

Making the Case for Planning

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Morgan County has an uneven history of planning.

Elected officials have been swept into and out of office based upon their views of land use. At the time of this report, however, momentum was clearly with the people wanting to take a more active approach to planning.

For example, the community completed Phase 1 of its comprehensive plan, which created goals and objectives for land use. County leaders also made some changes to their zoning and subdivision regulations. This report, Phase II, is designed to implement more of Phase I's goals.

But there is still debate about how far and how fast to push land use regulations. The arguments are centered around this principle: A community has a right to get the maximum benefit out of its prime land.

These questions cropped up constantly during Steering Committee meetings: Who gets to define "maximum benefit?" Can maximum benefit only be reached by building on the land? Should a land owner be prohibited from building on his property because the community wants to preserve the tangible and intangible benefits of undeveloped land?

As a result, the group settled upon an approach that is incremental and fairly cautious. The most commonly heard request was for a "common sense" approach to planning.

Morgan County prefers a "common sense" approach to planning.

Although the steps may be incremental, they should still move toward providing more protection for what the community as a whole sees as valuable and worth preserving, Steering Committee members said. This

list always included Morgan County's rural character and environment.

If those prime assets weren't threatened, local leaders probably would not have reinstated more formal land use practices. Every Steering Committee member could point to some recent development and say, "We don't want any more of that."

Many areas of Morgan County are not being developed right now, but every part is changing. It is inevitable: roads degrade; houses are built; new businesses begin and old ones close. Over time, sometimes too slowly to attract attention, these changes can alter a community's character.

Not everybody will agree with the goals of the plan or the tools suggested to reach those goals. In fact, some Steering Committee members disagreed. But there was consensus that a more active approach to the future was needed, particularly if plans for I-69 are carried out.

Other sections of this report talk about how to implement land use planning. This section talks about why. It attempts to make the case for the importance of planning, especially as it concerns key ideas of the Comprehensive Plan. Residents can use the section to learn the background information that went into the plan. Decision makers can use it to defend the planning choices they will no doubt have to make in the future. Key topics in this section include:

- ◆ Agricultural preservation
- ◆ Greenways
- ◆ Housing growth
- ◆ The SR 37 /144 Corridor
- ◆ Roundtable of Governments

Agricultural Protection

The Steering Committee spent more time on this topic than any other. The discussions took place under the following development principle:

“We believe in the use of planning and zoning to direct growth away from prime agricultural land while at the same time allowing for flexibility in decision making.”

The committee used research to guide their discussions. The Appendix has three project sheets (Agricultural Preservation Techniques, Conservation Subdivision and Hillside and Steep Slope Protection) that give background information and a common language on the most popular tools for controlling growth in agricultural areas.

The committee also requested examples from other Indiana communities, where zoning to protect or minimize growth on agricultural land has just started to appear.

For example, Hendricks County and Bartholomew County have just adopted new agricultural protection rules and Putnam County is currently developing new regulations. The type of protection that seems to have been the most successful so far in Indiana is zoning for multiple agricultural districts (see Agricultural Preservation Techniques project sheet).

As a general principle, experts give this warning: “Farmland preservation efforts are destined to fail if they are anti-development or anti-growth. To be successful, the efforts must preserve prime farmland and direct industrial, residential and commercial growth to areas less suitable to farming.”

Using a set of maps, the Steering Committee agreed

upon a “common sense” approach to protecting the county’s prime agricultural land. They:

1. Mapped existing or remaining farmland.
2. Identified zones within those areas where soils and floodplains make residential growth unlikely.
3. Designated those areas as places where growth would be discouraged (called Agriculture Preferred).
4. Decided on the strictest level of protection they were willing to designate (using examples from other Indiana communities).
5. Selected areas on the map where soils, existing infrastructure, etc., made some development likely in the future.
6. Put less restrictive designations on those zones.
7. Selected areas of the map where existing development, infrastructure, etc., made future growth likely or desirable.
8. Put few development restrictions on those zones.

The result was a set of guidelines that are only incrementally more restrictive than the existing regulations. More details about the land uses and where they are located can be found in the Land Use section and on the Future Land Use Map.

