

# QUALITY OF PLACE & WORKFORCE ATTRACTION PLAN

OWEN COUNTY, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2025



REGIONAL  
OPPORTUNITY  
INITIATIVES

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# INTRODUCTION

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

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

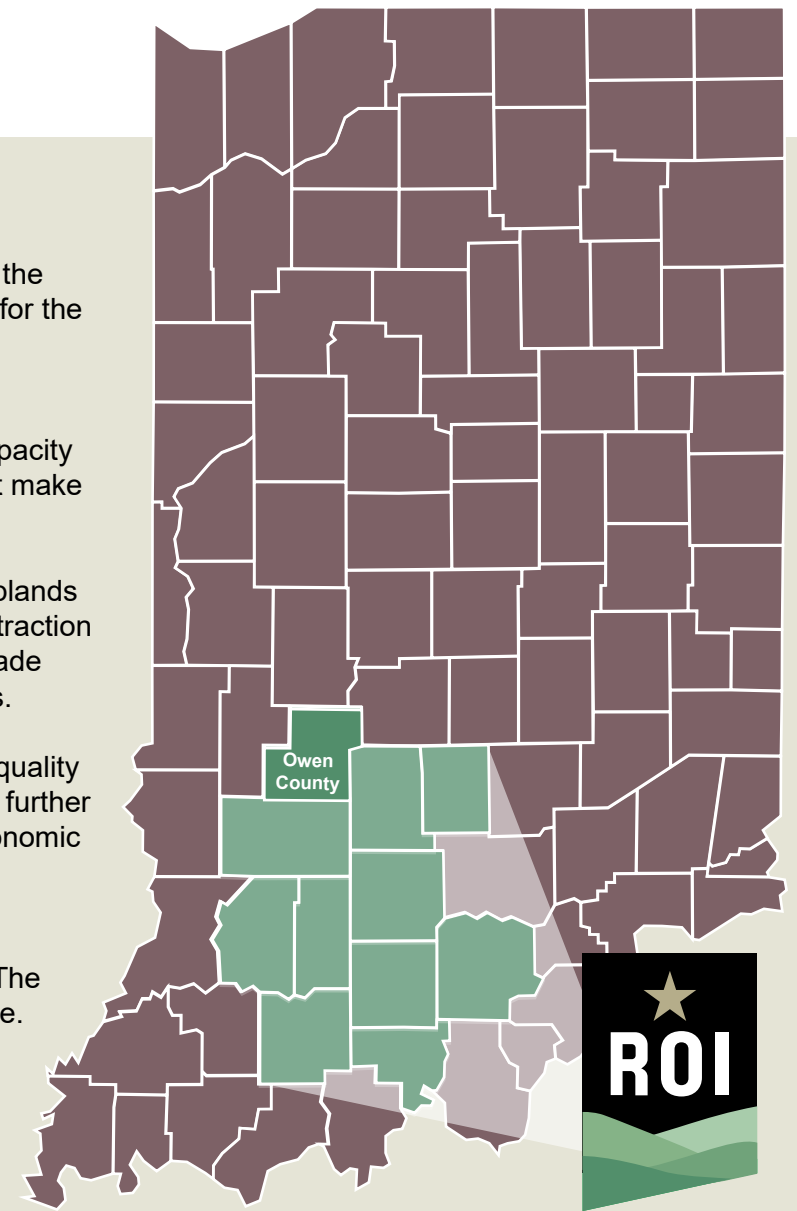
In 2019, the process began with Ready Communities Planning Grants. Each Indiana Uplands county received a \$50,000 planning grant to develop Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plans. Following the Ready Communities Planning Grant stage, up to \$3 million was made available for competitive quality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

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

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

## What Is a Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan?

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

During a discussion at Main Street Coffee, someone compared Spencer to the quaint town in the TV show, “Northern Exposure.” His justification was that Spencer, and all of Owen County, contained a mixture of people from a variety of backgrounds and talents, all in the same community, sharing conversations and ideas.

At a recent state meeting hosted by the Indiana Arts Commission, several communities were trying to figure out how to find out if any artists lived in their community. Owen County, on the other hand, was trying to figure out how to coordinate the multitude of artists and arts organizations that were active, and successful.

Owen County is a rural place, with traditional values and livelihoods. Yet, Spencer celebrates one of the largest, most successful Pride festivals and organizations in Indiana.

Driving along the twisted roadways through the hilly terrain, you never know if you are passing the home of a professor from nearby Indiana University, an executive from one of the life-sciences companies in town, an estate owned by an Indianapolis executive ... or the home of a family that is struggling to find work, feed the family, and care for their children.



*The newly polished courthouse dome shines over the Spencer business district.*

Public meetings and solution sessions have revealed the broad range of interests and needs. More importantly, the gatherings to discuss the community’s future have revealed a willingness to face our challenges, solve problems, and celebrate our successes.



Our geologic history left us with idyllic scenery and contrasting landscapes admired by both residents and tourists. Lazy streams flow into the torrent White River. Flat farms line valleys fading into hilly woods. Teeming wetlands are only a short trip from the largest Indiana waterfall, Cataract Falls.

But Owen's scenic landscape does not provide for easy living. Poor drainage and flooding restrict development in the valleys. Karst features may make land susceptible to sinkholes. Hilly landscapes make it costly to pump water around the county. Additionally, a "hard pan" and "periglacial loess" layer, both produced by glacier melt, makes it difficult to farm and septic tanks to filter wastewater.

Tough landscapes call for tough people, and our ancestors were up to the challenge. Colonizers started settlements along the White River for trade and connection to forts down river. Owen County was formed in 1819 and was named after Abraham Owen, a colonel who died at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. Waves of settlers came to Owen in allied family groups originating from the Ohio River Valley to farm and trap furs. Historical information from this section was taken from Owen County, Indiana, a History; Owen County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1994.

The Town of Spencer, as the county seat, was laid out in 1820 and Gosport followed 10 years later. Families from the east came to Owen and were invited in by the locals. Owen was nearly undeveloped, and families relied on each other for support.

Communities grew around specific industries and traded goods throughout the region. Along the river, Freedom and Gosport grew as shipping ports visited by flat boats. Coal City was platted in 1875 and named after its access to that resource. Patricksburg was formed along trading roads to the frontier.

Quincy, Spencer and Gosport all flourished along the rail line. Other communities were built around farming, like Arney or Jordan, or for lumber. By 1900, almost all the land was used for agriculture or was undeveloped.

Now, almost half of our total acreage is being cultivated, but farming only provides 540 jobs in the whole county, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis' 2017 report on jobs and earnings. The farm worker's average income is \$12,225, according to the bureau, meaning many farmers must seek a second job.

