



2022 TOWN CENTER VISION STUDY

SEPT. 28, 2022 TOWN REVIEW DRAFT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2022 HUNTERTOWN TOWN CENTER VISION STUDY

This plan was prepared for and in cooperation with the citizens of Huntertown. May the Town Center remain the heart of the community and a place Huntertown is proud of.

Special thanks to the following individuals for their participation and willingness to volunteer their time and ideas for the sake of the Huntertown Community:

Town Council

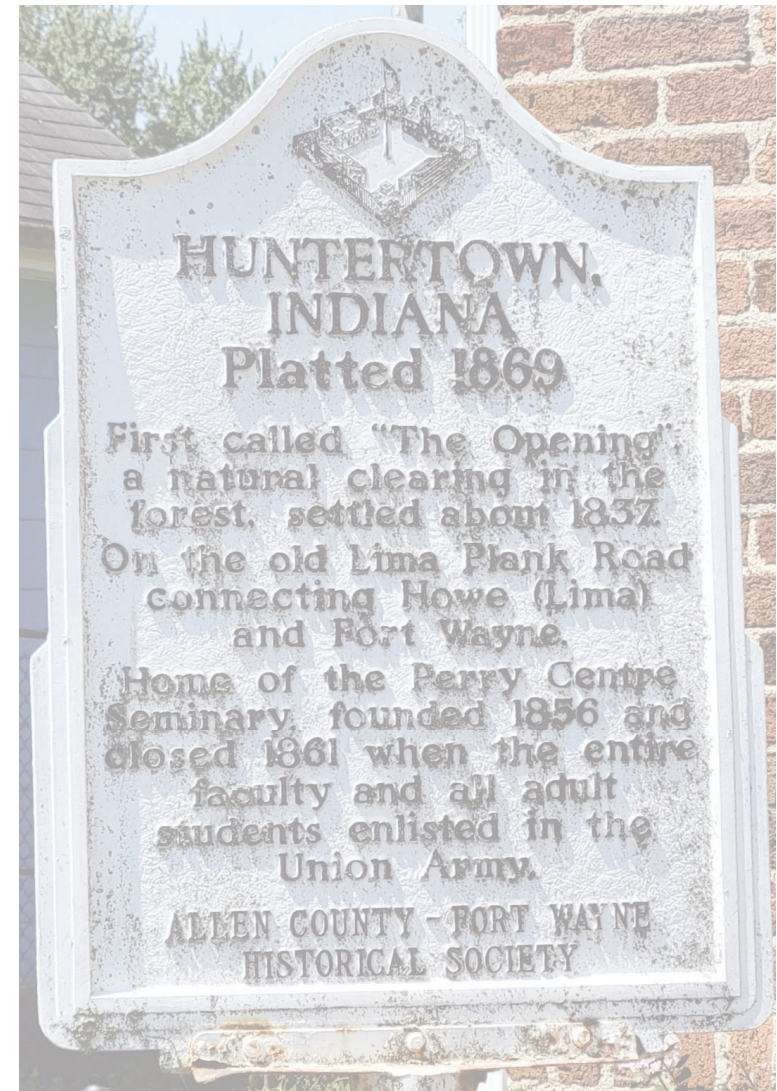
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Introduction

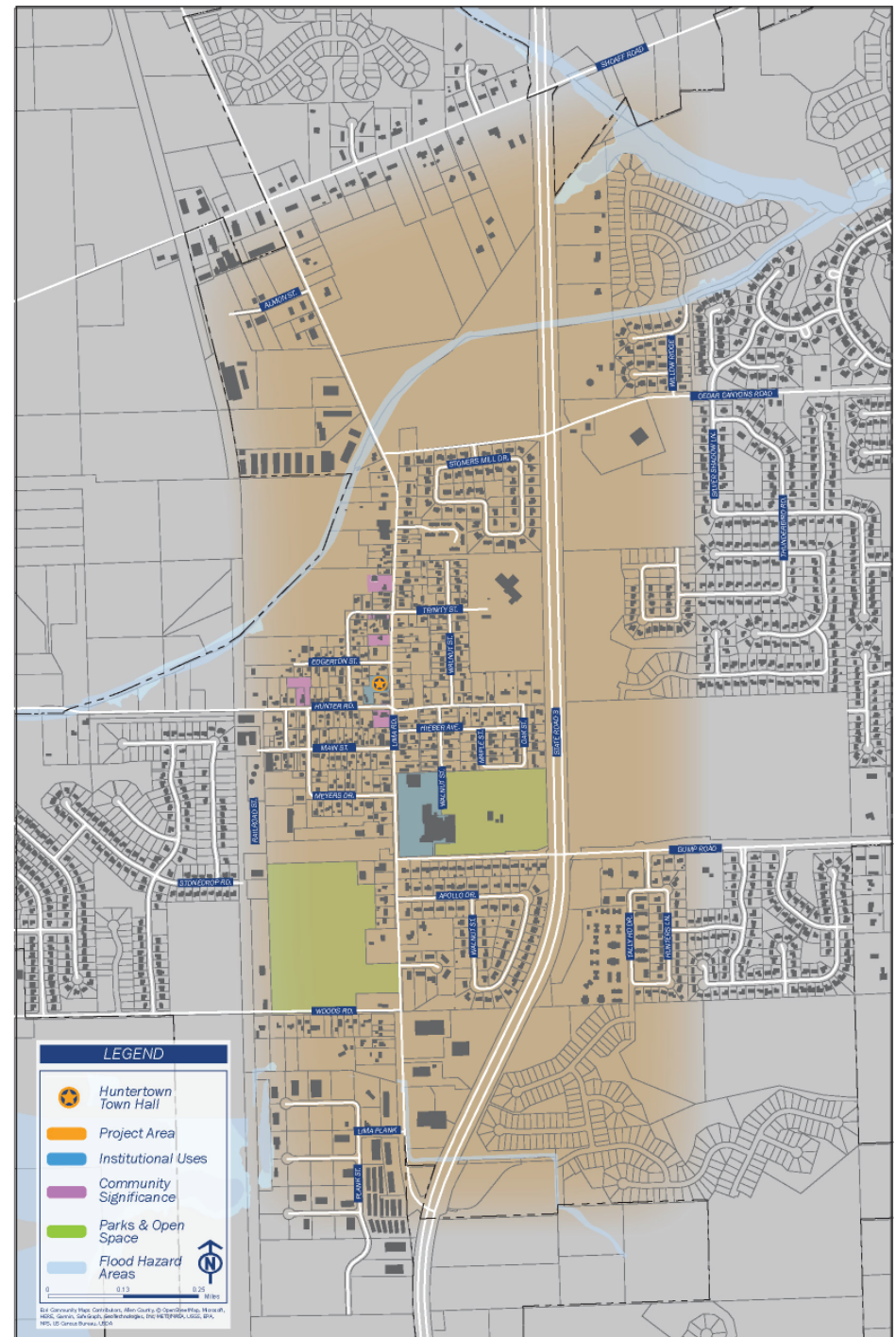
The Huntertown Town Center Vision Study is the community's initial effort to generate ideas and identify steps to revitalize the original part of town. The desire is to reinvest in original Huntertown over time to elevate its reputation as a unique community and regional attraction.