While this description is unlikely to alter some people’s views about the inalienable rights of the property owner, it should demonstrate how methodical the Steering Committee was in making decisions.

Greenways

Morgan County is rich in natural beauty but is short in recreational infrastructure to enjoy it. Outside

of Morgan Monroe State Forest and the new Ravinia Woods, there are few parks, trails or other recreational opportunities.

This shortage is particularly noticeable because the county has so much green, open space. In fact, its environment is one of the community's key assets. However it is a shortage that is being addressed. The Morgan County Park Board's 5-year plan is scheduled to be updated this year.

The park plan states "the need for additional sites providing active recreation has been identified east of Martinsville on State Road 252, in Madison Township, close to Monrovia and along the White River near Waverly. Each of these potential sites is located in heavily populated areas of the county.

"In addition to the development of park acquisition and development, Morgan County is actively pursuing the development of additional trails in Morgan County to build on the initial trail development effort in Pioneer Park in Mooresville."

A new component is the White River Greenway Plan, included in this report, which proposes a trail along the river. The plan shows a possible route and suggests best practices and trail standards.



White River

The greenway section also addresses concerns about trails, particularly cost and safety. It also outlines the

case for why these concerns should not overwhelm the benefits of trails and greenways.

Bartholomew County's planning director was asked about the 11-mile Columbus People Trail. He acknowledged that Columbus has a relatively aggressive maintenance program and it is expensive. Some of the most significant maintenance activities include:

- ◆ Snow removal
- ◆ Grass mowing
- ◆ Lane markings
- ◆ Leaf blowing and removal
- ◆ Trash removal
- ◆ Mile marker and "rules" sign installation and maintenance
- ◆ Trash can installation and maintenance
- ◆ Bench installation and maintenance

"The mowing, snow removal, and leaf blowing are the largest cost generators," he said. "Anyone considering a trail should give some consideration as to what extent they will take on these maintenance tasks. In a rural area they may be more optional."

He finished by saying that the trail is "extremely popular with local residents for socializing, recreation, and bicycle commuting."

The White River Greenway Plan as proposed would run exclusively through rural areas, where many of these services would not be a necessity.

Safety is another prime public concern, and people are rightfully outraged when a crime occurs on a recreational trail. But crime is a problem wherever it occurs; schools, parking lots, grocery stores, in homes. The possibility of crime has to be weighed against the benefits derived from those places in the vast majority of the time.

And those benefits can be large. “Trails and greenways provide countless opportunities for economic renewal and growth,” according to the National Trails Training Partnership. “Increased property values and tourism and recreation-related spending on items such as bicycles, in-line skates and lodging are just a few of the ways trails and greenways positively impact community economies.”

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For example, a 1992 study by the National Park Service estimated the average economic activity associated with three multi-purpose trails in Florida, California and Iowa was \$1.5 million annually. Closer to home, Bloomington is spending millions on The B-Line Trail, which converts 3.1 miles of the former CSX rail corridor into a multi-use trail. The trail is being touted as an economic development tool for the city.

Other benefits of trails and greenways include promoting healthy living. They provide a safe, inexpensive avenue for regular exercise for people living in rural, urban and suburban areas.

There are also environmental benefits. Greenways protect important habitat and provide corridors for people and wildlife. They also serve as natural floodplains.

Trails and greenways also have the power to preserve historic places and provide access to them. The White River Greenway Plan features historic landmarks in Waverly.

In summary, trails and greenways provide what many Americans seek - close-to-home recreational areas, community meeting places, historic preservation, educational experiences, natural landscapes and beautification. Morgan County is fortunate to have the White River and the time left to both protect and promote this asset.

Housing Growth

Many Morgan County residents who took part in this planning process expressed ambivalence about more homes being built in the county.

But most people were excited about the plans for Stonebridge, an up-scale housing development with shops and golfing that has already been approved for construction along SR 37. Details of this project can be found in the Critical Sub Areas Plan.



