

# **Project Report**

From Bland to a Brand:  
Wells County and its Tourism and Leisure Potential

Presented to  
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Development

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## Table of Contents

I.	<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	2
II.	<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	3
III.	<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	4
	a. Major Findings.....	4
	b. Recommendations.....	8
	c. Major Strategic Considerations.....	16
IV.	<b>Introduction</b> .....	20
	a. General Intro and Background and Methods.....	20
	b. The Team.....	22
	c. Details of the Site Visit .....	23
	d. SWOT of Wells County’s Recreational/Tourism Potential.....	26
V.	<b>Consideration: The Innkeeper’s Tax</b> .....	30
VI.	<b>Overview and Methodology of Online Survey</b> .....	35
VII.	<b>Recommended Roadmap to Development</b> .....	49
VIII.	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	56
IX.	<b>Appendices</b> .....	59
	I. Data and Background Info on Wells County and Environs.....	59
	II. Portfolio, Examples of Other Events in Other Places.....	63
	III. Examples of Efforts to Develop Tourism in Other Rural Areas.....	65
	IV. Cities/Towns in Indiana with Walking Tours.....	67
	V. Online Questionnaire.....	69
	VI. Online Questionnaire Responses (Quantitative) .....	73
	VII. Online Questionnaire Responses (Open-Ended) .....	79
	VIII. Tourism Success Stories, Events and Tourism Authorities.....	95



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Major Findings

1. Wells County is well on its way to building a strong infrastructure for leisure, recreation, and tourism. The questions remain to decide what the priorities are and whether to create institutions to support them or rely on a laissez-faire approach.
2. Wells County has something to offer those inside the county and outside the county, and every effort should be made to make it easy to find interesting things to do in the county for the benefit of the locals and to encourage visitors to stay and spend more time and money in the county.
3. Wells County has some potential to attract visitors, as some other rural places have done (see Appendix for some examples). It is just a matter of finding the right way of attracting visitors and encouraging them to stay longer in Wells County and spend money in the county.
4. Wells County residents have a desire for more things to do, according to the findings of the survey and discussions with residents during the site visit. Facilities and events for locals can also be utilized for visitors, but primarily, facilities and activities should be designed with the ultimate goal of increasing the quality of life for the residents of the county.
5. Wells County has two major economic hubs. One is the Bluffton/State Park area and the other is Ossian. The major hub (Bluffton/State Park) is what visitors will find most interesting because the State Park is highly developed and it has close proximity to



the biggest town in the county (and it needs amenities to encourage visitors to stay and spend money), although Ossian has potential for general economic development.

6. There is an impressive volunteer spirit and sense of community service in the population in Wells County, something that should be seen as an asset of the county.
7. There is a demand for the development of Bluffton, specifically to create leisure opportunities for locals and visitors. Many notice the lack of restaurants and pleasant/interesting shops in Bluffton. There appears to be a substantial latent demand for quality food, brewpubs, and ice cream parlors in Bluffton, as locals frequently lament the poor food choices in the county and Bluffton, in particular.
8. There are a great number of facilities available to the local population already but there is also a demand for more facilities that may be larger and offer different activities, or something that may be used for facilities for substantial sports meetups. However, because of the small local population and distance from major population hubs, it is very risky to invest in something largescale, such as Yeadon dome<sup>1</sup> that would enable 12 month a year indoor sports but cost one and a half million dollars or so, depending on the size chosen. Smaller scale facilities are less risky financially and politically, but admittedly have more limitations in terms of potential usage.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.yeadondomes.com/>



9. There is demand for more development north of the river in Bluffton. There may be some logic to developing more baseball/softball facilities there to attract visitors for sports events.
10. The local population values the Public Library and it obviously improves the quality of life of the residents. There may be a way to make this institution relevant to visitors driving through the county.
11. The county is not on a major thoroughfare or in a catchment area in which it could expect a great deal of casual visitors to come. The only natural flow of potential visitors are the snowbirds who visit the State Park. Encouraging those visitors to stay a bit longer in the county would be helpful for local businesses, especially those providing quality food and some entertainment.
12. The Street Fair is the mega-event for the county that pulls in dollars from many visitors and enhances the quality of life of the locals. There are smaller events and series of events that also contribute to the quality of life of the locals, but what is missing are events that are attractive enough to outsiders to make them come out of their way to visit the county.
13. There is history and culture in Wells County, but it needs to be developed intentionally to make locals aware and proud, creating a sense of identity.
14. The History Museum is noble and has excellent potential. To make it more attractive to visitors, some interpretation and modern enhancements should be put in place, especially to make the museum attractive to younger visitors.



15. The KOA camping grounds is a problem. While KOA is part of the network of camping, it currently is mostly used as housing for low-income populations and travelling labor working on projects in Wells County. Its proximity to the facility in the State Park means it is in competition with a more pleasant camping facility in a state park. How to make it more attractive to visitors is a challenge, although the management seems to make serious attempts to attract a different clientele. It may remain a venue to cater to the groups that it currently serves.



## Recommendations

1. **Create a Tourism Authority:** An authority with responsibility for tourism and leisure/recreation development is needed. What form such an authority takes, is a strategic question that should not be taken lightly.
2. **Institute an Innkeeper's Tax:** While no one likes paying taxes, a modest tax that will largely exclude the local electorate but not dissuade people from staying in Wells County could help support the tourism authority created.
3. **Make it Easy to Find Information:** A central authority that could disseminate information about what there is to do and see in Wells County would enable those who are interested to easily find out what is happening and what there is to see and do. A website with up-to-date information about events, restaurants, and attractions would be useful to locals and visitors. A free map would do the same. Social media should be able to do the same. A person looking to purchase local crafts or wishing to visit historical attractions should find it easy to find such information.
4. **Manufacture and Promote Local Charm:** Wells County has much going for it. It is a good place to live and work and a place with history. Reminding people of its history and creating a brand based upon small town/rural charm, quality of life, and history can create civic pride and identity. It is not an urban metropolis and it is not a multicultural mecca; it is what it is and it should be promoted for what it is.
5. **Keep up with Events:** There is a strong start in terms of events both big and small, but a smattering of other events could help. One major recurring theme is the lack of





things to do and go to; events of various sizes can assist in this. While the big Street Fair is the major event in the county and there are a number of other noteworthy events, such as the series of events done by Bluffton Parks, more medium sized events could be developed. Hopefully, events that would link into something of the heritage of the county, such as an iris/flower festival, bison festival, or pretzel festival which could help bolster a sense of identity in the community.

6. **Develop Downtown Bluffton:** Since it is the capital and home to about a third of the population of the county, it is the economic heart of the county and natural social center. The creation of public space near the courthouse is a good start and offers opportunities for public events. But smaller businesses such as restaurants, craft beer outlets, and other activities, such as the axe throwing business, need to be encouraged.
7. **Develop the Farmer's Market in Bluffton:** While such a market is an obvious place for local businesses to sell their wares, the one in Bluffton is not thriving. A serious effort should be done to find out how it can thrive. One possible suggestion would be to have a permanent structure, such as a small shelter so that vendors could have a covered place to show their wares, making it slightly easier for them to set up their tables for sales. There could be other factors at work, but it is an obvious place to help smaller businesses sell and encourage knowledge about the breadth of small businesses and unique businesses in the county.



8. **Signage:** Signs help drivers know where things are. It should be easy to find the state park and a visual, such as a bison on a sign, may intrigue the casual driver going through town. People should be able to follow signs and know what they are looking at. For example, there should be signs showing drivers how to find the Five Points School, as it is a bit out of the way. All major attractions should have some signage to attract the casual driver passing through.
9. **Make the Courthouse Visible:** Driving north into downtown Bluffton, some of the branches of the trees obscure the view of the courthouse. Since the courthouse is iconic, it should be as visible as possible. The trimming of some of the branches should make it a bit more visible to those driving through the county, impressing them with the beauty of this central piece of architecture and encouraging people to stop, see it and possibly eat in a local eatery. This may be done without sacrificing any trees, as the trees too are part of the beauty of Bluffton/Wells County.
10. **Think of the Snowbirds:** One of the streams of outside visitors into the county are the snowbirds, many who stay in the State Park on their trip from the north (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ontario...) to Florida. Some stay longer than they had planned, since the accommodations at the State Park are so pleasant. Looking into what this mobile population would like to see in the area to encourage them to stay longer could be looked into. As it is one of the segments of visitors in Wells County that seems to have money and time, providing them with leisure activities that would be of interest to them may be a good way to increase revenue from visitors.



- 11. Develop the Ossian Economic Hub:** The Bluffton/State Park hub are interconnected and should be developed in ways to gain synergies for both. But Ossian is different and should be developed further as a bedroom community, bringing money from outside to purchase housing and develop the town for the benefit of the entire county. There should be some priorities put into economic development of Ossian, such as the development of bike trails there, as this will make it more attractive to those working outside of the county who will purchase housing and goods/services in Wells County.
- 12. Make Events that are Attractive to Outsiders:** While there is an impressive array of events available to the population in Wells County, more can always be done. One thing that could be done is thinking about a portfolio of events. While the Street Fair is obviously the signature event of Wells County, other mid-sized events can be developed, especially those that would be attractive to outsiders. For example, a 5K event would not be as bombastic or massively attended as the Street Fair, but it would attract visitors from the outside who would, inadvertently, spend money. The other small-scale events (such as films in the park in Bluffton) seem appropriate and great to boost the quality of life, but something bigger and more memorable could also be added (Iris festival, 5K, or anything else) to attract outsiders and give locals something different or interesting to do. An appendix illustrates some novel or interesting events held elsewhere. Only the imagination limits what can be done.



- 13. Encourage Synergies between the State Park and Bluffton:** Since both are so close together, those staying at the State Park, a natural magnet for visitors from outside the county, should have ample information available on what things are available for leisure and recreation in Bluffton. In a like manner, those passing through Bluffton should be made aware of what the State Park has to offer.
- 14. Modernize the Museum:** The museum is a great asset. Not every town or county has something so impressive. However, it needs to be modernized in ways that create more interpretive history and a more interactive experience. At present, it is a repository for artifacts, resembling to some extent a crowded antique shop. However, it is more and can be perceived of as more with a variety of interactive and interpretive displays, some of which may be digital. This would make the history appear to be more relevant and alive to the visitors.
- 15. Make a Documentary about the History of Wells County:** A documentary about the history of the county is needed. The documentary could be shown at an outdoor showing in Bluffton. It could also be uploaded onto YouTube, shown in classrooms, and made available for rental at the library. Such a documentary would assist in creating a sense of history and pride in the county. It could also be part of an exhibit in the museum. Ball State University should help to make it happen.
- 16. Exploit the Courthouse and the Area Around it:** Utilize the area around the courthouse to promote a sense of history and culture in Wells County. A mural, statues, memorials, and other art forms can be used to do this. Make the courthouse



an attraction in itself. It is a functioning building, but it is also a beautiful and iconic building for the county. There should be information on it, a virtual tour of it, history of its construction, and possibly a guided tour.

17. **Create a Self-Guided Walking Tour of Bluffton:** Since Bluffton is not a massive city, it is ideal for walking tours. Such tours give visitors a reason to meander around, inform them of the history and architecture and encourage spending money in the town center. Such tours are not particularly revolutionary and examples of such tours are available in an appendix at the end of this document.
18. **Ask for Help from Educational Institutions:** Ask for more assistance from Ball State University or other educational institutions nearby, as they have expertise and talent. Some talent may be more useful than others and some of it will be cheaper than others, but it is unlikely that higher educational institutions will refuse to help. In fact, it is likely the institutions will be enthusiastic about helping.
19. **Invest in Recreation Along the Wabash River:** The Wabash River is a major natural asset of Wells County, and if more of an investment were made into it, then that would provide more recreational opportunities for visitors as well as residents. Designated landing sites would provide people with areas to dock their canoes/kayaks for picnics or to stop and take a rest, thus making a canoe/kayak trip more leisurely and appealing. The creation of rental shops for kayaks, canoes, paddleboats, and fishing equipment, and also ones for bicycles and rollerblades along the River Greenway, should also be encouraged to appeal to visitors passing



through and residents who do not have their own equipment. Even an upscale restaurant using the river view as an attraction would use the river as an asset to enhance a dining experience.

**20. Encourage Diversification of Agriculture and other “Rural” Products:** Since Wells County is very rural, being rural and having a strong agricultural base is one of its strengths. Creating a rural product would include making products that are linked with agriculture, although corn and soy alone would have limited appeal for consumers as local products. However, quality/craft/organic butter, milk, yogurt, ice cream, maple products, honey, wine, or other things linked with rural production would have value, especially if linked together on an agricultural route on a map, showing where consumers and visitors can purchase these things. Lengerich Meats is a good example of something that creates quality products that have an appeal to visitors. If such a place could be linked on a map/route with other places such as wineries, craft/organic cheese, ice cream, maple syrup, and other local manufactures, it would give an interesting route for visitors to follow and spend their money on local products. It would also be good for locals to know about what things are available from local manufacturers in the county.

**21. Encourage Downstream Manufacturing of Local Products:** Producing milk locally would be attractive to health-aware local consumers. But downstream production would add value to the product and create a rainbow of choices for consumers. For example, a local dairy could produce milk, butter, yogurt, cheese,



cheese curds, and ice cream. Each of these products would enhance the choices for consumers. Even the processing of deer at Lengerich Meats would offer downstream manufacturing that would be of interest to visitors, such as the preparation of deer pelts as rugs, the making of deerskin moccasins, and other downstream products.

**22. Encourage Local Production and Consumption:** Encouraging people to buy local is a trend. Making it known what exists locally will encourage local production, as well as encourage visitors to spend more time and money in Wells County. This will be a virtuous cycle in which there is more local production, more local consumption of local goods, increased consumption by visitors, and more choices to all consumers.



