

Simply Pulaski: A Plan for Quality

*a 2021 Review of and Update to the 2010 Ginovus
Pulaski County: Mapping a Path Forward
Economic Development Strategy
emphasizing Quality of Life, Opportunity, and Place*

Simply Pulaski: A Plan For Quality

8 November 2021

Dear Pulaski County stakeholder:

This document reflects the efforts of the members of the Pulaski County Community Development Commission's 2021-2022 Strategic Visioning Committee. The committee currently comprises two Commission officers, three elected officials, and one at-large member; four own or serve in executive-leadership positions in Pulaski County businesses, one is a regional relationship manager for a local bank, and one enjoys a very active retirement.

The project began in 2017, but was tabled in 2018 in light of more pressing issues, especially the adjustments, made by the County Council and driven by the Commission, to the County's property- and income-tax structures — changes made to increase Pulaski County's affordability while stabilizing finances. These alterations did not occur without significant debate, delay, and compromise, or without concern from property owners, but immense care was put into the process, seeking to lay the groundwork for a more prosperous future.

So, too, the program set forth in this update to 2010's *Pulaski County: Mapping a Path Forward* seeks to pour the foundation for a more vibrant and flourishing Pulaski County for all. It is an ambitious vision, but not one beyond the reach of this community. It will not be implemented effectively without the adequate allocation of the resources necessary to carry out its numerous projects, but this allocation will not be a *cost*: it will be an *investment*. To fund this plan properly will be to invest in this community — in the descendants, genetic and geographic, of those earliest settlers who built communities, lives, and cultures along the Tippecanoe River and the railroads that once crisscrossed these twelve townships; tamed the land and made it bountiful; and were proud to call themselves Americans, Hoosiers, and the sons and daughters of Pulaski County. To fund this plan will be to build our very own Mayberry 2.0, where we embrace our heritage and welcome progress to ensure the best quality of life, opportunity, and place for ourselves and future generations.

These updated Key Actions Steps are not merely an intellectual exercise, nor are they simply my ideas or committee members': they reflect the collective wisdom and care of the Committee and the full Commission; elected officials and community organizations; the residents, landowners, and business leaders of Pulaski County; and outside advisors who took the time to contribute thoughtful input. They are meant to be carried out, not forgotten on a shelf. They are meant to be a part of our community's future.

On behalf of the members of the Committee and the Commission, I am

at your service,



Nathan P. Origer,
Executive Director

Pulaski County Community Development Commission

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2021-2022 Pulaski County
Community Development Commission

Officers

Sheila Jimenez, President; Town of Winamac
Christy Coon, Vice-President; at-large
Douglas Denton, Secretary; Town of Monterey
Kelsie Zellers, Membership Officer; at-large
Brandon DeLorenzo, Board Member; at-large

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Maurice Loehmer; Board of Commissioners
Kathleen Thompson; County Council
Aaron Paulsen; Chamber of Commerce Board
Lynn Johns; Town of Francesville
Arthur Conley; Town of Medaryville

At-large members

Bill Champion
Blake Kasten
Brian Ledley
Breann Wilson

Staff

Nathan P. Origer, Executive Director

2021 Pulaski County
Elected Leadership

Board of Commissioners

Charles Mellon, President; District 2
Maurice Loehmer, Vice-President; District 1
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County Council

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Adam Loehmer, Vice-President; at-large
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Brian Young; District 3
Michael Tiede; District 4
Tim Overmyer; at-large

Clerk to the Board and Council

Laura Wheeler, Auditor; at-large

2021-2022 Strategic Visioning Committee

Sheila Jimenez, Chair
Kelsie Zellers
Maurice Loehmer
Kathleen Thompson
Lynn Johns
Bill Champion
Nathan P. Origer, *ex-officio*

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Project Background and Timeline

As stated in the stakeholder letter at the beginning of this report, the plan laid out over the following pages represents an update to the 2010 *Pulaski County: Mapping a Path Forward* economic-development strategic plan developed for the Community Development Commission by Indianapolis-based consulting firm Ginovus. The Commission's executive director and Strategic Visioning Committee (SVC) reviewed the 2010 plan's Key Action Steps (KAS), discussed the relevance of those KAS in 2021, assessed progress over the last decade, and determined what pieces missing from the plan need to be part of the Commission's roadmap going forward before adopting the first draft of this report.

After the SVC adopted the first draft, the full Commission reviewed and approved it, and the executive director then presented it to the Pulaski County Board of Commissioners and Council and to partner organizations for their input, as well as disseminating the draft to the general public and collecting input at open houses in the fall of 2021. After months of committee work and engagement with elected leadership, partner organizations, the community, and outside advisors, the SVC approved a final plan and presented it to the full Commission for final acceptance. This is that final plan.

