

Executive Summary

Overview

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the official policy document for addressing issues relating to growth and development in Allen County and the City of Fort Wayne. The Plan provides a framework for future decision making based on a solid analysis of major changes to the area's natural, man-made, and cultural environment and the people who helped shape that environment.

The purpose of the existing conditions analysis is to provide a foundation on which to build future policy. It is the information gathering phase of the planning process and is designed to inform the more intuitive public input. The existing conditions analysis is also more than a snapshot of the current situation or an elaboration of key indicators of change. It offers a glimpse of how the County and City have changed and whether or not there is a distinct pattern to that change or any emerging trends. It also compares both jurisdictions to other peer jurisdictions throughout the country to better understand relative similarities or differences. Current circumstances and trends are not the only direction each jurisdiction can take. There is an opportunity to change course and shape a better future through more strategic decision making and the development of specific policies.

This chapter summarizes key elements of the existing conditions report for both the City and the County

Existing Conditions Analysis

The Existing Conditions analysis is composed of nine separate components representing each element of the Plan including:

- Demographics
- Land Use
- Housing
- Economics
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Environmental Stewardship
- Community Facilities
- Community Identity

Demographics

The Demographics section of the Existing Conditions report describes the characteristics of the population, how these characteristics have changed over the past several decades and the implications these changes will have on future policy. These characteristics include age, racial composition, and socio-economic factors such as income and educational attainment. Several population projection methods are used in determining the expected population, in five year increments, over the next 20 years.

Key findings from the Demographics analysis include:

- **Regional Population Growth:** Regional population growth has remained strong with a 10.9 percent increase from 1990 to 2000. A majority of the County's population gain during these years was experienced in census tracts located at the periphery of Fort Wayne. Much of the population growth experienced in the City of Fort Wayne was through the annexation of unincorporated Allen County.
- **Declining Population Density:** Population density has declined as development has moved outward from the City of Fort Wayne's core. Density ranges from over 10-15 persons per acre in the city's core to 0-1 persons per acre in unincorporated areas of the County.
- **Projected Population will Increase at a Slower Rate:** From 1990 to 2003, or the past 13 years, Allen County's population increased by 12.7 percent. For the next 21 years; however, the population is projected to increase at a slower rate of between 15.8 and 18.2 percent.
- **Aging Population:** The number of Allen County residents over the age of 65 has increased 45.5 percent since 1970 and population projections show a near doubling of the senior population by the year 2025.
- **Minimal Gains in Median Income:** When adjusted for inflation the 1999 median household income in Allen County of \$42,671 was near the state level of \$41,567 and the national average of \$41,994. It was also 17 percent higher than Fort Wayne's average of

\$36,518; but it has remained stagnant for the past ten years due to the rate of inflation.

- **Growing Hispanic Population:** The Caucasian and African American populations are growing (4.3 and 23.2 percent respectively) but not as fast as the Hispanic population at 144.1 percent.
- **Increasing Foreign Born Population:** Fort Wayne experienced the second largest percent increase in the foreign born population when compared to peer communities. The County's population growth can be attributed to increasing birth rates and international migration.

Land Use

The land use analysis includes an assessment of how much land is being used, the pattern of development, the amount of land suitable for development, and the amount of land needed (given current utilization) to accommodate future population and household growth. The assessment categorizes each jurisdiction into different land use classifications including agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, park/open space, and vacant land and, where information was available, compares past land utilization to current utilization.

Key findings from the Land Use analysis include:

- **Regional Influence:** Surrounding counties toward the north and west of Allen County (Whitely, Noble, Dekalb) show steady population growth and strong commuter ties to Allen County.
- **Township Growth:** Between 1990 and 2000, Aboite Township (west Allen County) experienced the largest number of single-family plats with 116 (or 28.7 percent of the total number of plats), followed by St. Joseph Township (northeast Allen County) at 93 plats, and Perry Township (north Allen County) at 85 plats.
- **Residential is the Predominant Land User:** Over 50 percent of the County's developed land area is residential and in the City of Fort Wayne, most of the total land area (35.3) is occupied by residential use.
- **Declining Population Density:** Since 1987, the City of Fort Wayne's population density has declined by 21 percent and the amount of land developed or consumed (62.7 percent increase in developable land area since 1987) was over twice the population growth rate of 27.5 percent.
- **Land Consumption:** The amount of land consumed per household in the City of Fort Wayne (including recently annexed land) has increased by 27.3 percent since 1987.
- **Undeveloped Land:** Agricultural land with "prime" characteristics covers over 93.6 percent of the undeveloped land area in the County.