A map of the project area is shown to the right. It focuses on areas immediately surrounding Lima Road between SR 3 and Shoaf Road. This area is significant because it is what most consider "Old Huntertown" and contains most of the memories and history that residents are fond of and desire to preserve. This report refers to the study area as the Town Center District.

Recent rapid growth in the community has been primarily residential and concentrated beyond the study area to the east and west. This growth has attracted many new residents to Huntertown looking for a quieter lifestyle and the high-quality education Northwest Allen County Schools are known for.

The town's location within the Ft. Wayne region and along State Road 3 makes it a top choice for a wide variety of people seeking to relocate away from more congested areas south of Huntertown. These factors, coupled with the high-quality housing and growing attractions, give local leadership confidence that this growth will continue until the land is no longer available.

The timing of the study is intentional. Because of the recent and expected growth, the town must make plans to protect, revitalize, and enhance its heritage within the study area before it is too late. This vision study is just the beginning. It is the initial effort to explore ideas and dream of the possibilities within the Town Center District. It is a catalyst project, identifying the community's priorities for the area, aiding in its future likeness, and is the basis for more detailed planning and design efforts. Now that the priorities have been recognized, the real work begins.



Overview

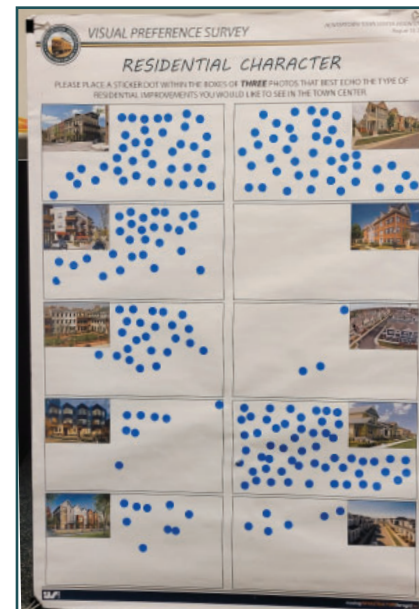
PROJECT PROCESS

The project process collected a broad range of ideas from as many people as possible within a short timeframe. It used a committee structure to guide project direction. Residents and community leaders played important roles in informing the project direction through a series of public outreach efforts. A summary of the process is included below and detailed information on the process findings, including survey results and meeting minutes, can be found in the accompanying appendix.

- **Task Force** - A group of community leaders and town officials responsible for guiding the direction of the study and reviewing initial findings. This group met five times during the project.
- **Focus Groups** - Groups of community leaders and business owners who met to discuss the plan-related topics listed below. More than 35 individuals participated.
 - Buildings and Businesses
 - Circulation and Connectivity
 - Parks and Public Spaces
 - Programming and Events
- **Public Survey** - An online tool to seek ideas and opinions from a larger resident population. More than 160 responses were received during the six-week collection period.
- **Public Launch Meeting** - An open-house event held on a Saturday during the Hunteertown Heritage Days festival. The relaxed outdoor setup allowed people to learn more about the project and provide opinions on their priorities for the Town Center District.

PUBLIC LUANCH MEETING

The Public Launch meeting allowed visitors to the Allen County Marketplace held during the Hunteertown Heritage Days festival to discuss the project with USI Staff, Task Force members and Hunteertown staff. It included two opportunities for people who stopped by to offer their opinions on project priorities and their visual preferences.



The photo above shows one example of the outstanding feedback recieved during the open house event. Photos to the left show some of the many different individuals who stopped by the tent to learn more and contribute their ideas to the plan.

PHOTO CREDITS: USI



Key Findings

SURVEY RESULTS

The online survey received more than 160 responses. It asked a variety of questions relating to the Town center district and included a visual preference survey, the results of which are shown to the right. The full survey summary is included in the appendix for further review. The overview below provides a highlight of the key findings.

- Homegrown businesses and the school make Huntertown regionally distinctive.
- Improving the appearance, amenities, and attractions within the Town Center District ranked among the most important goals.
- Creating pedestrian and bicycle-friendly connections between the Town Center District and other parts of the community was a top goal.
- New retail, restaurants, and recreation opportunities were the highest supported types of development.
- Private investment and grant funds were preferred funding sources to complete projects.

INTRODUCTION TO KEY THEMES AND PRIORITY AREAS

As the project team reviewed project information with Task Force members a number of key themes began to emerge. These were each explored in depth and used to provide the recommended framework for the project. An overview of each key theme is listed below with more detail on each in the following pages.

1. Enhancing east-west shared-use connections across SR 3.
2. Revitalizing the Town Center District.
3. Increasing attractions to draw more people into the Town Center District.

VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS

The visual preference survey was an opportunity for people to select their top preferences for visual character among three categories. Participants were asked to select up to three images in each category among a total of 24 options. Below are the combined results of the online survey results (160 responses) and the public launch meeting voting (+/-100 responses).