Because of our rural nature, changes in farming practices and shifting industries – there is not a clear pattern to land use, especially regarding the mix of commercial and residential properties.

It is not uncommon to find used car lots in a residential neighborhood or to see homes used as businesses. There are commercial spaces in remote areas of the county and residential areas are scattered throughout without organization into neighborhoods. While some mixing of uses is appropriate in a rural area such as Owen County, it provides little direction to those making land-use decisions. For property owners, it is also difficult to determine where to build homes because of the uncertainty of what will be allowed next to their property in the future.

What's true for the county also holds for our biggest town, Spencer. Although the land around Spencer seems open and rural to outsiders, geographic factors constrain the town's potential for growth.

The White River rings the town to the east and south sides. Floodplain encompasses parts of the town. To the north, the land climbs to steep ridges and ravines. In fact, flooding and scarcity of buildable land are not just impediments to growing the town's boundaries; they are an ongoing problem inside the existing borders, as shown by the 2008 floods.

Despite these limitations, the population started increasing again in the 1950s, peaking in 2005. Electrification and highways passing through the county created new opportunities for regional connections and overcoming local challenges.

As old connections fade – to coal, timber, river traffic – new connections form. Owen has shifted from agriculture and extraction to building and manufacturing. Half of our workforce is employed in the life sciences and manufacturing sectors and our two largest employers are Boston Scientific and Cook Urological. Both those firms have added new jobs and Boston Scientific has bought land to expand.

A stirring economy provides residents an improved quality of life; especially, as we add more modern amenities and housing to our small-town charm

## MAKING OWEN HOME

Owen County has much to offer but sits at a critical juncture. Although roughly half our jobs are in manufacturing – which are traditionally high-paying - that sector of the economy comes with risks. Owen County's manufacturing jobs have a 60% risk of being lost to automation and 28% risk of moving offshore, according to the Ball State Center for Business and Economic Research.

Additionally, our population is hovering around 20,000 and young people are choosing not to call Owen home. For example, there was a 2% drop per year in the number of people ages 10 - 29 in Spencer between 2014-2016, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

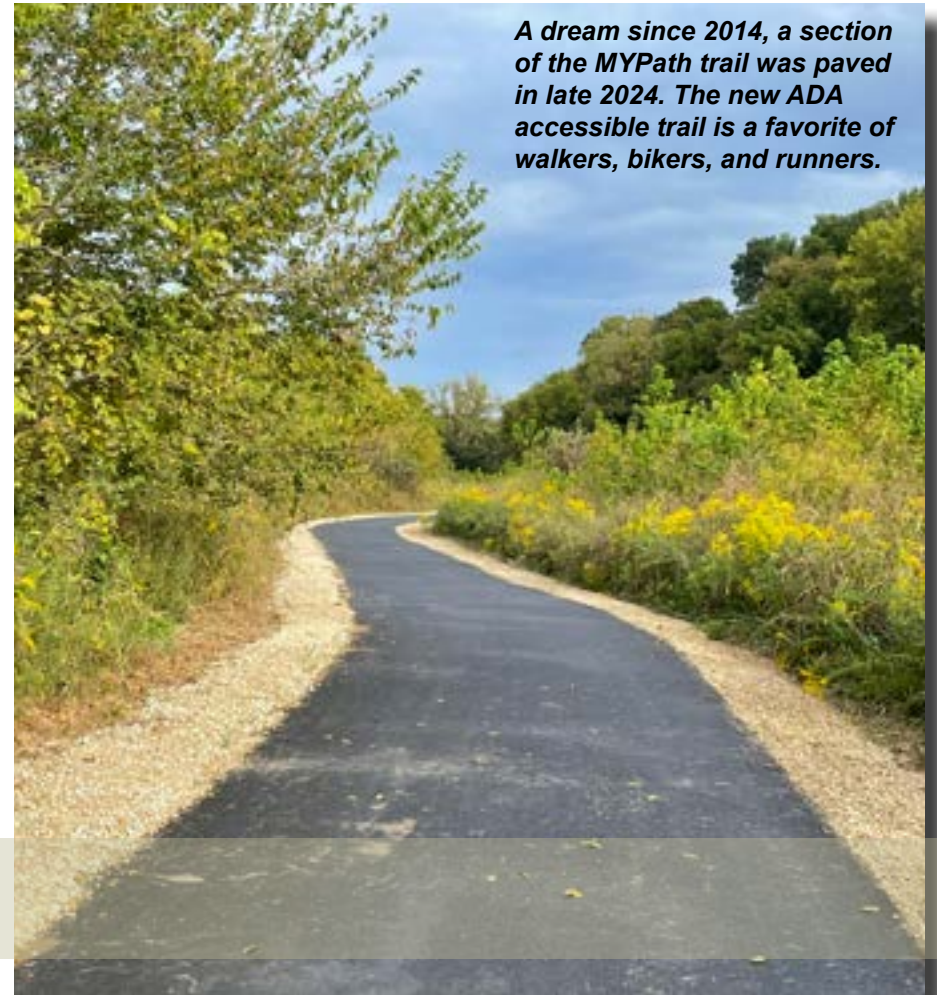
However, we are now more alert and informed about issues in our community. Our cohesion and shared vision is a byproduct of our bicentennial. We formed a committee with ambassadors from all our communities – incorporated and unincorporated – to celebrate and plan this year.

But we have also been connecting our shared resources and opportunities. People are saying they see more economic activity now than they have in decades. For example, after about 30 years of discussion, we launched a countywide effort to extend sewer lines out to SR 43, and were immediately rewarded with Hoosier Energy opening a multi-million-dollar facility with dozens of high-paying jobs. The Chamber of Commerce is enacting a robust strategic plan connecting industries throughout Owen County.

Entrepreneurs are founding their businesses in Owen – and are learning modern strategies from each other. Spencer and Gosport are revitalizing their downtowns, as you will read about in detail in other sections. Historic buildings are reoccupied and functioning with their old gusto.

Community groups, companies and governments are working together to reconnect the hidden gems of Owen, making it easier and accessible to have the full Owen County experience.

Owen County is intimately connected within the Uplands Region and with Central Indiana. Our connectivity provides access for industry, small-town life for residents and hidden gems for visitors. Our strategy of interconnection has historically worked well for Owen and will help us rise to new challenges - pulling a shared history forward and driving the future to Owen County



***A dream since 2014, a section of the MYPath trail was paved in late 2024. The new ADA accessible trail is a favorite of walkers, bikers, and runners.***

## IMPACT OF THE PARK, AND HOPE OF THE TRAIL

While Owen County has always known it was closely tied to McCormick's Creek State Park, in 2023, the economic importance of that connection became apparent.

