

CHAPTER 5

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

PART I: COMMUNITY GOALS

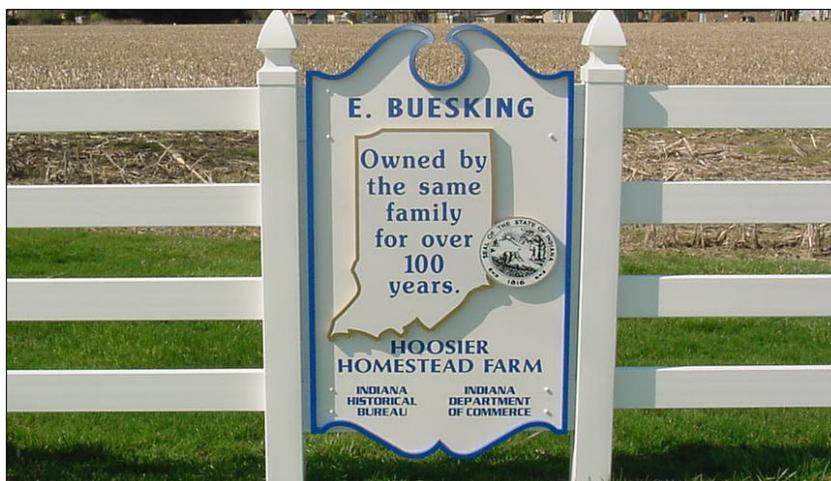


INTRODUCTION

This Growth Management chapter of the comprehensive plan focuses primarily on ways that the county can manage the impacts of growth in a way that maintains and enhances its quality of life. The on-going growth of Hancock County is bringing more people, traffic, and demand for vital services and infrastructure. The county faces the challenge of accommodating growth and providing services and infrastructure both efficiently and effectively. Not only must growth be guided in ways that complement infrastructure availability, but that infrastructure must be appropriately managed to maintain an adequate level of service.

This chapter is intended to provide a framework for managing the impacts of growth over time. While the land use, environment, and character chapters all speak to individual components of growth, this chapter brings them together under a strategy for managing growth over the long term. This includes minimizing the cost of growth to county residents, while maximizing the impact of public investments in infrastructure and services. It is this balance that the following goals and policies are intended to achieve.

Long-time family farms, such as the one noted in the picture at right, are beginning to feel the impacts of nearby growth.



Encourage development to locate in areas with adequate infrastructure and services.

Policy 1 Discourage development in areas where infrastructure is not available to serve it.

Development should be directed to areas that can adequately support it with appropriate services and infrastructure. This is important not only for sewer and water, but for other services like police, fire, and schools. The highest residential densities should occur adjacent to cities and towns and along major transportation corridors, with commercial and industrial uses of appropriate scales included.

Policy 2 Provide land owners the opportunity to develop their land as long as appropriate infrastructure is available.

One of the key issues that helps to set the context for this plan is the recognition of property rights. The county's growth management policies should balance development patterns with the protection of these rights. Growth patterns that reflect infrastructure availability are achievable in the context of property rights protection.

Policy 3 Support continued farming activities.

Farming as a land use has become threatened by continued residential development in some areas of Hancock County. While the county may not enact a formal farmland preservation program, there are other steps it can take to promote continued farming. The county should work to provide education, information, and support for those who choose to practice farmland preservation.

Note: The Farming Protection Profile on page 5-9 describes some tools that could be used to protect farming operations in Hancock County.

GOAL TWO: ADEQUATE FACILITIES & SERVICES

Provide infrastructure and services that support planned future growth.

Policy 1 Ensure adequate infrastructure & services capacity.

The Future Land Use Plan designates the future pattern of growth and development in Hancock County. The county should tailor its infrastructure and services investments to support the Future Land Use Plan. In this way, areas expected to grow will be provided with the infrastructure support they need in a timely and efficient way.

Policy 2 Discourage inconsistent development.

Development that is inconsistent with the Future Land Use Plan should be discouraged. This type of development may negatively impact those areas where growth is encouraged, and could also unnecessarily redirect the county's investments in infrastructure and services.

Policy 3 Support the installation of fiber optic infrastructure.

Fiber optic lines are key assets in terms of marketing the county to high-tech businesses. Efforts to install this infrastructure in strategic locations should be supported in order to make the county a viable option for this type of employer.

