

# JRAC Special Meeting

Location: Wells County Courthouse; Circuit Court Jury Room

Date: June 30, 2025

Time: 4:00 PM

Attendees: Council Member: Greg Werich, Chair, Chief Probation Officer  
Council Member: Judge Kenton Kiracofe, Secretary, Wells Circuit Court  
Council Member: Jinny Broderick, Park Center  
Council Member: Scott Holliday, Wells County Sheriff  
Council Member: Kyle Randall, Bluffton Chief of Police  
Council Member: Scott Turmail, Wells County Community Corrections  
Council Member: Colin Andrews, Prosecutor  
Public Attendee: Brandon Harnish, County Council  
Public Attendee: Trent Reichley, PAGO USA  
Public Attendee: Tammy Slater, Wells County Foundation  
Public Attendee: Jessica Bricker, Wells County Foundation  
Public Attendee: Jeffrey Stineburg, Prosecutor's Office  
Public Attendee: Holly Gaskill, Bluffton News Banner  
Public Attendee: Joshua Barkley, Barkley Builders  
Public Attendee: Nathan Stauffer, Parlor City Cabinetry  
Council Member Jordyn Shumate, Probation Secretary

## Agenda items

### 1.A agenda presented

Items deferred: Minutes (to August Regular Meeting), Quarterly Electronic Monitoring Report, Annual Local JRAC Report, Juvenile Services, Community Supervision Committee, Mental Health Committee, Sequential Intercept Map Project Committee, Old Business

New Business: Discussion of Opioid Use Settlement Funds for a Bluffton downtown revitalization project, "Bluffton Vitalism" by Brandon Harnish in conjunction with PAGO USA.

Chair Gregory Werich opened the meeting by expressing appreciation for those in attendance.

### 2. Bluffton Vitalism Project

Brandon Harnish, County Council, and Trent Reichley, PAGO USA, presented a long-term downtown Bluffton revitalization project that aims to address social determinants of drug abuse (poverty, isolation, and disinvestment) through downtown redevelopment. The presenters identified ways in which the project might align with the uses of restricted Opioid Settlement Funds under applicable laws and guidance.

### **Main Project Components**

The presenters proposed the formation of a land trust under the Wells County Foundation that would acquire and renovate downtown properties to create recovery-focused spaces in the community. Harnish suggested that redevelopment of mixed-use spaces can preserve local ownership and prevent displacement for those coming out of incarceration or treatment.

### **Specific Funding Proposals**

- Reserve downtown commercial space for a nonprofit drug abuse recovery organization
- Acquire and transform the old Bluffton hospital building (1100 S Main St) into an “Angel of Recovery” Park with potential for a pavilion for mental health/recovery groups and Narcan dispensary
- Expand River Greenway

Harnish presented these ideas as part of his commitment to using these funds responsibly.

### **Financial Overview**

- As of June 27, 2025, the County Auditor shows the Opioid Settlement Fund balances as:
  - Restricted: \$218,979.07
  - Unrestricted: \$85,630.31
- The proposed budget is \$301,609 with \$3,000 allocated to CADA.
- The City of Bluffton is committing a \$1 million line of credit for property acquisition.
- Wells County Government is also committing a \$1 million line of credit.
- The Wells County Foundation is expected to meet this month to discuss its financial contribution.

### **Outcome**

Although JRAC does not have the authority to allocate funds, members agreed to give their voice of support to the commissioners.

First motion: Colin Andrews, who expressed willingness to represent JRAC at a future commissioners’ meeting, made a motion to recommend that the full available amount be considered for use in the Bluffton Vitalism project. The motion received no second and was not brought to vote.

Second motion: Andrews made a second motion to send a letter to the commissioners to support the utilization of these funds for the Bluffton Vitalism project. This motion was seconded by Judge Kiracofe (Secretary).