## Major Strategic Considerations

1. **The Political Organization of a Tourism Authority:** The creation of a formal organization to centralize authority with regards to marketing what the county has to offer would go a long way towards coordination of marketing of recreation, leisure, and tourism. To continue with a laissez-faire approach, assuming the market will find the solutions will be a mistake, as the free market is unlikely to produce websites, maps, and social media that will disseminate information to citizens in Wells County and beyond. Wells County can continue without a tourism authority of some sort, but an organization dedicated to tourism in the county can ensure that information is available to all and may not cost much to the locals. Locals and non-locals will benefit from easy-to-access information/promotional materials.
2. **The Home of the Tourism Authority:** While it seems almost necessary to create a dedicated tourism authority of some sort, there are choices for where it is to be housed, in an institutional sense. The choice of how to do it will lead to different costs and flexibility of the organization. The choice is highly political, as it may be seen as costly or an inappropriate use of resources, especially for something that is hard to measure the success of in the short term. The major logical choices and their strengths and weaknesses are:
  - a. **Create an Independent Destination Marketing Organization/Visitors Bureau:** A dedicated organization of 1-3 people could coordinate





information from the various organizations creating events in Wells County, and market events, services, and facilities. Setting up such an organization as a non-profit will cost some money as a startup, but it will have the legitimacy of being an independent legal entity and will be able to market the leisure, recreation, and tourism products and services that Wells County has in an unbiased way. An independent authority will also be seen as an equal to other authorities externally and be able to coordinate, cooperate, and network as an equal with other Destination Marketing Organizations.

b. **Use a Pre-existing Organization's Cover for a Responsible Tourism**

**Marketing Authority:** A Chamber of Commerce, NOW, or other pre-existing authority would work in ways with a responsible tourism officer. The benefit of this would be cost savings, as the organization exists as a legal entity and will cut costs in terms of operations with regards to accounting, payroll, and other operational expenses that a normal organization has. The weakness of this is that it would not necessarily be seen as an unbiased and unfettered organization which is solely charged with marketing what Wells County has to offer.

c. **Give the Responsibilities to an Arm of County Government or**

**Contract it Out:** We usually think of government as being responsible for economic development and this is not unreasonable. It would be possible



to have an office of Wells County's government responsible for marketing what Wells County has to offer, but it may not be as flexible or responsive as a more independent organization. In contrast, the responsibility for the marketing of what Wells County has to offer could be contracted out to a private contractor for such things as social media presence and such. But such a contractor may not be such a prudent choice, as the choice of which company to do the job would likely be driven by the cost and the company will probably not have the sense of civic pride that an authority, it would be hoped, would have.

- d. **Create a Joint Venture with another County's Tourism Authority:** If there is funding, it would be possible to create a joint venture with a similar county with a pre-existing organization, such as Jay County Visitor and Tourism Bureau. This may be cost effective and strategically make some sense, but some would probably fear that it would dilute the interests of those in Wells County.
3. **Funding a Tourism Authority:** There are three major ways that Destination Marketing Organizations are funded: innkeeper's taxes, government grants, and private memberships. The most common and most reliable of these is the use of the innkeeper's tax. As long as the tax is a reasonable amount that does not dissuade people from staying in the county, most visitors will not notice nor care, as it will be seen as a normal way of doing business. It is hard to imagine that a



person would refuse to stay in a hotel for a “destination marketing fee” of five dollars or less and instead stay in another county, and many visitors will likely not even notice the tax. The owners of the enterprises will complain, most probably, but eventually see it as “the cost of doing business.” Creating a new tax on a frugal electorate is not easy, but the beauty of such a tax is that it does not impact directly on most of the local population. Grants from government and private memberships/sponsorships would bolster the finances of the tourism authority, but such sources of finance will be less reliable and fickle. In addition, a membership organization may have implications for the status of the tourism authority, so this is a concern. The best bet is to seek funding from all possible sources but rely mostly on the innkeeper’s tax. Serious research should be done to determine if an innkeeper’s tax and public funding could ensure that the tourism authority would be sustainable. It may well be that the tourism establishments are not enough to sustain an independent tourism authority.



## **Introduction**

While Wells County has substantial opportunities for economic and demographic growth, there is a lack of knowledge of the leisure and tourism potential for Wells County. The intention of this project is to take into account what is currently in Wells County and to make an assessment of its possibilities for attracting tourism from the region, leisure facilities, and opportunities to make the county known. For this project, we propose a survey of Wells County, looking at the current state of facilities and activities that could attract tourists and enhance the leisure opportunities for those who are currently living in Wells County. The intent is to create a strategic assessment of the current condition of the tourism and leisure potential and to map out strategic choices and opportunities that would make Wells County stand out as a place with a high quality of life, invigorating tourism in the county and attracting new residents and investments to the county.

## ***Background and Methods***

During the summer of 2018, Chad Kline, Executive Director of the Wells County Economic Development, approached Dr. Sotiris Hji-Avgoustis, Chair of the Department of Management at Ball State University, to ask for the assistance of Ball State in developing the potential of recreation, leisure, and tourism in Wells County. Dr. Craig Webster of the Department of Management was invited to the meeting because of his experience in the political economy of tourism and tourism futures.



In response to the initial request, Dr. Craig Webster wrote a proposal to design an initiative to assist Wells County in the development of its leisure, recreation, and tourism potential. It was decided that it was best to launch the program during the summer season so that Dr. Webster could concentrate on the project and find a capable assistant who could dedicate time to this project.

In order to make an intelligent and thorough investigation of what Wells County can achieve, the team did desk research, a site visit, and a short survey. This report is based upon the findings of the three-pronged investigation of the team.



## The Team

**Team Leader: Craig Webster, Ph.D., MBA, MA, BA** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management at Ball State University, USA. He studied Government and German Literature at St. Lawrence University in New York State, received an MA and Ph.D. in Political Science from Binghamton University in New York State and an MBA from Intercollege, Cyprus. He has taught at Binghamton University, Ithaca College, the College of Tourism and Hotel Management, and the University of Nicosia. His research interests include the political economy of tourism, future tourism, robots and artificial intelligence in tourism, and event management. Dr. Webster is the Editor-in-Chief of *Tourism Today*, has published in many peer-reviewed journals internationally, and is co-editor of the book *Future Tourism: Political, Social, and Economic Challenges*, an edited book published by Routledge. His most recent book is *Emerald Publishing's Robots, Artificial Intelligence and Service Automation in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality*, co-edited with Stanislav Ivanov. He currently teaches courses in Hospitality Management at Ball State University's Miller College of Business. Email: [cwebster3@bsu.edu](mailto:cwebster3@bsu.edu)

**Assistant: Alexis Palmer, BA** is a graduate student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. She studies Political Science with a focus in International Relations. She received her BA in Japanese from Ball State University and graduated *summa cum laude* from the Honors College. She studied abroad for one semester at Sapporo University in Sapporo, Japan and worked as an Assistant English Teacher on the JET Program for two years in Tottori, Japan. Her research interests are the government and politics of East Asia, U.S.-Japan relations, U.S. foreign policy, and global gender equality and women's empowerment. Email: [agpalmer@bsu.edu](mailto:agpalmer@bsu.edu).



## **Details of the Site Visit**

The team arrived on Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Bluffton to begin its survey of the facilities and people of Wells County. The team was guided by Chuck King and brought to many sites and facilities in Wells County in order to view the facilities and meet managers and employees at facilities. The team stayed at the Washington Street Inn during their stay which ended on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

The following people were consulted in the site visit:

### **Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup>**

- Chad Kline, Executive Director for Wells County Economic Development at the Wells County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development
- Chuck King, Wells County Councilman 4th District
- Connie Brubaker, Vice President (in charge of acquisitions) and Curator of the Wells County Historical Society
- Thomas Liby, Board Member, Wells County Historical Society
- Alice Curry, Librarian, Wells County Public Library
- Kathy Gardner, Owner of the Washington Street Inn

### **Wednesday, May 29<sup>th</sup>**

- Jonathan Winne, Property Manager, Ouabache State Park
- Morgan Myers, Operations Manager of the Bluffton KOA Campground
- Cathy Neu, Groundskeeper of 4-H Park



### Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup>

- Jack Pace, President of Friends of Five Points School
- Joe Ayers, Bluffton Free Street Fair Board Member (Chairman Emeritus)
- Cheryl Mohr, Lengerich Meats Employee
- Kim Minnich, Owner of Minnich's Antiques and General Store

### Friday, May 31<sup>st</sup>

- Ted Ellis, Mayor of Bluffton, Indiana

The following locations were visited:

- Bluffton
- Ossian
- Zanesville
- Uniondale
- Montpelier
- Ouabache State Park

The following sites were visited:

- Wells County Arts, Commerce and Visitors Centre
- Wells County Historical Museum
- Wells County Courthouse
- Wells County Public Library
- The Washington Street Inn
- Hugh's Bakery and Coffeehouse LLC
- Mariachi Loco Mexican Grill and Bar
- Ouabache State Park (and the Bison Enclosure)
- Bluffton KOA Campground
- Roush Park
- Kehoe Park
- Washington Park
- Jefferson Park
- Lions Park





- Wells Community Pool
- 4-H Park
- Milli's Restaurant
- Whicker Park
- Five Points School
- Archbold Wilson Park
- Heyerly's Bakery
- Lengerich Meats
- Minnich's Antiques and General Store
- Billy Ann's Supper Pub
- Bummie's Drive-In



## Wells County Recreation/Tourism Potential:

### Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

#### Strengths

- Relative to neighboring counties, Wells County's economy and demographics are healthy. While Wells County's data suggests that its population is slightly poorer than average Hoosiers, median household income and educational attainment of residents in Wells County seems to be better than its neighboring counties, for the most part. Only Allen County's population is a bit more educated.
- Wells County has a good quality of life.
- There is a vibrant volunteer culture in Wells County's population. Volunteer efforts bolster many of the key leisure and recreational facilities. A noteworthy effort, the Friends of Ouabache has supported public facilities for the general public, but it is not the only organization of its type. Many of the facilities in the county seem to be supported enthusiastically by volunteers in one way or another.
- There is some interesting architecture and some sights that people may find interesting.
- There is some history and folklore.
- Ouabache Park has a close proximity to the county's major population hub, making it in essence a large Bluffton city park but under the auspices of the State of Indiana.

#### Weaknesses

- In terms of a natural environment for tourism development, the county is not in an ideal position. Without oceanfront and without natural attractions such as fjords or alpine landscapes, the natural environment is lacking in terms of naturally occurring features that would act as a pull factor for tourism.
- In terms of the built environment for tourism development, the county is not the inheritor of a large draw for tourism that is made by humans. Although there is some interesting old architecture in the county, no Mount Rushmore, no St. Louis Arch, nor an Eifel Tower was built in the county that would act in ways that would be a major pull factor for tourism.
- The population of the county seems more resistant than most to increases in taxes to fund new ventures. So if plans are suggested that could bolster recreation, leisure, and tourism, the general public will be supportive but likely resist funding the new ventures.
- The "catchment area" is limited, as there is no nearby major city that is an obvious source market for what Wells County has to offer and there is no major



thoroughfare running through the center of the county. The nearest proxy for a big city to attract visitors from is Fort Wayne or Muncie.

- The population of Wells County is a limiting factor, as many facilities and events have limitations in terms of what they can attract given the population they can draw upon.
- The population of Wells County is small, so there is a small tax base/population to support large-scale sports/recreation facilities such as football stadiums.
- Many local people do not know about many of the facilities in the county.
- Blandness. There is nothing specifically unique or exciting about Wells County.
- The fickle nature of the flooding of the Wabash River can endanger some leisure activities, at times.

### Opportunities

- The creation of an authority responsible for recreation, leisure, and tourism for the entire county. A visitor's bureau is not a strange, new, or revolutionary idea. Such an authority could serve as an organization to disseminate critical information about events and facilities in Wells County.
- The expansion of bike trails. It is seen as a feature that enhances quality of life of the local population and encourages outside visitors. There is already a serious effort underway to support this.
- The further development of the waterways for recreation. With no oceanfront and no breathtaking scenery, the full development of what the county has in its physical environment, its rivers, is possible and desirable. Businesses will likely begin to offer services (canoe and kayak rentals) once the facilities are improved.
- The promotion of local businesses that produce things of high quality and are appreciated can be done in ways to increase their economic viability. For example, Micklitsch Maple Mill, Lengerich Meats, Heyerly's Bakery and other small-scale producers of quality foods or handicrafts should be promoted. At present, it seems that some may not even know of their existence in the county. The promotion of what is of good quality or has some charm should be a priority.
- The ability to manufacture charm/culture. Just because there is no unique local charm does not mean it cannot be manufactured. Promoting the mythology of William Wells, reminding locals of the Kingsland Wreck, and creating mythology of other notable residents, sites, and events should create a sense of civic pride and uniqueness of the place. If no unique charm is now prevalent, it does not mean it cannot be created.
- The promotion of the quality of life of Wells County. Pride in the quality of life in Wells County should be promoted.
- Encourage businesses that can latch on to trends. For example, craft breweries can be used as an economic development tool in downtown areas and can also



encourage local farmers to grow hops and encourage the growth of nearby restaurants.

- There is little “ethnic” food in Wells County (probably because of the demographics of the county), apart from some Mexican and Chinese food available to the public. A Thai, Vietnamese, German, or other food choice apart from mainstream American food fair may be a good business opportunity for someone, as a major complaint is the lack of restaurants and good food.

### Threats

- Resistance to the creation of a tourism authority, largely because of the frugality of local taxpayers and the resistance of the owners of the hotels.
- Competitors in nearby counties could create events and facilities that would attract visitors who would otherwise come to Wells County. Many of the local counties have a larger population/tax base to support larger facilities and events, giving them an advantage.
- “Suburban flight” – as younger people become adults there might be the tendency for them to relocate to larger cities for university and remain there upon finishing, or they might relocate simply for better job opportunities or more exciting entertainment and leisure options.

### **Analysis of SWOT:**

The county has some major strengths and weaknesses. In general, the county should move ahead with what it has. What this means is that the quality of life, the vibrant volunteer culture, and features that already exist can be used in ways to bolster the local quality of life and encourage outside visitors. What can be done is the manufacturing of local charm and culture and the organization of an authority to market what the county has to offer to those already in the county and those outside of the county. The tourism authority should make information about what is already available in Wells County a priority and encourage other businesses to cater to the leisure and recreation needs of the Wells County market. Creating charm and marketing the



manufactured charm and the quality of life of Wells County should stimulate the local market and encourage people from the outside to come to see what the county has to offer.



## Consideration: The Innkeeper's Tax

This is a contentious and political issue and deserves some discussion. No one wants taxes and yet taxes are the mechanism that allows for many of the public goods that we enjoy to come into existence and be maintained.

There are some arguments for Wells County instituting an innkeeper's tax:

1. **(Almost) Everybody does it:** Of the 92 counties in Indiana, 78 have an innkeeper's tax<sup>2</sup>. While not all counties do it, almost 85% of the counties do, suggesting that following the majority of counties and instituting one is not something unheard of or revolutionary, but rather commonplace in Indiana.
2. **Outsiders pay for it:** Only visitors in hospitality establishments deemed taxable will pay for it. They should be overwhelmingly people from outside of Wells County. In a political sense, such a tax is not felt in the wallet of the common resident/voter of Wells County and will probably only be paid by those visitors passing through the county.
3. **Most will probably not notice it nor care:** As long as the tax is modest and not much more than what is expected in other counties, most will not notice, care, or complain. The only time it would be a concern would be if the taxation rate were so high that a person would rather book a hotel in another county because the Wells County rate was so high.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.in.gov/dor/3469.htm>



- a. For example, if one searches on Expedia for a hotel in Bluffton, Indiana during June, 2019, two options come up, one for \$67 per night for a room for two guests and one for \$130.
  - i. Assuming a 2% Innkeeper's tax (the lowest rate in Indiana), a guest would expect to spend between \$1.34 to \$2.60.
  - ii. Assuming a 10% Innkeeper's tax (the highest rate in Indiana), a guest would expect to spend between to \$6.70 to \$13.00.
  - iii. Assuming a 5% Innkeeper's Tax (the most common rate in Indiana), a visitor would expect to spend between \$3.35 to \$6.50.
- b. Following the herd (copying the common rate of other counties in Indiana) would suggest that the average guest would pay about five dollars in innkeeper's tax to spend the night in Bluffton. It would be hard to imagine that a five dollar charge or so would dissuade someone from staying in the county for a night.

