

7. Community Facilities

Introduction

The current trend of outward expansion of growth and development in Allen County and Fort Wayne is having a substantial impact on the community facilities that serve the region. Public safety services must accommodate this expansion, schools must deal with fluctuating enrollments, additional parkland should be acquired, and further efforts are needed to preserve and enhance cultural resources throughout the County. During the public meetings that served as the foundation for this Plan, residents expressed particular concern for issues pertaining to public safety, recreational opportunities, improvements in education, and expansion of the arts, entertainment and cultural events. For many community facilities, full accessibility is a major priority. Facilities planning should involve strategic siting, connectivity of roads, and provision of sidewalks and paths that accommodate a variety of users.

Overview

This chapter outlines the recommendations for addressing community facilities in Allen County and Fort Wayne, and is organized in the following sections:

- Policy Foundation of the Plan;
- Key Findings;
- Goal; and
- Objectives and Strategies.

Policy Foundation of the Plan

The foundation of the Plan was shaped by an extensive community involvement and planning process (see Executive Summary). The Comprehensive Plan has three key layers of policies: goals, objectives, and strategies. Goals are the broadest policy statements that state a desired outcome in general terms. Objectives indicate 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. 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.

Key Findings

A summary of key findings derived from the existing conditions analysis related to community facilities in Allen County and Fort Wayne is outlined below. For a more detailed explanation of each finding, see the Community Facilities Chapter of the Existing Conditions Report.

Schools

Recently, Allen County and Fort Wayne have been experiencing out-migration trends in terms of school enrollment. To a notable extent, families are choosing where to live based on perceived school performance. The newer schools being built in more peripheral areas tend to be large facilities, situated like other suburban structures (i.e., surrounded by parking, inaccessible to pedestrians). These schools often lack the accessible, neighborhood quality of urban schools, and the vast majority of students must travel via bus or automobile. Another important enrollment trend in local school districts is a recent influx of students who speak English as a second language.

Public Safety

Allen County's and Fort Wayne's public safety services are expanding to meet growing demands. As additional areas are annexed into the City of Fort Wayne, facilities are constructed and personnel are hired to meet the community's needs. Public safety departments have reported increased calls for service. Much of this increase results from new development and the associated population increase and traffic issues, but the aging of the population as underscored in the Existing Conditions Report is another significant factor. While public safety services are meeting community needs, they tend to be hampered in certain areas by the absences of a sense of community, and neighborhood design issues that limit the number of "eyes on the street" (e.g., prominent garages and fences, limited front windows, etc). Improvements to public safety are priorities for residents in Fort Wayne and Allen County. Allen County and Fort Wayne have merged their Homeland Security Departments and Fort Wayne will be building a Regional Public Safety Academy which will provide police, fire, emergency medical services and homeland security training, along with education for professionals and students.

Parks and Recreation

The two primary service providers for parks and recreation are the Allen County Parks and Recreation Department and the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department. Funding for parks and recreation within the City of Fort Wayne has not kept pace with the increasing demand placed on the system by the continued growth of the community, in addition to the need to update existing infrastructure. As growth occurs in Allen County, more active park acquisition should be pursued to meet future needs. According to projections, about 1,200 additional acres of parkland will be needed in the County by 2025. With increasing suburban development using up land, residents have commented that the acquisition of parkland and conservation of open space needs to become a higher priority.

Cultural Facilities

Fort Wayne and Allen County are home to a number of significant cultural institutions. The Allen County Public Library (ACPL) is a Countywide system, widely recognized as a premier community institution. The Fort Wayne-Allen County Convention and Visitors bureau is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to enhancing tourism and investment. Currently 5.3 million visitors come to the area each year for shopping, meetings and leisure activities. Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne is a not-for-profit arts group in northeast Indiana. It is the largest single source of financial support for the arts in the region, and manages several facilities, primarily located in downtown Fort Wayne. The Grand Wayne Center and Allen County War Memorial Coliseum attract numerous conventions, trade shows and special events. Residents of Fort Wayne and Allen County have indicated a strong preference to expand and enhance the arts, entertainment and cultural activities.

Goal

The following goal for community facilities was developed by the Comprehensive Plan Committee based upon citizen input:

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.

Objectives and Strategies

Outlined below are objectives and strategies to support the provision of quality community facilities.

Schools

OBJECTIVE CF1.

ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL RESIDENTS.

Allen County and Fort Wayne are home to four public school districts, various private and parochial schools, and many institutions of higher learning. The following strategies identify ways to improve educational opportunities and establish supportive learning facilities that benefit all residents.

