the SBERP housing study. (Could be combined with E7 & E13)	SBERP	Ongoing	In progress
<b>E10</b>	<b>Build safe and attractive connections to support active transportation between parks, attractions, shopping and schools</b>	(This goal needs to be clarified)	None	Mid-term	In progress
<b>E11</b>	<b>Maintain aesthetics, safety, accessibility and identification of park system</b>			Ongoing	Inactive
<b>E12</b>	<b>Support projects that promote purposeful engagement with the rivers</b>	Elkhart should continue to support initiatives like ECWA, and should continue to hold events and activities that incorporate the rivers. As part of the River District development, the dam near the Elkhart Avenue bridge will be demolished in order to help with flooding and to promote public engagement with the river. If you would like to aid in this effort, please connect with us at <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Elkhart-County-Waterways-Alliance-173410066698783/">https://www.facebook.com/Elkhart-County-Waterways-Alliance-173410066698783/</a>	Allison Turner (a.turner@en-focus.org) is currently the coordinator of ECWA. Jamison Czarnecki, Daragh Deegan, Adam Fann, Joe Foy, and Mike Machlan currently represent the City of Elkhart at ECWA.	Ongoing	In progress
<b>E13</b>	<b>Expand the housing inventory to serve an increasingly diverse community</b>	Consider this issue when making recommendations after completion of the SBERP housing study. (Could be combined with E7 & E9)	SBERP	Long-term	In progress

**Status - narrative**

The River District and improving economy have increased the opportunities to age-in-place in Elkhart, although this issue still lacks a comprehensive plan. The SBERP housing study will likely make recommendations to address the issue of aging in place.

There has been an increase in bike paths and bike lanes.

The City of Elkhart's Parks Department is hoping to begin this initiative in 2019, once a new Parks Superintendent is hired.

The Elkhart County Waterways Alliance, which the City of Elkhart is a part of, seeks to promote engagement with the rivers.

The River District and improving economy have improved the housing stock in Elkhart, although this issue still lacks a comprehensive plan. The SBERP housing study will likely make recommendations to address the housing inventory.

# ACTION AGENDA AUDIT — GOSHEN

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>G1</b>	<b>Renovate the Goshen Theatre</b>	Continue current efforts. If you would like to learn more about the Goshen Theater renovations, you can follow at <a href="https://goshentheater.com/">https://goshentheater.com/</a>	The Goshen Theater	Mid-term	In progress
<b>G2</b>	<b>Eliminate blight around the community</b>	Continue current efforts.	City of Goshen, Redevelopment Commission	Ongoing	In progress
<b>G3</b>	<b>Develop a safe and attractive sidewalk system</b>	Increase visibility of 50/50 matching program.	City of Goshen	Mid-term	In progress
<b>G4</b>	<b>Promote Goshen's tourism assets</b>	Continue current efforts. For the long-term, the ECCVB has engaged the group DestinationThink! to help produce a place-based identity and branding initiative that will launch in 2019.	Elkhart County Communicators, Chamber of Commerce,	Ongoing	In progress
<b>G5</b>	<b>Maintain and expand downtown attractiveness</b>	The city is currently waiting for the state to turnover control of Main Street so further efforts to improve downtown can be accelerated.	The City of Goshen, Goshen Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Goshen	Ongoing	In progress
<b>G6</b>	<b>Remove and redevelop the county jail</b>	Continue current efforts.	Elkhart County Redevelopment	Short-term	In progress
<b>G7</b>	<b>Improve public transportation</b>	Continue current efforts. The public transportation system could benefit from community engagement.	MACOG	Ongoing	In progress
<b>G8</b>	<b>Add more multicultural activities</b>	Continue current efforts. The Goshen Theater in particular has plans for multicultural events moving forward.	Goshen Theater, Arthouse	Ongoing	In progress
<b>G9</b>	<b>Construct a recreational facility for year-round activities</b>	Continue current efforts.	City of Goshen	Short-term	In progress
<b>G10</b>	<b>Provide adult language education courses</b>	Continue current efforts and increase visibility and access to program.	Goshen College	Ongoing	Complete

#### Status - narrative

The Goshen Theater is wrapping up its Phase 1 capital campaign and will begin Phase 1 renovations to improve access in Summer 2019.

The city has established a variety of programs to encourage redevelopment in Goshen and the general aesthetics of the city are improving.

There is currently a 50/50 matching program where residents and business can receive city funds to help repave sidewalks and there are conversations about further efforts.

The Elkhart County Communicators meets on a monthly basis with the goal of developing a unified communications and marketing procedure for the entire county. The Goshen Chamber of Commerce has been printing and distributing brochures that promote Goshen's tourism assets and for the first time in recent memory the stock was not enough - Goshen hosted over 350,000 visitors in 2017.

Downtown Goshen has increased in vibrancy and attractiveness through the efforts of the city, businesses and private citizens. The city is currently in the design phase of future improvements. The downtown area was the recipient of over \$100 million of private investments in 2017.

The new jail has been built and is in use and a new juvenile center is in construction. Once completed and in use, the old jail will be repurposed or removed. The final decision rests with the county.

