

QUALITY OF PLACE & WORKFORCE ATTRACTION PLAN

LAWRENCE COUNTY, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2025



REGIONAL
OPPORTUNITY
INITIATIVES

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December 2025

Prepared for Lawrence County

Funded by Regional Opportunities Initiatives, Inc.

2019 Plan prepared by Group Stellar and kglobal

Updated by TPMA in 2025

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.

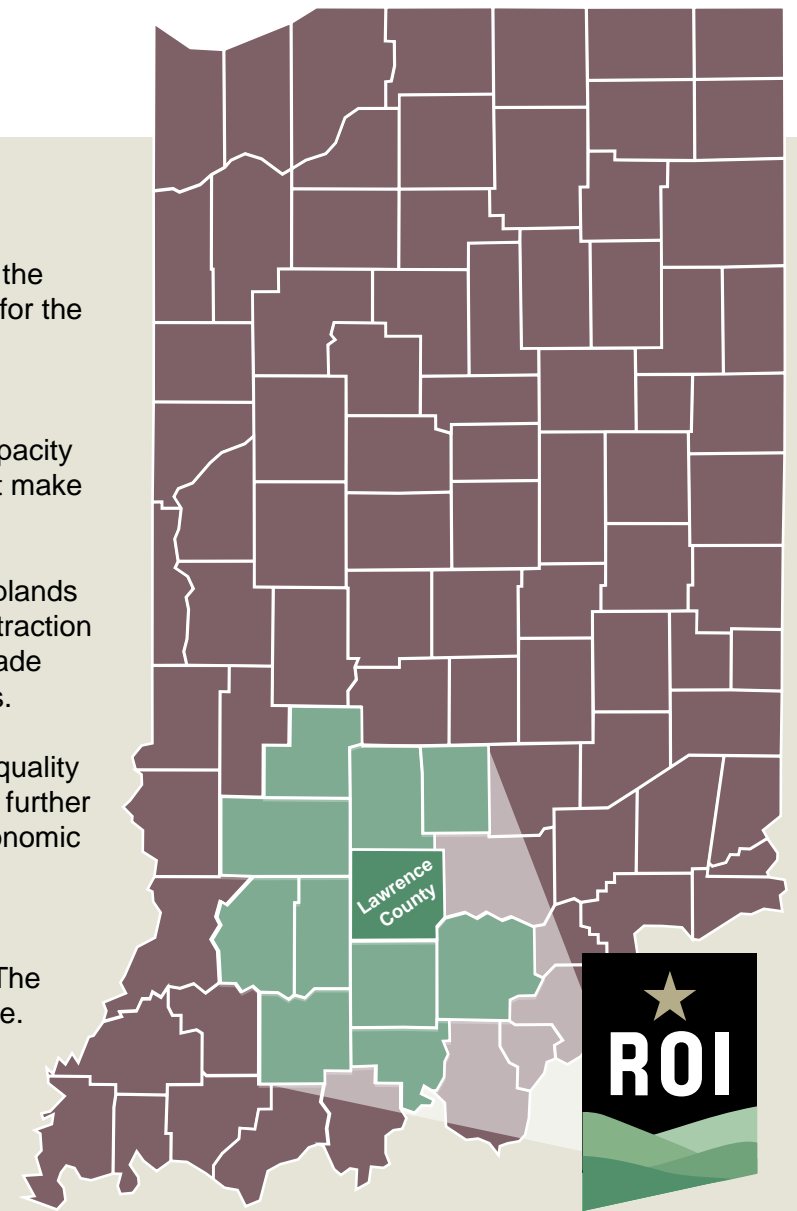
In 2019, the process began with Ready Communities Planning Grants. Each Indiana Uplands county received a \$50,000 planning grant to develop Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plans. Following the Ready Communities Planning Grant stage, up to \$3 million was made available for competitive quality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

A Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan provides county and community leaders with 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.



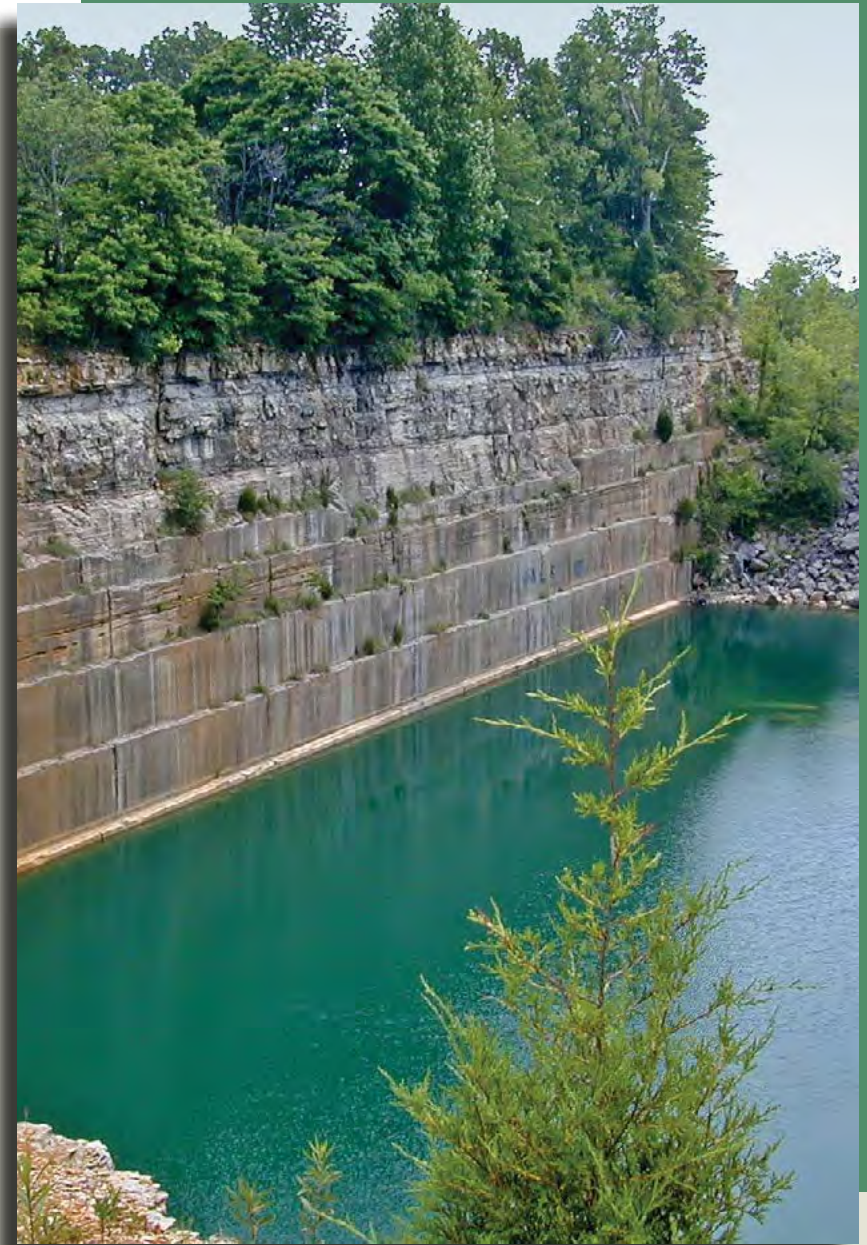
The plan that follows was funded by a grant from the Regional Opportunity Initiatives, Inc. (ROI) and was completed as part of a wholistic strategy for improving economic and community prosperity in the Indiana Uplands counties (Brown, Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Lawrence, Martin, Monroe, Orange,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

OUR STORY

Lawrence County is a place defined by resilience, craftsmanship, and deep community pride. Rooted in the rolling hills of Southern Indiana, our county stands as the historic center of the nation's limestone industry — an industry whose legacy has shaped the skylines of America. From the Empire State Building to the National Cathedral to countless civic structures, Lawrence County limestone represents more than natural resources; it represents generations of skilled workers, artisans, and families who built a national legacy from right here at home.

