

6. Community Identity and Appearance

Introduction

Fort Wayne and Allen County are identified by a range of significant visual landscapes, from the downtown skyline and historic urban neighborhoods to small towns, farmsteads and natural areas. Citizens throughout the County are invested in preserving their unique sense of place, with particular attention to historic preservation, open space and environmental conservation, and the celebration of cultural diversity. This chapter focuses on a number of specific attributes that distinguish community identity and community appearance throughout Allen County and Fort Wayne, and suggests strategies for preserving, enhancing and celebrating the community's defining characteristics.

Overview

This chapter outlines the recommendations for addressing community identity and appearance 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 implementation: 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 identity and appearance in Allen County and Fort Wayne is outlined below. For a more detailed explanation of each finding, see the Community Identity and Appearance Chapter of the Existing Conditions Report.

Natural Features and Landscape

The three rivers running through Fort Wayne and Allen County (St. Joseph, St. Mary's, and Maumee) are frequently noted as a key character-defining feature of the community. While these rivers were integral to the historical development of the region, they have suffered from underutilization and neglect in recent years. Concerted cleanup efforts and enhancements to public accessibility throughout the region would be welcomed efforts. The agricultural landscapes in rural parts of the County (including fields, hedgerows, pastures and wooded plots), are also prized as character-defining features. The Fort Wayne Parks system is another key asset, and has the potential to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Other landscape features which help define the community's identity include the Kessler-designed system of boulevards in Fort Wayne, various parks, gardens and greenways.

Historic Sites and Cultural Resources

Fort Wayne and Allen County have a wealth of historic architecture, districts and neighborhoods. Fort Wayne in particular has a substantial number of historic landmarks, Local Historic Districts and properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Whether officially designated or not, these include the Allen County Courthouse, Lincoln Tower, Embassy Theatre, Swinney Homestead, and the West Central and Oakdale neighborhoods, to name a few. The area also is home to a number of character-defining features/places that serve as local landmarks, including the General Electric and Sunbeam Bread signs, Henry's Bar, Cindy's Diner, Coney Island, and the Concordia Theological Seminary. Other place-making buildings and historic corridors are dispersed throughout the County and serve as community identifiers, such as characteristic barns, churches and schools. Without official designation or protections, these sites and corridors are in particular danger of being lost to new development.

Community Attractions

Traditional neighborhood commercial districts can be found throughout the County and attract visitors from the surrounding region. The Three Rivers Co-op and the Southside Farmers Market in Fort Wayne are two examples of the unique shopping experiences available in the County. Various cultural institutions also help to define the community. These include the Allen County Public Library (with its notable genealogy department), the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, and the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo. Sports offerings include the Wizards baseball team and the Fort Wayne Komet's hockey team. Various annual festivals, such as the Johnny Appleseed Festival, Grabill Days Festival, Germanfest, New Haven Canal Days and the Three Rivers Festival attract visitors to the area. Allen County and Fort Wayne also offer cultural diversity, as seen in distinctive Amish settlements and ethnic neighborhoods.

Adaptive Reuse

Fort Wayne and Allen County have a limited history of success in the adaptive reuse of older structures. Community comments indicate that City and County agencies should strive for significant development and redevelopment that reinforces the character of the community, rather than allowing more generic approaches to development. Several potential models for redevelopment efforts already exist. Adaptive reuse of the Troy Laundry Building has brought additional vitality to the Calhoun Street corridor. Club Soda, the Gas House, the McCulloch-Weatherhogg House, St. Peter's School, and the Rolland Center at the University of St. Francis all illustrate how existing buildings can be creatively adapted for new uses. The excellent rehabilitation of historic bridges has returned many character-defining decorative elements that were lost over the years. Building upon a foundation of these examples as well as others, Fort Wayne and Allen County should continue to pursue high quality rehabilitation/redevelopment efforts.

Goal

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

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

Objectives and Strategies

Outlined below are objectives and strategies to support maintaining and improving the community identity and appearance of Allen County and Fort Wayne.

OBJECTIVE CI1.

RENEW, PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE RIVERS AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT WATERWAYS THAT DEFINE THE REGION.

The St. Joseph, St. Mary's and Maumee Rivers, and waterways associated with the Wabash River corridor such as the Little River, define the natural landscape in Fort Wayne and Allen County. They have played a significant role in the historical growth and development of the County. These natural features also play an important role in tying the City and County together. Unfortunately, the rivers also suffer from periodic pollution, a general lack of visibility, and are fairly inaccessible from the standpoint of passive and active recreation opportunities. Particular attention should be placed on waterways to protect them as significant components of the natural and cultural environment.