All in favor: Gregory Werich (Chair), Judge Kiracofe (Secretary), Colin Andrews, Scott Holliday, Kyle Randall, and Scott Turmail.

All opposed: Jinny Broderick

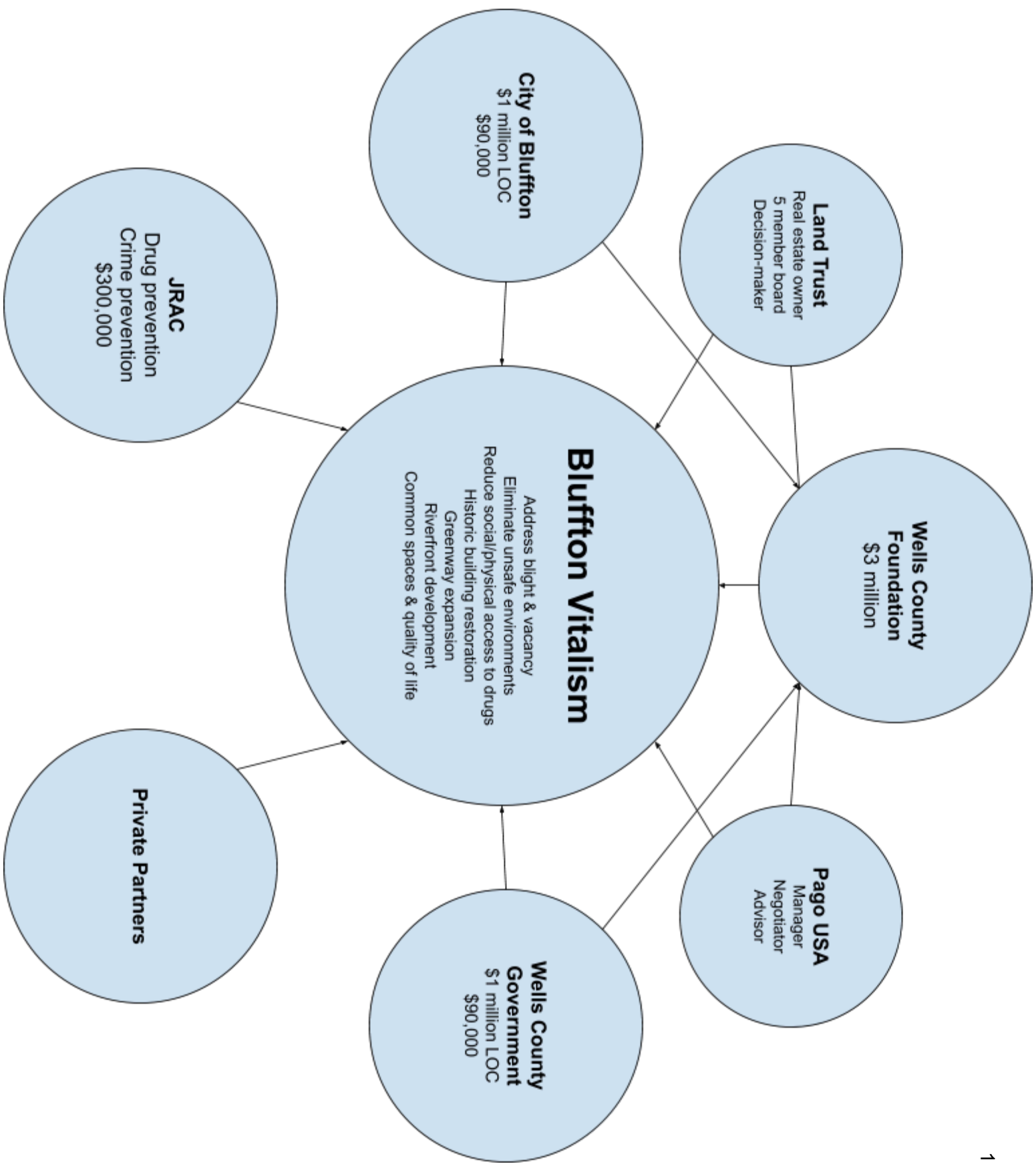
### **3. Future JRAC Activities**

- Draft and deliver a letter of support from JRAC to the Wells County Commissioners, voicing advisory support for the Bluffton Vitalism Project and proposed use of the county's Opioid Settlement Funds.