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER RESULTS



122 Votes



91 Votes



73 Votes

RETAIL CHARACTER RESULTS



198 Votes



127 Votes



71 Votes

OPEN SPACE CHARACTER RESULTS



188 Votes



93 Votes



86 Votes



Key Theme #1: Enhanced Connections

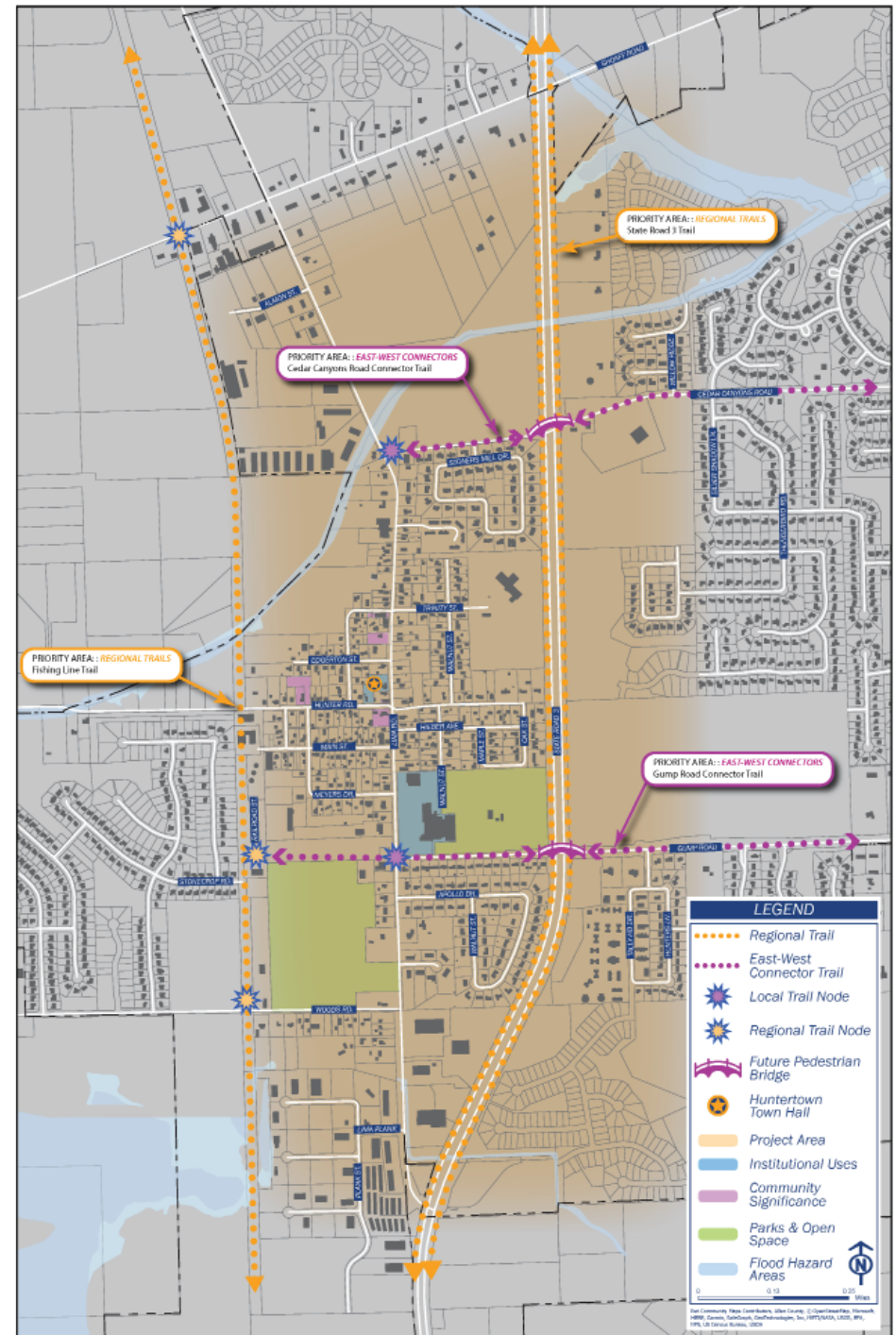
INTRODUCTION

The highest priority theme emerging from the public outreach was the desire to reconnect new residential development with the Town Center District. The biggest identified challenge to achieving this is the SR 3 highway corridor that bisects the community and creates a divide between rapidly growing residential areas and the Town Center District. Accomplishing long-term connectivity is possible using a combination of new shared-use trails and other local improvements that enhance local connectivity within the Town Center District.

Opportunities for enhancing connections extend beyond connecting new neighborhoods with the Town Center District because of the number of new regionally significant trails currently in planning stages. The town is involved in planning efforts with regional and state partners about miles of regional trails connecting through Hometown. Now, armed with a clearer vision for the future of the Town Center District, Hometown is well equipped to actively champion the best and highest uses for properties, amenities, and attractions adjacent to these valuable transportation corridors.

Hometown now has an opportunity to orient the Town Center District towards a development pattern supportive of a trail and tourism-driven economy. This will provide amenities for people passing through on longer trips, increase opportunities for local businesses, and enhance the community's ability to provide the high-quality atmosphere to attract residents to the district year-round.

The map to the right depicts the overarching ideas for enhancing connections taken from the study process. The following pages provide more details on specific projects and action items to help Hometown achieve this goal.



Regional Trails

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RANKING

The highest ranked priority during the public open house event was further developing regional trails through Huntertown. A number of regional trails immediately adjacent to the Town Center District are in various stages of planning or construction and include:

- The Fishing Line Trail (former rail corridor on west side of Town Center District)
- Shared-use trails along both sides of SR 3 within INDOT right-of-way
- The Pufferbelly Trail along a former rail line east of Dunton Road

Many conversations have taken place about the opportunities these corridors present to increase activity within the Town Center District through the following key efforts:

- Improving key areas around the proposed Fishing Line Trail, which will run along the former rail corridor west of Huntertown Town Center.
- Working closely with INDOT to further the planning and implementation of proposed trails along SR 3.
- Installing unique and attractive trail nodes at key roadway and trail crossing intersections to increase trail activity and direct people to the Town Center District.
- Attracting new restaurant and entertainment investment along planned trail corridors.

The images to the right depict just a few of the possibilities that regional trails present for Huntertown. Each example project has been completed in peer communities within Indiana and has provided a catalyst for each community to successfully achieve larger community goals because of the attraction it provides.



