

QUALITY OF PLACE & WORKFORCE ATTRACTION PLAN

ORANGE COUNTY, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2025



REGIONAL
OPPORTUNITY
INITIATIVES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 03

OUR STORY 04

ENGAGEMENT 08

DATA 13

CONTEXT 16

SOLUTIONS 27

CLOSING 31

December 2025
Prepared for Orange County
Funded by Regional Opportunities Initiatives, Inc.

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.

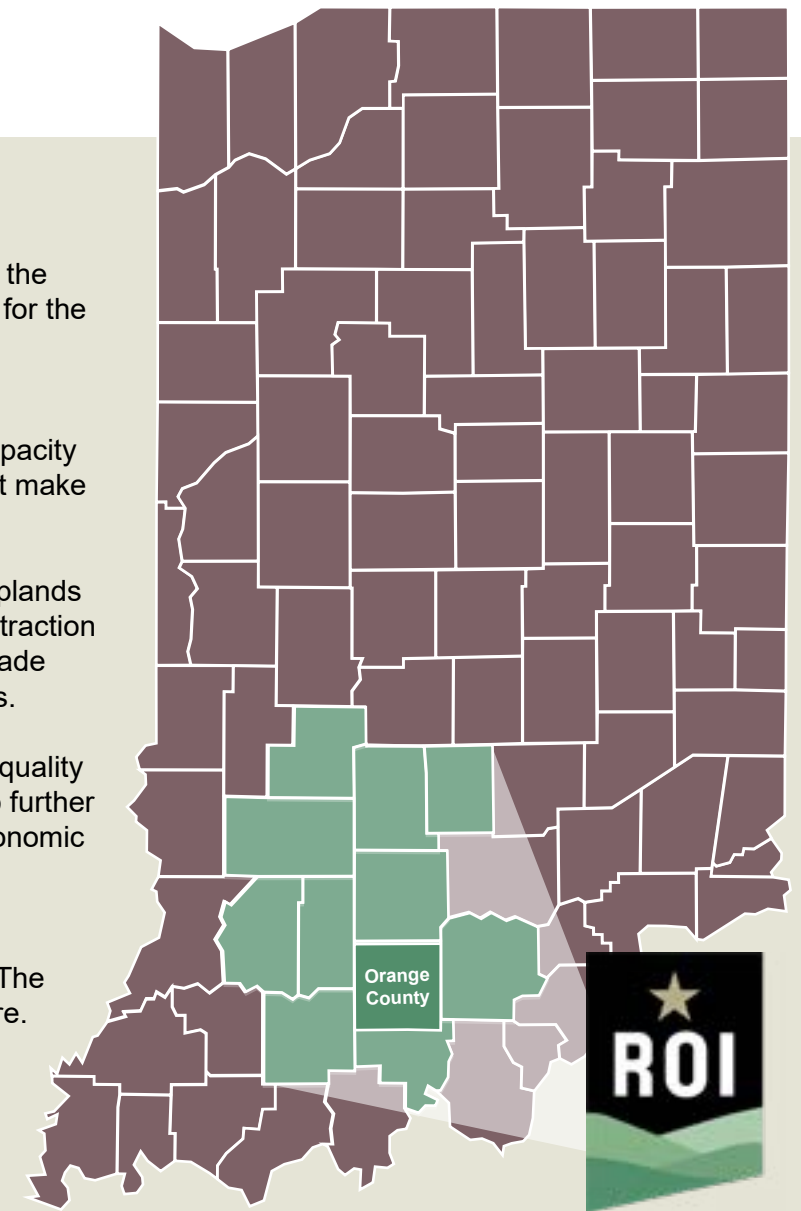
In 2019, the process began with Ready Communities Planning Grants. Each Indiana Uplands county received a \$50,000 planning grant to develop Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plans. Following the Ready Communities Planning Grant stage, up to \$3 million was made available for competitive quality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

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

Orange County, Indiana is a place shaped by landscape, legacy, and community. Located in south-central Indiana, the county is home to roughly 19,000 residents and is defined by its rolling hills, forested terrain, historic towns, and long-standing culture of self-reliance and hospitality. While Orange County is rural in character, it is not isolated. Its proximity to regional population centers, combined with nationally recognized tourism assets, positions the county at the intersection of local tradition and external opportunity.

History & Heritage

Founded in 1816, Orange County's development has long been tied to its natural resources and distinctive geography. Early settlement patterns were influenced by agriculture, waterways, and later, mineral springs that would become the foundation of a globally recognized resort economy. The towns of Paoli, Orleans, French Lick, and West Baden Springs each developed their own identities while remaining deeply interconnected through shared history and economic ties. One of the county's most unique historical threads is its connection to the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, which maintained winter quarters in nearby Peru, Indiana, and whose legacy remains visible in Orange County through museums, stories, and local pride. This "circus heritage," along with architectural landmarks such as the Orange County Courthouse and the domed West Baden Springs Hotel, reflects a past rooted in creativity, entrepreneurship, and regional significance.





Cultural Identity & Community Character

Orange County's cultural identity is grounded in authenticity. Residents value close-knit neighborhoods, volunteerism, and a strong sense of place tied to the land. Community events, local traditions, and shared public spaces—from courthouse squares to town parks—play a central role in daily life. The county's historic downtowns, while facing challenges common to many rural communities, continue to serve as symbolic and functional centers of civic life. Agriculture remains a visible and meaningful part of the county's identity, particularly in and around Orleans, where farming traditions, local food production, and seasonal markets reinforce the county's rural roots. At the same time, tourism-driven communities such as French Lick and West Baden Springs contribute a complementary cultural layer, bringing visitors, events, and amenities that influence the broader county experience.

Demographics & Population Trends

Like many rural Indiana counties, Orange County has experienced population stagnation and gradual decline over the past decade, accompanied by an aging population and workforce challenges. These trends underscore the importance of intentional quality of place investments—not only to attract new residents, but to retain existing families, support aging residents, and create environments where younger generations can envision a future. Despite these challenges, Orange County benefits from a strong sense of community stability. Many residents choose to remain due to family ties, affordability, and lifestyle preferences, even when employment opportunities may lie outside the county. This dynamic highlights both the opportunity and urgency for aligning workforce development, housing, and quality of place strategies.

WORKFORCE & INDUSTRY PROFILE

Orange County's workforce is diverse, with employment distributed across tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, healthcare, education, agriculture, and retail. Tourism is a cornerstone of the local economy, anchored by the French Lick Resort, West Baden Springs Hotel, casino operations, golf courses, and related attractions that collectively draw more than one million visitors annually.

