

WELLS COUNTY MASTER PLAN 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 Wells County Master Plan is the culmination of a countywide effort to balance tradition and progress in a region deeply rooted in agriculture yet poised for economic diversification. Initiated in response to shifting demographics, evolving market demands, and critical infrastructure needs, the Plan is designed to ensure that Wells County and its communities grow in a way that preserves their rural identity while capitalizing on new opportunities and fulfilling the ideas of the Vision 2035 Plan. To achieve this, local leaders, planners, and residents collaborated through an inclusive, multi-phased process involving countywide data analysis, public surveys, and a series of community meetings. By understanding regional economic benchmarks, comparing household incomes and growth projections, and capturing the voices of thousands of residents, the planning team developed a strong fact-based foundation on which to build.

Key findings from this process underscored several challenges and opportunities. First, agricultural preservation remains a high priority, reflecting a strong desire to retain prime farmland and maintain the county's rural charm. At the same time, residents and businesses voiced a need for diverse economic opportunities, ranging from small-scale entrepreneurship to larger manufacturing and service-sector employers that can offer stable jobs. In concert with these economic considerations, housing emerged as a critical theme: public input revealed demand for everything from attainable single-family homes and senior-friendly layouts to higher-density options in and around Bluffton, Ossian, and other population centers. Meanwhile, the Plan highlights infrastructure modernization, particularly road maintenance, stormwater management, water/sewer capacity, and rural broadband, as essential for accommodating both residential and industrial growth without sacrificing quality of life.

Throughout the public engagement phase, residents consistently underscored the importance of maintaining small-town values. They advocated for preserving local heritage and open spaces, while also welcoming projects, be they new retail offerings, expanded recreation, or healthcare facilities, that reflect modern community needs. To address these issues, the Plan articulates a series of overarching Vision Principles for the county, supported by more focused action items for each municipality and rural area. These Principles direct land use regulations, capital improvement priorities, and intergovernmental partnerships, ensuring that resources are deployed efficiently and align with community values.

Looking ahead, the Wells County Master Plan functions as a shared roadmap for local and county officials, stakeholders, and residents to fulfill Vision 2035. It sets forth practical strategies: farmland preservation zoning, incentives for housing infill, coordination with regional workforce programs, incentives for locally owned businesses, and rigorous infrastructure planning tied to growth projections. By rigorously implementing these strategies, while continuously monitoring progress and engaging citizens, the Plan aims to keep Wells County on a trajectory of balanced growth. Ultimately, the 2025 Wells County Master Plan invites all communities to collaborate in protecting the county's agricultural roots, broadening its economic base, and ensuring that future development remains people-centered, sustainable, and adaptable to changing times.

INTRODUCTION



Nestled in the heart of northeastern Indiana, Wells County has a rich history shaped by its agricultural roots, strong work ethic, and commitment to community. Established in 1837, the county's fertile land and access to transportation routes quickly made it a center for farming, milling, and early industry. With its flat terrain and productive soil, agriculture became the backbone of the local economy, a legacy that continues today as Wells County remains a leader in crop and livestock production.

As industry and commerce grew alongside agriculture, towns such as Bluffton, Ossian, and Markle developed into key economic and social hubs, fostering a balance between rural traditions and modern opportunities. Bluffton, the county seat, became a center for manufacturing and business, while smaller communities maintained their close-knit, small-town charm. The county's transportation infrastructure, including major highways and rail access, has played a crucial role in economic development, connecting Wells County to regional and national markets.

Today, Wells County is known for its strong agricultural base, growing industries, and high quality of life. The county offers a mix of historic charm and forward-thinking growth, with expanding residential areas, business-friendly development, and a dedication to preserving its rural character. Parks, trails, and recreational opportunities provide residents and visitors with access to natural spaces, supporting a lifestyle that blends tradition with progress.

This deep connection to its land, economy, and people provides a strong foundation for Wells County's master plan, ensuring a future that embraces sustainable growth, economic resilience, and community-driven development while preserving the heritage that makes the county unique.

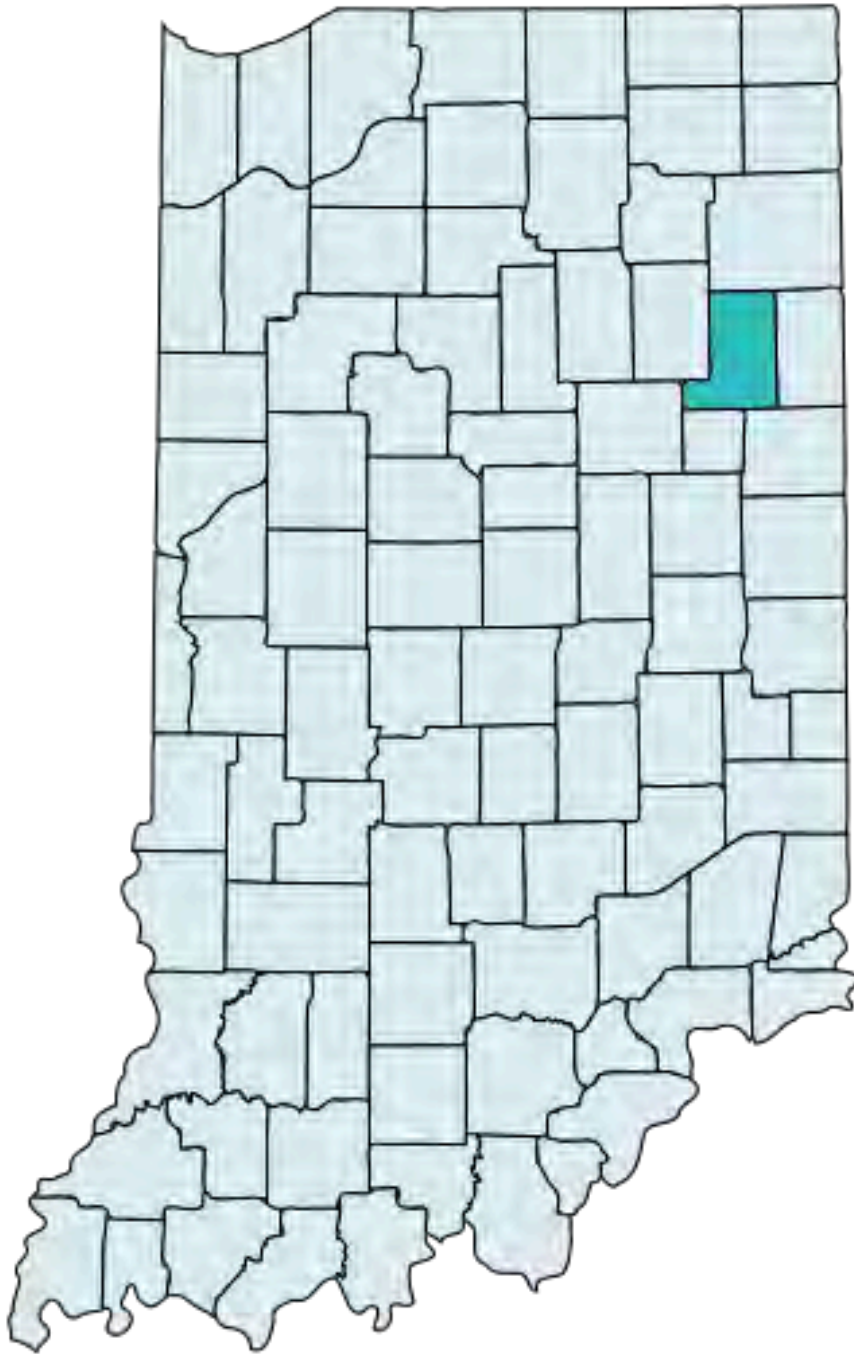


Figure 1: Wells County, Indiana

Wells County has the opportunity to focus on strategic growth and development that balances its strong agricultural heritage with expanding residential, commercial, and industrial opportunities. This master plan will explore a range of strategies, including housing, infrastructure, economic development, and land use planning, to support sustainable progress while preserving the county's rural character and high quality of life. As Wells County experiences shifts in population and economic trends, the plan will address the need for diverse housing options, improved infrastructure, and a strong local economy that supports both residents and businesses.