The county's identity is shaped equally by its natural beauty and its close-knit communities. Residents enjoy a way of life grounded in rural charm, strong values, and connection to place. Hoosier National Forest, Spring Mill State Park, the White River, and Bluespring Caverns provide unmatched outdoor recreation — and for many families, these are anchor points of memory, tradition, and belonging. Annual festivals, arts programming, and historical attractions further reinforce Lawrence County's unique cultural character.

Demographically, Lawrence County is home to more than 45,000 residents who value community familiarity, affordability, and access to outdoor amenities. The county's population has remained relatively stable over the past several decades, with slow decline in younger populations and slow growth among older adults — consistent with statewide rural trends. While modest in population density, the county punches above its weight in workforce skills, technical trades, and industrial experience.





Quality of place assets are abundant and appreciated. Residents enjoy accessible parks, greenways, athletic spaces, trails, riverways, museums, historic downtowns, and thriving local festivals. Lawrence County's natural assets rank among the strongest in the region, contributing both to its livability and its tourism economy.

Workforce is a defining strength. Lawrence County's workers have long been recognized for their expertise in advanced manufacturing, machining, fabrication, construction trades, and craftsmanship. Its proximity to Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane — one of the state's largest high-tech employers — continues to open pathways in engineering, cybersecurity, ordnance, and research. Employers consistently highlight the strong work ethic, loyalty, and technical capability of the local labor force.

Education partners contribute heavily to workforce readiness. North Lawrence Community Schools and Mitchell Community Schools provide foundational academics, career pathways, and extracurricular enrichment. Vocational and technical programs — including welding, machining, healthcare pathways, and advanced manufacturing — and the COSMOS partnership with Mitchell Schools, are increasingly aligned with employer needs. Vincennes University's Advanced Technology Center in Bedford serves as a major hub for credentialing, short-term training, and continuing education. Regional partners, including WorkOne, Radius Indiana, and Crane Regional Defense organizations, support residents with job readiness, training, and career transitions.

Economically, the county benefits from a diverse portfolio: advanced manufacturing, medical device production, limestone extraction, retail and services, defense contracting, logistics, agriculture, and tourism. Major employers include Cook Medical, Indiana Limestone Company, NSWC Crane (regional), Bedford Machine & Tool, school corporations, IU Health Bedford, and a variety of small and mid-sized industries that form the backbone of the county's economy.

2025 UPDATE

Since the completion of the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan, Lawrence County has experienced meaningful progress — and new challenges that shape today's priorities. Several recreation, beautification, and downtown revitalization projects advanced. Broadband expansion accelerated due to pandemic-driven need. Employers strengthened partnerships with schools and training providers. Tourism grew around outdoor amenities and state park attractions. And community identity work — events, gateways, public art — moved forward.

Yet, the county faces real challenges shared by rural regions statewide:

- Housing availability remains a barrier to talent retention.
- Workforce shortages are persistent across industries.
- The population is aging, increasing demand for senior services, healthcare, and transportation.
- Youth outmigration continues to concern educators and employers.
- Communication across agencies is inconsistent, making it harder for newcomers, residents, and employers to access timely information.
- Infrastructure needs — broadband, roads, utilities, stormwater — remain top of mind.

This 2025 update reflects the county's commitment to remain forward-looking while honoring the identity and heritage that make Lawrence County a special place to live, work, and raise families.



ENGAGEMENT

A strong Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan reflects the voices of the people it serves. Both the 2019 and 2025 planning processes in Lawrence County were shaped by extensive community input, cross-sector collaboration, and transparent engagement with residents, employers, educators, and public leaders.

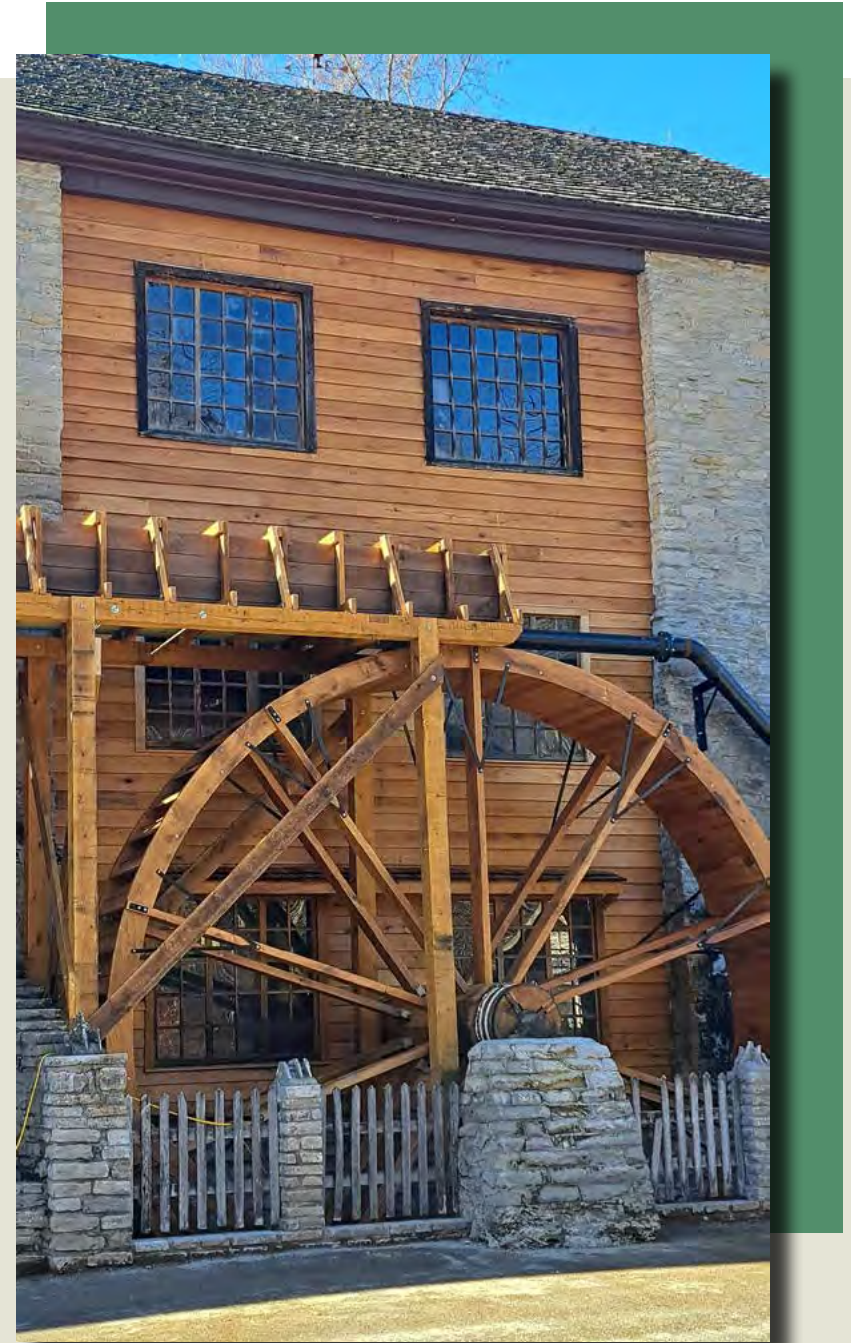
The following summarizes how the community helped guide the direction of this updated plan.