While some of the specific tasks aligned with the various KAS in this plan are fairly definitive in their nature, others are starting points that may require the development of specialized and detailed plans exclusively for those projects (e.g., potentially addressing the need for an improved housing stock in Pulaski County). Some of these efforts will be exclusively or primarily the responsibility of the Commission; others will require significant buy-in and collaboration from other organizations, the citizenry of Pulaski County, or both, as well as support from regional and state-level partners.

The ordering of the KAS largely reflects the structure of the 2010 document and should not be interpreted as indicating any particular prioritization. The challenges that Pulaski County faces are complex and interrelated and demand a balanced approach to improving upon and investing in all three fronts — quality of life, opportunity, and place: making Pulaski County a better place to call home, in which to work or to run a business, and to visit, respectively. We recognize that making our community the best place to call home is necessary to retain and to attract residents, which is in turn necessary to attract future capital investment. At the same time, the fiscal concerns that limit the County's ability to make transformative investments of any scale demand that we expend energy toward facilitating strategic investments.

Ultimately, the Community Development Commission must strike a precise balance between making it clear that 'community development' is in its name for good reason and at the same time generating new sources of necessary revenue for the County government to ensure the long-term sustainability of this plan and the County government, more generally.

In the earliest years of implementation, the Commission must work closely especially with the Community Foundation of Pulaski County's Aspirations in Action steering committee to ensure that relevant community-driven efforts are strengthened by collaboration and not weakened by an uncoordinated and dispersed investment of resources, while simultaneously precisely targeting economic-development projects that provide vital injections of capital without draining existing resources. Beyond this scheduling consideration, the order of project implementation will depend on a number of variables; the Strategic Visioning Committee will continue to oversee implementation and to work with staff to establish timelines, to prioritize programs and projects, and to consider revisions to the plan as circumstances may necessitate.

Community development is a team sport, and all of Pulaski County is on the active roster. The following is our playbook for a vibrant, sustainable, healthier, and wealthier Pulaski County.

Plan-development process

6 April 2021	First Strategic Visioning Committee meeting Meadow Springs, Salem Township
4 May 2021	Second Strategic Visioning Committee meeting Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
1 June 2021	Third Strategic Visioning Committee meeting Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
7 July 2021	Fourth Strategic Visioning Committee meeting Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
3 August 2021	Approval, first draft, by the Strategic Visioning Committee Monterey Town Hall
3 August 2021	Adoption, first draft, by the Community Development Commission Monterey Town Hall
4 August 2021	Electronic publication, approved first draft

Partner-organization conversations

9 August 2021	Board of Commissioners and County Council County Highway garage, Monroe Township
13 August 2021	Pulaski County Industrial Forum County Highway garage, Monroe Township
31 August 2021	Uptown Project, Inc., Economic Restructuring Committee Montgomery Mercantile, Francesville
15 September 2021	Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
21 September 2021	Community Foundation of Pulaski County Board of Directors Zoom meeting

Public-information/-input sessions

18 October 2021	Star City Community Building, Star City
19 October 2021	West Central Schools central office, White Post Township
20 October 2021	Tepicon Hall, Tippecanoe River State Park, Beaver Township

Final Steps

26 October 2021	Plan revision by the Strategic Visioning Committee Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
2 November 2021	Approval, final draft, by the Strategic Visioning Committee Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
2 November 2021	Adoption, final plan, by the Community Development Commission Municipal Utilities Complex, Winamac
8 November 2021	Electronic publication, adopted final plan
13 December 2021	Presentation to Board of Commissioners and County Council County Highway garage, Monroe Township
1 January 2022	Begin plan implementation

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Formatting key

- Underlined, larger-size, Roman text indicates this is one of the three primary sections of this plan.
- **I. Boldfaced text following a Roman number indicates that this is an overarching Key Action Step (KAS), either from the 2010 plan or new to the 2021 update.**
- Plain, Roman text **following the boldfaced text** indicates this this is a brief commentary on and/or description of the particular KAS.
- *a. Italicized text following a lowercase letter indicates that this is a focused goal or objective encompassed by a 2010 KAS.*
- Plain, Roman text *following the focused goal or objective* indicates that this is an update and/or commentary on the particular goal or objective from 2010.
- **Boldfaced text following the 2010-plan goals/objectives** and the updates/commentary thereon or following the plain, Roman description of a new KAS **indicates that this is an introduction to new or updated goals and objectives encompassed by the KAS.**
- • **Boldfaced text following the boldfaced new-goals/-objectives text, set off with a bullet point**, and followed by plain, Roman text **indicates that this is a new or updated goal or objective**, followed by an explanation thereof.

