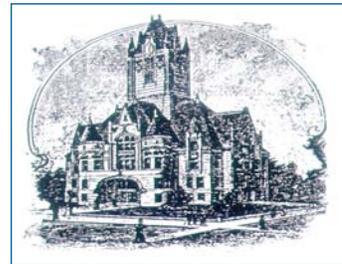


COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

HANCOCK COUNTY, INDIANA



ORIGINALLY RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION BY
THE AREA PLAN COMMISSION ON: JULY 26, 2005

ORIGINALLY ADOPTED BY THE HANCOCK COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS ON: AUGUST 29, 2005
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ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY:
HANCOCK COUNTY AREA PLAN COMMISSION

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PREFACE

*A typical farm field in Hancock County.
Many such fields have become
residential subdivisions in recent years.*

FOREWORD

Built on the strong foundation of its agricultural heritage, Hancock County is currently experiencing growth that presents a challenge to maintaining its rural quality of life. Integrating the long-standing character, values, and infrastructure & service capacities of the County with the diverse needs of the growing population is the issue that sets the stage for an update to the Hancock County Comprehensive Plan.

Since the last Hancock County Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1991, much has changed. The population has increased by nearly 25% as new homes have multiplied in the western portion of the county, utilities services have expanded, and traffic volumes have increased. It is the community's desire to manage the impacts of these trends that is the impetus for this Hancock County Comprehensive Plan update.

This Plan serves as a comprehensive guide for County decision-making in areas related to land use and growth. In order to develop such a broad-based document, a variety of information gathering tools were used. Numerous public input workshops were held, key community stakeholders were consulted, in-depth research and analysis was conducted, and a Steering Committee watched over the process closely.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

PREFACE

Foreword	II
Contents	III
The Vision For Hancock County	IV
Comprehensive Plan Mandate	V
How to Use This Document	VI
Updating the Comprehensive Plan	VII
Acknowledgments	IX

Chapter 1: Community Profile

History & Setting	1-2
County Dynamics	1-5
Demographics Summary	1-6
Public Input Overview	1-7
Issue Identification	1-9

PART I: COMMUNITY GOALS

Chapter 2: Natural Environment

Introduction	2-2
Goals & Policies	2-3
Riparian Areas Profile	2-4
Floodplain Management Profile	2-5
Wetlands Profile	2-7

Chapter 3: Character & Identity

Introduction	3-2
National Road Profile	3-3
James Whitcomb Riley Profile	3-4
Agricultural Heritage Profile	3-5
Goals & Policies	3-6
Wastewater Treatment Profile	3-10

Chapter 4: Land Use

Introduction	4-2
Goals & Policies	4-3
Certified Technology Park Profile	4-10

Chapter 5: Growth Management

Introduction	5-2
Goals & Policies	5-3
Impact Fees Profile	5-5
Farming Preservation Profile	5-9

PART II: IMPLEMENTATION

Chapter 6: Land Use Plan

Introduction	6-2
Build-Out Calculations	6-3
Location Criteria	6-4
Future Land Use Plan Map	6-5
Land Use Designations	6-7
Critical Areas	6-21

Chapter 7: Transportation Plan

Introduction	7-2
Regional Transportation	7-3
Thoroughfare Plan	7-4
Thoroughfare Plan Map	7-5
Mass Transit Plan	7-12
Critical Areas	7-13
Trails Plan	7-16
Trails Plan Map	7-17

Chapter 8: Town Subareas

Introduction	8-2
Location Map	8-3
Fortville	8-6
Shirley	8-8
Spring Lake	8-10

PART III: SUPPORTING DATA

Chapter 9: Visioning Data

Introduction	9-2
Key Stakeholder Interviews	9-3
Visioning Workshops	9-7
Prioritization Workshops	9-12

Chapter 10: Physical Data

Introduction	10-2
Demographics Overview	10-3
Demographic Profile	10-4
Physical Analysis Maps	10-24

The Vision Statement is an articulation of the values and aspirations of the Hancock County community. The goals and policies of the comprehensive plan that follow are designed to help the community achieve this broad vision. The Vision for Hancock County was developed by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, and is based on the input provided by Hancock County citizens and stakeholders throughout the planning process.

VISION STATEMENT

Hancock County should protect and enhance its unique identity, provide opportunities for all residents to advance their quality of life, and match development with infrastructure capacity.

The following key principles should guide Hancock County's efforts to fulfill this vision:

A UNIQUE COMMUNITY IDENTITY

The special character and heritage of Hancock County should be protected and enhanced for future generations. This includes enhancing the awareness of agricultural activities, supporting the vitality of the many small towns in the county, and carefully managing the important transportation routes in the area.