Community engagement for the 2025 update included interviews, surveys, facilitated workshops, and targeted outreach to employers, educators, seniors, nonprofits, industry representatives, and the general public. Residents and stakeholders contributed feedback through formal and informal engagements.

The original 2019 plan was developed through a broad engagement effort that included a county-wide community survey, stakeholder and leadership interviews, and discussions with representatives from education, business, government, and nonprofit sectors.

These engagements established a solid foundation by identifying community strengths—including natural assets, schools, and local identity—and needs involving housing, workforce alignment, placemaking, amenities, and childcare.

The process was designed to ensure broad, representative participation across Lawrence County.



LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVITIES

Leadership

The Quality of Place & Attraction Team (QPAT) served as the leadership and advisory body for this update. Members represented a diverse cross-section of Lawrence County's civic, business, education, healthcare, tourism, and community landscape.

2025 QPAT Members

Dan Bortner, Lawrence County Economic Growth Council

Don Caudell, Mayor, City of Mitchell

Tonya Chastain, Lawrence County Tourism

Sam Craig, Mayor, City of Bedford

Hope Flores, Lawrence County Community Foundation

Shawna Girgis, IU Health Hospital

Jeff Quyle, Radius Indiana

Judy Quyle, Lawrence County Community Foundation

Nick Webb, Hoosier Hills Credit Union

QPAT met multiple times throughout Fall 2025 to guide analysis, review findings, and refine strategic direction.

Activities

- Phone interviews with QPAT members, industry leaders, and community stakeholders
- Online, community-wide electronic survey
- Industry and business leader input session
- Public input session
- Education partner discussions
- TPMA-led workshops to refine priorities and objectives
- Conversations with seniors and service providers regarding transportation access
- Targeted input sessions on communications needs



2025 KEY THEMES

- Housing remains the number one barrier to attracting and retaining workers.
- Workforce shortages persist across healthcare, trades, manufacturing, and defense sectors.
- Senior and rural transportation is an urgent and growing need.
- Countywide communication is fragmented — residents want one unified, accessible source of information.
- Broadband improvements are appreciated but still incomplete in certain rural pockets.
- Quality of place amenities — parks, trails, events, beautification, and recreation — remain high community priorities.
- Youth retention requires stronger career pathways and local leadership opportunities.
- Tourism potential is growing, especially around outdoor spaces and festivals.
- Infrastructure needs to keep pace with development interest and industry demands.
- Quality school districts and access to stellar k-12 education
- Adequate, safe childcare is needed to support the workforce

Community Strengths

Residents overwhelmingly value:

- Small-town character and sense of belonging
- Natural assets and outdoor recreation
- Heritage, identity, and authenticity
- Affordability
- Strong community schools
- Placemaking remains central to talent attraction

PRIORITY SHIFTS SINCE 2019

- Housing and childcare have emerged as larger workforce barriers.
- Digital communication needs were amplified post-COVID.
- Senior mobility issues increased significantly.
- Outdoor recreation surged in popularity.
- Broadband became a necessity rather than a convenience.
- Talent attraction requires stronger community identity and messaging.
- Substance abuse, mental health, and recovery support increased.

Consistent Priorities

- Housing remains a major challenge
- Workforce pathways and training continue to be essential
- Natural assets are enduring strengths

2025 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. QPAT Steering Committee Meetings

These facilitated sessions focused on:

- Reviewing key components of the 2019 plan
- Analyzing current demographic, economic, and community data
- Identifying emerging issues and opportunities
- Prioritizing themes from survey results and interviews
- Developing draft goals and strategies

2. Phone Interviews with Community & Industry Leaders

Structured interviews conducted in Fall 2025 captured insights from:

- Major employers and industry partners
- Local business owners
- Education leaders
- Nonprofit, civic, and community foundation leaders
- Tourism and hospitality representatives
- Healthcare and financial institutions
- Former QPAT members and long-time community stakeholders

3. Business & Industry Engagement Session

A dedicated session with the Business & Industry Group gathered perspectives on:

- Workforce shortages and talent alignment
- Housing constraints for workers
- Recruitment and retention challenges
- Amenities needed to attract younger families and employees
- Childcare, transportation, and connectivity issues
- Downtown and corridor impressions

4. County-wide Public Survey

The public survey collected 156 responses, making it one of the most robust engagement efforts in recent planning history. Residents across Bedford, Mitchell, Oolitic, and rural communities shared detailed feedback on:

- Quality of life and amenities
- Housing availability and affordability
- Job quality and wage levels
- Youth and family activities
- Downtown vitality and aesthetics
- Parks and recreation
- Health and mental wellness
- Safety and community pride
- Communication and information access

5. Public Input Session

A community meeting invited residents to review emerging themes and offer feedback on:

- Parks and recreation
- Youth programming
- Downtown ideas
- Beautification efforts
- Safety and wellness
- Communication needs



6. Final Public Engagement Meeting — December 2, 2025

Held at the StoneGate Arts & Education Center in Bedford, this open-to-the-public meeting provided a final opportunity for residents, employers, and stakeholders to weigh in.

Attendees:

- Reviewed survey findings
- Validated draft priorities
- Offered recommendations on strategies
- Shared lived experiences related to housing, wages, amenities, and community pride

This final session ensured transparency and broad ownership of the plan.

7. Ongoing Listening Throughout Fall 2025

Additional insights were gathered through:

- Informal conversations at community events
- Participation in civic and economic development meetings
- Dialogue with educators, nonprofit leaders, and long-time residents
- Input from QPAT members and partner organizations.

Conclusion

The 2025 engagement process—conducted entirely in Fall 2025 and blending QPAT leadership, phone interviews with community and industry leaders, employer feedback, a 156-response public survey, an open public meeting, and continuous listening—represents one of the most comprehensive and inclusive planning efforts in Lawrence County's recent history.

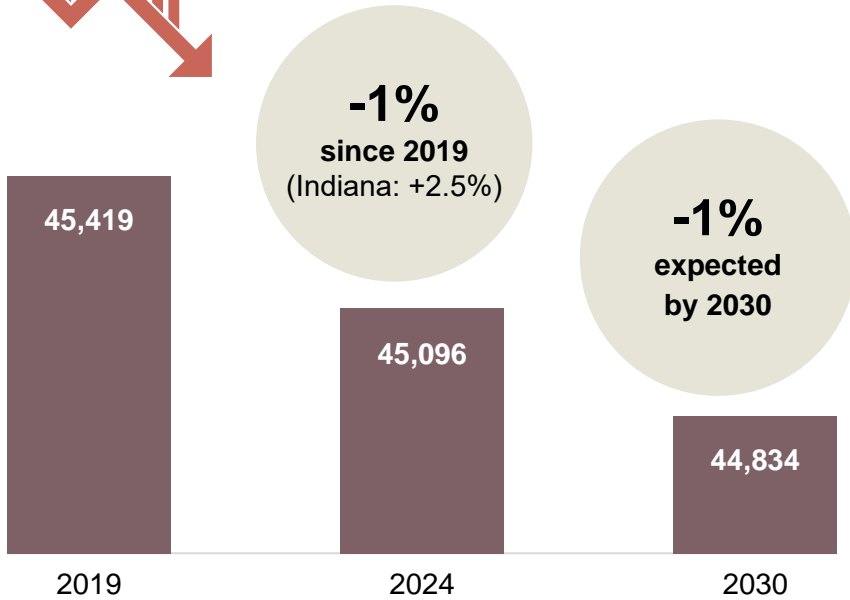
This plan reflects the shared aspirations of residents, businesses, educators, and community leaders, all committed to strengthening Lawrence County's quality of place, supporting its workforce, and building a vibrant future for generations to come.