Development along Monon Boulevard in Carmel
PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF CARMEL



Iconic public art along Monon Boulevard in Carmel
PHOTO CREDIT: VISIT HAMILTON COUNTY



Urban section of Monon Greenway in Hamilton County
PHOTO CREDIT: VISIT HAMILTON COUNTY



Monon Greenway in Hamilton County
PHOTO CREDIT: CARMEL-CLAY PARKS



Pufferbelly Trail in Allen County
PHOTO CREDIT: INPUT FORT WAYNE



Development along the Nickel Plate Trail in Fishers
PHOTO CREDIT: FISHERS PARKS DEPARTMENT



Nickel Plate Trail in downtown Fishers
PHOTO CREDIT: FISHERS PARKS DEPARTMENT



East-West Connectors

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RANKING

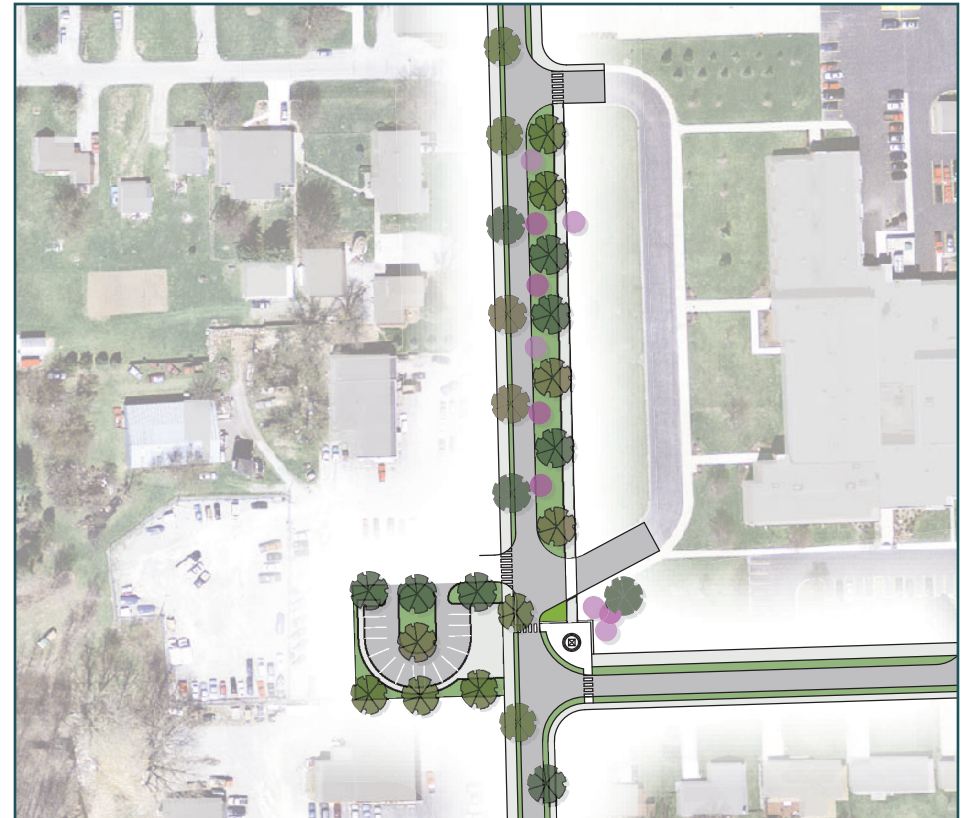
Many comments have been made about the disconnect between newer residential neighborhoods east of SR 3 and the Huntertown Town Center west of SR 3. Completing projects to provide the shared-use east-west connection between residential areas and the Town Center District was ranked second among the priority topics considered at the public open house event.

This priority area focuses on creating safer and more usable multi-modal (bicycle, pedestrian, golf cart, etc.) connections with the following key improvements:

- Shared-use trail along Gump Road
- Shared-use trail along Cedar Canyon Road
- Trail node and a resting spot at Gump Road and Lima Road
- Trail node and a resting spot at Cedar Canyon Road and Lima Road
- Pedestrian bridges across SR 3 at Gump Road and Cedar Canyons Road

The graphics to the right depict one layout idea for a possible connection along Gump Road in front of Huntertown Elementary School. It shows the possible connection and trailhead within the Town Center District to the existing trail along Gump Road east of SR 3. Extending the trail just 1/4 mile west of the trailhead will connect to the Fishing Line trail and the northern edge of Huntertown Family Park. Less than one hundred feet beyond that is new residential development.

EXAMPLE TRAIL CONNECTION AND TRAILHEAD LAYOUT



Rendering showing new trail with gateway marker and trailhead along Gump Road looking towards Lima Road.
PHOTO CREDIT: USI