Housing

The Housing section of the Existing Conditions Report provides a summary of residential land use in the region and how changes in demographic characteristics correspond with housing preferences. The section acknowledges variations in the type and number of housing units in both jurisdictions as well as size of households, housing tenure, costs, and other households and householder characteristics.

Key findings from the Housing analysis include:

- **Variation in Housing Unit Change vs. Population Change:** Between 1990 and 2000, housing unit change outpaced population growth in the County (13.0 percent vs. 10.3 percent) but not in the City (17.8 vs. 18.8 percent).
- **Growth in Female Headed Households:** Between 1990 and 2000, both the County and the City experienced a significant increase (nearly 37 percent) in female headed households with child (ren)/no spouse.
- **Significant Share of Single Householders:** On average, 32.6 percent of total householders in the City of Fort Wayne live alone.
- **Homeownership Rates Comparatively High:** Allen County and the City have a comparatively high rate of homeownership at 71 and 61.6 percent respectively.
- **Considerable Growth in North and West Allen County:** Neighborhoods located along the northern and western border of the City of Fort Wayne encountered a large increase (18 to 24 percent) in the number of new residents between 1998 and 2000.

Economics

The Economic Conditions Report provides an assessment of Allen County and Fort Wayne's economic base and identifies strategic issues that should be addressed by the Plan.

Key findings from the Economic analysis include:

- **Changing Economic Base:** The economic base of the City of Fort Wayne and Allen County are changing in response to major global and national economic, technology, business strategy, and demographic forces. Much of the change occurring in the area's economic base is driven by external events and factors.
- **Restructuring Manufacturing Sector:** The continued restructuring of the area's manufacturing sector remains the number one economic transition issue for the City, County, and larger surrounding regional economy. This reinforces the need for greater economic diversification efforts in the future. It also suggests that new types of strategies will be needed to respond effectively to this restructuring process.

- **Response to Threats and Opportunities:** The results of this analysis point to the need for an integrating framework that defines the comprehensive economic development system that supports the City and County. There is also a need to identify innovative strategies to help the City and County respond in a more powerful way to the major economic development threats and opportunities on a global horizon.
- **Total Employment has Grown:** Since 1990, total employment has grown in Fort Wayne, Allen County, and the Fort Wayne metro area. Allen County jobs grew 11.4 percent, with the creation of 17,511 new jobs. The City of Fort Wayne grew at an identical 11.4 percent rate with the creation of 9,778 new jobs.
- **Job Growth in Fort Wayne:** Overall, Fort Wayne and Allen County have been holding their own in terms of economic development. While there are losses to both the City and County economic base, these losses do not appear to be as severe as those seen in many other major older industrial centers. Between 1991 and 2003, total jobs in the Fort Wayne metro area grew by 12.2 percent. The real question is: how well can the Allen County/Fort Wayne Area grow or tread water as globalization pressures (offshore outsourcing), increased corporate merger and acquisition activity, and other external events take their toll on communities nationwide?
- **Development Opportunities:** Based upon earlier regional industry cluster work by the Northeast Indiana Corporate Council, future promising development opportunities for the area include: defense-related manufacturing; certain aspects of the new life sciences and biomedical industries; advanced manufacturing, aviation and inter-modal logistics, plastics product manufacturing; healthcare services; certain aspects of the finance and insurance sector; and small and medium-sized manufacturing and technical service firms.

Transportation

The Transportation section of the Existing Conditions Report includes an assessment of existing transportation facilities in relation to traffic flow, the availability of public transit, and roadway quality; and recognizes planning implications for future development based on current level of services.