DATA PROFILE



POPULATION CHANGE

Source: Lightcast, 2024



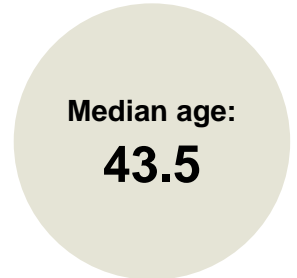
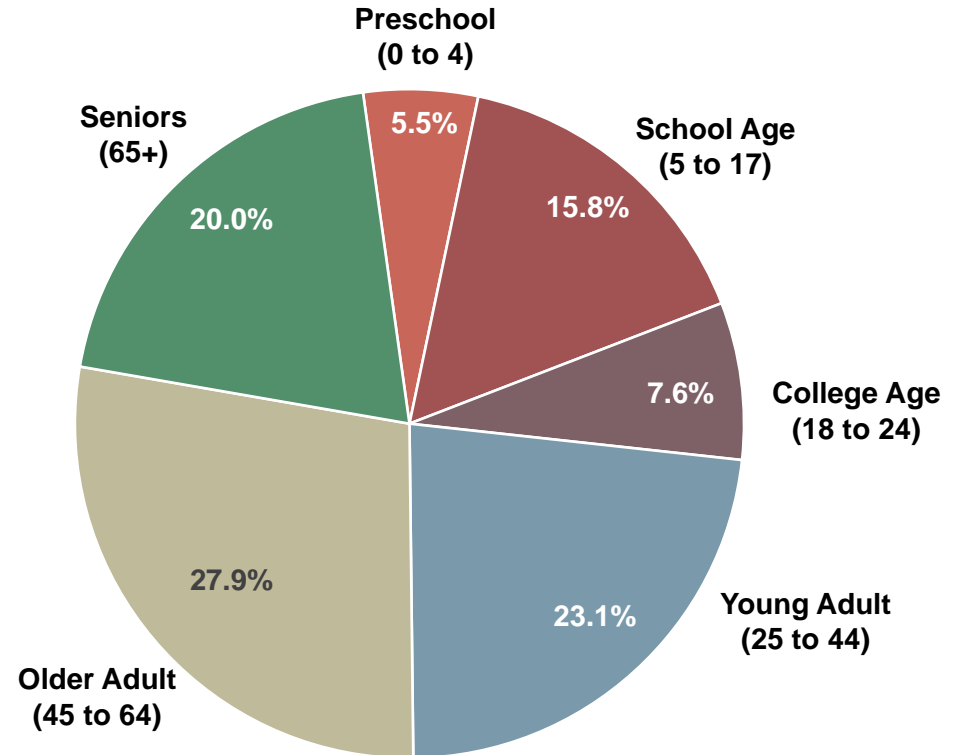
RACE & ETHNICITY

Source: Lightcast, 2024

White	94.7%
Hispanic/Latino	2.2%
African American/Black	0.6%
Asian	0.6%

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



\$65,551
(Indiana: \$70,051)

MEDIAN HOME SALE

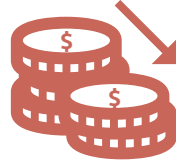
Source: Indiana Association of Realtors, 2025



\$217,000

POVERTY

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

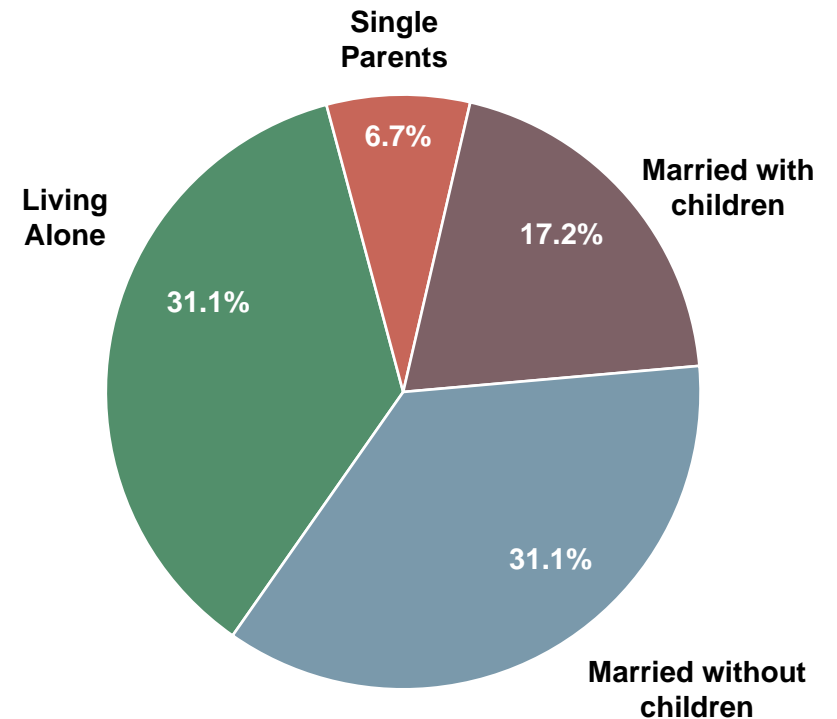


12.1%
AMONG CHILDREN
(Indiana: 15.7%)

11.3%
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

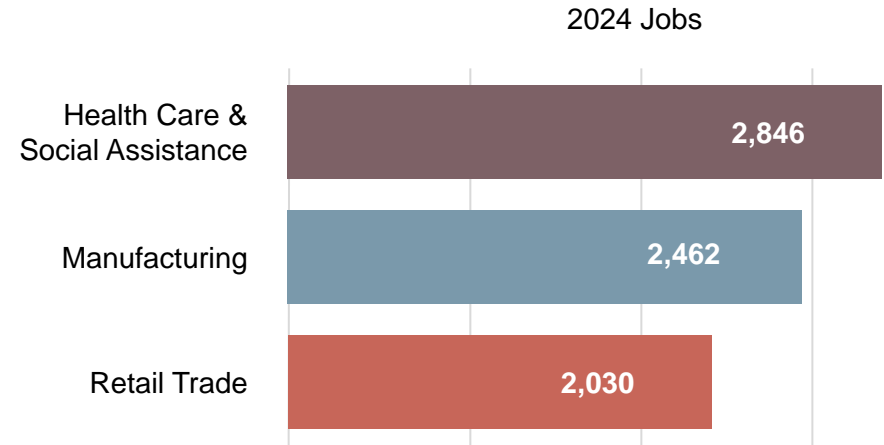
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Top Counties for Inbound Commuters	Top Counties for Outbound Commuters
Monroe	Monroe
Orange	Marion
Marion	Orange



