



QUALITY OF PLACE & WORKFORCE ATTRACTION PLAN

BROWN COUNTY, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2025



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INTRODUCTION

As part of an overarching strategy for improving economic and community prosperity in the Indiana Uplands, Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) established a grant opportunity for the 11 counties of our region to help ensure the region is ready for the opportunities ahead.

Ready Communities grants provide communities and organizations with resources to strategically develop programs and projects that build quality of place, grow regional capacity for workforce development and attraction, and improve the attributes and amenities that make the Indiana Uplands a desirable place to live, work, and play.

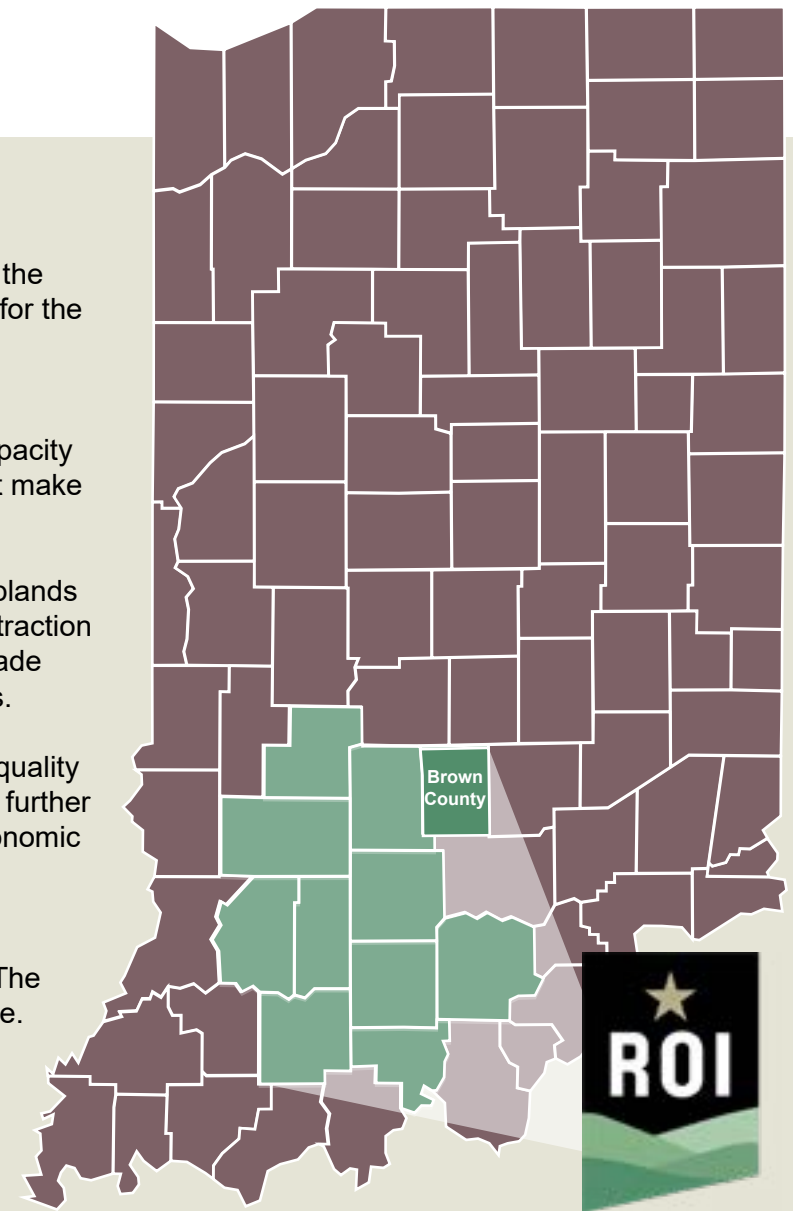
In 2019, the process began with Ready Communities Planning Grants. Each Indiana Uplands county received a \$50,000 planning grant to develop Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plans. Following the Ready Communities Planning Grant stage, up to \$3 million was made available for competitive quality of place and workforce attraction implementation grants.

These planning and implementation grants from ROI provided the foundation for many quality of place and workforce attraction initiatives and projects. Uplands counties were able to further utilize their plans to capitalize on funding opportunities through the state's Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI 1.0 and 2.0).

Recognizing the success of these initial planning efforts, ROI sought to reconvene our county partners to update the Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction plans in 2025. The hallmark of these plans is inclusive community input in developing priorities for the future. The consensus built around these priorities provides a roadmap for success.

What Is A Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan?

The Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plans provides county and community leaders a strategic plan for, developing and implementing projects and initiatives to build quality of place amenities, strengthen local and regional capacity for workforce attraction and improve residents' quality of life. Together these efforts make the Indiana Uplands a desirable place to live, work and play.



The plan that follows was funded by a grant from the Regional Opportunity Initiatives, Inc. (ROI) and was completed as part of a wholistic strategy for improving economic and community prosperity in the Indiana Uplands counties (Brown, Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Lawrence, Martin, Monroe, Orange, Owen and Washington).

OUR STORY

Brown County was established in 1836 in the rolling hills of southern Indiana, named after General Jacob Brown of the War of 1812. Founded as a pioneer colony, original settlers drew their wagons from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and the Carolinas in search of new land. Soon, log cabins dotted the beautiful landscape. Thus, the future of this culturally rich, environmentally-friendly, and artistically compelling community began.

Brown County is a place shaped by its natural beauty, creative heritage, and strong sense of community. For more than a century, people have been drawn to its hills, forests, trails, and vibrant artistic culture.

Our identity is rooted in traditions that continue to guide us while our current moment calls for investments that make Brown County not only a wonderful place to visit, but a place where working families can build full and meaningful lives.





Many of the original settlements in Brown County are now considered jewels among Brown County's renowned collection of log residences. Their craftsmanship and workmanship set the foundation for Brown County's future and the pioneering spirit from which the county was founded would reprise itself in many iterations over the following centuries.

By the early 1900s, a new type of colony formed, and Brown County was christened as "Peaceful Valley" by a group of Chicago-based artists who followed renowned painter T.C. Steele to Indiana. Inspired by the majestic landscape and colorful locals, these painters spread the word of Peaceful Valley far and wide. Soon art students followed, in addition to writers, potters, weavers, naturalists, and photographers, establishing an art colony in the heart of Nashville, the county seat.

Over the years, artists have continued to make their way to Brown County, keeping the art colony alive and fueling tourism that has served as the community's economic engine since the 20th century.

ABOUT BROWN COUNTY

Brown County seeks to index county assets, develop an aspirational outline, and identify potential partnership projects to develop or amplify existing quality of place and workforce attraction initiatives. If the county is successful in implementing many of the projects outlined, certain community performance indicators should improve; e.g. assessed value, local tax revenue, per capita income, population growth, educational attainment rates, and school enrollment.

Quality of place incorporates attractive living conditions, availability of cultural and recreational amenities, and the palpable sense of community and vibrancy an area offers to visitors and residents. Success in amplifying quality of place will come in the form of new residents moving to the county, collective agreement about the county's identity and values, and increased visibility and recognition of natural assets and community-based events.

The retirement community in Brown County is thriving. Baby Boomers move to the county to experience the scenic beauty, enjoy the remote location and share experiences with other down-to-earth residents. This active, older cohort of citizens adds to the county's knowledge base and provides unique cultural and professional context that enhances community involvement for peers and younger residents. Brown County's retirement community is directly related to the area's strong sense of volunteerism, which contributes greatly to quality of place.



The county's natural and historic assets elevate quality of life attributes for the entire Indiana Uplands region. Hoosiers throughout the Uplands, the State of Indiana, and visitors from across the nation benefit from the serene community. Brown County welcomes an estimated two million tourists every year. Traveler spending supported the most jobs in Brown County in 2024.

Brown County's unique topography of scenic hills, ridges and valleys. Community consensus affirms that protecting this asset needs to be at the forefront of a successful development plan for Brown County. By maintaining and remediating existing natural assets, the potential for expanding ecotourism is high throughout the county. Brown County has by far the highest concentration of forested land of any of Indiana's counties, estimated at 90 percent coverage (without any large commercial farms, United States Department of Agriculture).



The unincorporated towns in Brown County offer more opportunities to experience the county's culture, history and beauty. Bean Blossom, home of the Bill Monroe Memorial Music Park and Campground, has hosted bluegrass music performances for over 60 years. Helmsburg and Gnaw Bone offer visitors quaint antique shops, art galleries, and cabins for overnight lodging. Story, Indiana boasts the Story Inn, which provides unique lodging experiences; guests enjoy the vintage cottages and fine Hoosier cuisine prepared and served in the restored General Store.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ATTRACTION

In order to develop a workforce from within and attract young professionals, a county must focus on readying young people for 21st-century careers in emerging fields, providing industry exposure through mentorships, internships, and facility tours, and connecting labor with regional employers. Successful implementation of Workforce Development and Attraction projects could yield an increase in population, more residents with vocational certifications, the emergence of new businesses operating in innovative sectors, and the development of more work based learning initiatives.

Brown County is not like other lightly populated counties in Indiana. More than 31 percent of Brown County's labor force commutes outside of the county for work. With over 15,500 residents, Brown County ranks eighth out of 92 counties in population. Brown County has a population density of 48 people per square mile compared with 182 people per square mile statewide. (STATS Indiana)

The district boasts two four-star elementary schools, one National Blue-Ribbon elementary school, multiple middle school teams, participants in the International Intel Science Fair, National History Day finalists, a state championship performing arts team, and gold and silver award winning instrumental musicians and vocalists. And though budgets are tighter than ever, the district now boasts a desirable 14:1 student teacher ratio.

Brown County's population of roughly 15,780 grew 5% (compared to state average of 2%) since 2019 and is projected to grow by 2% by 2030. (Lightcast 2024). The county seeks to attract workforce by informing the Uplands region of its innovative workforce development programs and excellent schools and further developing youth industry exposure initiatives as well as address affordable housing for young families.





PROGRESS UPDATE: TRADE PROGRAMS, VOCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, & EMPLOYER COLLABORATIVES

Brown County Schools & Career Resource Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Brown County Schools in Nashville is now in its third year of distinction as the only high school in Indiana officially licensed as a TEDx site, offering students a rare and powerful platform to develop advanced communication and presentation skills while engaging their local community.

Through its annual TEDx event, Brown County High School students participate in a rigorous, real-world learning experience that extends far beyond traditional classroom instruction. Students are involved in every phase of the process—from idea development and storytelling to public speaking, event production, and community engagement. Guided by educators and community mentors, students learn to craft messages rooted in research, personal insight, and civic relevance, building confidence and clarity in how they communicate complex ideas.