Historically, Wells County's development has been driven by agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation access, shaping a landscape where rural communities thrive alongside industrial and commercial growth. However, as market demands evolve, the county must plan for economic diversification, workforce development, and land use efficiency while maintaining the characteristics that make it unique. This master plan incorporates demographic data, economic trends, and community input to guide decision-making and ensure that growth is both sustainable and aligned with community priorities.

By identifying key priorities, addressing critical needs, and shaping development policies that reflect community values, this plan, building from Vision 2035, will serve as a roadmap for Wells County's future, ensuring that it remains a great place to live, work, and grow for generations to come.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

National trends must be considered in the context of Wells County's future growth and development, as these trends will shape local dynamics across housing, workforce, infrastructure, and community services.

Recognizing these shifts is essential for stakeholders in economic development, land use planning, and public services to proactively guide sustainable growth. Key elements that need to be considered in the context of this master plan include:

- **Population Shifts to Suburban and Rural Areas:** While urban centers have historically driven population growth, recent trends indicate increasing migration to suburban and rural communities. Factors such as housing affordability, remote work opportunities, and quality of life considerations are drawing new residents to areas like Wells County, influencing infrastructure needs, economic development strategies, and housing supply.
- **Workforce Evolution and Labor Market Changes:** Automation, remote work, and shifts in industry demand are reshaping workforce needs. Counties that provide access to high-speed internet, workforce training, and business-friendly environments will be better positioned to attract and retain workers across a variety of industries.
- **Declining Household Size and Shifting Lifestyles:** Average household sizes are decreasing due to delayed marriage, lower birth rates, and an increasing number of single-person households. These changes influence demand for smaller, more flexible housing options and community amenities that cater to diverse living arrangements, including young professionals, retirees, and multigenerational households.

These demographic shifts highlight the importance of adaptable planning strategies, infrastructure investments, and policy updates to support Wells County's long-term success. Housing diversity, workforce development initiatives, and multimodal transportation options will all be critical in ensuring the county remains a desirable place to live, work, and invest.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership plays a crucial role in shaping economic development and regional collaboration across Wells County and its neighboring counties. As a key economic development organization, the Partnership focuses on business attraction, talent development, and infrastructure investment to strengthen the region’s economic competitiveness. Within the context of the Wells County Comprehensive Plan, the Partnership serves as a valuable resource in aligning local planning efforts with broader regional initiatives, ensuring that growth and investment strategies are coordinated for maximum impact.

Wells County benefits from its strategic location within Northeast Indiana, offering access to regional transportation networks, workforce development programs, and business-friendly initiatives championed by the Partnership. Through efforts like the Road to One Million Plan and other regional economic strategies, the Partnership promotes policies that support industrial growth, workforce readiness, and quality of life improvements—key themes reflected in this comprehensive plan.

As Wells County seeks to balance agricultural preservation, business expansion, and residential growth, collaboration with the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership provides opportunities to attract investment, enhance workforce retention, and leverage infrastructure funding. By aligning local goals with regional strategies, Wells County can foster a resilient economy, support job creation, and ensure long-term prosperity while maintaining its rural character and community values.



Figure 2: North East Indiana Regional Partnership

COMPARISON DATA

This section of the master plan examines the demographic, housing, and economic data for Wells County, Indiana, and its communities, including Bluffton, Ossian, Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz. By analyzing key metrics such as population growth, housing trends, income levels, and socioeconomic indicators, this section provides valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of the county and its communities. These data points not only help identify current trends but also inform future planning and decision-making to support sustainable growth and development across Wells County.

The analysis also includes comparisons with regional competitors to provide context for Wells County's position within the broader region. Communities within Wells County were evaluated alongside nearby towns and cities to assess relative strengths, challenges, and opportunities. This comparative lens helps highlight areas where the county and its communities are excelling, as well as areas where strategic efforts may be needed to remain competitive. As part of the larger master plan, these findings serve as a foundation for crafting actionable strategies that align with the county's goals for economic vitality, housing development, and overall community well-being.

The following pages delve deeper into the specifics of this analysis, focusing on individual communities, their performance against regional benchmarks, and the implications of these findings for future growth in Wells County.

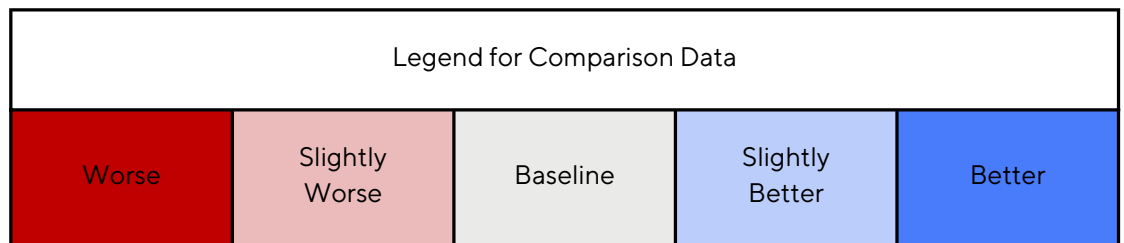


Figure 3: Legend for Comparison Data

WELLS COUNTY

This section examines Wells County’s demographic and economic trends in comparison to regional peers and state averages. By analyzing factors such as population growth, income levels, and other indexes, this section provides context for how Wells County stacks up against nearby communities. These comparisons help identify strengths, such as socioeconomic status, as well as challenges, including modest population growth. The insights gained will inform strategies to enhance economic development and long-term community sustainability.

POPULATION TRENDS

Figure 4 provides a comparative overview of population trends in Wells County and its neighboring counties from 2024 to 2029. Wells County demonstrates remarkable population stability, with a modest growth of 0.43% over this period. This positions Wells County as a steady performer in a region characterized by significant population variability.

Site	2024 Total Population		2029 Total Population		Population Change % (2024 - 2029)	
	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference
Wells County	28,470	0.00%	28,593	0.00%	+0.43%	0.00%
Whitley County	34,738	+22.02%	34,955	+22.25%	+0.62%	+44.59%
Noble County	47,420	+66.56%	47,397	+65.76%	-0.05%	-111.23%
Jay County	19,995	-29.77%	19,552	-31.62%	-2.22%	-612.82%
Huntington County	36,863	+29.48%	36,715	+28.41%	-0.40%	-192.93%
Grant County	65,484	+130.01%	64,345	+125.04%	-1.74%	-502.60%
DeKalb County	43,862	+54.06%	44,153	+54.42%	+0.66%	+53.56%
Blackford County	11,877	-58.28%	11,618	-59.37%	-2.18%	-604.75%
Adams County	36,307	+27.53%	36,619	+28.07%	+0.86%	+98.91%

Figure 4: Population Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

In comparison:

- Whitley County, a neighboring county with a similar growth trajectory, shows a slightly higher growth rate of 0.62%. This suggests comparable regional conditions, although Whitley County's total population remains larger.
- Counties such as Jay County and Blackford County experience notable population declines (-2.22% and -2.18%, respectively), highlighting potential challenges in neighboring areas that Wells County appears to avoid.

- While Adams County exhibits the highest growth rate among the counties at 0.86%, its total population increase is only slightly larger than Wells County's, reflecting similarly stable growth dynamics.

The consistent growth in Wells County, albeit modest, indicates a stable economic and residential environment. The chart in Figure 4 underscores this stability, providing a visual comparison against the more variable trends of its neighbors. This stability positions Wells County favorably as a reliable community within the region.

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Figure 5 highlights the median household income trends for Wells County and its neighboring counties from 2024 to 2029. Wells County shows significant growth in median household income, increasing from \$76,052 in 2024 to \$86,138 in 2029, a 13.3% growth over five years. This steady increase places Wells County in a strong economic position relative to its neighbors.

Site	2024 Median Household Income		2029 Median Household Income	
	value	difference	value	difference
Wells County	\$76,052	0.00%	\$86,138	0.00%
Whitley County	\$75,586	-0.61%	\$82,061	-4.73%
Noble County	\$74,124	-2.54%	\$82,878	-3.78%
Jay County	\$53,358	-29.84%	\$59,243	-31.22%
Huntington County	\$66,868	-12.08%	\$77,471	-10.06%
Grant County	\$55,028	-27.64%	\$64,247	-25.41%
DeKalb County	\$75,253	-1.05%	\$82,967	-3.68%
Blackford County	\$53,823	-29.23%	\$60,158	-30.16%
Adams County	\$65,284	-14.16%	\$76,287	-11.44%

Figure 5: Median Household Income; Source: Esri Business Analyst

In comparison:

- Whitley County and DeKalb County have similar income levels in 2024, but both experience declines in relative growth, with decreases of -4.73% and -3.68%, respectively, by 2029.
- Huntington County, although starting with a lower median income than Wells County, sees slower growth, with its 2029 income at \$77,471, reflecting a -10.06% decline in relative terms.
- Counties like Jay County and Blackford County face the most significant challenges, with median household incomes declining by over -30%, suggesting economic distress.