Manufacturing and industrial employers—particularly in and around Orleans and Paoli—provide stable employment opportunities and contribute to the county's economic base. Healthcare is another critical sector, with IU Health Paoli Hospital serving as both a major employer and an essential community asset. Many residents also commute to nearby employment centers, reflecting Orange County's role within a broader regional labor market. Major employers and top industries are closely tied to quality of place considerations. Workforce attraction and retention are increasingly influenced by housing availability, amenities, connectivity, and community vibrancy, reinforcing the need for integrated planning across sectors.



MAJOR EMPLOYERS & TOP INDUSTRIES

The county's economy is anchored by a mix of tourism, manufacturing, healthcare, and agriculture. Key employers and sectors include:

- French Lick Resort & West Baden Springs Hotel – the largest hospitality employers in the region
- Big Splash Adventure / Valley Links / entertainment venues
- Manufacturing firms, including furniture production, metal fabrication, and food processing
- Healthcare services, led by IU Health Paoli Hospital
- School corporations and local government
- Agricultural operations and related suppliers
- Small businesses, retail, and local restaurants, especially within town centers and tourist corridors

These industries not only support jobs—they help define the county's identity and influence housing, transportation, and workforce needs.



EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING

Orange County's educational landscape includes three public school corporations:

- Paoli Community Schools
- Orleans Community Schools
- Springs Valley Community Schools

Each system serves as a hub for youth activities, family engagement, athletics, and community identity. In 2025, each school corporation had their own State Champion - Orleans won the Basketball State Championship, Springs Valley had a Cross Country State Champion, and the Pride of Paoli were ISSMA Class D State Champions.

Local libraries play an important role in lifelong learning, digital access, community programming, and cultural enrichment.

Regional higher education access within driving distance—such as Indiana University Bloomington, Vincennes University Jasper, and IU Southeast—expands educational and career pathways.

The Orange County Economic Development Partnership offers educational opportunities such as Quickbooks training, Serv Safe certification courses, and other workforce development and small business trainings.

OUR STORY: 2019-2025

Since the adoption of the 2019 Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan, Orange County—like communities everywhere—has navigated significant change. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped workforce patterns, accelerated housing pressures, and altered how residents and visitors engage with communities. At the same time, interest in rural living, outdoor recreation, and quality-of-life-driven location decisions has created new opportunities. This 2025 update reflects an evolving understanding of Orange County's strengths and challenges. While the county continues to build on its tourism economy and natural assets, there is growing recognition that long-term success depends on coordinated investment in housing, connectivity, workforce development, and community capacity. The story of Orange County is not one of reinvention, but of intentional evolution—honoring its history while adapting to changing needs and expectations. This plan update serves as a guide for that next chapter, grounded in local values, informed by community voices, and aligned with realistic pathways for progress.

ENGAGEMENT

Summary of Engagement from the Previous Plan (2019)

The 2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan was informed by a comprehensive engagement process that combined data collection, public outreach, and collaboration with a wide range of community stakeholders. The planning effort began with the review of existing plans and datasets to establish a baseline understanding of community needs and opportunities. A Client Workshop brought together key partners to identify and prioritize both previously discussed projects and new ideas aligned with long-term community goals.

Public outreach was conducted through multiple channels to ensure broad participation. Engagement included updates shared on the OCEDP Facebook page, an online public survey, public open houses, and a community stakeholder roundtable. These engagement efforts generated valuable insight from residents, businesses, and civic leaders across Orange County.

Through this process, several major concerns emerged. Residents identified housing, availability of jobs, cultural amenities, multi-modal transportation, workforce training, and affordable housing as the most important issues. Despite these challenges, residents expressed strong pride in Orange County's strengths, consistently describing the county as safe, affordable, and community-oriented with abundant natural resources. Many residents emphasized the need for recreation-focused projects and additional opportunities for the children and youth of the county. The vast majority also felt that tourism is an asset that helps drive local growth.

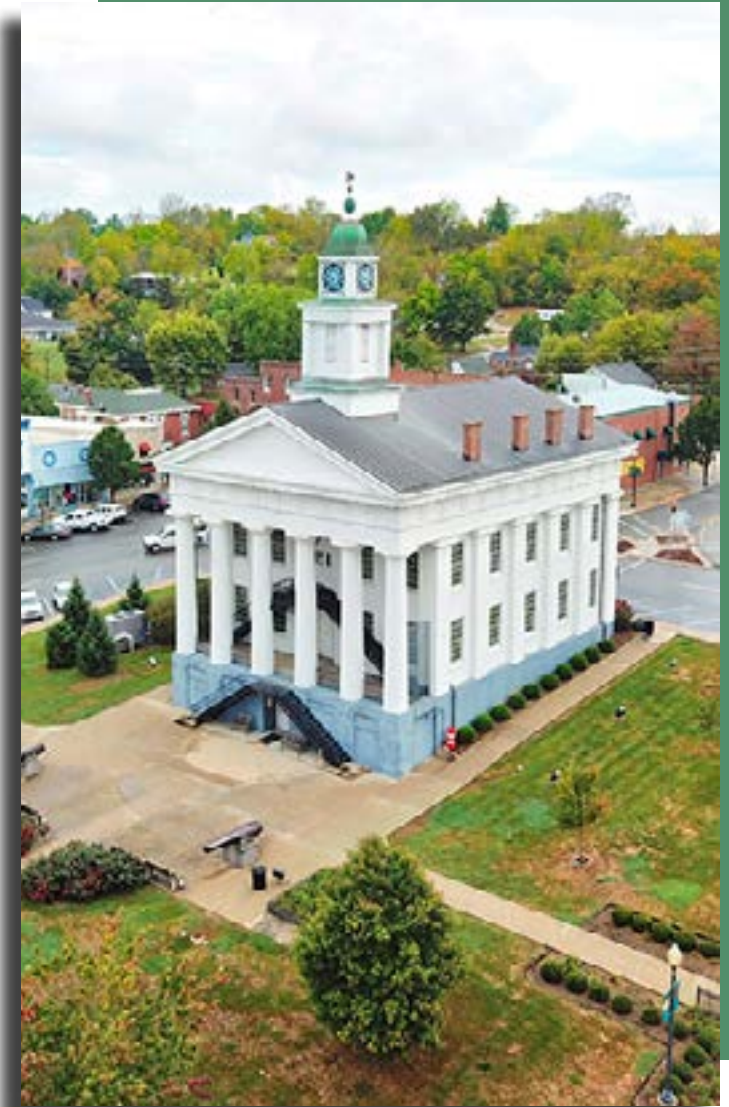


2025 QUALITY OF PLACE ADVISORY TEAM (QPAT)

The 2025 Quality of Place Advisory Team includes local leaders and practitioners representing a broad cross-section of Orange County. These members contributed their expertise in housing, community development, youth services, economic development, public engagement, and local governance.