Key findings from the Transportation analysis include:

- **Current Transportation System Challenges:** Current transportation system challenges are narrow rights-of-way; insufficient number of bridges; radial system with majority of traffic traveling through central business district; hazardous diagonal intersections; lack of north-south continuity on major arterials; large number of heavy trucks; serving new housing development

southwest and north of Fort Wayne; serving new industrial parks in northwest, the City of New Haven, and around the Fort Wayne International Airport; serving commercial and retail development along I-69; and serving large medical facilities at I-69 / US 24 and I-69 / Dupont Road interchanges.

- **Regional Connections:** Fort Wayne and Allen County have excellent regional connections to the interstate highway system that connect the area to major cities in Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Kentucky. The region is also positioned well for future highway dependent growth and regional activities.
- **Anticipated Capacity:** Current and anticipated future capacity-deficient roadways are primarily located in the developing areas to the southwest, northwest, and northeast, and the arterials that connect those areas to the central portion of the City of Fort Wayne. Adequately serving suburban and “fringe” growth will be a continuing challenge.
- **Freight Opportunities:** Fort Wayne and Allen County’s location and good interstate highway access place it in “Cargo Alley,” making it a prime area for freight movement. Moreover, transportation is not a barrier to future industrial growth.
- **Airport Growth:** Fort Wayne International Airport anticipates a steady and significant increase (40 percent over 15 years) in passenger and cargo operations.
- **High Speed Rail:** Indiana Department of Transportation and Amtrak have recently selected a high-speed rail alternative from Chicago to Cleveland that passes through Fort Wayne/Allen County.
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities:** Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are not readily accessible and are in inadequate supply. While maintenance and upgrades are needed, the RiverGreenway creates an excellent “spine” for bikeway expansions.
- **No Severe Traffic Congestion:** Due to moderate traffic demands Fort Wayne and Allen County do not experience the same long daily periods of severe traffic congestion as many larger urban areas.
- **Location of Vehicular Crashes:** The largest numbers of crashes occur away from the central part of Fort Wayne along heavily traveled corridors leading to the central city, and at I-69 interchanges. Future crash problems are anticipated on rural roadways in quickly developing areas, roadways with poor access control and high volumes, and highly congested roadways.
- **Citilink Ridership:** Citilink has experienced increased bus ridership since 1999 and has completed aggressive plans for increased service.

- **Livability Barriers:** Current transportation system challenges include livability barriers such as a lack of a comprehensive system of paths and trails, lack of pedestrian connections between neighborhoods, underutilization of public transit, inadequate or lack of sidewalks in neighborhoods, high-speed traffic on local roadways, and motorist’s attitudes about sharing the roadway.

Environmental Stewardship

The Environmental Stewardship section of the Existing Conditions analysis provides an assessment of the ecological functions of the region and how anticipated growth and development affects environmental quality. The analysis includes pertinent information related to community characteristics such as soils, land and vegetation cover, water and air quality that have an effect on the health, safety, and general welfare of residents in the region.

Key findings from the Environmental Stewardship analysis include:

- **Physical Setting:** Allen County is divided into three distinct physiographic regions that are the result of glaciation: Tipton Till Plains (south and west); Steuben Morainal Lakes Region (north and northwest); and Maumee Lake Plain (east). These differences give rise to significant differences in the character, abundance, and vulnerability of natural resources across the County.
- **Soils:** Over 90 percent of soils in the County qualify as prime farmland. Loss of prime farmland soils reduces the overall efficiency of agriculture, with attendant increases in costs, energy and chemical inputs, and polluting wastes.
- **Impact of Development:** The pattern of increasingly low-density suburban development evident around Fort Wayne and other communities is the principal threat to prime farmland. It accelerates the overall rate of loss and leads to fragmentation of farmable tracts.
- **Land Cover Data:** Good quality (i.e. high resolution, readily quantifiable) land cover data appears to be lacking for Allen County. This inhibits meaningful analysis and trending of land cover changes which could be used to better inform land use and natural resource planning decisions (e.g. tracking losses and gains in wetlands, forested lands, agricultural land, and impervious surfaces).
- **Land and Vegetation Cover:** The County's historical forests have largely been cleared and converted to agricultural and urban land uses. Today's forested areas are generally small and scattered along stream corridors and in small rural woodlots. The Cedar Creek corridor and Fox Island Park in the Little River watershed contain the County's largest remaining contiguous forested areas.
- **Water Systems:** With the exception of Fort Wayne and New Haven, all of Allen County’s 107 public water systems rely on ground water, along with thousands of private wells.