The data in Figure 5 underscores Wells County's economic stability and growth, making it a standout performer in the region. With robust income growth and no relative decline compared to surrounding counties, Wells County demonstrates a resilient and thriving economy that supports household prosperity. This positive trend positions the county as an attractive area for residents and businesses alike.

SOCIOECONOMIC, HOUSING, WALKABILITY, AND BIKE ANALYSIS

Figure 6 illustrates Wells County's socioeconomic status, housing affordability, and bike accessibility compared to neighboring counties. The data demonstrates that Wells County consistently maintains a strong position in all three metrics relative to its peers.

Site	2024 Socioeconomic Status Index		2024 Housing Affordability Index		Bike Score	
	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference
Wells County	56.5	0.00%	155	0.00%	34	0.00%
Whitley County	53.7	-4.96%	135	-12.90%	21	-38.24%
Noble County	49.0	-13.27%	136	-12.26%	21	-38.24%
Jay County	47.7	-15.58%	155	0.00%	27	-20.59%
Huntington County	52.1	-7.79%	147	-5.16%	25	-26.47%
Grant County	46.4	-17.88%	149	-3.87%	25	-26.47%
DeKalb County	51.7	-8.50%	153	-1.29%	27	-20.59%
Blackford County	50.4	-10.80%	198	+27.74%	26	-23.53%
Adams County	48.8	-13.63%	125	-19.35%	26	-23.53%

Figure 6: Other Index Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Socioeconomic Index:

- Wells County ranks highest with a 56.5 index score, setting the standard in the region.
- Nearby counties such as Whitley County (53.7) and DeKalb County (51.7) are slightly lower, while counties like Grant County (46.4) and Jay County (47.7) lag significantly, showing socioeconomic challenges.

Housing Affordability Index:

- Wells County scores 155, tied with Jay County for the highest in the region. This reflects a balance of affordable housing options.
- Whitley County (135) and Adams County (125) exhibit lower affordability, with decreases of -12.90% and -19.35%, respectively.

Bike Accessibility (Bike Score):

- Wells County leads with a score of 34, indicating better biking infrastructure compared to neighboring counties.
- Most other counties, including Whitley, Noble, and Huntington, have scores around 21-27, representing a significant gap of up to -38.24% compared to Wells County.

Overall, Wells County performs well across these metrics, maintaining its leadership in socioeconomic stability, housing affordability, and bike accessibility. This positions the county as a desirable location for residents seeking a higher quality of life and accessibility. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of these regional disparities, emphasizing Wells County's strong standing.

REGIONAL ECONOMY AND WORKFORCE

Figure 7 highlights the Cost of Living (COL) index, mean commute times, and job market trends for Wells County and its neighboring counties from 2023 to 2033. The data illustrates Wells County's relative strengths and opportunities for growth in the context of the regional economy and workforce.

	COL Index	Mean Commute Time (2022)	Jobs (2023)		Jobs (2033)		Job Change (2023 -2033)		Jobs Change %
	value	value	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference	value
Wells County	95.9	23.8 minutes	12,379	0.00%	12,920	0.00%	541	0.00%	4%
Adams County	93.1	22.7 minutes	15,506	+25.26%	16,272	+25.94%	766	+41.59%	5%
Blackford County	94.5	25.2 minutes	3,366	-72.81%	3,353	-74.05%	-13	-102.40%	0%
DeKalb County	95.9	20.6 minutes	23,512	+89.93%	23,777	+84.03%	265	-51.02%	1%
Grant County	93	22.1 minutes	32,247	+160.50%	33,227	+157.17%	980	+81.15%	3%
Huntington County	93.4	22.2 minutes	15,768	+27.38%	16,414	+27.04%	646	+19.41%	4%
Jay County	94.3	21.3 minutes	8,013	-35.27%	8,270	-35.99%	257	-52.50%	3%
Noble County	93.8	24.4 minutes	18,815	+51.99%	19,272	+49.16%	457	-15.53%	2%
Whitley County	96.7	24.0 minutes	15,276	+23.40%	16,552	+28.11%	1,276	+135.86%	8%

Figure 7: Jobs Comparison; Source: Lightcast

Cost of Living (COL): Wells County has a COL index of 95.9, aligning with DeKalb County as the most competitive in the region. This indicates an attractive cost of living compared to neighboring counties, making Wells County a desirable location for residents seeking affordability.



Mean Commute Time: The average commute time for Wells County residents is 23.8 minutes, slightly above the regional average. Counties such as Jay County (21.3 minutes) and Grant County (22.1 minutes) have shorter commutes, suggesting potential opportunities for transportation improvements in Wells County.

Job Market (2023–2033):

- Wells County shows 4% job growth over the decade, adding 541 jobs, reflecting moderate but steady economic expansion.
- Comparatively, Whitley County leads in job growth, with an 8% increase and the addition of 1,276 jobs, showcasing stronger workforce development initiatives.
- Adams County also outpaces Wells County with 5% growth and 766 new jobs.
- Counties like Blackford County and Jay County face significant economic challenges, with 0% and 3% growth, respectively, and job markets that remain stagnant or experience minimal increases.

Wells County's stable job growth and competitive cost of living make it an attractive choice for new residents and businesses. However, the slightly higher commute time and moderate job expansion present opportunities to further enhance infrastructure and economic development strategies. Figure 7 provides a visual comparison of these factors, emphasizing Wells County's potential for sustained growth within the regional economy.

CITY OF BLUFFTON

This section examines Bluffton’s demographic, housing, and community trends in comparison to neighboring municipalities. By analyzing factors such as population growth, median household income, socioeconomic status, housing affordability, walkability, and bike accessibility, this section provides valuable context for how Bluffton performs relative to its regional peers. These comparisons help highlight Bluffton’s strengths, including steady population growth and stable housing conditions, as well as potential opportunities for improvement in areas like walkability and bike infrastructure. The insights gained will inform strategies to strengthen Bluffton’s economic resilience, enhance quality of life, and ensure long-term community sustainability.

POPULATION TRENDS

Figure 8 provides a detailed comparison of population trends for Bluffton and its neighboring municipalities from 2024 to 2029.

Site	2024 Total Population		2029 Total Population		Population Change % (2024 - 2029)	
	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference
Bluffton City, IN	10,592	0.00%	10,790	0.00%	+1.87%	0.00%
Auburn City, IN	13,770	+30.00%	14,010	+29.84%	+1.74%	-6.76%
Huntington City, IN	17,018	+60.67%	16,950	+57.09%	-0.40%	-121.38%
Hartford City, IN	6,040	-42.98%	5,909	-45.24%	-2.17%	-216.02%
Decatur City, IN	10,004	-5.55%	10,051	-6.85%	+0.47%	-74.87%
Portland City, IN	6,183	-41.63%	6,045	-43.98%	-2.23%	-219.40%
Marion City, IN	27,637	+160.92%	27,164	+151.75%	-1.71%	-191.56%
Kendallville City, IN	10,286	-2.89%	10,267	-4.85%	-0.18%	-109.88%
Huntertown Town, IN	12,053	+13.79%	12,609	+16.86%	+4.61%	+146.77%
Columbia City, IN	10,104	-4.61%	10,298	-4.56%	+1.92%	+2.71%

Figure 8: Bluffton Population Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Key observations specific to Bluffton include:

- **Steady Growth:** Bluffton’s population grows by 1.87%, increasing from 10,592 in 2024 to 10,790 in 2029. This steady growth highlights stability and consistent appeal.

- Comparison to Neighboring Municipalities: Bluffton outpaces nearby cities such as Decatur City (+0.47%) and Columbia City (+1.92%) in population growth. It contrasts sharply with declining populations in Hartford City (-2.17%) and Portland City (-2.23%), which face notable challenges in retaining residents.
- Regional Context: While Bluffton’s growth is moderate compared to Hometown (+4.61%), it remains consistent and avoids the volatility seen in larger cities like Huntington City (-0.40%) and Marion City (-1.71%).