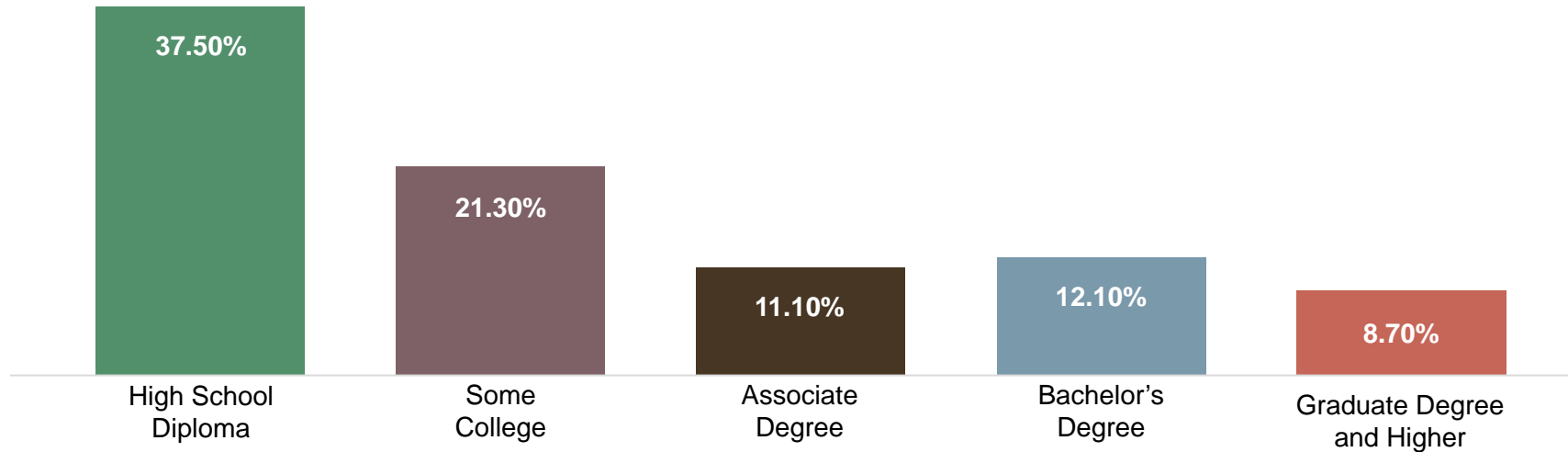
TOP INDUSTRIES

Source: Lightcast, 2024



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Source: Lightcast, 2024



CONTEXT

This section highlights Lawrence County's progress since the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan, provides an updated inventory of assets, and establishes the revised priorities and objectives that will guide investments and strategies in the 2025 plan. Together, these components outline the “why” behind the community's direction and set the stage for the Solutions section to follow.

Since the adoption of the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan, Lawrence County has made meaningful progress in several key areas despite economic shifts, workforce challenges, and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The county has also learned valuable lessons that inform this updated plan.

The priorities and solutions outlined here are intended to align with and build upon other recent planning efforts in Lawrence County, including initiatives related to housing, downtown development, transportation, workforce development, and community health. Rather than duplicating those efforts, this plan reinforces shared goals, identifies areas of overlap, and provides an implementation framework that connects quality-of-place investments to workforce attraction and retention. Many strategies also reflect Lawrence County's role within broader regional systems—such as labor markets, healthcare access, transportation networks, and recreational assets—highlighting the importance of collaboration with neighboring communities, institutions, and partners.



PROGRESS

SUCCESSSES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Educational and Workforce Investments

- Expansion of StoneGate Arts & Education Center programming, including Ivy Tech, Oakland City University, and the onboarding of Vincennes University.
- Growth of robotics teams, adult education, and business incubation at StoneGate, supporting lifelong learning and workforce readiness.
- Continued partnership with the regional Career and Technical Education Center, strengthening career pathways in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and skilled trades.

Impact: These investments have broadened access to training, strengthened employer pipelines, and reinforced Lawrence County's commitment to talent development.

2. Outdoor Recreation & Quality-of-Place Enhancements

- Ongoing improvements at Spring Mill State Park, Otis Park, local ballfields, and trail corridors.
- Incremental progress on trails and outdoor recreation infrastructure, which residents consistently identify as a strength and high-value asset.

Impact: Natural amenities continue to serve as a top attraction for families and visitors.

3. Strengthened Collaboration & Regional Participation

- Active involvement in READY Communities and the Indiana Uplands regional network.
- Creation and growth of the Lawrence County Workforce Coalition, with over \$1 million secured for workforce and education programming.
- Increased collaboration among county leaders, school systems, nonprofit partners, and economic development organizations.

4. New and Expanded Partnerships

- Partnerships with hospitals, credit unions, tourism leaders, nonprofit organizations, and private employers have broadened the county's capacity to address quality-of-place needs beyond the scope of the original plan.

5. Increased Focus on Mental Health & Recovery

- While not central in the 2019 plan, the county has increasingly coordinated on issues related to substance use, mental health services, and recovery, recognizing their importance for workforce participation and community stability.

6. Enhanced Public Engagement and Communication Efforts

- Local leaders, school districts, and civic organizations have experimented with new communication channels, events, and outreach strategies, acknowledging that residents want more coordinated access to information.

AREAS WHERE PROGRESS WAS LIMITED

1. Housing Supply & Quality

- Despite increased attention, housing remains a critical need.
- Starter homes and modern rentals remain scarce
- Workforce housing shortages continue to constrain employer recruitment
- Aging housing stock is difficult to replace or rehabilitate without coordinated investment

2. Downtown Revitalization

Efforts in Bedford and Mitchell have shown promise, but:

- Business turnover remains high
- Vacant storefronts persist
- Aesthetic and corridor improvements lag behind community expectations

3. Youth & Family Amenities

- This was a stated need in 2019 but remains largely unmet.
- Residents consistently cite the absence of:
 - A YMCA-style indoor recreation facility
 - After-school and weekend youth programming
 - Family-friendly community spaces

4. Wage Growth and Job Quality

- While employment is strong, wages have not kept pace with regional competition.
- This challenge has intensified since 2019 and was one of the clearest themes in the 2025 survey.

LESSONS LEARNED & UPDATED DIRECTION

Lawrence County learned that:

- Quality of place and workforce attraction are inseparable, not separate planning categories.
- Housing availability is now directly tied to economic growth and talent attraction outcomes.
- Youth amenities and downtown vibrancy have become defining factors in whether families choose to stay or relocate.
- Substance use and mental health must be acknowledged as critical community issues, not peripheral concerns.
- Communication and transparency matter; residents want to understand where the community is headed and how to engage.
- These lessons inform the priorities and objectives outlined later in this section.



ASSETS



Community assets have the greatest impact when they align with evolving needs, reinforce one another, and connect to regional systems.

Lawrence County's assets reflect both long-standing strengths and evolving community needs since 2019. Changes in housing, digital connectivity, mobility, and quality-of-life expectations—experienced across Indiana and the region—shape how these assets function and where gaps remain.

The asset inventory that follows highlights key physical, social, cultural, and institutional assets that support workforce participation and quality of place. These assets align with and reinforce other county planning efforts related to housing, downtown development, transportation, and workforce development, while also reflecting the county's role within broader regional systems. Coordination across jurisdictions and sectors is increasingly important to maximizing their impact.

ASSETS

AESTHETICS AND BEAUTIFICATION

- Historic Downtown Bedford
- Historic Downtown Mitchell
- Lawrence County Courthouse
- Limestone architecture and heritage features
- Limestone monuments and public art
- Spring Mill State Park and Pioneer Village
- Local parks network including Avoca, Otis, Thornton, and Wilson Parks
- Indiana Limestone Heritage Trail
- Bedford Main Street program
- Murals and community art installations
- Seasonal decorations and streetscape enhancements
- Flowers, pocket parks, and planter programs
- Gateways and signage along SR-37
- Trail systems and greenways
- Mitchell City Park revitalization efforts
- Avoca Fish Hatchery redevelopment
- Limestone Capital of the World branding

CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE

- SR-37 regional highway access
- Local public transit routes and demand-response services
- Mitchell–Bedford connector routes
- School transportation networks
- Existing sidewalk networks in Bedford
- Sidewalk improvement initiatives in Mitchell
- Multi-use paths in parks
- Trail connections at Spring Mill State Park
- Hoosier National Forest trail access
- Neighborhood walkability in central Bedford
- Downtown crosswalk improvements
- Accessible routes around the Courthouse Square
- Trail planning momentum from prior QPAT planning
- Bike-friendly residential streets
- Broadband expansion projects
- Smithville Fiber service areas
- High-speed internet coverage
- Public Wi-Fi in libraries, parks,

