

Executive Summary

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir people’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that your children and grandchildren are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.”

*Daniel H. Burnham, 1910
Architect, City Planner and Author: The Plan of Chicago*

Introduction

Plan-it Allen! is our citizen-powered initiative to develop a new Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan for Allen County and the City of Fort Wayne – the first-ever, joint effort in our community’s history. This once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the future culminates in 2007.

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the official policy document for addressing issues relating to growth and development in Allen County, its cities, towns and communities; and the City of Fort Wayne. The Plan provides a framework for future decision making grounded in extensive community involvement and a solid analysis of major changes to the area’s natural, man-made and cultural environments, as well as the demographics of the area.

Comprehensive Plan Mandate and Description

To better understand what a Comprehensive Plan is and why Allen County and the City of Fort Wayne undertook this effort, the formal mandate and description for it are presented:

- A Comprehensive Plan is a land use and development plan. It lays out the “vision” for the future growth and development of the community, what the community will be like and look like in the future. It then serves as a guide for community decision making, and provides policy and program direction to help realize the community’s vision.
- A Comprehensive Plan is a document, or series of documents, prepared under the leadership of a Plan Commission or Plan Commissions, with input from citizens and community leaders. The Plan sets forth policies for the future development of the entire community. It is based upon inventory, analysis and evaluation of issues such as land use, population, economy, community facilities, housing, natural resources, utilities and transportation.
- Indiana State law says that the primary goal of a Comprehensive Plan is the “promotion of public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, or the general welfare, and for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of development,” – Indiana Code 36-7-4-501.
- In Indiana, a Comprehensive Plan is required to include three elements: 1) A statement of objectives for future development; 2) Statement(s) of policy for land use development; and 3) Statement(s) of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures and public utilities.
- A typical Comprehensive Plan attempts to forecast community needs, define a 20-year community vision and establish policies to achieve our goals. It is not a plan for government consolidation, a program plan, a financial plan or a business plan. It should be reviewed and updated every five years.

The Contents of the Plan

Plan-it Allen! is organized into 10 chapters. Each chapter reflects one of the Plan elements or subject areas: Land Use; Economic Development; Housing and Neighborhoods; Transportation; Environmental Stewardship; Community Identity and Appearance; Community Facilities; Utilities; Grabill, Huntertown, Monroeville and Woodburn; and Implementation. The individual chapters outline topic-related recommendations, and each is organized into the following sections: Policy Foundation of the Plan, Key Findings, Goal, and Objectives and Strategies.

A Plan Shaped by Community Involvement

Throughout every step of the process, Plan-it Allen! has been shaped by the people of Allen County, its cities, towns and communities; and Fort Wayne. In hundreds of community meetings, open houses, workshops, speaking engagements, focus groups and surveys; through the Web site, personal conversations and media coverage; the ideas and insight of the public – you – have been continually gathered and incorporated into this Plan.

Plan-it Allen! has been the culmination of a three-year planning process that included the participation, collaboration and consensus of Allen County, the City of Fort Wayne, local city and town government officials, boards and commissions, and citizens throughout the community.

The process itself has been directed by the 16-member community steering committee known as the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Its members were selected specifically to be representative of Allen County's and Fort Wayne's many unique constituencies and diversity of voices.

Four series of public meetings, nearly 60 in total, have been held countywide over the course of the process to engage residents and to ensure opportunities for full involvement. These meetings generated thousands of comments, ideas and suggestions that, in turn, became the basis for the Plan.

Amplifying participation opportunities, a 150-member Vision Work Group was called together for several sessions to help craft the Plan's vision and goals.

To build the Plan's baseline of in-depth research and statistical analysis, 10 panels of community experts, the Element Work Groups, worked to add specialized knowledge to each of the Plan's chapters both in the existing conditions phase and throughout the writing of the Plan. Upon completion of the draft Plan, nearly 40 meetings with key stakeholder groups took place to refine and align the content.

Throughout the process, the Plan-it Allen! Web site and Speakers' Bureau also have been continually available to make the project accessible to the public at all times. The Web site will remain a key informational tool moving ahead: www.PlanYourCommunity.org.

Why Allen County and Fort Wayne Need a New Plan Now

Allen County's current Plan is nearly 30 years old and the City of Fort Wayne's Plan is well over 20 years old. It is time. Our community has changed dramatically. Our lives are interconnected and interdependent. By working together, we can build a healthy, livable and competitive community as a whole, in all its parts and for all our citizens.

The Purpose of Plan-it Allen!

Plan-it Allen! defines a new vision and an inclusive roadmap for our community's future growth and development. It will give us an up-to-date policy guide for encouraging high-quality development and for preparing our community for the changes the future will bring.