The City of Goshen has been working to improve connectivity and reduce traffic downtown. This has been accomplished by working with the state to move 33 and 15 off of Main Street, increasing East/West access by improving 38 between 17 and 33, building a railroad overpass on County Road 40. MACOG has increased the number of bus shelters and is working to connect to the South Bend Transpo System.

The city recently established a Latino Advisory Committee which will give a voice to the Latino community in Goshen. There has been an increase in multicultural activities, but this new group will help to increase those opportunities.

The Goshen Redevelopment Commission has selected a site and architecture firm for the Millrace Pavilion. The multi-purpose pavilion will be located south of the Goshen Powerhouse at 324 W. Washington St. The pavilion will have an ice rink in the winter, and be suitable for various activities in the summer. The plan also includes a separate facility with restrooms, parking, and a greenspace.

There are adult language education courses offered by Goshen College.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – GOSHEN (Cont.)

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>G12</b>	<b>Launch improved marketing of low-cost healthcare products and services in the community</b>	Continue current efforts.	Goshen Health, Centers for Healing and Hope	Short-term	In progress
<b>G13</b>	<b>Develop a Goshen Central Park and Dog Park</b>	This project needs funding and public support.	None	Short-term	To be started
<b>G14</b>	<b>Provide more entertainment options in the community at affordable prices</b>	Continue current efforts.	Goshen Businesses	Ongoing	In progress



**Status - narrative**

Goshen Health and the Centers for Healing and Hope have launched a new urgent care and low-cost health care services.

There have been several discussions initiated by project champions about this project, but no significant movement yet.

There has been an increase in entertainment options including at Ignition Garage, Arthouse, Goshen Brewing Co., and Goshen Theater. There has also been an increase in the number of events and festivals that take place in Goshen.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – MIDDLEBURY & BRISTOL

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>MB1</b>	<b>Provide internet for everybody</b>	The project would benefit from community support and especially residents and stakeholders willing to get involved.	Middlebury Town Council, County Council	Mid-term Project	In progress
<b>MB2</b>	<b>Create an Active Transportation Safety Plan</b>	This goal requires a key stakeholder to act as project champion. The active transportation safety plan and slow-moving vehicle safety initiative could be combined.	None	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>MB3</b>	<b>Establish a slow-moving vehicle safety initiative</b>	(combined with MB2)	None	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>MB4</b>	<b>Install wayfinding signs</b>	Celebrate.	Middlebury Town Council, County Council	Short-term Project	Complete
<b>MB5</b>	<b>Adopt a neighborhood preservation ordinance</b>	First, the goal of establishing a preservation ordinance needs to be defined. Community leaders have voiced that this needs to be further clarified as the utility of the preservation ordinance is not known.	None	Short-term Project	Inactive
<b>MB6</b>	<b>Prepare a strategic marketing plan</b>	This project needs funding and/or public support.	Elkhart County Communicators	Short-term Project	In progress
<b>MB7</b>	<b>Create a multi-use trail to connect Middlebury and Bristol</b>	More community support needed. Explore possibility of connecting Middlebury to Bonneyville. Explore state-level grant opportunities.	None	Mid-term Project	To be started
<b>MB8</b>	<b>Build downtown public restrooms</b>	Continue current efforts.	Town of Middlebury	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>MB9</b>	<b>Create a Community Cultural Enrichment Council</b>	Connect to Elkhart County Arts Council	Middlebury Chamber of Commerce	Short-term Project	In progress
<b>MB10</b>	<b>Create a downtown public art program</b>	Continue current efforts.	Middlebury Chamber of Commerce	Short-term Project	In progress

**Status - narrative**

In Middlebury, the town council is in talks to implement internet installation. The goal is to have an RFP soon. Additionally, the County is looking to run fiber toward Bristol and Middlebury for the purpose of supplying internet to customers.

In Middlebury, there is general interest, but no key stakeholders willing to carry out the project. One of the key objectives is to request funding from INDOT to widen state road 13. This goal does not pertain to Bristol.

(combined with MB2)

In Middlebury, the wayfinding signs were installed in 2016, and there are plans to evaluate them for updating needs. Bristol does not have wayfinding signs, but did update their "Welcome to Bristol" sign 18 months ago. Bristol on the River may consider installing wayfinding signs in the long-term future.

In Middlebury, this has been discussed, but there has not been action. In Bristol, this has not yet been discussed. One of the reasons there has been no action is there is no established benefit from adopting the ordinances.

The Elkhart County Communicators meets on a monthly basis with the goal of developing a unified communications and marketing procedure for the entire county. The Towns of Bristol and Middlebury, on their own, have not yet done anything related to marketing due to lack of capacity.

There have been discussions and some evaluations. An on-road trail, The Quaker Trace Trail, currently exists on C.R. 8. However progress on a multi-use trail has been stalled due to right-of-way opposition. There is public support, but the project needs funding. The project has a particular impact on the Amish community.

There is a plan to move Middlebury's town hall to the downtown area, which would include a restroom open to the public. The project is contingent on other issues, such as acquiring land and approving a plan for the current town hall. This goal does not pertain to Bristol.