CI1.A Collaborate with an array of community partners to improve water quality and enhance rivers, streams, corridors and watershed areas.

National organizations such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and local groups such as the St. Joseph River Watershed Initiative can help monitor progress and suggest methods for protecting the County's rivers. Attention to nonpoint source pollution (such as runoff), enhancements to riparian buffers, and revisions to land use policies can all contribute to creating healthier rivers and protecting important natural resources.

CI1.B Improve public access to rivers and waterfronts.

Allen County and Fort Wayne should collaborate with parks and recreation departments and other stakeholders who are interested in improving public access to waterfronts and rivers. These groups should identify locations for creating boat launches and docking areas, and examine opportunities for enhancing trails and greenways along riverfronts.

CI1.C Investigate downtown river development and vistas.

A public/private effort should be developed to clean and improve the three rivers that converge in downtown Fort Wayne, in particular the St. Mary's river. This endeavor requires a complex and multifaceted strategy, including: structural improvements (to improve water quality and regulate water levels); visual improvements (to clean up banks and thin overgrown areas to improve visibility between downtown and the river), and an investigation of appropriate development to increase activities along the river. The effort should include not-for-profit organizations, environmental groups and government in partnership with the private sector.

OBJECTIVE CI2.

PRESERVE RURAL AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES.

The plowed fields, pastures, hedgerows, agricultural buildings and structures and wooded plots that define Allen County's agricultural landscapes were consistently cited in residents' comments as being visually and culturally significant features. Due to current trends of outward growth and low-density metes and bounds development, many of these agricultural landscapes are changing. The following strategies suggest ways to sustain these significant community features.

CI2.A Encourage the preservation of prime agricultural areas that are distinguished by high crop yields and large contiguous blocks of land.

Exclusive agriculture zoning districts are one way to encourage the preservation of agricultural landscapes. Continue a community discussion on the potential use of these districts. Review current ordinances with local farmers. The use of conservation easements is another way to preserve agricultural landscapes, and they should be investigated.

CI2.B Encourage the preservation of agricultural uses and structures by protecting agricultural areas from incompatible land uses.

Nonagricultural land uses are impacted when they are within close proximity of agricultural operations. Nearby nonagricultural uses can also influence the conversion of agricultural lands due to the availability of utilities and other urban infrastructure. Ways to protect agricultural areas from incompatible uses include: working cooperatively with local planning entities to discourage non-agricultural land uses in agricultural areas; limiting rural residential development; encouraging compatible rural residential development; and reviewing ordinances that allow rural development. A balanced perspective is needed when reviewing development in close proximity to agricultural operations.

CI2.C Develop and adopt updated regulations that place limits on metes and bounds tract property sales and development.

A study completed in early 2005 by the Allen County planning staff notes that from 1995 through 2004, nearly 17,000 acres were used for metes and bounds housing development, averaging approximately 8.7 acres of land per home. Centralized sewer systems are not feasible at this density, thus requiring on-site sewage treatment. Placing limits on the number of metes and bounds lots that can be split from an original parcel would help reduce the number of these lots and mitigate the potential negative impacts that this type of rural development can have on the agricultural landscape.

CI2.D Investigate agritourism opportunities as a way to promote and preserve our agricultural heritage.

Agritourism provides a way of linking the urban and rural aspects of our community. Agritourism enterprises may include: outdoor recreation; educational experiences; entertainment; hospitality services; and on-farm direct sales.

OBJECTIVE CI3.

PROMOTE THE REVITALIZATION OF URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS.

Downtown Fort Wayne and its surrounding neighborhoods represent a cultural core within the community, offering arts, entertainment and sports opportunities in a compact walkable area that is rich with historic resources. The following strategies suggest ways to create a more vibrant urban community.

CI3.A Review and update regulations and establish incentives to better support the adaptive reuse of historic and existing structures.

Reuse and rehabilitation have proven to be effective strategies to adapt buildings that have outlived their original purposes but have retained their historic features. Such efforts reinforce community identity by blending the past with the present, and attract new residents to downtown. Fort Wayne and Allen County should review, and if necessary, amend their zoning ordinances to facilitate reuse and rehabilitation of historic buildings, with a particular focus on promoting such

reuse in order to revitalize urban neighborhoods and towns. Specifically, ordinances should be amended to include special-exception uses and conditional uses that are predicated on the rehabilitation and maintenance of historic features.