In 1916, Owen County community leaders collected and pooled resources to purchase a section of land that houses the current Canyon Inn. That property was donated to the state, making McCormick's Creek the first state park in Indiana. Since then, the fates of the park and the community have been closely tied. A violent spring storm, March 31, 2023, destroyed the McCormick's Creek campground, killing two people and knocking over countless trees. Our community felt the impact too.

To analyze the economic cost of this disaster, Marce Johnson, CEO of the Owen County Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development, asked area businesses about the impact on shopping. In Spencer, gross revenue dropped nearly 11%. In Gosport, gross revenue dropped 25%. In 2024, as storm-damaged trails re-opened, maybe local shopping would pick up too. Instead, revenue in Spencer dropped another 1.6%, with another 17.7% drop in Gosport. These are significant losses for small businesses, impacting employment and investment in the community.

The State of Indiana has released \$25 million to rebuild the campground. We anticipate economic activity will improve, but there is another action we should take.

Since 2014, the Owen County Community Foundation has been leading an effort to connect McCormick's Creek State Park to the Family YMCA west of Spencer. The effort used shared sidewalks and streets to go through downtown Spencer and across the White River. In a partnership with the Soil and Water Conservation District, more property was added along the south side of the river.

When the Foundation was awarded a very-competitive Next Level Trails grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources the new "Riverfront Trail" was paved and a bridge over Elliston Creek was installed. Usage of the trail jumped from about 800 per month to nearly 2,000 per month.

In partnership with the IU Center For Rural Engagement and the IU O'Neill School of Public Affairs, a study was conducted on the impact of MYPath.

Based on the input of similar trails around the state and country, local users of MYPath spend between \$7.21 and \$11.33 per daily trail visit. Non-local users spend between \$13 and \$70.50 per daytrip. Overnight visitors spend between \$98 and \$176.98. By expanding the trail the economic impact will increase because more people will be attracted to MYPath for both day use and overnight visits. Currently, the end of MYPath is less than 2 miles from the McCormick's Creek State Park gatehouse.

If our community can connect to the park in time for the reopening of the campground, possibly in 2028, the economic boost will be noticeable and welcome. The improvements to health, recreation, and social connection will be just as welcome.

At the same time, Spencer has a park along the White River, Cooper Commons. It is a nice park that is enjoyed by the community. However, many communities have made rivers a central part of economic and community development. Spencer and Owen County have plans too. The Riverfront Commons proposal would activate the park for the community. The new Sweet Owen Arts Commission has helped incorporate arts into the new park design, including an amphitheater. A new water access site would allow local canoes and kayaks to enjoy the river. And MYPath would wind through the park, connecting to the Owen County Fairgrounds and the state park. Park improvements are happening and a trail would tie it all together, for the economic and recreational benefit of the entire region.



*Participant in the 2025 MYPath 5k run/walk enjoy the course which includes the giant chicken at the Owen County Fairgrounds.*

# ENGAGEMENT

Thanks to the Ready Communities process in 2019, community groups, companies, and governments worked together on our Quality of Life Advisory Team (QPAT). The plan overlapped with the Owen County Bicentennial, allowing QPAT to work with the Bicentennial Ambassadors to discuss the needs and connections of even the most remote regions of the county. Through public meetings, focus groups, and in-depth surveys, this effort was able to guide Ready Community and economic development plans for the community.

QPAT helped lay the groundwork for a new Comprehensive Plan, which was driven to completion in 2022, thanks to the hard work of the Owen County Chamber of Commerce/ Economic Development and the Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF).

Community feedback has identified many needs in the community. In 2024, OCCF dug a little deeper into particular needs, to help guide future grant spending for a Community Needs Assessment. Using Lilly VIII support, OCCF held a series of five “Solution Sessions” in different parts of the county. Based on previous community meetings, including the comprehensive plan efforts, OCCF focused the discussion on three recurring topics: Access to an Accurate, Unbiased News Source; Access to Quality Childcare/Early Learning; Parks and Recreation in Owen County. While the meetings were happening, OCCF was also providing a survey so even more community members could offer input on these topics.



*Owen County residents share ideas at the Cataract Solution Session.*

In late 2025 OCCF conducted a community survey to update the Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan. This input will help us continue to make life in Owen County the kind of life Owen County wants to live.

The Owen County Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan Survey results and the 2025 Community Needs Assessment report are appended to this document.

Members of the QPAT assembled to evaluate feedback on the previous Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan to discuss new ideas and possible solutions.

Those priorities and solutions, in addition to the survey and community meeting information, formed the updated plan.

QPAT members participating in the workshop included:

- Evan McKalip, Spencer Town Council & Parks Board & Library Board
- Hunter Stogsdill, Town Council Admin (Spencer)
- Marce Johnson, CEO, Owen County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development
- Brittany Van Nook, Owen County Library Director/Adult Education Director
- Tyler DeFord, Technology Services LLC
- Todd Gardner, President, Owen County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors & BBP Water Corps
- Jacob Balash, Spencer Pride Center
- Janet Rummel, Owen County Community Foundation President & CEO



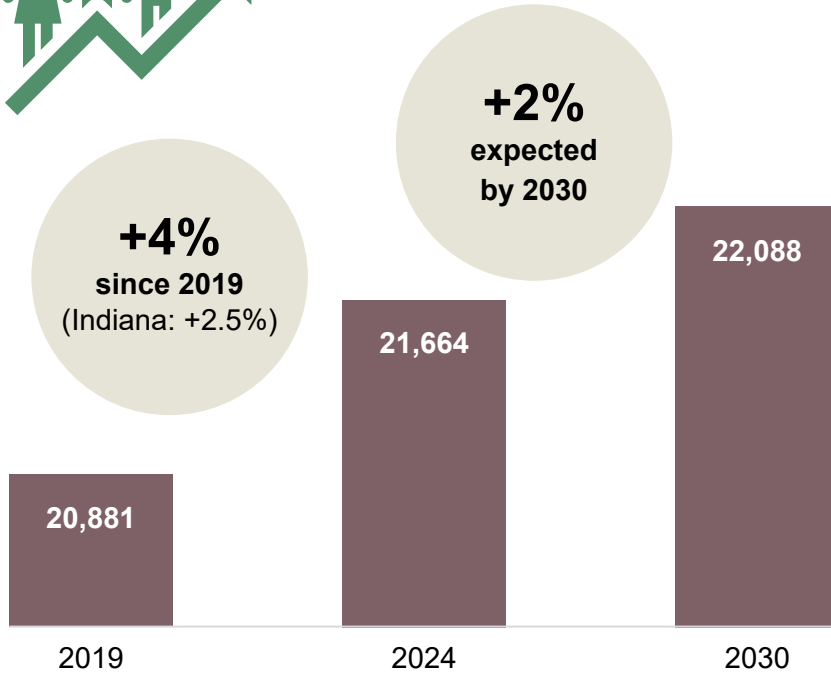
***Ron Taylor from Taylor Siefker Williams Design Group shares concept of the proposed amphitheater, based on suggestions from the new Sweet Owen Arts Commission***