2025 QPAT Members

- Skylar Whiteman — Orange County Economic Development Partnership
- Kristina Allen — Orange County Community Foundation
- Jimmy Ellis — Orleans Community Schools
- Chelsey Thomas — Possibilities in Paoli / Paoli Chamber of Commerce / OCEDP
- Shannon Cangey — Southern Indiana Community Healthcare / Orange County Players
- Steve Johnson — Hoosier Hills Credit Union
- Justin Harris — French Lick Resort
- Chris Burton — Springs Valley Community Schools / Brooks Galloway Real State
- Heather Ross — Orleans Community Member, CVB Board
- Kali Walls - French Lick Town Council Member



2025 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

The 2025 engagement process aimed to capture input from residents across all three communities and ensure that a diverse range of voices informed the updated plan. Engagement activities included both digital tools and in-person outreach to reach residents of all ages, household types, and access levels.

A countywide online public survey was the central engagement tool. It was promoted broadly through various social media pages and community partner networks to maximize participation. To extend the survey's reach beyond online users, the QPAT team issued a press release in the local newspaper encouraging residents to participate.

Recognizing that many residents are more reachable through community events and local service points, the team also distributed paper surveys and QR codes at a wide range of in-person locations. These included the Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) of each school system, Trunk or Treat events, the Early Learning Provider Summit, Safe Haven, and multiple food pantries. This strategy ensured representation from families, young parents, childcare providers, and residents who may be less likely to engage through digital platforms alone.

Together, these activities created a robust and inclusive engagement approach that successfully captured community priorities for the next phase of quality-of-place and workforce strategy development.

2025 ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

Nearly 250 residents participated in the 2025 survey and community outreach activities. Their responses revealed strong community pride alongside clear priorities for investment and improvement.

Community Strengths & Satisfaction

Nearly 80% of respondents stated they were very or somewhat satisfied with living in Orange County. Community feedback reinforced many of the priorities identified in the 2019 plan while also highlighting areas of change. Residents consistently emphasized the importance of:

- Maintaining and enhancing natural assets, outdoor recreation, and scenic beauty
- Expanding housing options that are attainable for the local workforce
- Strengthening amenities that support families, young professionals, and older adults
- Improving connectivity, including broadband, transportation, and walkability
- Supporting workforce development and education pathways aligned with local jobs
- Respondents also expressed a desire for continued collaboration across communities within the county and stronger regional partnerships to maximize impact.

MOST DESIRED SINGLE IMPROVEMENT

If one improvement could be made in the next decade, residents most frequently selected:

- Better/higher-paying jobs (94 responses)
- Affordable housing/availability (59 responses)
- Childcare/youth amenities (13 responses)

Key Themes

Overall, the data reveal consistent priorities:

- Housing is the most urgent community need.
- Job quality and wages require significant improvement.
- Childcare is a critical barrier for parents and employers.
- Residents want more entertainment, restaurants, retail, and youth amenities.
- Community identity, safety, schools, and natural resources remain strong assets.



2025 FINDINGS COMPARISON

A comparison of engagement results from 2019 and 2025 reveals both continuity and change in community priorities.

Persistent Priorities with Growing Urgency

- Housing, identified as a concern in 2019, has become the most urgent issue in 2025.
- High-quality jobs and wages have replaced general “job availability” as the top workforce concern.
- Childcare, mentioned in 2019, has grown into a major barrier to workforce participation and resident attraction.

Evolving Expectations for Community Amenities

While 2019 emphasized recreation and youth projects, 2025 shows increasing desire for restaurants, shops, entertainment, and vibrant downtown areas.

- Expectations for arts, culture, and community events have risen as recent investments in parks and placemaking have heightened community interest.

Transportation Concerns Have Shifted

- In 2019, focus was on multi-modal options.
- By 2025, concerns have broadened to include basic mobility and transportation barriers to work, healthcare, and daily needs.

Consistent Community Strengths

Across both plans, residents consistently highlight:

- Strong community connections
- Safety and low crime
- Natural beauty
- High quality of schools

These persistent strengths form the foundation for ongoing quality-of-place strategies.

DATA PROFILE

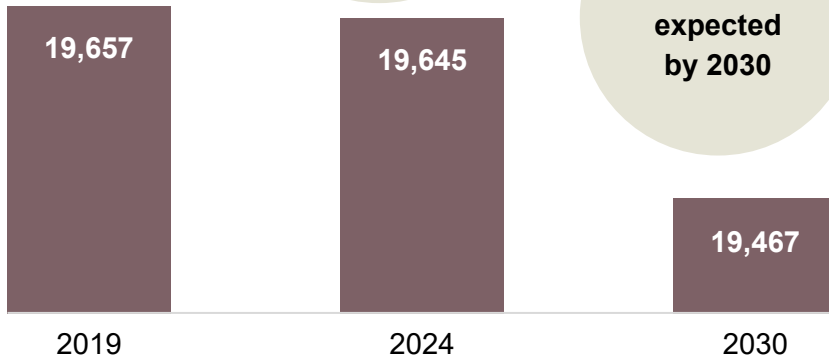
POPULATION CHANGE

Source: Lightcast, 2024



-0.6%
since 2019
(Indiana: +2.5%)