This program strengthens essential workforce and life skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and professional presentation—skills increasingly valued by employers, higher education institutions, and civic organizations.

As the program enters its third year, Brown County Schools continues to demonstrate how innovation in education can flourish in a rural setting—preparing students not only for college and careers, but for thoughtful leadership and civic participation within their home community and beyond.

AMENITIES AND ATTRIBUTES



Brown County is ideally situated between I-69 and I-65. The county's proximity to large cities (Indianapolis and Louisville), Indiana University, and the Hoosier National forest affords opportunities for residents to easily explore the amenities found throughout the Uplands region and beyond.

The county's location near Monroe, Bartholomew and Johnson Counties also offers residents the added benefits of these areas (retail, healthcare, industry, events, dining) that add to quality of life. More employment opportunities exist by way of large, established businesses in neighboring counties, including education, medical, and pharmaceutical companies in Monroe County and engineering and manufacturing businesses operating in Bartholomew County.

A love for the area's amenities and attributes contributes to community cohesion and provide resources for individuals and families. Community organizations and clubs, public events, and infrastructure all serve to unify communities and contribute to quality of life. Brown County will leverage its strong spirit of volunteerism to strengthen certain amenities to support the health, safety, and quality of life for all residents. Brown County desires to be an even stronger asset to the Indiana Uplands region and looks forward to intentional, sustainable growth through collaborative partnerships and design thinking. Brown County aspires to leverage various funding opportunities to serve as catalyst for a robust and desirable ecosystem throughout the region. Many creative-minded people call this community home, and county leaders anxiously look forward to intentional participation in available programs

ENGAGEMENT

The Brown County Community Foundation (BCCF) has played a central convening and leadership role in improving quality of life across Brown County by intentionally engaging local, regional, and institutional partners around shared priorities. We informed our leadership hiring and strategic plan by gathering community feedback regarding needs and desires. As outlined in the Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan (2025), BCCF collaborated closely with local government, Brown County Schools, employers, arts organizations, healthcare providers, faith-based groups, and Indiana University partners to guide planning, align investments, and advance community-driven solutions.

Through initiatives such as **Brown County CONNECT**, the **Quality of Life Advisory Board**, and countywide planning workshops, BCCF helped create structured forums for dialogue, data review, and consensusbuilding. These partnerships directly contributed to tangible improvements including expanded recreational amenities, arts and cultural investments, trail and sidewalk planning, workforce and vocational partnerships, community health initiatives, and early progress on housing, childcare, and digital access. By grounding decisions in broad community engagement and leveraging trusted relationships, BCCF has strengthened collaboration, reduced duplication of effort, and positioned Brown County for thoughtful, sustainable growth that honors its heritage while preparing for future workforce and family needs.



BROWN COUNTY CONNECT

The Brown County Community Foundation partnered with the Brown County Convention & Visitors Bureau to host monthly Brown County CONNECT events, creating a regular forum for community members, local leaders, nonprofit partners, and business owners to come together, share news, and collaborate on community priorities. Held once a month, these gatherings provided updates on local initiatives, offered opportunities for peer learning, and encouraged cross-sector communication in an informal, inclusive setting. By cosponsoring these events, the Foundation and CVB strengthened community cohesion, increased awareness of ongoing projects and resources, and fostered a culture of shared responsibility for Brown County's quality of life and vitality.

Engagement Projects

1. Countywide and Town of Nashville comprehensive planning workshops
2. Community Health Needs Assessment
3. Brown County CONNECT monthly networking gatherings
4. Faith Based Engagement
5. Sustaining Hoosier Communities



BROWN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Brown County hired TPMA as a consultant to facilitate work on a county master plan: A draft of the 2025 Brown County Comprehensive Plan was circulated in February 2025, reflecting updates to land use guidance and community goals.

While the full finalized version wasn't formally adopted online at that time, the draft served as a working document for Plan Commission review and public discussion.

Purpose and Scope

The plan is designed to:

- Establish a shared vision for growth and conservation in Brown County over the coming decades.
- Inform future zoning, development ordinances, and transportation strategies.
- Reflect public preferences regarding housing, economic opportunities, natural and cultural resources, and rural character.

Process toward Adoption

- The draft plan was under review by the Area Plan Commission, with multiple revisions based on community feedback planned through spring and mid-2025.
- Following recommendation by the Plan Commission, the final Comprehensive Plan would be forwarded to the Brown County Board of Commissioners for formal adoption.

TOWN OF NASHVILLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Summary of Coverage

Through the support of BCCF, the Town of Nashville has shaped a new Comprehensive Plan to guide growth and development over roughly the next 20 years, emphasizing thoughtful planning, community input, and strategic priorities that reflect both local values and practical needs.

1. A Long-Term Vision for Growth

The plan developed with input from the Redevelopment Commission and presented to the Town Council in mid-2025, establishes a future land use framework and long-range goals intended to steer decisions on development, infrastructure, and community character. It builds off previous planning efforts while updating land use goals to reflect current conditions and aspirations for the town.

2. Community Engagement and Public Input

Public participation was a cornerstone of the planning process. Multiple workshops and surveys were held to gather residents' views on priorities and concerns, with opportunities for feedback shaping revisions to the draft plan.

3. Informing Future Policies

Though the Comprehensive Plan itself doesn't enact zoning changes, it sets the stage for policy and regulatory updates that will come next.

4. Land Use and Annexation Considerations

Media coverage also noted that the plan addressed potential annexation strategies, a topic of interest as Nashville evaluates how its municipal boundaries might expand in ways that support services and orderly development.

HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Summary: Brown County Community Foundation & IU Health Needs Assessment Partnership

The Brown County Community Foundation partnered with the Indiana University School of Public Health and IU's Rural Engagement division to conduct a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment for Brown County. This collaborative effort brought together local leaders, health providers, residents, and academic expertise to gather data, identify key health challenges, and understand the community's strengths and needs.

Through surveys, focus groups, and analysis of health indicators, the assessment illuminated priority areas such as access to healthcare, mental health services, substance use support, healthy lifestyles, and social determinants of health that influence well-being in rural communities. The partnership ensured that the assessment was grounded in reputable public health research while remaining deeply informed by local context and lived experience.

By engaging IU's resources and the Foundation's community relationships, the project strengthened local capacity to plan, prioritize, and pursue targeted strategies that improve health outcomes and quality of life across Brown County. The resulting findings now serve as a foundation for coordinated action, guiding future investments, program development, and community partnerships for better health.



FAITH-BASED ENGAGEMENT

Over the past several years, the Brown County Community Foundation has partnered with faith-based organizations to strengthen community health, meet basic needs, and engage residents in countywide planning. Local churches and faith groups supported outreach for the Community Health Needs Assessment, hosted or promoted wellness events, and helped reach residents through trusted networks. Faith partners have also played a role in emergency response, food and utility assistance, housing support, and volunteer coordination. Through these collaborations, BCCF has worked alongside faith communities as long-standing anchors of care and connection, aligning charitable resources with demonstrated community needs while honoring the county's tradition of service and neighbor-to-neighbor support.

- Supporting Community Health & Wellness Initiatives
- Housing & Basic Needs Partnerships
- Community Planning & Engagement
- Cultural & Spiritual Enrichment
- Volunteer Mobilization & Service

Faith communities often serve as volunteer networks, and BCCF has coordinated and supported many faith based organizations to address social service needs, especially due to the lack of a United Way in Brown County, Indiana. By partnering with churches and spiritual groups, BCCF taps into trusted local structures to expand capacity for service.



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

In December of 2025, Brown County and Nashville Awarded Sustaining Hoosier Communities Grant Brown County and the Town of Nashville have been selected to participate in Indiana University's Sustaining Hoosier Communities (SHC) program, a collaborative initiative that pairs rural communities with IU faculty, students, and staff to advance locally identified priorities. This designation is part of a statewide effort to strengthen community vitality by bringing university resources to real-world community challenges.

Through the SHC partnership, community members will work with IU partners to develop and implement projects that span areas such as health and wellness, economic resilience, arts and culture, leadership development, and local planning. The process emphasizes community-led visioning, student-engaged research and practicums, and development of actionable deliverables — including policy proposals, program frameworks, design concepts, and funding strategies — that help Brown County address its most pressing needs. The grant supports an intensive collaboration over the academic year, enabling Brown County and Nashville to leverage the expertise of IU faculty and students while strengthening local capacity to pursue long-term community goals. By integrating academic partnerships with local leadership and residents, the Sustaining Hoosier Communities funding is expected to help the region enrich quality of life, expand opportunities for residents, and build momentum toward sustainable, community-driven solutions.

PROGRESS

Strengths of Local Readiness:

- Shared planning frameworks already approved
- High community consensus
- Strong cross-sector participation
- Clear project feasibility and regional alignment
- Leadership stability
- History of volunteerism and collaboration

QPAT Members

- **Pam Gould**, Quality of Life Advisory Board, Local Lodging Owner (32 years), Former Member of Many Philanthropic Boards
- **Jimmy Tilton**, Brown County CVC, Hotelier, Quality of Life Advisory Board
- **Alice Susemichel**, CEO, Brown Co. Community Foundation
- **Amy Huffman**, Oliver Brown Co. Schools School Board Member, Quality of Life Advisory Board
- **Lyn Letsinger-Miller**, Brown County Art Gallery Foundation, ROI Uplands Arts and Culture Strategic Plan, Quality of Life Advisory Board
- **John Elliott**, Board Chair, Brown County Community Foundation, Quality of Life Advisory Board
- **Gary Huett**, President, Brown County Council, Quality of Life Advisory Board



Collaboration

- Brown County Schools
- Brown County Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Town of Nashville & Brown County
- Governments
- Brown County Art Gallery & Arts community
- Employers across key sectors
- Quality of Life Advisory Board
- IU Center for Rural Engagement (CRE)
- IU School of Public Health

PROGRESS

Completed or Advanced Projects Since 2019 QPAT

- Town of Nashville Comprehensive Plan
- Trail Connectivity Plan
- Eagle/Eaglet Manufacturing early development
- Vocational and workforce partnerships
- Early Education Center (EEC)

Community Engagement

- Brown County CONNECT
- Quality of Life Advisory Board established
- Brown County Community Health Needs
- Assessment in partnership with IU
- IU Health Primary Care facility opened
- Habitat homes (5 completed since 2020)
- Brown County Health and Wellness
- Brown County Music Center
- Bicycle Pump Track at Deer Run Park
- Fire Training Center
- New investments due to land sales