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 20, 2025 at 11:30 in the Wells Circuit Court Jury Room.

### **4. Attachments**

- Bluffton Vitalism Bubble Map
- Bluffton Vitalism - Building a Stronger Wells County: Evidence Based Approach to Small Town Vitality and Drug Abuse Prevention
- Wells County Land Trust: Changing Spaces, Changing Lives
- PAGO USA: What Makes the PAGO USA Model Different?
- Opioid Settlement Document



# Bluffton Vitalism - Building a Stronger Wells County

An Evidence-Based Approach to Small Town Vitality and Drug Abuse Prevention

## JRAC's Role:

Under Indiana Code 33-38-9.5, JRAC plays an advisory and coordinating role in the criminal justice system, with indirect responsibilities related to opioid settlement funds through its broader mandate and in connection with Indiana Code 4-12-16, which governs the distribution and use of opioid settlement funds.

These responsibilities include the following:

- Advising Local Governments on Fund Allocation
- Ensuring Compliance with IC 4-12-16 and Exhibit E
- Promoting Evidence-Based Strategies
- Supporting Reporting and Accountability

## The Big Idea:

**Addressing Social Determinants:** Investments in economic or environmental improvements that reduce risk factors for opioid misuse, such as poverty, isolation, or neglected environments.

## 1. Economic Improvement

- **How it works:** Public-private investments in mixed-use developments (e.g., condos, retail) create jobs and attract businesses, reducing poverty—a key driver of opioid abuse and drug crime. Under Exhibit E's broad scope, restricted opioid funds can support economic initiatives like grants in revitalized areas, addressing social determinants of addiction.
- **Evidence:** A 2017 National Bureau of Economic Research study linked job access to a 10-20% reduction in opioid misuse. In Indiana, **Fort Wayne's downtown revitalization**, including the Riverfront Fort Wayne project, reduced drug-related arrests by 12% through job growth from new businesses and tourism (FBI UCR data). Fort Wayne has also implemented initiatives like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which has demonstrated a significant reduction in overall crime rates in specific areas, such as High Street, through enhancements like improved street lighting.
- **Indiana example: Riverfront Fort Wayne** (2018–present) used public-private partnerships to develop mixed-use spaces along the St. Marys River, creating over 500 jobs and attracting \$200 million in private investment. This economic boost correlated with reduced drug-related crime in nearby areas, as reported by local police data. Similarly, **Evansville's downtown revitalization** (2015–2021) included the Ford Center and new commercial spaces, generating 300+ jobs and an 11% drop in drug arrests (FBI UCR data).
- **Impact on opioid abuse/crime:** Stable employment reduces financial desperation driving opioid use and dealing.
- **JRAC relevance:** Funds can be used to support demolishing blighted properties to eliminate drug hotspots, replacing them with community assets like parks or commercial spaces to foster economic growth and hope, provided these projects are tied to drug abatement strategies. These align with Indiana's opioid remediation goals under IC 4-12-16.