Policy 4 Seek alternative infrastructure financing sources.

The county should look for new and creative ways to fund necessary infrastructure improvements. With the uncertainty of the modern economy, it makes sense to be prepared to use alternative funding methods. These could come in the form of grants, taxing districts, or even impact fees charged to new development.

Note: The Impact Fees Profile on page 5-5 describes the methodology for creating impact fees to fund infrastructure improvements.

Action Step(s)

Prepare for the impacts of constructing County Fairground facilities at a new location.

The creation of a new County Fairground has been a topic of discussion in the community. While no final decision on a location or source of funding has been made, it is important that the county prepare for the land use and infrastructure impacts that such a facility would have. If utilities are extended from Greenfield to a new facility outside the city, this could spur additional development of other uses in the area. The traffic impacts of a new fairground, as well as ancillary development in its vicinity, may necessitate road upgrades. These and other factors must be considered as this project continues to move forward.

Development in Hancock County has an ever-increasing impact on the safety and efficiency of the county’s roads. In order to make the road improvements required to accommodate new growth, a source of financing is required. Indiana State Law provides the opportunity for communities to enact Impact Fees on new development to fund infrastructure improvements.

What is an Impact Fee?

An Impact Fee is a fee charged to a developer based on the impact that a development will have on the community. The fees are charged to any development that would require a building permit, whether it is a grocery store or a single family home. If a community wished to fund transportation improvements, it would charge an impact fee for each new vehicle trip that a development adds to the roadway. For example, if a single family home creates 10 new vehicle trips, the per trip fee would be multiplied by 10 to arrive at the total impact fee. The fees collected are then reserved in a special account that is later used to fund the desired improvements.

How Are Impact Fees Established?

The Indiana State Code (IC 36-7-4-1300 Series) defines a detailed process that a community must follow in order to enact impact fees. A general summary of this process is as follows:

- **Impact Zone:** The community must first designate an Impact Zone, the geographic area where the Impact Fee will be assessed to new development.
- **Zone Improvement Plan:** Next, a Zone Improvement Plan must be prepared. This plan specifies the infrastructure improvements that will be made within the Impact Zone with the funds generated by the Impact Fee. The Zone Improvement Plan is then adopted as a component of the community’s Comprehensive Plan.
- **Impact Fee Ordinance:** Finally, an Impact Fee Ordinance must be prepared. This ordinance specifies the exact Impact Fees that will be charged to development. The fees are calculated based on the cost of the improvements that are specified in the Zone Improvement Plan. The Impact Fee Ordinance is then adopted as a component of the Zoning Ordinance.

State law provides specific requirements and standards for the definition of Impact Zones and the content of Zone Improvement Plans and Impact Fee Ordinances.

GOAL THREE: COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION

Work with local and regional stakeholders to coordinate future growth plans.

Policy 1 Maintain working relationships with the cities and towns that are not members of the Area Plan Commission.

All of the communities within Hancock County should work together to protect and enhance the county's quality of life. Coordination between the plans and ordinances of the various communities will provide more seamless transitions between them. In order to do so, the county must maintain an awareness of the policies and plans of the communities that aren't included in the Area Plan Commission.

Policy 2 Maintain communication with the planning authorities of the counties that border Hancock County.

While internal coordination will reap benefits, the county should also remain abreast of the growth and development policies of the counties that border Hancock County. Each county has unique growth issues as well as unique planning solutions to address them. Particularly in the growing western portion of the county, it is important to coordinate development policies at the county's edges.

Policy 3 Coordinate future growth plans with the county's school districts.

Due to the impact that residential growth has on school facilities, the county's school districts need to remain informed about planned growth patterns so that they may program their facilities needs accordingly. This coordination would also allow the county to be prepared for the impact that new school facilities can have on public infrastructure and services.

Policy 4 Enhance coordination between the county and utilities service providers.

There are often times when a community's future growth plans do not match with those of private or public utilities service providers. Coordination with these providers, both public and private, would help to reduce such conflicts, and would help make the development process in the county more predictable. This coordination could take the form of monthly or quarterly meetings with the utilities operators to discuss future plans.

Action Step(s)

Establish liaisons with other plan commissions in Hancock County.