Continued Work

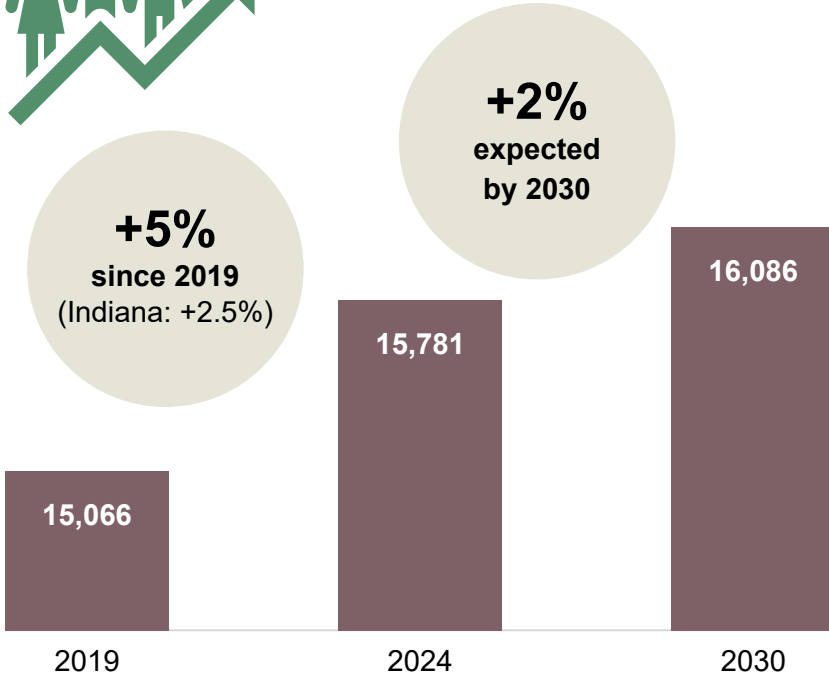
- Downtown WiFi and digital access
- Beautification, gateways, wayfinding (BCCF worked with IU Placemaking)
- Expanded sidewalks and safe routes
- Youth-friendly recreation and gathering spaces
- Affordable housing and sewer infrastructure
- Employer pipelines and workforce readiness
- Comprehensive plan for County
- STEAMery organization (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics)
- Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
- Brown County App
- Public Safety incentives
- Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)

DATA PROFILE



POPULATION CHANGE

Source: Lightcast, 2024



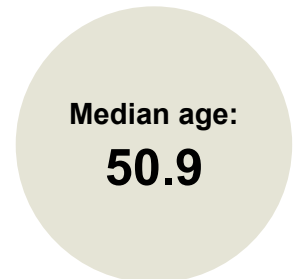
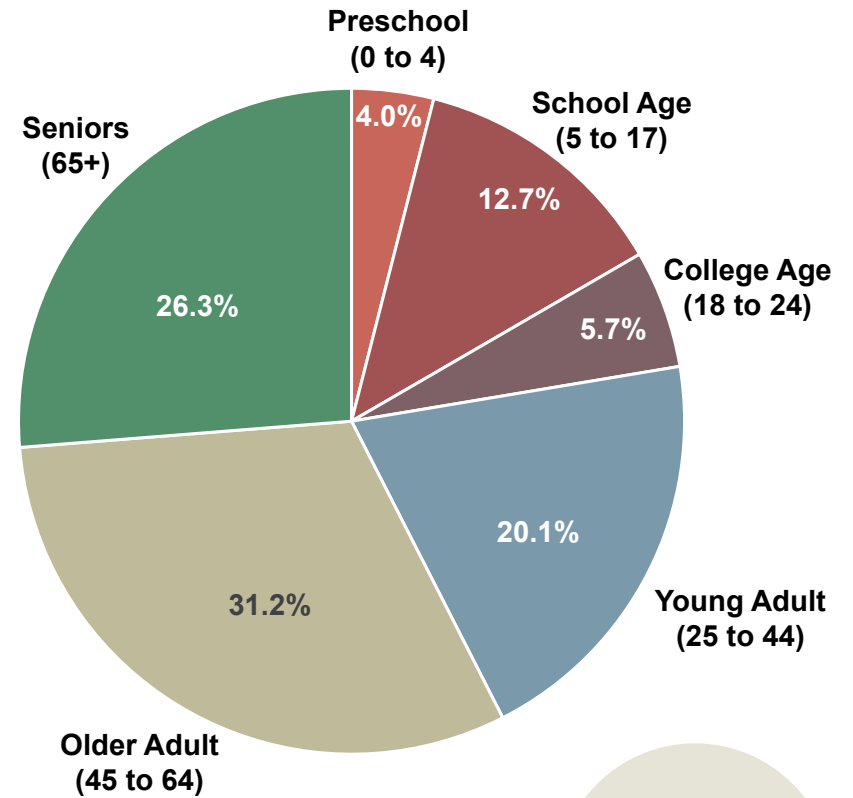
RACE & ETHNICITY

Source: Lightcast, 2024

White	94.3%
Hispanic/Latino	2.1%
African American/Black	0.3%
Asian	0.7%

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023



(Indiana: Seniors 17.5%; Older Adult 23.9%; Young Adult 25.9%; College Age 9.7%; School Age 17.0%; Preschool Age 5.9%)

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2023



\$72,644

(Indiana: \$70,051)

MEDIAN HOME SALE

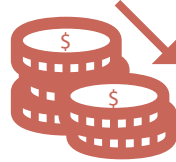
Source: Indiana Association of Realtors, 2025



\$381,000

POVERTY

Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2023



9.3%
AMONG CHILDREN

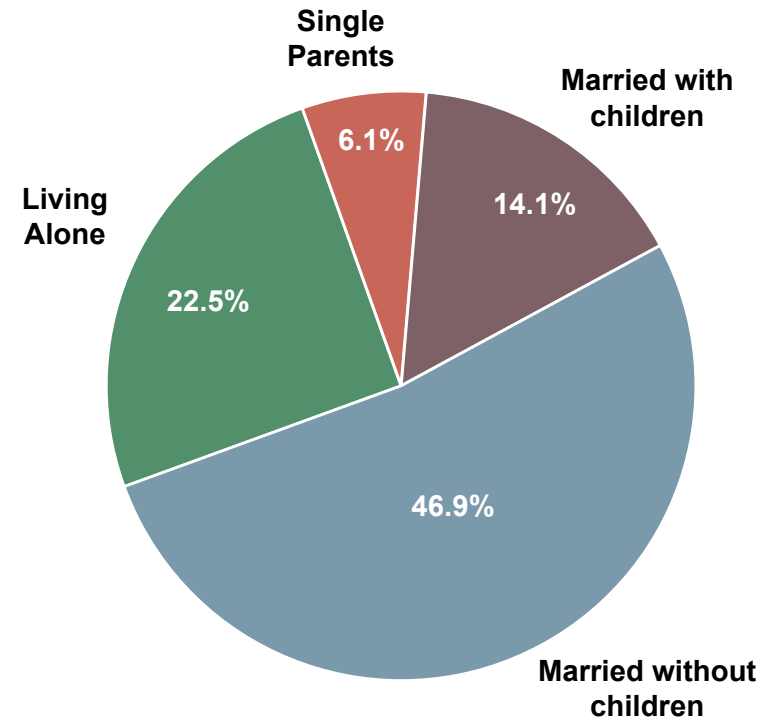
(Indiana: 15.7%)

8.6%
OVERALL

(Indiana: 12.2%)

HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2023



(Indiana: Single Parents 9.0%, Married with children 17.2%; Married without children 29.4%; Living Alone 29.8%.)

CHILD CARE

Source: Transform Consulting Group, 2024



\$7,317

**Average Annual Cost of
Child Care in the County**

(Indiana: \$8,590, Source for Indiana data: Early Learning Indiana, 2024)



COMMUTING TRENDS

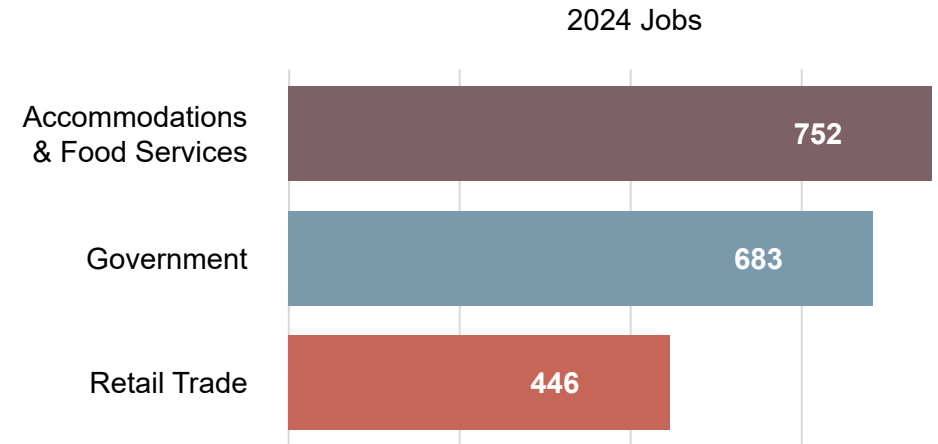
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Top Counties for Inbound Commuters	Top Counties for Outbound Commuters
Morgan	Bartholomew
Bartholomew	Johnson
Monroe	Marion



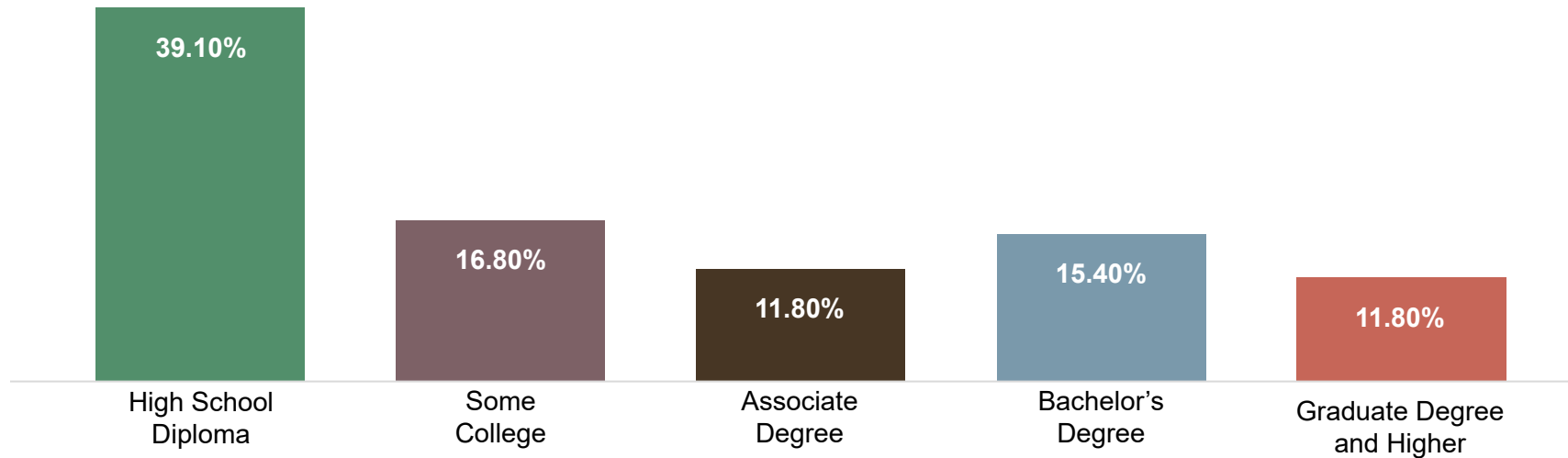
TOP INDUSTRIES

Source: Lightcast, 2024



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Source: Lightcast, 2024



PROGRESS

Since the adoption of the 2019 plan, Brown County has achieved meaningful progress across community planning, public health, workforce development, infrastructure, and quality-of-life initiatives. Several major projects identified in the original plan have been completed, while new opportunities and unexpected challenges have helped refine the county's overall direction.

