

Community Identity



International Harvester tower

Introduction

A community's identity is based in part on how the physical environment (that has been discussed in the Land Use chapter) is perceived by its inhabitants. The appearance of a community is important because it can contribute positively or negatively to the community's sense of pride, it can help orient or disorient those finding their way, it can establish or detract from one's sense of place, and it can leave a lasting impression—good or bad—on visitors. Understanding how the physical (man-made and natural) elements of the community are perceived is also critical to establishing strategies directed toward their preservation, enhancement, or even application in other areas of the community.

The following chapter looks at major visual elements and other character-defining features in the Allen County-Fort Wayne community and identifies the role they play in contributing to the community's uniqueness. Many of these elements — historic buildings, corner stores, landmarks, parks etc. — all play a part in forming a community's overall identity.

This chapter is organized into the following sections:

- Method and Scope
- Key Findings
- Policy Implications
- Natural Features and Landscaping
- Landmarks
- Commercial Features
- Attractions
- Distinctive Development and Adaptive Reuse
- Diversity
- Miscellaneous

Method and Scope

In reviewing the comments culled from the various public meetings held throughout the City and County as a part of the Comprehensive Plan development process, it was noted that a majority of people feel that the Fort Wayne-Allen County community has no identity...or at least, no positive identity. Typical comments included: “We need to promote a positive community identity”; “Develop and improve self-image”; and “Help adjust our collective attitude. This is not Fort nowhere, it’s a great place.” The concepts of "utilizing our community strengths," "promoting cultural diversity," and "paying attention to our community appearance," were also stressed. As one respondent stated, we need to “identify unique, positive character assets, then preserve and enhance them.” In organizing the comments by similarity of thought or idea, the following major thematic groups emerged: identity, attractiveness, diversity, downtown, history/preservation, small town character, and landscape.

To develop and expand on the public comments regarding community appearance, a focus group was organized to examine this issue. These individuals were selected for their community involvement and professional skills in advertising, art, design, education, landscaping, preservation, and video production. This group was asked to identify those items that are unique to the Fort Wayne-Allen County community, character-defining features of the City and County, and those elements of design, cultural heritage, or natural features, that imparted a sense of place and had a positive effect on community character. Group members were asked to poll their friends and coworkers. Responses came from people ranging from 15 to 85 years old, from lifetime city and county residents to relative newcomers.

The results of this examination are listed below as a series of bullet points roughly grouped in relation to the themes identified in the community meeting comments. The following are features that should be enhanced and promoted to develop the character of the community and improve community appearance. For a further description of the programs and activities related to historic preservation (districts, landmark properties and historic corridors) see the Community Facilities chapter.

Key Findings

The following gives a brief overview of the key findings of Community Identity:



From the Downtown skyline ...



...to the open farm fields and in between, Allen County exhibits a diverse visual character.

- Twenty areas were identified as having natural significance or were recognized for their exceptional landscaping.
- 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.
- Commercial features vary from Glenbrook Mall, a suburban shopping center, to The Landing in downtown Fort Wayne.
- The Museum of Art, Botanical Gardens, and the annual Johnny Appleseed Festival are regional attractions that bring in visitors from outside the County and positively contribute to the area's economic development.
- The rural landscape is characterized by farm houses, barns and outbuildings, all fitting naturally within their respective settings.
- Adaptive reuse of existing buildings offers the opportunity for more creative, unique developments while recycling building materials and returning vacant properties to productive use.
- Fort Wayne has a history of innovation, and efforts should be made to reinforce that reputation.
- 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.
- The Fort Wayne parks system and the patterns made by the agricultural use of land in the county—with plowed fields, hedgerows, pastures and wooded plots—were emphasized as important character-defining features and positive elements in determining community identity.
- There is significant potential for the areas that define the County’s rural identity to be lost as growth pressure to move outward – especially in western and northern Allen County – increases.
- Unique areas within the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods are in jeopardy of being lost as the population moves outward.

Policy Implications

- In addition to the officially identified historic districts, structures and landmarks located throughout Allen County (including Fort Wayne, unincorporated Allen County and the County’s smaller jurisdictions) there are a number of sites that, because of their unique characteristics, have contributed, in total, to the areas identity. Because they have not been formally recognized and may not have scenic, historical or architectural significance does not mean they are not important to residents in the community. These

community “identifiers” are in the greatest jeopardy of being lost to development.