## 2. Improved Public Spaces and Community Engagement

- **How it works:** Investments in parks and riverfronts create safe spaces for recreation and social interaction, fostering community cohesion and reducing environments conducive to drug activity. Restricted funds can support public spaces under Exhibit E, such as community centers, wellness programs, or peer support hubs that promote opioid prevention and recovery.
- **Evidence:** A 2013 *Injury Prevention* study in Philadelphia found greening vacant lots reduced violent crime by 9% and depression by 41% (2018 *JAMA Network Open* study), a factor linked to opioid abuse.
- **Indiana example: Indianapolis's White River State Park redevelopment** (1980s–present), funded partly by the Lilly Endowment, created a vibrant urban park system with cultural and recreational spaces, leading to a 15% reduction in drug-related incidents in adjacent neighborhoods (IMPD data). The **Bloomington Community Orchard**, a public-private initiative, transformed a vacant lot into a community space, reducing nearby drug-related calls by 8% (BPD data).
- **Impact on opioid abuse/crime:** Safe public spaces deter open-air drug markets. Recovery-focused spaces, like parks with naloxone kiosks or wellness events, support harm reduction and prevention.
- **JRAC relevance:** Exhibit E allows funds for community-based programs, such as parks hosting recovery meetings, mental health workshops, or youth prevention activities, meeting Indiana's goal of reducing opioid misuse through community resilience.
  - **Fund Allocation:** JRAC could recommend using funds to demolish a blighted building and build a park with prevention or recovery features, as Indianapolis did with **\$1.2 million** for recovery residences (2024 FSSA report). Exhibit E allows funds for community spaces addressing social determinants like despair.
  - **Opioid-Specific Outcomes:** JRAC could ensure parks reduce drug abuse by hosting CADA, Tri Recovery, or Wells County Drug Taskforce programs.

## 3. Addressing Blight and Vacancy

- **How it works:** Demolishing or renovating abandoned properties eliminates drug activity hotspots. Exhibit E broadly supports blight remediation tied to opioid abatement.
- **Evidence:** A 2015 *PLoS One* study in New Orleans showed blight remediation reduced drug-related crimes by 5.7% in nearby areas. Cleveland's Vacant Lot Reuse Program saw a 13% drop in drug arrests after converting lots into community gardens or housing (CPD data). In Indiana, **Indianapolis's blight reduction efforts** through the Indy Land Bank (2016–2022) cut drug-related calls by 10% in targeted neighborhoods (IMPD data).
- **Indiana example: Indianapolis's Great Places 2020 initiative** partnered with local nonprofits and private developers to redevelop blighted areas in six neighborhoods, converting vacant lots into housing and community spaces. This led to a 12% decrease in drug-related crime in areas like Near Eastside (IMPD data). **Terre Haute's blight elimination program** (2018–2023), funded partly by federal grants, demolished 200+ abandoned structures, reducing drug-related arrests by 9% in affected areas (THPD data).
- **Impact on opioid abuse/crime:** Blighted areas foster drug use and trafficking due to lack of oversight. Remediation disrupts these environments, reducing opioid-related activity.
- **JRAC relevance:** Exhibit E supports blight remediation as an infrastructure improvement if tied to opioid remediation, such as eliminating drug hotspots, under harm reduction or social determinants of health provisions.
  - **IC 4-12-16** allows this for unrestricted funds without restriction and for restricted funds if justified as addressing opioid-specific outcomes, such as reducing drug activity.

- **Blight remediation** reduces **environmental factors** like drug hotspots, supported by precedents and research linking blighted properties to substance use.