Significant accomplishments include the completion of the Town of Nashville Comprehensive Plan and the Trail Connectivity Plan, which received strong community support and now guide ongoing efforts to expand mobility and outdoor recreation. New amenities such as the bicycle pump track at Deer Run Park, expanded pickleball courts at the YMCA and BCSP, the continued success of the Brown County Music Center, and the development of the Fire Training Center demonstrate the county's commitment to enhancing public safety and recreational assets.

Economic and workforce development advanced through strengthened Ivy Tech vocational partnerships and early development of Eagle/Eaglet Manufacturing, supporting diversification of the local economy.

Housing efforts also moved forward with the completion of 5 new Habitat for Humanity homes. Public health emerged as a major area of progress. Brown County partnered with Indiana University to complete a Community Health Needs Assessment, and the opening of the IU Health Primary Care facility in 2024 significantly improved access to local healthcare. The Brown County Health and Wellness initiative further expanded programming and community engagement around health.



Some goals encountered challenges—most notably childcare expansion, which required new strategies after statewide funding cuts. Despite these setbacks, the county's adaptability led to renewed partnerships and revised approaches.

Overall, Brown County's direction has evolved to place greater emphasis on health, connectivity, economic resilience, and high-quality community amenities. The combination of planned achievements and new initiatives reflects a community that is responsive, collaborative, and proactive in shaping its future.

PROGRESS

TRAIL CONNECTIVITY: SALT CREEK TRAIL HISTORY

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Early 2019 saw movement on land sales and approvals between Brown County Schools and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) to allow construction of a bridge and continuation of the trail alignment through Eagle Park.

2020 – Construction Phase Activity

Throughout 2020, work progressed on Phase 2 of the trail. This included bridge construction activity and planning for connections to additional segments, although specific segment completions were evolving and contingent upon right-of-way and funding.

2022–2024 – Planning for Loop & Connectivity

According to the 2024 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan for the Town of Nashville, a new trail section is envisioned that will create a loop with the existing Salt Creek Trail.

Summary of Milestones

- **2002** – Initial community conversations and volunteer planning began for a trail concept that would someday connect key local destinations (not formally documented in county reports but referenced in longer planning history).
- **Nov 8, 2013** – Phase 1 opened (paved trail between YMCA and CVS).
- **2015–2017** – Continued planning, funding discussions, and stakeholder engagement for future phases.
- **2018–2019** – Easement and land agreements for bridge construction and trail expansion approval.
- **2020** – Construction and bridge activity underway for Phase 2.
- **2021** – Local reporting indicated Phase 2 expected to be completed later that year.
- **2024** – Master planning continues for new trail connections and a full loop, reflecting ongoing multi-year planning efforts.



PROGRESS

BROWN COUNTY ACCESSIBILITY

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

The Town of Nashville has its own ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan (adopted 2/18/2021)—that’s important because many day-to-day accessibility pinch points are about sidewalks, crossings, public buildings, meetings, and services in town. These plans are the strongest “hard evidence” sources because they’re built specifically to identify accessibility issues (facilities + programs), prioritize them, and guide compliance work.

Accessibility shows up as a planning priority in Nashville’s transportation/sidewalk work Nashville’s planning materials explicitly point to updating and implementing ADA/PROWAG transition plans for sidewalks and intersections (curb ramps, crossings, trip hazards, detectable warnings, etc.). That’s a clear signal that pedestrian accessibility is a known need and an ongoing work area.

Brown County’s Access Brown County public transportation program (through the YMCA) states that vehicles are wheelchair accessible, it operates by appointment, and it provides curb-to-curb service (with scheduling requirements). It also offers free rides for residents 60+ and lists fares for others. What this suggests about accessibility challenges (common in rural counties):

- If transit is appointment-based with limited dispatch hours, access can still be tough for spontaneous needs, short-notice medical visits, or people with fluctuating health/mobility.

PROGRESS

TRADE PROGRAMS, VOCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, & EMPLOYER COLLABORATIVES: BROWN COUNTY SCHOOLS & CAREER RESOURCE

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Since adoption of the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan, Brown County Schools and the Career Resource Center have made measurable progress advancing career pathways and workforce alignment.

Brown County Schools has formalized work-based learning, including internships for academic credit, expanding student access to real-world employment experiences and strengthening employer engagement. **The Eagle Manufacturing program**—identified in 2019 as a priority pathway—has advanced from a growth objective to an operational, expanding student-run enterprise, offering hands-on experience in manufacturing, engineering design, and business operations. The Eagle/Eaglet Manufacturing and vocational partnerships have a consistent cadence of projects, confirming sustained progress.

The **Career Resource Center** continues to serve as a countywide workforce hub, connecting students and adults to career services, training, certifications, and employer partnerships. Together, these efforts demonstrate that Brown County has moved from planning to implementation and readiness for next-phase investment, with core workforce systems in place and positioned for expansion.

INCORPORATING THE HUMANITIES IN STEM LEARNING PROGRAMS: BROWN COUNTY SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

School-Based STEAM Integration

Since 2019, Brown County Schools has continued to emphasize interdisciplinary learning environments that naturally support STEM. Arts, music, theater, writing, and media programs operate alongside STEM coursework and clubs, reinforcing creativity, communication, and problem-solving skills that complement technical learning.

STEM Certification with Interdisciplinary Emphasis

Both Helmsburg Elementary and Brown County Middle School have achieved Indiana STEM Certification. State STEM certification criteria emphasize inquiry-based, project-centered, and interdisciplinary learning—creating a framework that supports integration of humanities, design, and real-world context into STEM instruction, even when not labeled explicitly as “humanities.”

Community-Based STEM Initiatives

A notable public development is The STEAMery, an emerging community-driven initiative proposing a multi-lab STEAM facility. Publicly shared plans highlight integration of art, music, ceramics, culinary arts, and technology, demonstrating a deliberate blending of creative disciplines with technical skill-building for students and residents. Informal & Library-Based STEAM Programming Publicized community and library programs increasingly pair storytelling, art, and creative expression with hands-on STEM activities. While informal, these programs reinforce STEM concepts and broaden access to humanities-infused STEM learning beyond the classroom.

PROGRESS

POPULATION/STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Data from U.S. Census and state demographic estimates indicate:

- Steady but modest overall growth over the last decade:
- Brown County’s population was 15,242 in 2010 and grew to about 15,475 by the 2020 Census—an increase of roughly 1.5%.
- More recent estimates (2024) suggest continued slight growth, with an estimated population of around 15,650—approximately a 1.2% increase since 2020.
- Projections for 2026 suggest the population may level off or even show very slight declines year-to-year, but the long-term trend since 2010 remains positive (about 2.3% growth since 2010–2012 levels).

Summary:

Brown County has experienced a slow but positive net population change over the past decade, reflecting rural demographic dynamics where growth is present but modest compared with statewide urban areas.

School Enrollment Trends

Brown County School Corporation’s reported total enrollment for 2024–2025 was around 1,549 students.

Historical press coverage suggests enrollment declined notably from earlier years (e.g., about 1,787 in 2018) but has more recently stabilized rather than continuing steep declines.

This fits broader state data showing that many rural districts saw declines in enrollment earlier in the decade, with stabilization or smaller fluctuations more recently.

Important point:

Enrollment trends in Brown County Schools have not shown dramatic recent growth, but there is evidence that the rate of decline seen earlier has moderated and student numbers are holding steadier in recent school years.

Population growth in Brown County has been modest but positive over the last decade, with incremental increases in residents. Student enrollment reflects a community that is relatively stable in total population of school-age children, with earlier declines leveling off.

PROGRESS

HOUSING

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Developer Resources, Housing Diversity & Affordability, and Historic Preservation

Since adoption of the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan, Brown County has made measurable progress in strengthening housing data, improving tools for developers, expanding affordable housing efforts, and leveraging preservation as a housing strategy—while acknowledging that demand continues to outpace supply.

Improved Resources for Developers & Decision-Makers

Brown County now benefits from updated, developer-oriented housing analysis through the Indiana Uplands / ROI Housing Study Update (2023), including a Brown County addendum. This work functions as a practical guide for local governments and developers, clarifying housing demand, price points, and viable strategies. Updated data highlights the continued need for workforce housing, particularly for households earning under \$50,000, and identifies the importance of rental and “missing middle” housing types.

Movement Toward More Diverse Housing Options

Post-2019 analysis has sharpened focus on housing diversity, recommending a mix that includes rentals, duplexes, townhomes, smaller ownership units, and rehabilitation of existing housing stock. While large-scale production remains challenging, the county has shifted from general discussion to defined targets and tools, positioning Brown County for phased development as funding and land access allow.



Investment in Rehabilitation & Preservation

Brown County has advanced housing affordability through rehabilitation strategies, including receipt of an Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Grant, supporting repairs that preserve existing affordable homes. In addition, Brown County residents and developers can leverage the Indiana State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, which provides a 20% tax credit on qualified rehabilitation expenses for contributing historic properties. This incentive supports both historic preservation and cost-effective housing reinvestment.

Affordable Housing Delivery: Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity of Brown County continues to provide direct affordable housing production. Public filings indicate that two new homes were completed and transferred to income-qualified families in 2024, demonstrating ongoing local capacity to deliver homeownership opportunities for working families. Habitat homes built since 2019 - 2020: Helmsburg - County Government Employee 2023: Helmsburg - County Healthcare Employee, 2024: Nashville - County Hospitality Employee, 2025: Helmsburg - County Hospitality Employee, 2025: Nineveh - In Progress

PROGRESS

CHILDCARE

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)



The 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan identified childcare availability and early childhood education as critical workforce infrastructure, noting that limited childcare options constrained labor force participation, business attraction, and family stability. Since that time, Brown County has continued to struggle to provide childcare to the community impacting the interest in young families moving to the area.