Tools and incentives should be established to encourage reuse and rehabilitation. Some examples include tax abatements, shortened review time, tax increment financing, federal funding assistance, and federal tax credits.

CI3.B Support distinctive commercial areas and corridors.

Fort Wayne and Allen County have a variety of commercial areas that offer distinctive shopping experiences, such as the Southside Farmers Market, and numerous historic commercial districts, including Broadway, Calhoun Street, East State Boulevard, Wells Street, and central Waynedale, among others. Fort Wayne should work with local businesses and business alliances in order to actively support these unique shopping locales. They should also examine ways in which improvements to the public infrastructure, such as sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, etc., could increase commercial activity in these areas.

CI3.C Educate the public and the development community about community characteristics that should be preserved and enhanced.

Fort Wayne and Allen County residents have already identified a number of historic structures, architectural qualities, and community institutions that they would like to preserve (see the Existing Conditions Report – Community Identity and Appearance). These preferences must be clearly communicated to the public, and in particular to the development community. Workshops and reference materials that describe community identity and emphasize key characteristics that should be preserved can help to ensure that future development preserves existing structures and complements existing neighborhoods.

CI3.D Enhance the pedestrian experience throughout downtown Fort Wayne and other neighborhood commercial areas and corridors.

Downtown Fort Wayne needs to be reframed as a key destination, rather than a place to pass through. By generating a more pedestrian-friendly environment, downtown Fort Wayne and neighborhood commercial corridors can become more vital places for residents, businesses and visitors. Several recommendations related to this can be found in the Downtown BlueprintPLUS, completed in 2005.

OBJECTIVE CI4.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY APPEARANCE AND DESIGN QUALITY.

Based on community comments, residents of Allen County and Fort Wayne would like to see high-quality, context-sensitive public and private development that is integrated with its surrounding environment. The following strategies provide guidelines as to how this type of design quality can be emphasized, and suggests ways that community appearance could be enhanced.

CI4.A Encourage context-sensitive design tools to enhance local character and ensure that new development, redevelopment and roadway improvements are integrated with the community and complementary to existing structures and the environment.

Downtown Fort Wayne, urban neighborhoods, towns and rural areas all have specific needs in terms of preserving community character through good design. Fort Wayne, Allen County, and subsidiary municipalities and neighborhood groups should consider initiatives to develop context-

sensitive design guidelines, preferably with input from the public and the development community. These guidelines should address issues related to scale, setbacks, suitable materials, connectivity and signage, among others.

CI4.B Promote property maintenance.

Fort Wayne and Allen County should seek to aggressively enforce property maintenance standards in order to maintain the appearance of urban neighborhoods, towns and subdivisions. On a periodic basis, housing and building codes should be evaluated to ensure that they are meeting residents' expectations and community needs. Promote property owner responsibility and education.

CI4.C Undertake improvements to better define the public environment.

Allen County and Fort Wayne should undertake efforts to beautify public spaces. Specific efforts may deal with landscaping, medians, tree planting, public signage, lighting improvements and streetscape modifications. The Downtown BlueprintPLUS vision provides a number of specific recommendations regarding improvements to the public realm in downtown Fort Wayne.

CI4.D Promote the integration of public art into improvements to create a distinctive appearance.

Public art can be an effective way to communicate a sense of community identity, feature the work of local artists, and convey a unique sense of place. As public improvements are funded and constructed, public art should be incorporated to strengthen place-making efforts. Support should be given to public art projects identified in the Downtown BlueprintPLUS.

CI4.E Protect and enhance tree cover through an urban forestry program.

Trees are important community assets that can help to define a neighborhood, increase property values and improve the pedestrian experience. Fort Wayne should pursue urban forestry initiatives in urban areas, both in existing neighborhoods and new residential developments throughout the City. The Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department could take a leadership role in providing tree planting specifications and guiding tree maintenance. Depending on local interest, such an initiative could actively engage an array of volunteer support and private funding.

CI4.F Improve community gateways.

The gateways to a community create initial and lasting impressions. Fort Wayne already has gateway markers at major entrances to the City. Parts of Allen County and Fort Wayne, including distinctive historic neighborhoods and individual towns, should engage in efforts to create gateways through signage, landscaping and/or public spaces that reflect the community's commitment to maintaining a quality physical environment.

OBJECTIVE CI5.

IDENTIFY, PRESERVE, AND PROTECT HISTORIC SITES AND DISTRICTS.