The strategic choice of deciding a rate that is reasonable, so as not to dissuade visitors, if a rate is to be decided, seems to be quite simple. Of the 78 counties in Indiana that have such a tax, 59 (almost 76%) of them have the tax set at 5%. According to the Indiana Tourism Association, the lodging tax is 5% at a maximum, under most circumstances<sup>3</sup>. So, in a realistic sense, the tax would be capped at 5%. A look at the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.indianatourismassociation.com/burea-basics>



counties adjacent to Wells County show a large variation in the tax rates for them.

Three of the six adjacent counties have a tax of 5%, while one has a tax of 7%, and the remaining two have no such tax.

<b>Adjacent Counties to Wells County</b>	<b>County Innkeeper's Tax: Rates<sup>4</sup></b>
Adams County	0
Allen County	7%
Blackford County	0
Grant County	5%
Huntington County	5%
Jay County	5%

Following the herd would suggest instituting such a tax and having it set at 5%. While following the herd and going from zero to five percent overnight may be desirable, it may be a shock for those paying for it. The political authorities should first determine if the institutionalization of such a tax and going from no tax to five percent would be a good idea. A gradual increase in a tax from 2% to 4-5% may be more palatable. But estimates should be made to determine how much money is needed to fund a tourism

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.in.gov/dor/3469.htm>





authority to determine if the few applicable establishments in Wells County could actually sustain such an authority with the tax.

### ***How Much Revenue from an Innkeeper's Tax?***

In terms of the foundation upon which such a tax can be based, there are only a few businesses that would likely have to deal with the tax. The five establishments and the number of beds that would expect to be taxed are shown below.

<b>Housing Establishments</b>	<b>Number of Rooms Available</b>
Americas Best	43
Comfort Inn	53
Budget Inn	30
Washington St. Inn	4
KOA	5
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>135</i></b>

Assuming no renovations and that the number of rooms available in the county is 135, we can make some estimations of how much gross revenue can be collected by instituting an innkeeper's tax, changing some of the assumptions with regards to room costs and occupancy rates. Such simulations are shown in the table below.



<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Tax Rate</b>	<b>Average Room Cost</b>	<b>Gross Revenue Expected</b>
All rooms sold out 365 days a year (135 x 365)= 49,275	5%	\$100	\$246,375
Half rooms sold 365 days a year (68 x 365)= 24,820	5%	\$100	\$124,100
All rooms sold out 365 days a year (135 x 365)= 49,275	5%	\$75	\$184,781
Half rooms sold 365 days a year (68 x 365)= 24,820	5%	\$75	\$93,075

This is where the changes in the average price of the room and the number of visitors becomes an issue. In a scenario in which the average room is \$100, there is a 5% innkeeper's tax, and all rooms are full, the expectation is about a quarter of a million dollars in gross revenue. Assuming the rosier of scenarios seems to gross what would likely be a sustainable amount of money to fund a modest tourism authority (salaries, operational expenses...). However, some of the other scenarios suggest a more modest funding base, if the funding is to be based only on the innkeeper's tax. Therefore, while an independent tourism authority may make the most sense, there should be some consideration with regards to the amount of funding that an innkeeper's tax would likely result in. Such an authority would have to be run in a frugal way, most probably because the most optimistic of outcomes should not be relied upon.



## Overview and Methodology of Online Survey

In order to gather data systematically from the residents of Wells County, an online survey was developed during the site visit of the team. Following the visit, the survey was put onto an online platform and disseminated with the help of the Wells County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development. The intention of the survey was to learn from the local population something about attitudes towards the leisure and recreation facilities in Wells County, and get input into what assets are most valued and what assets are desired by the population. To this end, a fourteen-question survey was developed by Craig Webster. It was posted to Facebook on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and was closed on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. There were 257 responses to the online survey. The tables, graphs, and responses to the open-ended questions are found in the appendix, at the end of this report.

## *The Findings*

When asked to measure how **important (specified) leisure-related facilities are for the residents for Wells County**, there was a significant amount of variation, although most of the facilities were rated quite high on a scale of importance from not important at all to extremely important.

- The facilities that rated the highest were Ouabache State Park, Wells County Public Library, and the River Greenway. Each of these rated at 4.5 or higher as a mean response on a five-point scale in which five signified “extremely important.”



- 4-H Park, Wells Community Swimming Pool, Kehoe Park, Roush Park, Washington Park, Archbold Wilson Park in Ossian, Jefferson Park, and the Wells County Historical Museum were not deemed nearly as important as the top three, although the responses typically suggest that the respondents view them as “moderately important” to “very important.”
- Lancaster Park and Five Points School were generally perceived as the least important, commonly described as “moderately important” on the scale given, although Lancaster Park was rated slightly higher than Five Points School.
- Thirty other facilities/comments were written in by respondents, most notably Whicker Park, mentioned by ten respondents, and Downtown Bluffton/Courthouse Plaza, mentioned by four respondents. Three mentioned development of the rivers for recreation.

Respondents were asked about which facility they rated as **the most important leisure related facility in the county**.

- Over a third of respondents responded that Wells County Public Library is the most important.
- Over a quarter of respondents indicated that they felt that Ouabache State Park is the most important facility in the county.
- Twelve percent of the respondents indicated that the River Greenway is the most important.



- Trailing far behind the three first choices is 4-H Park (six percent), followed by all the other facilities.
- Interestingly, two respondents noted that Whicker Park is the most important, although it was not in the full list of choices.

In terms of how people said that they felt specific facilities were the most important, an open-ended question allowed respondents to indicate **the reason that they rated their preferred facility most highly**. One hundred and sixty-five respondents wrote comments to the question.

- The most common reasons for valuing Wells County Public Library so highly are linked with the multipurpose nature of the activities that go on in the library, the fact that it offers yearlong opportunities, its provision of free access to computers, internet, and other resources, and that it is educational in nature.
- The most common reasons for rating Ouabache State Park as the most important facility are that it offers a diverse set of recreational activities, it offers a place for families to have recreation, it allows people to experience the outdoors and learn about nature, and it attracts visitors from outside of the county.
- Reasons for rating the River Greenway so highly are generally linked with the fact that the facility is free of charge, encourages exercise and fitness, is accessible to all, and is attractive.



- Trailing far behind these three first choices is 4-H Park. The reasons that are generally given for rating it as the most important are the variety of activities and accessibility to the families and communities in the county.

There is variation in terms of **the facilities that the respondents had visited, visited more than a year ago, or visited in the last year**, according to the responses in the survey.

- The facilities that strong majorities of respondents had visited in the last 12 months were (in order of the size of the majority): Ouabache State Park, 4-H Park, the River Greenway, and the Wells County Public Library.
- Around half of the respondents had visited Kehoe Park and Roush Park in the last year.
- Many of the other facilities (Lancaster Park, Archbold Wilson Park, Wells County Historical Museum, Jefferson Park, Wells Community Swimming Pool, and Washington Park) were visited by about twenty to forty percent of respondents to the survey in the last year.
- The least visited facility is the Five Points School, probably because it is so far from the population centers of the county. About three-fourths of respondents indicated that they had never visited the facility.



In an open-ended question aimed at learning about **what leisure, sports, or recreation facilities respondents would like to see developed in Wells County**, one hundred and sixty-five respondents made some suggestions that could be analyzed. Many respondents showed a general desire to develop indoor facilities, whether for sports or other forms of recreation for use all year, and to keep children/teenagers occupied. There were also a number of responses that illustrated a desire to develop facilities and opportunities in Ossian.

- The most common theme from the responses, mentioned by about thirty-seven respondents, is the desire for a movie theater/drive-in theater.
- The second most common theme, mentioned by about nineteen of the respondents, is a desire to develop Lancaster Park.
- The third most common themes, mentioned by about seventeen respondents each, are the expansion of the River Greenway/trails and the need for better restaurants/eateries.
- Around twelve respondents indicated a desire for improvements/additions to the Wells Community Swimming Pool, a pool in Ossian, and other recreational water facilities, as well as the development of the river for recreation
- A number of specific facility ideas were mentioned, such as ten mentioning an indoor recreation facility/facility for year-round activities, eight mentioning building a skate park, eight mentioning a sports complex, and five mentioning a social/community/theater facility.



- Kayaking/canoeing was mentioned about eight times, with respondents indicating the need for rental locations and easy access/launching points.
- Wells County Public Library was referred to about eight times, with some respondents commenting in favor of continued support, expansion, and funding for the library.
- About ten responses mentioned the need for improved baseball/softball facilities.
- Specific sports/pastimes mentioned a noteworthy number of times were mini golf/putt-putt golf, go carting, ice skating/rollerblading, and rock wall climbing.

When asked about **attendance to events offered in the county**, there is a great deal of variation.

- Of those responding, over ninety percent said that they had attended the Bluffton Street Fair in the last year.
- About three-fourth of respondents had been to the 4-H Fair in the last year.
- Only a little over forty percent of respondents noted that they had been to concerts in Kehoe Park or the Bluffton Farmer's Market in the last year.

When asked **how people learn about events in Wells County**, it seems that a variety of different means are used to become informed.





- Most commonly, Facebook is the way that people become informed about events with almost thirty percent of respondents indicating that this is how they become informed.
- Word of mouth is the second most common way people become informed about events (reported by about a quarter of respondents).
- The newspaper is the third most common way people become informed about events in the county (almost twenty percent of respondents).
- Only about ten percent were informed by email, according to their responses.
- A few indicated alternative ways of being informed with the Chamber of Commerce being one of the ways that some become informed about events.

When asked in an **open-ended question on historical or other points of interest in Wells County that more people should be aware of**, eighty-eight respondents volunteered responses that could be interpreted. The most common themes in the responses to this question are:

- More people should be aware of the Historical Society/Museum and it was mentioned in over twenty of the eighty-eight responses. This is the most common theme and many of the responses seemed to indicate that few know about the museum and what it has to offer.
- The second most common theme is that people should be more aware of the State Park and its CCC heritage.



- Another common theme is that people should be more aware of Downtown Bluffton/the Courthouse.
- Several respondents also mentioned the work of Bluffton's Parks Department and the events that they organize as well as other events organized.
- A few respondents also mentioned the Five Points School and the Old Bluffton Cemetery Trail.
- Additional parks were mentioned by several respondents, such as Whicker, Lancaster, and Roush Park.
- There were additional comments made but they were difficult to classify into meaningful categories.

In responses to an **open-ended question about what Wells County could do to attract more visitors**, many respondents suggested very specific recommendations, while some were more general. One hundred and forty-four respondents gave responses to the question that could be interpreted for this report.

- The most common theme in the responses is the need to have better or more restaurants/eateries/cafes/or brewpubs, mentioned by about twenty-nine of the respondents. The responses lament the lack of variation in what is currently available and suggest that local respondents feel that by having better food and drink choices in Wells County, visitors will be encouraged to spend more time and money in Wells County. One respondent wrote, "Allow more upscale chain



restaurants like applebees [sic] and Texas Steakhouse [sic],” suggesting a demand for something other than low-end fast food.

- The second most common theme in the responses is the idea that advertising, marketing, or using social media would bring people to Wells County because more would be known about what is available.
- As common as the theme of advertising/marketing is the idea that more events and better events/festivals should be developed.
- The fourth most common theme is the notion that sports facilities/sport teams should be developed. The theme is based upon the notion that youth sports and travel teams are big business and that organizing them and having the facilities to host them would put Wells County into a situation in which it could raise revenue from such activities.
- About as common as sports facilities/sports teams is the notion that something has to be done to give kids something to do, such as putt-putt, go carts, a roller-skating rink, or laser tag.
- Other themes that are less common in the responses are the notion of cleaning up/developing Bluffton’s downtown, having a movie theater, improving shopping opportunities, developing the river for recreation, and having more/better concerts. There were also a few who were interested in developing the Bluffton Farmer’s Market.



In terms of **rating many of the aspects of daily life in Wells County**, the respondents showed that they are generally happy with the quality of the schools and public safety, above all else. The findings also suggest a generally happy population in terms of the quality of life in Wells County.

- The highest rated aspect was the quality of the schools, with strong majorities of the respondents rating them as somewhat good or extremely good.
- The second highest rated aspect was public safety, with about ninety percent of respondents rating it as somewhat good or extremely good.
- Most of the other aspects of quality of life asked about (quality of public events for the family, variety of public events for the family, quality of county government, quality of public spaces, quality of leisure and recreational facilities for residents) were rated quite high (usually described as “neither good nor bad” or “somewhat good”). This suggests that the respondents are generally satisfied with these aspects of the quality of life in the county.
- Only the “quality of roads” was not rated so highly, with the median respondent describing the quality of roads as “neither good nor bad.”

All respondents were given the opportunity to identify **something interesting in Wells County that few people would know of**. While only forty of the respondents replied to the question, there were some interesting responses.



- The leading theme was connected to the history of Bluffton/Wells County. Respondents mentioned things such as the old tunnels connecting buildings in Bluffton, a mafia bust in the 1970s, the historical courthouse, the history of William Wells, the Underground Railroad, and the Kingsland train crash.
- A more minor theme was the trails in the county that are attractive for biking and hiking.
- Another minor theme was the rivers and potential for recreation on or near the rivers.
- A less common theme was the events of the Bluffton Parks Department.
- There were also some other idiosyncratic responses that are hard to classify into broader categories.

All respondents were given a chance to make any **final comments for how to improve the quality of life for Wells County's residents and visitors**. Fifty-five of the respondents made some comments. The general themes of the comments are:

- The leading theme identified is that there should be more and better events/activities/festivals to provide things to do and things for kids/families.
- The second most common theme is the need for better or more variety in the restaurants available.
- The third identifiable theme is that there is a need for better sports facilities/baseball/softball facilities.



- A more minor theme is the need for more attractive quality housing.
- Another minor theme is the desire for more community involvement and collaboration of organizations for creating events and spaces and generating ideas.

## Conclusion

The survey suggests that:

- The local population values Ouabache State Park, Wells County Public Library, and the River Greenway most highly.
- Ouabache State Park, 4-H Park, the River Greenway, and the Wells County Public Library are facilities that large numbers of respondents have been to.
- The survey respondents illustrate a desire for a movie theater, the development of Lancaster Park, the expansion of the River Greenway/trails and the need for better/more restaurants/eateries. There is a general notion that facilities are needed for year-round activities and facilities that can keep kids/teenagers busy.