# DATA PROFILE



## POPULATION CHANGE

Source: Lightcast, 2024



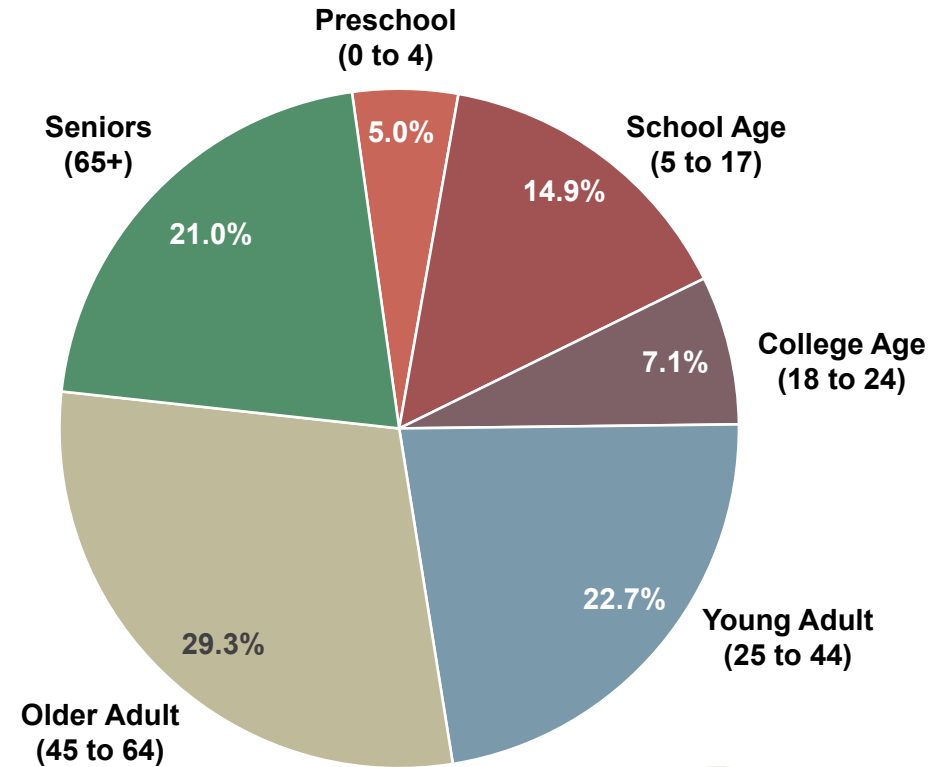
## RACE & ETHNICITY

Source: Lightcast, 2024

White	94.9%
Hispanic/Latino	1.8%
African American/Black	0.8%
Asian	0.5%

## AGE DISTRIBUTION

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023



Median age:  
**45.3**

(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



**\$59,586**

(Indiana: \$70,051)

## MEDIAN HOME SALE

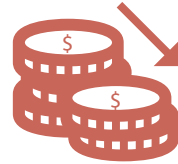
Source: Indiana Association of Realtors, 2025



**\$232,450**

## POVERTY

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



**19.7%**  
**AMONG CHILDREN**

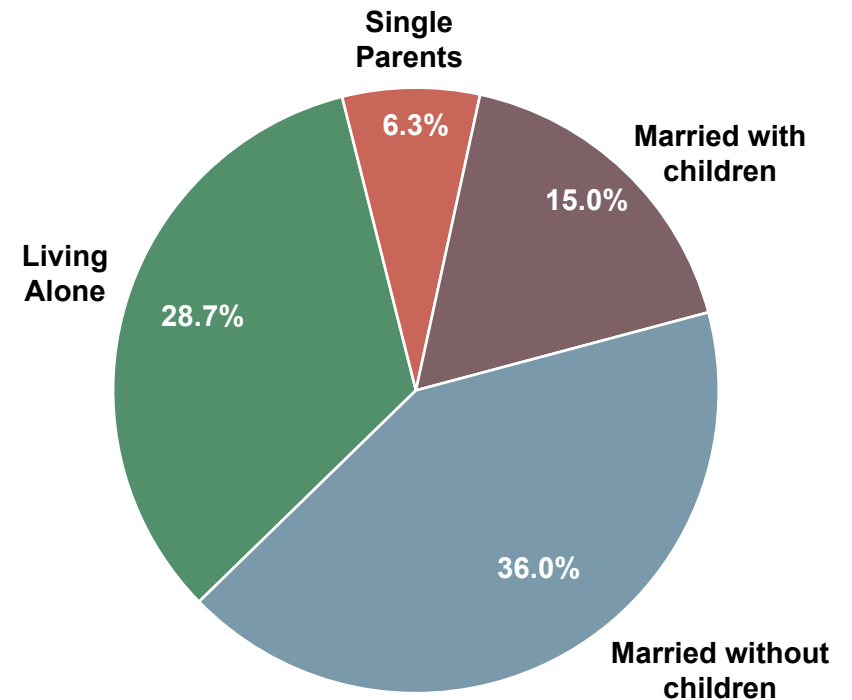
(Indiana: 15.7%)

**11.9%**  
**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



**\$7,153**

Average Annual Cost of  
Child Care in the County

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



## COMMUTING TRENDS

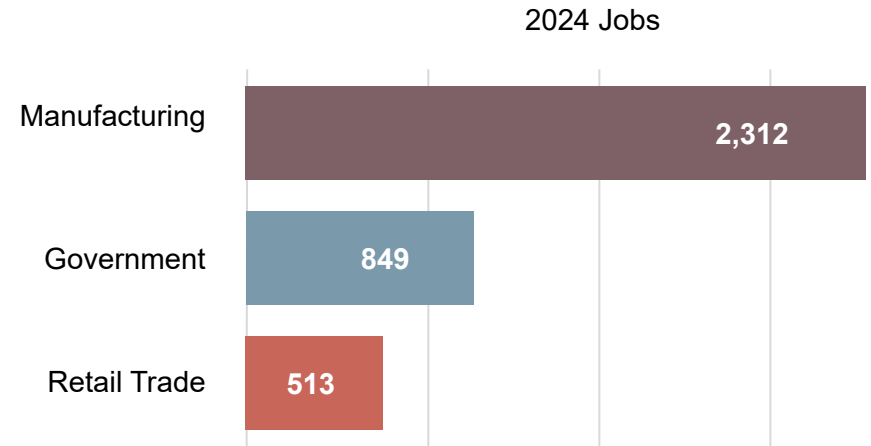
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Top Counties for Inbound Commuters	Top Counties for Outbound Commuters
Monroe	Monroe
Greene	Marion
Morgan	Putnam