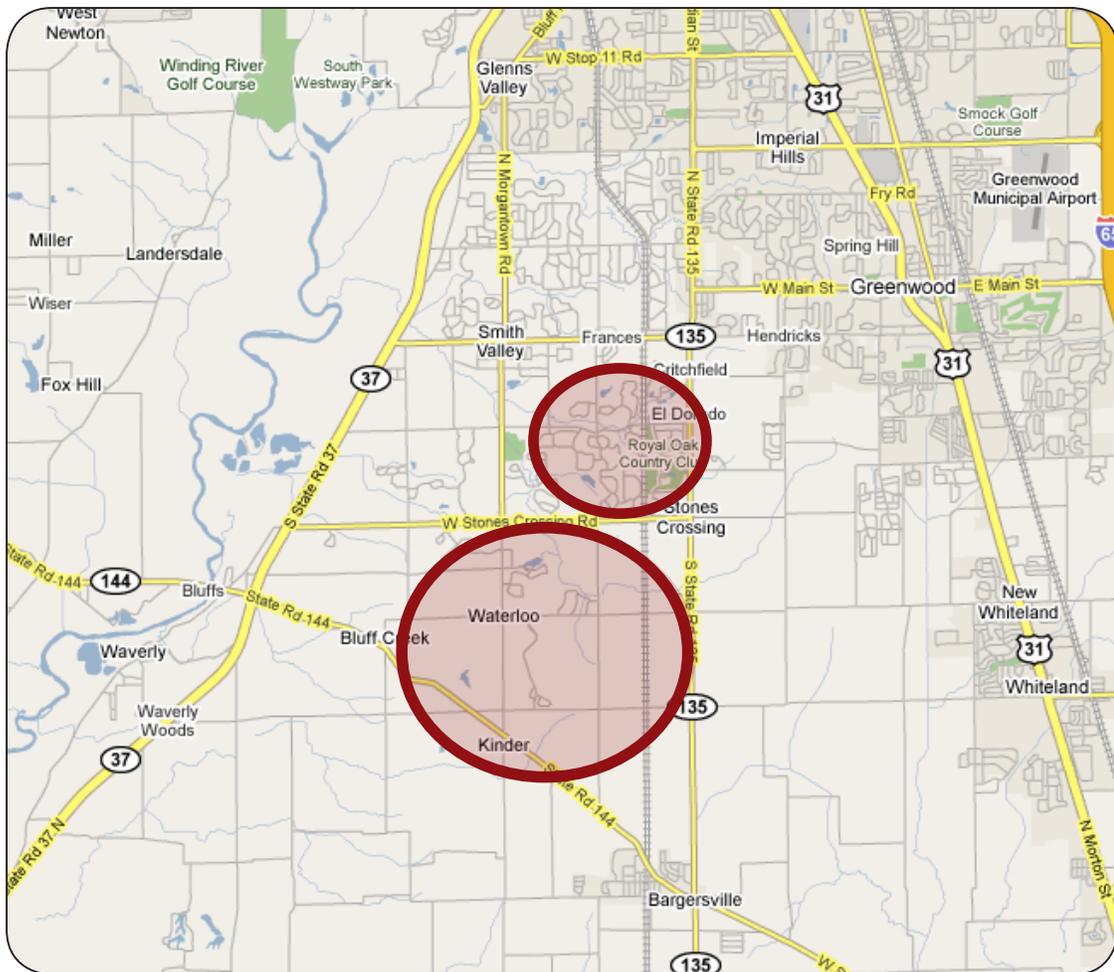
On the other hand, many pointed to recent, large-scale subdivisions in the Indianapolis region as prime examples of what they don't want. They believed the mass housing to be poorly constructed and the neighborhoods ill conceived. People also said they do not want multi-unit housing, such as large apartment blocks, for similar reasons.