Bluffton’s steady growth underscores its role as a stable and resilient community within the region. Figure 8 visually demonstrates this stability, highlighting Bluffton’s strong position relative to neighboring municipalities.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Figure 9 provides a comparison of median household income trends for Bluffton and its neighboring municipalities from 2024 to 2029.

Site	2024 Median Household Income		2029 Median Household Income	
	value	difference	value	difference
Bluffton City, IN	\$62,479	0.00%	\$72,078	0.00%
Auburn City, IN	\$67,260	+7.65%	\$77,508	+7.53%
Huntington City, IN	\$55,137	-11.75%	\$62,605	-13.14%
Hartford City, IN	\$39,446	-36.87%	\$46,618	-35.32%
Decatur City, IN	\$53,469	-14.42%	\$58,871	-18.32%
Portland City, IN	\$46,437	-25.68%	\$51,397	-28.69%
Marion City, IN	\$44,467	-28.83%	\$51,757	-28.19%
Kendallville City, IN	\$64,329	+2.96%	\$73,417	+1.86%
Hometown Town, IN	\$107,719	+72.41%	\$121,650	+68.78%
Columbia City, IN	\$62,596	+0.19%	\$69,986	-2.90%

Figure 9: Bluffton Median Household Income; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Key insights specific to Bluffton include:

- Consistent Growth: Bluffton’s median household income is projected to grow by 15.4%, increasing from \$62,479 in 2024 to \$72,078 in 2029. This growth reflects a stable economic environment.
- Comparison to Neighboring Municipalities: Bluffton’s growth is comparable to Auburn City, which sees a similar increase from \$67,260 in 2024 to \$77,508 in 2029, maintaining a slightly higher income level overall. Bluffton outperforms cities facing significant declines, such as Huntington City (-13.14%), Hartford City (-35.32%), and Marion City (-28.19%), which all experience notable drops.

- Regional Leaders: Hometown stands out with the highest income levels, increasing from \$107,719 in 2024 to \$121,650 in 2029, reflecting its status as a rapidly growing and affluent area.

Steady growth in household income stresses the city’s economic stability and ability to provide a favorable environment for residents. Figure 9 illustrates these trends, highlighting Bluffton’s strong performance relative to neighboring cities.

SOCIOECONOMIC, HOUSING, WALKABILITY, AND BIKE ANALYSIS

Figure 10 provides a comparison of Bluffton’s socioeconomic status, housing affordability, walkability, and bike accessibility to neighboring municipalities in 2024.

Site	2024 Socioeconomic Status Index		2024 Housing Affordability Index		Walk Score		Bike Score	
	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference
Bluffton City, IN	51.2	0.00%	157	0.00%	65	0.00%	46	0.00%
Auburn City, IN	50.0	-2.34%	156	-0.64%	84	+29.23%	52	+13.04%
Huntington City, IN	46.8	-8.59%	171	+8.92%	80	+23.08%	50	+8.70%
Hartford City, IN	47.5	-7.23%	185	+17.83%	59	-9.23%	43	-6.52%
Decatur City, IN	54.1	+5.66%	136	-13.38%	67	+3.08%	43	-6.52%
Portland City, IN	46.4	-9.38%	205	+30.57%	71	+9.23%	59	+28.26%
Marion City, IN	41.3	-19.34%	178	+13.38%	52	-20.00%	44	-4.35%
Kendallville City, IN	46.3	-9.57%	160	+1.91%	71	+9.23%	53	+15.22%
Huntertown Town, IN	66.4	+29.69%	161	+2.55%	44	-32.31%	36	-21.74%
Columbia City, IN	51.2	0.00%	132	-15.92%	78	+20.00%	50	+8.70%

Figure 10: Bluffton Other Index Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Key insights include:

- Socioeconomic Status: Bluffton scores 51.2, reflecting stability in its socioeconomic environment. This is on par with Columbia City and higher than many other municipalities, such as Marion City (41.3, -19.34%) and Portland City (46.4, -9.38%).
- Housing Affordability: Bluffton maintains a housing affordability index of 157, indicating a favorable housing market. While Hartford City (185, +17.83%) and Portland City (205, +30.57%) score higher, Bluffton outpaces the declining housing affordability seen in Decatur City (-13.38%) and Columbia City (-15.92%).



- Walkability (Walk Score): Bluffton scores 65, indicating good pedestrian accessibility. While it trails Auburn City (84, +29.23%) and Huntington City (80, +23.08%), it remains competitive and well-suited for residents who prefer walking as a mode of transportation.
- Bike Accessibility (Bike Score): Bluffton's bike score of 46 places it in a solid mid-range among its peers. It is outperformed by Portland City (59, +28.26%) and Auburn City (52, +13.04%) but remains higher than Huntertown Town (36, -21.74%) and Marion City (44, -4.35%).

Bluffton demonstrates a balanced performance across these metrics, maintaining stability and competitiveness in its socioeconomic environment, housing affordability, and accessibility. Figure 10 visually highlights Bluffton's position, emphasizing its consistent appeal within the regional context.

TOWN OF OSSIAN

This section explores Ossian’s demographic, housing, and community trends in the context of neighboring municipalities. Through an evaluation of factors such as population changes, median household income, socioeconomic status, housing affordability, walkability, and bike accessibility, the analysis provides insight into Ossian’s regional standing. The findings highlight Ossian’s strengths, including its socioeconomic stability and competitive housing affordability, while also identifying areas for potential enhancement, such as improved walkability and bike infrastructure. These insights will guide strategies aimed at fostering economic growth, enhancing livability, and supporting the long-term vitality of the Ossian community.

POPULATION TRENDS

Figure 11 provides a comparison of population trends for Ossian and its neighboring municipalities from 2024 to 2029.

Site	2024 Total Population		2029 Total Population		Population Change % (2024 - 2029)	
	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference
Ossian Town, IN	3,334	0.00%	3,317	0.00%	-0.51%	0.00%
Avilla Town, IN	2,481	-25.58%	2,514	-24.21%	+1.33%	-360.86%
Berne City, IN	4,231	+26.90%	4,315	+30.09%	+1.99%	-489.36%
Butler City, IN	2,595	-22.17%	2,551	-23.09%	-1.70%	+232.53%
Churubusco Town, IN	1,884	-43.49%	1,871	-43.59%	-0.69%	+35.33%
Garrett City, IN	6,597	+97.87%	6,603	+99.07%	+0.09%	-117.84%
Leo-Cedarville Town, IN	3,872	+16.14%	3,980	+19.99%	+2.79%	-647.02%

Figure 11: Ossian Population Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Key insights related to Ossian include:

- **Population Stability:** Ossian’s population decreases slightly by -0.51%, declining from 3,334 in 2024 to 3,317 in 2029. This slight decline reflects stability compared to more significant population fluctuations in neighboring communities.
- **Comparison to Neighboring Municipalities:** Leo-Cedarville Town experiences the highest growth, with a 2.79% increase, growing from 3,872 in 2024 to 3,980 in 2029. Berne City also grows steadily, increasing by 1.99%, while Avilla Town sees modest growth of 1.33%. Neighboring municipalities like Butler City and Churubusco Town experience population declines of -1.70% and -0.69%, respectively, indicating challenges in retaining residents.

- Regional Context: While Ossian’s population is relatively stable, it contrasts sharply with Garrett City, which has the largest population in the comparison but exhibits minimal growth (+0.09%) and potential challenges in sustaining its rapid prior expansion.

Ossian’s slight population decrease underscores its need to address potential challenges related to growth and retention while maintaining its stable community base. Figure 11 illustrates these trends, providing a clear view of Ossian’s position relative to nearby municipalities.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Figure 12 highlights the median household income trends for Ossian and neighboring municipalities from 2024 to 2029.