## 4. The Bluffton Vision

- **River Greenway Expansion**
  - We want to lean into events like Recovery on the River at Kehoe Park and Tri Recovery 5k runs. Investments in parks and riverfronts create safe spaces for recreation and social interaction, fostering community cohesion and reducing environments conducive to drug activity.
  - **The Riverfront Fort Wayne project** reduced drug-related arrests by 12% through job growth from new businesses and tourism. Restricted funds can support public spaces under Exhibit E.
  - **South Bend's East Bank redevelopment** (2015–2022) added housing and retail along the St. Joseph River, stabilizing the area and cutting drug arrests by 9% (SBPD data).
  - **Our vision for Bluffton** includes a River Greenway expansion northwest of the Chamber of Commerce, around the bend of the Wabash River, up to the Old Bluffton Cemetery, extending the total length of the Greenway to 5 kilometers (from the State Park to the Cemetery).
- **Attacking Downtown Vacancy & Underutilization**
  - Across the 20 downtown Bluffton buildings we've targeted for remediation, as of December 2024, 70% of the apartments are vacant.
  - **Haughville and West Indianapolis:** These neighborhoods, with vacancy rates as high as 20% in 2018, reported 25% higher rates of opioid-related emergency calls compared to city averages (2022 Indianapolis EMS data). Residents cited abandoned properties as symbols of neglect, contributing to community despair and drug activity.
  - **Evansville's Haynie's Corner Arts District** (2010–present), a public-private effort, redeveloped historic buildings into condos and cultural spaces, increasing property values by 20% and reducing drug-related incidents by 11% (EPD data).
  - Rundown towns, city neglect, and building vacancy create despair, foster social isolation, and erode community pride.
  - **Our vision for Bluffton** includes redeveloping/refurbishing old buildings into apartments, retail and cultural spaces, while emphasizing and maintaining the historic integrity of the downtown, alongside existing businesses and apartments.
- **The Old Wells Community Hospital**
  - Blight and vacancy in urban areas can create a sense of hopelessness that contributes to drug abuse, including opioid misuse, by fostering environments of neglect, social isolation, and economic despair. Vacant properties often become hotspots for illegal activities, including drug use and trafficking, normalizing substance abuse in the community.
  - The City of Bluffton, Wells County Government, and numerous private donors have come together to invest in a new multi-million dollar pool on Spring Street. We want to build on this momentum and the vacant Wells Community Hospital also on Spring Street is a natural target. Acquiring this physically imposing instance of urban blight will empower our community to assess its condition and decide on refurbishment or demolition.
- **Small Town Love and Fidelity**
  - Revitalized areas signal investment and care, boosting residents' sense of hope and reducing psychological triggers for drug use. By fostering a sense of community through the creation of common spaces, revitalization can strengthen social support networks and discourage drug use, especially among vulnerable populations.
  - We want the City of Bluffton to be a beacon of hope for Wells County residents. Wells County, on the whole, can be a place where our children want to stay and put down roots, but that requires men and women with the vision and the will to make that happen.

## **WELLS COUNTY LAND TRUST**

### ***Changing Spaces. Changing Lives***

The Wells County Land Trust is a nonprofit created by the Wells County Foundation and local partners to restore historic downtown properties, expand housing, support small business growth, and break the cycle of long-term blight. By investing in and transforming the **built environment**—our physical spaces—we create safer, healthier, and more hopeful communities. When we invest in place, we influence behavior: clean, stable spaces reduce hopelessness, improve outcomes, and support recovery. But the community can't fix what it doesn't own. That's why the Trust exists: to acquire and steward key properties, reinvest locally, and ensure redevelopment reflects the values and needs of Wells County residents.

### **WHY JRAC?**

The Justice Reinvestment Advisory Council's mission is to reduce addiction, incarceration, and recidivism through sustainable, community-based change. Investing in the built environment is one of the most proven, effective strategies for advancing that mission:

- Turns vacant, distressed properties into positive community assets & gathering places
- Removes physical triggers that perpetuate cycles of trauma, poverty, and addiction
- Provides stable, place-based housing, a key factor in long-term recovery
- Improves public safety and walkability, decreasing opportunities for criminal activity
- Stimulates economic mobility & spaces for entrepreneurship, giving people a reason—and a place—to stay and thrive

### **CASE STUDY: OVER-THE-RHINE**

Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine district was once a national symbol of concentrated poverty, addiction, and abandonment. Through a nonprofit-led, public-private redevelopment effort (3CDC), dozens of vacant & drug-prone properties were restored. The result: reduced crime, streamlined homeless outreach services, increased housing stability, new spaces for local businesses, health services, and long-term community trust. Wells County now stands at a similar inflection point—with the chance to revitalize on its own terms, with local leadership and a right-sized strategy.