ARTS, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION

- Spring Mill State Park
- Spring Mill Pioneer Village
- Mitchell Opera House
- Bedford Little Theatre
- Lawrence County Museum of History
- Downtown Bedford event spaces
- Downtown Mitchell Depot District events
- Community festivals and seasonal events
- Local murals and public art
- Community arts studios and maker spaces
- Artisan and craft vendor presence
- Boys & Girls Club
- Youth sports and recreation leagues
- Parks and playgrounds across the county
- Avoca Park and Fish Hatchery
- Otis Park and Stone Crest golf courses
- Outdoor trails and hiking access
- Local restaurants and cafés
- Retail shops in Bedford and Mitchell
- Hotels, inns, and lodging near Spring Mill

ASSETS

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- North Lawrence Career Center
- LCEGC adult, re-entry, and skills-training programs
- StoneGate Arts & Education Center
- Bedford and Mitchell Public Libraries
- Public K–12 school systems
- Early-learning and childcare providers
- Early-learning and pre-K programs through Head Start and community partners
- Boys & Girls Club
- Career and Technical Education pathways
- Employer-supported internships and job shadowing
- Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs
- Adult education and GED programs
- Ivy Tech partnership access
- Vincennes University partnership access
- Crane-linked workforce and internship pipelines
- Healthcare, trades, and manufacturing training tracks

HOUSING & UTILITIES INFRASTRUCTURE

- Single-family housing stock
- Multi-family and apartment housing
- Workforce housing availability
- Senior-friendly housing options
- Historic neighborhood housing
- Manufactured and modular homes
- Local real estate resources
- Housing rehab and weatherization
- Bedford municipal water service
- Mitchell municipal water service
- Rural water providers
- Municipal sewer systems
- Countywide septic infrastructure
- Trash collection services
- Recycling service access points

HEALTH & SAFETY

- IU Health Bedford Hospital
- Local primary care clinics
- Urgent care services
- Mental health providers
- Substance abuse treatment resources
- Counseling and therapy services
- Public health department programs
- Wellness and fitness programs
- Community health education
- Senior and aging services
- Home health providers
- Assisted living facilities
- Emergency medical services
- Fire department response
- Police and sheriff services
- 911 dispatch services
- Domestic violence support resources
- Child and family services
- Food security programs
- Housing stability assistance

PRIORITIES

Objective 01

Strengthen Education, Childcare, and Workforce Pathways

STATEMENT:

Lawrence County is dedicated to strengthening the community's cradle-to-career ecosystem in ways that support lifelong learning, workforce readiness, and opportunities for both youth and adults.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Residents and employers consistently identify childcare, education quality, and workforce alignment as foundational to economic mobility and community growth. Strengthening these pathways supports families, prepares youth for success, removes barriers to employment, and increases Lawrence County's competitiveness in attracting and retaining residents and employers.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Childcare shortages limit workforce participation
- Need for youth and adult skill-building
- Strong CTE and workforce assets (NLCC, StoneGate, LCEGC)
- Desire for more internships, apprenticeships, and employer partnerships
- Workforce needs in healthcare, trades, manufacturing, and Crane-related fields
- Barriers include transportation, awareness of resources, and soft-skills readiness
- Schools act as key hubs for community connection and engagement

PRIORITIES

Objective 02

Expand Housing Access and Strengthen Neighborhood Vitality

STATEMENT:

Lawrence County is committed to increasing access to quality, attainable housing across all life stages in ways that support community stability, workforce retention, and vibrant neighborhoods.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Housing access directly affects quality of life, workforce stability, and economic development. Residents of all ages expressed difficulty finding housing that meets their needs and budgets. Neighborhood revitalization supports safety, pride, and long-term property values, making the county more attractive for new residents, employers, and families.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Limited supply of workforce and starter homes
- Need for modern, safe, attainable rental units
- Aging neighborhoods require rehabilitation and reinvestment
- Housing scarcity impacts workforce attraction and retention
- Infrastructure costs and zoning affect developable areas
- Opportunities for infill and redevelopment
- Desire for increased housing education and awareness for residents
- Multi-family housing options

PRIORITIES

Objective 03

Enhance Community Vibrancy, Recreation, and County-wide Communications

STATEMENT:

Lawrence County is focused on strengthening the community's sense of place through parks, trails, cultural amenities, programming, and clear, coordinated communication that fosters connection and engagement.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Residents consistently asked for more things to do, more information, and stronger community connection. Vibrant public spaces, cultural assets, and a unified communication system strengthen identity, support tourism and small businesses, increase participation in community life, and improve overall resident satisfaction.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Need for more youth and family activities
- Strong desire for walkability, trails, and modern recreation spaces
- Downtown Bedford and Mitchell revitalization opportunities
- Interest in arts, culture, heritage, and public events
- Lack of centralized, reliable information sharing in the county
- Opportunity for LCEGC to serve as a communications backbone
- Communications critical for community pride, participation, and transparency
- Connect Bedford to Mitchell with dedicated walking/biking trail
- Connect Mitchell to Orleans for regional wellness and connectivity

PRIORITIES

Objective 04

Improve Health, Safety, Transportation, and Community Wellbeing

STATEMENT:

Lawrence County is committed to enhancing resident well-being by supporting access to healthcare, behavioral health, emergency services, housing stability resources, and reliable transportation, particularly for seniors and vulnerable populations.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Health and safety are foundational to a thriving community. Residents identified significant gaps in behavioral health access, senior needs, and transportation barriers. Improving wellbeing strengthens families, increases workforce readiness, supports aging in place, and enhances quality of life across the county.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence concerns
- Limited specialty medical services (e.g., OBGYN)
- Senior mobility and rural access challenges
- Barriers to care for low-income and aging populations
- Importance of EMS, fire, and law enforcement readiness
- Social determinants impacting family stability
- Community interest in transportation solutions for seniors and non-drivers
- Volunteer firefighter recruitment at rural departments

SOLUTIONS

Objective 01 aligns with two of Lawrence County’s focus areas: Education & Workforce Development and Quality of Life. Childcare access has emerged as one of the county’s most significant barriers to workforce participation, family stability, and talent attraction. Residents, employers, and community partners consistently identified the need for increased childcare capacity, extended-hour options, and stronger early learning support. Addressing this need will strengthen the county’s workforce pipeline, improve family outcomes, and support long-term community growth.

STATUS	Planning	TIMELINE	ST-MT
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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

1.1 Expand childcare capacity and create sustainable partnerships.

- 1.1.1 Conduct a countywide childcare supply, demand, and gap assessment.
- 1.1.2 Support expansion of licensed providers (through coordination, technical assistance, and funding partnerships), including extended-hour and nontraditional-shift care.
- 1.1.3 Develop public–private childcare partnerships, including employer-sponsored childcare solutions.

1.2 Strengthen early learning support to prepare children for long-term success.

- 1.2.1 Expand early learning and family education programs through libraries, schools, and community partners.
- 1.2.2 Support early childhood workforce pipelines (through training, credentialing, and employer partnerships) through Ivy Tech and local training partners.
- 1.2.3 Establish a shared countywide resource hub for early learning information, enrollment, and support.

Objective 01

Expand Childcare Access and Early Learning Support

PARTNERS

Lead: LCEGC, Lawrence County Community Foundation
Support: Childcare providers; NLCS/MCS; OASC; United Way; local employers; libraries; Ivy Tech; churches

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL) grants
- Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
- Build, Learn, Grow stabilization and expansion funds
- Local employer contributions and childcare partnerships
- Community Foundation childcare innovation grants
- Shared-use facility partnerships with faith-based organizations
- Ivy Tech ECE (Early Childhood Education) training pipeline
- State Family and Social Services Administration resources

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 1.1.a New childcare seats created countywide.
- 1.1.b Number of providers expanding capacity or hours.
- 1.2.a Participation rates in early learning programs.
- 1.2.b Increase in early learning workforce credentials.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 02 aligns with focus areas of Education & Workforce Development and Economic Growth. Residents, students, employers, and community partners consistently emphasized the need to strengthen career exploration, expand technical training, improve soft-skills readiness, and create clearer pathways into local high-demand careers. Employers in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, the trades, and defense-connected industries are eager to collaborate, but students and adults often lack awareness or access to available opportunities. Strengthening these pathways will increase job readiness and support employer retention.