- There are certain characteristics of these “place-making” buildings, sites and corridors (e.g. design, materials, signage, etc.) that can be further enhanced by incorporating their qualities into new development.

Natural Features and Landscaping

The three rivers running through Fort Wayne-Allen County are consistently noted as the community’s primary character-defining feature and the one item that ties the city and county together. It is also consistently noted that the rivers are drastically underutilized and ignored, and are in desperate need of attention. As important as the rivers were in the early development of Fort Wayne (indeed, the primary reason for the City’s existence), they receive little attention at this point in time. Environmentally responsible use and development coupled with removal of both man-made pollution and excessive overgrowth would deliver a tremendous community benefit.

The Fort Wayne parks system and the patterns made by the agricultural use of land in the county (plowed fields, hedgerows, pastures and wooded plots) are emphasized as extremely important character-defining features and positive elements in determining community identity.

- **The three rivers – these are overlooked and underutilized.** Better connections to the waterways, and concentrated beautification/cleanup efforts would add greatly to community identity/image. Clean up emphasized.
- **Park system is important.** Attention should be given to identifying the unique qualities of each park, and resources found to enhance these qualities for the overall benefit of the community. The Fort Wayne park system has been determined potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, a determination not found in many communities.
- **Kessler system of parks and boulevards in Fort Wayne.** Only a handful of communities in the U.S. can claim to have plans developed by noted landscape architect/planner George Kessler. Indianapolis has recently capitalized on their Kessler park plans by achieving a National Register listing.
- **Rudisill, Anthony, and State Blvds.** In Ft. Wayne (Part of Kessler Plan)
- **Headwater’s Park**, Clinton & Superior Sts., Ft. Wayne.
- **Foster Park** (Lilacs).
- **Freimann Square.**
- **Lakeside Rose Gardens**, 1400 Lake Ave., Ft. Wayne.
- **Reservoir hill** (Reservoir Park),



Entry maker to the City of Fort Wayne



Typical image of Allen County's extensive rural landscape

- **Salomon Farm**, 817 W. Dupont Rd., Ft. Wayne.
- **The river greenway system.**
- **Tree-lined streets are important.** Blooming trees such as those along Broadway are notable.
- **The “Welcome to Fort Wayne” signs.** These were created in manicured plantings at Indian Village and Swinney Park (SW and W entries into the city) are unique features rarely seen elsewhere. The detailed pruning and maintenance involved in the care of these markers implies that this is a community that is aware of its appearance.
- **The Main Street median development in downtown Fort Wayne.** Creating more median gardens to show off Allen County and Fort Wayne parks and corridors, would impress outsiders visiting the area for the first time. Main corridors enhanced with unique landscaping, center strips added with planting space for blooming perennials, attractive light poles and signage would these streets from others...as if to say, “This street is special and we want you to know it!”
- **The deeply-wooded, lush, natural beauty of the Cedar Creek area.** Wonderful contrast to urban development and open fields.
- **Lindenwood Cemetery**, 2324 W. Main St., Ft. Wayne. Park-like setting with wonderful monuments. A wonderful combination of history, landscape, and planning.
- **Fox Island Park and Nature Preserve**, 7324 Yohne Rd., Ft. Wayne.
- **Prairie Marsh/Wabash outwash**, US 24 & Huntington Rd. area.
- **Little River Wetland**
- **Rural landscape and its defining patterns.** Plowed fields and wooded areas punctuated with rural buildings.



Allen County Courthouse and Courthouse Green

Landmarks

Numerous references were made regarding the preservation of historic architecture, neighborhoods, downtown, etc. Due to the number of historic resources existing in the community, it is best to refer to the Historic Sites and Structures Inventories completed for both Fort Wayne and Allen County when issues arise regarding the identification of these unique character-defining features. These should not be viewed as definitive lists however, since the passage of time and changes wrought by man or nature can either add to or detract from a site's significance. The following structures were individually noted in the comments received and are therefore listed by name. Any historic designation is also noted: LHD-local historic district or NR-National Register.

- **The Allen County Courthouse and Courthouse Green.** A National Historic Landmark.
- **Lincoln Tower**, 116 E. Berry St., Ft. Wayne.