Members of the Area Plan Commission could be designated to coordinate with each of the cities and towns in the county that have their own plan commission. Coordination could mean attending other meetings of the community Plan Commissions or having regular communication with their planning staff about growth and development issues.

Develop a county roadway system that is safe, efficient, and serves future land use patterns.

Policy 1 Develop an arterial roadway system that addresses the county’s future needs.

The traffic growth resulting from the county’s population increases is noticeable on many roadways. The county should develop an effective hierarchy of roadways to serve this new development in the future, paying special attention to the growth patterns established by the Future Land Use Plan.

Policy 1 Example: The establishment of a “frontage road” system along I-70 would better serve local traffic and reduce pressure on the highway. This could be accomplished by improving County Roads 200 North and 300 North, which already parallel I-70.

Policy 2 Reserve adequate rights-of-way for new or improved county roads.

One of the most important components of constructing new or upgraded roads is providing the land needed for the project. With a well planned and designed Thoroughfare Plan, the county will be able to reserve adequate rights-of-way as development occurs, setting it aside for future upgrades. This is a process that will save the county money in the long term, as less right-of-way will need to be purchased before road projects can begin.

Policy 3 Develop a strategy for the long-term upgrade of selective county roads.

While many county roads are likely in need of upgrade due to their age or an increase in traffic volume, it is not physically or financially feasible to undertake these upgrades all at once. The county must have a long term strategy for upgrading roads that meets traffic demands as well as the demands of limited funding resources. This strategy should reflect on-going growth patterns as well as the hierarchy established by the Thoroughfare Plan.

Policy 4 Seek opportunities to create more effective north-south transportation routes in the county.

Most of the major road corridors in Hancock County run east to west, while there is a lack of efficient routes for travelling north and south. It will become more important as growth continues to seek opportunities to upgrade existing roads and make new connections. The connectivity of the transportation system in the county needs to be balanced in all directions.

Policy 4 Example: As the Mt. Comfort Road corridor continues to experience more development, alternative north-south routes providing access to U.S. 40 and I-70 will be needed.

Action Step(s)

Develop access control standards.

In heavily developed commercial areas, the multitude of driveways creates conflicts between through traffic and those trying to enter or exit business establishments. Likewise, a proliferation of residential driveways on more rural county roads causes similar safety hazards. The development of standards that limit driveway access to roads and encourage sharing of access points would greatly increase the safety and efficiency of the county’s transportation system.

GOAL FIVE: **ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION**

Explore opportunities to enhance infrastructure for alternative transportation such as bicycling, walking, and transit.

Policy 1 Encourage site design practices that support bicycle and pedestrian travel.

The design of development can have a major impact on accessibility for bicyclists and pedestrians. The provision of sidewalks in developments is a basic standard that can greatly enhance walkability. In residential areas, providing multiple roadway connections between subdivisions can make them more accessible to all forms of travel.

Policy 2 Provide support for potential future stops along the proposed Indianapolis regional transit system.

Indianapolis is currently studying the feasibility of establishing a regional mass transit system that could potentially have lines extended into Hancock County. If transit stops are designated in the county, there should be consideration given to appropriate land uses and development patterns around them. This includes provisions for commercial development, high-density residential development, and adequate parking for transit riders.

Action Step(s)

1 Address bicycle & pedestrian facilities in the zoning ordinance.

Certain zoning ordinance measures can help to create a built environment that is supportive of bicyclists and pedestrians. This includes the inclusion of sidewalks as well as bicycle parking facilities in new development. In addition, provisions that establish pathways within and between new residential developments are key in this effort.

2 Participate in the Regional Mass Transit study process.

Recognizing the impact that a regional mass transit system could have, it is important that the county maintain a level of awareness and involvement with the transit study process. As a member of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization, Hancock County is in a position to effectively coordinate the results of the study with local land use and development issues.

Farming has been an active part of the economy and a way of life in Hancock County for generations. As development occurs, farming operations are threatened by the impacts of growth. Hancock County farmers should be given every opportunity to keep their operations viable. This profile summarizes a number of techniques that could be considered as the county works to preserve farming.