Key Theme #2

Town Center Revitalization

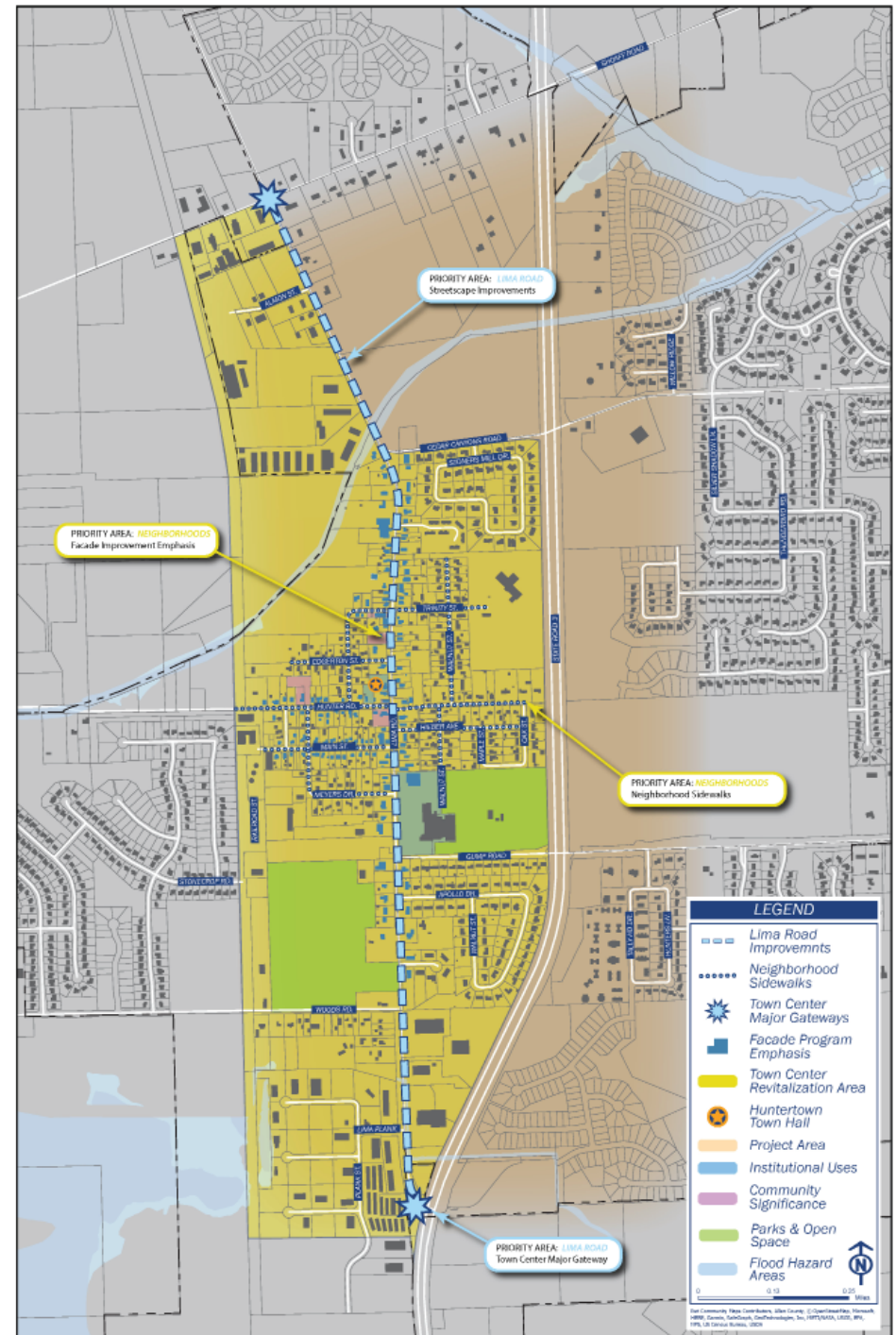
INTRODUCTION

Based on discussions and survey responses during the planning process, it is apparent that the Town Center District holds a special place in the hearts of many residents. This opinion extends across a broad section of the community including long-time residents whose families have been around for generations and relocates that have just recently moved to Huntertown seeking a better quality of life. This resounding response helps provide the value and importance of the ideas presented in this plan.

Through all of the conversations which occurred many resounding themes emerged relating to the Town Center District, some are summarized below.

- Find ways to preserve and repurpose the buildings and features that many consider being an important piece of the community. They leave a legacy that provides reminders of past times and what has made Huntertown special for so long.
- Explore creative ways to recognize Huntertown's history and uniqueness. Finding opportunities to help others learn this will add intrigue and connection for visitors to the Town Center District.
- Continue cherishing the local businesses that call Huntertown home. It is important to do everything possible to support a local business environment instead of typical regional or national chains.
- Improving the appearance of existing neighborhoods and surroundings through rehabilitation, infill, and redevelopment efforts is broadly supported and seen as an important catalyst for achieving other Town Center District goals.

The map to the right depicts the overarching revitalization ideas. The following pages provide more details on specific projects and action items to help Huntertown achieve this goal.



Lima Road Streetscape

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RANKING

Lima Road has been the heart of Huntertown for generations and will continue to play a role in the area. This roadway corridor holds the potential to become a community focal point through better use of the available space along the roadway. Potential improvement along Lima Road are summarized below.

- Road dieting increases active pedestrian space. It includes reducing the travel lanes to ten or eleven feet to slow traffic and provide space to install wider trails and sidewalks.
- Utilizing vacant space to create pocket parks and other attractions that activate pedestrian zones and increase foot traffic.
- Giving the town center area a unique identity by constructing streetscape enhancements that include consistent decorative lighting, unique paving, street trees, and other signature elements.
- Installing information signage to help people learn about Huntertown's interesting heritage and attractions.
- Installing public art and murals to increase intrigue and interest.

The images to the right provide one idea for a possible streetscape layout that will improve pedestrian safety and comfort. Improvements like this will support the future success of new local businesses within the Town Center District because they help encourage additional foot traffic that directly correlates to an increased business opportunity.

EXAMPLE LIMA ROAD STREETSCAPE LAYOUT



An existing conditions photo (top) compared with a rendering of possible improvements along Lima Road.

PHOTO CREDIT: USI



Neighborhoods

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RANKING

Many project participants have commented on the desire to preserve the small town feel of Huntertown but also acknowledged the importance of freshening up the appearance within the Town Center District. Neighborhood revitalization efforts will help make the Huntertown Town Center area more attractive and accessible through the following key activities:

- Installing connector sidewalks along key roadways.
- Providing opportunities for yard and building cleanup.
- Emphasizing and expanding the current facade grant program to assist with building beautification projects.
- Encouraging appropriate and attractive infill development on vacant or underutilized parcels.
- Supporting appropriate redevelopment of property at important locations along Lima Road.

The images to the right showcase existing places within Huntertown exhibiting the potential that reuse and infill development provides for the Town center District. Some have already received investment and some show the potential that exists with the proper mindset and some imagination to creatively consider how to bring new life to Huntertown cultural landmarks.