For example, some responses to this were:

- *“Movie Theater/Roller Rink or something for the kids to do - A teen hang out.”* Respondent
- *“Things to do with children. Teenagers need a place. Down town attractions.”* Respondent



- *“Indoor play area for kids . Something to help get kids out of the house in the winter and enjoy good clean fun.”* Respondent
- *“something more for the kids to do. the busier kids are the less trouble. a ice skating ring; roller dome; movies. somewhere for these kids to go and to be safe.”* Respondent
- *“We need a hang out for kids in the winter time. The gym only offers so much. They need some form of entertainment for the younger generation.”* Respondent
- Many respondents feel that more people should know about the museum/Historical Society, the State Park and its CCC heritage, and the Downtown Bluffton/the Courthouse area.
- In terms of developing tourism and encouraging visitors, respondents indicated that having better food options is the most important thing that needs to be done. Other important things are that Wells County should market what it has and that more events and better events should be developed. In their words:
  - *“Add a Starbucks, add more things to do for younger people so we don’t have to go to Fort Wayne.”* Respondent
  - *“For starters having stuff for visitors to do.”* Respondent
- Respondents’ responses show a general appreciation for the quality of life in Wells County.



- Comments for how to improve the quality of life for Wells County’s residents and visitors were mostly about having fun things to do for families and kids. Some examples were:
  - *“Have more activities for families as a whole other than sports (i.e. other than baseball, soccer, football).”* Respondent
  - *“Have more quality restaurants and family friendly things to do downtown.”* Respondent

The survey suggests that there are vital things needed to develop tourism and enhance the quality of life for the residents and those visiting:

- The portfolio of events has to be expanded, with more middle range events that would be interesting to locals but also attract visitors.
- More food options are needed.
- The development of Downtown Bluffton is a priority. If it is developed, visitors to the State Park will have a place to go to spend time and money and locals will use it as well.
- There is a demand for facilities that offer year-round activities and will keep the youth busy.





## Recommended Roadmap to Development of Leisure, Recreation, and Tourism

There are several steps to the development of a stronger economy for leisure, recreation, and tourism.

### Step 1: Institutionalization of a Tourism Authority

- Having a small office of one to three people responsible for marketing what Wells County has, should be a priority. This comes with a political risk, as the costs will be visible but the benefits will be hard to measure. The Indiana Tourism Association gives fairly clear guidance about how this is typically done by setting up a 501-c-6 organization<sup>5</sup>.
- Such a tourism authority should be responsible for:
  - Marketing leisure, recreation, and tourism for Wells County
  - Spreading information with regards to upcoming events in Wells County
  - Providing information to visitors with regards to leisure, recreation, and tourism-related organizations in Wells County
  - Promoting local businesses linked with tourism, hospitality, and recreation/leisure
- Such an authority should probably have a physical presence near the courthouse area of Bluffton, so that it is visible to those working in Wells County government and seen as a vital player in the economy of Wells County.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.indianatourismassociation.com/burea-basics>



- It should produce a paper map, free of charge, showing the sites and businesses that would be of interest to a visitor or someone looking for leisure or recreational activities. It should also provide a hard copy brochure/pamphlet and digital resources free of charge to encourage leisure pursuits, recreation, and visitors in Wells County.

### **Step 2: Innkeeper's Tax to Fund the Authority**

- Taxing visitors is less risky than taxing residents. A small tax may not be noticed and will not be resisted as much as a broad tax on the public. It is also better to fund the authority through such a tax than rely on voluntary donations from businesses and government, entities with other priorities.
- It would be best to have such a tax collected for six months to a year before the allocation of funds, if possible. The accumulation of such funds would assist in the startup costs and enable enough financial security so that the organization could function for some time without having to ask for grants or seek out sponsorships/memberships. Creating an organization that almost immediately turns around to ask government and other local funding sources for funds should be avoided.



### **Step 3: Focus on the Local, then Others will come**

- Since much of the market is local, making locals aware of what is already here is a priority. Once the local market for leisure and recreation is developed and the infrastructure is developed, that can assist in building a more vibrant local market. With increased marketing, some will spill over into attracting the external visitors, as many modern media do not discriminate between local circulation and global circulation.
- A free map available in hotels, restaurants, campgrounds, and other businesses would be a cheap way to encourage the spread of information on relevant facilities and businesses and encourage membership spending on a tourism authority. A website would do the same and could be more frequently and easily updated.

### **Step 4: Collect Data on What is Currently Available, Disseminate That**

- Wells County has things that are worth a trip to see and have value, but not everyone knows about them. A website that could collect the sites, attractions, and businesses that would be interesting to locals and those from out of the county is a start. It should be helpful to collect data on what is already here. It took some looking, but the team did find a producer of maple syrup in the county. It should be easy to find such a producer, if someone wants to buy locally produced maple syrup.



**Step 5: Engage in Digital Media and Social Media, as well**

- The tourism authority should be a central source in terms of identifying what is happening in Wells County and what is available to do. A free paper map is critical, but other/digital issues are possible.
- A website with the event venues, restaurants, leisure facilities, and parks should be created so that any interested party can gather information quickly and identify things that she/he may find interesting or useful.
- Social media should inform the residents of Wells County about events that may be of interest to them.
- An app could be developed to go to the smart phones of people informing them of upcoming events, so that they would not need to browse the internet to be informed about events in Wells County.

**Step 6: Manufacture Charm and Culture**

- Everything that is unique or charming about Wells County should be developed. The intention of this is to make the county seem distinct and encourage a sense of history, culture, and pride. Also, quality of life should be a focus of marketing the Wells County product, as it is a good place to live.
- There are simple steps that can be done for this. For example:



- A tourism authority logo with a cartoonish “Billy Wells” could be used to remind the locals of the source of the name and encourage mythology about the person the county was named after.
- A visible memorial to the Kingsland Wreck outside of the courthouse could remind people of the horrific accident that shaped the county.
- Using the silhouette of the courthouse on letterheads in addition to or separate from a “Billy Wells” logo would link a current visible feature in with the identify of those from Wells County.
- Other aspects of local history or the economy should be made visible; bison, pretzels, petroleum, and irises are other possible local things that can be exploited for imagery, linking something physical with the history and culture of the county.
- The “I” in Indy concept could be mimicked<sup>6</sup>, with the word “Wells” made as a statue with one of the letters missing, so that a visitor could be one of the “L”s in Wells County, thus encouraging the sharing of that on social media.
- Signs and identifying markers around the county for anything that could be considered important or interesting should be done. Already, much has been done on this, but more is always welcomed.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.visitindy.com/indianapolis-ndy>



- Encouraging a section in the library for books from local authors would encourage civic pride and knowledge of noteworthy locals.

### **Step 7: Engage with Local Businesses and Competitors/Collaborators**

- The tourism authority should be a catalyst for local businesses. It should encourage the development of what people already want in Wells County and what they speak about (the need for more restaurants and better restaurants in the downtown Bluffton area), and things that many have not really thought about, such as craft breweries and small-scale soap manufacturers.
- The tourism authority should also engage with the authorities in other counties to learn about how to market tourism and seek synergies. Cooperation with authorities in other counties will be a learning experience for a nascent tourism authority.

### **Step 8: Assess What is Needed**

- In about a year, a full survey of what the residents want and what they need for leisure and recreation should be assessed. Their satisfaction with what is here and their desire for something new could suggest something affordable and effective to bolster the quality of life in Wells County and encourage visitors from outside the county to visit. While this survey gave some basic background information, a more detailed survey would enable policymakers to understand



more about the leisure and recreation needs of different generations of residents. Such research would likely uncover the sorts of recreation that millennials want and expect, such as escape rooms, craft breweries, VR gaming, or other such recreational things. Such research should also uncover what some other generations of residents would like to see. There are changes and trends that Wells County may be behind. For example, the surplus of antique shops is a bit of a concern, since younger generations (Millennials and Generation X) have little interest in such shopping.



## Conclusion

- Wells County has potential to get into a position in which there is increased quality of life for the residents and improvements in terms of an inflow of visitors that will assist in making the local economy prosper.
- Developing local charm and civic pride is a key part to creating a sense of uniqueness of the county.
- Encouraging local production and local entrepreneurship is one key component to economic growth in Wells County. The data show a latent demand for leisure facilities, some of which are not particularly large-scale, such as a restaurant.
- Future efforts for encouraging visitors is to focus upon local consumption, giving locals opportunities and enhancing the quality of life (which is already quite high) in Wells County that visitors can take advantage of.
- The key geographical asset that can be developed is the river, for recreation (kayaking/canoeing) and also for its view (for example, restaurants with a river view).
- The key cultural/economic asset to be developed is rural/agricultural in nature, with the possibility of developing quality/organic local agricultural products and downstream derivatives. The downstream agricultural/rural derivatives will add value and reinforce a sense of rural charm and pride in quality products.
- The facilities that have been built can be improved upon, but most of the major improvements have to be made to the provision of information and the creation of





a more sophisticated portfolio of events that are strategically developed to make locals happy and provide a reason for people to visit from other counties.

- Snowbirds are the only naturally occurring flow of visitors that the county now can target to provide them with goods and services that they need. The snowbirds who stay at the state park have the time and money, so consideration should be given to providing them with a reason to stay a few more days in the Bluffton area than they otherwise would.
- There is knowledge and expertise in nearby universities that would love to assist in making Wells County a better place to live and to visit; it is just a matter of the logistics to get the expertise and assistance to those who need it in Wells County. Just ask and many will want to assist.
- Development of events that would attract outside visitors can be beneficial, Appendix VIII highlights how some destinations have been able to leverage events to attract visitors.
- Specialized knowledge of how to set up a tourism authority should be sought out from the Indiana Tourism Association. They seem to have the experience and knowledge for how to do such a thing. In the short period of this project, an effort was made to contact them and ask them for professional insight, but there was no response. It would be better to do this when things go back to business as usual, following the summer. They should assist in giving insight into how to proceed and the technicalities of what form of organization would be best suited



to Wells County. It is likely that such an authority would benefit Wells County, as such authorities have assisted other destinations (See Appendix VIII); it is just a matter of the structure and cost of such an organization for Wells County that is the issue.



## Appendix I: Data and Background Info on Wells County and Environs

### Towns in Wells County (2017)

Towns	Population <sup>7</sup>	Median age	Median household income	Unemployment rate	Educational attainment (percent of population who attended college or received a degree)	Ethnic makeup (percent of population that is white)	Labor force (persons working in the area)
Bluffton	9,823	38.6	\$40,194	3.4%	51.9%	96.4%	4,673
Markle	1,311	38.1	\$50,000	2.0%	47.0%	98.3%	650
Ossian	3,899	34.5	\$59,818	2.1%	59.5%	96.2%	1,887
Poneto	163	37.8	\$47,500	2.4%	33.0%	98.2%	85
Uniondale	303	31.3	\$41,719	9.8%	43.4%	92.4%	153
Vera Cruz	95	31.6	\$42,000	12.0%	41.6%	90.5%	50
Zanesville	565	44.2	\$51,389	2.6%	40.9%	92.2%	313

<http://statsamerica.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Information for all columns was obtained from statsamerica.org, which gathered its figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, latest 5-Year Estimates.



## Wells County and Surrounding Counties

	Population (2018) <sup>8</sup>	Median age (2018) <sup>9</sup>	Median household income <sup>10</sup> (2017)	Unemployment rate (2018) <sup>11</sup>	Educational attainment <sup>12</sup> (percent of population who attended college or received a degree) (2017)	Ethnic makeup <sup>13</sup> (percent of population that is white) (2017)	Labor force <sup>14</sup> (persons working in the area) (2018)
Wells County	28,206	39.8	\$55,221	2.8%	52.3%	96.6%	14,396
Allen County	375,351	35.7	\$52,661	3.2%	60.3%	79.5%	184,863
Adams County	35,636	33.3	\$51,488	2.6%	43.0%	96.9%	17,494
Jay County	20,764	39.8	\$46,740	3.3%	35.0%	97.5%	9,843
Blackford County	11,930	43.7	\$42,636	3.9%	37.9%	97.4%	5,341
Grant County	65,936	39.9	\$44,790	3.9%	46.2%	88.0%	32,239
Huntington County	36,240	40.3	\$53,635	3.6%	47.0%	96.5%	18,376
State of Indiana	6,691,878	37.7 (2017)	\$58,873	3.4%	55.9% <sup>15</sup>	85.4%	3,381,713

<http://statsamerica.org/>

## Major Employers in Wells County

According to cberdata.org, there were 12,637 people employed in Wells County in 2010. The leading employment is in the service industry, which accounts for 35.38% of

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, latest 5-Year Estimates

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey One-Year Estimates, National Science Foundation



employment, or 4,471 jobs. The transportation, public utilities, and trade sector accounts for 19.55% (2,470 jobs), manufacturing accounts for 16.12% (2,037 jobs), government and government enterprises accounts for 10.72% (1,355 jobs), farming accounts for 5.56% (703 jobs), construction accounts for 4.86% (614 jobs), and finally agricultural services, forestry, fishing and mining accounts for 0%. According to [hoosierdata.in.gov](http://hoosierdata.in.gov), some of the major employers are Kroger Distribution Center (1,836 employees), Ti Automotive (400 employees), Pretzels Inc. (300 employees), Bluffton Motor Works Llc. (300 employees), and Novae (287 employees).

<https://cberdata.org/>

<http://hoosierdata.in.gov/>

### **Quality of the Schools in Wells County**

On the school's report card for 2017-2018, obtained from the Indiana Department of Education Compass website, the following areas of learning are assessed: 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade student performance in mathematics and English/Language Arts (measured by percent passing), 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade student performance in Algebra I and English 10 End-of-Course Assessments (measured by percent passing), graduation rates (measured by the percent of on-time graduates), and college and career readiness (measured by the percent of AP, IB, dual credit, or industry certification student success). Northern Wells Community Schools, Southern Wells Community Schools, and M S D Bluffton-Harrison Schools are the three main school districts. Northern Wells Community Schools are above the state average in everything except for college and career readiness. Southern Wells Community Schools are below the state average in everything except for Algebra I End-of-Course Assessments and graduation rates. M S D Bluffton-Harrison Schools are above the state average in all categories except for 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics and 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade English 10 End-of-Course Assessments.