A. 2010 Key Action Steps, amended

I. **Marketing/Branding Business Development**

This Key Action Step (KAS) focuses on the Commission's efforts both to maintain itself in a place of prominence within and beyond the community and to market Pulaski County's offerings to prospective investors.

a. *An annual workforce/economic development summit.*

As initially proposed, this event was to have been geared primarily toward the business community. It has become an annual dinner open to the general public as well as the business community; it provides an opportunity for the executive director to offer an annual State of the County Economy address, as well as to expose members of the community to the insights of relevant keynote speakers.

In an effort to improve relationships with industry partners and to implement the business-sector focus of the original summit vision, the Commission has established the Pulaski County Industrial Forum, a loose partnership of manufacturers and other heavy-sector employers in Pulaski County that meets every other month for open discussions, to hear presentations from guests, and to discuss workforce-training and -attraction efforts.

b. *"[An] aggressive initiative for the CDC and economic development marketing efforts that describes the mission of the organization and differentiates it from other economic and workforce development related organizations".*

The Commission's resources are better expended implementing projects and programs to facilitate an increase in community wealth than on "spreading the message"; moreover, this plan minimizes the importance of business-attraction efforts, negating the need for external differentiation between the Commission and other organizations.

However, it is important that industry partners, governing officials, and the public be aware of the efforts and successes of the Commission. In addition to maintaining a social-media presence, the Commission has previously published a quarterly newsletter and from time to time publishes articles on timely issues in local newspapers.

c. *"Partner with the MidWest Indiana Economic Development to ensure that Pulaski County is woven into the [regional] branding and marketing messages...."*

Pulaski County is no longer affiliated with Indiana's Technology Corridor (f.k.a. 'MidWest Indiana'), instead aligning with the Northwest Indiana Forum. The executive director served on the steering committee for the development of the Forum's regional economic-development strategic plan and has developed close working relationships with counterparts in the three other rural member-counties.

Although regional partnerships present challenges, they also provide opportunities for leveraging assets, sharing resources, and helping local employers to build relationships with potential vendors and clients in neighboring communities.

In addition to continuing the annual Economic Development Summit, bi-monthly meetings of the Pulaski County Industrial Forum, and membership in and participation with the Northwest Indiana Forum, the Commission will implement the following strategies to maintain and to improve communications and relations with key partners and the community:

- **Quarterly C.D.C. Coffee Hours at various locations across Pulaski County.**
These will be advertised through both traditional and social media, and the executive

director will be responsible for securing a special guest attendee to participate at each — an officer of the Commission, a County or State elected official, a representative of an existing or prospective employer currently making news in the community, or other high-profile person of interest to the community. From time to time, a hosted breakfast meeting may be an appropriate alternative.

- **Quarterly newsletter.** Distributed via email and the Commission’s website and Facebook pages, made available in hard copy in public places throughout the community, and submitted to local media, this revived communication piece should highlight efforts of the Commission, other noteworthy County projects and programming, and relevant news in the community, region, or state.
- **A renewed emphasis on one-on-one business-retention visits.** Staff will reprioritize on-site and in-office visits with employers in the community, for the purposes of discussing specific needs or concerns that the employers have and maintaining an open line of communication and a presence.
- **Strengthened and focused regionalism.** The Commission will renew and strengthen relationship with its closest strategic partners, especially the three other counties that belong to both the Northwest Indiana Forum and the Kankakee-Iroquois Regional Planning Commission (KIRPC) and KIRPC itself, to have a reliable core partnership for shared marketing, networking, and leveraging assets.
- **Local engagement.** The Commission will strategically coordinate, collaborate, and participate with entities in Pulaski County with overlapping, adjacent, and complementary missions to ensure the avoidance of redundancies, the shared directionality of programming, and a comprehensive and community-driven approach to development in the community. In addition to organizations mentioned by name elsewhere in this plan, such partners may include Pulaski Memorial Hospital and other healthcare providers, libraries and school corporations, and Pulaski County Human Services and other nonprofit service providers.

II. Workforce Development

This KAS is one of the most crucial aspects of economic development in Pulaski County; focused and properly aligned programming on this front creates opportunities to build the necessary workforce pipeline that existing employers require to be productive and competitive in Pulaski County while improving resident-workers’ opportunities to develop skills and to increase household wealth.

a. *“Partner with Ivy Tech and other educational providers to understand what industry recognized certifications exist CDC will partner with the educational providers to develop them.”*

The Commission has worked closely with Ivy Tech and relevant Purdue agencies to promote existing training opportunities, both certificate-based and not, for incumbent employees and to develop localized training, which have not typically resulted in industry-recognized certificates. Representatives of both providers are regular participants at Industrial Forum meetings.

b. *“Launch a collaborative training program with Ivy Tech and other educational providers to encourage existing businesses and companies in targeted industry sectors to*

develop basic and transferable skills of employees [to] make companies more competitive and increase business recruitment efforts.”

