

# Land use plan

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan for Elkhart County, Indiana

## What is a comprehensive land use plan?

This document is a guide to land development and preservation, for county government, the public, and other stakeholders in the future of Elkhart County.

The effects of good land use planning — or lack of it — impact our lives, in ways large and small, every day.

This *Comprehensive Plan* has been prepared by The Elkhart County Advisory Plan Commission and The Elkhart County Board of Commissioners, to promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, and the general welfare within Elkhart County, for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of development.

Built upon two extensive community visioning processes (*Take Charge!* and *The Horizon Project*) and put through a practical refining process involving hundreds of County residents, this document meets all requirements specified by Indiana state statute 36-7-4-502/3 (<http://www.ai.org/legislative/ic/code/title36/ar7/ch4.html#IC36-7-4-502>) for a comprehensive plan, including:

1. Objectives for future development of Elkhart County.
2. Policies for land use development of Elkhart County.
3. Policies for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

As required by Indiana statute, all persons, boards and commissions under the jurisdiction of this resolution shall pay reasonable regard to this Comprehensive Plan in order to achieve these stated purposes and objectives.

This comprehensive plan is one of five State statutory considerations for the development or preservation of land (*IC 36-7-4-603*):

1. The comprehensive plan;
2. current conditions and the character of current structures and uses in each district;
3. the most desirable use for which the land in each district is adopted;
4. the conservation of property values throughout the jurisdiction; and
5. responsible development and growth.

As ambitious as this document is, it accomplishes nothing unless we are held accountable for its implementation, in sculpting our built environment in the decades that follow. With this commitment, it is the intention of the County Board of Commissioners, Advisory Plan Commission, Redevelopment Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals to make Elkhart County a unique and vibrant place in which to live, work, recreate and find inspiration.

*Duly adopted by The Board of Commissioners, Resolution 05-704 Nov. 21, 2005, Goshen Ind.*



County auditor Dave Hess explains how sprawling development costs taxpayers, at one of several community meetings and public hearings on the proposed land use plan, over summer and autumn, 2005.

# Goal ① Planned Growth

Elkhart County will manage growth through orderly development focused in and near cities and towns and along selected major highways that connect them, minimizing conflicts between uses, and maximizing accessibility to services.

## Policies ①

The County will work with cities and towns to lay the groundwork for their expansion into the county, by designating **URBAN GROWTH AREAS**. These are areas adjacent to cities and towns where development is cultivated and, once urbanized, municipal-level governance is expected.

*Urban Growth Areas should be supported as active and vibrant places for economic development in unincorporated Elkhart County:*

**COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT** in the county should be directed to Urban Growth Areas, where retail is needed, and in designated transportation corridors, to take advantage of their proximity to municipal infrastructure.

**INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT** should be encouraged in cities and towns, and within Urban Growth Areas.

**RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT** is a desirable feature of a well-planned, economically diverse and livable community. In the county, demand for housing should be met in Urban Growth Areas, and by cities and towns incorporating existing neighborhoods along with, and in proportion to, other land use sectors.

② Redevelopment and reuse of commercial and industrial sites should be encouraged.

Developing available properties zoned for commercial and industrial uses should have priority over converting undeveloped land to more intense zoning. The exception to this policy is if continued industrial/commercial activity would conflict with neighborhoods, schools, environmental assets, or scheduled (less intense) downzoning.

③ Residential subdivisions should be allowed only in areas zoned for residential uses.

To protect human health, safety and general welfare, as well as the integrity of the land, proposals to create residential subdivisions should conform to regulations of highway, environmental health, planning and other County divisions and departments that influence development of land.

This policy shall not affect land subdivided in "R" districts prior to the adoption of this Plan.

④ A fair, uniform policy and process should be designed for an equitable contribution – by all direct beneficiaries – toward public costs that result from, or benefit, a commercial, industrial or residential development.

User or impact fees should be designed to replace taxpayer subsidies of infrastructure and other public improvements caused by new development, especially when those costs are higher because they are located further from public services and improvements already in place.