Church spires above the tree canopy are a way finding device



The Coliseum-a major regional facility and landmark



Performing Arts Center

- **International Harvester Tower (LHD)**
- **Carillon on top of Lincoln Tower.** This carillon is a pleasant memory to many residents. Music floating through a downtown area from one of its tallest buildings is a unique experience rarely found other than at the Christmas season. Needs to be fixed and reactivated.
- **One Summit Square, the tallest building in downtown Ft. Wayne,** Bounded by Calhoun, Wayne, Washington, and Clinton St.
- **Rialto Theater (LHD)** 2614-16 Calhoun St and **Scottish Rite Auditorium (NR),** 431 W. Berry St.
- **Federal Building,** 1300 S. Harrison St. & **Lincoln Life Insurance Building,** 1301 S. Harrison St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Chief Richardville House (LHD & NR),** 5705 Bluffton Rd., Ft. Wayne.
- **Embassy Theater (LHD & NR),** 121 W. Jefferson Blvd., Ft. Wayne.
- **The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (NR),** 1117 S. Calhoun St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Filtration Plant ,** 1100 Griswold Dr., Ft. Wayne.
- **Canal House(LHD & NR),** 114 E. Superior St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Swinney Homestead (LHD & NR),** 1424 W. Jefferson Blvd., Ft. Wayne.
- **Bass Mansion at University of St. Francis (NR),** 2701 Spring St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Carol Lombard House(LHD & NR),** 704 Rockhill St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Klaehn Funeral Home (LHD & NR),** 420 W. Wayne St., Ft. Wayne.
- **St. Louis Besancon,** 15529-15535 E. Lincoln Highway.
- **Architecture of older churches,** i.e. spires.
- **The Performing Arts Center,** 303 E. Main St., Ft. Wayne. Designed by Louis Kahn.
- **Concordia Theological Seminary,** 6600 N. Clinton St., Ft. Wayne. Campus by architect Eero Saarinen & landscape architect Dan Kiley. The combined talents of recognized master designers create a unique setting that is known worldwide.
- **Historic Fort Wayne,** 1200 Block of Spy Run Ave., Ft. Wayne ***
- **The Coliseum,** 4000 Parnell Ave., Ft. Wayne **

A community can be known for a special restaurant, bar, ice cream parlor, etc. The following locations are unique and will not be found elsewhere. Whether “officially” designated or not, these establishments are local landmarks.

- **Henry’s Bar,** 536 W. Main St., Ft. Wayne. Perfect combination of urban neighborhood bar, good food, and historic character. The

original character-defining interior features have not been compromised as the business has expanded.

- **Cindy's Diner (LHD)**, 830 S. Harrison St., Ft. Wayne. Historic 1954 diner.
- **Power's Hamburgers**, 1402 S. Harrison St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Casa d' Angelo**, 3402 Fairfield Ave., Ft. Wayne.
- **Coney Island**, 131 W. Main St., Ft. Wayne. (A place from another time)
- **Zesto**, Creighton Ave. & Broadway, Ft. Wayne.
- **Three Kings Tavern**, 121 S. First St., Hoagland and **The Whippy** in Monroeville



The Landing, Fort Wayne

Commercial Features

- **Glenbrook Mall and Jefferson Pointe** in Fort Wayne are large, notable, distinctive shopping developments that also serve as regional attractions.
- **The Landing**, Columbia St. The original heart of Fort Wayne. This historic commercial district has a cohesive, identifiable character. Should be connected to other developments/districts downtown by attractive pedestrian pathways.
- **Traditional/historic neighborhood commercial districts** such as Broadway, Calhoun St., Wells St. in Fort Wayne, or the heart of Waynedale have a distinctive character.
- **Farmers Market**, Warsaw Street, Ft. Wayne. Only place in town for this type of experience. Should be enhanced and promoted.