Site	2024 Median Household Income		2029 Median Household Income	
	value	difference	value	difference
Ossian Town, IN	\$64,286	0.00%	\$75,157	0.00%
Avilla Town, IN	\$82,533	+28.38%	\$93,022	+23.77%
Berne City, IN	\$65,351	+1.66%	\$76,606	+1.93%
Butler City, IN	\$71,458	+11.16%	\$78,829	+4.89%
Churubusco Town, IN	\$62,527	-2.74%	\$75,851	+0.92%
Garrett City, IN	\$58,717	-8.66%	\$67,049	-10.79%
Leo-Cedarville Town, IN	\$111,089	+72.80%	\$133,166	+77.18%

Figure 12: Ossian Median Household Income; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Key insights related to Ossian include:

- Income Growth: Ossian’s median household income is projected to grow by 16.9%, increasing from \$64,286 in 2024 to \$75,157 in 2029. This steady growth underscores a stable economic environment for residents.
- Comparison to Neighboring Municipalities: Avilla Town and Leo-Cedarville Town lead in income levels, with Avilla growing by 23.77% to reach \$93,022 in 2029 and Leo-Cedarville achieving a significant 77.18% growth, reaching \$133,166 in 2029. Garrett City experiences the most significant decline, with its median household income decreasing by -10.79%, indicating potential economic challenges. Neighboring municipalities like Butler City (+4.89%) and Berne City (+1.93%) also show growth but at a slower pace compared to Ossian.
- Regional Context: Ossian’s income growth aligns closely with regional trends, though it lags behind rapidly growing municipalities like Leo-Cedarville. It also avoids the economic declines observed in Garrett City and Churubusco Town (-2.74% in 2024).

Ossian’s consistent income growth reflect its economic stability and the ability to support a thriving middle-income population.

SOCIOECONOMIC, HOUSING, WALKABILITY, AND BIKE ANALYSIS

Figure 13 compares Ossian’s socioeconomic status, housing affordability, walkability, and bike accessibility to neighboring municipalities in 2024.

Site	2024 Socioeconomic Status Index		2024 Housing Affordability Index		Walk Score		Bike Score	
	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference	value	difference
Ossian Town, IN	59.2	0.00%	136	0.00%	51	0.00%	43	0.00%
Avilla Town, IN	53.7	-9.29%	185	+36.03%	38	-25.49%	42	-2.33%
Berne City, IN	52.4	-11.49%	145	+6.62%	54	+5.88%	53	+23.26%
Butler City, IN	43.8	-26.01%	192	+41.18%	41	-19.61%	36	-16.28%
Churubusco Town, IN	52.7	-10.98%	152	+11.76%	61	+19.61%	42	-2.33%
Garrett City, IN	50.7	-14.36%	154	+13.24%	53	+3.92%	45	+4.65%
Leo-Cedarville Town, IN	62.0	+4.73%	135	-0.74%	22	-56.86%	30	-30.23%

Figure 13: Ossian Other Index Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

Key insights include:

- Socioeconomic Status: Ossian scores 59.2, the highest among most neighboring towns, indicating strong economic stability and resident well-being. Only Leo-Cedarville Town outpaces Ossian, with a score of 62.0 (+4.73%).
- Housing Affordability: Ossian’s housing affordability index is 136, reflecting competitive housing conditions. Neighboring towns like Butler City (192, +41.18%) and Avilla Town (185, +36.03%) offer higher affordability, while Leo-Cedarville Town (135, -0.74%) is slightly less affordable.
- Walkability (Walk Score): Ossian’s walk score is 51, reflecting moderate walkability. It is surpassed by Churubusco Town (61, +19.61%) and Berne City (54, +5.88%), while Avilla Town (38, -25.49%) and Leo-Cedarville Town (22, -56.86%) lag significantly.
- Bike Accessibility (Bike Score): Ossian scores 43 for bike accessibility, a mid-range performance. Berne City leads with a score of 53 (+23.26%), while Leo-Cedarville Town (30, -30.23%) falls behind significantly.

Ossian’s strong socioeconomic index and balanced housing affordability highlight its stability and desirability as a community. While its walkability and bike accessibility are competitive, opportunities exist to improve infrastructure in these areas to match or exceed regional leaders.

OTHER TOWNS

This section delves into the demographic, economic, and community trends of Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz, providing a comparison to nearby towns and communities. Key metrics such as population dynamics, median household income, socioeconomic conditions, housing affordability, and infrastructure for walkability and biking are analyzed to assess their regional performance. While these towns exhibit strengths in areas like socioeconomic stability and housing accessibility, they also face challenges, particularly in walkability and bike connectivity. This analysis aims to identify opportunities for growth and improvements that will support the long-term prosperity and quality of life in these communities.

POPULATION TRENDS

The data in Figure 14 highlights population trends for Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz within Wells County, providing comparisons to other regional towns and communities. Key insights include those on the following page.

Site	2024 Total Population	2029 Total Population	Population Change % (2024 - 2029)
Poneto Town, IN	171	168	0
Uniondale Town, IN	265	266	0
Vera Cruz Town, IN	81	80	0
Albion Town, IN	2,330	2,393	3%
Andrews Town, IN	1,048	1,034	0
Ashley Town, IN	1,039	1,020	-2%
Geneva Town, IN	1,509	1,526	1%
Harlan CDP, IN	1,645	1,657	1%
Laotto CDP, IN	238	234	-2%
Markle Town, IN	1,097	1,094	0%
Monroe Town, IN	898	898	0%
Monroeville Town, IN	1,316	1,342	2%
Spencerville CDP, IN	421	413	-2%
Warren Town, IN	1,216	1,220	0%
Woodburn City, IN	1,608	1,657	3%
Zanesville Town, IN	564	569	1%

Figure 14: Other Towns Population Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

- Population Stability: Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz all maintain a stable population over the five-year period, with no significant growth or decline. Poneto’s population slightly decreases from 171 to 168 (-0.02%), while Uniondale increases by one resident (265 to 266) and Vera Cruz decreases by one (81 to 80). This indicates population stability but also a lack of growth momentum.
- Comparison to Other Communities: Neighboring towns such as Albion and Woodburn demonstrate modest growth of 3%, reflecting some level of population increase. Geneva, Harlan, and Zanesville each show a 1% growth rate, indicating minor yet positive population changes. In contrast, towns like Ashley, Laotto, and Spencerville experience declines of -2%, suggesting challenges in retaining residents.
- Regional Context: Larger towns like Monroeville (+2%) and Markle (0%) provide additional context, showing that moderate growth or stability is common for smaller municipalities in the region.

The population data in Figure 15 suggests that Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz are holding steady but lack the growth seen in some other communities. While stability can reflect a strong local foundation, the absence of population increases highlights opportunities to explore strategies for attracting and retaining residents. This will be critical to ensuring long-term vitality and competitiveness in the region.

Site	2024 Median Household Income	2029 Median Household Income
Poneto Town, IN	\$84,471	\$107,558
Uniondale Town, IN	\$100,966	\$97,611
Vera Cruz Town, IN	\$66,453	\$70,499
Albion Town, IN	\$64,339	\$75,919
Andrews Town, IN	\$76,741	\$85,142
Ashley Town, IN	\$61,300	\$79,019
Geneva Town, IN	\$58,058	\$70,730
Harlan CDP, IN	\$69,539	\$81,903
Laotto CDP, IN	\$75,000	\$81,073
Markle Town, IN	\$77,009	\$91,414
Monroe Town, IN	\$76,196	\$91,426
Monroeville Town, IN	\$56,852	\$68,559
Spencerville CDP, IN	\$89,174	\$87,353
Warren Town, IN	\$79,198	\$86,334
Woodburn City, IN	\$66,902	\$74,566
Zanesville Town, IN	\$84,709	\$101,088

Figure 15: Other Towns Median Household Income; Source: Esri Business Analyst

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The data in Figure 15 (page 23) highlights median household income trends for Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz in Wells County, with comparisons to neighboring towns. Key insights include:

- **Poneto Town:** Poneto exhibits significant growth in median household income, increasing from \$84,471 in 2024 to \$107,558 in 2029, a 27.4% growth rate. This positions Poneto as one of the stronger performers in the region.
- **Uniondale Town:** Uniondale starts with a higher median household income of \$100,966 in 2024, but it decreases slightly to \$97,611 in 2029 (-3.3%). Despite this decline, Uniondale remains one of the highest-income communities in the region.
- **Vera Cruz Town:** Vera Cruz has the lowest median income among the three towns, starting at \$66,453 in 2024 and increasing modestly to \$70,499 in 2029 (+6.1%). While growth is positive, Vera Cruz remains behind many other towns in the region.
- **Comparison to Other Communities:** Towns like Zanesville (\$84,709 to \$101,088) and Markle (\$77,009 to \$91,414) show strong income growth, similar to Poneto. Albion and Ashley, with lower starting incomes, demonstrate more significant percentage increases but remain below Poneto and Uniondale. Spencerville and Harlan, though smaller, have relatively high incomes, with Spencerville notably declining from \$89,174 to \$87,353.
- **Regional Context:** Poneto and Uniondale demonstrate strong economic positioning, with Poneto showing substantial growth and Uniondale maintaining high income levels despite a slight decline. Vera Cruz, while improving, continues to lag in income levels compared to neighboring towns. This highlights opportunities for economic development and workforce enhancements in Vera Cruz to narrow the gap. These trends provide a foundation for targeted strategies to maintain economic competitiveness across all three towns.