<https://compass.doe.in.gov/search.aspx?q=southern+wells+community+schools>

### **History of Wells County**

- Formed in 1837
- Named after Captain William A. Wells, who was captured by Native Americans when he was a young boy and adopted by the Miami Chief Little Turtle



- Wells County was named after him because he died a heroic martyr's death protecting women and children at Fort Dearborn when it was attacked by the Potawatomi
- Bluffton, founded in 1838, is the county seat
  - The county has a total area of 370.25 square miles, 99.42% of which is land and 0.58% of which is water
  - The population as of 2010 was 27,636, with 75 people per square mile
  - The county government is composed of a county council, a board of commissioners, a court, and county officials



## Appendix II: Portfolio, Examples of Other Events in Other Places

### Spark! Fishers (Fishers, IN)

- A community-led weekend celebration of the city that takes place in June. It was created to replace the discontinued Fishers Freedom Festival, an annual outdoor festival which ran during the summer for 29 years.
- It features a Friday night concert, a family-friendly 5k walk/run, a Street Fair with food and entertainment, a community parade, and a community fireworks show.
- <https://sparkfishers.com/>

### Indiana Renaissance Faire (Noblesville, IN)

- An annual Renaissance Faire which takes place for one weekend in October. It was founded in 2005 to promote the bond between Fishers and its sister city, Billerica, England.
- It features costumed characters, full-contact non-choreographed jousting, period music, comedy, acrobats, sword play, food and drink vendors, artists and merchants and more.
- <https://www.indianarenfaire.com/>

### Muncie Gras (Muncie, IN)

- An annual party which took place in March in the streets of downtown Muncie for 16 years (although is now discontinued) and attracted as many as 13,000 people. Unintentionally, it became a regional event with people coming all the way from Indianapolis and Lafayette to attend the event, despite never being marketed outside of Muncie.
- It involved New Orleans-style festivities, live musical performances, fireworks, food and alcohol vendors, and various other attractions such as a mechanical bull, zipline, human bowling, and so forth.
- <https://www.facebook.com/events/176865849742602>

### Ohio River Paddlefest (Cincinnati, Ohio)

- One of America's largest paddling events. It involves more than 2,000 paddlers floating 9 miles along the Ohio River.
- The day before is the Paddler's Party for a Cause, during which paddlers can complete registration, drop off canoes and kayaks, enjoy live music, food trucks, craft beer, and a raffle. After the paddle is the Finish Line Festival, which features live music, racer awards, dance performances, food, beer, and exhibitors.
- <https://www.ohioriverpaddlefest.org/>



**Swedish Days (Geneva, Illinois)**

- An annual celebration of summer and all things Swedish honoring the area's Swedish heritage. It is a 70-year-old festival which takes place in June.
- Includes live music, carnival rides, food booths, a 5k, and of course Swedish food, arts and gifts, and cultural activities including folkdances.
- [https://www.genevachamber.com/swedish\\_days.php](https://www.genevachamber.com/swedish_days.php)

**Lilac Festival (Mackinac Island, Michigan)**

- An annual 10-day festival dating back to 1949 which occurs during June when the lilacs are in full bloom.
- Visitors can enjoy concerts in the park, a 10k run/walk, dancing, tours, the Grand Parade, horse-drawn floats, and the crowning of the Lilac Queen.
- <https://www.mackinacisland.org/mackinac-island-lilac-festival/>

**Scarecrow Fest (St. Charles, Illinois)**

- A weekend-long festival which has taken place in October for the past 30 years. Attendees choose from more than 150 entries to crown the winner of the Scarecrow Contest.
- Includes two stages of live entertainment, make-your-own scarecrow stations, a carnival, and an arts and craft show.
- <http://scarecrowfest.com/>





## Appendix III: Examples of Efforts to Develop Tourism in Other Rural Areas:

### Metamora, Indiana

- An unincorporated historic town which has a population of 188 (as of 2010) and is primarily dependent on tourism.
- Offers visitors the opportunity to step into the past with a horse-drawn canal boat, an operating grist mill, and the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site.
- Gives visitors the chance to experience riding a train into the town via the Whitewater Valley Railroad.
- Has the only wooden aqueduct still in service in the country.
- Offers carriage rides, a gem mine, horseback riding, and a hiking-biking trail.
- Promotes numerous local restaurants, crafts and shops.
- <https://metamoraindiana.com/index.php>

### Baraboo, Wisconsin

- A city with a population of 12,173 (as of 2016), located near the countryside with farmlands, bluffs, rivers and lakes.
- Emphasizes significant events and people in the city's history: for example, it is known as "Circus City" because The Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus originated there, as well as numerous other circuses. Also, the first syndicated newspaper was created here.
- Preserves and promotes its county and city's history with a county historical museum, history center, and Courthouse Square, which is home to many historical structures.
- Hosts numerous events such as seasonal fairs, summer concerts, wine tasting tours, a farmers' market, historical walking tours, and so forth.
- Devil's Lake State Park, Mirror State Park, and the Baraboo River provide plentiful opportunity for outdoor recreation.
- Its close proximity to the Wisconsin Dells attractions draws in visitors.
- <https://www.cityofbaraboo.com/> , <http://www.baraboo.com/visit-baraboo/>

### Chillicothe, Ohio

- A city in southern Ohio which has a population of about 21,901 (as of 2010) and is surrounded by farming communities.
- Capitalizes on the area's rich Native American history by promoting Native American burial mounds, ancient trails, earthworks, and early historic sites.
- Takes advantage of the abundance of nature and offers canoeing, kayaking, horseback riding, biking trails, hunting, and so forth in the state parks and surrounding nature.
- Has a vibrant theater and performing arts culture.



- Advertises local restaurants, bakeries, shops and products.
- Created a Visitors Bureau website which is convenient, easy to navigate, and shows visitors what to do, where to shop, where to eat, and where to stay in the city.
  - <http://visitchillicotheohio.com/>

### **Chizu, Tottori, Japan**

- A rural, agricultural town in southwestern Japan with a population of about 7,000.
- Maximized its manufacturing charm and culture by:
  - Creating a cute character as the town mascot which incorporates aspects of the town's assets and culture.
  - Advertising and selling products that the town specializes in, such as locally-distilled sake and products made from the locally-produced wood and blue dye.
- Advertises unique festivals and events, such as a snow festival, a kimono and retro car festival, and a cherry blossom-viewing festival.
- Takes advantage of the abundance of natural attractions (mountains, river, forests, rice fields) and offer events and experiences to draw people in to enjoy the nature.
  - For example, guided forest therapy and an outdoor restaurant in the forest along the river.
- Established a tourist information center and created a tourism website.
  - <https://chizu-cho.com/>



## Appendix IV: Cities/Towns in Indiana with Walking Tours

### Walk Indianapolis

- Self-guided audio tours of Indianapolis architecture and landmarks. Visitors can download the tour map and follow the route for each tour while listening to audio that describes each landmark along the route. The audio files can be streamed on the website, which is mobile formatted, or the user can subscribe via iTunes, download the VisitIndy app, or download mp3 files and manually load them.
  - <http://www.walkindianapolis.org/>

### Historic Bloomington Walking Tours

- Self-guided tours of Bloomington's historic districts. Visitors can download a map that lays out landmarks of interest in the historic district of their choosing. The map is accompanied by a brochure that gives a history of the district and provides pictures and brief informational sections about each landmark.
  - <https://bloomington.in.gov/about/walking-tours>

### A Walking Tour of Corydon

- A self-guided tour of the historic sites and modern businesses in downtown Corydon. This presents the visitor with a slice of historic, small town Americana. The walking tour maps are available at the Blaine H. Wiseman Visitor Center in the town.
  - <https://www.thisisindiana.org/directory/walking-tour-corydon/>

### New Harmony Architecture Walking Tour

- A self-guided tour of the historic and modern architecture in New Harmony. Visitors can do the smartphone tour through the town's mobile walking tour website. It provides a picture of each site and an audio description as well as a written transcription.
  - [https://visitnewharmony.com/playexplore\\_cpt/self-guided-architecture-walking-tour/](https://visitnewharmony.com/playexplore_cpt/self-guided-architecture-walking-tour/)

### Columbus Downtown Art and Architecture Tour

- Self-guided tours of the art and architecture in Columbus. Visitors can obtain free tour maps at The Visitors Center which coincide with the smartphone content. Through their smartphone, visitors can view pictures, brief descriptions, and audio and video files of each stop.
  - <https://columbus.in.us/sqt-must-see-sites/>

### Madison Walking Tours

- Self-guided tours of historic Madison and locations known for their stained glass. Visitors can download tour brochures from the website or obtain them from the



Madison Visitors Center. An app can also be downloaded and utilized for self-guidance.

<http://historicmadisoninc.com/toursrentals/>



## Appendix V: Online Questionnaire

### Wells County Leisure, Recreation, and Tourism Development Survey

In an effort to learn more about developing the leisure and recreational facilities of Wells County, the Wells County Chamber of Commerce has commissioned a survey.

You are invited to take this short survey so that we may learn about how you view some aspects of the quality of life here in Wells County and what you feel can be done to improve the quality of life in Wells County.

Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential so that no one will be able to identify the respondent with particular responses to questions.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research effort, please contact, Dr. Craig Webster at Ball State University.

Thank you.

#### **Researcher Contact Information:**

Craig Webster, PhD  
Department of Management  
Ball State University  
Muncie, IN 47306  
Email: cwebster3@bsu.edu

By clicking "I agree" below, you agree to participate. If you are under 18 years of age or would prefer not to participate, please either close your browser or click "I do not agree" below.

- 1.) In your opinion, how important are the following leisure-related facilities for the residents of Wells County? (the order of facilities are to be randomized) (responses very important to very unimportant)
  - a. 4-H Park
  - b. Archbold Wilson Park in Ossian
  - c. Five Points School
  - d. Jefferson Park
  - e. Kehoe Park
  - f. Lancaster Park
  - g. Ouabache State Park
  - h. Roush Park
  - i. The River Greenway



- j. Washington Park
  - k. Wells Community Swimming Pool
  - l. Wells County Historical Museum
  - m. Wells County Public Library
  - n. Other (Specify)
- 2.) Which one of the following leisure-related facilities do you feel is the most important in Wells County?
- a. 4-H Park
  - b. Archbold Wilson Park in Ossian
  - c. Five Points School
  - d. Jefferson Park
  - e. Kehoe Park
  - f. Lancaster Park
  - g. Ouabache State Park
  - h. Roush Park
  - i. The River Greenway
  - j. Washington Park
  - k. Wells Community Swimming Pool
  - l. Wells County Historical Museum
  - m. Wells County Public Library
  - n. Other (Specify)
- 2a.) Why do you feel this is the most important leisure related facility? (open-ended)
- 3.) Which of these facilities have you **ever** visited? (randomized)
- a. 4-H Park
  - b. Archbold Wilson Park in Ossian
  - c. Five Points School
  - d. Jefferson Park
  - e. Kehoe Park
  - f. Lancaster Park
  - g. Ouabache State Park
  - h. Roush Park
  - i. The River Greenway
  - j. Washington Park
  - k. Wells Community Swimming Pool
  - l. Wells County Historical Museum
  - m. Wells County Public Library



- 4.) Which of these facilities have you visited in the **last 12 months**? (randomized)
- 4-H Park
  - Archbold Wilson Park in Ossian
  - Five Points School
  - Jefferson Park
  - Kehoe Park
  - Lancaster Park
  - Ouabache State Park
  - Roush Park
  - The River Greenway
  - Washington Park
  - Wells Community Swimming Pool
  - Wells County Historical Museum
  - Wells County Public Library
- 5.) What facilities for leisure, sports, or recreation would you like to see developed in Wells County?
- 6.) Which of these events have you **ever** attended?
- 4-H Fair
  - Bluffton Free Street Fair
  - Bluffton Farmer's Market
  - Concerts in Kehoe Park
- 7.) Which of these events have you attended in the **last 12 months**?
- 4-H Fair
  - Bluffton Free Street Fair
  - Bluffton Farmer's Market
  - Concerts in Kehoe Park
- 8.) How do you typically learn about events in Wells County?
- Word of mouth
  - Facebook
  - Newspaper
  - Emails
  - Twitter
  - Local Calendar



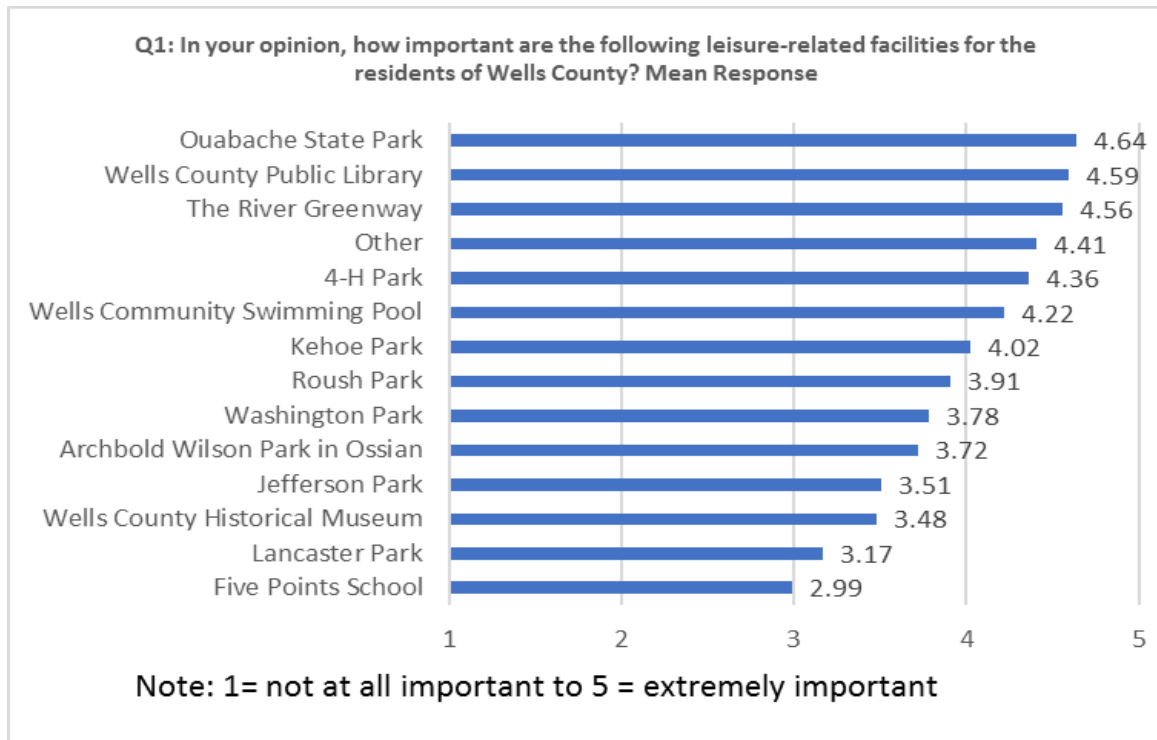
- 9.) Which historical or other points of interest in Wells County do you think more people should be made aware of?
- 10.) What could Wells County do to attract more visitors from outside of the county?
- 11.) How would you rate the following aspects of Wells County? (On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very good and 5 being very poor.) (Aspects to be Randomized)
- a. Quality of leisure and recreational facilities for residents
  - b. Quality of schools
  - c. Quality of county government
  - d. Quality of roads
  - e. Public safety
  - f. Quality of public spaces
  - g. Quality of public events for the family
  - h. Variety of public events for the family
- 12.) Do you know of something that is interesting in Wells County that few people know of? If so, what is it?
- 13.) Do you have any final comments on how to improve the quality of life and improve what the county has to offer residents and visitors?