Attractions

- **Allen County Public Library System** is a significant/positive community feature especially noted for the genealogy department.
- **The Lincoln Museum**, 200 E. Berry St., Ft. Wayne.
- **Museum of Art**, 311 E. Main St., Ft. Wayne. Does not possess a notable, world-class collection, but provides an excellent venue for hosting high-quality traveling exhibits.
- **The Fort Wayne Philharmonic.**
- **The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo**, 3411 Sherman Blvd., Ft. Wayne.
- **The Botanical Conservatory**, 1100 S. Calhoun St., Ft. Wayne
- **Wizards** baseball team.
- **Komets Hockey Team.**
- **Johnny Appleseed Festival**, Fort Wayne. Popular event with early Fort Wayne heritage theme.
- **Grabill Days Festival.** Viewed as the festival that still retains its small-town character.
- **Christmas lighting displays in downtown Fort Wayne...** especially Santa & Wreath. A local and area holiday attraction.



Landmark sign on Pearl Street

- **Unique, large-scale, landmark signs** in Fort Wayne, such as the never-ending Sunbeam Bread loaf on Pearl Street, the General Electric sign between Fairfield Avenue and Broadway, and the Club Soda sign with its moving bubbles on Superior St., are unique and loaded with character. The Embassy Theater marquee with its neon and choreographed light bulb patterns has recently been renovated and complimented by a new blade sign. The Scott’s Grocery cornucopia sign at 5300 Old Decatur Road, Ft. Wayne, has been altered from its original design, but maintains its status as a landmark for those entering Fort Wayne from the south.
- **The smell of bread from Sunbeam Bakery, 350 Pearl St., and Holsum Bakery, 136 Murray St., Ft. Wayne.** Few other cities have downtown areas that smell this good.

Distinctive Development and Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse of existing buildings offers the opportunity for more creative, unique developments while recycling building materials and returning vacant properties to productive use. This also reinforces community identity by blending the past with the present. Specific financial incentives are often available to assist developers with imagination. Fort Wayne has a history of innovation, and efforts should be made to recover that reputation.

A number of comments also addressed the older neighborhoods as the heart of the city for their uniqueness and variety in both architecture and layout, sense of community with sidewalks and porches that promote interaction with neighbors, and construction value.

The general feeling is that City and County agencies should strive for significant development that reinforces the character of the community rather than promoting generic development that could be found in any city, anywhere.

Good examples of adaptive reuse—potential models for future efforts—include:

- **The Rolland Center** (arts bldg.) at University of St. Francis. Adaptive reuse of brownfield building.
- **The Troy Laundry Building**, 1717 S. Calhoun St., Ft. Wayne. Adaptive reuse of unique local landmark building creates distinctive development that adds character and vitality to the Calhoun St. corridor.
- Turning the former intersection of **Broadway and Beaver St.** in Fort Wayne into a landscaped plaza with a fountain that allows outdoor dining at Chappell’s Coral Grill is an excellent example of an innovative/well-done development that has added character, vitality, and visual interest to the surrounding neighborhood while serving practical needs.



Older Fort Wayne residential neighborhoods



Historic Columbia Street bridge



Grabill entry feature and town gathering

- **Lutheran Park**, bordered by Fairfield, Kinnaird, South Wayne, and Home Avenues. Location of former Lutheran Hospital complex turned into new well-detailed greenspace development by private organization. Excellent detail. Should encourage similar developments by others.
- **The General Electric Complex**, 1635/36 Broadway. A large landmark industrial complex, important in the history and development of Fort Wayne. As the company continues to downsize and move operations, plans should be made for adaptive reuse of these distinctive buildings.
- **St. Peter’s-Zion**, Hanna, Dewald & Creighton Streets, Ft. Wayne. Adaptive reuse of National Register listed school coupled with new construction that brings new and renovated housing, social services, and a library to inner-city neighborhood.
- **Excellent historic bridges and recent bridge rehabilitation:** Parnell Ave @ St. Joseph River, Tennessee Ave. @ St. Joseph River, Main St. @ St. Mary’s River, Columbia St. @ Maumee River, and historic Wells St. Bridge. In some cases this entailed reversing earlier rehabs that simplified the structures by removing decorative details in favor of strictly utilitarian options and returning character-defining elements such as decorative balustrades and lighting that enhance the area and city.
- **Neighborhood markers**, i.e. Oakdale, Forest Park, South Wood Park, Harrison Hill, etc. Distinctive masonry markers at the main entries to residential developments in Fort Wayne set the tone for the development and instantly help create that “sense of place”.
- **Scenic older neighborhoods**, i.e. South Wood Park, Wildwood Park, and Forest Park Blvd. Homes in these neighborhoods may be compatible in massing, setback, and yard size but the variety of stylistic detailing, even among houses of the same architectural style or type, clearly distinguishes each house from its neighbor. The characteristic retention of existing trees and often gently curving streets add to the character and “sense of place”.