-1%
expected
by 2030



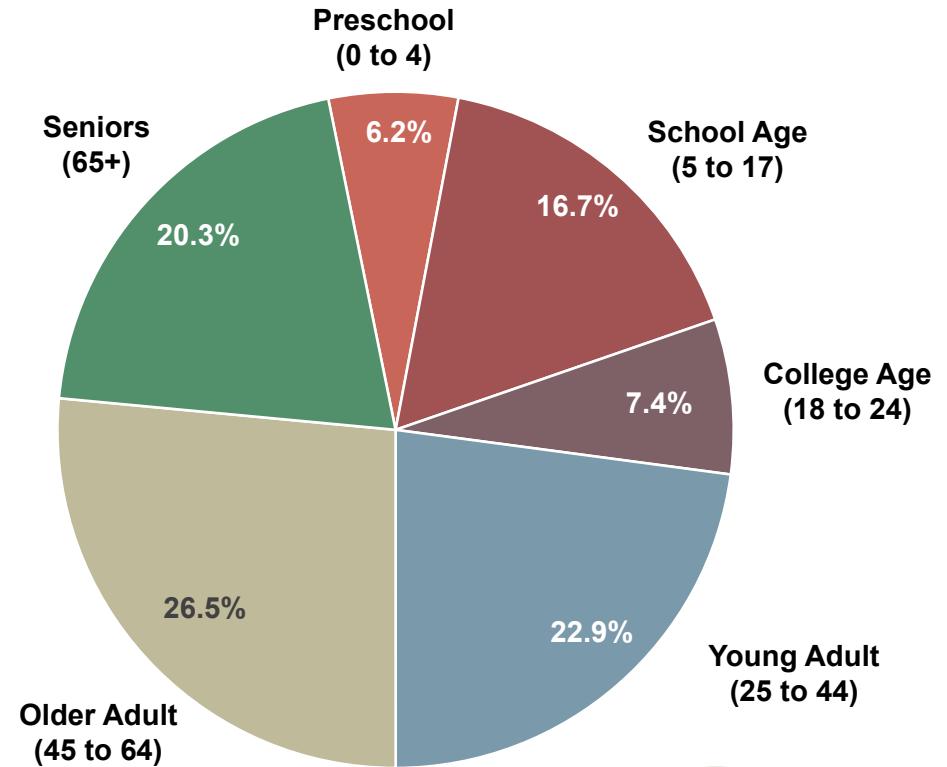
RACE & ETHNICITY

Source: Lightcast, 2024

White	94.0%
Hispanic/Latino	2.0%
African American/Black	1.6%
Asian	0.4%

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023



Median age:
43.0

(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



\$64,758

(Indiana: \$70,051)

MEDIAN HOME SALE

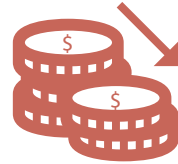
Source: Indiana Association of Realtors, 2025



\$165,000

POVERTY

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



19.0%
AMONG CHILDREN

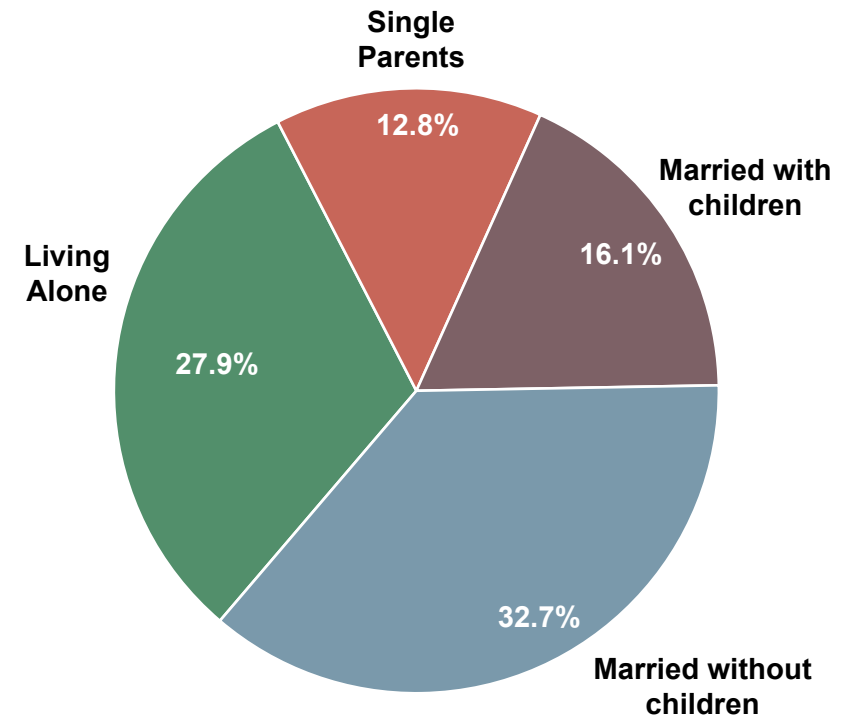
(Indiana: 15.7%)

13.3%
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



\$6,195

Average Annual Cost of Child Care in the County

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



COMMUTING TRENDS

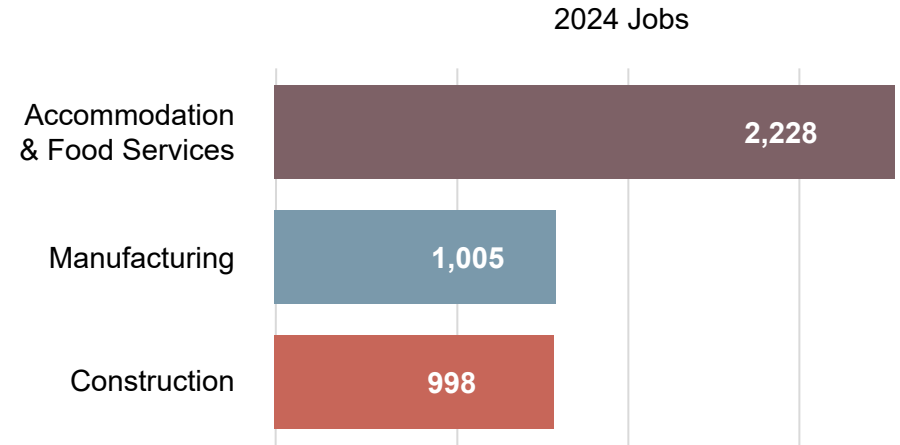
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Top Counties for Inbound Commuters	Top Counties for Outbound Commuters
Lawrence	Dubois
Dubois	Lawrence
Washington	Marion