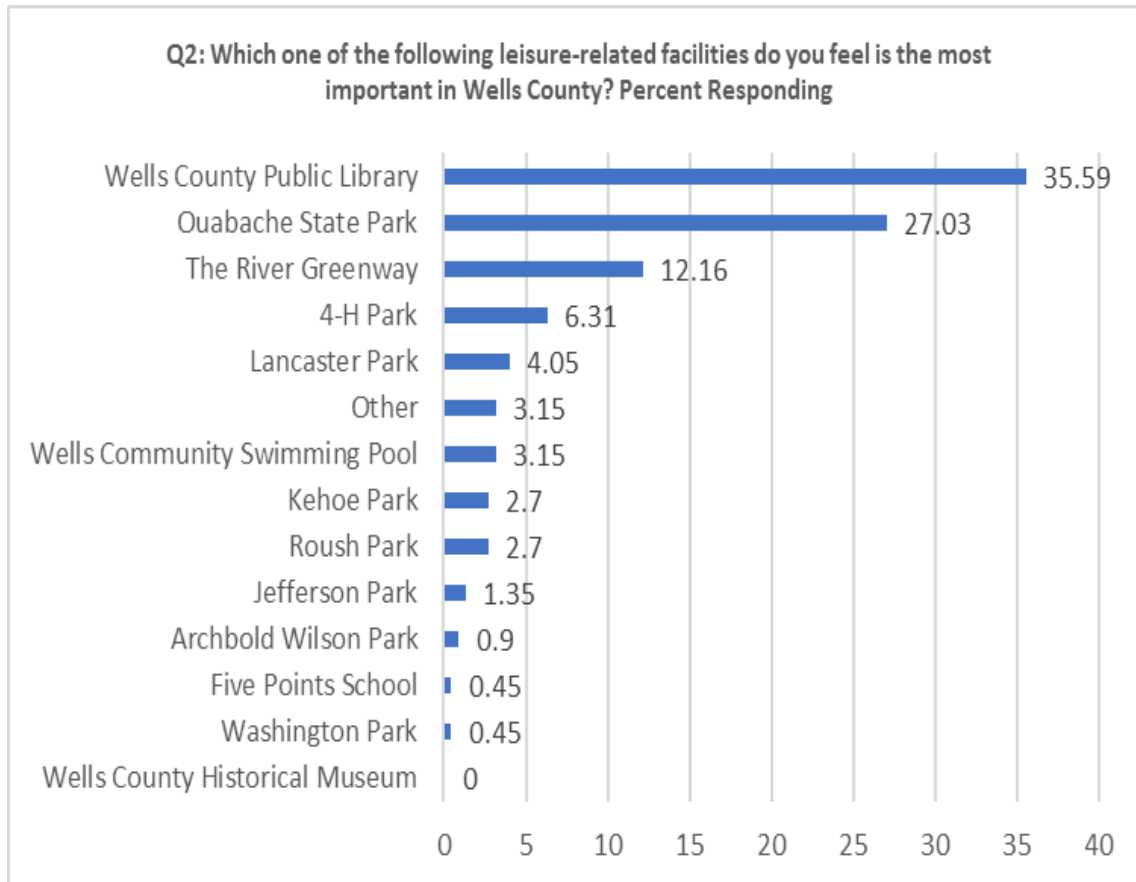
Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Dr. Craig Webster of Ball State University at [cwebster3@bsu.edu](mailto:cwebster3@bsu.edu).





## Appendix VI: Online Questionnaire Responses (Quantitative)





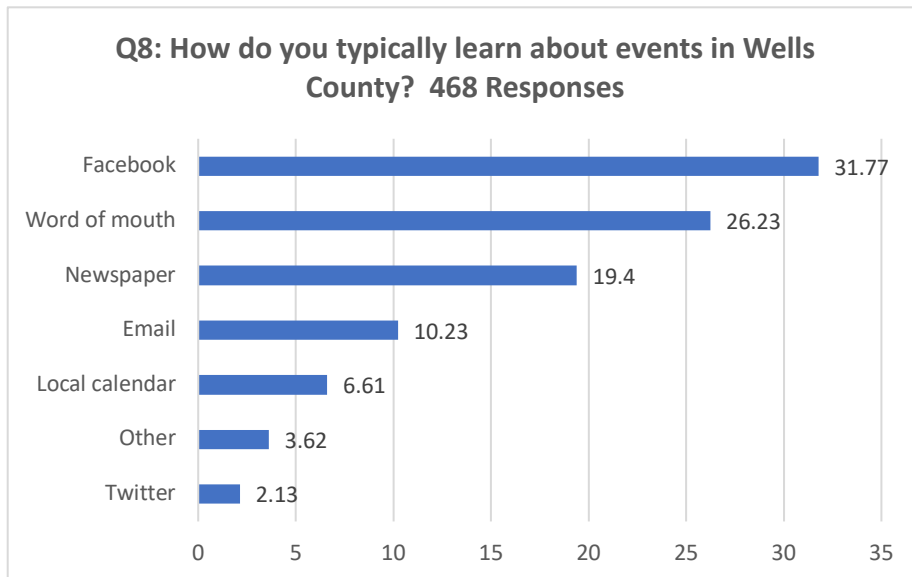
Q 3-4: Which of these facilities have you ever visited? Which of these facilities have you visited in the last 12 months?

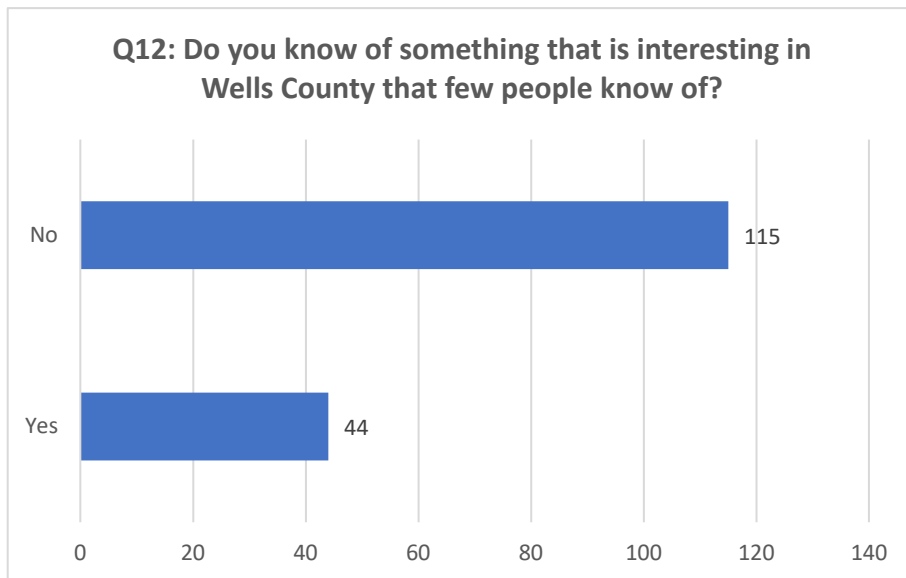
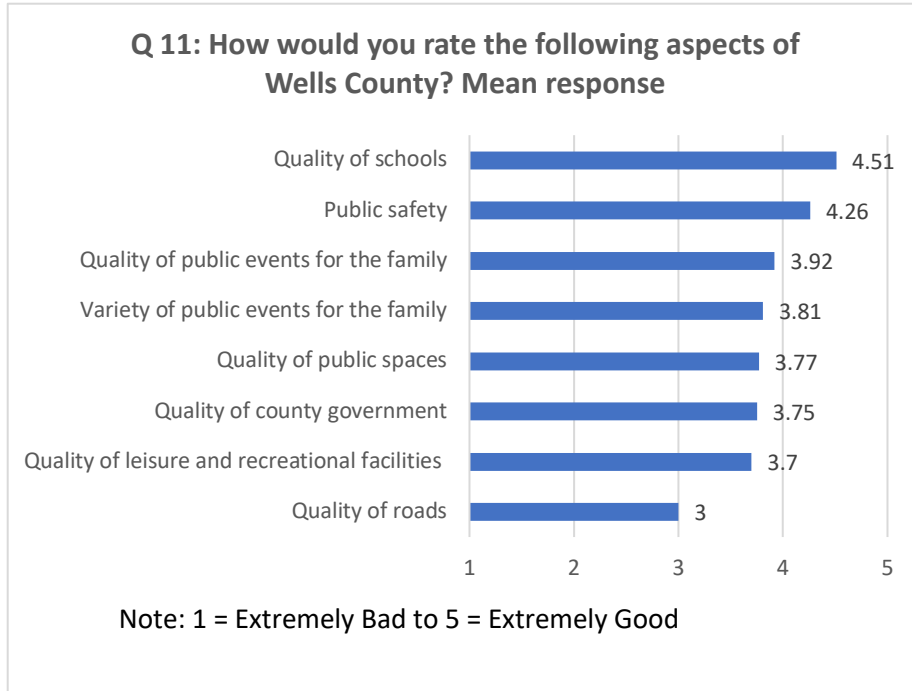
	Have not visited		Visited more than 12 months ago		Visited during the last 12 months	
Ouabache State Park	1.46%	3	11.17%	23	87.38%	180
4-H Park	1.46%	3	12.62%	26	85.92%	177
The River Greenway	4.83%	10	10.63%	22	84.54%	175
Wells County Public Library	1.94%	4	17.96%	37	80.1%	165
Kehoe Park	12.81%	26	33.99%	69	53.2%	108
Roush Park	13.24%	27	42.65%	87	44.12%	90
Washington Park	16.67%	34	47.06%	96	36.27%	74
Wells Community Swimming Pool	14.56%	30	51.46%	106	33.98%	70
Wells County Historical Museum	33.99%	69	36.95%	75	29.06%	59
Jefferson Park	24.51%	50	46.57%	95	28.92%	59
Archbold Wilson Park in Ossian	56.65%	115	21.67%	44	21.67%	44
Lancaster Park	49.02%	100	32.35%	66	18.63%	38
Five Points School	75.25%	152	13.86%	28	10.89%	22

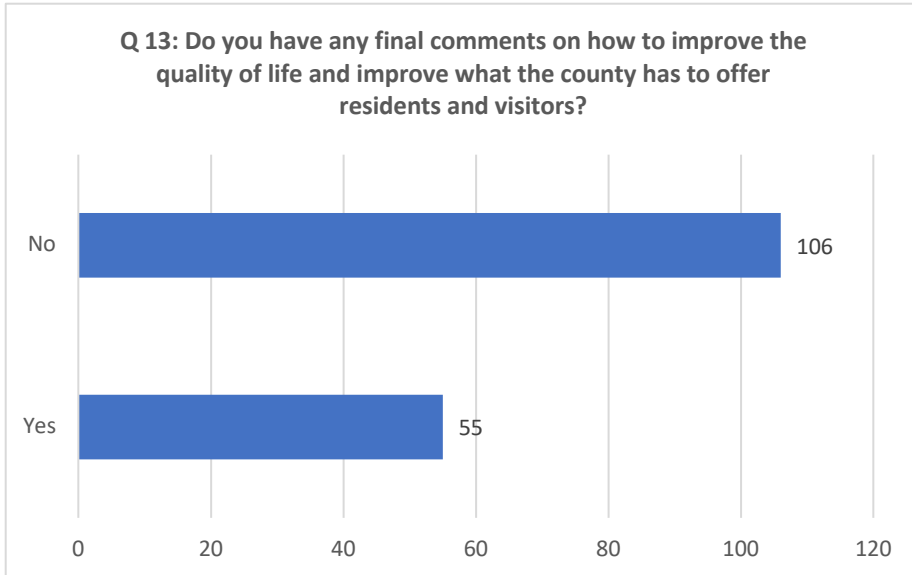


Q6-7: Which of these events have you ever attended? Which of these events have you attended in the last 12 months?

	Have not attended		Attended more than 12 months ago		Attended in the last 12 months	
	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count
Bluffton Free Street Fair	0.48%	1	6.76%	14	92.75%	192
4-H Fair	3.41%	7	20.98%	43	75.61%	155
Concerts in Kehoe Park	25.37%	52	29.27%	60	45.37%	93
Bluffton Farmer's Market	24.02%	49	33.82%	69	42.16%	86







## Appendix VII: Online Questionnaire Responses (Open-Ended), Samples of Responses Given

### Q2 and 2a Open-Ended Responses: Why is this facility the most important?

#### 4-H Park (9 responses given)

1. Grandparents, parents, kids, and community all come together for activities here.
2. Touches several families
3. Affects more people
4. The size of the facility can accommodate most any event.
5. It's easily accessible. Offers several community opportunities.
6. This facility is used by all walks of people, young and older for 4-H, Engine/Tractor show, rodeo and receptions. This area is used almost year round.

#### Lancaster Park (9 Responses Given)

1. Need a park facility on the north side of Bluffton
2. Only opportunity north of city for park activities. Area for tremendous housing growth.
3. It has the potential to serve any residents and to attract many visitors to Bluffton.
4. Northern Wells, specifically Lancaster, needs a recreational park to be used by everyone in Wells County
5. It is under developed and needed for the North side of the city and if used correctly could increase visitors to the area.

#### Ouabache State Park (45 Responses Given)

1. I feel this is the most important because it is the only true leisure facility that can draw visitors to our community across the region/state
2. It attracts people to our community who may not otherwise visit.
3. It has the most to offer this community as far as family oriented activities. It brings people from other towns here.
4. This area gives family's the opportunity to come together. Enjoying outdoor and indoor fun alike. More should be invested in the park to create more venues for family attractions.
5. It brings in people from outside Wells County
6. It's the one place/activity that people from the outside would travel to Wells County for which brings in outside revenue.
7. Variety of spaces and use, opportunity for people to get away to nature



8. It gets the most publicity from State publications on tourism in Wells County.
9. It is single handly the largest regional attractor for our community.
10. It draws people from our town as well as people from outside our communities
11. Visitors come to Bluffton from miles away to see the park
12. Ouabache State Park not only benefits Wells County residents, but attracts visitors from throughout Northeast Indiana.