- **Water Quality of Cedar Creek:** Cedar Creek is designated as a State Scenic River from County Road 68 in Dekalb County to its confluence with the St. Joseph River at Leo-Cedarville. It is also designated an "Outstanding Resource Water" for water quality purposes, and identified under Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Natural Heritage Program as an exceptional ecological resource.
- **Surface Water Threats:** Because of their connection to the Great Lakes, the County's surface waters are at risk for invasion by over 30 aquatic nuisance species. Threats from invasive plants are currently being managed in parks and preserves where they threaten high quality native plant communities.
- **Air Quality:** Historically, air quality in Allen County has been in attainment with national standards. A review of available U.S. EPA and Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) compliance data also shows a generally low incidence of air violations at individual industrial facilities in the County. Only one facility in Allen County, the General Motors Assembly Plant in Fort Wayne, appears on IDEM's most recent state list of "Top 95 percent Emitters" with a rank of 69 out of a total of 82 facilities in terms of total reported emissions.
- **Brownfield Redevelopment:** The City of Fort Wayne's history and ongoing presence as a diverse manufacturing center make it a prime location for brownfields redevelopment. The City's Redevelopment Department has completed two successful brownfields projects to date, one at the former Bowser Pump Plant downtown, and one at the former Myers Petro terminal at St. Francis University.
- **Flood Prevention:** Flooding is principally a concern in the City of Fort Wayne, although there are areas within the County which are also subject to significant flooding. Since a major flood struck the downtown Fort Wayne area in 1982, many structural improvements have been made to mitigate flooding in the City. The City also has a state-of-the-art flood monitoring system that provides real-time rainfall and stream level information throughout the Fort Wayne area.

Utilities

The Utilities section of the Existing Conditions analysis consists of an inventory of the region's water distribution, sewer systems, and stormwater facilities and considers the carrying capacity of these systems. The assessment acknowledges current problems and suggests improvements needed to accommodate anticipated development needs.

Key findings from the Utilities analysis include:

- **Sanitary Sewer Challenges:** In Allen County, the availability of utilities, primarily sanitary sewer service, has been and continues to

be a key driver to the new land development aspect of land use planning. The successful pursuit of the dual goals of improving regional water quality and the continued availability of new sanitary sewer capacity for land development will depend on improved coordination and a regionalization of interest in this dual accomplishment.

- **Water and Sewer Systems:** Water and sewer systems in Allen County are important in maintaining quality of life and economic prosperity for the citizens of the County and its municipalities. While both water and sewer services are critical, sewer service is typically the more costly of the two to provide, and is more commonly the controlling factor in the economic balance between development and utility extensions.
- **Capacity Considerations:** Existing systems in Allen County generally have adequate water supply and wastewater collection and treatment capacity to meet ongoing growth. However, the treatment capacity may not be in the most convenient location and often is available in a political entity that is not the focus of the demand. These factors make availability and cost important in certain locations.
- **Water Quality Concerns:** Current regional water quality concerns include: failed or underperforming septic systems, combined sewer overflows, and sanitary sewer overflows. There will be a significant cost to reduce or eliminate these community wide issues.
- **Wastewater Disposal in the City:** For wastewater disposal, the City is expanding its capacity from 60 million gallons per day (mgd) to 80 mgd, primarily to reduce combined sewer overflows. At present, the existing capacity plus the planned improvements allow the City to continue adding customers by serving development in areas directly served, or served by satellite systems, and to add other satellite areas as the need arises, such as through replacement of on-site disposal systems with central sewer service.
- **Drinking Water:** Drinking water issues parallel the wastewater issues, including cost of service, availability, public safety, and effects on development. In general the effects of drinking water systems are less because the engineering characteristics of water systems make them generally more flexible and less costly than wastewater systems.
- **Storm Systems:** Stormwater impacts the use and enjoyment of property, the public health, and the economy of the community. Stormwater and its drainage patterns do not recognize political boundaries and require a coordinated effort to ensure that all standards and reviews for new development are conducted in a

consistent manner to protect Allen County's general public and the environment.