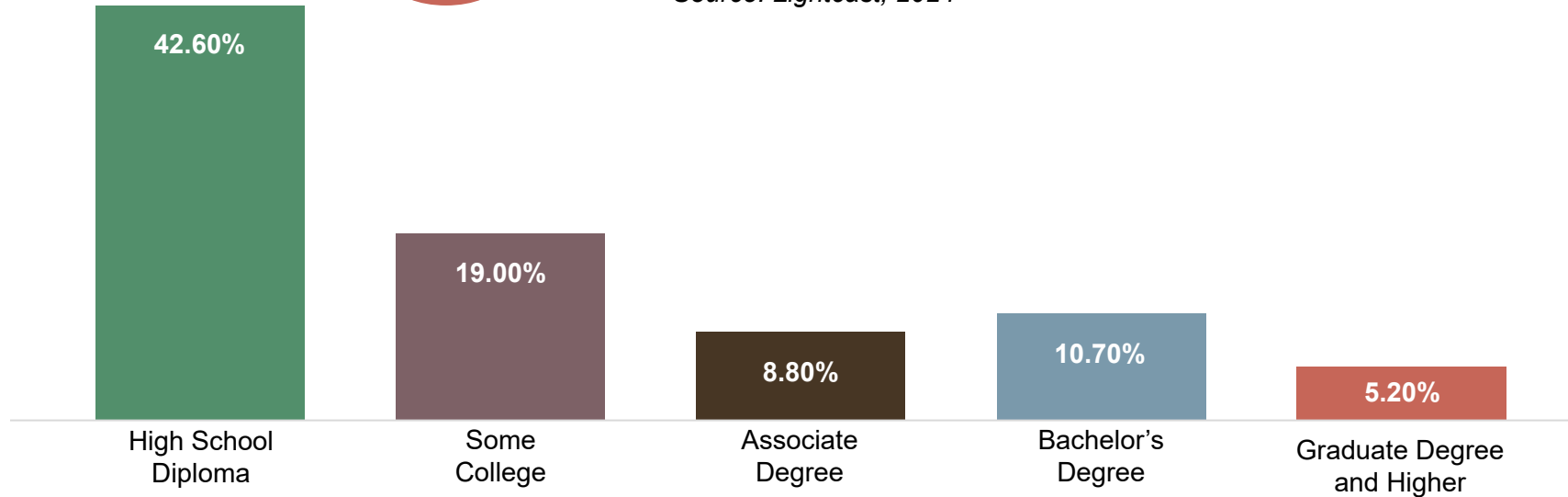
TOP INDUSTRIES

Source: Lightcast, 2024



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Source: Lightcast, 2024



CONTEXT

This plan update was developed with intentional alignment to existing local and regional planning efforts, including comprehensive plans adopted by Orange County communities. Priorities and strategies were reviewed alongside these plans to identify shared goals, reinforce common themes, and avoid duplication or conflict. Where possible, this plan elevates and supports initiatives already identified by local jurisdictions, providing a countywide framework that complements local implementation.

Implementation of these objectives will rely on phased strategies, strong partnerships, and regional and state resources to navigate funding constraints, capacity limitations, and coordination across multiple partners and towns.

The strategies and actions outlined in this plan intentionally emphasize the role of support. The team of community partners assembled to update this plan do not have the authority to act, or to act alone, in many areas addressed in this plan. Instead, we will work to convene partners, align efforts, provide data and coordination, and support implementation led by local governments, organizations, and community stakeholders. This approach reflects both the practical realities of authority and the belief that durable, community-wide outcomes are achieved through collaboration rather than unilateral action.



PROGRESS

Since the adoption of the 2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan, Orange County communities have made significant progress in revitalizing neighborhoods, expanding housing options, enhancing public amenities, and strengthening regional collaboration. These achievements reflect the shared commitment of local governments, nonprofits, private developers, community groups, and residents to improve quality of life and support long-term workforce attraction.

A major area of progress has been neighborhood rehabilitation and the expansion of diverse, attainable housing. The French Lick Redevelopment Commission has led the redevelopment of blighted properties, resulting in the construction of more than ten new homes. Private developers have continued similar revitalization efforts in West Baden, while infill development in Paoli has strengthened existing neighborhoods and restored underused lots. Habitat for Humanity has remained active countywide, contributing new home construction as well as accessibility improvements—including home ramps funded through Healthy Indiana initiatives. As a founding member of the Uplands Regional Land Bank, Orange County is positioned to more strategically return vacant properties to productive use. Complementing these efforts, both Orange County and the Town of French Lick have applied for OCRA Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation grants to help homeowners address vital repairs. OCEDP has also continued to maintain a countywide inventory of vacant commercial properties to encourage redevelopment opportunities.

Significant employer-driven housing has further expanded local workforce options. French Lick Resort has completed 12 workforce homes in West Baden and is currently building 27 additional homes in French Lick, all sold at cost and reserved for employees of Orange County businesses. This represents a major investment in stabilizing workforce housing. In addition, the West Baden Lofts apartment complex—developed in partnership with IHCD and TWG Development—has added new multifamily units to meet demand.

Public spaces, parks, and recreational amenities have also undergone major upgrades. In Paoli, PLAYoli—a volunteer-built community playground—opened in 2021 following extensive local fundraising and coordination. Bicentennial Park was rededicated as Veterans Bicentennial Park with new benches and a prominent flag mural. Paoli’s downtown has also seen renewed vibrancy with murals added around the Paoli Square and a new mural underway at Lost River Market just off the square. JayCee Park has improved its capacity to host community events with the installation of permanent power, supporting Grub Alley Food Truck events and the Paoli Fall Festival.

In West Baden, the West Baden Springs Community Park underwent a substantial transformation supported by READI 1.0, including flood mitigation work, a new concession stand, improved lighting, new pickleball and tennis courts, a walking and cross-country trail, murals, and a splash pad. Mural projects funded through this initiative extended to Paoli and Orleans as well, resulting in a countywide mural trail that strengthens tourism and placemaking. The Town of French Lick further expanded recreational assets by developing the Parks at Cherry Hill—featuring a basketball court, playground, shelter house, and a walking trail—supported by READI 2.0.

AREAS WHERE PROGRESS WAS LIMITED

Trails and connectivity projects have also moved forward. The Monon Trail officially opened in Orleans, with long-term plans to connect the community to other destinations along the historic corridor. Orleans continued its commitment to active transportation with the development of a Walk and Bike Path Plan, supporting safer, healthier mobility options.

Finally, regional collaboration has strengthened significantly. Community groups and local governments have improved coordination around major events and tourism-driven opportunities. The successful 2024 Eclipse planning effort brought organizations together across jurisdictions, and similar coordination is underway for upcoming America 250 celebrations.

Several strategies initially identified in the 2019 plan remain relevant, including housing rehabilitation, beautification projects, and trail development. New strategies added in 2025 reflect emerging needs such as childcare access, broadband expansion, and coordinated wayfinding.

While meaningful progress has been made across many areas, several strategies from the 2019 plan did not advance as originally envisioned. In most cases, the barriers were tied to funding limitations, capacity constraints, or the absence of a clear organizational owner to shepherd projects forward.

For example, community-led beautification initiatives such as a House or Yard of the Month program did not gain traction due to a lack of local ownership and sustained volunteer interest. Other anticipated projects, including housing that supports aging in place, remain under discussion but have not moved into development, largely due to the absence of dedicated funding sources and the challenge of identifying a developer willing to undertake specialized senior-focused construction in a rural market.