APPROPRIATELY PLANNED GROWTH

Growth in Hancock County should be carefully integrated into the established community and maintain a balanced mix of land uses. New development should occur in a way that ensures appropriate infrastructure and services are provided.

A STRONG ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

The economy of Hancock County should be enhanced through a coordinated and comprehensive economic development strategy, including the recruitment of high-tech, new economy businesses. At the same time, support for more traditional businesses and industries should also remain strong.

VIBRANT CITIES AND TOWNS

Hancock County should ensure the vitality of each of its cities and towns as unique centers of activity. Each community should be valued and supported within the framework of the overall quality of life of Hancock County.

A SAFE AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Hancock County should have a transportation system with adequate road capacity, safe travel routes, and efficient connections between key destinations. The county should also support alternatives to traditional forms of transportation, such as bicycling and mass transit, particularly as connections with destinations throughout the Indianapolis region.

ADEQUATE PUBLIC SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Hancock County's public services and infrastructure should be of the highest quality possible. The governmental entities in the county should work together to provide these services while minimizing the tax impact that new growth has on residents.

BALANCED HOUSING OPTIONS

Hancock County should offer a diverse array of housing styles, types, and price ranges to best serve the growing residential market. Quality housing options should be accessible to residents of all income levels.

This comprehensive plan is based on community input, existing land uses, development trends, suitability of land uses, economic feasibility, natural land features, and the requirements of Indiana law.

Indiana statute, Title 36, Article 7, as amended, empowers counties to plan. Local government is further charged with the purpose of improving "the health, safety, convenience, and welfare of the citizens and to plan for the future development of the community to the end that:

- highway systems (and street systems) be carefully planned;
- new communities grow only with adequate public way, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities;
- the needs of agriculture, industry, and business be recognized in future growth;
- residential areas provide healthful surroundings for family life; and
- the growth of the community is commensurate with, and promotive of the efficient and economical use of public funds". (IC 36-7-4-201)

Public law further states that a county may establish planning and zoning entities to fulfill this purpose. (IC 36-7-4-201)

Furthermore, the adoption of comprehensive plan is established by legislative mandate as the basis for zoning and subdivision control ordinances. The Indiana statutes provide for, and require the development and maintenance of a comprehensive plan by each plan commission. (IC 36-7-4-501)

IC 36-7-4-502 and 503 state the required and permissible contents of the plan. Required plan elements include:

- a statement of objectives for the future development of the jurisdiction;
- a statement of policy for the land use development of the jurisdiction; and
- a statement of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

The Plan Commission may also compile additional information, permissible by case law, into a Comprehensive Plan. This mandate serves as the foundation for the Hancock County Comprehensive Plan.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The Comprehensive Plan is a community guidebook. It will help guide the Area Plan Commission in its decision-making process. However, it addresses many other community issues as well. When reviewing development plans, making budgets, or setting priorities this document should be used to help guide decisions.

Because of its emphasis on public participation this plan gives county leaders knowledge of what the community wants and needs. This plan:

- can assist the County when considering infrastructure or economic development decisions,
- can provide civic groups with ideas on how to strengthen and enhance the community, and
- serves as the legal basis for protection and conservation of sensitive environmental features, historic sites, and other community resources.

To facilitate the decision making process, the document is organized with the following features:

PREFACE

The preface provides a synopsis of the contents of the plan. It includes a community profile, which provides a snapshot of the community in time and describes recent trends. This profile includes a brief summary of local history and demographics, as well as the public input and other information that serves as the basis for the rest of the document. The preface also identifies the primary issues that were identified during the planning process.

PART I - COMMUNITY GOALS

The goals provide a conceptual response to Hancock County’s vision and a direct response to the issues identified in the community. Each goal describes a philosophy of the community and provides a platform for the plan’s implementation tools. The community goals section is divided into topic areas, each with its own set of goals and corresponding policies. The policies are composed of more specific directives that suggest means to accomplish each goal. Together, these goals and policies form the foundation that should guide future decision making by the county.

PART II - IMPLEMENTATION

The Implementation section provides tools by which the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan may be implemented. Specifically included here are the Land Use Plan and the Transportation Plan. These plans detail the location and type of future growth recommended for Hancock County, as well as future transportation system changes required to serve this growth. The Towns chapter includes detailed information pertaining to the towns that are members of the Area Plan Commission. Specifically, this includes the towns of Fortville, Shirley and Spring Lake.