CF1.A Encourage a dialogue to support the continuance of existing Fort Wayne neighborhood schools as needed.

Fort Wayne should work with school districts to promote the use of existing school facilities. Many of these existing facilities are located within an accessible distance of homes, thus giving students a choice to walk or use their preferred method of transportation. The continued use of these neighborhood school facilities promotes walkability, easy student access, neighborhood identity and stability.

CF1.B Promote and encourage a collaboration between public, private and parochial schools and school systems, and the City of Fort Wayne and Allen County to investigate the viability of developing new neighborhood schools.

Fort Wayne should work with public, private and parochial schools and school systems; neighborhood associations; and others to examine the continued use and development of new neighborhood school facilities. Neighborhood school facilities may include magnet schools, charter schools and other educational, neighborhood-affiliated facilities.

CF1.C Communicate with local school districts to strategically plan for the placement of new schools in areas where enrollment is projected to increase.

In selecting the location of new schools, Allen County, Fort Wayne, and the four public school districts should work together to determine which sites would best meet the needs of changing populations. Ideally, new schools should serve multiple functions within the community, offering recreational opportunities and space for community meetings and other activities. New school facilities should also be sited with an emphasis on providing safe accessibility to surrounding neighborhoods. Connectivity and walkability between schools and nearby neighborhoods should also be encouraged.

CF1.D Work with school districts to plan for the appropriate adaptive reuse of school buildings in areas where the school system has eliminated the need for certain facilities.

School facilities and the land they are on represent important assets for their communities. These sites could potentially be converted to community centers; or sold to private developers for adaptive reuse as educational facilities, residential, commercial or mixed-use facilities. Site plans for vacant

school buildings should incorporate public input so that the buildings can be used effectively to best meet community needs.

CF1.E Work and coordinate with educational institutions to meet community needs as they impact neighborhoods.

The growth and expansion of public and private educational institutions can have a favorable effect on the stabilization and enhancement of an area. This is also true when these facilities are located within a neighborhood. However, it is important to provide coordination between neighborhood groups and educational institutions to alleviate potential conflicts and mediate problems.

Public Safety

OBJECTIVE CF2.

ENHANCE PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES, REDUCE CRIME AND IMPROVE PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC SAFETY.

Maintaining safe and secure communities is of utmost importance to residents, businesses, and local governments alike. The following strategies suggest ways in which Allen County and Fort Wayne can enhance the provision of public safety services, reduce crime and improve overall perceptions of public safety.

CF2.A Continue coordination between land use agencies and fire and safety agencies.

Allen County and Fort Wayne land use agencies should continue to work with public safety agencies through development review and long range planning. This coordination helps to alleviate potential design problems and increases access and response times.

CF2.B Encourage neighborhood design that can help to deter crime (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design – CPTED).

Improved safety and quality of life can be attained through the implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. The four basic strategies of CPTED address natural access control (involving movement of people, shrubs and fences); natural surveillance (including window placement, lighting and landscaping), territorial reinforcement (using sidewalks, landscaping, and porches to distinguish between public and private space and promote stewardship), and maintenance.

CF2.C Endorse and support community maintenance efforts to improve perceptions of safety.

In addition to providing necessary public safety services, Fort Wayne and Allen County can support certain maintenance activities to improve public perceptions of safety. Code enforcement, maintenance of public spaces, graffiti removal, neighborhood cleanup programs, and the redevelopment of vacant properties will help to create a better sense of public safety, thereby supporting the development of a more vibrant community life and attracting additional residents, businesses, shoppers and visitors.

CF2.D Support the Allen County All Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Fort Wayne-Allen County Office of Homeland Security's All Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies natural hazards that impact Allen County, identifies actions and activities to reduce any losses from those hazards, and establishes a coordinated process to implement the plan. Allen

County along with the City of Fort Wayne, Town of Grabill, Town of Hometown, Town of Leo-Cedarville, Town of Monroeville, City of New Haven, City of Woodburn, and the Maumee River Basin Commission should continue to support the All Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Parks and Recreation

OBJECTIVE CF3.

SUSTAIN AND IMPROVE HIGH-QUALITY PARKS AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY.

Fort Wayne and Allen County have nearly 100 parks that serve the recreational needs of residents. Moving forward, the City and County will need to plan for the acquisition and development of additional parklands. The following strategies recommend ways to improve and expand the park system throughout the County, and pursue strategies for collaborating with the private sector and school corporations, and across municipal boundaries.

CF3.A Pursue strategic collaborations to develop parks and expand recreation opportunities.