Several park and public space enhancement projects identified in 2019, including improvements to JayCee Park and activation efforts at Marea Radcliff Park and Lick Creek, did not advance because of limited funding availability during the previous planning cycle. Similarly, planned improvements to community gateways, points of arrival, and wayfinding signage did not proceed at the time due to competing priorities and the lack of dedicated resources.

Infrastructure and service-expansion proposals faced similar barriers. Efforts to expand waste collection services stalled due to both funding constraints and limited community demand. The concept of expanding the French Lick Trolley Tour System was also not feasible, as the system is privately operated and neither funding nor operational capacity existed to support a broader public transportation function. Additionally, while multi-community trail connectivity remains a long-term aspiration, the idea of creating a continuous trail system comparable to the Monon South did not advance because key portions of the former rail corridor between Orleans and French Lick are privately owned, presenting both financial and logistical obstacles.

These unmet strategies highlight the importance of aligning future initiatives with available funding, local capacity, and clear project ownership. They also demonstrate the need for adaptable planning that builds on momentum while remaining realistic about local conditions, an approach reflected in the priorities and strategies outlined in this updated 2025 plan.

ASSETS

Orange County’s assets provide a strong foundation for quality of place and workforce attraction efforts. These assets span natural, cultural, infrastructural, and institutional categories and contribute to both resident quality of life and economic vitality. Before detailing specific asset categories, several signature assets help define Orange County’s identity and competitive advantage:

- A nationally recognized tourism economy anchored by French Lick Resort, West Baden Springs Hotel, and associated attractions
- Extensive natural resources, including the Hoosier National Forest, Patoka Lake, and regional trail systems
- Historic downtowns and architectural landmarks that reflect the county’s heritage
- Strong community institutions, including schools, libraries, healthcare facilities, and civic organizations

These assets are further organized within the following focus areas:

Aesthetics & Beautification

Includes historic preservation efforts, downtown streetscapes, public art, parks, and community-led beautification initiatives that enhance visual appeal and community pride.

Arts, Culture, Entertainment & Recreation

Includes museums, festivals, performance spaces, recreational facilities, golf courses, trails, and tourism-related amenities that support both residents and visitors.

Connectivity & Infrastructure

Includes broadband access, transportation networks, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and utilities that enable mobility, access, and economic participation.

Education & Workforce Development

Includes K–12 schools, postsecondary institutions, workforce training programs, and partnerships that support skill development and career pathways.

Housing & Utilities Infrastructure

Includes housing stock, development capacity, water and wastewater systems, and other foundational services necessary to support growth and retention.

Health & Safety

Includes healthcare facilities, emergency services, public safety infrastructure, and initiatives that contribute to physical and mental well-being.

ASSETS

AESTHETICS AND BEAUTIFICATION

- West Baden Park Improvements
- Possibilities in Paoli (Main Street)
- Court Street Commons
- Orleans Grain Bin Mural
- West Baden Mall
- Paoli Veterans Bicentennial Park
- Paoli RDC Purchase of Empty Lot on Square
- Valley Inn & Suites
- Countywide mural trail with installations in Paoli, Orleans, and West Baden
- Beautification improvements at Veterans Bicentennial Park
- Cherry Hill Park development in French Lick
- PLAYoli playground in Paoli Community Park
- West Baden Springs Park upgrades through READI funding
- Neighborhood revitalization efforts led by French Lick RDC and Habitat for Humanity

CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE

- Road and Sidewalk Improvements
- Monon South Trail
- WiFi at French Lick Town Green
- Orange County Fiber
- Safe Haven Transportation
- Monon Trail segment opened in Orleans, with plans for expansion
- Orleans Walk & Bike Path Plan
- Improved pedestrian power infrastructure at JayCee Park for community events
- Sidewalk networks in varying but improvable conditions
- Broadband service coverage across key commercial corridors
- Partnerships with INDOT and regional planning organizations

ARTS, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION

- Murals throughout County
- French Lick Resort
- Big Splash/Wilstem/Castle Knoll
- Green Acres Golf Course
- French Lick Scenic Railway
- Alana Judah Art Studio
- Bledsoe Farms
- Main Street events
- Food Truck Frenzy/Grub Alley
- Orange County Museum
- French Lick/West Baden Museum
- Orange County Fairgrounds
- Patoka Lake
- Hoosier National Forest
- Robust mural program and emerging publi

ASSETS

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Orange County Early Learning Coalition
- On My Way Pre-K at all 3 Schools
- Bulldog Manufacturing
- Paoli Schools - STEM Certified
- Lost River Career Cooperative/ COSMOS
- Manufacturing Day
- OCEDP Trainings
- Choose Southern Indiana
- Dual Credit Availability at all 3 Schools
- Strong K–12 schools engaged in community partnerships
- Collaboration with youth-serving organizations (libraries, PTOs, clubs)
- Employer-led initiatives supporting workforce housing
- Training and career pathway opportunities through regional workforce partners

HOUSING & UTILITIES INFRASTRUCTURE

- French Lick Resort Workforce Housing
- West Baden Lofts
- French Lick Redevelopment Commission
- Uplands Regional Land Bank
- Habitat for Humanity
- Paoli Wastewater Improvements
- REMC Fiber Internet
- Orange County Recycling Co-op
- EV Charging Stations
- Increase in local developers building homes
- French Lick Resort workforce homes (12 completed, 27 in progress)
- Habitat for Humanity new construction and home repairs
- Uplands Regional Land Bank membership
- Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation grant efforts
- Utility expansions supporting new housing

HEALTH & SAFETY

- SICHC Clinics
- IU Health Walk-In Clinic
- Safe Haven Recovery Center
- 2 Community Gardens
- Lost River Market Farm Stand, CSA, Soup & Seniors
- Monon South Trail
- Food Pantry Expansion
- Team OC
- Team Peace
- FT Nurse at OC Health Department
- Regional Fire Training Center
- Springs Valley Fire Territory
- Safe communities, repeatedly identified as a top resident strength
- Strong sense of community cohesion and

PRIORITIES

Objective 1: Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization

Reduce blight, expand workforce and affordable housing, and support rehabilitation and infill to strengthen neighborhood stability and quality of place.

Feedback from the 2025 community engagement process consistently identified housing as the most pressing issue facing Orange County. Survey respondents and employers alike noted that limited housing availability, aging housing stock, and neighborhood disinvestment are directly impacting workforce recruitment, retention, and overall community perception. Participants expressed concern that blight and a lack of diverse, attainable housing options undermine neighborhood stability and downtown revitalization efforts. Prioritizing housing quality, availability, and neighborhood reinvestment.