Phased development of public infrastructure improvements should be allowed when resulting from multiple developers/ developments, who should all help pay for them.

⑤ Existing residential communities should be supported and protected from conflicting land uses.

⑥ When reviewing development or redevelopment proposals, the approval process should consider the resources of public safety, schools, parks, libraries, and other public entities.



TAXPAYERS subsidize every extra mile of infrastructure & services to remote or isolated developments. Good government encourages more efficient, compact growth.



## Goal ② A Sense of Community and Rural Character

Using zoning, design, density and other measures, Elkhart County will preserve its open space, rural character, communities, and unique places.

### Policies



SUSTAINING Elkhart County's economic energy calls for preserving rural features that fuel agriculture, tourism, creativity, and other sectors ... and that give our community its unique "breathing room".

① The primary role of the agricultural zone designation is to protect agricultural operations from conflicting land use.

Agricultural zoning districts should be used for agricultural and related business activities and, where appropriate, agritourism.

Smaller communities should be supported with land use decisions appropriate to their growth management plans.

② The county's towns and other smaller population centers may need assistance in sustaining viability as traditional, compact communities. They should be supported with planning and zoning decisions that emphasize mixed uses and neighborhood-like residential design, to help maintain their unique character.

③ The development of financing options to voluntarily purchase or lease development rights in agricultural zones should be supported.

Undeveloped "green space" may be protected with the use of conservation easements administered by a variety of public and private organizations.

④ Elkhart County's planning and zoning boards and committees will follow and enforce consistent and uniform compliance with the subdivision and zoning ordinances, and give due consideration to the goals and the spirit of this Plan.

Rural character and vistas should be protected by establishing tighter standards for permitting of special uses, and by promoting the stringent standards established under the Use Variance section of Indiana and Elkhart County codes.



Dottie Kauffmann photo

# Goal ③ A Coordinated Approach to Planned Growth

Elkhart County will make land use planning a regional, interdepartmental, interjurisdictional activity.

## Policies

Little of this Plan is possible without routine, open dialogue between County departments and neighbor jurisdictions – complex relationships that benefit from communication, creativity and persistence.



The opening of the CR 17 bridge over US 33 celebrated good cooperation between State, County, and City governments.

① To cultivate development and growth around cities and towns, the County should make land use decisions that reflect their plans for expanding municipal and service boundaries when they are consistent with the spirit of this Plan.

In order for the County to promote growth that proceeds in an orderly and logical fashion from civic boundaries, cities and towns should be encouraged to identify specific areas planned for municipal and utility expansion. Since access to utility networks urbanizes land use, areas that receive or are intended to receive utilities should be annexed by the city or town providing them.

② Cities, towns, and the County should work on uniform development standards and consistent approval and enforcement processes for Urban Growth Areas.

Local governments should standardize zoning, street, building, signage, transfer of jurisdiction, and other codes and regulations, as well as inspection and enforcement levels, when they contribute to more seamless operations and community appearance throughout Urban Growth Areas.

③ Cities, towns and the County should work on joint policies that encourage city and town based growth, and discourage sprawl and leapfrog development.

The success of Urban Growth Areas can be advanced by such tools as overlays, area-specific comprehensive or economic plans, resident and landowner participation, as well as unique zoning and incentives.

④ When consistent with this Plan, appropriate land use elements of other County divisions, area coalitions, organizations and agencies should be integrated into land use planning and decision making.

Elkhart County's thoroughfare, access management, street standards, and other transportation plans are supporting documents for this land use Plan and its implementing ordinances where applicable.

The execution of this Plan should also incorporate or reference relevant land use elements of sewer, water, air, drainage, communication, technology, emergency, public safety, utilities, and other initiatives and mandates that have been, or are in process of being, adopted by the County. For example, Elkhart County Parks' master plan brings open space and other significant contributions to land use management and preservation in the community.

Conflicts or inconsistencies between land use policies in the County's jurisdiction should be rectified, and amendments re-posted in a timely manner.