- **Elimination of Septic Tanks:** Fort Wayne has an ongoing program to eliminate septic tanks within the City limits, at a rate of about 100 to 150 per year. There are currently about 250 to 300 septic tanks in the City.

Community Facilities

The Community Facilities element of the Existing Conditions analysis provides an assessment of schools, public safety, parks and recreation, and historic and cultural facilities for both the City and the County. These facilities provide services to the general public and as the population grows and changes, so will the demand for these services and the facilities that house them.

Key findings from the Community Facilities analysis include:

- **Schools:** New enrollment in county school districts is primarily affected by in-migration from Fort Wayne Community Schools. Because of Fort Wayne's diminishing school age population, future enrollment in county schools is expected to increase.
- **Demographic Changes:** The more "elastic" middle age and senior population will require more life long learning experience and the out migration of young adults will eventually reduce the school age population.
- **Fire Protection:** Two new City of Fort Wayne fire stations are scheduled to be operational by January 1, 2006 to serve the Aboite annexation area. One is Station 18 at Scott and Covington Roads and the other is Station 19 at Liberty Mills and Homestead Roads. Along with Station 17, these two new stations will serve the entire Aboite annexation.
- **Response Times:** The Fort Wayne Fire Department's average response time is 4 minutes and 30 seconds, which is at the excellent level by national standards.
- **Increased Service Request:** Increased calls for service for the Allen County Sheriff's department directly relate to population changes, traffic issues, school developments, and other new development.
- **Parks and Recreation:** When considering potential growth to the north, northwest, and west sides of Allen County, more active park acquisition should be pursued in these areas to meet future needs.
- **Cultural Facilities:** The Allen County Public Library (ACPL) is a countywide system with taxing authority. The library system is composed of a main library in downtown Fort Wayne and 13 branch libraries located in Fort Wayne neighborhoods and several Allen County communities.

- **Historic and Cultural Resources:** Fort Wayne has 63 individual properties or districts that are designated as Local Historic Districts. Fort Wayne also has 41 properties or districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places within its boundaries. There are eight (8) additional properties or districts listed on the National Register in Allen County, making a total of 49 county-wide. Even though these districts cannot provide complete protection, making information readily available about their location and significance is an important step toward preservation.
- **Threatened Resources:** Historic farms and other agricultural properties, individual houses, bridges, cemeteries, and township schools are historic resource types that are among the most likely to be threatened by new development in Fort Wayne and rural Allen County.
- **Limited Protection:** Allen County government does not have an historic preservation ordinance, nor does the County offer historic preservation programs. The same is true for all other municipal units within Allen County with the exception of Fort Wayne.

Community Identity

The Community Identity element of the Existing Conditions analysis focuses on how the residents of the region perceive the physical environment and how elements such as landscaping, landmarks, commercial features, and attractions play a significant part in promoting a sense of community.

Key findings from the Community Identity analysis include:

- **Landmarks:** Landmarks range from buildings and structures with architectural importance – the Performing Arts Center by Louis Kahn – to restaurants and diners like Cindy’s Diner in Fort Wayne.
- **Natural Features:** The three rivers running through Fort Wayne/Allen County were consistently noted as the community’s primary character-defining feature and the one item that ties the city and county together.
- **Adaptive Reuse of Existing Buildings:** Adaptive reuse of existing buildings offers the opportunity for more creative, unique developments while recycling buildings and returning vacant properties to productive use.
- **Regional Attractions:** The Museum of Art, Botanical Gardens, and the annual Johnny Appleseed Festival are regional attractions that bring in many visitors from outside the County and positively contribute to the area’s economic development.
- **Historic Corridors:** Several roadway corridors leading into the County and City including Wayne Trace, Lima Road, Piqua Road, Winchester Road, and Lincoln Highway began very early in the County’s history. They represent an excellent opportunity to tell the

story of the area's early settlement and heritage through roadway markers and signage directed at tourists and sightseers.