Objective 2: Downtown Vibrancy & Placemaking

Enhance downtown vitality through beautification, public art, coordinated wayfinding, and expanded cultural and entertainment offerings.

Feedback from the 2025 engagement process highlighted strong interest in more active, welcoming, and identifiable downtown spaces. Residents expressed a desire for additional entertainment, dining, and gathering places, as well as amenities that support year-round events and everyday use. Participants also noted that recent placemaking efforts—such as murals and public art—have generated enthusiasm, increased foot traffic, and improved community perception. Prioritizing downtown vibrancy responds directly to this feedback by reinforcing downtowns as centers of community life, supporting small businesses, and strengthening local identity.

Objective 3: Connectivity & Infrastructure Development

Improve mobility, accessibility, and essential workforce-supporting infrastructure, including sidewalks, trails, wayfinding, childcare, broadband, and transportation access.

Feedback from the 2025 engagement process identified connectivity and infrastructure gaps as significant barriers to workforce participation and daily mobility. Transportation options were among the lowest-rated areas in the survey, and participants consistently noted that limited childcare availability, incomplete sidewalk and trail networks, and inadequate broadband access affect residents' ability to work, access services, and fully participate in the community. Prioritizing connectivity and infrastructure development responds dire

Objective 4: Youth & Recreation

Expand youth and family recreation opportunities, enhance outdoor amenities, and promote stewardship of natural assets to support community wellbeing.

Feedback from the 2025 engagement process identified youth activities and recreation opportunities as one of the strongest community priorities. Survey respondents expressed a desire for more programs and amenities for youth and families, as well as better use of existing parks and outdoor spaces. Participants also emphasized the role of recreation in supporting physical and mental health, family retention, and overall quality of life. Prioritizing youth and recreation responds directly to this feedback while building on recent park investments and reinforcing Orange County's natural assets as long-term community and tourism resources.

PRIORITIES

Objective 01

Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization

STATEMENT:

Strengthen housing quality, availability, and neighborhood appearance by reducing blight, expanding rehabilitation, and supporting new workforce and affordable housing options.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

- Housing is the number one priority identified in the 2025 survey.
- Employers report challenges recruiting due to limited housing choices.
- Blighted and aging housing stock reduce visual appeal and reinvestment potential.
- The Land Bank, Habitat for Humanity, and redevelopment partners offer strong tools for revitalization.
- Infill development can efficiently expand housing without major infrastructure extensions.
- Financing gaps and rising construction costs can limit the feasibility of affordable and workforce housing projects, particularly in small rural areas.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Housing is the number one priority identified in the 2025 survey.
- Employers report challenges recruiting due to limited housing choices.
- Blighted and aging housing stock reduce visual appeal and reinvestment potential.
- The Land Bank, Habitat for Humanity, and redevelopment partners offer strong tools for revitalization.
- Infill development can efficiently expand housing without major infrastructure extensions.
- Financing gaps and rising construction costs can limit the feasibility of affordable and workforce housing projects, particularly in small rural areas.

PRIORITIES

Objective 02

Downtown Vibrancy & Placemaking

STATEMENT:

Enhance downtown appeal and community identity through public art, coordinated wayfinding, beautification, cultural programming, and infrastructure that supports year-round events.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Vibrant and attractive downtowns support small business vitality, tourism, community pride, and resident attraction.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Residents desire more entertainment, dining, and gathering spaces.
- Murals and public art have generated enthusiasm and tourism interest.
- Downtown businesses benefit from greater foot traffic and placemaking efforts.
- Event infrastructure improvements increase community functionality.
- Wayfinding signage reinforces identity and improves navigation.
- Limited organizational capacity and funding can make it challenging to sustain regular programming and placemaking activities over time.
- Small businesses may face constraints related to staffing, capital, and seasonality that limit their ability to fully leverage increased downtown activity.



PRIORITIES

Objective 03

Connectivity & Infrastructure Development

STATEMENT:

Improve community connectivity and workforce-supporting infrastructure through expanded sidewalks, trails, wayfinding signage, childcare capacity, broadband access, and transportation options.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Connectivity and infrastructure improvements support daily life, economic opportunity, and workforce attraction across Orange County.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Transportation options were among the lowest-rated items in the 2025 survey.
- Childcare quality and availability affect workforce participation.
- Wayfinding enhances the usability of community spaces and tourism areas.
- Infrastructure improvements often require significant funding, coordination, and long implementation timelines.
- Responsibility for transportation, infrastructure, and childcare infrastructure is distributed across multiple entities, requiring coordinated and phased approaches.



PRIORITIES

Objective 04

Youth & Recreation

STATEMENT:

Expand youth and family recreation opportunities, enhance outdoor amenities, and promote stewardship of natural assets to support community wellbeing and quality of life.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Youth and recreation amenities are essential to attracting and retaining families while supporting community cohesion and healthy lifestyles.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- One of the strongest themes in the survey was desire for more youth activities.
- Recent park upgrades provide a strong foundation for expanded programs.
- Active recreation supports family retention, public health, and mental wellbeing.
- Outdoor amenities are key tourism and resident-attraction assets.
- Expanding youth programming and recreational amenities requires sustained staffing, operational funding, and long-term maintenance capacity.
- Ensuring equitable access to recreation opportunities across the county would likely require additional coordination and investment from each community.



SOLUTIONS

Objective 1 supports the county’s focus areas of Aesthetics & Beautification, Housing & Utilities Infrastructure, and Workforce Attraction. Residents emphasized the importance of addressing housing shortages, revitalizing older neighborhoods, and improving community appearance. Strengthening the housing ecosystem will improve quality of life while supporting employer recruitment and long-term economic health.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 1.1: Reduce blight and rehabilitate deteriorated housing stock.

- 1.1.1 Conduct a countywide assessment of blighted and vacant structures.
- 1.1.2 Prioritize demolition or rehabilitation through Land Bank partnerships.
- 1.1.3 Support OCRA Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation grant applications annually.
- 1.1.4 Partner with Habitat for Humanity on home repair and accessibility projects.

Strategy 1.2: Expand workforce and affordable housing options.

- 1.2.1 Identify and market priority sites for workforce or mixed-income housing.
- 1.2.2 Encourage employer-assisted housing models in partnership with local businesses.
- 1.2.3 Support public–private partnerships for new construction aligned with local needs.

Strategy 1.3: Support infill development and neighborhood beautification.