Diversity

Areas that represent distinctive cultural heritage help broaden the character and add flavor to a community’s identity.

- **The Amish.** Easily identifiable, distinctive lifestyle is characteristic of several settlements in the county.
- **Cultural concentrations** – neighborhoods and their associated commercial enterprises (Asian, Hispanic). Positive community features that should have some coordinated development to enhance and display their unique characteristics, such as color use, signage, decorative detail on buildings, etc. to develop identifiable sense of place.

Historic Corridors

Several roadway corridors leading into the County and City 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. Map 9.1 shows the general location of the corridors. The following lists the major historic routes into the area:

- **Wayne Trace.** The route followed by General Anthony Wayne's army in its departure from the fort in 1794, which was improved and widened into a public highway as the years passed.
- **Lima Road.** Initially laid out in the 1830's, the Lima Road was a major northern route connecting Fort Wayne and Lima (present day Howe, Indiana). The roadway became Fort Wayne's first "plank road" in 1848-49 when large, rough-hewn planks of wood were installed as paving. Plank roads were promoted by Judge Samuel Hanna as a means of overcoming the numerous swamps surrounding Fort Wayne and encouraging the transportation and commerce necessary for growth of the town.
- **Piqua Road.** An early road leading southeast from Fort Wayne toward Piqua, Ohio. Due to poor construction and natural marshes, the road was difficult to travel; it was taken over by a stock company in 1850 that graded and planked from Fort Wayne to Willshire, Ohio, installed a line of daily stages, and erected toll houses to collect revenue. Today the route is commonly known as Decatur Road or US 27 & 33.
- **Winchester Road.** An 1824 election was held to select three justices of the peace for Allen County. The first act of this board was to accept a report filed to survey and locate the Winchester Road, "from Vernon, in Jennings County, by way of Greensburg, Rushville, and Newcastle, to Fort Wayne." This route became Allen County's first established rural highway.
- **Indianapolis Road.** First route surveyed through Pleasant Township, leading southwest to Indianapolis.
- **Bluffton Road.** This early route was originated and surveyed by William and Samuel Edsall. It was completed as a plank road in 1850.
- **Lower Huntington Road.** Initially surveyed in 1842 this route encouraged settlement in Lafayette Township and later developed into a major thoroughfare leading southwest.
- **Wabash and Erie Canal Corridor (US 24).** Constructed between 1832 and 1843, the Wabash and Erie Canal was the longest canal project undertaken in the United States. Connecting Lake Erie and the Ohio River via the Maumee and Wabash River valleys, the canal was a practical solution to the transportation problem of

reaching the frontier interior. Although it proved to be a financial disaster, the canal successfully opened up extensive portions of the pioneer state of Indiana, bringing people and greater commerce to inland communities such as Fort Wayne.

- **Lincoln Highway.** Established in 1913, the Lincoln Highway was one of America's first coast-to-coast highways. Beginning in New York City and ending in San Francisco, the Lincoln Highway played an important role in the development of the automobile's influence on way of life in 20th century America.
- **Clinton Street-Leo Road.** Early northeast travel route. Town of Leo formed in 1849.
- **Maysville Road.** 1849 stage line established between Fort Wayne and Maysville. The town of Maysville was platted in 1859 by Ezra May. Located adjacent to Harlan, which was platted in 1853.