Agricultural Conservation Easements

Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements programs pay property owners to protect their land from development. The property owner sells or donates the conservation easement to a government entity or private organization, which usually pays the owner the difference between the value of the land as agriculture and the value of its “highest and best use”- typically residential or commercial. The land can continue to be farmed, and the land owners reaps a profit as if the land had been developed. Programs of this nature are typically enabled through state legislation that allows local governments to devise the specific details of the program that are appropriate for their community.

Right-to-Farm Ordinances

Most states, including Indiana, have enacted some form of right-to-farm ordinances. Hancock County is one of many communities that have adopted such ordinances on the local level. These ordinances establish the policy that agriculture is a valuable component of the local economy, and as such, will be given certain protections. Often, a right-to-farm ordinance will require that language be added to the deeds of rural properties that makes potential buyers aware of the noise, dust, odors, and other impacts of nearby farming operations. Some also provide a level of protection to farmers from nuisance lawsuits. Generally, these ordinances are a way of educating residents about the importance of farming, and letting the farming community know that they are supported.

Agricultural Protection Zoning

Agricultural protection zoning creates zoning districts that specifically identify agriculture as the primary allowed use. Such ordinances would protect farming operations and discourage other land uses from occurring in these areas. These ordinances also may address the density of residential development in rural areas, advocating much lower residential densities. This tool often results in a reduction of conflicts between farmers and non-farming neighbors, and can help to keep enough contiguous land in farming so that the operation remains viable.

Cluster Subdivision Design

Local zoning ordinances could be structured to promote cluster subdivision design for rural subdivisions. This design concept allows houses to be grouped close together on small lots to protect open land. The remaining portion of the parcel that is not developed is typically held in a conservation easement. This land can be rented to farmers for continued agricultural use. This tool is most successful when the remainder land is of a size large enough to be economically productive, or when that land is used as a buffer between the residential area and existing agricultural operations.

For more resources on this topic, visit the following websites:

The American Farmland Trust
www.farmland.org

The Farmland Information Center
www.farmlandinfo.org

The Natural Resources Conservation Service
www.nrcs.usda.gov

Indiana Agricultural Statistics Service
www.nass.usda.gov/in/

Hancock County, like other communities, is experiencing challenges in meeting the needs of new growth, particularly in the area of public infrastructure and services. As new residents move to the area, demand grows for infrastructure like roads and sewers, as well as for services like police and fire protection. As it reviews proposals for new developments, the county should investigate the impact of the proposed development on the county's ability to provide the needed infrastructure and services. Fiscal Impact Analysis offers one method of making that assessment.

What is Fiscal Impact Analysis?

Fiscal Impact Analysis is a tool that can be used to determine the fiscal impact that a proposed development will have on the local government's ability to provide needed infrastructure and services to that development. It compares the tax revenue generated by the proposed development with the services it will require, and the resulting public cost of providing those services. In this way, the local government can gauge whether the proposed development would, in effect, pay for itself, or if it would create a fiscal strain on the community.

As an example, suppose a development of 100 homes was to be proposed. The Fiscal Impact Analysis would first estimate the revenue that would be generated by those homes. Next, based on desired levels of service, an estimate of the cost of providing services to these new homes would be generated. If the revenue generated exceeds the cost of services, the development provides a net benefit. If the cost exceeds the revenue, the development does not, in a fiscal sense, support itself.

How is a Fiscal Impact Analysis Created?

It is important to ensure that any Fiscal Analysis is based on the most recent, accurate data possible to ensure that it truly represents the fiscal situation of the community. In general, the following steps are key in performing Fiscal Impact Analysis:

- **Operating Costs:** An estimate of the cost of services provided by the local government must be prepared. This is done by reviewing the operating budget of each government agency to determine what services they provide and the cost of providing them. This can be done on a more detailed level by determining the cost of providing services to different land use types. The result is a series of multipliers that can represent the per acre or per unit cost of providing each community service.
- **Capital Revenues:** On the other side of the equation, an estimate of the revenues that the community would collect from the proposed development would be calculated. This would take into account all local taxing districts, including property taxes as well as such things as school, library, or parks district taxes.

As noted previously, the cost and revenue numbers would be compared to assess the fiscal impact of the development. It should be noted that this is an estimate only, and that it should not be used as the sole decision-making tool when a land use proposal is evaluated. It can, however, prove to be an enlightening process for local officials and the public if implemented effectively.