Equally significant, as we change, the Plan will help us preserve our distinct and diverse community character – all the things that make our cities, towns, suburbs and rural areas unique and desirable places to live, work and raise our families. The Plan will be a fundamental tool to realizing our dreams.

What This Plan Means to Us

Plan-it Allen! is about building community one unique and lasting neighborhood at a time. The Plan's purpose is to lay out a path to sustainability, to preserve and enhance our quality of life and natural environment, and to position Allen County and Fort Wayne as regionally strong and competitive in the global economy.

For the first time in our community's proud history, the public and private sectors will be working off the same page – a common Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan. The Plan's shared vision and policy framework will establish a unified approach to infrastructure expansion, economic development and neighborhood enhancement efforts. It won't alter the character or integrity of our small towns, rural countryside or urban neighborhoods, but it will reduce jurisdictional differences in planning and development that cost time and money. It will also send a message to the world around us: this is a community that is ready to grow in a way that builds on our strengths and our most appealing attributes.

The Plan's benefits are many:

- A clear community vision created through community consensus, one that captures the values, goals and objectives of the community.
- An up-to-date policy guide for encouraging quality physical and economic development.
- A competitive community prepared for the changes the future will bring.
- Preservation of our community character.
- An enhanced quality of life.
- Efficient, coordinated use of public resources.
- Advancement of actions that will be in the long-term best interests of the community.
- Application of innovative planning, development and growth concepts.

The Impact of the Plan

As a taxpayer, the cohesive vision and coordinated goals of the Plan will mean more cost-effective, responsive community decision making. As a homeowner, the Plan's Conceptual Development Map will promote informed choice for homebuyers and protect lifestyle options. For project developers, the Plan will foster efficient project management and growth that is desirable for the community long term. For businesses, the Plan will cultivate an environment in which businesses and good jobs can grow and thrive. For every resident, the Plan's thoughtful stewardship of the land will enhance our quality of life, preserve and protect our natural resources, and strengthen our physical surroundings.

How the Plan Is Different

Plan-it Allen! has been a pioneering venture for Allen County and Fort Wayne. It is not a one-size-fits-all initiative. It is a first in our collective history. It presents a shared vision and goals for the common ground that is our home. But it also recognizes the variety and unique character of the community's many parts. It is a Plan that is designed to work for all jurisdictions.

The Plan's principles, goals and objectives offer real guidance for land use and development decisions – how we will grow. The Plan's Conceptual Development Map gives clear geographic direction on land use and development decisions – where we will grow. Together, the two components of the Plan signify a new approach to growth. The end result: a more proactive, dynamic form of growth, one in keeping with contemporary lifestyles, yet constantly anticipating demographic changes and trends; one that invests in our economic vitality while honoring the natural environment and community characteristics that give us pride of place.

Why We Choose to Grow in a New Way

Plan-it Allen! brings an integrated approach to planning and development. Often in the past, land use and development decisions were made in isolation, one jurisdiction from another, one department from another. A road project might have been built for safety and efficiency, without considering the impact on surrounding neighborhoods, the environment, utilities, the sense of place, pedestrian movement and other factors. Now each project will be examined through the filter of all of the Plan's elements, principles and goals; how they interconnect and relate not just to one project, but to our greater community.

With its communitywide perspective, moving forward, the Plan will help us institute the policies that will ensure we can accomplish our goals, and actually create the community we envision. The full impact, however, will be seen over time as the implementation process begins to unfold. Already, the concepts contained in the Plan have begun to influence decision making. Even now, we are working to make our community more walkable, more connected, more welcoming, better able to compete for good jobs and new businesses.

The Role of the Plan and How It Will Be Used

Plan-it Allen! is **advisory** in nature. It lays out a vision for the future growth and development of the community, what the community will be like and look like in the future. At the vision and policy level, it will serve as a guide for community decision making. It addresses both where we will grow and how we will grow.

Communities should strive for concurrence with the Plan in rezoning or development approvals. Plan-it Allen!'s goals and policies aim for an "ideal scenerio." These high aspirations mean that sometimes different objectives and strategies may conflict with one another, requiring careful balance. As such, this Plan supplies guidance in the decision-making process, but it is not the final word.

Plan-it Allen! will be used by the community as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment and capital improvements, including: community utility-system improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting the growth of the community.