SOCIOECONOMIC, HOUSING, WALKABILITY, AND BIKE ANALYSIS

Figure 16 (page 25) highlights socioeconomic status, housing affordability, walkability, and bike accessibility for Poneto, Uniondale, and Vera Cruz compared to nearby communities in 2024. Key insights include:

Socioeconomic Status:

- Poneto leads with a 76.7 socioeconomic status index, demonstrating strong economic stability.
- Uniondale scores 68.6, slightly lower but still competitive regionally.
- Vera Cruz has the highest score of 77.4, indicating its relative socioeconomic strength despite its small population.

Housing Affordability:

- Poneto and Uniondale maintain high housing affordability indexes at 177 and 165, respectively, reflecting accessible housing options.
- Vera Cruz, however, has a 0 housing affordability index, likely due to limited housing stock or unique local housing conditions that restrict affordability.

Walkability (Walk Score):

- Walkability in Poneto (0) and Vera Cruz (0) is nonexistent, highlighting a need for infrastructure improvements.
- Uniondale fares slightly better with a walk score of 13, but it remains low compared to towns like Ashley (38) and Geneva (52).

Bike Accessibility (Bike Score):

- Poneto and Uniondale score 25 for bike accessibility, indicating basic infrastructure for cycling.
- Vera Cruz has a lower bike score of 21, highlighting fewer biking opportunities compared to towns like Ashley (42) and Woodburn (43).

Regional Context:

- Poneto and Vera Cruz excel in socioeconomic status but face significant challenges in walkability and bike accessibility.
- Uniondale offers a balance of higher housing affordability and moderate socioeconomic status but shares similar infrastructure limitations.

These trends suggest opportunities to enhance transportation infrastructure and expand housing options to support community growth and livability. Figure 16 illustrates these comparisons.

Site	2024 Socioeconomic Status Index	2024 Housing Affordability Index	Walk Score	Bike Score
Poneto Town, IN	76.7	177	0	25
Uniondale Town, IN	68.6	165	13	25
Vera Cruz Town, IN	77.4	0	0	21
Albion Town, IN	48.5	128	5	27
Andrews Town, IN	57.3	125	14	32
Ashley Town, IN	48.6	173	38	42
Geneva Town, IN	41.6	122	52	38
Harlan CDP, IN	55.7	87	25	40
Laotto CDP, IN	66.4	110	33	28
Markle Town, IN	49.5	158	32	36
Monroe Town, IN	47.6	150	31	33
Monroeville Town, IN	55.8	112	29	45
Spencerville CDP, IN	60.0	149	13	28
Warren Town, IN	59.2	180	31	39
Woodburn City, IN	46.4	145	46	43
Zanesville Town, IN	63.5	121	25	29

Figure 16: Other Towns Other Index Comparison; Source: Esri Business Analyst

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Wells County Master Plan was developed with extensive community engagement to ensure that the voices of residents, business owners, and stakeholders were central to shaping the county’s future. A variety of public input methods were used to gather feedback on key aspects of the plan, including an online survey and multiple public meetings held in different locations across the county. These engagement opportunities allowed participants to share their perspectives on development priorities, funding strategies, and growth considerations, ensuring the plan reflects the community’s collective vision.

The public survey, hosted online between October 24 and December 19, 2024, received 1,239 responses, demonstrating strong participation from a diverse cross-section of Wells County. Survey respondents provided valuable insights into the community’s preferences for future development, housing needs, infrastructure priorities, and economic opportunities, helping to establish a data-driven foundation for decision-making.

Additionally, the Veridus Group facilitated 5 public meetings to gather in-depth feedback from the community. These sessions focused on listening to residents’ recommendations regarding potential development areas, investment priorities, and strategies for sustainable growth. Through interactive tools such as maps and visual imagery, attendees explored specific issues like the character of future growth, housing preferences, and economic development opportunities. The feedback gathered during these meetings played a critical role in shaping the goals, strategies, and recommendations of the Wells County Master Plan. The details of these public meetings, including key takeaways and community input, are outlined within each area's breakdown, ensuring that the plan reflects the perspectives and priorities of Wells County residents.

Based on insights from both the survey and public meetings, vision principles were established to guide future planning. Each municipality, rural area, and focus area within the county has its own set of vision principles, ensuring that development aligns with community values and long-term aspirations. These vision principles, along with the detailed findings from the public meetings, are outlined within each area’s breakdown to provide clear direction for growth and investment.

PUBLIC SURVEY

The public survey, launched on October 24, 2024, with 1,239 responses, featured a series of slider scale and ranking questions that allowed respondents to prioritize key issues and opportunities. These options were informed by feedback from the stakeholder committee, ensuring the survey addressed the most pressing topics and offered actionable insights for the comprehensive plan.

To accurately reflect community preferences, the survey used a weighted ranking system where respondents ranked options from 1 (most important) to 6, 7, or 9 (least important). A ranking of 1 received the highest weight, while a 6, 7, or 9 was weighted the lowest. Higher overall scores in the data indicate greater support for those options, as they received more top rankings compared to lower rankings.

The survey collected input on critical issues shaping the county's future. Questions covered topics such as the pace of growth and development, infrastructure needs, economic development priorities, housing preferences, and desired business types. Respondents ranked key issues facing Wells County over the next decade, including education, public safety, job opportunities, attainable housing, access to healthcare, economic development, infrastructure, and natural resource preservation. The survey also asked participants to prioritize types of development, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use projects, as well as preferences for transportation improvements and quality-of-life amenities. This data provided a comprehensive understanding of community priorities and helped shape the recommendations of the comprehensive plan.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey responses were primarily from individuals over the age of 35, with a relatively even distribution among age groups. Specifically, 24.11% of respondents were 65+, followed by 22.89% in the 35-44 age range, 18.51% in the 55-64 age range, and 17.21% in the 45-54 group. This suggests that older residents, who likely have a longer history in the county, were more engaged in the survey.

Geographically, the majority of respondents (47.24%) were most connected to Bluffton, followed by Ossian (21.39%) and rural areas (19.45%). Other towns, such as Uniondale, Poneto, and Vera Cruz, had significantly lower representation. The overwhelming majority of respondents (87.09%) live in Wells County, with 52.46% owning property and 32.53% working in the county. Notably, 75.17% of respondents have lived in Wells County for over 20 years, reinforcing the idea that long-term residents were more likely to participate.

65+

The majority of respondents fell in the 65+ age category.



Over 87% of respondents live within the County.

> 20 years

Over 75% of respondents have lived in the County more than 20 years.



The majority of respondents were most connected to the City of Bluffton.

QUALITY OF LIFE AND KEY ISSUES

Respondents rated the overall quality of life in Wells County at an average of 68 out of 100, indicating that while the county is generally seen as a good place to live, there is still room for improvement. When asked to rank key issues for the next 10 years, residents identified the following priorities:

1. Education/Schools (18.36%)
2. Public Safety (17.84%)
3. Job Opportunities (15.63%)
4. Attainable Housing (11.59%)
5. Access to Healthcare (11.07%)
6. Economic Development (7.68%)
7. Infrastructure/Roads (7.81%)
8. Natural Resource Preservation (5.60%)
9. Other (4.43%)

Rank issues facing Wells County in the next 10 years from most important to least.