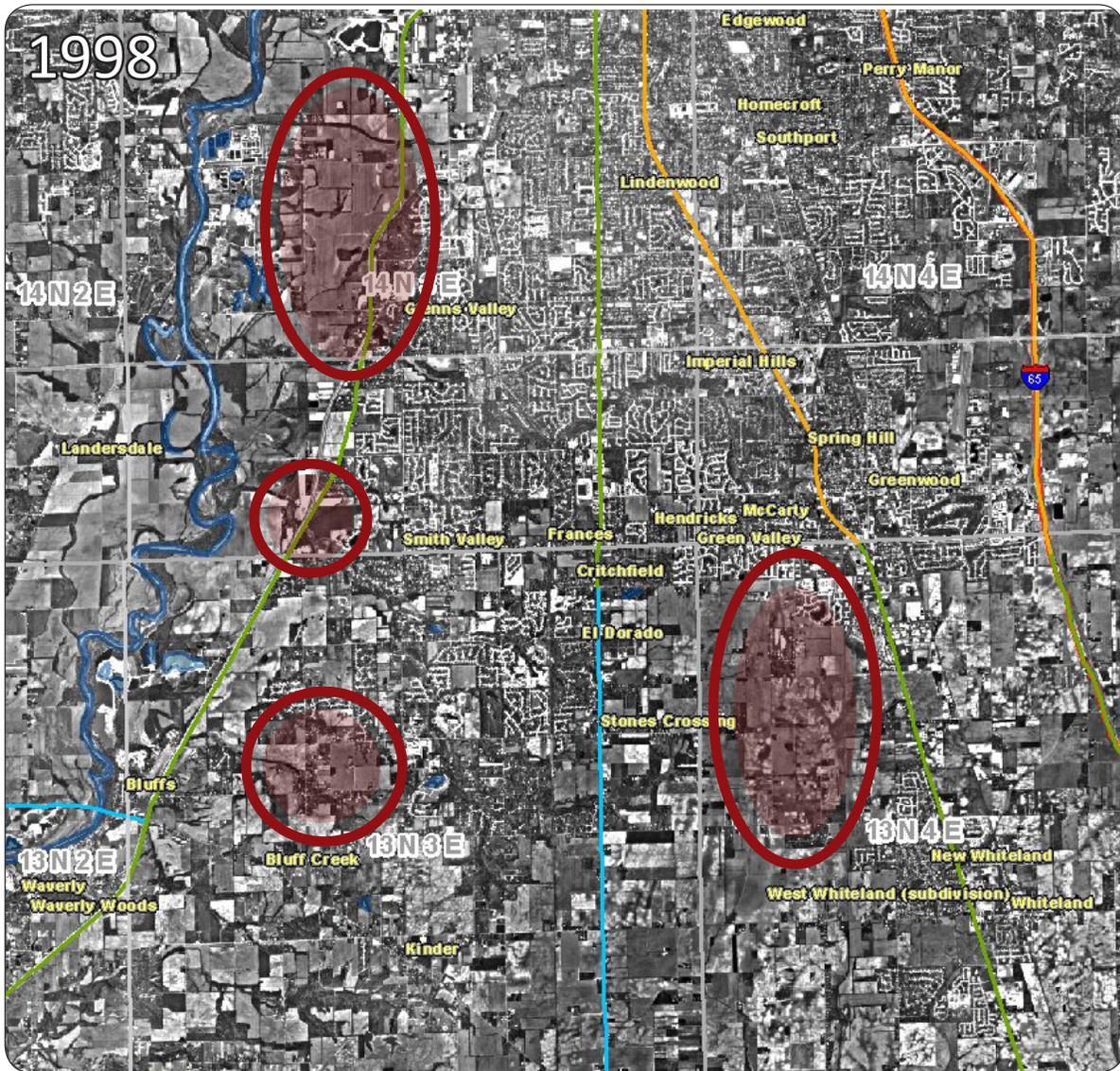
While Stonebridge may be a wonderful asset for the county, future growth is just as likely to be the type of housing subdivisions residents said they do not want.

Single family and multi-family housing developments are growing southward out of Indianapolis toward Morgan County.

Evidence of this can be found with a simple Google search. On the map below, look at the top-right quadrant starting at W. Stones Crossing Road (areas circled in red). Note the spaghetti-patterned roadways from subdivisions on the east side of SR 37 in Johnson County.