Expansion of School-Based Early Childhood Programs

Brown County Schools has worked to increase its early childhood footprint through the Early Education Center in Nashville. The program now serves toddlers and preschool-age children, with plans underway to expand services to infants and younger toddlers, creating one of the county's most comprehensive licensed childcare hubs.

In 2024, Brown County Schools received a major Early Years Initiative grant, funding renovations and program expansion that include additional classrooms, infant and toddler capacity, family engagement space, and operational improvements. These investments increase licensed childcare seats, extend hours for working families, and strengthen alignment between early learning and K–12 education.

Increased Access Through Pre-K Scholarships

Brown County continues to expand access to early education through Pre-K scholarships, supported by local and state resources, however, more recently federal and state funding through the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) has been cut and voucher availability for low income households is greatly reduced.

Growth of Community & Family-Based Childcare

Since 2019, Brown County has moved from identifying childcare as a barrier to building tangible capacity. Expanded school-based childcare, increased Pre-K scholarship access, and strengthened family-based care have collectively improved availability, affordability, and quality. While continued growth is needed to meet demand, the foundational systems, partnerships, and facilities are now in place to support further expansion.

Key Considerations for Improving Childcare Options in Brown County, Indiana

Improving access to affordable, high-quality childcare is essential to supporting working families, strengthening the local workforce, and sustaining long-term community vitality in Brown County. Reliable childcare enables parents and caregivers to participate fully in the workforce, pursue education and training, and maintain economic stability, while also providing young children with a strong foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. In a rural community with a diverse employment base and limited service capacity, childcare challenges affect not only families, but also employers, schools, and economic development efforts. Achieving meaningful progress requires coordinated, community-wide attention to childcare capacity, workforce recruitment and retention, affordability for families, facility and infrastructure limitations, and the alignment of systems and stakeholders working toward shared outcomes.

1. Capacity and Availability

A primary challenge is ensuring sufficient childcare capacity, particularly for infants and toddlers, where demand consistently exceeds supply. Expansion efforts must also account for non-traditional work schedules common in rural and tourism-based economies, including early mornings, evenings, and seasonal fluctuations. Geographic access and transportation constraints further underscore the need for childcare options that are distributed across the county.

2. Workforce Recruitment and Retention

The sustainability of childcare services depends on a stable, qualified workforce. Low wages, limited benefits, and inconsistent schedules contribute to high turnover. Addressing these issues requires intentional investment in compensation, professional development, credentialing pathways, and shared staffing supports, such as substitute or float pools, to prevent classroom closures.

3. Affordability and Financial Sustainability

There is a persistent gap between the true cost of providing quality childcare and what families are able to afford. This gap is most pronounced in infant care. Improving affordability requires a combination of childcare assistance utilization, local scholarship or bridge-fund models, and operational support that enables providers to maintain quality while remaining financially viable.

4. Facilities and Infrastructure

Facility constraints often limit expansion. Zoning requirements, licensing standards, fire and safety codes, and renovation costs can present significant barriers, particularly in older or repurposed buildings. Creative use of existing community spaces—such as schools, churches, and public facilities—can be effective when paired with early planning and capital support to meet regulatory requirements.

5. Quality and Regulatory Support

Expanding childcare access must be accompanied by a commitment to quality. New and expanding providers benefit from coaching, technical assistance, and support navigating licensing requirements. Consistent staffing, safe environments, and developmentally appropriate practices are essential to building family trust and ensuring positive outcomes for children.

6. Mixed-Delivery Approach

No single childcare model will meet all community needs. A balanced strategy that includes center-based care, licensed in-home providers, school-linked pre-K programs, and employer-supported childcare options offers the greatest flexibility and resilience, particularly in a rural county setting.

7. Coordination and Systems Alignment

Fragmentation can limit impact. A coordinated approach—featuring centralized intake or waitlist management, shared data on capacity and demand, and a designated convener or backbone organization—helps align efforts among providers, employers, schools, local government, and funders.

8. Employer Engagement

Local employers are both stakeholders and beneficiaries of improved childcare access. Their engagement is critical in identifying demand, supporting flexible scheduling, and exploring employer-assisted childcare solutions such as reserved slots, stipends, or back-up care. Employer participation strengthens workforce retention and reinforces childcare as an economic development priority.

PROGRESS

MENTAL HEALTH

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Since 2019, Centerstone has significantly expanded both its service offerings and regional role in Indiana, strengthening access to mental health and substance use care for residents in rural communities such as Brown County. Centerstone has evolved from a primarily outpatient counseling provider into a comprehensive behavioral health organization offering a full continuum of care. Services now span outpatient therapy, psychiatric care, substance use treatment, crisis intervention, recovery support, and integrated behavioral–primary care models serving children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and veterans. This expansion reflects a broader shift toward prevention, early intervention, and long-term recovery support rather than episodic care.

A key area of growth since 2019 has been crisis response capacity:

Centerstone plays a leadership role in Indiana’s behavioral health crisis system, including participation in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, mobile crisis response, and urgent behavioral health services. These efforts have elevated Centerstone’s status as a trusted crisis-care partner for communities that lack local emergency mental health infrastructure. Accessibility has also improved through the rapid expansion of telehealth services, allowing rural residents to receive counseling, psychiatric consultations, and follow-up care without long travel distances. This has been particularly impactful for Brown County residents, where transportation barriers and provider shortages have historically limited access to mental health care.

Regionally, Centerstone has strengthened its presence through expanded facilities and programs in nearby communities such as Columbus, Bloomington, Bedford, and Martinsville, providing Brown County residents with greater proximity to in-person services when needed. The organization has also increased school-based services, community partnerships, and care coordination, reinforcing a more holistic, community-centered approach to mental health.

Organizationally, Centerstone’s growth has elevated its statewide and national standing. Through its research institute, foundation, and large multi-state network, the organization has become a leader in evidence-based behavioral health care, workforce development, and system innovation. Its expanded scope and leadership role reflect a growing recognition of mental health as a core component of community health and quality of life.

PROGRESS

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION & AGRITOURISM

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

The 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan identified agritourism and sustainable tourism as opportunities to strengthen the local economy while promoting environmental education, land stewardship, and Brown County’s agricultural and cultural heritage.

Farm-Based & Local Food Experiences

Brown County continues to support small-scale agritourism experiences that connect visitors with local agriculture and rural traditions. Publicly promoted destinations such as The Wood Frog Farm offer farm-based products, workshops, and demonstrations that blend homesteading skills, sustainability, and education. A seasonal farmers market in Nashville remains a visible visitor attraction, providing direct farm-to-consumer engagement and reinforcing local food systems as part of the tourism experience.

Sustainable & Environmental Education Tourism

Brown County’s outdoor assets continue to anchor environmentally focused tourism. Interpretive programs and nature education offered through Brown County State Park and surrounding forests provide visitors with learning opportunities related to ecology, conservation, and land stewardship. These experiences align with sustainable tourism goals by pairing recreation with environmental education.

Heritage Tourism Integration

Agricultural and environmental narratives are reinforced through heritage tourism assets, including historic sites, covered bridges, and the legacy of the Brown County Art Colony. These elements help interpret the county’s settlement, farming, and land-use history, allowing visitors to understand the cultural context of the rural landscape alongside modern tourism activities.

Tourism Promotion & Alignment

The county’s tourism promotion continues to emphasize outdoor experiences, local culture, and place-based authenticity, creating a platform that naturally supports agritourism and heritage-focused initiatives even when not explicitly branded as such. This integrated approach aligns with the 2019 plan’s call to connect agriculture, environment, and heritage into a cohesive visitor experience.

PROGRESS

RETIREMENT NETWORKS

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

The 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan identified the opportunity to better engage retirees and older adults as community assets—leveraging experience, time, and skills to support youth development, volunteerism, and social connection.

Publicized Progress & Advancements

Growth of Structured Volunteer Pathways

Brown County has strengthened formal volunteer pathways that attract retirees into consistent service roles, including mentoring, tutoring, nonprofit board service, and community event support. These roles create reliable points of entry for retirees while benefiting youth-serving organizations and civic initiatives.

Intergenerational Programs & School Connections

Retirees are increasingly visible in school-connected activities, including classroom support, career mentoring, literacy assistance, and extracurricular engagement. These efforts support youth learning while fostering intergenerational relationships—directly advancing the 2019 goal of linking retirees with youth-focused initiatives.

Nonprofit & Community Foundation Coordination

Through nonprofit coordination efforts and facilitated engagement models, retirees are more intentionally matched with community needs. This has shifted volunteerism from informal participation to purpose-driven service, strengthening community cohesion and institutional capacity. The Brown County Community Foundation awarded an Impact Grant in 2024 to Habitat for Humanity and TRIAD to address needs of seniors in the community with renovation projects bringing young and old together in community.



Senior-Focused Community Hubs

Local senior-serving organizations and community spaces continue to function as organizing hubs for volunteer engagement, social connection, and civic participation. These hubs reduce isolation among older adults while channeling volunteer energy toward community priorities.

Alignment with Community Cohesion Initiatives

Retiree volunteerism has increasingly been tied to broader community goals—supporting nonprofits, youth programs, arts and culture, education, and quality-of-life initiatives—helping sustain momentum across generations and reinforcing shared community identity.

PROGRESS

THE BROWN COUNTY PARTNERSHIP

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

The 2019 report noted that Brown County had numerous studies, plans, and well-intentioned initiatives, but lacked a single, inclusive leadership body to:

- Align priorities across sectors (housing, childcare, health, workforce, infrastructure)
- Engage residents, nonprofits, and local government in shared decision-making
- Translate planning into coordinated action and funding strategies

At that time, leadership was described as fragmented, with momentum often tied to individual projects rather than a sustained, community-wide framework.

Transition to a Coordinated Governance Model

In response, Brown County intentionally moved toward a standing advisory model that could steward community priorities over time. This evolution is reflected in the formation of the Quality of Life Advisory Board, which has been regularly referenced in reporting by The Brown County Democrat as a forum for discussing housing, childcare, healthcare access, trails, workforce, and infrastructure. Rather than launching new, siloed plans, the Board was designed to:

- Pull forward prior planning work (2019 Quality of Place, health needs assessments, housing studies, childcare studies)
- Provide a public, transparent setting for identifying and prioritizing needs
- Serve as a bridge between local government, nonprofits, schools, healthcare providers, and funders



Current Role of the Quality of Life Advisory Board

Today, the Quality of Life Advisory Board functions as the inclusive leadership mechanism envisioned in 2019. Its work reflects a shift from planning in isolation to integrated, community-wide problem solving. Key characteristics include:

- Cross-sector representation (public, nonprofit, education, health, philanthropy)
- Regular agenda items tied to priority community challenges
- Emphasis on sequencing, coordination, and readiness rather than one-off solutions
- A focus on identifying next steps, funding alignment, and implementation pathways

Media coverage has highlighted the Board's role in vetting ideas, revisiting data, and ensuring that proposed solutions are grounded in community input and prior research—addressing a core gap identified in 2019.