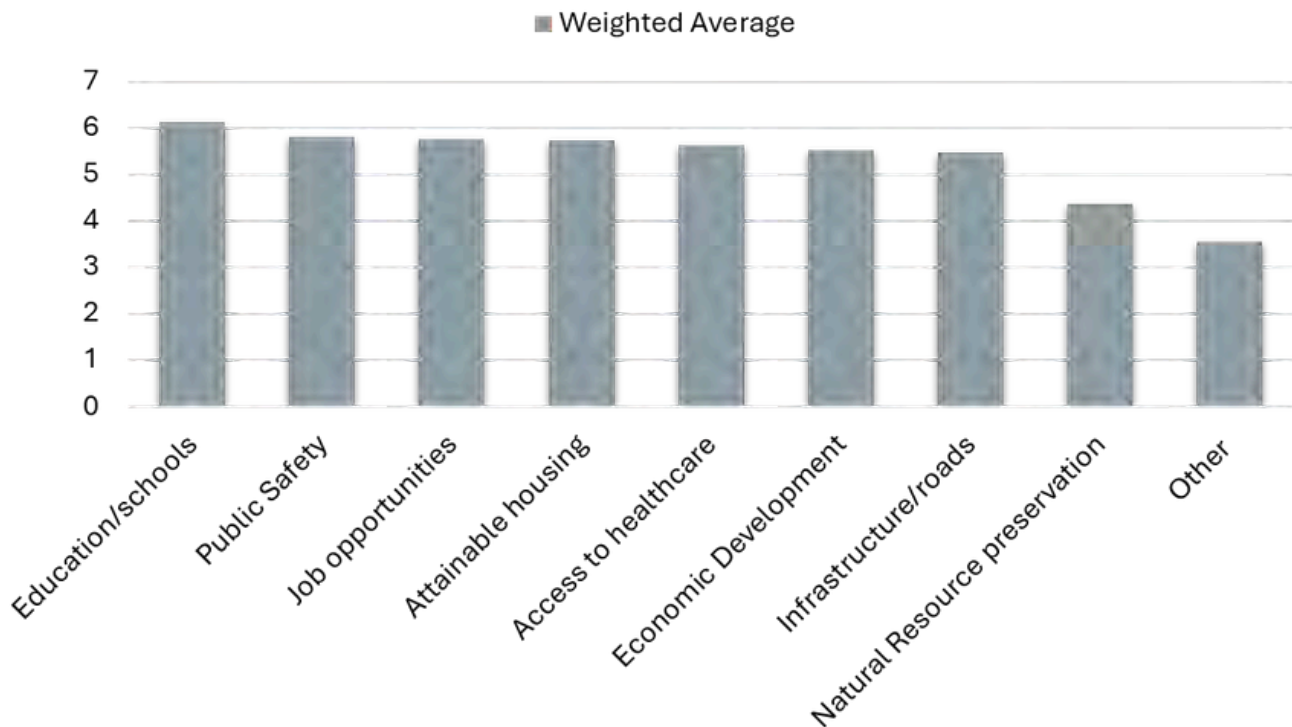


Figure 17: Q6; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

These rankings suggest that foundational services such as education, public safety, and economic opportunity are primary concerns for residents. While infrastructure and housing remain significant, they are perceived as secondary issues compared to broader concerns about quality of life and community well-being.

PACE OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

When asked about the pace of growth in Wells County, a majority (41.65%) of respondents felt it was "just right," while 25.82% believed it was "too slow." Interestingly, 18.13% were unsure, outnumbering those who thought growth was occurring "too fast" (14.40%).

How do you feel about the pace of growth and development in Wells County?

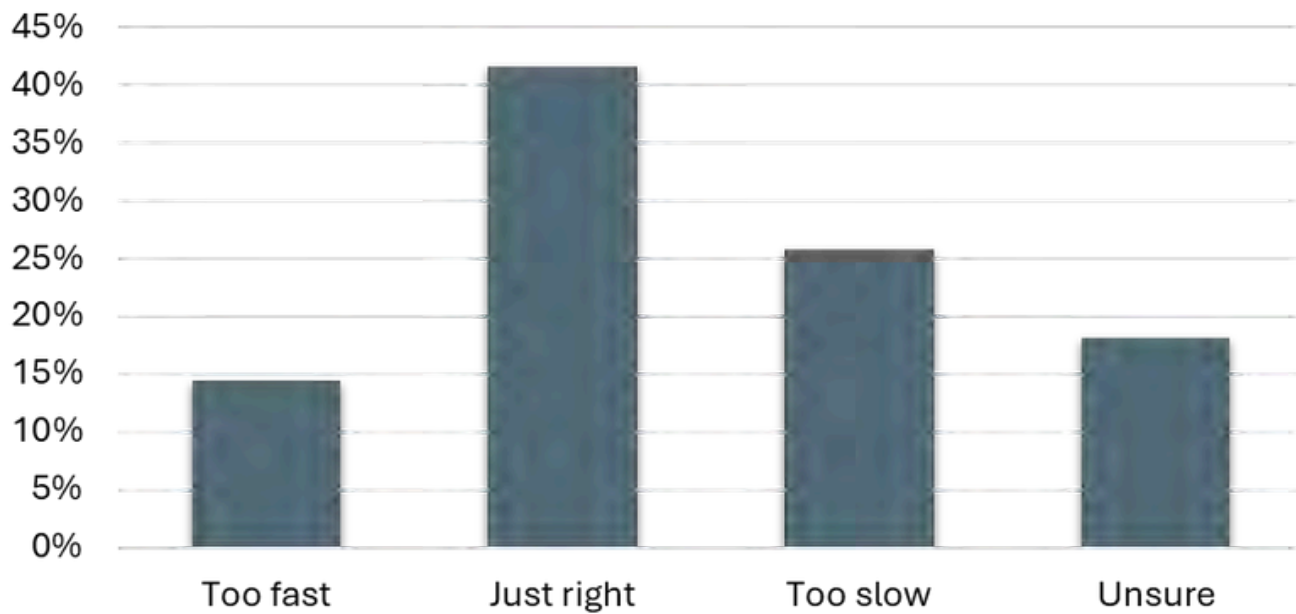


Figure 19: Q8; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

Regarding development priorities, respondents ranked the following in order of importance:

1. Residential Development (22.96%)
2. Agricultural Preservation (20.45%)
3. Commercial/Retail Development (19.82%)
4. Parks and Recreation (14.18%)
5. Industrial Development (10.66%)
6. Mixed-Use Apartments (7.28%)
7. Other (4.64%)

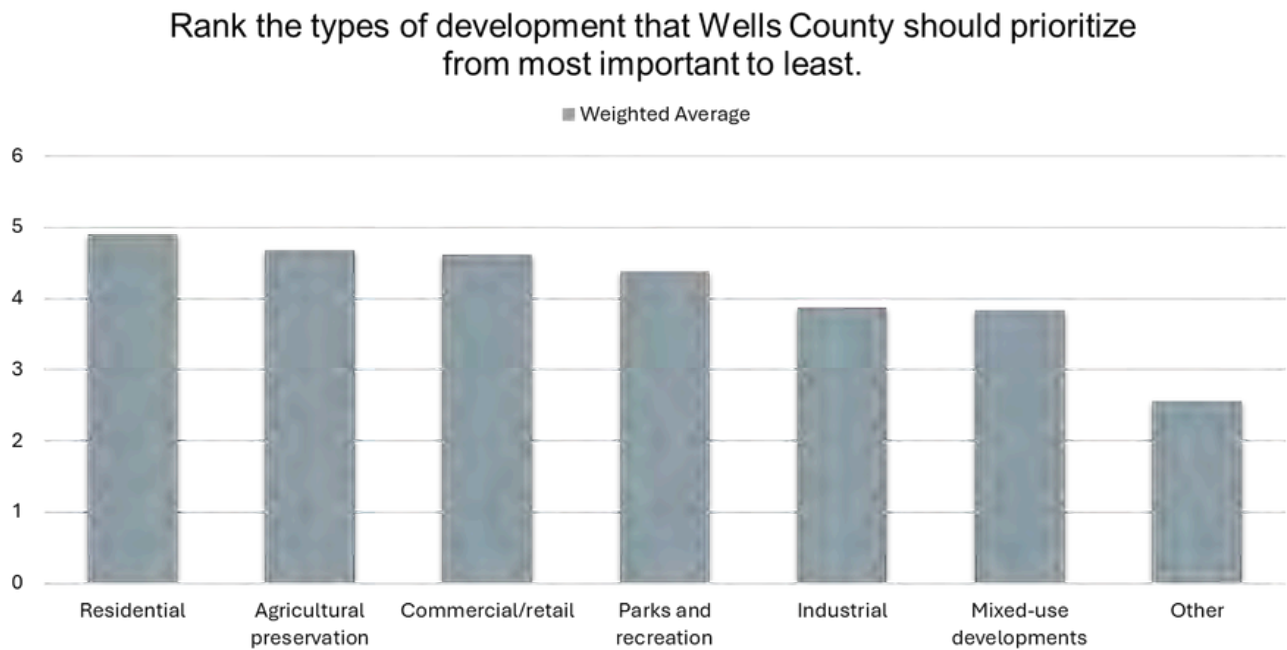


Figure 20: Q9; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

These responses highlight a balanced approach—supporting residential growth while ensuring that agricultural preservation remains a priority.