As noted above, Ivy Tech has been involved in the development of localized training programs based on input from local employers, although these programs have failed to sustain long-term.

c. “Collaborate with state resources (Conexus) and existing business to launch awareness and intern programs targeting high school students to promote career opportunities in manufacturing and other targeted industry sectors to effectively communicate the opportunities for career possibilities particularly within the manufacturing field, which is a strength in Pulaski County.”

While a formal and sustainable internship program has not been developed, the Commission and the Industrial Forum led efforts to develop a manufacturing vocational-training program at West Central High School, students from which have been placed in local manufacturing internships.

As workforce-development programming is crucial for existing-business retention and expansion, attracting outside investment, and improving the skills and wealth of resident-workers, the Commission must focus a significant amount of its time and energy on such efforts. The following steps should be taken to ensure a sustainable and aligned workforce-development program:

- **Work-release.** The Commission will collaborate with the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office, Circuit and Superior Courts, and Prosecutor's and Probation Offices; training providers such as WorkOne; other services providers as recommended by program partners; and local employers to coordinate and to expand in-county opportunities for qualified inmates of the Pulaski County Jail to be placed in appropriate positions in local facilities, in positions aligned with their skillsets whenever possible.
- **Information prioritization and dissemination.** The Commission will establish or re-establish relationships and communications with entities such as Ivy Tech and Purdue, Conexus Indiana, and the Indiana Manufacturers Association and serve as a funnel of information on workforce-development opportunities and a central checkpoint for local employers.
- **Youth vocational programming.** The Commission will continue and improve its relationships with vocational cooperatives and local high schools, serve as a bridge between these programs and their students and local employers, and explore ways further to align training programs available to local youth with the workforce needs of Pulaski County employers, including potentially revisiting the 2010 plan's proposed internship program.
- **Incumbent-worker training.** The Commission, through the Industrial Forum, will renew efforts to coordinate demand-based skills training for current employees of Pulaski County firms. These may be provided by Ivy Tech, other academic and vocational institutions, private-sector providers, or in-house experts at local facilities as deemed appropriate.

III. Targeted Industry Sectors

This 2010 KAS presents a list of sectors on which business-attraction efforts should be focused that is needlessly broad, particularly in light of Pulaski County's demographic and logistical challenges. If population trends would reverse and increase the available labor

pool, business-attraction efforts may in the future become more important, but presently are a low priority.

While the Commission will not turn away investors expressing interest in Pulaski County, proactive business-attraction efforts will be minimized, and in reactive efforts, the following sectors will be prioritized:

- **Supply-chain boosters.** Efforts will prioritize manufacturers, industrial-service suppliers, and other businesses that would shorten the supply chains of existing firms, especially when they could support multiple existing businesses.
- **Value-added agriculture.** Efforts will prioritize manufacturers, commercial-scale produce growers, food processors, and other businesses that would either shorten the supply chains of existing producers and suppliers, diversify the local agricultural economy, or both.
- **Low-workforce-impact investments.** Efforts will prioritize businesses that would measurably increase assessed value in the community or generate new economic opportunities without straining the local workforce.

IV. Real Estate Development

This KAS focuses on developing a better marketing strategy for existing real estate and developing new sites for enhanced business-attraction and -expansion efforts.

a. *“Create a brand identity for Winamac Industrial Park ... to have real estate options readily available to propose to prospective users within targeted industry sectors.”*

In light of the limited access to and highway visibility of the remaining 35-40 acres in the industrial park and the minimized emphasis on business-attraction efforts, little effort has been devoted to this task, although the Commission continues to market it passively through its website and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation’s available-sites database.

b. *“Develop the Pulaski County Center for Agricultural-Renewable Energy (PC-CARE) along the west corridor of the county, taking advantage of HWY 421 and the CSX rail line.”*

The Commission had preliminary-engineering studies completed for three sites deemed to be appropriate for this project, and the County’s Advisory Commission on Industrial Development tentatively agreed to a purchase price with the property owners of the site determined to be the most acceptable. However, elected officials declined to fund or to approve the acquisition; in light of demographic concerns and minimized emphasis on business-attraction efforts, the Commission recognizes this as the best decision for the County.

A local family has since purchased one of the properties for which an engineering study had been completed, establishing a commercial-produce-growing operation on part of the site and making the remainder of it available for development. The Commission has provided guidance to the family and is currently marketing the site passively through its website and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation’s available-sites database.

c. *“Develop an assisted-living community within the county.”*

This task was included in the strategic plan at a time when focusing on marketing Pulaski County as a retirement community was considered to be a viable strategy. Although it fits within a broad conception of community development, this project does

not align with the underlying philosophical approach of the Commission and has no direct place in this plan. Although efforts have stalled, the Pulaski Health Foundation has undertaken efforts toward the implementation of this project.