In Middlebury, the Cultural Enrichment Council was started and is gaining momentum. The group has ongoing meetings and plans to grow in the near future. This goal does not pertain to Bristol.

In Middlebury, there is a community meeting in October to discuss next steps. Faces of Middlebury exhibit. In Bristol, an 8x8 quilt garden mural was approved for a downtown building and additional murals may be added in the long-term future.

## ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – MIDDLEBURY & BRISTOL (Cont.)

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>MB11</b>	<b>Prepare a downtown development plan</b>	Continue current efforts.	Town Center Inc.	Mid-term Project	In progress
<b>MB12</b>	<b>Construct the Spring Valley Tunnel a pedestrian crossing on US20 near the middle and high school.</b>	Needs funding and community support	Middlebury Town Manager	Short-term Project	In progress
<b>MB13</b>	<b>Conduct a feasibility study for the Trestle Terrace Development</b>	This project would benefit from public support	Trestle Terrace	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>MB14</b>	<b>Evaluate options for a grocery store</b>	Continue current efforts.	Middlebury Town Manager, Middlebury Chamber of Commerce	Short-term Project	In progress

**Status - narrative**

In Middlebury, Town Center Inc. has been established and has 20 members. They have ongoing meetings about downtown development, and are currently in talks to expand downtown. In Bristol, a group named Bristol on the River has formed and are currently working as an Indiana Main Street program; a downtown development program may occur some time in the future.

Constructing a tunnel is impossible because of the level of the water table. The town manager of Middlebury has met with INDOT about the feasibility of other options, and possible ways forward have been discussed. This goal does not pertain to Bristol.

Although this goal has been established, there has been little movement as the project relies on stakeholder and public support

The feasibility has been established, and space located. Currently, Martin's is looking at creating a location near the Pumpkinvine. Bristol does not have a desire for a grocery store, as they already have a Harding's in town.

# ACTION AGENDA AUDIT – NAPPANEE & WAKARUSA

Code	Key Recommendation	Current Challenges and Next Steps	Active Champion(s)	Timeframe	Status
<b>NW1</b>	<b>Build multi-use bike and walking trail from Nappanee to Wakarusa</b>	This project would benefit from community enthusiasm and support.	Wakarusa Town Manager and Town of Nappanee	Mid-term Project	To be started
<b>NW2</b>	<b>Create a community calendar (with a focus on increased advertising)</b>	Celebrate.	Town of Nappanee	Short-term Project	Complete
<b>NW3</b>	<b>Rehabilitate and/or repurpose existing buildings</b>	Continue current efforts.	None	Mid-term Project	In progress
<b>NW4</b>	<b>Create new or re-purposed affordable housing</b>	A task force needs to be convened to meet about possible solutions.	None	Mid-term Project	To be started
<b>NW5</b>	<b>Create gateway improvements</b>	Continue current efforts, solicit community enthusiasm and support.	Towns of Nappanee and Wakarusa	Short-term Project	In progress
<b>NW6</b>	<b>Create adult programming and activities</b>	This project would benefit from community enthusiasm and support.	None	Short-term Project	In progress
<b>NW7</b>	<b>Prepare a tourism and restaurant strategy</b>	This project would benefit from community enthusiasm and support.	None	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>NW8</b>	<b>Develop a neighborhood activation plan</b>	This project would benefit from community enthusiasm and support.	None	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>NW9</b>	<b>Launch incentives for existing businesses and diversity</b>	Continue current efforts.	None	Short-term Project	To be started
<b>NW10</b>	<b>Create an Action Committee for Wa-Nee initiatives (Wa-Nee 2020)</b>	Continue current efforts.	Wa-Nee 2020, Towns of Wakarusa and Nappanee	Short-term Project	In progress

**Status - narrative**

Discussions between the Wakarusa town manager and Nappanee mayor are ongoing.

The city of Nappanee launched a website with a community calendar and continue to offer enhancements to that calendar. The Elkhart County Communicators meets on a monthly basis with the goal of developing a unified communications and marketing procedure for the entire county.

The recent economic growth has meant that most vacant buildings have been redeveloped. Some highlights include Ruhe@152, a locally owned brewery and restaurant that will open in 2019, the Pretty Cakery and C&C Breakfast Co., and the expansion of Main Street Coffee House. The old Hartman building is being transformed into new apartments.

A task force needs to be convened to meet about possible solutions.

Concept signs have been developed, and discussions are ongoing.

Work is ongoing to create partnerships for programming.

A task force needs to be convened to meet about possible solutions.

A task force needs to be convened to meet about possible solutions.

Discussions are ongoing, but recent economic growth has reduced the need for incentives. Recent expansions include a new production facility built by the Aluminum Trailer Company, a new service center and campground built by Newmar, and the Sammlung Platz event center built by Kountry Wood Products.

The first major Wa-Nee initiative is 'Wa-Nee 2020'. The project raised money and has started construction on soccer fields and a new Boys & Girls Club. The soccer fields are expected to be complete yet this year. Meanwhile, ground has been broken for the new Boys & Girls Club, with projected completion of summer 2019. Phase 3 of the project would follow after summer 2019.