### **Requested Investment**



\$300,000 in opioid settlement funds targeted toward the acquisition and stabilization of high-risk, blighted properties in the community.

## WHAT MAKES THE PAGO USA MODEL DIFFERENT?



### OUR PHILOSOPHY

As individuals increasingly choose where to live and work based on the quality of life a community offers, communities must take proactive steps to secure their future. A stagnant community—one lacking diverse housing options or failing to maintain their downtown—will find itself at a disadvantage. Communities that prioritize quality of life, invest in their identity, and support future-oriented growth will thrive, while those that don't will struggle.

If your community aspires to transform your downtown into a vibrant destination with preserved historic buildings, new housing options, and space for small businesses and entrepreneurs to grow, you as leaders will have to do the work. And PAGO USA and our partners will bring the tools and the expertise required to execute the bold vision.



### PAGO USA AS YOUR PARTNER

Pago USA firmly believes the community should own its strategic real estate assets, not an out-of-town developer or private equity company.

Since we do not hold ownership, we operate on a fee-for-service basis. This means we provide recommendations while the owner retains the decision-making power. Our primary role is to offer guidance and support in implementing your vision.



### OWNERSHIP

If you build a new house (a strategic personal asset), the owner, not the builder, makes the decisions.

Similarly, if you revitalize your downtown (a strategic asset for your community), the community, not the developer, should make the decisions.

Ownership entails both privilege and responsibility. In the PAGO USA model, the owner is responsible for making decisions regarding finishes, materials, rental rates, and tenant leasing, while receiving guidance from PAGO USA, our development partners, and any other partners the owner chooses to involve.

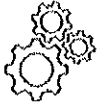


### VALUE RETAINED WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

A fundamental aspect of the PAGO USA model is our choice to forgo monetizing the appreciated value of the project, instead allowing it to stay within the community. By utilizing a downtown trust as the owner, the increased value of the restored buildings remains local.

Typically, a developer will sell a project 5 to 10 years after its completion, often transferring it to a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), most of which are not even based in Indiana. Consequently, the project then aligns with the interests of that REIT, which is specifically structured to extract value from its investments for its shareholders. Our model leaves the value to the benefit of the community.





## WHAT WE DO + HOW WE DO IT

We help communities restore **their "American Village"** to boost community pride and make small town America a place where people have enhanced opportunities for personal and professional growth. Our overarching objective is **100%** restoration to modern standards of as many historic/strategic buildings in your downtown core or city limits as possible, enabling them to last for another 100+ years. Once this work is completed, the community will have a built environment that helps its people and businesses **thrive and fosters population growth**. There are five basic steps to our process: Property Acquisition, Design & Financing, Construction, Property Management, and Event Planning.



### STEP 1: PROPERTY ACQUISITION (12-24 MONTHS)

1. Create a downtown trust in partnership with a community foundation and/or community investors. Estimated costs to purchase 40 buildings would be \$3.5M. This budget will be market-dependent
2. Hire PAGO USA as a consultant to assess the target area and document the total number of buildings, owners, square footage, condition, and value, create a purchasing budget and prioritize the buildings to purchase
3. Strategically purchase buildings as efficiently as possible, based on collective prioritization



### STEP 2: DESIGN AND FINANCING (12-18 MONTHS POST ACQUISITION)

1. PAGO USA and Model Group (MG) put together a plan and financial model to restore and lease up 10-20 buildings (a Phase 1 project)
2. PAGO USA and MG recommend architect and engineering firms suitable for this work and Owner makes hiring decision to design the project and develop construction documents
3. PAGO USA and MG acquire federal, state and local tax incentives with a goal to cover ~60% of the project
4. PAGO USA and MG work with Owner to acquire bank debt/Indiana Main Street Fund Loan and secure buyer(s) for tax credits
5. Owner commits to funding equity
6. Closing