While this KAS is a low-priority strategy for the Commission, the following efforts will be considered reasonable expenditures of Commission resources:

- **Maintaining the Winamac Industrial Park’s viability.** The Commission will continue passively marketing the property through currently used media and respond to those inquiries for available land for which the property is qualified and that come from industry sectors prioritized in amended KAS III.
- **West-side developable property.** The Commission will continue passively marketing the property through currently used media and work with the property owners to develop strategies for improving the property’s sustainable, plan-complementary attractiveness.
- **Assisted-living community.** While avoiding direct involvement in the development process, the Commission will, as needed and requested, assist the Pulaski Health Foundation or another owner to navigate relevant land-use, fiscal, and statutory issues.

V. Entrepreneurial Development (formerly KAS VI.)

This KAS focuses on facilitating the successful start-up of new, local businesses and the sustainable growth of existing small businesses. This KAS provides opportunities for increased assessed valuation in the community, new employment opportunities, and quality-of-life and quality-of-place improvements.

a. *“CDC continues to work to identify resources within the community to assist aspiring individuals with entrepreneurial efforts. Resources may include educational partners, existing business owners and retirees living within the community and Small Business Development Centers. The objective of this recommendation is to build upon the strong entrepreneurial history within the community, provide reasons for college graduates to return to Pulaski County and provide inspiration to those in the K-12 educational system.”*

The Commission has implemented this through countless avenues: sponsoring Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) workshops, meeting with entrepreneurs in conjunction with SBDC counselors, operating business-plan competitions in business classes at Winamac Community High School in the past, implementing a business-plan executive summary/“Can it work?” project into Junior Achievement Economics-classroom visits, and promoting the Revolving Loan Fund.

The Commission will promote entrepreneurial development in Pulaski County through existing, aforementioned programming and through any or all of the following as appropriate:

- **Entrepreneur mentoring program.** The Commission will develop, or co-develop, an advisory and networking program that pairs successful entrepreneurs, preferably within the community, with start-up and first-stage entrepreneurs to provide experience-based guidance and counsel in addition to services provided by the Commission directly, the SBDC, and other entities. Additionally, the Commission should encourage successful entrepreneurs in the community to participate in SBDC workshops to offer their experience-based insights in addition to the SBDC curriculum.

- **Financial assistance.** The Commission will investigate available grant funding and collaboration opportunities with local financial institutions to expand the County's ability to provide low-interest business loans further to support sustainable entrepreneurship in the community.
- **Start-up check-ins.** The Commission will maintain a database of start-up businesses and make regular visits with owners, whether or not the Commission has previously played a role in assisting them, to monitor their successes, to recommend valuable resources, and to maintain a supportive presence.
- **Incubation/co-working spaces.** Locally, regionally, or both, the Commission will investigate the viability of and demand for dedicated, properly equipped spaces in which entrepreneurs not yet in need of or unable to afford their own facilities can operate with fewer overhead costs. Additionally, ensuring the financial sustainability of such facilities will be a concurrent task.
- **Entrepreneur attraction.** The Commission will investigate the viability of working with the Ball State University Entrepreneurship Center and similar academic programs in Indiana to target young entrepreneurs whose personal interests and professional objectives align with the rural culture and economic needs of Pulaski County.
- **Business-pitch competition.** The Commission will investigate community interest in, financial support for, and expectations of winners of a possible business-pitch competition, similar to programming implemented in Starke and Fulton Counties, to provide grant funding and counseling services to inspired, driven community members with viable ideas for small businesses in Pulaski County.
- **Youth entrepreneurship.** The Commission will work with the appropriate faculty at local high schools to gauge interest in a youth business-plan competition in Pulaski County. If interest proves to be present, the Commission will collaborate with educators, the Chamber of Commerce, other organizations, and local businesses to build a sustainable program that encourages entrepreneurship and provides relevant education to students interested in this career trajectory.
- **Agricultural entrepreneurship.** Agriculture is an important part of Pulaski County's economy, culture, and history; opportunities exist for the Commission to provide connections to technical assistance, low-interest funding, and other support to entrepreneurs (whether start-ups or expanding operations) seeking to invest in agricultural diversification, which might be in the form of enhancing local food networks, non-row-crop production for mass-market distribution, supply-chain and agricultural-support improvements, or agri-tourism.
- **1 Million Cups.** The Commission will investigate partnering with the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street organizations, and counterparts in neighboring counties to determine if critical mass exists to introduce a local or regional 1 Million Cups entrepreneur-engagement program.