STATUS	In progress (30%)	TIMELINE	ST-MT
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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

2.1 Expand career exploration, technical education, and employer engagement for youth.

2.1.1 Expand hands-on career exploration through industry tours, guest speakers, and school-based career modules.

2.1.2 Increase employer-hosted internships, job shadowing, and mentorship opportunities.

2.1.3 Establish a Youth Advisory Council to inform programming, communications, and community engagement.

2.2 Strengthen adult workforce training, re-skilling, and re-entry pathways.

2.2.1 Grow adult training cohorts in high-demand fields (healthcare, trades, manufacturing, defense).

2.2.2 Strengthen employer-aligned curriculum design in partnership with North Lawrence Career Center and StoneGate.

2.2.3 Expand employment and training pathways for justice-involved adults.

Objective 02

Strengthen Education-to-Employment Workforce Pathways

PARTNERS

Lead: LCEGC, North Lawrence Community Schools (NLCS) & Mitchell Community Schools (MCS)

Support: Lawrence County Community Foundation, North Lawrence Career Center; StoneGate Arts & Education Center; Ivy Tech; Vincennes University; local employers; Boys & Girls Club; libraries; WorkOne; justice system partners

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Indiana Department of Education Career Exploration and Engagement Funds
- Next Level Jobs (Workforce Ready Grants)
- WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funding
- IN-MaC (Indiana Manufacturing Competitiveness Center) grants
- Crane STEM and workforce pipeline initiatives
- Community Foundation education endowments
- Employer-sponsored training tuition and stipends
- Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship program toolkits
- Adult Education and High School Equivalency funding
- Re-entry program funding through DOC and community partners

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2.1.a Increased student enrollment in CTE, dual-credit, and credential pathways.

2.1.b Number of employer-hosted career experiences annually.

2.2.a Adult training completions and credential attainment.

2.2.b Job placement rates in priority sectors.

2.2.c Reduced recidivism for participants in re-entry training pathways.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 03 aligns with Housing, Quality of Place, and Economic Growth. Residents, community partners, and employers consistently identified the limited availability of attainable housing as a major barrier to workforce attraction, retention, and community stability. Aging housing stock, rising rental demand, and a shortage of starter and workforce homes create challenges for families, seniors, employers, and new residents. Improving neighborhood conditions—through revitalization, rehabilitation, and infrastructure investment—will strengthen safety, enhance pride, and ensure competitiveness in resident and talent attraction.

STATUS	Planning	TIMELINE	ST-LT
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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

3.1 Expand attainable housing options through development, infill, and public-private partnerships.

- 3.1.1 Identify development-ready sites and support infrastructure planning (through coordination and pre-development assistance) for attainable housing projects.
- 3.1.2 Encourage infill development and mixed housing types in Bedford, Mitchell, and high-demand areas.
- 3.1.3 Facilitate public-private partnerships with developers, lenders, and employers to increase housing supply.

3.2 Revitalize aging neighborhoods through rehabilitation, infrastructure upgrades, and community support programs.

- 3.2.1 Support exterior home repair, weatherization, and rehabilitation assistance programs (through partnerships and funding alignment) for aging homes.
- 3.2.2 Target neighborhood-scale improvements such as sidewalks, lighting, and blight removal.
- 3.2.3 Increase resident access to housing education, financial counseling, and homeownership resources.

Objective 03

Increase Housing Availability and Improve Neighborhood Vitality

PARTNERS

Lead: LCEGC; Cities of Bedford and Mitchell
Support: Hoosier Uplands; Developers; local financial institutions; USDA Rural Development; Bedford Housing Authority; Mitchell Housing Authority; Lawrence County government; local employers; nonprofits; community groups; utility providers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCDA)
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- USDA Rural Development housing programs
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)
- Affordable Housing and Home Repair grants
- Employer-assisted housing partnerships
- Community Foundation home repair or stability funds
- Neighborhood grant programs and volunteer-led revitalization
- Blight elimination and property rehabilitation funding
- Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)
- Small Developers Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 3.1.a Number of new attainable housing units planned or developed.
- 3.1.b Number of infill or redevelopment projects initiated.
- 3.2.a Homes rehabilitated or improved annually.
- 3.2.b Neighborhood improvements completed (sidewalks, lighting, blight removal).
- 3.2.c Increased homeownership or housing stability among residents.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 04 aligns with Lawrence County's focus areas of Quality of Place, Recreation & Wellness, and Community Identity. Residents consistently expressed a desire for more recreational amenities, youth and family activities, improved parks, expanded trails, and more vibrant public spaces. Downtown Bedford and Mitchell hold strong historic character but require reinvestment and activation. Arts, culture, and community events emerged as powerful unifying forces that strengthen pride and attract visitors. Enhancing vibrancy and recreation will support resident retention, talent attraction, community wellbeing, and economic development.

STATUS	Planning	TIMELINE	ST-LT
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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

4.1 Improve parks, trails, and recreation amenities to meet community needs.

- 4.1.1 Conduct a parks and recreation needs assessment and prioritize high-impact upgrades.
- 4.1.2 Expand trail connections between parks, neighborhoods, schools, and natural assets.
- 4.1.3 Create inclusive, family-friendly amenities such as playgrounds, sports courts, and activity areas.

4.2 Strengthen arts, culture, downtown vibrancy, and placemaking efforts.

- 4.2.1 Support arts programming, public murals, cultural events, and community festivals (through partnerships, coordination, and promotion).
- 4.2.2 Revitalize downtown districts through façade improvements, signage, lighting, and seasonal beautification.
- 4.2.3 Develop a coordinated calendar and marketing approach for events, arts programs, and attractions.

Objective 04

Enhance Community Vibrancy, Recreation, Arts, and Trails

PARTNERS

Lead: Bedford Parks Department; Mitchell Parks Department
Support: Lawrence County Community Foundation, Radius Indiana, LC Tourism; Bedford/Mitchell Public Libraries; local arts organizations; downtown businesses; Mitchell Opera House; Bedford Little Theatre; Lawrence County Museum; chambers; volunteer groups; schools; local nonprofits; community foundations

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) trails/land/water
- Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- OCRA placemaking and downtown revitalization grants
- Arts Commission grants (state and national)
- Community Foundation quality-of-place grants
- Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funding
- Local business sponsorships and naming rights
- Volunteer beautification and adopt-a-spot programs
- Tourism marketing funds
- Public art and cultural grants through NEA and Arts Midwest
- Indiana Arts Commission

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 4.1.a Number of parks upgraded or improved.
- 4.1.b Miles of trail constructed or enhanced.
- 4.1.c Increased participation in recreational activities.
- 4.2.a Increase in arts and cultural programming.
- 4.2.b Downtown business openings and façade improvements.
- 4.2.c Attendance at events and festivals.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 05 aligns with Health & Safety, Quality of Life, and Community Resilience. Residents identified significant needs related to mental health, substance abuse treatment, access to primary and specialty care, aging-in-place supports, and reliable transportation—particularly for seniors and individuals without vehicles. Barriers such as distance, limited providers, and lack of coordinated services affect workforce participation, family stability, and long-term wellbeing. Addressing these challenges will strengthen emergency response systems, reduce preventable crises, support aging residents, and ensure access to essential care.