Now look south of W. Stones Crossing Road and SR 144 at all the relatively undeveloped land.



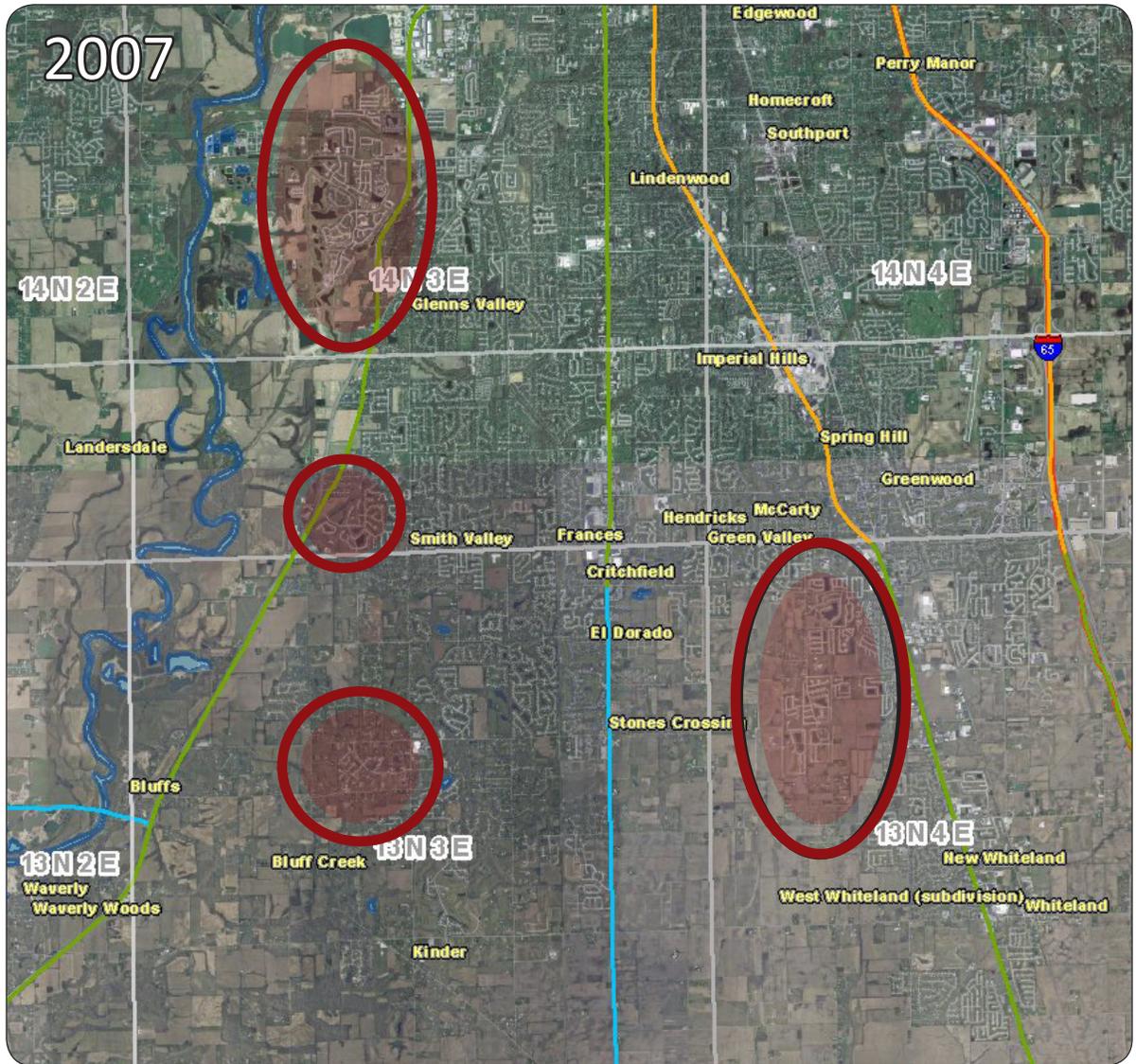


These two pages show aerial photos of White River Township, one from 1998 and the other from 2007. The highlighted areas on the 2007 map confirm the southward growth of development from Indianapolis into Johnson County.