The Plan plays five primary roles to help our community achieve its goals:

1. **Negotiation Agent.** Land use and development decisions often require finding solutions between conflicting or competing interests, for example, the needs of an individual property owner versus the desires of the surrounding residents, or the aspirations of one jurisdiction or department over another. Through its direction, the Plan will create a path to reaching negotiated decisions.
2. **Policy Recommendation.** Local elected officials are frequently called upon to make land use and development decisions. In its guidance role, the Plan will aid in the setting of public policy by providing support, assistance, recommendations and counsel to decision makers.
3. **Information Management.** As our society becomes increasingly more complex, both the demand for and the supply of data have grown exponentially. Demographic, social, economic, land use and environmental trends and statistics are crucial to reaching informed, objective choices. Through the Plan and the support of the professional staff administering it, the collection and management of information can be effectively handled, making this key resource to decision making more accessible, useful and meaningful.

4. **Change Agent.** The Plan can aid the community in anticipating change and preparing for the future. Whether in the identification of trends that may have an adverse effect on area quality of life or in spotting opportunities to increase our economic growth, the Plan can be used as a catalyst to support leaders as they seek to spur action. This change agent role is especially important within our highly competitive global economy.
5. **Program Management.** The healthy, sustainable physical development of the community often necessitates significant investment of public dollars or the development of collaborative public-private sector projects. The Plan serves as a tool to guarantee that public dollars are spent wisely and that the programs engendered are effectively organized and executed to meet community goals and needs.

Key Findings

The existing conditions analysis forms the Plan's factual foundation for building future policy. It serves as the intelligence-gathering phase of the planning process and has been designed to inform the more intuitive public input. This component is more than a snapshot of the community's current situation or an elaboration of key indicators of variance. It paints a picture of how Allen County and Fort Wayne have changed, what the patterns of change are and what trends are emerging. It also compares both jurisdictions to other peer jurisdictions throughout the country to better understand relative similarities or differences. An important note: Current circumstances and trends tell us what is, but they do not indicate the only direction each jurisdiction can take. They give insight and reveal opportunities to change course and fashion a better future through more strategic decision making.

The existing conditions analysis is composed of nine separate components corresponding to the elements of the Plan: Demographics, Land Use, Housing and Neighborhoods, Economics, Transportation, Utilities, Environmental Stewardship, Community Facilities, and Community Identity and Appearance. A summary of each element's Key Findings appears within each Plan chapter.

A brief summary of the Existing Conditions Report, completed in 2005, is as follows:

- In 2025, there will be a nearly equal number of people in every age group.
- Residents age 65-plus have increased 45.5 percent since 1970.
- Foreign-born residents are the fastest-growing community segment.
- When it comes to economic development, in a comparison with peer communities, we are holding our own.
- Agriculture occupies 65.3 percent of our total land area in the county. Single-family housing occupies 14.7 percent.
- The combined total land area needed in 2025 for the three, major land uses will be just over 22,500 acres. By category, residential is 25,790 housing units or approximately 12,100 acres, industrial is 28,330,000 square feet of industrial building area or approximately 2,400 acres, and commercial and institutional are 81,746,000 square feet of building space or an estimated 8,000 acres.
- Per household land consumption is nearly three times more outside the City of Fort Wayne than within it.
- In 2025, Allen County's population is projected to be 410,349 persons.
- Non-family households (no spouse or dependent children) represent 33 percent of all households.
- From 1990 to 2000, for every new household created, builders produced 1.35 new housing units.
- Female-headed households with children and no spouse grew 37 percent over the past 10 years.
- Most of the forested river corridors in the county have been removed.

- Our three rivers are our primary character-defining feature, the one item that ties city and county together.
- Utility availability, especially sanitary sewer service, is the key driver for new land development.
- Water quality, stormwater drainage and sewage issues recognize no political boundaries and need regional coordination.
- Transportation improvements lag behind development, creating challenges.
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are inadequate and not readily accessible.
- By 2025, Allen County/Fort Wayne will need 1,223 more acres of parkland.
- School choices often motivate housing choices, affecting both.

Guiding Principles

Part of the Plan's overarching structure, the guiding principles are statements of purpose to help in determining the quality, pattern and character of future development. They describe a new approach to development. As such, the principles, summarized below, are touchstones to aid in decision making:

- The visual character, historic features and natural assets inherent within the community should be retained and enhanced.
- Contiguous development and compatible patterns of development delineated by sound planning are the preferred forms of growth.
- Land use planning should shape the community's development framework with utilities, transportation, infrastructure and institutional decisions coordinated to support those land use objectives.
- Neighborhoods, downtowns, commercial centers and towns should be compact, pedestrian friendly and mixed used; and districts of single use should be the exception.
- Housing with a diversity of values and types should be encouraged to provide housing choices within neighborhoods and throughout the community.
- Infill development and revitalization initiatives should be encouraged.
- Mature neighborhoods should be stabilized, maintained and enhanced; and new suburban development should be encouraged to develop as planned neighborhoods.
- Civic, institutional and commercial activity should not be isolated in single-use districts, but be integrated into the neighborhood fabric.
- The use of open spaces, such as parks, plazas and squares, should be encouraged to promote gathering places within neighborhoods, downtowns, commercial centers and towns.
- Corridors and trails should be used to define and connect neighborhoods, commercial centers, downtowns and towns.
- A connective framework of transit, pedestrian and bicycle systems should be provided that allows alternative modes of travel in addition to motorized vehicles.
- Many activities of daily living should occur within walking distance of most dwellings, allowing independence from driving as the only means of travel.
- The interconnection of existing and new residential, commercial and industrial development should be encouraged.
- Each community or cluster of neighborhoods should have a well-defined edge and be interconnected wherever possible.
- The continued agricultural use of the county's most productive farmland should be encouraged.

Goals

The Comprehensive Plan has three key layers of policies: goals, objectives and strategies. Goals are the broadest policy statements and state a desired outcome in general terms. The goals have been developed by the Comprehensive Plan Committee and were derived from the ideas generated by the public through its wide-ranging participation. The Goals frame the development of the objectives and the subsequent strategies.

Objectives denote a more specific policy direction and help organize strategies. Strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete an objective – such as a program or project. Within the Plan, there are multiple objectives for each goal and multiple strategies for each objective. The recommendations for each element of the Plan contain all three policy layers. The Plan goals are as follows:

Land Use

Carefully planned, sustainable growth and efficient use of land resources through coordinated and quality development, revitalization and redevelopment which leads to improved community well-being.

Economic Development

A vibrant, innovative and diverse economy that balances existing business growth and new business attraction in a manner that produces secure, well-paying jobs; provides infrastructure improvements needed for economic development; promotes downtown revitalization; fosters operational efficiencies; and increases utilization of the airports.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods that are stable and diverse, providing a wide range of housing options, linking residents to a variety of land uses which meet the needs of the community.

Transportation

An integrated transportation system that ensures accessibility, safe and efficient movement and connectivity through all parts of the county and region; and accommodates a range of transportation choices such as public and paratransit, high-speed rail, pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular and horse-drawn.

Environmental Stewardship

A healthy, sustainable, and enjoyable environment with clean air and water, greenways and open spaces for residents, habitats for wildlife, protection from flooding, utilization of rivers, protection of other environmental assets (farmland, woodlands and wetlands), and promotion of a strong ethic among residents and businesses to control pollution and support environmental stewardship efforts.

Community Identity and Appearance

An attractive, vibrant community with a positive image and physical appearance in its rural areas, small towns, neighborhoods and downtowns that celebrates its heritage, diversity and waterways through ongoing quality development, historic preservation and neighborhood revitalization.

Community Facilities

Quality facilities that promote recreation and cultural enjoyment, ensure public health and safety, provide educational opportunities, and encourage tourism and investment; collectively building a thriving, accessible and welcoming community for all ages and backgrounds.

Utilities

Safe and abundant drinking water and regionalization of interests for improving regional water quality – such as reduction of failed septic systems and improved performance from sanitary sewers and stormwater facilities – that is expandable to meet demands and support community plans for growth.

Implementation

The success of a Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan is measured in terms of its implementation. Only when the recommendations in the Plan are translated into actions can the goals and policies within the Plan be realized.

To that end, an Implementation Matrix outlining action steps for all of the goals, objectives and strategies contained in the Plan has been prepared. The Matrix will be the tool to manage and ensure the Plan is used. Along with the action steps, the Matrix will identify the lead department or agency, timing and budget for each entry. Ongoing review by an Implementation Task Force is also proposed to monitor activity and maintain public accountability. Periodic progress reports to the public also will be issued along with ongoing communication efforts to keep residents, businesses and stakeholders involved throughout the life of the Plan.

The Plan will be updated every five years. If community circumstances change more rapidly, an update may be initiated in a shorter period of time.

This Plan is to be used by the community as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment and capital improvements, including: community utility-system improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting the growth of the community. The Plan will be employed in the development, evaluation and application of annual work programs and budgets, development approvals, coordinated capital improvement plans, economic incentives, and private development decisions, and to aid in the future interpretation of major issues that may arise, but are not explicitly addressed in the Plan.

Learn More About Plan-it Allen!

The Plan-it Allen! Web site: www.PlanYourCommunity.org contains complete information about the entire process along with all project documents and reports. The full Plan is posted there for public review.

Groups and organizations interested in learning more about Plan-it Allen! may request a speaker by contacting: (260) 427-1127.