B. New 2021 Key Action Steps

VI. **Business Retention and Expansion**

Business retention and expansion efforts are recognized almost universally as the most effective of the three economic-development strategies (attraction, retention and expansion, and entrepreneurial development). Especially in a logistically disadvantaged region like Pulaski County, and in a community where a number of existing employers either remain locally owned or were originally established in the community, maintaining strong relationships with these firms and prioritizing their ability to remain sustainable and competitive in Pulaski County is of the utmost importance.

In addition to efforts outlined elsewhere in this plan (Industrial Forum and university partners, workforce-development programming, supply-chain-oriented attraction efforts, renewed focus on retention visits), the Commission will seek to assist in the growth of existing firms through the following efforts:

- **Economic Gardening.** Locally, regionally, or both, the Commission will coordinate the implementation of Economic Gardening consultation provided by the Purdue Center for Regional Development to assist qualified and capable existing firms in growing to the next stage of competitiveness, employment level, and sustainability.
- **Incentives and Financial Assistance.** The Commission will continue assisting expanding firms with local property-tax abatements and various State incentives through the Indiana Economic Development Corporation. However, the Commission will also work with the County Council, the Auditor's Office, and the Assessor's Office, as well as with any town councils interested in participating, and with input from the Pulaski County Industrial Forum, to develop a set of fair, reasonable guidelines, including scoring rubrics, to aid the County Council and any interested town council in objectively evaluating requests for tax abatement to ensure that such incentives are made strategically and with due respect to other taxpayers. Additionally, the Commission will implement a plan for following up with the recipients of such incentives — particularly tax abatements — to ensure that they complete required annual reporting timely and appropriately and that any concerns that may jeopardize their incentives are addressed proactively. The Commission will provide assistance, as needed, with the Revolving Loan Fund and other nontraditional forms of financing that may be required to finance investment in expanded operations.
- **Regional worker-attraction efforts.** In addition to efforts to promote Pulaski County as a destination for tourists and residential re-location and efforts to improve the skills of resident-workers, the Commission will collaborate with local employers and seek assistance from regional partners to investigate the feasibility of transporting targeted workers from counties with higher levels of unemployment to Pulaski County workplaces where aligned and unfilled job opportunities exist for these persons.

VII. **Tourism Development**

Tourism provides Pulaski County with the opportunity to highlight its quality-of-life and quality-of-place amenities to visitors and to generate economic activity. While emphasizing efforts that improve a community's livability over efforts to turn the community into a destination is generally a more effective strategy, it remains important for the Commission to leverage the existing assets that Pulaski County offers to display the attractiveness of the

community for both transient economic activity and the possibility of increasing residential relocation.

Historically, the Commission has used multiple media avenues in multiple regions to market the county to potential visitors, developed a short-form tourism-development strategic plan as part of the County's Hometown Collaboration Initiative project, organized a tourism advisory committee, and assisted with grant applications and planning for projects such as the expansion of the Panhandle Pathway/Winamac Parkway and the Winamac Town Park.

As tourism-development can be a critical tool for generating economic activity and encouraging residential relocation, the Commission, in addition to continuing and improving its marketing efforts, will undertake the following tasks to enhance tourism in Pulaski County:

- **Tourism Advisory Committee.** The Commission will re-establish the committee as a body responsible for guiding marketing strategies, advising on other tourism-related programming, allowing for networking and partnerships within the industry, and comprising representatives of tourism-oriented businesses and organizations in Pulaski County and interested citizens. In the longer term, the Commission should work with the Board of Commissioners, the County Council, and tourism-industry partners to investigate the establishment of a Tourism Commission or Convention and Visitors Bureau and the implementation of an innkeeper's tax.
- **Tourism-development strategic plan.** The Commission will, with the Tourism Advisory Committee, review, update, and implement the existing tourism-development strategic plan. This process should include addressing the following specific programs in particular:
 - **Accommodations development.** The Commission will spearhead renewed efforts to investigate the demand for a hotel in Pulaski County that could serve both tourists and overnight visitors to local businesses.
 - **Amenities development.** The Commission will continue its efforts to support non-profit and public amenities to improve their attractiveness and sustainability, as well as providing support, as needed and requested, to privately operated attractions. Early priorities will be continued efforts to extend the Panhandle Pathway to Tippecanoe River State Park and the North Judson Erie Trail to the north and to France Park, trails in Logansport, and other existing and proposed trails to the south; and the completion of the 2015 Hometown Collaboration Initiative's Pulaski County Bike Routes Network project. Additionally, addressing the dearth of indoor-recreation and cold-season-recreation opportunities should be a priority.
 - **Agri-tourism.** Agriculture is an important part of Pulaski County's economy, culture, and history; opportunities exist for the enhancement and promotion of attractions that capitalize on agricultural ventures to attract tourists for both recreational and educational purposes, and the Commission should strengthen its relationship with the agriculture sector to promote and to assist with these undertakings.