### **The River Greenway (19 Responses Given)**

1. This pertains to everyone in the community and it is a free activity.
2. Allows all people to exercise for free and enjoy the scenic view.
3. The river greenway has a beautiful view and now is connected to the inter urban trail that is used way more than I think anyone would have imagined. Now if they could extend it to Lancaster park that would be great!!
4. Because it is the one I use the most and see many people use it as well
5. It is available almost year around East to access. All ages welcome. Attractive. Safe.
6. Makes use of River. Itâ€™s beautiful and used very frequently
7. Probably the most consistently utilized of this list; also not sure the library is in this category.
8. It is used by so many, I would say next would be Washington Park or Kehoe Park

### **Wells County Public Library (65 Responses Given)**

1. High attendance coupled with free service and walk ability to townspeople.
2. Year round access to many resources and programs.
3. It can be used by most people all year round.
4. They provide a variety of educational / leisure activities, attractive to all ages.
5. The library offers many resources and activities.
6. It is multipurpose.
7. This facility can be used equally all year around by everyone, no matter their social status. They offer many educational opportunities and free events.
8. The library provides an equal-opportunity for all citizens to freely access technology, information and activities for all ages
9. It can be used by all ages and backgrounds year-round for multiple uses.
10. This is hard to pick between. The library is a great place for people of all ages to go and get books or participate in kids activities. I also feel like the parks are very important as this is where our kids play sporting events and a good place to go to be outside.





11. Provides a wealth of year-round activities that are fun & educational; Keeps up with new technologies; Used by all ages; Great source for Wells County history
12. It is available FREE to everyone in the county. Ouabache is a close second but not free.
13. The library is available all-year long to provide services to children, youth, and adults. Even those who may have limited resources have access to books, computers, Wi-Fi, programs, and interaction.
14. Is open all-year round and offers many types of activities
15. The library is one of the ONLY places in Wells County where every type of person is free to socialize with everyone else regardless of class, interests and religion.
16. The library can be used year round regardless of the weather conditions. It is free for all of Wells county residents to use and has something for all ages and a wide range of interests. Also the library's meeting spaces provide a comfortable place to come together with others in the community for a wide range of activities.

**Q5 Open-Ended Responses: "What facilities for leisure, sports, or recreation would you like to see developed in Wells County?" (165 Responses Given)**

1. "Downtown Movie Theater.
2. "Putt Putt. Rock wall. More downtown shopping. No more antique stores. Real shopping.
3. "River dock/landing areas.....
4. "Waterpark similar to the one in Portland. Indoor pool perhaps? More indoor activities for during the winter.
5. A facility for all ages including the local Senior citizens.
6. A facility that provides unique exercise and recreation that we don't already have
7. A mini-golf park, an arcade, a movie theatre,
8. A movie theater (in Bluffton)
9. A movie theater, a rollerskating rink, a Starbucks, a hangout spot for teens/young adults.
10. A multi use facility for movies, live performances, restaurants, river front development
11. Better access to recreation on the river. Canoeing and kayaking would be enjoyable if the river were improved and largely returned to a more natural state.
12. Better parks.. or better access to use the parks without having to pay an arm and a leg. When wanting to host a tournament you should be proud to show off your parks but they are lacking proper care! Restaurant downtown also!



13. Canoe and kayak rental for the Wabash river. Food truck days along the Wabash. Places people can walk and ride their bikes to.
14. Continue to upgrade the river front area. Use imagination for creative use of riverfront. Consider downtown movie theater.
15. Develop an outdoor park and sports recreation behind our amazing Caylor-Nickle YMCA where there is 15 acres available with easy access from our interurban green way for kids and families to enjoy this park, combined with a state of the art wonderful 8 million dollar YMCA. The Yorktown Y has this design and it is a very successful partnership that adds to the quality of life for everyone in that town and the city of Muncie in general.
16. Develop the River, it is an untapped resource.
17. Development of River front with benches, swings, walking path, restroom and drinking fountain. Full length of the river through town.
18. Downtown Ice Cream Parlor
19. Downtown restaurant, bocce ball courts, kayaking
20. Expand the creative arts and more community classes
21. Expand the greenway path and continue to update parks
22. Family movie theater, golf driving range
23. I am looking forward to the development of the amphitheater in Ossian. I would love to see a community swimming pool in Ossian. A somewhat upscale restaurant overlooking the River in Bluffton would be nice too.
24. I heard about a group willing to organize a fabulous facility at Lancaster Park. I was disappointed when the parks department dismissed it so quickly. I felt like a beautiful facility as was presented would be a nice view upon arriving in Bluffton.
25. I think a movie theater or miniature golf course, items along these lines would be a good addition. Family activities that can be done.
26. I would like the Lancaster Park proposal to be constructed. Bluffton residents north of the river are poorly served. The proposal would bring youth baseball, adult and youth softball, pickleball, soccer, walking track, inter-urban trail connection to Quabache State Park, playground, picnic facilities, basketball and a general total family recreation experience to Bluffton's north side.
27. I would like to see a sports complex for kids and adults. What any residents want to see and what private or public investment can fund are two different things.
28. I would like to see another disk frisbee course, preferably in Bluffton. A multi use recreation center on the river where shows/movies can be played, it would have education programs with the river/science center, access to the river, more restaurants that could be tied with that facility as well. Maybe an indoor or outdoor rock wall and putt putt as well tied into that family fun center/multi use recreation science/river center.



29. I would like to see Lancaster Park developed as proposed by the task force. It would be an asset to all of the people of Northern Wells. As of now it is bare ground with a sledding hill.
30. I would like to see Lancaster Park developed into a sports complex.
31. I would like to see Roush Park transformed into a sports plaza and more teams to play ball there. Also would like more activities for teens and adults.
32. I would like to see something developed at Lancaster Park site that is NOT a sports complex. This is an un-needed type of park. I would love to see something unique in that area if it's going to be further developed.
33. I would love to see a small movie theater come in to town. It wouldn't have to be large, maybe just one screen, and I wouldn't even need it to play current movies. A theater that played classic movies would be awesome to have! I also think having a building with rock climbing walls would be so fun and suit all ages and genders.
34. I would love to see additional options in Ossian. I think that would pull some folks down from Fort Wayne and provide another option for Ossian residents. For Bluffton, I would love to see options developed for on the River. Additional options for eating along the river (maybe overlooking it or even over the top of it)...or easy options to boat/kayak/paddle boat/etc.
35. I would love to see an Art and Performing Arts Center that doubles as a Movie Theater. I would like to see more trails connecting to areas that have apartments/housing editions. I would love to have a sandwich/ice cream shop downtown. A great restaurant downtown where you can have a nice meal before you go to the movies/theater or if you are visiting at the camp ground you have somewhere to go when it is bad weather. A men's fashion boutique would also be nice.
36. I would love to see better use made of the river if possible. I don't know how clean or safe it is to navigate but it would be great if we had a place to rent canoes right here in Bluffton. I think we could also use a Nature/Science/Children's Museum or Center near the river. Maybe the Nature/Science/Children's Museum or Center could be a partnership between the Upper Wabash Conservation and Science Center, the Bluffton Parks Department, and the State Park. It would be nice to add another year round attraction to Bluffton that would be enjoyable for all ages of visitors.
37. I'm excited about the new commons at the court house. I'm also excited to see what can happen with expansion at the Wells County Public Library.
38. indoor rec space like a gymnasium or workout room that doesn't have a membership fee. Or update the machines in the City Gym workout facility.
39. Indoor recreation activities for winter months



40. Indoor Recreation center, for baseball, basketball, pickle ball, during winter months
41. It's hard to think of stuff out of the blue. I mean sure you all have wonderful ideas. It would be really neat to have a sports complex. I'm dreaming big for Bluffton. Have an area that would incorporate large grass fields for soccer, football, or maybe an outside track. Then you could have an indoor area with a pool, some courts, or other areas. I think that'd be neat to get rec leagues going and centralized in a location for all ages. Plus all that room could be used for many other activities that the parks department has.
42. kayaking/canoeing, skate park
43. Lancaster Park
44. Lancaster park for sure. It is such a convenient spot and has potential for so much.
45. More trail connections - we have a good start!
46. more trails, outdoor fitness such as Ninja Warrior Course, disc golf, sand volleyball courts, BMX biking course
47. Movie theater for leisure. A nicer baseball/soccer/tennis/pickle ball/skateboard walking track facility for sports and recreation (possibly at Lancaster park)
48. Movie theater or drive-in
49. Movie theater, sporting venue for skating, roller blading, soccer, football for off season and youth groups, telescope, putt putt,
50. Movie theater, winery, more brand name sit down restaurants.
51. Movie theatre or drive in.
52. Movie Theatre/Arcade/putt putt/laser tag - something for kids/teens, Community Garden,
53. New outside sporting complex for baseball
54. Ninja Warrior Course, sand volleyball courts, BMX bike track, no more ball diamonds
55. Park for older kids/young adults: rock climbing wall, sand volley ball nets that are chain link fenced to help keep animals out of the sand, ninja warrior type courses.
56. Personally, I would like to see more nice shops and restaurants/pubs/live music/festivals in the downtown area. These should be open later at night and on weekends to attract more people to the downtown area!! I feel the new plaza at the courthouse will be a great place for community festivals and gatherings!!!
57. Pickleball Court, public ping pong tables and cornhole
58. River Greenway extended
59. Safe supervised place for teens to hang out
60. skate boarding park



61. Skate/bmx park. Go kart track and mini golf. An automotive venue like road course or drag strip. A movie theatre.
62. Skating rink, a second outdoor swimming pool/park, restaurants with outdoor dining, mini golf course, picnic pavilions
63. Soccer, expanded dog parks, pickle ball, WiFi access, study spaces,
64. Something for the young generation- I am getting old
65. something more for the kids to do. the busier kids are the less trouble. a ice skating ring; roller dome; movies. somewhere for these kids to go and to be safe.
66. The River Greenway expanded
67. There is a shortage of baseball and softball diamonds in Northern Wells County. There are existing teams that do not have a home field on which to practice due to the shortage. There is also a great need for play equipment in that area.
68. We are in desperate need of some dining establishments that are not fast food. Something to bring people to Bluffton. A place where you can take a client to lunch and have some privacy so not everyone hears your business. I would love the opportunity to be able to rent a bicycle to explore all the walking/biking paths. An "active" Farmer's Market with local produce, honey, baked goods, etc. Winery. Brewery. Downtown dining to support the growing businesses that are already downtown.
69. We need a hang out for kids in the winter time. The gym only offers so much. They need some form of entertainment for the younger generation.
70. We Need facilities for baseball and softball. Currently there is not a facility south of Fort Wayne that could home a great recreational activity. We need a park across from Lancaster elementary
71. Youth sports fields, especially for softball because other than Norwell there are no other softball friendly fields in northern wells county. Roush recently opened to Northern Wells League, but is not local to most player. Zanesville's Diamond has a mound so only Junior League could play there and working with the Lions club is difficult. Markle Park is a very reasonable group to work with (except for baseball selecting nights and times first) but is technically a Huntington CO park. Ossian front diamond is softball friendly, but they over charge and allow baseball to make all choices on field use before a softball group that would have brought in many more people.

**Q9 Open-Ended Responses: "Which historical or other points of interest in Wells County do you think more people should be made aware of?" (88 Responses Given)**



1. Acres Nature Preserves. There are several in the Bluffton area.
2. All events. An official event calendar that's utilized more would be nice, such as a "Visit Wells County" website.
3. businesses of downtown, Pretzels
4. CCC camp history and wildlife raised at State Park in 1960s
5. cemetery walks expanded...we have a lot of important people most are unaware of...
6. Court House
7. Downtown has more to offer now and it's getting better all the time.
8. Downtown history.
9. Firetower/Bison Pen at Oubache State Park, Splash Pad on East Washington Street, Rivergreenway
10. Five Points School
11. Five Points School and possible route of Old Bluffton Cemetery Trail
12. Five Points, the Wells County Historical Museum, Charles Deam related stuff, State Park, Library, Local Parks and concerts, River Greenway, local restaurants, bowling alley, creative arts council exhibits/programs/activities/plays etc.,
13. Five Points, Wells Community Boys & Girls Club
14. Historic downtown with informational signage for visitors to read.
15. Historical museum
16. Historical Society
17. I didn't realize until a few months ago that a notable piano business was located here.
18. I do wish I could find better information about the Farmer's Market. For example, what products are available there. (I like Instagram best for being aware of activities.)
19. I think the Inter Urban Railroad and old building that is now the county garage could be very cool to focus on. If they ever move from that location, it would be very neat to see a museum dedicated to the inter urban railroad and maybe old transportation around Wells county in that era. There could be a nice area to memorialize the Kingsland wreck, and showcase history of Wells county.
20. I think the museum is a wonderful place to visit and to learn about the history of our city.
21. If Lancaster Park is developed, it will be a drawing point to bring in new families to locate. As a baseball complex, it will bring visitors to our area & generate money for restaurants & other businesses.
22. Local shops and events more advertised
23. Museum and 5 point school
24. Nothing that I'm aware of ;) ..... Also, the Bluffton KOA



25. Old Bluffton Cemetery
26. Ouabache State Park should be upgraded. Reopen the pool and add other features there.
27. Ouabache, downtown shopping and events,
28. Our Courthouse is a treasure. If the buildings were in better shape downtown, a historical walking tour would be really neat.
29. Possibilities of Lancaster park
30. Probably the museum
31. Programs of WCPL and Historical Museum
32. Roush and Lions Park...
33. The beautiful Wabash River!!!!
34. The Charles C. Deam area, I don't know much about it but I think he is someone of importance in this community.
35. The county courthouse is an interesting building in which tours could be given routinely.
36. The Historical Museum
37. The Historical Museum has more in the building than people realize. I would love to see them get to a point where it needs to be open more often.
38. The Historical Society
39. The walking trail in Bluffton, near the Hardy's.
40. The Wells County Historical Museum and Five Points School
41. The Wells County Public Library and all the programs and events that they have.
42. Wells County Historical Museum
43. Whicker park

**Q10 Open-Ended Responses: "What could Wells County do to attract more visitors from outside of the county?" (144 Responses Given)**

1. 4 ball diamond complex (like Kendallville on Allen Chapel RD.)
2. A Cleaner city, nicer restaurants, reroute the semi-trucks around the downtown area.
3. A sports complex could help...youth sports has families traveling all over to play some games and they eat at the restaurants in town, get gas, go to the grocery and even stay in hotels.
4. Add a Starbucks, add more things to do for younger people so we don't have to go to Fort Wayne.
5. Additional downtown eateries and events
6. Advertise in vacation booklets, have more things to do that people enjoy.
7. Allow more upscale chain restaurants like applebees and Texas Steakhouse





8. Be supportive of the local entities who are trying to do what they can with limited budgets to draw in visitors!
9. Better shopping. Better quality eateries. Too much fast food and too many diners.
10. Breakfast places, bats, shops, boutiques, coffee shops downtown, Italian food
11. Build Lancaster Park, entice new family restaurants to come to Bluffton
12. Build recreational facilities on north side of wells county - Lancaster
13. Continue to bring in more good paying jobs. Continue to support local businesses. Push for good eateries, breweries, and attractions like a movie theater. It's sad that the fun place for people to go in Bluffton is Walmart... make Wells county attractive to visitors, and make them stay because of the people and environment.
14. Continue to publicize attractions that are unique to Wells County--Ouabache Park, Street Fair, etc.
15. Create a destination spot. Revitalize our downtown to have store fronts and restaurants. Create an identity for ourselves versus attempting to copy others.
16. Create more baseball diamonds and a park in Northern Wells County where new housing is being planned.
17. Develop a baseball facility at Lancaster Park
18. Downtown Diner or bring back the Dutch Mill
19. Get local restaurants in the Fort Wayne news paper. We have some great food in town. Ouabache should be a drawing point for people because it is very nice. Maybe looking to improve the park somehow.
20. Have a good ice cream parlour downtown. Play on the Parlour City nickname.
21. Have a nice complex at Lancaster park to hold baseball/softball tournaments, possibly soccer and flag football
22. Have a winery to draw people in.
23. Have more high-end or specialty restaurants and consistently have events and activities for families
24. Have more quality restaurants and family friendly things to do downtown
25. I was just looking through the NE Indiana Regional Partnership Magazine. Wells County should represent ourselves better through this partnership
26. I'd love a Food Truck Rally! Perhaps at the Courthouse?
27. Improve the retail community. Offer more places to eat and things to do.
28. Increase sports tournament offerings which will draw outside visitors. People today are consumed by their kids' sports travel teams. It's a market Wells county needs to focus on more. Basketball and baseball are king in midwest towns like Bluffton.