A fine example of a historic home, many still exist and provide opportunities for renovation PHOTO CREDIT: USI



An example of a new infill home within old Huntertown PHOTO CREDIT: USI



This former gas station has been repurposed into a popular local restaurant PHOTO CREDIT: USI



This existing barn is a lasting remnant of past times with potential for a new purpose PHOTO CREDIT: USI



Well-kept existing homes should be preserved PHOTO CREDIT: USI



This former bank building is an important existing building with future potential PHOTO CREDIT: USI



Town Hall has been renovated and is a fine example of adaptive reuse of an existing building PHOTO CREDIT: USI



Key Theme #3

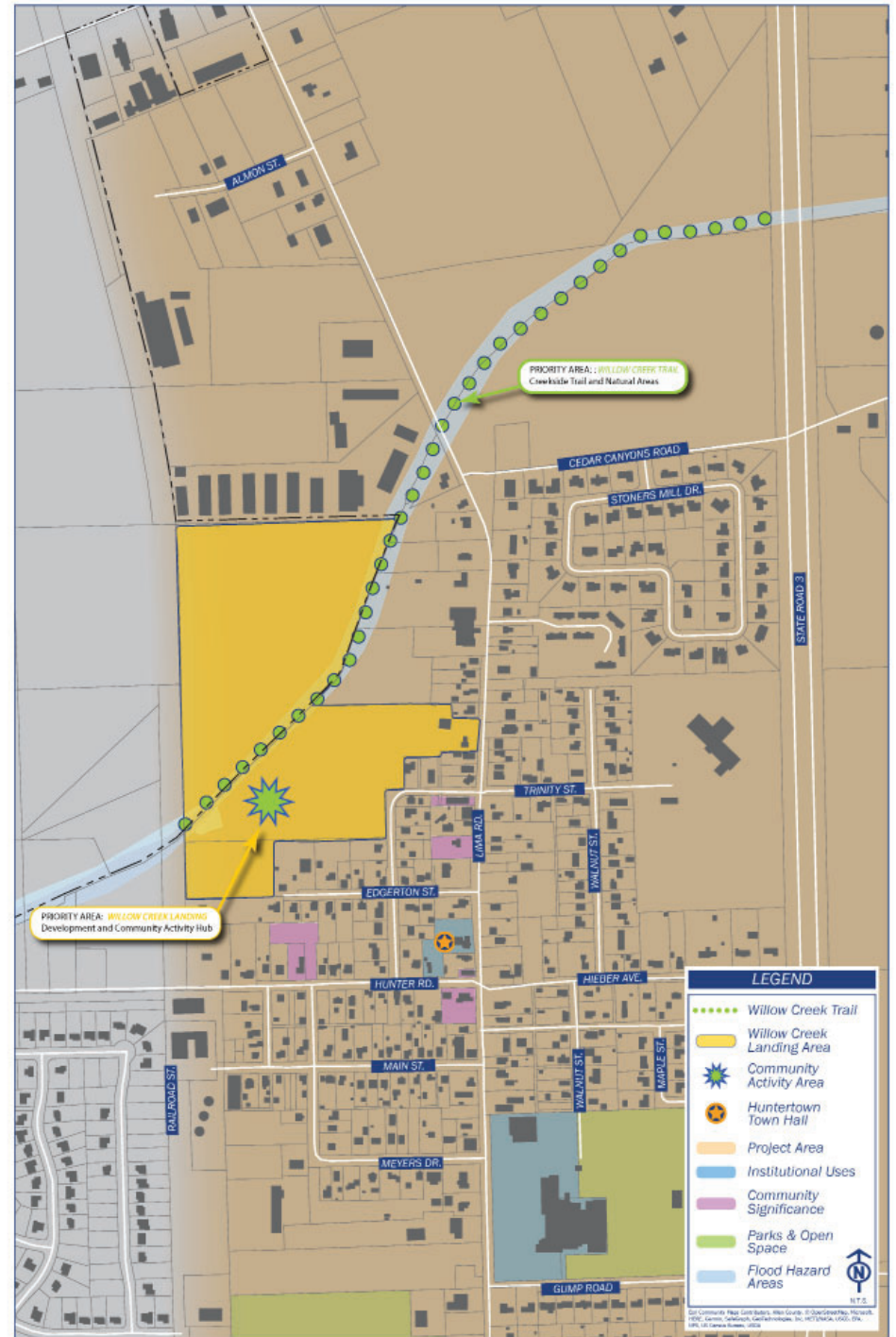
Community Attractions

COMMUNITY ATTRACTIONS INTRODUCTION

Creating the vibrant and active Town Center District that so many project participants expressed a desire for will require increasing amenities and attractions within the area. This presents challenges since the study area was developed over a long time period. There is little desire for a wholesale reconstruction of the Town Center District, like what some other communities within Indiana are doing, which means that every opportunity must be evaluated for its long-term potential and acted upon quickly.

Town officials have been aware of this and have recently undertaken efforts to identify and secure key properties within the community that have significance for future Town Center District plans. These range from existing buildings with historic significance to vacant parcels which have some value for future public amenities.

The map to the right depicts two of the biggest ideas for developing new community attractions discussed during the plan. Each project is discussed in more detail on the following pages.



Willow Creek Landing

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RANKING

Willow Creek Landing is an opportunity to build a new community attraction in the heart of the Town Center District. This +/- 50 acre parcel of land is bisected by Willow Creek and contains interesting features that make it attractive to bring the following possible amenities to boost activity throughout the town center area:

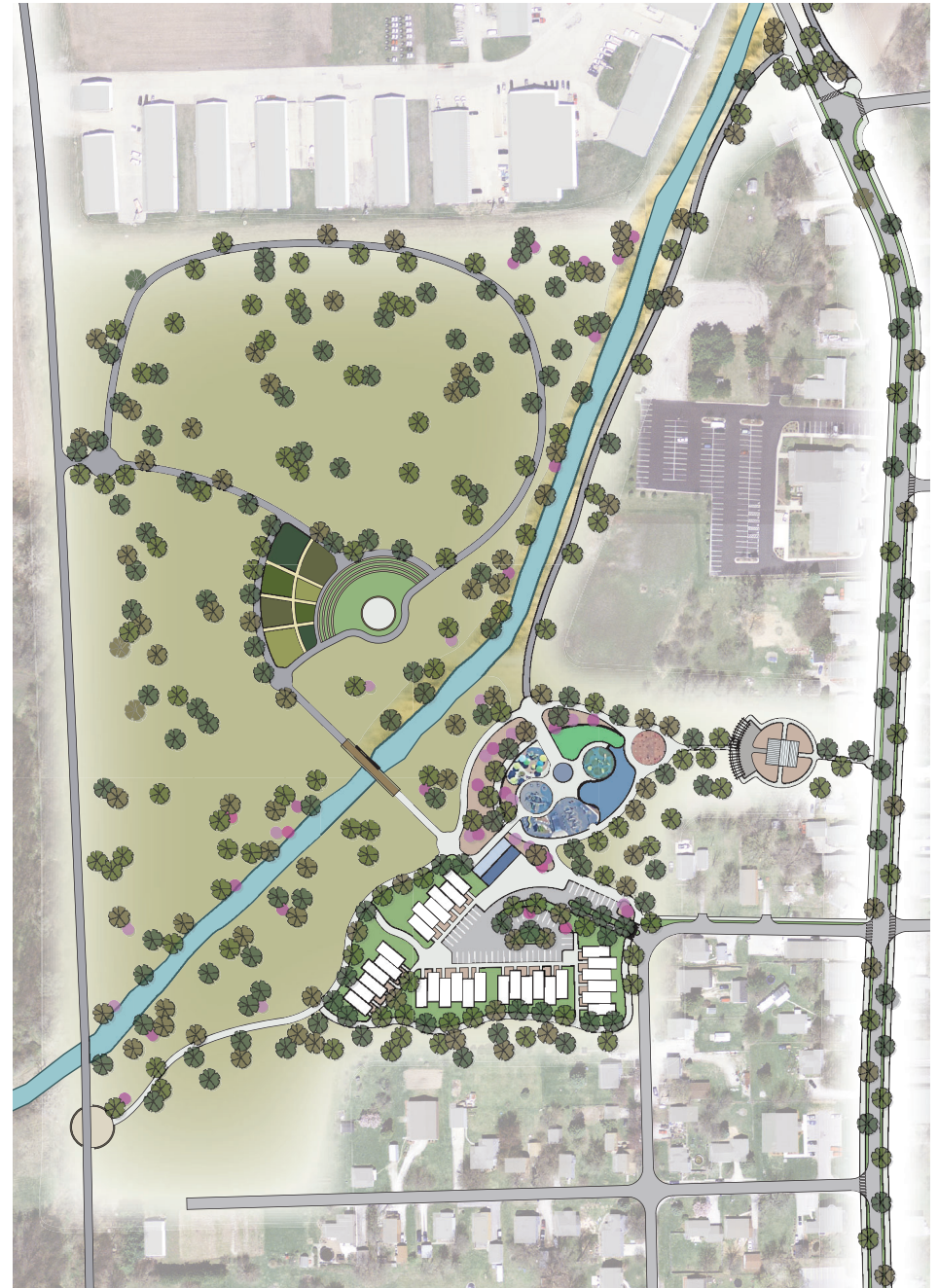
- Active play features
- Additional parking
- Event center
- Food and beverage vendors
- Active and passive public open space
- Exercise and fitness opportunities
- Natural areas
- New residential and restaurant opportunities



Precedent photo showing an existing playground in Maple Grove, MN. This image ranked high in the visual preference survey results. Space for a similar feature is included on the plan view to the right.

PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF MAPLE GROVE

EXAMPLE WILLOW CREEK LANDING LAYOUT



Willow Creek Trail

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RANKING

Willow Creek and its floodplain present an opportunity to activate a significant natural element within the Town Center District. This proposed trail will meander creekside through the Willow Creek Landing area and will provide opportunities to explore various aspects of Hometown's natural surroundings in the following ways:

- Using native vegetation in creative ways to enhance the trail experience.
- Establishing pollinator gardens at points along the trail.
- Installing landing and overlook points along the trail to allow for quiet observation and contemplation.
- Creating a unique focal point and connecting with nearby Willow Creek Landing attractions.
- Programming a fitness trail loop.
- Connecting to future Fishing Line and SR 3 regional trails and Lima Road.
- Utilize existing utility easements to limit right-of-way acquisition costs.

EXAMPLE WILLOW CREEK TRAIL LAYOUT



Existing easements along section of Willow Creek provide an opportunity to create a natural trail corridor.
PHOTO CREDIT: USI



Next Steps

The guiding vision for the future of the Huntertown Town Center District is a vibrant community center where residents and visitors can spend quality time together shopping, dining, and enjoying the quality of life that people treasure in this community. It will be a place that speaks of Huntertown's legacy but also points forward to a future where the town center is once again the heart of the community. The pride residents have in their community will be readily visible to people entering the Town Center District because of well-kept properties and ample opportunities to explore Huntertown's offerings. It will physically connect to the broader Huntertown community through shared-use trails and will encourage pedestrian and bicycle activity by minimizing automobile dominance.

This vision will only be possible through a firm commitment to careful planning and execution of the key ideas presented in the plan. Success will require a community-wide effort to articulate its needs and desires as leaders consider new opportunities. A consistent expectation for town staff, elected officials, and appointed officials to regularly turn to the vision plan as a guiding document when decisions are required will also be required.

To the right are the three principles to be used as a quick reference to guide discussion and planning for future projects and activities related to the Town Center District.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Revitalization

Enhance the appearance and attractions within the Town Center District to gradually evolve it back into the unique, attractive, and active heart of the community it is so fondly remembered as.

Destination Development

Leverage the appealing and unique qualities of Huntertown's heritage to enhance the regional identity of the Town Center District, gradually making it a top tier regional Live/Work/Play destination through an appropriate mix of neighborhood renewal, redevelopment, and amenities.

Opportunity Enhancement

Expand opportunities with the Town Center District by developing tools and projects to support existing businesses, recruit new small businesses, increase residential opportunities, and enhance community attractions.



Action Items

The following action items were developed to provide initial ideas on ways to quickly begin momentum towards the longer-term goal of full idea implementation. It is imperative to remember that these action items, like the vision plan itself, are just a starting point. They represent initial ideas that must evolve with changing conditions and be modified over time as the community works towards their desired outcome of a welcoming and vibrant Town Center District.