- 1.3.1 Develop an inventory of infill-ready parcels across communities.
- 1.3.2 Establish local incentives for infill development.
- 1.3.3 Expand neighborhood beautification projects with volunteers, schools, and civic groups.

Objective 01

Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization

STATUS

In Progress
(FOR ALL 3)

TIMELINE

Short-term to
Long-term

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Number of blighted structures removed or rehabilitated.
- Number of new workforce/affordable housing units added.
- Number of homes repaired or improved annually.
- Reduction in long-term vacant or distressed properties.

PARTNERS

Land Bank, OCEDP, Town Governments, Habitat for Humanity, Redevelopment Commissions, Employers, Developers, OCRA, IHCD.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OCRA programs, IHCD housing tools, READI, Healthy Indiana funding, employer partnerships.

SOLUTIONS

This objective aligns with Aesthetics & Beautification and Arts, Culture, Entertainment & Recreation focus areas. Public engagement revealed strong interest in enhancing arts, culture, and event offerings, while building on successful mural initiatives and park improvements. Strengthening placemaking and downtown vibrancy will reinforce local identity and economic activity.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 2.1: Expand public art, murals, and coordinated wayfinding signage.

- 2.1.1 Create a Countywide Public Art & Wayfinding Master Plan.
- 2.1.2 Install matching wayfinding signage across all communities.
- 2.1.3 Expand the mural trail with new installations annually.
- 2.1.4 Enhance streetscapes with lighting, benches, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities.

Strategy 2.2: Strengthen placemaking and cultural programming.

- 2.2.1 Expand festivals, music events, and seasonal programming.
- 2.2.2 Offer façade improvement programs for local businesses.
- 2.2.3 Create a coordinated marketing effort for downtown activities.
- 2.2.4: Support efforts to expand local retail, dining, and entertainment options through small business development partnerships and downtown activation.
- 2.2.5: Develop a coordinated countywide events calendar and communication process to avoid scheduling conflicts and maximize attendance.

Strategy 2.3: Improve event infrastructure and public space readiness.

- 2.3.1 Upgrade power access, lighting, and utilities at key event locations.
- 2.3.2 Increase seating, shade, trash receptacles, and ADA-compliant amenities.

Objective 02

Downtown Vibrancy & Placemaking

STATUS

2.1 In Progress
2.2 Planning

2.3 Planning

TIMELINE

Short-term to Long-term

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Number of new murals, public art pieces, and wayfinding signs installed.
- Event attendance and number of annual events.
- Number of façade improvements completed.
- Increase in downtown visitors or businesses.

PARTNERS

OCEDP, Town Governments, Chambers of Commerce, Orange County CVB, Local Artists, Schools, Civic Organizations, Service Clubs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Indiana Arts Commission, OCRA Placemaking, Sponsorships, Community Foundations.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 3 aligns with Connectivity Infrastructure Development and Workforce Support focus areas. Residents emphasized the need for sidewalk upgrades, trail expansion, childcare, broadband improvements, and consistent signage. Enhancing mobility and infrastructure will increase safety, accessibility, and economic competitiveness.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 3.1: Improve sidewalks, pedestrian safety, and ADA accessibility.

- 3.1.1 Conduct a countywide sidewalk assessment.
- 3.1.2 Prioritize improvements near schools, parks, and business districts.
- 3.1.3 Upgrade crosswalks, curb ramps, and pedestrian lighting.
- 3.1.4: Support municipalities in updating or developing Comprehensive Plans and corridor studies that align with countywide quality-of-place goals.

Strategy 3.2: Expand trails and implement coordinated wayfinding.

- 3.2.1 Install matching wayfinding signage on trails and pedestrian routes.
- 3.2.2 Expand trail connections linking neighborhoods, parks, and downtowns.
- 3.2.3 Implement Orleans' Walk & Bike Plan countywide where feasible.

Strategy 3.3: Strengthen childcare availability and workforce access.

- 3.3.1 Support the expansion of licensed childcare providers.
- 3.3.2 Collaborate with and support the Orange County Early Care Coalition and their Strategic Plan

Strategy 3.4: Improve broadband and transportation access.

- 3.4.1 Identify broadband gaps and support expansion projects.
- 3.4.2 Evaluate transportation needs for workers, students, and seniors.
- 3.4.3 Develop shared-ride, shuttle, or microtransit pilots.

Objective 03

Connectivity & Infrastructure Development

STATUS

3.1 Planning	3.3 In Progress
3.2 In Progress	3.4 Planning

TIMELINE

Short-term to Long-term

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Miles of sidewalk or trail improvements completed.
- Number of wayfinding signs installed.
- Childcare seats added or improved.
- Broadband coverage expansion.
- Transportation access metrics.

PARTNERS

Town Governments, INDOT, Schools, Early Learning Providers, Broadband Providers, Employers, OCEDP, Health Coalitions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CCMG, TAP, Safe Routes to School, OECOSL grants, FCC broadband funds, OCRA.

SOLUTIONS

Objective 4 aligns with Arts, Culture, Entertainment & Recreation and Health & Safety focus areas. Community engagement revealed a strong desire for expanded recreational programming, improved park amenities, and activities for families and youth. Stewarding natural assets enhances tourism, community identity, and long-term quality of life.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 4.1: Expand youth and family recreation programming.

- 4.1.1 Partner with schools, libraries, and nonprofits for coordinated programs.
- 4.1.2 Expand seasonal sports, arts classes, and youth activities.

Strategy 4.2: Enhance park and recreation facilities.

- 4.2.1 Upgrade parks to support year-round recreation.
- 4.2.2 Improve lighting, restrooms, shelters, and ADA access.
- 4.2.3 Add amenities such as splash pads, pump tracks, or skate features where appropriate.
- 4.2.4: Conduct a feasibility assessment for a countywide or regional youth sports and/or dance facility to support tournaments, events, and family recreation.

Strategy 4.3: Promote stewardship of outdoor and natural assets.

- 4.3.1 Expand trail access to natural areas and waterways.
- 4.3.2 Promote sustainable recreation practices.
- 4.3.3 Partner with conservation organizations to protect and enhance natural assets.

Objective 04

Youth & Recreation

STATUS

4.1 Planning
4.2 In Progress

4.3 Planning

TIMELINE

Short-term to Mid-term

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Number of new youth programs offered.
- Number of park upgrades completed.
- Increase in recreation participation.
- Number of natural asset stewardship initiatives.

PARTNERS

Parks Departments, Schools, Youth Organizations, Libraries, Conservation Groups, Tourism Offices, Local Volunteers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Grants, sponsorships, community foundations, Indiana DNR programs.



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.