29. It would need something that is either unique (like some type of arts related tour, certain types of parks, etc) or something that isn't close by otherwise (like a movie theatre, indoor park, river-related activities).
30. Just get the word out about what's available....advertise, etc.
31. Lancaster Park development for pickle ball, picnics, ball diamonds etc
32. Larger Farmers' Market, Continue more Musiic Festivals with Food trucks , Christmas Downtown with added Food Trucks, Unique/Home Cooking Restaurants - Revive the atmosphere of Dutch Mill Restaurant People came from all around.
33. Make a real commitment to unique businesses in the downtown. If you build it, they will come.
34. Make main and market street more inviting all over instead of just one area. Clean up some/tear down of the unused/abandoned buildings.
35. Make people outside of the county aware of what we have to offer.
36. Marketing/Advertising/Respond to queries from central location.
37. More unique shops downtown, old fashion ice cream parlour,put put, utilize the river more for fun.
38. Movie Theater, Disc golf course, more food selections
39. Movie Theater/Roller Rink or something for the kids to do - A teen hang out.
40. Offer additional activities such as what a sports complex at Lancaster Park location would bring.
41. Ouabache brings in a lot of campers from out of town. Better communication with those campers of what Bluffton offers - museum, library, shopping, bowling, etc
42. Promote growth and more activites at the state park, more downtown events and concerts, river activities/make it more accessible, build/create a multi use family fun center on the river with the mentioned programs and have a restaurant or two on that site as well.
43. Promote the greenway and Ouabache. Maybe we should embrace William Wells a little more...?
44. Provide a baseball complex
45. Publicize Park, Library history / genealogy room, closeness to Ft. Wayne re: their 2nd biggest genealogy library in the country - nice to stay here re: Park but maybe plan transportation to Ft. Wayne in van or such for small groups who want to do genealogy research?
46. Sit down restaurants and a movie theater
47. Some different places to eat would be great. No chain restaurants
48. Something that no one else has close by. Water park? Indoor water activities for during the fall. The YMCA offers an indoor pool, but the membership cost is sometimes too much for a lot of residents.



49. Think BIG.....Step out of their comfort zone.....Get rid of the "Conservative-Church" reputation. Be Original.....try ANYTHING different. Educate the public to think of more than Bluffton when they think of Wells County.
50. We need to continue to build services we offer families. We need to offer easy downtown shopping and attractions. Hold small artisan festivals. People love grand attractions and food both fortunately and unfortunately that may need to include beer, wine, and spirits.
51. While visiting other area counties, I've seen different brochures available that provide information about Huntington County or Richmond or Vincennes. I've NEVER seen any publications about Wells County. A website highlighting points of interest in Wells County. A Facebook page for the same purpose. The Cincinnati Zoo has a whole marketing campaign around a baby Hippo born at the Zoo. Wells County should do something around a baby bison?!?!?!?
52. Winery, Brewery, unique dining experience restaurants

**12 Open-Ended Responses: "Do you know of something that is interesting in Wells County that few people know of? If so, what is it?" (41 Responses Given)**

1. A Harvest of Health Nutrition & Wellness Center
2. ACRES Land Trust sites
3. Acres Preserves.
4. ACRES Trails along Wabash River
5. Archbold Wilson Park Disc Golf
6. Beautiful river areas around the Salamonie river and the river roads
7. crimson House is the best thing in Wells County
8. Deam Oak; Thirteen Graves (Batson cemetery), Ouabache Fire Tower
9. Develop Wabash River useage
10. Historical Courthouse
11. history of Masonic Lodge and signifiacance of officers in early 1900's
12. Horse racing was once very big in poneto
13. Interurban & Kingland train crash
14. mafia bust (late 70's), dont know much history
15. Mountain bike/nature trail, north of the river
16. Old tunnels connecting buildings in Bluffton. Sections should be cleared for historical tours.
17. Ossian/ Bluffton dog park and nature trails
18. Ouabache State Park. A lot of people outside of Wells county donâ€™t realize how much they offer.



19. Oubache
20. Our history of William Wells
21. Parlor City Christmas Celebration
22. The new downtown stores.
23. Trails behind the river, and murray trails
24. Underground railroad
25. Wells County has great people who care about their community and work to make it a wonderful place to live and raise a family
26. Whicker Field
27. Wicker Park

**Q13 Open-Ended Responses: "Do you have any final comments on how to improve the quality of life and improve what the county has to offer residents and visitors? - Yes (specify) - Text" (55 Responses Given)**

1. Add downtown and/or somewhere restaurants that are moderately priced and not necessarily fast food.
2. Although it may seem frivolous to some the visual matters. But not at the sacrifice of functionality.
3. And outdoor pavilion that could hold concerts and other events under a dome shape rough would be nice to see with seating for around 1000 to 1500
4. Baseball/softball diamonds in Northern Wells County
5. Become more creative of what is possible for the Bluffton and County. Co officials need to become involved with creative thinking, not just what it will cost the taxpayer. Make sure Creative Arts has positive leadership by director and board. Chamber of Commerce create sub-committees of future thinking
6. Better tourism advertising, coordination of all city events and businesses to let people know what there is to do;
7. Bird sculpture between Bluffton bridge and AC&VC
8. Boat launch & Restaurant downtown.
9. Build Lancaster Park!!!
10. Clean up the river so it could be used for canoeing.
11. Crackdown on drug sales/use.
12. Create more "destinations" so residents are inclined to stay around and visitors have more compelling options.
13. Create more family opportunities in the form of events. Develop the downtown area as well as the vacant field across from Lancaster. In order to drive new



- people to Wells county you have to look at the demographic and age groups that will be easily attracted to a small but vibrant town.
14. Create more housing so we can grow our community instead of staying the same size. Create a new attraction that is directed towards ALL age groups and not just one particular age bracket.
  15. Definitely by doing a sports complex/ big playground at Lancaster park.
  16. Do not spend so much money on down town
  17. Forgot to mention that a small Movie theater would be nice
  18. Get people involved
  19. Great place to raise a family
  20. Greater collaboration of entities and organizations that can help to strengthen the foundations of community, and keep our quality of life enrichment strategies geared towards young adults, children, seniors and families as our targets and objectives. Generally speaking, this can be a major economic driver for the community/county. Notably, just as a historical observation, it seems that companies want to bring their employees and families to a town/county that have like minded citizens and professionals who fundamentally truly get it.
  21. Has anyone talked with high school students/recent grads about what they would enjoy in Wells County? Is this survey or a similar one available/presented to teens? Ouabache just hosted the first Teen Indiana Master Naturalist Class in the state, adding it to what younger kids can learn in the Junior Class. On totally different topic, how can recycling be encouraged? Would love to hear how much gets recycled through the center and what good comes from that, beyond not having as much in land fills? Another different topic, might someone plan biking activities (if these are planned, sorry, I don't know about them).
  22. Have a Pretzel Fest with Beer. At KEhoe or downtown.
  23. I feel Bluffton would support a medium to upscale restaurant if the food and service was consistently good.
  24. I feel that we are on a good track.
  25. I think Pam does an amazing job with the Parks Department.
  26. I think that supporting Bluffton NOW and their ideas will help the county ultimately. Making a thriving hub of the county will push the county to new heights.
  27. I think that those in charge of these events are doing a good job. We live in a great community!
  28. I think to improve it moving forward, it'll take finding people that will do public-private partnerships to create facilities/space/events/etc. The NOW group is doing everything the right way and seems to be moving the ball forward in Bluffton. We need that in Ossian and Markle too.



29. I think we must attract more business, large and small and invest in infrastructure in this county and town.
30. Ignoring north and south of Market street is a hindrance to growth and creates an exclusive community.
31. Lancaster park development
32. Make surveys like this available and known to all.
33. More events and attractions, keep improving downtown
34. More events that bring in cultural diversity
35. More media offerings
36. More shops and restaurants
37. Need restaurants and locations for activities
38. Positive attitude goes a long way
39. Provide more interesting activities for teenagers
40. Public Art
41. Quality of life projects are great, but there needs to be an economic engine component behind them to ensure they are not just 'lipstick on a pig.' Growth and influx of visitors to the community are going to be most positively affected by strong economic development policies, and pro-business government incentives/development.
42. Roadway Improvement
43. See previous remarks about leadership.
44. support local business!!!
45. The Chamber is amazing!! They bring so many people in from the surrounding area. They are doing a wonderful job.
46. The Ciuncil in Aging in Wells County only focuses on transportation. I think there is a huge need for more senior activities and places for seniors to congregate
47. The people of Wells County should develop a mentality to welcome visitors with open arms in their places of business and strive to extend old fashioned Hoosier Hospitality to everyone they encounter!!!
48. The quality and variety of programs from the library and parks department are very good but because this is a small town they are not offered all the time. It is sometimes difficult to plan for just when those events occure.
49. There are no "quick fixes" and leadership and partnerships can make a difference in Wells County.
50. Try to clean up drug houses and create incentives for homes and rental properties to upgrade their property exteriors
51. We have pretty low self-esteem. It's a great place! Maybe we need to convince ourselves too!



52. We need a tap house, more restaurants, more concerts down town events, and better baseball and softball fields all of which add vibrancy to our community.
53. We need more to keep our young adults here.
54. We need to include the country people more. Most activities are attended only by folks in Bluffton, but the country people pay the most taxes for parks etc.
55. Would really like to see river front development, quality housing that is attractive and has amenities.



## Appendix VIII: Tourism Success Stories, Events and Tourism Authorities

### Two stories of areas that utilize events to attract visitors from near and far:

- Oxford is a city located in a heavily-forested, hilly region of Mississippi. Its population as of 2017 was estimated to be 23,639. It capitalizes on its literary and musical connections by advertising events centered around the famous authors and musicians who have lived or recorded there.<sup>16</sup> For example, a couple of notable events are Thacker Mountain Radio, a weekly live radio show which features author readings and a wide variety of musical performances<sup>17</sup>, and the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, which is centered around the literary works of William Faulkner, who grew up in Oxford.<sup>18</sup> The city's most famous event is probably Double Decker Arts Festival, which takes place every spring. It was originally inspired by the city's double-decker buses, which were imported from England in 1994. The festival began small, with only a handful of art and food vendors and the bed of an old pickup truck being used as a stage for music. Now the event is centered around the historic Courthouse Square and typically draws in a crowd of more than 60,000 people.<sup>19</sup>
- Dickinson is a rural city in southwest North Dakota with an estimated population of 22,739 as of 2018. Along with many other rural towns and cities, it has seen an increase in tourists in recent years.<sup>20</sup> It serves as the major hub for twelve counties in North Dakota, so its events not only serve the city's population but also draw in visitors from surrounding counties. One of its largest events is the Roughrider Days Fair and Expo, a two-week midsummer event that includes a carnival, motor sports, a parade, a 5k walk, concerts, a demolition derby and more.<sup>21</sup> The event started in 1971 as a way to keep people in town and support local businesses, but it has grown into an event that draws visitors from far and wide.<sup>22</sup> It also draws in tourists with other outdoor events such as the Southwest Speedway Stock Car Races and the Killdeer Mountain Roundup Rodeo.

<sup>16</sup> <https://visitoxfordms.com/events/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.thackermountain.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/events/faulkner/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.doubledeckerfestival.com/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://thedmonline.com/large-city-tourism-slacking-small-town-increasing/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.visitdickinson.com/events/2019/rough-rider-days->

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.thedickinsonpress.com/lifestyle/3288292-roughrider-days-fun-entire-family>



## Two stories of tourism success stemming from the establishment of a tourism authority:

- The Northern Kentucky Convention and Visitors Bureau (meetNKY) was formed in 1974 by Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties.<sup>23</sup> It has a significant positive impact on the growth of tourism in the area and the overall experience of visitors, which then benefits the residents. According to a 2014 article published by Cincy Chic, a study commissioned by the bureau in conjunction with the Cincinnati Convention and Visitors Bureau as well as the Regional Tourism Network found that the program saved each tax payer approximately \$600 per year in taxes.<sup>24</sup> In addition, in the Bureau's 2017 annual report, the bureau-generated estimated economic impact was up 15.6% to \$128 million dollars.<sup>25</sup> meetNKY is also an important collaborative partner to the local government and it makes targeted efforts to advocate for visitors. According to the Kentucky Travel Industry Association's webpage on tourism impact, meetNKY contributed to the City of Covington's riverfront revitalization efforts by advocating for a visitor component to be considered in the City's plan. It was successful in getting funding from the Covington Business Council for specific visitor enhancements around the Convention Center.<sup>26</sup>
- The Stark County Convention and Visitors' Bureau (Visit Canton) was originally created in 1980 in Ohio to operate in conjunction with the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, but was allowed to become an independent entity in 2016 in order to allow it to better focus on driving economic growth through travel and tourism.<sup>27</sup> Visit Canton has played a significant role in improving the travel economy in Stark County. According to the Canton 2018 Annual Report, the trend for room night demand and visitor spending has increased significantly over the past five years, with room night demand up 20.3% and visitor spending up 13.7% since 2013. Additionally, an increase to the lodging tax collection in 2017 positioned Visit Canton to invest more in attracting and supporting major events, expanding destination marketing outreach, and identifying opportunities to develop the Stark County destination. Visit Canton has also been active about entering into community partnerships with organizations such as ArtsinStark in 2018, which generated \$4,308,326 of visitor spending in 2018.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.meetnky.com/learn/our-history/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cincy chic.com/featured/meetnky>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.meetnky.com/2017/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ktia.com/tourism-impact>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.cantonrep.com/article/20151216/NEWS/151219505>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.visitcanton.com/about-us/>