Further evidence is found in population statistics. Highway 37 primarily runs through three townships in Johnson and Morgan Counties: White River Township (Johnson), Harrison Township (Morgan) and Washington Township (Morgan).

The tables below show the Johnson County township has almost doubled in population, a rate far faster than the Morgan County townships.

WHITE RIVER TOWNSHIP, JOHNSON COUNTY POPULATIONS	
1980	20,527
1990	28,232
2000	35,539
2007	39,709



HARRISON TOWNSHIP, MORGAN COUNTY POPULATIONS	
1980	1,501
1990	1,538
2000	1,601
2007	1,609

WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP – MORGAN COUNTY POPULATIONS	
1980	15,258
1990	15,977
2000	17,978
2007	18,133

More recently, the data shows that the two Morgan County townships experienced little to no growth in the first seven years of the new century, while White River Township in Johnson County experienced an 11.7% increase in population.

But there is no reason to believe that the growth will not continue creeping south. In fact, the 1,200-unit Stone Bridge proposal is a sign of that migration. Although the housing and credit crisis that began in late 2008 stunted residential growth across the country, most researchers say there will be a long-term, gradual climb toward new growth.

As plans for construction of I-69 grow firmer, housing pressure will undoubtedly increase along the corridor.

The SR 37/SR 144 Corridor Plan that complements this report addresses these concerns in detail. But this section is intended to make the case that local decision makers – if they want to prepare for the future - should act now on design guidelines, conservation subdivisions and other tools for land use planning.

The SR 37 /144 Corridor Plan



The SR 37/SR 144 Corridor Plan is a tool for promoting two of Morgan County’s prime economic assets while at the same time protecting the corridors from undesirable land uses and development practices.

Growth already is occurring along both of the corridors. New residential, commercial and industrial developments have been proposed on SR 37. Along SR 144, many residences are being added as a result of suburban Indianapolis development pressures.

The combination of these pressures and the likely impacts of I-69 have clearly generated a need to develop a plan for how land should be developed both today and in the future.

The SR 37/SR 144 Corridor Plan, which addresses these issues in detail, is complete. But there is no structure in place to see the plan to its conclusion. Representatives from Morgan County, Martinsville and Mooresville worked together on the document, but now must take advantage of the momentum. The next steps should be:

- ◆ Morgan County, Martinsville and Mooresville should each adopt the SR 37/SR 144 Corridor Plan as an element of their Comprehensive Land Use Plan update.
- ◆ Use the services of a certified land use planner to convert the Model Ordinance in the plan to language for new regulations.
- ◆ Have the Morgan County commissions and common councils of Martinsville and Mooresville adopt the new overlay zone regulations as part of their zoning ordinance and as an amendment to their zoning maps.
- ◆ Schedule routine “check-ups” between the three communities to see how the regulations are being applied.
- ◆ Update and modify as necessary.

Roundtable of Governments

As the above example makes clear, the separate governments of Morgan County need a forum to resolve regional issues by convening local elected officials and other stakeholders.

The environment, affordable housing, economic development, health and family concerns, human services, population growth, public safety, and transportation issues do not have political boundaries. They are regional concerns.

Currently, the burden of coordinating shared problems falls upon the shoulders of few individuals who keep communication flowing between the county, Martinsville and Mooresville. If those individuals leave, it is not clear who would take their place.

At meetings for the SR 37/SR 144 Corridor Plan it was obvious that members of one community's plan commission, for example, had little knowledge of what their neighbor's plan commission goals were.

A Roundtable of Governments could foster growth and planning by promoting regional partnerships, developing best practices, applying cutting-edge technologies and providing a forum for decision-making.

Local leaders did not want a formal, contract-bound organization. But they were also hard-pressed to imagine how the organizing would get done without one. The trick will be finding a middle way between having no system and creating a new level of bureaucracy.

The Implementation Plan suggests some alternatives and agendas, but it is up to community leaders to carry out the plan.