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# **TASK FORCES AND PROJECTS**

## COMMUNICATIONS TASK FORCE | BY TERRY MARK, ECCVB

Vibrant Communities communications have served to support the underlying messages and themes of the movement. Like other aspects of Vibrant Communities, these activities have evolved to meet the particular needs of that stage. The primary channels by which Vibrant Communities communicates to Elkhart County stakeholders are: (1) website; (2) social media; and (3) email.

At the outset, communications activities served to educate residents and community leaders about quality of place and its significant role in economic growth and prosperity. It also played a significant role in rallying a groundswell of community support that resulted in high levels of engagement in the Community Conversations process. This level of engagement established a high level of confidence that the Action Agenda accurately reflected the thoughts of Elkhart County's populace.

Through implementation activities, the website has served as an important repository of information such as the Action Agenda and communicating updates and the development of new programs such as the Little BIG Idea Grant. These actions demonstrate the movement's accountability to Elkhart County and those who have contributed to the Vibrant Communities movement.

Social media channels, primarily Facebook, has assumed the role of community cheerleader. Posts have celebrated achievements across Elkhart County and established our connection to the wider regional activities of the South Bend Elkhart Region.

Content created for the website and shared via social media have been a critical driver of traffic to the Vibrant Communities website, helping to maintain continued awareness of the movement. The Love Where You Live campaign has highlighted stories of individuals who contribute in large and small ways and have reinforced the positive messages of the movement. The 365 Vibrant People of Elkhart County campaign will carry this message forward in 2019.

A monthly email that provides updates on Vibrant Communities, including opportunities to engage and participate, has enjoyed high open rates and click-through rates, demonstrating that the movement continues to motivate.

# ELKHART COUNTY ARTS ALLIANCE

The Elkhart County Arts Alliance mission is to “help county artists and musicians to become more vibrant, viable, visible and vested in the public realm, by coalescing Elkhart County art and music interests.” Starting the Alliance was one of the items listed on the Vibrant Communities Action agenda.

The not-for-profit group will help formalize, strengthen and continue grassroots efforts that have been underway throughout the area. Often people are unaware of those with similar interests or do not know about available opportunities. An established network is able to better conceive and implement art-related initiatives and attract funding by demonstrating greater collaboration. The organization is putting greater focus on art in the public realm.

Building upon the success of Arts on Main’s art and music focused programs (which form the initial basis of an expanding operation), The Elkhart County Arts Alliance, Inc. will help Elkhart County artists and musicians to become more:

**VIBRANT:** increasing the frequency and breadth of art and music events in the public realm, through programming and education.

**VIABLE:** offering artists and musicians more income opportunities from works sold, from teaching and performance fees; also offering guidance in promoting and marketing their work.

**VISIBLE:** raising the profile of the arts through a wide variety of traditional and social media outlets; communicating that the presence of multiple arts disciplines, arts commerce and instruction, are essential to expanding quality-of-life amenities for Elkhart County.

**VESTED:** coalescing art and music organizations from among private groups, artist guilds, institutions, non-profits and other organizations to foster greater cooperation, better communication and to identify and elevate creative expression in the local marketplace.

The Alliance has already undertaken several activities in the city of Elkhart and begun cooperative efforts throughout the county.

# ELKHART COUNTY WATERWAYS ALLIANCE | BY ALLISON TURNER, ENFOCUS SENIOR FELLOW

The mission of the Elkhart County Waterways Alliance is to promote and enhance recreation and sustainability of connected waterways in Elkhart County through improved access, management, education and advocacy. The Alliance was formed in December 2017, and consists of members from local municipalities, private sector groups, and relevant nonprofit interest groups. Many of these organizations are already doing excellent work related to the waterways; the Alliance simply seeks to help organizations coordinate efforts and share their progress with a larger audience.

The Alliance has five short-term goals, which align well with the waterways related items in the Action Agenda. Those goals include developing a print Waterways Resource Guide for Elkhart County before summer 2019, inventorying existing waterways-related assets in Elkhart County by creating an asset map, developing a maintenance strategy for Elkhart County's waterways to improve safety for recreationalists, and becoming a clearinghouse for information on local waterways through the creation of a website and other materials.

In the long-term, the Alliance hopes to implement numerous best practices focused on education, conservation, community support, and planning with the goal of eventually becoming a National Recreation Trail or a National Water Trail.

# ELKHART COUNTY COLLABORATION | BY COMMISSIONER SUZIE WEIRICK

The very first item on the Action Agenda is “Improve communication between organizations, local governments and other community sectors.” Building an environment that is conducive to collaboration is not simple. However, the benefits are considerable.

Over the past several years, attempts have been made to have various entities come together to address issues of importance. Many have been successful. Of course, we can and should do even better.

The inclusion of paths is one big issue that is attached to our road construction, redevelopment commission and parks department at the County level. Not only have paths come up with our Action Agenda in 2016 but they remain on the forefront of folks’ minds as they were the top request for the County Parks Department to include in their newest long-term plan.

The collaboration continues as the Commissioners and the County Parks are helping coordinate conversations between citizen groups, the engineering and construction requirements as facilities by our Highway Department and the vision of the Redevelopment Commission. As paths continue to get requested in specific locations, the Parks Department is helping by taking final ownership of the “linear parks” and establishing long-term maintenance plans that include staff and equipment. This is just one issue that continues to gain attention where multiple groups have come together to make it a reality.