By cooperatively planning for future parks and open space areas, Allen County and Fort Wayne can ensure that their park systems will meet the needs of all residents, and that parks, open space areas and greenways will help to protect the scenic and historic character of the region. Collaborations should be pursued between Allen County Parks and Recreation, Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation, New Haven/Adams Township Park District, other public park agencies and groups, and with private recreation providers and school corporations.

CF3.B Expand and enhance existing parks and improve parks infrastructure.

Allen County and Fort Wayne should undertake measures to expand parks, greenways and open space areas. Furthermore, Allen County and Fort Wayne should look for strategic opportunities to use existing utility and transportation corridors and acquire additional lands through purchase or donation. They should also seek to enhance existing parks through capital improvements related to landscaping, equipment and additional facilities such as athletic fields and picnic shelters. Fort Wayne should continue to reference and pursue implementation of recommendations within the Cultural Landscape Reports.

CF3.C Encourage parkland and open space conservation.

Allen County and Fort Wayne should encourage ways to conserve open space and parklands. This strategy is of particular importance in suburban areas, where outward migration and low-density development are rapidly consuming existing land resources; and in areas with unique natural, historic and/or cultural features.

CF3.D Develop greenways and facilities that interconnect parks, schools and key points of interest in the community.

Allen County, Fort Wayne, and other parks and trail organizations should continue to work together to develop a comprehensive trail system that connects parks throughout Allen County, and potentially beyond. The connectivity of this system will provide alternative modes of transportation for residents as it connects neighborhoods to parks, schools and key points of interest.

CF3.E Encourage usable open space for new development.

Allen County and Fort Wayne should encourage developers to set aside a certain percentage of usable land for parks, greenways or open space. Wherever possible, this land set-aside should offer opportunities for and encourage connectivity with existing greenways, trail and park systems. In certain situations when usable open space cannot be set aside, options for developers should be investigated and considered.

CF3.F Work with cities and towns to promote sustainability of existing and proposed park areas.

Park and recreation areas are central to many of the cities and towns surrounding Fort Wayne and New Haven. Not only do they provide a recreation function but they also promote civic pride in these communities. As development patterns shift, it is important to maintain and enhance these areas.

CF3.G Continue to support recreational and sport facilities as vital community and economic resources.

Fort Wayne and Allen County have a significant number of recreational and sport facilities which allow for active and passive participation. These facilities increase the quality of life of Allen County's residents and support the region's tourism economy. Examples of these significant recreational and sport facilities include, but are not limited to, McMillen Park Ice Arena, Lawton Skate Park, Fort Wayne's aquatic centers, Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, Memorial Stadium, and several golf courses.

Cultural Facilities

OBJECTIVE CF4.

CELEBRATE, PROMOTE AND ENHANCE ARTS, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL FACILITIES, EVENTS AND TOURISM.

Residents throughout the County have expressed the desire to participate in more arts, cultural and heritage events and activities. Tourism is a substantial economic driver in Fort Wayne and Allen County, largely due to the quality cultural facilities that exist in the region. The following strategies identify ways to celebrate and enhance arts and culture opportunities, while increasing tourism.

CF4.A Enhance collaboration among arts and cultural organizations to secure more funding, facility planning and promotion of the arts.

Under the umbrella of Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne and the Community Arts Council, arts and cultural facilities in Fort Wayne and beyond should continue to work together and pool resources in order to pursue additional funding opportunities and address facilities management, human resource management, program expansion and other common needs.

CF4.B Support efforts to recognize diversity, and the variety of cultures that exist in the community.

Fort Wayne and Allen County have a number of distinctive cultural groups and neighborhoods. In order to celebrate the diversity of the region, efforts should be taken to increase public awareness of diversity through cultural festivals and activities, and the support of ethnic shops, restaurants and products.

CF4.C Continue to support community facilities as vital cultural and economic resources.

Fort Wayne and Allen County have a variety of essential community organizations and facilities that serve cultural, social, educational, athletic, business and economic needs of the local community, as well as northeast Indiana. Examples of these essential community resources include, but are not limited to, the Allen County Public Library system, the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum complex, the Grand Wayne Center, the Allen County Fairgrounds, the Embassy Centre, the Arts United Center, and other facilities owned and managed by Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne. Other important resources include the community's variety of museums, educational institutions and historic sites, such as the History Center, the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Science Central, the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, the Chief Richardville House, and the Allen County Courthouse. Fort Wayne and Allen County should pay special attention to protecting and meeting the resource needs of vital community facilities.