VIII. Community Capacity Building

Just as there are three primary strategies for economic development (attraction, retention and expansion, and entrepreneurial development), so, too, are there three primary components of the foundation on which sustainable economic development occurs: workforce development, quality of life, and infrastructure. The Commission's focuses on business retention and expansion and entrepreneurial development and minimization of business-attraction and site-development efforts reduce the need for growth-oriented infrastructure development, and this plan has already addressed workforce development; improving the community's capacity to welcome and to sustain growth is critical for the long-term well-being of Pulaski County.

In order to increase Pulaski County's capacity for sustainable growth, the Commission will undertake the following efforts:

- **Broadband development.** Reliable and fast internet access has become increasingly necessary for everything from virtual schooling to modern agriculture to home-based small businesses and well beyond. Unfortunately, the return on investment for installing the necessary cabling to connect rural sites with high-speed access is often prohibitive for private-sector service providers. The Commission will work with local, regional, and state-level partners to seek grant funding, private investment, and direct public investment to provide all of Pulaski County with the access required to be connected and competitive in the Twenty-first Century.
- **Housing stock.** As early as 2006, the Commission was aware of the challenges that the existing housing stock in Pulaski County presents for residential retention and relocation, even receiving a grant to have a comprehensive housing-needs assessment completed. As housing is often a function of the market, local government has limited ability to address concerns regarding private property, and as Commission resources have been limited, little action on this front has occurred. However, concerns about conditions have only increased, with multiple local employers expressing frustration over, among other issues, the lack of appropriate housing for employees and would-be employees. The Commission will work with local, regional, and state-level partners to assess the demands expressed to local employers and real-estate professionals and to devise plans for facilitating the provision of housing stock that matches desires in order to make the community more attractive for residential retention and relocation. Additionally, the Commission should investigate the possibility of securing grant funding to be able to provide creative financing alternatives for local entrepreneurship oriented toward addressing the housing stock.
- **Childcare.** A dearth of quality childcare options presents challenges for single parents in the workforce as well as families with both parents working the same or overlapping shifts, which creates financial struggles for these families and labor-shortage issues for employers. The Commission will work with existing childcare providers, local schools, employers, and other partners to assess the need for expanded childcare opportunities and parents' expectations of these services with the end goal of developing a strategy for supporting persons interested in and capable of expanding or establishing daycare services and facilities in the community that meet families' needs.
- **Community Leadership Development.** The ongoing cultivation of informed and responsible leaders is essential to the long-term health of the community and its local governments, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, and businesses. The Commission will continue its partnership with Purdue Extension – Pulaski County, the

Community Foundation of Pulaski County, and private-sector collaborators to ensure that the Leadership Pulaski County program remains sustainable and active for the years to come. Additionally, the Commission will work with these and other partners to support other programming that develops leadership abilities among residents of the community, whether broadly or in tailored ways, such as non-profit or elected-office leadership.

- **Young Professionals Organization.** The Commission will revisit past efforts to establish a young-professionals organization in the community as an avenue for young professionals to socialize, to network, to develop mentorship relationships, and to engage in coordinated volunteer efforts to improve Pulaski County.

IX. Downtown Development

Downtown districts present the opportunity for interdisciplinary programming and projects at the intersection of multiple Key Action Steps, especially entrepreneurial development, community capacity building (housing), and tourism development (amenities development, accommodations development, and marketing). Additionally, their traditional grid-based layouts and higher levels of density are conducive to walkability, which can contribute to improved health outcomes, as well as the less tangible benefits of neighborliness and what urbanist Jane Jacobs dubbed “eyes on the street” — informal community policing through presence, observation, and interaction that promotes safety and security.

The greater diversity in size of commercial spaces in downtown districts provides for flexibility and affordability for start-up retail, service, and cottage-scale manufacturing businesses, while second- and third-floor spaces provide opportunities for rehabilitation into both affordable and higher-end market-rate housing, as well as live-work opportunities. The frequent presence of municipal, institutional, and public uses in these areas creates a sense of public pride and engagement as well as a stage for civic and cultural events. That existing utility lines serve these districts’ buildings and vacant lots permits for in-fill development that creates less demand for infrastructure improvements relative to greenfield development.

In order to capitalize on the benefits of downtown development, the Commission undertake the following steps.