STATUS	Planning	TIMELINE	ST-LT
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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

5.1 Strengthen access to healthcare, behavioral health, and crisis support services.

- 5.1.1 Expand partnerships to increase availability of mental health, counseling, and substance abuse services.
- 5.1.2 Support initiatives addressing domestic violence and family stabilization services (through coordination, referrals, and funding alignment).
- 5.1.3 Improve access to primary care, specialty care, and preventative health through coordinated outreach and telehealth.

5.2 Expand transportation options for seniors, vulnerable residents, and individuals needing access to services.

- 5.2.1 Conduct a countywide mobility assessment to identify transportation gaps for seniors and vulnerable residents.
- 5.2.2 Develop or expand demand-response or shuttle transportation models in partnership with healthcare providers and service agencies.
- 5.2.3 Pursue funding to support senior transportation programs, accessible transit, and rural mobility solutions.

Objective 05

Improve Community Health, Behavioral Health, Safety, and Transportation Access

PARTNERS

Lead: Lawrence County Community Foundation; Health Department; local healthcare providers
Support: Cities of Bedford/Mitchell; Rural Transit; IU Health Bedford; mental health agencies; substance abuse treatment providers; domestic violence shelters and advocates; senior service organizations; LCEGC; Lawrence County EMS; fire departments; law enforcement; county government; transportation providers; OASC; nonprofits; faith-based partners

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Health Resources & Services Administration
- Family & Social Services Administration
- USDA Rural Development
- Area Agencies on Aging

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 5.1.a Increase in behavioral health service availability and utilization.
- 5.1.b Decrease in crisis calls or preventable emergency interventions.
- 5.2.a Number of individuals served through expanded transportation programs.
- 5.2.b Reduction in missed medical appointments due to transportation barriers.
- 5.2.c Increased senior engagement in community services and support.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 06 aligns with Community Engagement, Quality of Place, and Economic Growth. Residents consistently expressed frustration with the lack of centralized, reliable, and accessible information about events, resources, services, and opportunities. Establishing this will improve transparency, strengthen community trust, celebrate local successes, increase participation in programs and support talent attraction, tourism, and economic development. This objective positions LCEGC as a communications leader and unifying source of truth for the community.

STATUS	Planning	TIMELINE	ST-LT
STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS			
<p>6.1 Build and launch a centralized communications and information hub for Lawrence County.</p> <p>6.1.1 Develop a unified digital platform providing news, events, resources, updates, and community announcements.</p> <p>6.1.2 Establish LCEGC as the lead communications backbone coordinating with cities, schools, nonprofits, and agencies.</p> <p>6.1.3 Create consistent information-sharing processes, including monthly e-newsletters and real-time alerts.</p> <p>6.2 Strengthen county-wide branding, storytelling, and community engagement efforts.</p> <p>6.2.1 Launch a countywide “Good News Lawrence County” campaign highlighting progress, businesses, people, and success stories.</p> <p>6.2.2 Develop countywide branding and marketing materials to support tourism, business attraction, and resident retention.</p> <p>6.2.3 Coordinate a shared event calendar and expand community outreach through social media, print, and partnerships.</p>			

Objective 06

Establish a County-wide Communications and Information System

PARTNERS

Lead: LCEGC
Support: Cities of Bedford and Mitchell; Lawrence County Government; NLCS/MCS; libraries; LC Tourism; chambers; nonprofits; emergency management; parks departments; local employers; community volunteers

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Digital platform development grants
- OCRA community engagement and capacity-building funds
- Tourism and marketing funds
- Community Foundation grant opportunities
- Local sponsorships from businesses and employers
- Internships with high school and college students (CTE, communications, IT)
- Social media ambassadors and volunteer storytellers
- Best-practice models from other rural counties that have built communications hubs
- Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC) Toolkits

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 6.1.a** Website and platform traffic, engagement, and reach.
- 6.1.b** Number of partner organizations contributing content.
- 6.2.a** Engagement metrics on communication campaigns.
- 6.2.b** Resident satisfaction or awareness survey results.
- 6.2.c** Increase in participation at local events and programs.



**REGIONAL
OPPORTUNITY
INITIATIVES**

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

ABOUT THE LAWRENCE COUNTY ECONOMIC GROWTH COUNCIL (LCEGC)

The Lawrence County Economic Growth Council (LCEGC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the economic vitality and overall quality of life in Lawrence County, Indiana. LCEGC leads local workforce development initiatives, supports business retention and expansion, facilitates community development projects, and coordinates multi-sector partnerships across the county. LCEGC served as the convener, coordinator, and lead facilitator for the Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan Update. The organization plays a central role in talent attraction, workforce training, housing advancement, community engagement, and long-term county competitiveness.

APPENDIX B

EXISTING PLANS AND DOCUMENTS REFERENCED

The following documents were reviewed and informed the analysis, objectives, and strategies included in this plan:

- 2019 Lawrence County Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan
- READY Communities planning materials
- City of Bedford planning and development documents
- City of Mitchell planning and development documents
- Lawrence County demographic and housing datasets
- North Lawrence Career Center program materials
- LCEGC workforce training and re-entry program documentation
- Tourism and recreation data from Lawrence County Tourism
- Public input summaries from 2025 engagement sessions
- Interviews with residents, employers, educators, seniors, public officials, and community organizations
- Notes from community forums, workshops, and stakeholder meetings
- County broadband, transportation, and infrastructure summaries

APPENDIX C

PARTNER & RESOURCE ACRONYMS (REFERENCE GUIDE)

- BGC — Boys & Girls Club
- CDBG — Community Development Block Grant
- CCDBG — Child Care Development Block Grant
- CTE — Career and Technical Education
- DOC — Department of Correction
- DNR — Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- FSSA — Indiana Family & Social Services Administration
- FTA — Federal Transit Administration
- HRSA — Health Resources & Services Administration
- IHEDA — Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority
- IN-MaC — Indiana Manufacturing Competitiveness Center
- IU Health — Indiana University Health
- LCEGC — Lawrence County Economic Growth Council
- LIHTC — Low-Income Housing Tax Credit
- LWCF — Land & Water Conservation Fund
- MCS — Mitchell Community Schools
- NEA — National Endowment for the Arts
- NLCC — North Lawrence Career Center
- NLCS — North Lawrence Community Schools
- OASC — Older Americans Service Corporation
- OCRA — Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs
- OECOSL — Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning
- RTP — Recreational Trails Program
- SAMHSA — Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
- ST / MT / LT — Short-Term, Medium-Term, Long-Term
- WAP — Weatherization Assistance Program
- WIOA — Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

APPENDIX D

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & CONTRIBUTORS

The Lawrence County Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan Update was made possible through the contributions of residents, organizations, and partners across the county.

Special thanks to:

- The Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Team (QPAT)
- The Lawrence County Economic Growth Council Board of Directors
- Lawrence County Community Foundation Board of Directors
- Leaders from the Cities of Bedford and Mitchell
- Lawrence County Government
- North Lawrence Community Schools & Mitchell Community Schools
- Lawrence County Parks and municipal parks departments
- Local employers, business owners, and workforce partners
- Healthcare, mental health, and social service providers
- Lawrence County Tourism and arts organizations
- Nonprofits and volunteer groups
- Residents who participated in interviews, surveys, and public forums

APPENDIX E

SUPPORTING NOTES, DATA, AND PRIOR PLANS

This appendix includes supporting materials used to inform the plan's findings and strategies, such as:

- Summaries from engagement workshops and public forums
- Stakeholder interview notes
- Photos and transcriptions from community input boards
- Housing, childcare, and workforce data tables
- Maps (where applicable) including trails, parks, infrastructure, broadband, or housing condition overlays
- Summaries of existing challenges and opportunities identified through research
- Items from the 2019 plan that remain relevant