PROGRESS

BROADBAND

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

The 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan identified limited and uneven broadband access as a critical barrier to workforce participation, education, healthcare access, and overall quality of life—particularly in rural areas of Brown County. The plan emphasized the need for both infrastructure expansion and affordability solutions to ensure residents could fully participate in modern work, learning, and civic life.

Infrastructure Expansion Since 2019

Since the 2019 report, Brown County has benefited from state-led broadband expansion initiatives, including Indiana’s Next Level Broadband and subsequent federal and state investment programs. These efforts have resulted in:

- Expanded fiber and fixed wireless coverage in previously underserved areas
- Increased participation by internet service providers in rural build-outs
- Greater availability of high-speed internet capable of supporting remote work, online learning, and telehealth

While coverage gaps remain, Brown County has moved from limited options to incremental, countywide improvements driven by coordinated state and local investment.

Addressing Affordability: Brown County Internet Scholarship

Recognizing that access is not only about infrastructure but also cost, the community took a proactive step through the creation of the Brown County Internet Scholarship. This locally supported program provides financial assistance to households that have broadband service available but face affordability barriers. The scholarship:

- Helps offset monthly internet costs for income-eligible residents
- Supports students, job seekers, seniors, and families who rely on connectivity for education, employment, and services
- Complements infrastructure investments by ensuring new broadband capacity is actually usable by residents

The scholarship represents a targeted, community-based solution that directly responds to the 2019 plan’s equity concerns.

Integration with Education, Workforce & Community Goals

Improved broadband access has supported:

- Remote learning and digital coursework for students
- Work-from-home and hybrid employment opportunities
- Expanded access to telehealth and online services
- Stronger connectivity for nonprofits and small businesses

Broadband is now treated as essential infrastructure, aligned with housing, childcare, and workforce strategies rather than a standalone utility issue.

PROGRESS

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Brown County, Indiana (2019–2025)

Water & Sewer Infrastructure Progress

Since 2019, Brown County has shifted from reactive, project-by-project infrastructure decisions to a more coordinated and forward-looking approach. A formal sewer planning plan has been developed, establishing priority areas for sewer expansion, identifying locations with known septic failures and water quality concerns, and outlining phased strategies to align infrastructure investment with anticipated residential growth.

Water and sewer planning is now more intentionally integrated with housing, land-use, and environmental strategies, helping ensure that infrastructure capacity supports appropriate development while protecting sensitive water resources. This coordinated framework improves predictability for developers, provides clearer guidance for decision-makers, and reduces public health risks associated with inadequate wastewater management.

Safety, Housing, and Growth Readiness

The 2022 Strategic Wastewater Plan prioritizes areas where improved wastewater management will reduce contamination risks and improve overall water quality. By clearly identifying where sewer service can be extended—and where it cannot—Brown County has strengthened its readiness for responsible residential growth.

However, the lack of adequate water and sewer infrastructure remains a limiting factor for new housing development. In areas without sewer access, development is often constrained by soil conditions, septic system limitations, and environmental protections. As a result, housing projects may be delayed, scaled back, or deemed infeasible, even where demand exists. Addressing these infrastructure gaps is essential to unlocking future housing opportunities and supporting workforce retention and attraction.



Key Considerations

While planning efforts have advanced significantly, implementation remains dependent on securing sustainable funding sources. Water and sewer infrastructure projects require substantial capital investment, long-term operational funding, and coordination across local, state, and federal funding programs. Potential funding sources may include state revolving loan funds, federal infrastructure grants, regional partnerships, and local match commitments. Identifying and leveraging these resources will be critical to moving from planning to construction.

Without dedicated and predictable funding, infrastructure expansion will continue to limit housing development, economic growth, and community resilience. Strategic investment in water and sewer systems is therefore not only an infrastructure priority, but a foundational requirement for addressing housing needs, protecting public health, and supporting Brown County's long-term growth goals.

Overall Assessment

Since 2019, Brown County has made meaningful progress by establishing a coordinated sewer planning framework that improves safety, protects water resources, and positions the county for responsible residential growth. While full infrastructure build-out will occur over time, the foundational planning needed to guide investment, pursue funding, and manage growth effectively is now in place. Continued focus on implementation and funding will be essential to translating this planning progress into tangible improvements for residents and future development.

LESSONS LEARNED

Since the adoption of the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Action Plan, Brown County has gained valuable insight into what it takes to move from visioning to implementation in a rural, tourism-driven community. One of the clearest lessons is that planning alone is not sufficient; progress accelerates when planning is paired with sustained leadership, coordination, and readiness for implementation.

The past several years demonstrate that communities benefit most when plans are treated as living tools that guide decisions, funding alignment, and sequencing of projects rather than static reports. A second key lesson is the importance of integrated, cross-sector collaboration. Early efforts revealed that siloed initiatives—while well intentioned—often limited impact. The transition to a more coordinated governance approach, most notably through the establishment of the Quality of Life Advisory Board, has strengthened alignment across housing, childcare, healthcare, workforce, infrastructure, and placemaking efforts. This shift should improve

transparency, reduced duplication, and created a shared forum for revisiting data, prioritizing needs, and aligning next steps across organizations and jurisdictions.

.Brown County has also learned that health and infrastructure are foundational to workforce attraction and quality of life. Progress in public health—including completion of a Community Health Needs Assessment and the opening of a local primary care facility—has reinforced the connection between healthcare access, economic stability, and community resilience. Similarly, advancements in broadband expansion and sewer planning have shown that addressing core infrastructure constraints is essential to unlocking housing development, supporting families, and enabling long-term growth. However, the county has also learned that planning without dedicated, predictable funding can slow implementation, underscoring the need for sustained investment strategies. Another important lesson is that rural innovation thrives when local assets are leveraged intentionally. Brown County's success in expanding trail systems, arts and cultural programming, workforce pathways, and student-centered initiatives—such as vocational partnerships and the TEDx high school program—demonstrates that rural communities can lead with creativity, education, and place-based identity. These efforts have reinforced community pride while supporting tourism, youth engagement, and workforce readiness.

Finally, Brown County has learned the value of adaptability and persistence. Not all goals advanced as originally envisioned; childcare expansion, for example, will require new approaches following changes in state funding. Rather than stalling, the community will need to adjust strategies, strengthen partnerships, and continue incremental progress. This adaptability reflects a growing maturity in how the county approaches complex challenges—acknowledging constraints while remaining committed to long-term outcomes.

Together, these lessons highlight a community that has evolved from identifying needs to building the structures, partnerships, and capacity required to address them. Brown County's experience since 2019 affirms that thoughtful planning, integrated leadership, and sustained collaboration are essential to preserving the county's character while preparing for future generations.

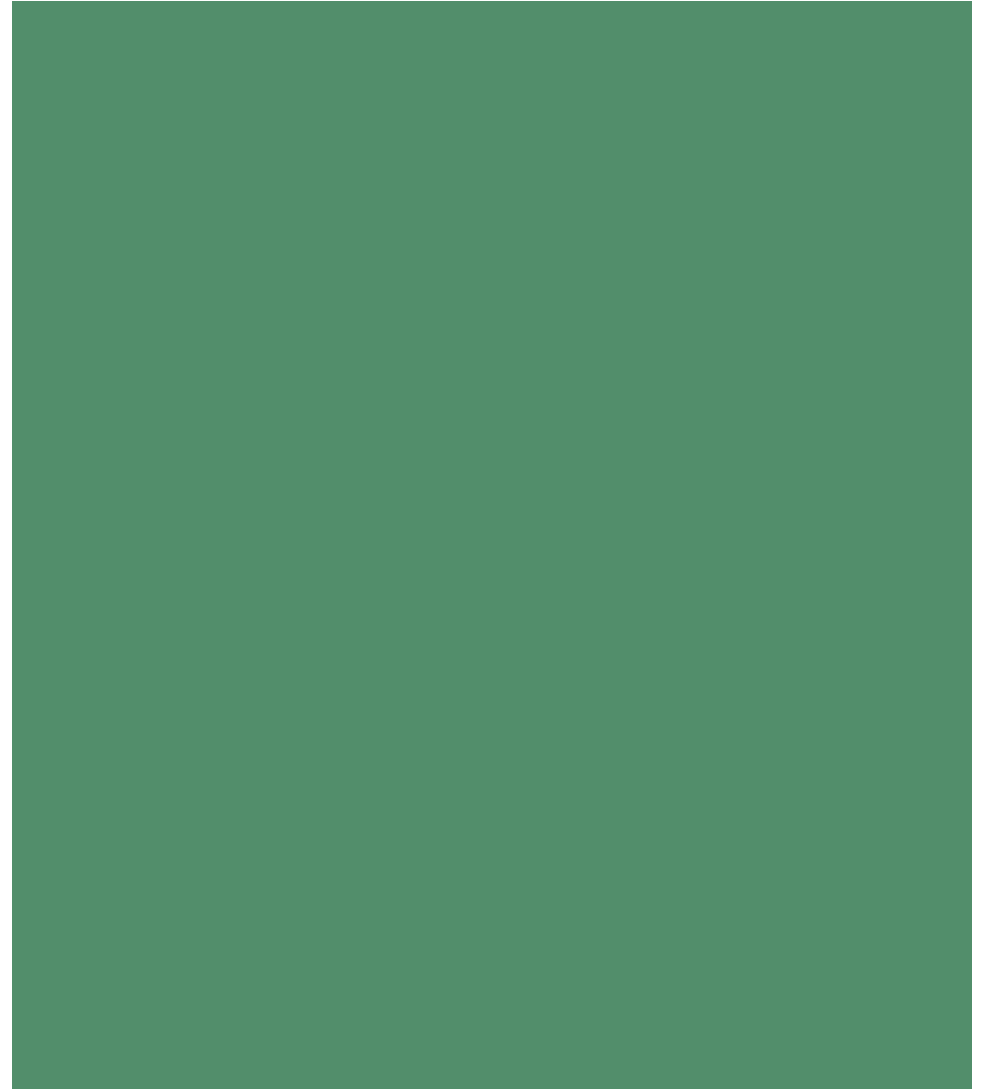
ASSETS

Brown County, Indiana is known for its natural beauty, strong sense of belonging, and safe, close-knit community. Residents benefit from strong schools investing in STEAM education, an outdoor-focused lifestyle, and a long-standing arts-driven identity that shapes the county's culture and economy.