- **Main Street organizations.** The Commission will maintain its involvement in existing Main Street/downtown organizations and provide technical assistance and project support for the development and operations of any similar organizations that may arise.
- **Municipal programming.** The Commission will maintain close relationships with town governments and provide advice and counsel regarding any of their programs and projects that impact central business districts in hopes of ensuring complementarity with a vision for vibrant and sustainable downtown neighborhoods.
- **Downtown housing.** The Commission will develop relationships with building owners and developers interested in downtown rehabilitation projects and seek, when necessary, to link the two parties, and will assist in obtaining low-interest loans, grants, tax credits, and other incentives to promote the rehabilitation of downtown spaces for a greater diversity of housing options.

- **Commission programming.** The Commission will ensure that any project, program, or plan that it undertakes that could have a downtown-development component has such a component, one treated as a priority not as a minor detail.

X. **Institutional Capacity Building**

Over the course of its existence, the Commission has often found itself assuming responsibilities beyond its mission, particularly over the last 10-15 years. These have included providing assistance to the Advisory Plan Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and staff for these bodies; involvement in disposing of the former County Home; overseeing public-works projects for the County; and working closely with the County Council on addressing the County's fiscal-health concerns. While executive directors have willingly done this, this expanded service to the County has limited the Commission's ability to follow its mission and to implement the 2010 plan, especially in times without additional staff in the office. If the Commission is to implement this plan effectively and efficiently, then the County must ensure that proper staffing is in position in multiple County departments.

- **Commission staffing.** The Commission recommends that the County Council re-establish and preserve at least a second full-time position in the Commission's office. This plan presents a tremendous opportunity for sustainable, long-term growth in Pulaski County, but its proper and useful implementation requires an investment in the Commission. While the Commission appreciates the restoration of a part-time position in the office in the 2022 budget, this is unlikely to be sufficient to implement this plan timely and effectively. Throughout 2022, the Council, Commissioners, and Commission staff should assess the Commission's ability to implement the plan and to operate effectively with a full-time director and one part-time position. This assessment should be used to determine whether the part-time position should be made full-time, a new full-time position should be added, or both, or if creative sharing of (a) position(s) by the Commission and (an) other department(s) may be an appropriate strategy. As additional funding becomes available for right-sizing the Commission staff, the Commission and executive director will develop job descriptions and seek to hire appropriately qualified persons in such a way as to align individual staff positions to the greatest extent possible with each of the overarching themes of this plan: quality of life, quality of opportunity, and quality of place.
- **Planning staffing.** Sound planning is an important component of a comprehensive and sustainable approach to community development; the Commission has played an integral role supporting the Pulaski County Advisory Plan Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Building & Zoning staff, including funding the development of a comprehensive plan and an updated unified development ordinance and providing staffing support. In light of this relationship, the Commission recommends that the Commissioners, Council, Commission, and Plan Commission examine comprehensive staffing needs across both departments (and related departments as necessary) and determine whether the various functions should remain segregated in their current alignment, be merged into one department, or segregated in a more appropriate manner, as well as how many full-time and part-time personnel are required for the department(s) to operate optimally.
- **Development-oriented commissions.** The Commission recommends that the Commissioners, Council, and Commission examine whether the Commission, as currently structured under County resolution, is the appropriate vehicle for overseeing community-development services and the implementation of this plan, or

if it should be replaced or supplemented by any or all of the following statutory entities:

- Redevelopment Commission,
 - Economic Development Commission,
 - Tourism Commission or Convention and Visitors Bureau,
 - Advisory Commission on Industrial Development (currently legally established, but dormant), or
 - Advisory Plan Commission *as overseeing entity (per above task)*.
- **General operations of County government.** The Commission recommends that the Commissioners and Council examine the various roles taken on by the Commission's executive director beyond the job description and the Commission's mission and perhaps those undertaken by other County personnel beyond their job descriptions or statutory roles, as well as tasks that should be managed but may not be currently, to determine if one or more administrative/operational positions should be established to ensure the effectiveness of the County's overall operations without hindering the Commission's ability to implement this plan.
- **Community institutions.** As part of strategic-relationship building (KAS I.), Commission staff should work with volunteer leaders of community partners to explore, to develop, and to implement strategies that ensure the financial and operational sustainability of these organizations to protect against future scenarios in which the struggles of any one or more of these entities might contribute to a loss of services, an unwieldy burden on other entities, or both.

C. 2010 Key Action Steps, removed

I. **Metrics (formerly KAS V)**

This KAS focuses on measuring the effectiveness of the Commission's efforts, quantifying successes in implementing the other Key Action Steps of the plan, and ensuring the Commission's accountability to its stakeholders.

It is not, however, a deliverable action item that directly creates new opportunities for quality of life, quality of opportunity, or quality of place in Pulaski County.

Rather than continuing to be included in the strategic plan as a Key Action Step, appropriate metrics have been incorporated by the Commission's Executive Board into the evaluation rubric used annually to review the executive director's performance.