Huntertown Town Hall, Huntertown
Indiana

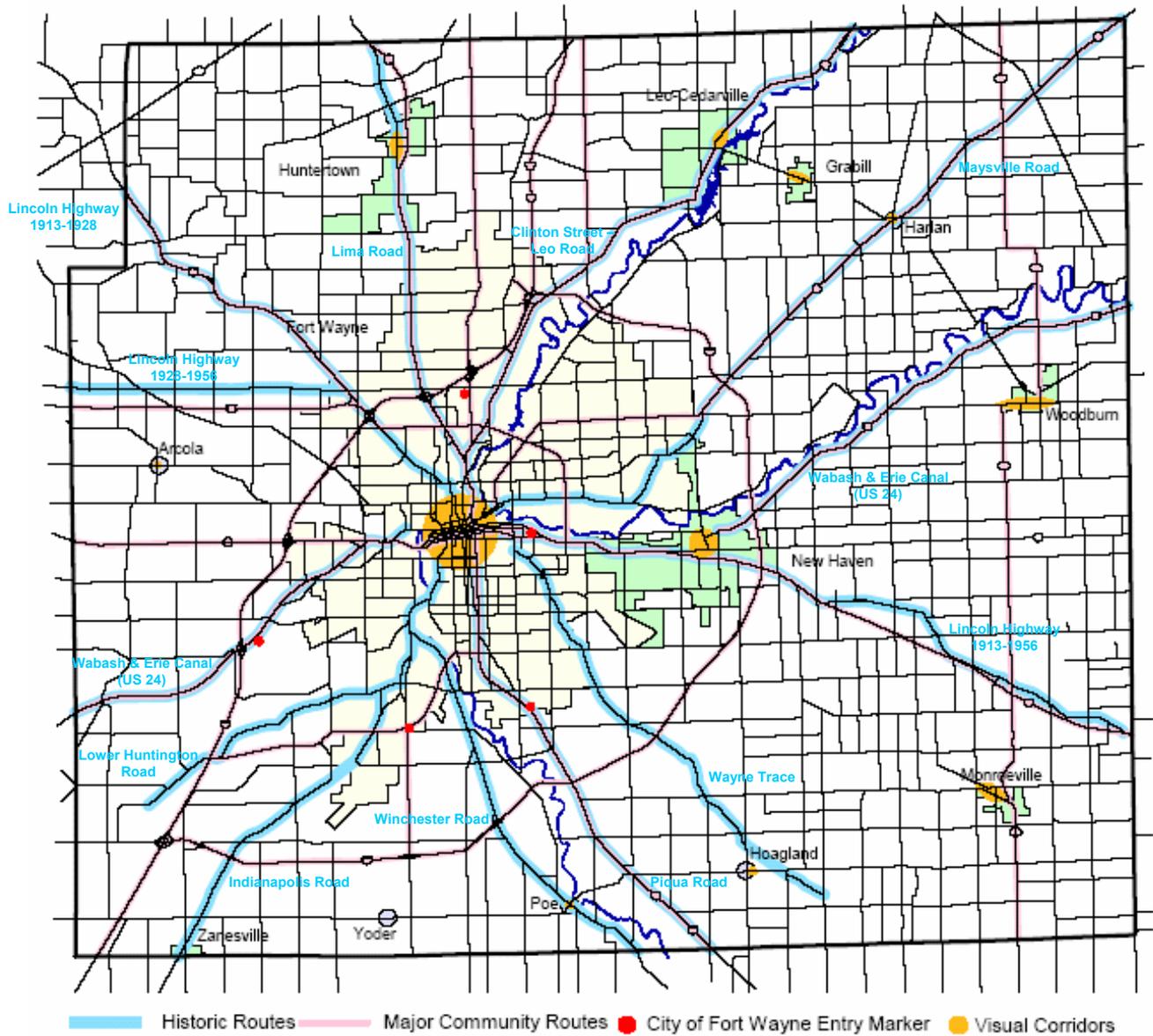


General Motors Assembly Plant
sign

Miscellaneous

- **Barns.** Many with regionally characteristic rainbow, or arched, roofs.
- **One-room schoolhouses.**
- Atmosphere of **Grabill, Huntertown, Monroeville, Woodburn, Leo-Cedarville, and New Haven.**
- **Churches** of all denominations.
- **Indiana Institute of Technology campus,** 1600 E. Washington Boulevard, Ft. Wayne. Expansion with distinctive new construction on main campus provides a positive landmark when entering Fort Wayne from the East.
- **Variety of schools:** parochial, public, and private.
- **South Side H. S.,** 3601 S. Calhoun St. and **North Side H.S.,** 475 E. State Blvd., Ft. Wayne. Architecturally outstanding 1920's era schools that have been appropriately expanded and renovated to continue serving the community.
- **The General Motors plant, 12200 Lafayette Center Rd., Ft. Wayne,** and supporting industries.

Map 9.1: Historic Corridors



Source: City of Fort Wayne