At the same time, Brown County faces challenges common to many rural communities, including limited affordable housing, gaps in sidewalks and family connectivity, childcare shortages, lack of an in-county emergency medical facility, and limited employment options for young families. Addressing these needs while preserving the county's character is central to supporting long-term quality of life and sustainability.

BROWN COUNTY ASSETS

- Beauty and belonging
- Safe environment
- Strong schools investing in STEAM
- Outdoor lifestyle
- Indiana's most iconic arts colony and cultural identity
- Brown County State Park—the largest in Indiana, known nationally
- Highly ranked mountain biking and outdoor recreation
- A thriving creative community (galleries, studios, music venues)
- A strong philanthropic backbone
- Strong volunteer base and sense of community



ASPIRATIONS

BROWN COUNTY ASPIRATIONS

- Safe sidewalks and trail networks linking neighborhoods, amenities, and schools
- Infrastructure that aligns with a walkable, family-centered community
- WiFi and communications systems supporting residents and visitors
- Expanded festivals, venues, and creative spaces
- Strong arts education and youth creative opportunities
- Downtown Nashville as a lively and accessible hub.
- A vibrant cultural community
- Expanded childcare options to meet community needs
- Youth recreation and gathering spaces
- Senior services and intergenerational community supports
- A resilient local economy
- Strong employer pipelines through vocational and technical trades
- Broad opportunities for artisans, entrepreneurs, and remote workers.



BROWN COUNTY CHALLENGES

- Lack of Affordable Housing
- Lack of sidewalks and connectivity for families
- Limited childcare
- Limited healthcare
- No in-county emergency clinic or hospital
- Limited employment options for young families
- Limited access to social support services and resources due to out of county, or part time within county.
- Growing retiree population with limited services

ASSETS

BROWN COUNTY ASSETS

- Beauty and belonging
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- A strong philanthropic backbone
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AESTHETICS & BEAUTIFICATION

Brown County prioritizes the creation of a decorative wall into town to establish a strong first impression that reflects the community’s identity, history, and arts-driven character. Enhancing streetscape and landscape design will improve the appearance, walkability, and functionality of public spaces while making downtown areas more welcoming for residents and visitors. Improved lighting in town is a key focus to increase safety, visibility, and comfort during evening hours while also enhancing the atmosphere of streets and public gathering spaces. Developing clearly defined gateways into Nashville will help orient visitors, reinforce a sense of arrival, and strengthen community pride. Expanding the use of murals will celebrate local artists, tell Brown County’s story, and add visual interest that supports placemaking, tourism, and cultural engagement.

ARTS, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION

Brown County prioritizes continued promotion through the Brown County Convention and Visitors Bureau to strengthen tourism, support local businesses, and ensure consistent messaging that highlights the county’s natural beauty, arts, and cultural assets. Developing a festival venue near Nashville will provide a dedicated space for community events, arts programming, and regional gatherings, reducing strain on downtown areas while expanding opportunities for year-round activity. Expanding regional tourism collaboration will allow Brown County to partner with neighboring communities to market shared assets, attract new visitors, and extend visitor stays. Increasing ethnic food options is seen as a way to enhance cultural diversity, meet visitor and resident demand, and support small business development.

The county also seeks to increase event space in Nashville to accommodate growing demand for community meetings, performances, and celebrations while strengthening the town’s role as a gathering hub. Finally, investing in amenities in outlying towns will help distribute economic benefits more evenly across the county, support local identity, and improve quality of life for residents outside the town center.

ASSETS

CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Brown County prioritizes expanding WiFi in downtown Nashville to support local businesses, remote workers, students, and visitors while strengthening economic activity and access to digital resources. Improving trail connectivity with way stations will create safer, more enjoyable experiences for residents and visitors by providing rest areas, signage, and amenities that encourage reminders of place and orientation.

Developing hiking and biking trails connecting to Columbus and Bloomington will strengthen regional connectivity, promote outdoor recreation, and expand transportation options beyond automobiles.

Completing the Salt Creek Trail from Brown County State Park to Deer Run Park will link major recreational assets, support healthy lifestyles, and enhance tourism while serving local families. Creating accessible, safe sidewalks in town is essential to protect pedestrians, improve mobility for all ages and abilities, and support walkable neighborhoods and downtown areas. Exploring a shared transit system will help connect residents to jobs, services, and recreation, particularly for those without reliable transportation. Advancing a State Road 135 bypass is seen as a way to reduce through-traffic in the town center, improve safety, and promote a more pedestrian-friendly culture in downtown Nashville.

Mountain Biking

A Next Level Trails (NLT) grant awarded in May 2019 set up a multi-year buildout of new MTB trail mileage in Brown County State Park. The Weed Patch Trail (2.4 miles) opened in November 2019, adding an intermediate, modern-style option and signaling the “new wave” of trail building.

New trails have been created since 2019 - Limekiln East (1.6 miles) opened in October 2021 as part of the NLT-funded build (7.5 miles total planned under a ~\$200,000 grant). Limekiln East turned Limekiln into a beginner-friendly directional loop (instead of a crowded out-and-back), specifically to reduce congestion and make the system more welcoming for new riders.

With the NLT project, the park’s MTB mileage was projected to reach 43.5 miles once the three new trails were completed.

2022: new trail types (and more “destination” feel)

- Two more NLT-supported trails officially opened Oct. 7, 2022:
 - West Gate Trail (beginner, about a mile)
 - Gnawbone (a directional descent trail—exactly the kind of “purpose-built” experience riders travel for)

By 2024–2025: a broader, more varied system is clearly established

- The official Brown County State Park trail table lists newer additions like Limekiln East, plus purpose-built favorites such as Hobbs Hollow (alongside classics like Schooner Trace, Green Valley, Walnut, etc.).
- By 2025, the county’s tourism messaging is confidently selling Brown County as a premier MTB destination with “over 50 miles” of purpose-built riding and an annual fall festival experience.

ASSETS

What changed around the trails (culture, events, and tourism):

1. **The “beginner pipeline” got stronger**

The 2021 Limekiln East project is a great example of modern trail thinking: build loops, spread use, reduce conflict, and keep new riders from feeling like they’re in everybody’s way. That’s how a trail system grows for the long haul.

2. **Brown County leaned harder into destination branding**

Even though the park had already earned national recognition earlier (IMBA designations), the 2019–2025 period is where the marketing shifts from “we have great trails” to “plan a trip here.” BrownCounty.com’s MTB writeups explicitly connect trails + lodging + food/drink + other outdoor assets into a mini-vacation pitch.

3. **Events helped turn riders into repeat visitors**

The Brown County Epic festival/ride is promoted as an annual fall draw with supported routes and a full weekend feel—exactly the kind of tradition that builds community pride and out-of-town traffic.

4. **Mountain biking plugs directly into the local visitor economy**

Brown County’s tourism impact reporting emphasizes how visitor spending supports local economic activity—so when MTB visitation rises, it’s not just trailhead parking lots that feel it, it’s shops, restaurants, lodging, and services too.

Brown County’s MTB growth wasn’t mainly about “more people bought bikes.” It was the classic, proven formula—done well:

- State investment + grants (NLT) enabling professional-quality expansion
- Volunteer/trail-organization muscle helping build and sustain quality
- More variety (beginner loops, directional descents, technical trails)
- Tourism packaging (ride + stay + eat + festival weekends)

Developing hiking and biking trails connecting to Columbus and Bloomington will strengthen regional connectivity, promote outdoor recreation, and expand transportation options beyond automobiles. Completing the Salt Creek Trail from Brown County State Park to Deer Run Park will link major recreational assets, support healthy lifestyles, and enhance tourism while serving local families. Creating accessible, safe sidewalks in town is essential to protect pedestrians, improve mobility for all ages and abilities, and support walkable neighborhoods and downtown areas. Exploring a shared transit system will help connect residents to jobs, services, and recreation, particularly for those without reliable transportation. Advancing a State Road 135 bypass is seen as a way to reduce through-traffic in the town center, improve safety, and promote a more pedestrian-friendly culture in downtown Nashville.

ASSETS

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Brown County prioritizes regional vocational training with apprenticeships to better prepare residents for skilled trades and technical careers while creating direct pathways between education and local employers. Expanding employment opportunities outside of tourism is essential to building a more resilient local economy and providing stable, year-round jobs for young families and working adults. Strengthening or establishing an Economic Development Corporation will help coordinate business attraction, workforce development, and strategic investment aligned with community goals.

The county also seeks to expand STEAM opportunities for youth and adults, supporting innovation, problem-solving skills, and career readiness in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Shared maker spaces are envisioned as collaborative hubs where residents can access tools, training, and creative resources to develop skills, test ideas, and support entrepreneurship. Encouraging micro-business development will help residents turn local talents and crafts into viable income streams, while targeted start-up support for new businesses—including mentoring, technical assistance, and access to capital—will reduce barriers to entry and foster long-term economic growth.

HOUSING & UTILITIES INFRASTRUCTURE

Brown County is advancing Regional Sewer District plans to address long-standing infrastructure limitations that restrict housing development, economic growth, and environmental health. Expanding sewer service in Nashville, Bean Blossom, Helmsburg, and Gnaw Bone will support affordable housing, enable responsible development, protect water quality, and improve public health while positioning these communities for sustainable, long-term growth.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Brown County is prioritizing investment in public safety equipment to ensure first responders have the tools and resources needed to protect residents and visitors effectively. Strengthening fire and ambulance services will improve emergency response times, expand coverage across rural areas, and support the safety of a growing population. Establishing an emergency healthcare center within the county is a key goal to provide timely, life-saving care and reduce reliance on distant facilities.

In addition, the county seeks to expand in-home services for the senior population, helping older adults age safely and independently in their homes while reducing strain on families and caregivers. Developing or enhancing a senior center will create a centralized space for health services, social connection, education, and support, strengthening quality of life for older residents and fostering intergenerational community engagement.

PRIORITIES

STATEMENT:

In 2024, Brown County approved an increase in the innkeepers' tax to capture additional revenue generated by the area's strong tourism economy, with the intent of reinvesting those dollars back into the community in thoughtful, long-term ways. Recognizing that visitor spending directly affects infrastructure, amenities, and the overall experience for both residents and guests, county leaders formed a Quality of Life Advisory group to help guide how these funds should be used. This group was created to listen to community needs, evaluate opportunities, and recommend strategic investments—often through a grant-style process—that enhance tourism while also strengthening quality-of-life assets such as trails, public spaces, beautification, and community facilities. The approach reflects a balance between honoring what has long made Brown County special and planning carefully for sustainable growth that benefits residents, visitors, and local businesses alike.