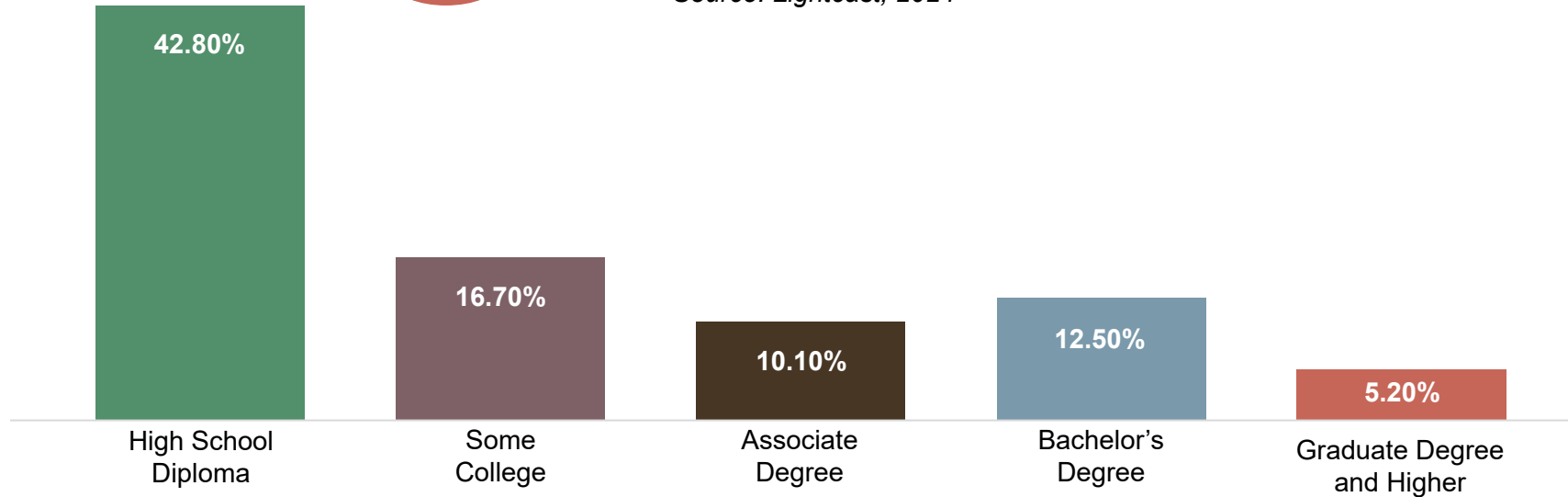
## TOP INDUSTRIES

Source: Lightcast, 2024



## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Source: Lightcast, 2024



## PROGRESS

Through the Ready Communities planning process, using feedback from residents in Owen County, local leaders were able to update the previous Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan from 2019.

The updated plan serves as the foundation for Owen County's future. It focuses on improving the quality of place for residents, highlighting the unique features and strengths of our home, the Uplands Region and promoting the county as an attractive place that values the health and prosperity of current and future generations. This plan was informed by current datasets and local stakeholder input. It will help guide elected officials, nonprofits, schools, entrepreneurs, creative professionals, employers and residents as they lead community and economic development efforts within Owen County.

Much was accomplished from the 2019 plan and it is important to document the progress that was made in many key areas. Aesthetics & Beautification Enhancements: Owen County updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2022. This monumental planning effort compliments and aligns with many of the priorities of the 2025 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction Plan. Together both plans serve as a roadmap for measuring progress in key areas that significantly impact the economic and social fabric of the county.

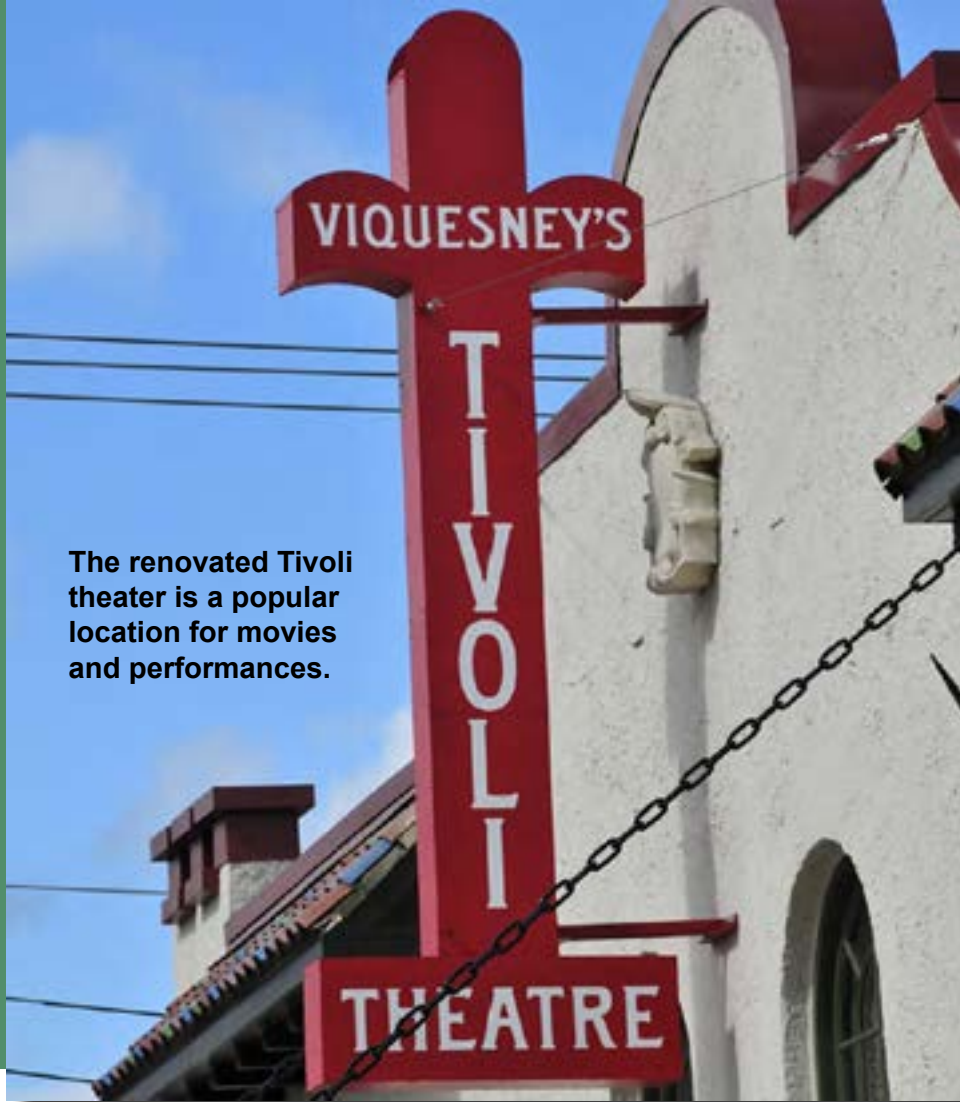
Beautification enhancements included new benches downtown and along the MYPATH trail, renewed copper dome on the county courthouse, two new downtown murals and new wayfinding signs in Spencer. Future planning and design for gateway signage into Spencer also got underway.