⑤ Countywide access to technologies that add to communication, education, and recreational capabilities as well as other aspects of quality of life should be promoted.

Today's as well as tomorrow's technologies should be explored, planned for, and made available in rural as well as urban areas when they do not compromise County right of way, promote sprawl, or go against the other tenets of this land use Plan. Partnerships with utilities, educational institutions, and other communities' technology networks should be encouraged, with the same considerations.

# Goal ④ Environmental Stewardship

Elkhart County will protect and improve its environmental assets.

## Policies



The environment, from the upper atmosphere to the bedrock below, can be made safe for future generations through good land use planning and practices.

- ① Development that promotes the accessibility, visibility and healthful use of public places, land, structures, waterways, forests, open spaces and paths should be encouraged, along with the preservation of features, sounds and sights that showcase the county's natural assets.  
To promote the county's rural character, results of human activity (excessive noise, artificial light and visual clutter) that take away from the experience of being 'in the country' – for residents, visitors, and commuters – should be recognized and reduced.
- ② Development that preserves natural landscapes, indigenous species, and features of topography should be promoted.  
Site development that maintains well-scaled landscaping – and guards against invasive, non-native and vulnerable species in favor of native plantings – should be advanced, while the land's own geological features should be incorporated.
- ③ All land use and development should comply with county, state, and federal environmental regulations.  
All levels that govern permitting and pollution criteria for air, water, soils, and other areas, as well as the State of Indiana's minimum control technology requirements should be met, in rural as well as urban areas.  
For example, the Elkhart County Drainage Board's jurisdiction over regulated drains is acknowledged by this Plan.
- ④ High-intensity commercial and industrial development should not be considered where municipal utilities are not available.
- ⑤ Alternative methods of replacement wastewater disposal and water supply for rural residential areas should be encouraged.  
Technologies that offer environmentally friendly alternatives to municipal treatment of sewage and water should be pursued when consistent with the other goals of this Plan. While supporting options for replacement of existing systems, guard against consequences such as 'leapfrogging' and unintended development.
- ⑥ Design and management practices (including development that employs onsite technologies) that ensure air and water quality, routine recycling, as well as prevention of excessive water runoff and flooding, should be promoted throughout the county, including in its public places, land and structures.
- ⑦ Detrimental effects of former or existing land use such as contamination above and below ground, blight, unlawful dumping, as well as neglect and nuisances defined by state and local codes, should be eliminated.  
Any community-wide effort to improve quality of life in Elkhart County should include promoting cleanliness, appearance, safety and health of our land – developed and undeveloped – with activities that instill pride, lower tolerance for vandalism, raise compliance, and recognize model stewardship of the land.

# Goal ⑤ An Efficient Transportation Network

Elkhart County will get people where they want to go, with a transportation network that fosters public safety, good use of County resources, effective interface with alternative transportation, and this Plan's other goals for good land use.

## Policies



①

Efficient and safe movement of people and commerce is a priority in land use decisions. The Plan Commission should work with the Highway Department to maintain a Thoroughfare Plan that leads development, manages access, and contributes standards for orderly growth.

Traffic gridlock lowers productivity of the workforce and contributes to lower quality of life in neighborhoods.

To ensure our communities continue to achieve economic vitality, efficient movement of people and resources should be maintained.

②

Street standards should be followed in all development to protect right of way and provide safe access to property.

③

Road projects throughout the county should be coordinated systematically.

County Highway road construction and maintenance plans should be coordinated with those of cities and towns to build a better commuting network, maintain consistency, and add to quality of life.

④

Alternative transportation should be encouraged and supported where safe passage can be maintained.

Pedestrian and bike traffic on designated trails and sidewalks, as well as interchanges needed by horses and buggies, should be safely accommodated in transportation planning and projects.

Streets and highways allow the most intense use of the land by everyone in the community. They are one of the best indicators of good land use policy, or reveal dangerous conflicts between uses.



Goshen News photo