REVITALIZATION ACTIONS:

Neighborhood Cleanup Days:

Organize regular and repeated seasonal opportunities for neighbors to pitch in and help each other with exterior property upkeep. Advertise the events and provide waste disposal services. Enhance program impact through partnerships with religious, social, and cultural organizations willing to assist with labor, materials, or other services.

Seek Grant Funding:

Use this plan as a starting point to qualify and apply for available grant funding resources. Grant funds can offset some local costs for physical improvements within the public realm. Most of these are available through existing programs at state agencies like:

- Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA),
- Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC),
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR),
- The Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC), and
- The Indiana Arts Commission (IAC).
- Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA),

Various specially funded state and regional programs such as READI, Stellar Communities, Next Level Trails, and others are also offered periodically.

Land Banking and Preservation:

Continue evaluating properties within the Town Center District for land banking. Properties important to future implementation, have cultural or historic significance, or are in visible locations should be evaluated for future uses supporting vision plan recommendations.

Building Rehabilitation and Repurposing:

Breathe new life into the unique and diverse existing architectural styles within the Town Center District by encouraging reinvestment into existing homes and businesses. Explore opportunities to reuse and re-purpose existing buildings that have unique and important architectural or historical significance for the Town Center District.

Business Diversity:

Create an attractive downtown destination by encouraging and recruiting a diverse mix of new retail, commercial, dining, and entertainment options. Maintain focus on small businesses which offer regionally unique and authentic experiences, products, and services.

Architectural Standards:

Develop architectural standards in the spirit of visual preference survey findings. Ensure the visual character and quality of proposed projects meet the expectations and standards established by the community for the Town Center District, including more traditional neighborhood development patterns and high-quality visual character.

Public Open Space:

Encourage formal and informal community activity by enhancing existing park spaces and expanding new public open space opportunities throughout the Town Center District. Evaluate projects on their ability to offer unique, varied, and appealing experiences and activities.



REVITALIZATION ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

Infill and Redevelopment:

Define acceptable infill development and redevelopment practices and formalize them into future planning documents such as comprehensive plans and development ordinances. Develop an infill development strategy to efficiently use land within the Town Center District. Redevelopment should focus on the ability to attract the appropriate number and mix of uses to support the Town Center District as a viable residential, retail, dining, and entertainment location within Hometown.

Infrastructure Investments:

Continue to make utility and roadway infrastructure investments that address short-term needs such as repaving and neighborhood sidewalks while simultaneously planning for major projects in the future. Factor in future needs and desires for potential infill and redevelopment locations within the district.

Parking Concentration:

Minimize the impacts of automobile use on the preferred pedestrian environment by implementing a parking strategy that allows parking in concentrated locations. Develop parking standards that clearly define the intent and desire for the Town Center District to maintain a high-quality visual character and business visibility by providing unique and innovative approaches to meet the future parking needs of new residents and businesses. Strategies should consider golf cart parking, parking off Lima Road, Surface parking in concentrated locations, within geographically diverse areas of the district, and visual screening requirements to enhance visual appeal.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

Branding and Advertising:

Begin branding and advertising the town center as a unique destination within the community and the Ft. Wayne region. Encourage regular and repeated visits to the Town Center District through ongoing marketing activities specific to the Town Center District across a wide variety of digital and print media platforms.

Public Art:

Support and implement the development of temporary and permanent public art displays that add color, vibrancy, and character to the Town Center District. Work with the IAC to find peer communities that can assist in getting a local effort started. Seek guidance from IDDC on effective ways to use the arts to draw additional tourism interest.

Brand Awareness:

Rebrand the Town Center District and use regular and repeated positive news releases, using both formal and informal media outlets, to help promote and maintain a positive and uplifting opinion of activities within the Town Center District. Squander no opportunity to turn even the most seemingly insignificant event or development into an opportunity to showcase the positive changes occurring within the Town Center District through a consistent branding message.

Consistency:

Maintain a constant focus on encouraging and promoting only attractions, events, and businesses that adhere to the long-range vision defined in the Town Center District plan. The many opportunities that will undoubtedly present themselves will make this difficult but it is important for positive outcomes. Maintain flexibility by ensuring adherence to the spirit of the vision plan by including it in all future planning efforts.

Increase Activity:

Work towards consistent year-round activity within the Town Center District. This will help support existing local businesses and gradually build a market for town center business expansion. Gradually increasing the number of residents within the district will help increase constant resident activity. Highlighting significant existing historic and cultural assets within the Town Center District and backfilling them with additional social and cultural resources will support regular and ongoing activity and visitor interest.



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

Set Expectations:

Clearly define the town's expectations for the future and defend against undesirable development. Ensure the desired uniqueness, quality, and visual integrity of proposed investments adhere to the long-range vision for the Town Center District. Accomplish this by developing and applying policy measures and local tools, such as development ordinances and architectural standards, and clearly defined development expectations. Develop training tools to help future leaders and officials learn about the importance of the town's intended vision and how to defend the community's interests when considering new proposals and projects.

OPPORTUNITY ENHANCEMENT ACTIONS

Comprehensive Plan and UDO:

Incorporate this plan by reference into future comprehensive planning and development ordinance projects. Use it as a guiding vision to develop a broader set of documents that clarify the town vision and codify future development expectations – make it easy to do business in Huntertown by clearly articulating the expectations and process for new projects and holding firm to the town's desires.

Develop Projects:

Develop a strategic investment plan (SIP) to complete important public projects identified in the vision study. The SIP should articulate the desired project outcomes, define how expected relevance to the broader Town Center District initiatives, and align each project with the anticipated local funding mechanisms and dollar amounts for use as a local match for future grant assistance applications.

Create Incentives:

Expand existing tools such as the façade grant program and develop new tools to incentivize positive change and creative ideas for existing buildings and properties. Some tools used by other communities include tax credits, fee waivers, improvement grants, public art funding, and others. Reach out to peer communities to learn of their unique programs and tools to employ in Huntertown to incentivize and encourage targeted public and private investments.

Recruit Businesses:

Actively build a portfolio of small business recruitment tools that clearly define the advantages and opportunities for investment in the Town Center District. Some of the heavy lifting to start this has already taken place within the state, so reach out to IEDC, OCRA, IHCD, and peer communities to learn of available programs and tools which have been successful in other regions within Indiana.