County connectivity through infrastructure development also made significant progress. A regional connectivity group formed called Regional Trail Advocates and portions of the MYPATH Trail system were paved. The Uniform Development Plan (UDO) was also proposed to guide future economic development areas throughout the county.

Numerous amenities and assets in the Arts, Culture, Entertainment, and Recreational spaces were started. Building on the critical number of artists and creative professionals in our county, the Sweet Owen Arts Commission (SOAC) was formed. This included hosting the first Festival of the Arts in Cooper Commons. Thanks to the influence of the SOAC, a new performance venue was undertaken as part of the proposed Cooper Commons Renovation. The planned renovation of the Cooper Commons area led to further discussions of expanding White River as a tourist destination. New pickle ball, tennis courts, and a basketball facility at the Cooper Commons were installed along with public restrooms added near the Chamber and pickle-ball courts. Another amenity targeted toward young people included the founding of the Boys and Girls Club of Owen County. Finally, The Owen News Project has been publishing a local newspaper which brings back a critical asset for sharing community news.



*The Boys and Girls Club of Owen County began offering services in the community.*



**The renovated Tivoli theater is a popular location for movies and performances.**

In the important area of Education and Workforce Development (including childcare), The Exchange, an entrepreneurial co-working space at the Owen County Chamber opened. Offerings such as economic gardening, tailored workshops, personalized mentoring, and higher education courses are available to all county residents.

Since 2019, new child care options opened but then many were closed due to state cuts to vouchers for parents. However, local and regional work continues in the child care space to find immediate and long-term solutions for families and employers.

Catalytic projects occurred in the Housing and Utilities Infrastructure space with the opening of the Cook and Four Oaks Neighborhoods for single family homes. Thanks to the State of Indiana's Regional Acceleration and Development Initiatives (READI) program,

Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) designated \$1.9 million toward Texas Pike Place, a single-family housing neighborhood that will be phased in up to 300 homes offered for sale. Significant sewer and water lines were extended to accommodate this new residential development.

Finally, Health Wellness & Safety continue to be areas where county leaders will build on the foundation of important service providers such as the Area 10 Agency on Aging and the numerous health and rehab facilities. Rural health access looks to be a growing issue in the years ahead.

Thanks to the priorities and solutions identified in the 2019 Quality of Place and Workforce Attraction plan, numerous, tangible results were achieved. The 2025 plan will pick up where many of these important projects, programs and initiatives left off and continue to build on the momentum achieved.

# SUCCESS STORY

## Corporate, Community Partnership Brings New Homes to Owen County

Like many communities, Spencer and Owen County have been trying to figure out how to provide housing that will attract residents to the area. Potential homeowners have been seeking new houses at a price they can afford. And employers have been asking for new housing so their workers can find an affordable place to live, close to their jobs.

### What if they all worked together?

Thanks to the State of Indiana's Regional Acceleration and Development Initiatives (READI) program, Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) designated \$1.9 million toward Texas Pike Place, a single-family housing neighborhood. Eventually, up to 300 homes will be offered for sale.

Local government extended significant sewer and water lines to accommodate this new residential development. The properties are sold through CFC Properties, a division of Cook. Buyers apply through CFC, who prevents people from "flipping" so a certain level of affordability can be maintained. The houses are 1,100 – 1,800 square feet, have 2-3 bedrooms, and sit on approximately 1/3 acre lots.

Recently, a new market-rate housing development was opened on the east side of the county. A partnership of Owen County business leaders established the Four Oaks development to provide variety of new homes.

These new housing developments answer some of the housing needs of a growing Owen County. Of course, housing continues to be a challenge in the Uplands Region. Community leaders remain committed to finding a variety of solutions.



*New housing developments in Owen County will help the community's efforts to attract residents and employers' efforts to attract employees. The Cook workforce housing development on Texas Pike takes shape. This is one of two new housing developments in Owen County.*

# ASSETS

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## **AESTHETICS AND BEAUTIFICATION**

- Updated Comprehensive Plan
- New benches downtown and along MYPATH
- Renewed copper dome on courthouse
- Two new downtown murals
- White River Public Access Point
- Planning and design for gateway in Spencer
- New Wayfinding signs
- 

## **EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

- Spencer-Owen Community School Corporation
- The Exchange, entrepreneurial and small business, co-working space offered through the Owen County Chamber of Commerce
- Boys & Girls Club of Owen County

## **ARTS, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION**

- Historic Spencer Courthouse Square and numerous small businesses
- Sweet Owen Arts Commission formed to work with local artists and arts organizations.
- Cooper's Commons activation plan
- Gosport Town Park
- Tivoli Theater
- Cataract Falls State Recreation Area & Covered Bridge
- McCormick's Creek State Park
- Lieber State Recreation Area
- Numerous festivals: Coal City, Gosport Lazy Days, Patriot, Spencer Pride, Apple Butter, Vandalia Strawberry, Arts in the Park

## **CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

- MYPATH expansion
- Owen County is a broadband ready community

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

- Area 10 Agency on Aging
- Health and Rehab facilities
- Extensive trail system along with local and state parks

## **HOUSING & UTILITIES INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Cook Neighborhood
- Four Oaks Neighborhood
- New sewer and water line expansion

# PRIORITIES

## Objective 01

### Aesthetics & Beautification Enhancements

#### STATEMENT:

In survey after survey and meeting after meeting, Owen County residents cite the natural beauty of the area as one of the things they love about living here. It is natural, then, that beauty and aesthetics be incorporated in public spaces.

Owen County is blessed with many artists. It is also fortunate that a major river runs through the County Seat.

Plans to renovate Cooper Commons park in Spencer would help residents activate the beauty and recreational utility of the river. At the same time, local artists can help transform Cooper Commons into an arts park that will encourage outside visitors as well as provide enjoyment for locals.

#### WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

With beautification and river enhancements, Spencer and Owen County can attract more visitors and economic activity at the same time instilling a sense of pride in the appearance in the community.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- White River currently underutilized
- Current grant application would enable community to upgrade the park
- White River floods, but careful planning will allow improvements to survive
- Recent murals on the sides of buildings are well-received
- Proposed archway would encourage more visitors

# PRIORITIES

## Objective 02

Connectivity  
Infrastructure  
Development

### STATEMENT:

Since MYPath was paved in late 2024, trail usage has increased dramatically, art and gathering spots have been added, and the community can imagine the benefits of connecting the trail to McCormick's Creek State Park, and beyond. Recent studies have shown the positive economic impact of MYPath, that will only get better as the trail expands.

And as MYPath grows in popularity, users wonder what it might be like if water recreation was improved, as outlined in the proposed Cooper Commons renovation. While recreation is an important draw for future development and residents, broadband access can be the final incentive to make Owen County home.

### WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Expanding a trail network has been a priority in Owen County since at least 2014. Residents are eager for the recreational, economic, and development opportunities that come with trail projects. We are very close to reaching McCormick's Creek SP. Let's finish the job.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Trail is currently less than 2 miles from the McCormick's Creek gatehouse.
- Monroe County is working to bring a trail next to the Owen County line.
- White River is underutilized.
- Broadband access is nearly complete.

# PRIORITIES

## Objective 03

### Arts, Culture, Entertainment, and Recreation

#### STATEMENT:

Arts, culture, and recreation are a draw for visitors, as the same time they are enjoyable activities for local residents. Owen County has a lot of artists and arts organizations. With the help of a newly formed Sweet Owen Arts Commission, artists will have more opportunities for displays and activities.

The proposed Cooper Commons renovation will provide even more events and activities for locals, and visitors, to enjoy visual and performing arts.

#### WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Arts are a proven quality-of-life enhancement. Art activities attract visitors and economic activity to the community.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Sweet Owen Arts Commission has been established
- Proposed Cooper Commons renovation could become an arts park
- Art shows and art events could attract visitors and economic activity to the community
- Expanding White River as a tourist destination was proposed solution in one of the brainstorming session.

# PRIORITIES

## Objective 04

### Education and Workforce Development (including childcare)

#### STATEMENT:

Taking care of our children, from early childhood through their careers, is one of the most important things we can do as a community.

Like many rural communities, Owen County is susceptible to limited child care and career opportunities. Fortunately, we have an engaged school system and companies that are good corporate citizens.

Together, we can find solutions.

#### WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

- Limited child-care options threatens families' ability to participate in the workforce.
- Owen County suffers from low educational attainment of its residents.
- Educational and workforce opportunity impact the livability of the community.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Child-care voucher cuts have reduced already limited options.
- The Community Foundation has access to grants for educational attainment.
- We have two major employers in the growing life-sciences sector.
- Our chamber of commerce stands ready to nurture entrepreneurial endeavors.

# PRIORITIES

## Objective 05

### Housing and Utilities Infrastructure

#### STATEMENT:

Like most of the country, Owen County faces a lack of quality, affordable housing options. Fortunately, Cook Biomedical has invested in quality housing options for its workforce. Recently, the Four Oaks subdivision was created to provide even more housing to the community. Housing development can be held in check by lack of sewers and water services. But the community has shown a willingness to expand.

#### WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

For Owen County to grow and attract families to our community, we need places for them to call home.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Two new housing subdivisions are active.
- As Owen County develops housing, our community becomes an option for job development in neighboring counties.
- Local governments have demonstrated a willingness to work toward expanding necessary utilities as needed.

# PRIORITIES

## Objective 06

### Health Wellness & Safety

#### STATEMENT:

Owen County residents, as a whole, tend to be less healthy than many Hoosiers. Health issues lead to expensive medical care and impact quality-of-life. Lack of access to medical care continues to trouble rural communities.

By working with partners in the health care and senior mobility sector, at the same time we work on wellness initiatives, we can ensure Owen County is a place people can live a long, healthy life.

#### WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Owen County has an aging population. We are trying to encourage a younger population to move here. In both cases, access to health care and access to healthy lifestyle facilities are vital.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Lack of access to health care is an issue in the entire region.
- Area 10 agency on aging is able to provide transportation for seniors.
- Improvements in recreational facilities will provide more options for a healthy lifestyle.

# SOLUTIONS

As outlined in the Progress section above, the Owen County Community has achieved many of the proposed solutions from the previous plan. But there is more to do.

Aesthetics & Beautification enhancements will be served by a renovated Cooper Commons that will connect the community to its waterfront. In near-by downtown, continue the artistic improvements that has included two new murals and could include a gateway to the community.

## Objective 01

### Aesthetics & Beautification Enhancements

#### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

##### 1.1 Complete Cooper Commons renovation strategy.

**1.1.1** Complete Cooper Commons renovation. The park will be a major regional attraction and will also complete waterway connections as outlined in Objective 2.

##### 1.2 Promote place branding

**1.2.1** Install a new welcoming archway.

##### 1.3 Continue downtown revitalization.

**1.3.1** Create program to encourage property owners to improve the attractiveness of their property.

**1.3.2** Encourage more window painting, facade improvements, and murals. Work with the Arts Commission in Objective 3

#### PARTNERS

- Local government
- Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF)
- Chamber Economic Development
- Sweet Owen Arts Commission
- Downtown Spencer
- Owen County Redevelopment Commission (RDC)

#### PERFORMANCE MEASURES

**1.1** Did we achieve the grant

**1.1** Stages of completion

**1.2** Did we achieve funding?

**1.2** Stages of construction

**1.3** Plans identified

**1.3** Survey of owners on economic impact (can be combined with trail survey too)

#### STATUS

**1.1** In Progress  
(plans complete,  
not started)

**1.2** In Progress  
(20% complete)

**1.3** Planning

#### TIMELINE

**1.1** MT

**1.2** ST

**1.3** MT

# SOLUTIONS

With the recent paving of MYPath, a regional trail network is taking shape that will bring economic impact to the community. At the same time it will improve community health, recreation, and gathering as well as transportation alternatives.

A proposal to upgrade Cooper Commons offers recreational and water transportation development opportunities.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

### 2.1 Enhance Trail Connectivity

**2.1.1** Collaborate with regional partners to connect trail network.

**2.1.2** Complete MYPath connection to McCormick’s Creek State Park

### 2.2 Leverage Water Trail Assets

**2.2.1** Complete Cooper Commons renovation to connect people, commerce, and arts with Spencer’s historic waterway.

### 2.3 Broadband access countywide

**2.3.1** Offer more broadband options to Spencer residents.

**2.3.2** Assist more residents in connecting to broadband.

## STATUS

**2.1.1** In Progress  
(25% complete)

**2.2.1** Planning

**2.3.1** In Progress  
(85% complete)

**2.1.2** In Progress  
(75% complete)

**2.3.2** In Progress  
(75% complete)

## TIMELINE

**2.1.1** MT  
**2.1.2** ST

**2.2.1** ST

**2.3.1** MT  
**2.3.2** MT

## Objective 02

### Connectivity Infrastructure Development

## PARTNERS

- Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF)
- Chamber and Economic Development
- Town of Spencer
- County Commissioners and Council

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

**2.1** Number of connected miles

**2.1** Increased trail use as recorded on trail counters.

**2.1.2** Funding secured

**2.1.2** Construction progress

**2.2** Measured progress toward completion of Cooper Commons renovation.

**2.3** Number of homes connected

**2.3** Number of homes connected to broadband.

# SOLUTIONS

As recommended in previous reports, the Sweet Owen Arts Commission was created at the end of 2024 to assist Owen County artists and promote the artistic culture in Owen County.