### STEP 3: CONSTRUCTION (18 MONTHS FROM CLOSING)

1. MG manages construction process per plan
2. MG reports monthly progress to owner
3. Owner manages change order decisions with counsel from MG



### STEP 4: PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

1. PAGO USA and MG recommend Property Management (PM) companies and Owner makes hiring decision, or
2. Owner forms a PM company and General Manager (GM) to form PM team
3. PM team rents apartments and commercial space (with input from Owner, curates the retail, restaurant, and office experience)



### STEP 5: EVENT PLANNING

1. Owner/community ensures that sufficient community events are occurring to help support the investment in revitalization and to showcase all the community offers (e.g. plan and execute 52 weekend events per year and 24 weekday events per year)

## DOWNTOWN TRUST OVERVIEW



### WHAT IS IT?

An Indiana nonprofit corporation



### WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

To acquire, hold and develop or redevelop improved and unimproved real estate within the City and the unincorporated areas of the County.

To undertake specific economic development projects and other improvements within the County.

To raise and hold funds, consistent with the 501(c)(3) charitable and tax exempt status of the Corporation, from corporate, foundation and other private sources, together with funds from public sources, to undertake and carry out the purposes of the Corporation;

To enable effective and timely implementation of specific real estate based development projects, either through the purchasing, holding, selling or leasing of improved or unimproved real estate within the County and participate in projects of strategic significance that promote new economic development or redevelopment within the County.

To participate in real estate development projects within County by the use of grants, loans or equity participation in an effort to leverage third party private sector financing and any applicable public financing for an identified project.

To work cooperatively with the City, County, their respective Departments of Redevelopment and other entities or stakeholders that are principally engaged in efforts that are aligned with the purposes of the Corporation.



### HOW IS IT FORMED?

Through a combination of private sector leaders and/or public or private institutions within the County. In conjunction with Taft Law, PAGO USA has developed legal documents that can be used to establish a Downtown Trust using best practices.



### WHO SITS ON THE BOARD?

We recommend a board of 5-7 leaders in the community, with a majority from the private sector.



### WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE DOWNTOWN TRUST?

The Downtown Trust can accept funds from the public sector and the private sector.

## **G. PREVENT MISUSE OF OPIOIDS**

Support efforts to discourage or prevent misuse of opioids through evidence-based or evidence-informed programs or strategies that may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Funding media campaigns to prevent opioid misuse.
2. Corrective advertising or affirmative public education campaigns based on evidence.
3. Public education relating to drug disposal.
4. Drug take-back disposal or destruction programs.
5. Funding community anti-drug coalitions that engage in drug prevention efforts.
6. Supporting community coalitions in implementing evidence-informed prevention, such as reduced social access and physical access, stigma reduction—including staffing, educational campaigns, support for people in treatment or recovery, or training of coalitions in evidence-informed implementation, including the Strategic Prevention Framework developed by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (“SAMHSA”).

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7. Engaging non-profits and faith-based communities as systems to support prevention.
8. Funding evidence-based prevention programs in schools or evidence-informed school and community education programs and campaigns for students, families, school employees, school athletic programs, parent-teacher and student associations, and others.
9. School-based or youth-focused programs or strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in preventing drug misuse and seem likely to be effective in preventing the uptake and use of opioids.
10. Create or support community-based education or intervention services for families, youth, and adolescents at risk for OUD and any co-occurring SUD/MH conditions.
11. Support evidence-informed programs or curricula to address mental health needs of young people who may be at risk of misusing opioids or other drugs, including emotional modulation and resilience skills.
12. Support greater access to mental health services and supports for young people, including services and supports provided by school nurses, behavioral health workers or other school staff, to address mental health needs in young people that (when not properly addressed) increase the risk of opioid or another drug misuse.

## **H. PREVENT OVERDOSE DEATHS AND OTHER HARMS (HARM REDUCTION)**