The protection of historic resources retains the character of a community or region as reflected in its built environment and its landscape. It ensures that the community's heritage and unique character are preserved and passed on to future generations. Historic resources foster a connection to the community and a sense of pride among residents. These resources also provide an awareness of the community's roots and traditions, and they are valuable tools for education and scholarly research. The protection of historic sites and districts can contribute toward guiding redevelopment and

revitalization efforts that in turn, generate economic benefits, attract tourists and maintain a strong community identity.

CI5.A Partner with preservation organizations to educate the public and the development community about historic resource protection initiatives.

Information campaigns should be used to build awareness of the unique historic resources of Fort Wayne and Allen County. Protection of these resources can offer a number of benefits in terms of quality of life, community character and tourism. Informing the public about these benefits represents a critical step in securing citizen support for preservation initiatives.

CI5.B Conduct a thorough review of existing historic resources, and maintain and update historic property inventories accordingly.

Existing inventories of historic resources in Fort Wayne and Allen County are dated and considered to be incomplete. Fort Wayne and Allen County should work with historic preservation organizations in order to compile and maintain an inventory of historic resources in the County.

CI5.C Promote recognition of historic properties and resources through National Register of Historic Places designation.

The National Register of Historic Places acts as an important tool in the recognition of historic resources. This type of designation often changes the way communities perceive their historic resources and gives credibility to efforts to preserve these resources as irreplaceable parts of the community. The benefits of National Register designation include tax incentives for the rehabilitation of income producing properties and tax deductions for donations of easements. In addition, any property listed in or eligible for listing on the National Register is subject to a formal impact review if federal or state funds will have an impact on the property.

Fort Wayne and Allen County have many properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Many more districts and individual properties deserve special historic recognition, but are not currently listed. Considering the region's current trend of outward growth and rapid land consumption, official recognition of historic properties will be essential to preserving the unique character of both rural and urban communities.

CI5.D Promote Local Historic District designation of historic properties in the City of Fort Wayne.

Local historic district designation is a tool, provided by the Fort Wayne Historic Preservation and Protection Ordinance, to monitor changes which occur in historic areas. A Local Historic District designation may be applied to a single property or a group of properties. Upon designation, a design review process, prescribed by the ordinance, regulates proposed exterior changes by requiring property owners to apply for and obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness before a building permit can be issued or exterior work begun. In conjunction with independent preservation organizations, local governments should examine ways to confer protected status on key properties and districts that are historically significant.

CI5.E Enhance mechanisms for encouraging the protection of historic resources throughout Allen County.

Currently, the City of Fort Wayne has the only preservation review board in the County. Allen County and its communities should explore a process to review historically and architecturally significant resources throughout the County.

CI5.F Promote the maintenance and rehabilitation of historic buildings.

Fort Wayne and Allen County should undertake a number of activities in order to assist property owners in the maintenance and rehabilitation of historic buildings. Efforts should be made to provide information about available tax incentives, offer technical assistance regarding building design and the use of appropriate materials, and in some cases provide funding to support more extensive rehabilitation efforts. In pursuing these efforts, governments should engage in collaborations with preservation organizations, including the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana (HLFI), ARCH, and the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society.

CI5.G Maintain and enhance heritage corridors.

Several transportation corridors tell the history of the region, including the Lincoln Highway, Maumee River Heritage Corridor and the Wabash and Erie Canal Corridor (which opened up inland portions of the state to commerce and settlements), among many others. Fort Wayne and Allen County should examine ways to highlight these corridors for residents and sightseers through signage, tours, etc., in order to celebrate local history. Identifying and promoting potential heritage areas is a means to foster both historic preservation and economic development.

CI5.H Promote historic resources to capitalize on their economic, cultural, and recreational values.

Fort Wayne and Allen County should examine ways to promote the cultural heritage of the region as a key component of its economy. Through partnerships with historic preservation organizations, marketing campaigns and guided tours, Fort Wayne and Allen County can increase public awareness of historical assets among local residents and throughout the broader region. As the popularity of cultural tourism increases, it can play an important role in strengthening and diversifying the local economy, and generating public support for continued preservation efforts.

CI5.I Encourage the identification, protection and interpretation of Allen County's archaeological sites and the cultural heritage that these sites represent.

Allen County has an archaeological heritage that shows much evidence of prehistoric peoples and early settlers in what would become Fort Wayne and Allen County. Currently, archaeologists have identified and documented more than 2,080 prehistoric and historic archaeological sites in Allen County. There are more recorded sites than any other county in Indiana. The location and protection of archaeological resources should be considered when determining future growth and development. Fort Wayne and Allen County may support efforts to promote awareness and education about the prehistoric- and historic-archaeological resources of Allen County.