Already, artists have begun to display work along MYPath. A newly renovated Cooper Commons will provide even more opportunity for the display and presentation of local art. SOAC suggests Cooper Commons become an Arts Park.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

### 3.1 Increase recreational tourism.

**3.1** Assist local performance venues to work together on regional promotions.

### 3.2 Maximize festivals and events.

**3.2.1** Complete Cooper Commons revitalization, which would include at new community amphitheater influenced by the Sweet Owen Arts Commission.

**3.2.2** Promote Cooper Commons revitalization as a way to access water activities and arts.

**3.2.3** Host additional Festival of the Arts through the Sweet Owen Arts Commission.

### 3.3 Promote arts and culture.

**3.3.1** Encourage more murals on buildings.

**3.3.2** Promote events so local artists are rewarded financially.

## TIMELINE

3.1 ST

3.2.1 MT

3.2.2 MT

3.2.3 ST

## Objective 03

Arts, Culture,  
Entertainment,  
and Recreation

## PARTNERS

- Sweet Owen Arts Commission (SOAC)
- Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF)
- Chamber and Economic Development
- Local governments
- Local artists
- Downtown Spencer

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

**3.1** Number of attendees at performances

**3.2.1** Funding secured for amphitheater. Number of attendees at events.

**3.2.2** Secure funding for project. Number of boats using water access. Number of people visiting park.

**3.2.3** Attendance at Festival of Arts. Number of vendors at Festival of Arts.

## STATUS

**3.1** Planning

**3.2.2** Planning

**3.2.1** In Progress 50%  
(Plans complete.  
Funding and construction  
have not begun)

**3.2.3** Complete

# SOLUTIONS

As recommended in previous reports, the Sweet Owen Arts Commission was created at the end of 2024 to assist Owen County artists and promote the artistic culture in Owen County.

Already, artists have begun to display work along MYPATH. A newly renovated Cooper Commons will provide even more opportunity for the display and presentation of local art. SOAC suggests Cooper Commons become an Arts Park.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

### 4.1 Career development for the workforce

- 4.1.1 Continue school to work programs at high school
- 4.1.2 Work with local companies to identify needed training.
- 4.1.3 Higher educational attainment

### 4.2 Increase childcare options

- 4.2.1 Work with local employers on childcare options that serve their employees.
- 4.2.2 Work with schools on childcare options.

### 4.3 Foster small businesses and entrepreneurs

- 4.3.1 Support Chamber/EDC efforts to grow small business

## STATUS

4.1.1 Complete	4.2.1 Planning
4.1.2 In Progress 25%	4.2.2 In Progress (25% complete)
4.1.3 Complete, just needs to be utilized.	4.3.1 Complete. Programs need to be utilized.

## TIMELINE

4.1 ST	4.2 MT	4.3 ST
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## Objective 04

### Education and Workforce Development (including childcare)

## PARTNERS

- Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF)
- Chamber and Economic Development
- School systems
- Indiana Small Business Development Center (ISBDC)
- Ivy Tech Community College
- Indiana University
- Childcare providers

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 4.1.1 Job placements for high school graduates
- 4.1.2 Number of apprenticeships or other student/employer partnerships
- 4.1.3 Number of high school graduates attending college or training programs
- 4.2.1 Increased number of childcare options
- 4.2.2 Increased number of child readiness programs offered at schools
- 4.3.1 Number of tenants at the Exchange. Number of participants in business development programs

# SOLUTIONS

The Cook housing development on Texas Pike and the new Four Oaks subdivision are examples of new housing options in Owen County. Continue to explore wastewater and stormwater mitigation that will encourage more housing.

**Objective 05**

Housing and  
Utilities  
Infrastructure

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS			
<b>5.1 Determine wastewater and stormwater shortcomings.</b>			
5.1.1 Conduct study of wastewater and stormwater capacity.			
<b>5.2 Identify options for floodwater mitigation</b>			
5.2.1 Conduct study of floodplanes.			
<b>5.3 Continue promoting value of housing investment in Owen County</b>			
5.3.1 Refine marketing to developers			

PARTNERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Government</li> <li>Local Realtors</li> <li>Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF)</li> <li>Chamber and Economic Development</li> </ul>

STATUS	5.1, 5.2 Planning	5.3 In Progress (75% complete)
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PERFORMANCE MEASURES
5.1, 5.2 Completion of wastewater and stormwater plans.
5.3 Number of new housing units

TIMELINE	5.1 MT	5.2 MT	5.3 ST
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# SOLUTIONS

Owen County is less-healthy than many Indiana Counties. Some of the problem is lack of access to health care. The lack of access to recreational opportunities is another shortcoming.

Objective 06

Health  
Wellness &  
Safety

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 6.1 Partner with health providers to promote physical activity.**
  - 6.1.1** Encourage health providers to use MYPath, the YMCA, the track at the high school, and area parks for physical activity for patients.
  - 6.1.2** Partner with Health Department on events and development at the above-mentioned resources.
- 6.2 Partner with health providers to increase public health knowledge.**
  - 6.2.1** Find additional outlets for sharing health information with targeted populations.
- 6.3 Provide transportation for elderly residents**
  - 6.3.1** Continue to work with Area 10 Agency on Aging

## PARTNERS

- Owen County Community Foundation (OCCF)
- Chamber and Economic Development
- Owen County Health Department
- IU Health
- YMCA
- Area 10 Agency on Aging

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 6.1.1, 6.1.2** Attendance at healthy activity events
- 6.2.1** Number of distributed health materials.
- 6.3** Usage of Area 10 transportation
- All** Increase in health statistics for County

<b>STATUS</b>	<b>6.1.1</b> Planning	<b>6.2.1</b> Planning
	<b>6.1.2</b> Planning	<b>6.3</b> Complete

<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>6.1.1</b> ST	<b>6.1.2</b> ST	<b>6.2.1</b> ST



**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

## QUALITY OF PLACE AND WORKFORCE ATTRACTION SURVEY RESULTS



# APPENDIX B

## 2025 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