Additionally, beautification continues to be a concern. All of us who love Elkhart County want to take pride in where we live. To do this, sometimes we get to talk about making sure grass is cut, more plants are in place and maintained in medians, and bridges have some aesthetic value. But beautification isn’t just roses. Sometimes we have to have discussions about the ugliest of things to get to the positive end we desire.

Talking trash is one of these examples. In this case, the County Commissioners pulled together many elected officials who serve locally and at the State House to discuss ways to help eliminate trash and showcase our great county. We were even able to pull together businesses, including trash haulers, to have a discussion on the problem and ways to improve.

If you notice as you drive past a garbage truck, they are likely to have the tarps pulled over their haul and secured to their truck so trash doesn’t fly off onto our roads. You may hear about some state legislation this session to address the issue as well. The County’s Landfill is working on different programs including recycling curriculum to help reduce trash. And finally, hopefully you will notice some other attempts at communication about what you can do to eliminate trash. This all goes to show we all need to work together to get the job done.

# THE ELKHART HEALTH FITNESS AQUATICS AND COMMUNITY CENTER | BY SHELLEY MOORE

In the fall of 2013, the board of directors of the former Elkhart YMCA (later named The Center) engaged in a strategic growth planning process to put ideas to paper and pitch a project that initially was not well received by stakeholders. The proposed \$32 million project aimed to combine a Beacon Health and Fitness center with the high schools' needs for a new pool, along with the need for a new facility to house continued community programming. The project was initially viewed as too large and not feasible.

It was a collaboration that was difficult for people to imagine. How do such diverse organizations collaborate to leverage the costs of managing a pool? None of the organizations were fully utilizing all the available time of their current pools, yet their individual operational expenses were grand. The Center's leader, Tom Housand, forged the planning process ahead.

In the spring of 2015, reality struck hard. A power surge at The Center caused \$70,000 of utility damage in the midst of memberships falling below 1,000. The tough decision, just as they faced and managed to avoid in 2011, was once again upon them. They had to regrettably close the facility and hope the planning process could reveal a newer, brighter future for the community organization.

At that point, the project's largest, individual, private donors, Sharon and Pete Liegl, clearly required that the facility be a regional, state-of-the-art, aquatics competition attraction. They also required that all stakeholders, including major donors, the schools, the health system, the community foundation, and the city be fully committed before they would personally commit to any gift. The Community Foundation of Elkhart County backed their challenge and committed \$10 million to the project. This engaged Beacon who committed \$16.2 million for a health and fitness center. The schools diverted approximately half of their slated new pool construction fund, \$6 million, to the capital project. Then, the City of Elkhart committed \$2 million, and the Regional Cities Initiative topped off the public and institutional funding with \$9 million.

As the organizations fully engaged in the programming process, the project unfolded to be the 170,000-square-foot facility that is currently under construction. It will be a state-of-the-art competition pool with a Beacon Health and Fitness center and will include space for community programming. The \$69.5 million project includes a \$10 million endowment that will contribute \$500,000 to the operating budget annually. The schools have signed a long-term lease for their use of the facility for various aquatics-related programming. Bethel College will also lease lanes to premiere their new aquatics program.

The scale of the project has left over \$26 million for the community to raise. Amazingly, all funds will be pledged by the time of the June 2019 opening making this project Elkhart's largest public-private venture to date.

Now over 60 percent complete, this project has been the impetus for further public-private investments by many of the same private donors who will also create the River District. The City of Elkhart has formally committed \$30 million supporting infrastructure developments in the River District, including new tree-lined streets, park enhancements, additional lighting, river access, and investment-ready land that will ultimately bring approximately \$300 million of development to Elkhart. Fifty percent of the River District is on track to be constructed within the next three years.

What started as a struggle to provide a community swimming pool has evolved into an economic, placemaking source that has started to reinvent how people see and live in the City of Elkhart. At the core of the resolve is strong, public-private community leadership that has worked diligently to collaborate and be accountable and transparent to achieving steadfast results. These projects have inspired further developments throughout the city, which we foresee will continue to transform Elkhart into a city that will economically thrive, attract new industry and talent, and be equipped to adapt and assail through inevitable future economic challenges.

Those involved in this project continue to ask, if this can happen, how else can we apply the same energy, focus, commitment and leadership to other aspects of our community?



## **GOSHEN THEATER |** BY EVERETT THOMAS, CHAIR, GOSHEN THEATER BOARD

The Goshen Theater is the last of what had been four historic theaters in Goshen and currently is viable for movies, plays, comedians, concerts and more. In August 2017, the board of directors and fundraising task force members launched a capital campaign to raise \$5.2 million for the first phase of what will eventually be a complete overhaul of the building and include an endowment to ensure a stable business plan.

Aly Sterling, fundraising consultants hired for the campaign, projected that a campaign to raise \$5.2 million would take up to 18 months. Fourteen months into the campaign the total of contributions, grants and pledges is slightly more than \$4.8 million. We hope to raise the remaining \$400,000 by January 2019.