PART III - SUPPORTING DATA

The supporting data section includes all of the background information and analysis used in the development of the Hancock County Comprehensive Plan. This includes demographic data, public input data, and a series of maps.

The comprehensive plan represents a response to the development trends, public opinions, and physical circumstances that affect Hancock County today, as well as the impact they may have in the future. Over time, these factors could change in a way that affects the comprehensive plan's policies. For this reason, it is important to undertake a regular review of the document to ensure that it contains an appropriate and effective set of policies to guide Hancock County.

WHEN SHOULD THE PLAN BE UPDATED?

Typically, a community will undertake a major update of its comprehensive plan approximately every 5 years. An interim review should occur annually. The interim review should include a discussion of changes in the community since the comprehensive plan was adopted and note amendments that may be appropriate. In addition, the community may periodically choose to revisit only certain elements of the comprehensive plan, particularly if necessitated by a major change in the community. In some cases, a development proposal will cause a community to reevaluate its comprehensive plan policies and consider making changes to the plan that will better inform or address similar types of development.

HOW IS THE PLAN AMENDED?

The process for amending the comprehensive plan is specified in the 36-7-4-500 series of the Indiana Code. The legislative body of the county or any of the member towns of the Area Plan Commission may initiate an amendment to the comprehensive plan. The process is as follows:

- Step 1** **Amendment Requested:** The legislative body sends a written request to the Area Plan Commission to prepare the desired amendment.
- Step 2** **Amendment Prepared:** The Area Plan Commission then has 60 days to prepare and submit the requested amendment. This time frame may be extended by the legislative body as needed.
- Step 3** **Public Hearing & Certification:** The Area Plan Commission holds a public hearing regarding the amendment, at which time the amendment may be approved or rejected. If approved, the amendment is certified to each participating legislative body.
- Step 4** **Legislative Body Action:** Once the amendment is certified, each participating legislative body may adopt a resolution approving, rejecting, or amending the amendment. The amendment is not effective for a jurisdiction until it has been approved by a resolution of its legislative body.
- Step 5** **Return to Plan Commission (if necessary):** If the amendment is rejected or amended by the legislative body, it is returned to the Area Plan Commission with a written statement of the reasons for its rejection or amendment.
- Step 6** **Plan Commission Reconsideration:** The Area Plan Commission has 60 days to consider the rejection or amendment, and to file its report with the legislative body. This time frame may be extended by the legislative body as needed.

Note: A reevaluation of the comprehensive plan most frequently occurs when a rezoning request for a particular use is made in an area where that use is not supported by the plan. It is important that any changes of this nature are carefully considered, and that the best interests of the entire community are kept in mind when making these decisions.

Step 7 **Plan Commission Action:** If the Area Plan Commission approves the amendment in its changed form, then it becomes effective as of the date the Commission files its report with the legislative body. If the Commission disapproves the rejection or amendment, the action of the legislative body on the original rejection or amendment stands only if confirmed by another resolution of the legislative body. If the Area Plan Commission does not file a report with the legislative body within the time frame allotted, the action of the legislative body in rejecting or amending the proposed amendment becomes final.

HOW SHOULD AMENDMENTS BE EVALUATED?

Some criteria that would be appropriate to consider as part of the amendment process are listed below. While these may not be the only criteria to consider, they will help to frame the discussion of each amendment.

- Will the amendment provide an improvement to the comprehensive plan and not be solely for the good or benefit of a particular landowner at a particular point in time?
- Is the amendment consistent with the overall intent of the comprehensive plan's goals and policies?
- Will the amendment affect the livability of the area, or the health, safety, or welfare of present or future residents?
- Will the amendment have an adverse impact on any neighboring lands?
- Will the amendment trigger the need for significant public expenditures for infrastructure or services like roads, sewer, or water?

The comprehensive plan should be a living document. While the plan cannot anticipate every possible land use or policy change in the future, a carefully considered process of review and updates will allow it to remain flexible and responsive to changing conditions. Diligent monitoring and maintenance of its goals and policies will ensure that Hancock County has proper guidance for its future growth and development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Hancock County Comprehensive Plan is the result of hard work and contributions from many people. A Plan that does not involve those it hopes to serve will not be as successful as one that does. For this reason, the residents of the community put forth much effort, thoughts, and ideas. It is appropriate and necessary to give special recognition to the following people and organizations who were integral to this planning process.

Special thanks goes to the people of Hancock County, particularly those who attended the workshops, completed the surveys, participated in the interviews, and otherwise provided their valuable input into the planning process. Thanks also go to the following people who made this effort possible:

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PREFACE

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