A formal vetting and grant process ensures that limited funds are directed to projects with clear public benefit, measurable impact, and alignment with countywide tourism and quality-of-life goals, rather than being spent reactively or in isolation. This approach also respects taxpayers, residents, and the hospitality industry by ensuring that innkeepers' tax dollars are reinvested in ways that strengthen the entire community, not just individual interests. By inviting nonprofits to propose projects, the county taps into organizations that already understand local needs, have proven track records, and can deliver results efficiently. The grant cycle creates consistency, fairness, and accountability, while allowing the county to plan ahead, leverage partnerships, and invest in improvements—such as amenities, placemaking, and experiences—that enhance tourism today and preserve Brown County's character for future generations.

Objective 01

To increase community collaboration through a Brown County partnership addressing needs and providing resources to enhance tourism.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Utilizing the increased innkeepers' tax revenue through a structured grant cycle for nonprofits has become a priority for Brown County because it brings discipline, transparency, and long-term thinking to the use of public tourism dollars. Brown County has a long tradition of stewarding its natural beauty, arts heritage, and small-town character—assets that draw visitors and support the local economy.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Stewardship & Accountability
- Alignment with Tourism & Quality of Life Goals
- Equity, Consistency, and Community Impact

PRIORITIES

STATEMENT:

Merging former county comprehensive plans, Town of Nashville plans, Childcare Needs assessments, Housing studies, infrastructure plans, and economic development strategies into one integrated plan is essential for Brown County, Indiana, to ensure informed, coordinated, and effective decision-making. Over time, these plans have been thoughtfully developed by dedicated community leaders, consultants, and residents, yet they often exist in separate documents that are difficult to access, compare, and apply consistently. Bringing them together into a single, organized reference honors the work already completed while creating clarity around shared priorities, overlapping goals, and mutual dependencies. An integrated plan allows community leaders to see the full picture—how housing affects workforce development, how childcare availability impacts economic growth, how infrastructure supports tourism, and how town and county goals intersect. This unified approach reduces duplication of effort, strengthens collaboration across sectors, and provides a practical, living resource that can guide grant decisions, policy discussions, and long-range investments. By grounding future actions in a comprehensive, merged framework, Brown County can respect its past planning efforts while moving forward with greater alignment, efficiency, and confidence in shaping a strong and sustainable future.

Objective 02

To ensure that the work of prior planning groups is fully utilized, an integrated plan will be developed that draws from and aligns past comprehensive plans into a single, cohesive framework.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

An integrated plan provides clarity and continuity, helping elected officials, boards, nonprofits, and partners align their efforts, make informed funding decisions, and respond more efficiently to emerging opportunities and challenges. It also strengthens public trust by demonstrating that decisions are grounded in thoughtful planning rather than reactive or short-term thinking.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Respect for Prior Work and Community Input
- Consistency and Better Decision-Making
- Efficient Use of Limited Resources
- Stronger Alignment for Grant Funding and Economic Growth
- A Practical, Living Tool for Leaders

PRIORITIES

BROWN COUNTY, INDIANA FORMER PLANS

Health & Human Services

- Brown County Health Needs Assessment, 2025
- Food Insecurity in Brown County, Indiana, 2025
- Brown County Early Care & Education Strategic Plan, 2024–2029
- The Indiana Commission to Combat Drug Abuse, 2025

Countywide Vision & Long-Range Planning

- Brown County Comprehensive Plan, 2025
- Leading Brown County:
- “A Strategic Renewal of Brown County: A Vision for the Future,” 2014
- Comprehensive Plan of Brown County, 2011
- Brown County: A Vision for the Future, 2009

Education & Workforce Development

- Brown County Schools Priority Plan, 2023-2026
- Brown County Board of Developmental Disabilities, 2022-2025
- Early Education Strategic Plan, 2023-2028

Economic Development & Workforce

- Brown County Community Foundation Strategic Plan, 2025–2029
- Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan, 2019
- Nashville, Indiana Economic Development Strategy, 2012

Objective 02

To ensure that the work of prior planning groups is fully utilized, an integrated plan will be developed that draws from and aligns past comprehensive plans into a single, cohesive framework.

Housing, Land Use & Infrastructure

- Nashville, Indiana Comprehensive Plan, 2025
- Strategic Wastewater Plan, 2022
- Brown County Zoning Ordinance, 2022
- Brown County Housing Study, 2023
- Indiana Uplands Regional Housing Study in Brown County, 2019
- Brown County Redevelopment Commission

PRIORITIES

STATEMENT:

Brown County, Indiana faces significant healthcare challenges stemming from a limited number of medical practices, the absence of a local hospital, and gaps in comprehensive, up-to-date data on community healthcare needs. Residents often must travel outside the county for routine, specialty, and emergency care, creating barriers for seniors, working families, and those with limited transportation. While building a hospital is not a realistic or sustainable option for a rural county of this size, there is a clear need for alternative, innovative healthcare solutions—such as expanded primary care access, mobile and telehealth services, coordinated emergency response, and preventive and community-based care models. Addressing these gaps thoughtfully, and grounding solutions in better local data, is essential to improving health outcomes while respecting Brown County’s scale, resources, and long-term sustainability.

Objective 03

To improve health and to strengthen partnerships and inform future programs and investments.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

This is a priority for Brown County because limited healthcare access affects residents’ well-being, workforce stability, and economic vitality, especially for seniors and families. By pursuing realistic alternatives to a hospital, the county can improve health outcomes, reduce barriers to care, and use resources more effectively.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Access to Care
- Strong Cross-Sector Partnerships
- Data-Informed Decision Making
- Prevention and Community-Based Solutions
- Sustainable and Scalable Models
- Community Trust and Engagement
- Implementation of a Referral-based Community
- Paramedicine Pilot
- Reduction in Avoidable Emergency & Hospital Use

SOLUTIONS

Expected Impact:

Through the Convention and Visitors Commission (CVC), a new group has formed called the Quality of Life Advisory Board after an increase in Inn-Keeper's tax provided additional funding to help with tourism related improvements in the county. This group will provide funding for nonprofit organizations that impact tourism.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 1.1: Develop a grant cycle to provide support for nonprofits serving in the areas of tourism

Action 1.1.1: Monthly meetings

Action 1.1.2: Provide facilitated Listening sessions in the community

Action 1.1.3: Publication of grant recipients

Strategy 1.2: Advisory board reviews applications for funding community problems and awards support.

Action 1.2.1: Partnership with Indiana University School for Rural Engagement - student groups

Objective 01

To increase community collaboration through a Brown County partnership addressing needs and providing resources to enhance tourism.

STATUS

In Progress

TIMELINE

LT

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- **Performance 1.1:** Brown County visitation numbers including Visitor Origin & Geographic Reach
- **Performance 1.2:** Media/Marketing Analytics
- **Performance 1.3:** Visitor Spending/Length of Stay

PARTNERS

- Brown County Convention & Visitors Commission
- Brown County government
- Town of Nashville, Indiana
- Indiana University

SOLUTIONS

Expected Impact:

By merging all existing county plans into one document, leaders will have an updated guide to reference in making decisions and advancing progress for Brown County.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 1.1: By merging former plans and compiling information into one master document, there is less to impede group progress for moving forward with implementation.

Action 1.1.1: Initiate meetings with plan creators

Action 1. 1.2: Collect latest plans and appendices

Action 1.1.3: Consult with professional planning organization to merge documents as well as IU School of Rural Engagement

Action 1.2.1: Review final publication with plan creators

Action 1.2.2: Make plan available through community resources

Objective 02

To ensure that the work of prior planning groups is fully utilized, an integrated plan will be developed that draws from and aligns past comprehensive plans into a single, cohesive framework.

STATUS

In Progress

TIMELINE

ST

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- **Performance 1.1:** Timeline tracking of creator meetings
- **Performance 1.2:** Utilization of integrated plan for future projects
- **Performance 1.3:** Increased rate of objectives achieved in county

PARTNERS

- Town of Nashville
- Brown County Government
- Brown County Schools
- Indiana University

SOLUTIONS

Expected Impact:

The Brown County Community Foundation and Indiana University School of Public Health partnered to develop a Health Needs Assessment for Brown County, Indiana due to the lack of data on resident health, access to healthcare, and use of local resources. The report from this assessment is now available. Brown County would like to launch a Community Paramedicine program.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 1.1: Community Healthfair (YMCA)

Action 1.1.1: Organize a community healthfair with healthcare providers, invite community, complete survey with IU staff oversight

Action 1.1.2: Completion of Health Needs Assessment report (Indiana University School of Public Health & School of Rural Engagement)

Action 1.1.3: Public presentation of health needs data

Strategy 1.2: Health Needs Assessment completion with IU partner

Action 1.2.1: Launch of pilot program of Community Paramedicine program

Strategy 1.3: Provide healthcare program in the absence of a hospital

Objective 03

To improve health and to strengthen partnerships and inform future programs and investments.

STATUS

In Progress

TIMELINE

MT

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- **Performance 1.1:** Tracking level of engagement from residents and healthcare organizations
- **Performance 1.2:** Tracking data on utilization of monitoring program through Community Paramedicine
- **Performance 1.3:** Repeat Health Needs Assessment following launch of Community Paramedicine program (among participants)

PARTNERS

- IU Health
- Indiana University
- Brown, Monroe, Bartholomew, Johnson, Morgan, Jackson
- County medical providers



Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) would like to thank all of our county and community partners who participated and devoted many hours to updating the Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plans. Meaningful conversations, problem-solving and innovation took place throughout the course of this process. Your continued partnership and collaboration make the Indiana Uplands a region on the move.

We would also like to extend gratitude to all of the residents who participated in townhall meetings and submitted their thoughts on the direction and priorities of their community through the survey tool. This level of engagement steered the local committees in their work.

ROI looks forward to assisting stakeholders throughout the region as the plans' priorities are implemented. Together the Indiana Uplands will continue to build a vibrant and prosperous future for our residents.



APPENDIX A

ACRONYMNS: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BCCF: Brown County Community Foundation

BCMC: Brown County Music Center

BCS: Brown County Schools

BOT: Board of Trustees

CRC: Career Resource Center

Fund: A pool of donor contributions

GIFT: Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow

IAC: Indiana Arts Commission

ICI: Independent Colleges of Indiana

IPA: Indiana Philanthropy Alliance

IRS: Internal Revenue Service

LEI: Lilly Endowment, Inc.

LESCP: Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship Program

OCRA: Office of Community and Rural Affairs

READI: Regional Economic Acceleration & Development Initiative

ROI: Regional Opportunity Initiative