The phase one project includes significant changes to the building to improve audience member experiences. This begins with an expanded lobby and bar/lounge area, an elevator with stops on all four floors, new code-compliant restrooms throughout the building, new infrastructure including electrical, HVAC and plumbing systems. In addition, improvements will be made to stage lighting, audio and under stage dressing rooms. Construction will begin in May 2019 after the River Bend Film Festival.

## **LITTLE BIG IDEA GRANTS** | BY STEVE GRUBER

One of the best ideas to emerge from the Vibrant Communities movement is actually a little one. Actually, it's a bunch of little ideas that have done a lot to make Elkhart County more interesting and dynamic.

Starting in summer of 2017, Little Big Idea Grants have been offered to those who live and work in Elkhart County. With financial support from the Community Foundation of Elkhart County and the Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau, people can receive up to \$1,000 to help them do fun, cool things. Since that time, LBI grants have helped paint rocks, build mini-libraries, run pumpkin races, start a podcast, grow gardens and host a slime party. Little Big Ideas have promoted good feelings, help share ideas and bring smiles to thousands of people throughout the county.

The application process is open to all who want to do something in Elkhart County. Grants are not given as a donation to a larger project, to help start a business or to pay applicants. Applications are diligently reviewed and responded to on a personal basis. Those involved in the process genuinely care about helping people bring their big ideas to life. Awards are made monthly.

Grants are for a one time shot. Repeating the same activity means getting funding elsewhere. That has already happened because the idea really took off.

You can find out more by looking for Little Big Ideas on the Vibrant Communities website.

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## **365 DAYS OF THE VIBRANT PEOPLE OF ELKHART COUNTY** | BY BIL MURRAY

More than having places to see and things to do, it is the people who live and work in Elkhart County who make our communities come alive. It seems like everywhere you go, you will find someone with a friendly face, a warm smile and a willingness to lend a hand. Our aim is to identify and recognize some of those folks throughout 2019.

Beginning January 1 and continuing each day throughout the year, we will celebrate an individual who lives or works in Elkhart County who have the knack for bringing a joy to others. We are looking for those who epitomize enthusiasm, vitality and pride in their community. It could be the teller at the bank, the volunteer who helps in the classroom, the kid who has a knack for getting others involved. We are looking for those who represent what is good about every aspect of Elkhart County. We will be open to all nominations and inclusive of those we distinguish as one of the 365.

There is no one thing that makes someone a vibrant person. You know who they are. They have that distinct combination of traits that makes them energetic, upbeat and fun. And, they deserve to be recognized for how they make others feel.

Those who are being recognized will have been nominated by a friend, co-worker or family member. Submissions can be made on the Vibrant Community website or at events throughout the county. The process is simple and easy. We just want to know what makes the person special in your eyes.

Every morning we will announce that day's Vibrant Person on the Vibrant Communities website. We will also share that information on our social media channels.

# THE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES PLACEMAKING ACADEMY | BY BIL MURRAY

One thing we have learned over the past few years is that placemaking done well requires dedicated people who are committed to making things come to life. We have also learned that most successful placemaking projects follow a process that has several stages and involves a number of specific actions. We have realized the value of understanding that process and incorporating tools and techniques along the way. That is why the Vibrant Communities movement will be launching its Placemaking Academy in 2019.

Still in the planning stages, the Placemaking Academy will feature workshops, toolkits, facilitation and support for individuals and groups who want to make the impact of their projects on quality of place stronger and better received.

Look for more information about the Placemaking Academy on the Vibrant Communities website.



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# GOALS



## 2019 – 2020 GOALS: THE MOVEMENT IS MOVING AHEAD

Movements that have the greatest impact need to have staying power. They are able to evolve and sustain their momentum.

The Vibrant Communities movement is at a point where it is time to expand our scope. While we remain committed to executing the Action Agenda, now is time to take on some new and different things.

Last Summer, the Organizing Group took time to look at what's next for Vibrant Communities. We spent time talking through why we are undertaking this broad reaching initiative, what we should be doing and where we should concentrate our efforts.

We identified seven goals that, as a Movement, we want to pursue. We know they are broad in nature and that there is no single accomplishment that will designate their achievement. Rather, we want them to serve as guiding lights for the next couple

of years. They are intended to provide direction and not define an endpoint.

We also realized these goals were meaningless without describing some specific actions that needed to be taken. We have generated a list of things we want to do. Some are very clear and steps have already been taken to make them happen. Others are less well defined and ideas and resources are still being corralled to make them come to fruition. Several require considerable planning to execute and will take a while before they even get started.

What matters most, we think, is that these goals provide ample opportunities for people with different interests and skills to find things they can do and get involved. The Vibrant Communities movement gives people throughout the county a chance to make their efforts count.



# GOAL: INCREASE AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF PLACEMAKING AND QUALITY OF PLACE.

Placemaking today is both an iterative and interactive process involving several groups of stakeholders. This includes designers, developers, government officials and ordinary citizens. The more people understand placemaking, the more likely they are to provide meaningful input and be a source of influence.

Making places come alive is not aimed exclusively at public spaces. Understanding placemaking will help those who own shops, restaurants and bars and other venues make their businesses more attractive to customers. This, in turn, will help them grow and sustain their businesses.

Awareness of placemaking has a broader

impact as well. The more aware of the importance of quality of place all of us are, the more we are apt to do things that contribute to making our communities better.

With these considerations in mind, the Vibrant Communities movement is undertaking two significant projects that will come to fruition in 2019:

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## TWO SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS FOR 2019

- 1 Creating a placemaking “academy” to provide training and support** for those who are involved in a place-making process. This will include workshops, toolkits and other resources.
- 2 Instituting a distinct set of vibrancy metrics and measurements** to assess vibrancy in Elkhart County. The project is a collaborative effort including professors from Indiana University South Bend working with area professionals and volunteers. The project is in the initial research phase. Public introduction is targeted for the summer of 2019.

## GOAL: INCREASE COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PLACEMAKING AND QUALITY OF PLACE THROUGHOUT ELKHART COUNTY

One great thing about placemaking is the low cost of entry. Another is that there is so much that can be done. The more everyone in Elkhart County understands the concepts and principle of placemaking, the more we can do to make our communities attractive and inspiring.

We understand not everyone has the

skills, resources and desire to spearhead a major placemaking project. Most of us, however, have what it takes to improve a neighborhood streetscape, make a local playground a little nicer or start a community garden. We want to encourage folks from all over the county get more involved in projects that improve quality of place.



## GOAL: CELEBRATE VIBRANT PEOPLE, PLACES AND IDEAS

Vibrant communities need people who are lively, upbeat and make things happen. It takes “yay-sayers” not naysayers to make things happen. Fortunately, there are an abundance of people like that in Elkhart County.

Our aim is to identify and celebrate those who are making this a better place to live and visit. While they are important, the movers and shakers are not who we are looking for. Rather, we want to find those individuals who are doing the little things that bring joy

to the lives of others. We want to recognize them and celebrate what they are doing.

We also want to do more to call out those places that add to the vibrancy of Elkhart County. So often, small business owners are passionate about what they are doing. Their passion is often contagious and is felt by their patrons. This makes those places integral parts of the county’s social infrastructure. They are vitally important and we want their owners and employees to be recognized for what they are doing.



## GOAL: LAUNCH A COUNTY WIDE FRAMEWORK FOR MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

It is widely recognized that the communities of Elkhart County each have their own distinct offerings and identities. What is not so clear is how all the pieces fit together.

Starting in the fall of 2017, under the direction of the Elkhart County, IN Convention and Visitors Bureau (ECCVB),

a market research project was initiated. Its purpose was to identify the attributes and characteristics that were found throughout the county and learn what makes Elkhart County unique. This would be incorporated into a framework for marketing and communication.

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## GOAL: INCREASE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS AND YOUTH

In 2017, a survey was conducted to help assess perceptions of those who live in Elkhart County. There was a distinct difference of opinions when comparing results of high school seniors and those over 30. Adults felt a strong sense of community, young people did not. Adults described the county as “safe.” The high schools’ kids agreed, but they also said it was “boring.”

The lack of perceived vibrancy and things to do is one of the reasons many young people to move away. It is also why attracting young talent is difficult.

Elkhart County has been fortunate to have so many dedicated and bighearted citizens. They been generous with their time, talent and money. Collectively, they are a force in helping our communities with projects and programs. To a great extent, we have come to rely on them to get things done. We also recognize that they are getting older. They will leave a big void when they are gone.

This is why it is so important to get young adults and youth involved in placemaking now. If they are inspired and empowered,

they can help make get things going that are consistent with their desires. Participating in placemaking projects while they are young, also prepares them for greater involvement as they grow older. Encouraging the civic involvement of younger people has the potential to provide numerous and broad reaching benefits.

We recognize that making younger people motivated to participate in the Vibrant Communities movement is not something that is quick and easy. While some steps have already been taken to get them involved, the importance of doing this successfully makes a quick and easy approach undesirable.

Thinking through what we want to accomplish, how to do it and getting ready for a more intensive effort to inspire youth and young adults will take some time. Thoughtful consideration and deliberation is called for.

Look for more activity related to this effort over the next few years.

## GOAL: SUPPORT THE INCREASE OF “FUN THINGS TO DO”

No place can be called Vibrant without having cool places to go to and enjoyable things to do. In Elkhart County there are lots of things going on, no matter what your taste. For example, there are ample outdoor activities throughout all four seasons. At the same, there are plenty of options for those inclined to stay inside.

Visitors to Elkhart County are impressed with the variety of options available here. They recognize and appreciate

that the balance between urban and rural life we have here provides an environment for entertainment and enjoyment that is quite distinct.

While visitors see and like what Elkhart County has to offer, too many of those who live here are unaware of them. Others just aren't inclined to take advantage. This goal is not just about offering more. It also means promoting what we have in Elkhart County and getting residents to appreciate them.

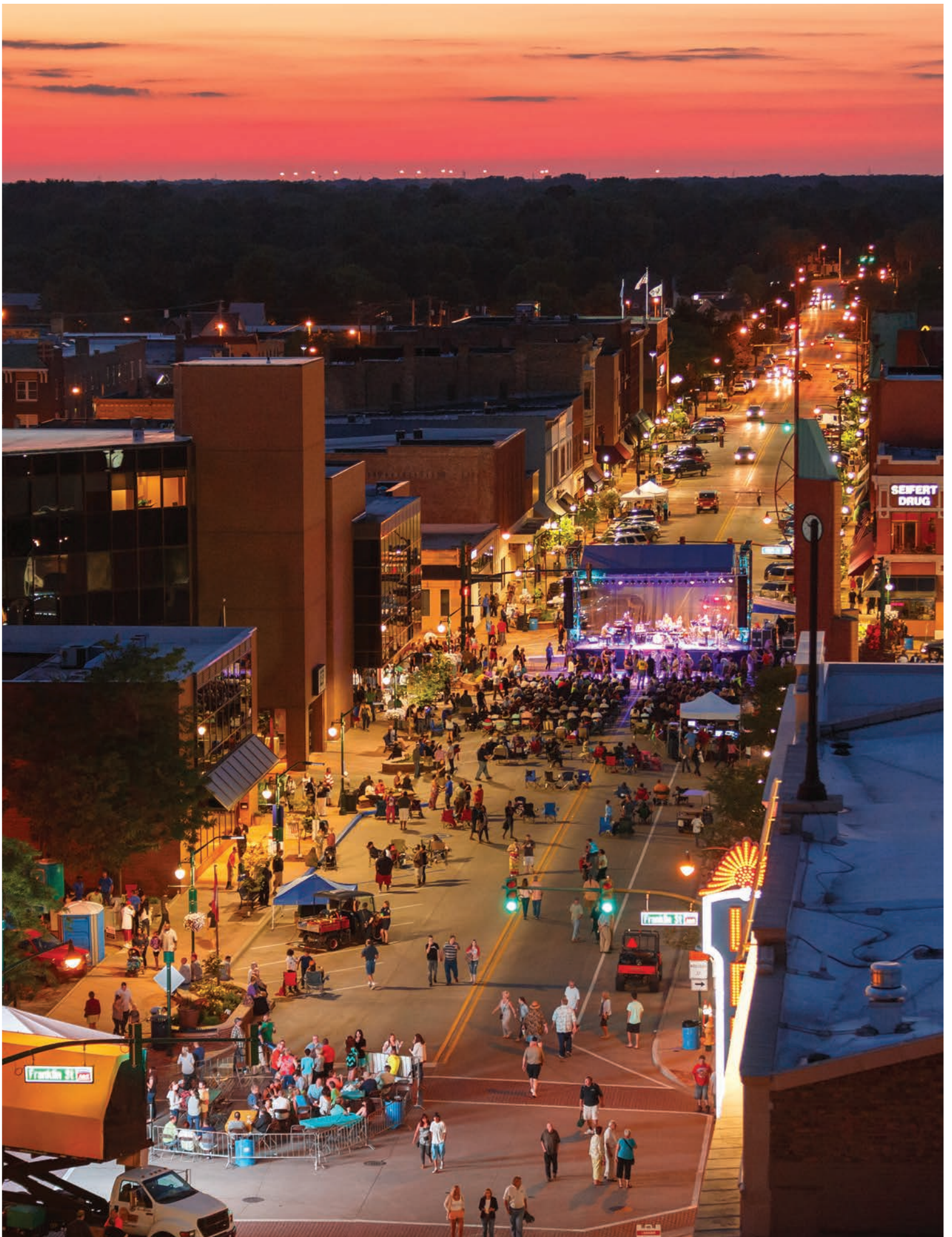
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## GOAL: CONTINUE PROGRESS ON PURSUING THE ACTION AGENDA

From early on, the Action Agenda has been an integral part of the Vibrant Communities movement. It has provided a way to identify what can and should be done throughout the county.

The Agenda audit has given us a useful assessment of the progress that has been

made. We celebrate what has been done and we are pleased with how ongoing items are being addressed. We also remain strong in our belief that efforts should continue to be made to pursue the remaining agenda items. We are committed to supporting that work.







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# **MOVING FORWARD**

## MOVING FORWARD

The Vibrant Communities movement in Elkhart County has demonstrated its value and worth to the community. Since 2016, Elkhart County residents have accepted the importance of quality of place, contributing in meaningful and tangible ways to placemaking initiatives and helping launch an initial set of high-value projects in all our communities. We are in a strong position to build on this momentum and accelerate the impact of these initial investments.

“Quality of place” is established firmly in the vocabulary of many civic leaders, becoming an important factor in making choices about plans and investments in development. Many residents understand the connection between quality of place and community building, talent attraction, talent retention, and economic development. The considerable progress on almost all of the original Action Agenda items is just the beginning.

Change that is both far-reaching and long-lasting takes time, and Vibrant Communities of Elkhart County is very much a work in process. There remain plenty of opportunities to make Elkhart County a more desirable place to live, work, learn and play. The Vibrant Communities movement has created an environment that is effective for generating ideas and putting them into action. Our aim is to get more people involved and start the next series of projects. We are committed to supporting placemaking and those things that improve quality of place. In these ways, we will inspire people to love Elkhart County.