Further insights from Question 10 reveal diverse opinions on what types of development should be prioritized. Many respondents emphasized the need for enhanced entertainment options, such as movie theaters, sports complexes, family-friendly attractions, and a wider variety of sit-down dining establishments. Housing affordability also emerged as a major theme, with calls for more low-cost homeownership opportunities rather than increased rental developments.

Infrastructure improvements were frequently mentioned, including better roads, sidewalks, and water treatment facilities. Economic development was another common concern, with suggestions to attract major retail stores, manufacturing, and commercial businesses to stimulate local growth. Renewable energy development sparked mixed reactions, some respondents supported solar and wind projects for economic benefits, while others opposed them due to concerns about farmland preservation.

Additionally, many residents stressed the importance of preserving the county's small-town character, revitalizing downtown areas, and expanding public spaces such as community centers and parks. Overall, the responses reflect a strong desire for balanced growth, enhancing quality of life while maintaining Wells County's rural identity and agricultural heritage.

Overall, the responses reflect a strong desire for balanced growth, enhancing quality of life while maintaining Wells County's rural identity and agricultural heritage.



Figure 21: Q10; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

HOUSING NEEDS

Housing is a key issue in Wells County, with respondents ranking the most needed types as follows:

1. Attainable Single-Family Homes (64.84%)
2. Senior Housing (13.54%)
3. Townhomes/Cottage Courts (6.83%)
4. Rental Housing (3.48%)
5. Apartments/Condos (3.48%)
6. Luxury Homes (1.74%)
7. Other (6.09%)

The overwhelming support for single-family homes and senior housing suggests a strong preference for homeownership and aging-in-place options over high-density rental developments.

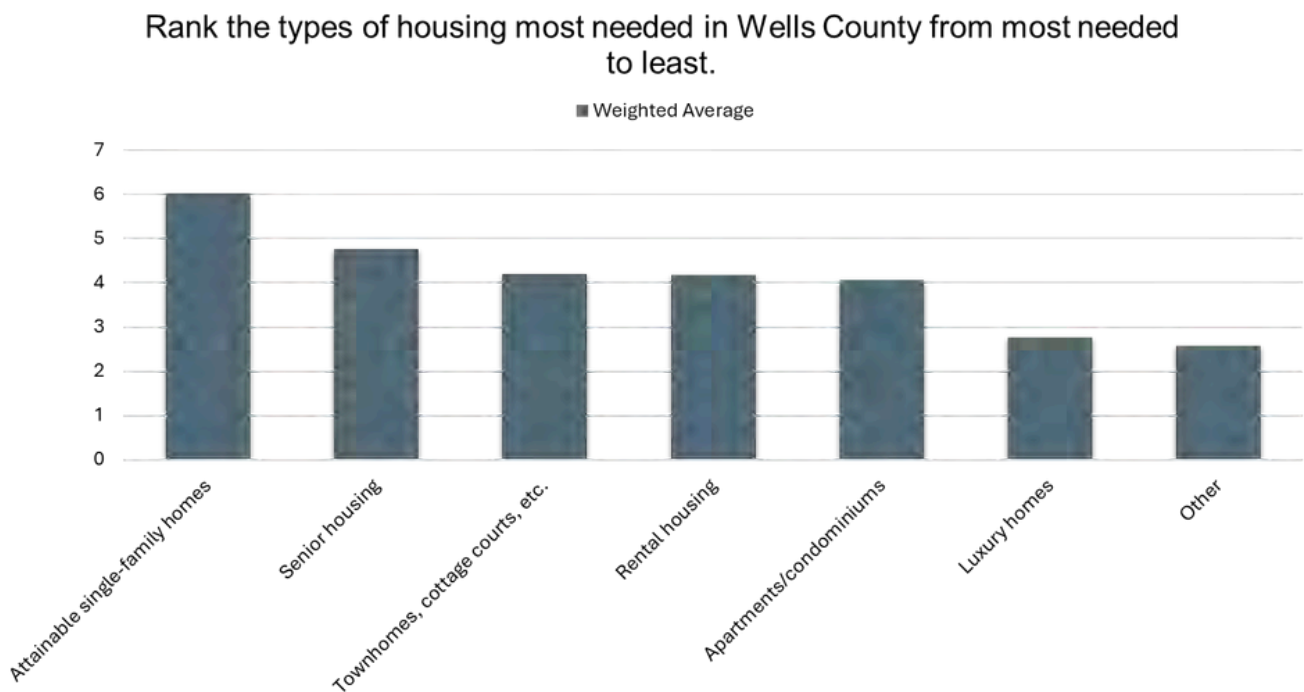


Figure 22: Q11; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

Further insights from Question 12 highlight a strong emphasis on the need for affordable housing, particularly for low-income residents, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Many respondents expressed concerns about the rising costs of both homeownership and rental properties, with some suggesting rental price caps to help ensure affordability. Others advocated for more single-family homes instead of additional rental units, citing concerns over slum landlords and deteriorating rental housing conditions.

There were also calls for specific housing types, including tiny homes, manufactured housing, assisted living facilities, and housing for veterans and individuals in rehabilitation programs. Some respondents opposed further housing development altogether, arguing that growth should be controlled to preserve the county's small-town character and agricultural land. Others suggested revitalizing existing housing stock rather than continuing to expand new developments.

Overall, the responses reflect a tension between the need for housing affordability and accessibility and the desire to maintain Wells County's rural identity.



Figure 23: Q12; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development was seen as very important or extremely important by 68.93% of respondents, with only 2.81% stating that it was "not so important."

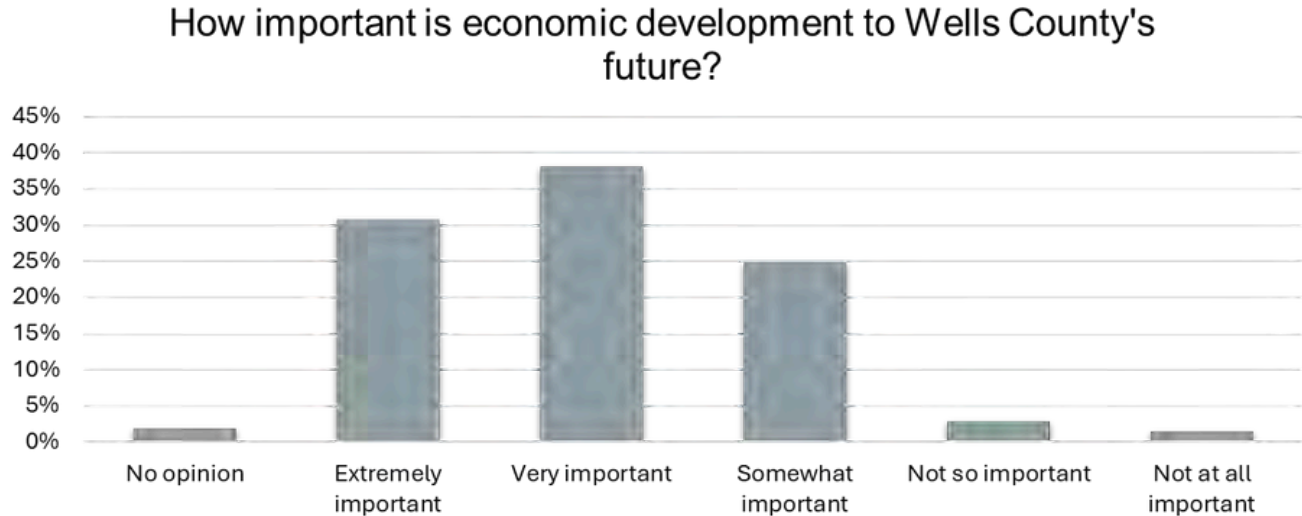


Figure 24: Q13; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

When ranking the types of businesses they would like to see more of in Wells County, respondents prioritized:

1. Restaurants/Dining (39.19%)
2. Healthcare Services (21.10%)
3. Retail/Shopping (14.29%)
4. Manufacturing (10.22%)
5. Tech Companies (8.13%)
6. Tourism and Hospitality (3.80%)
7. Other (3.28%)

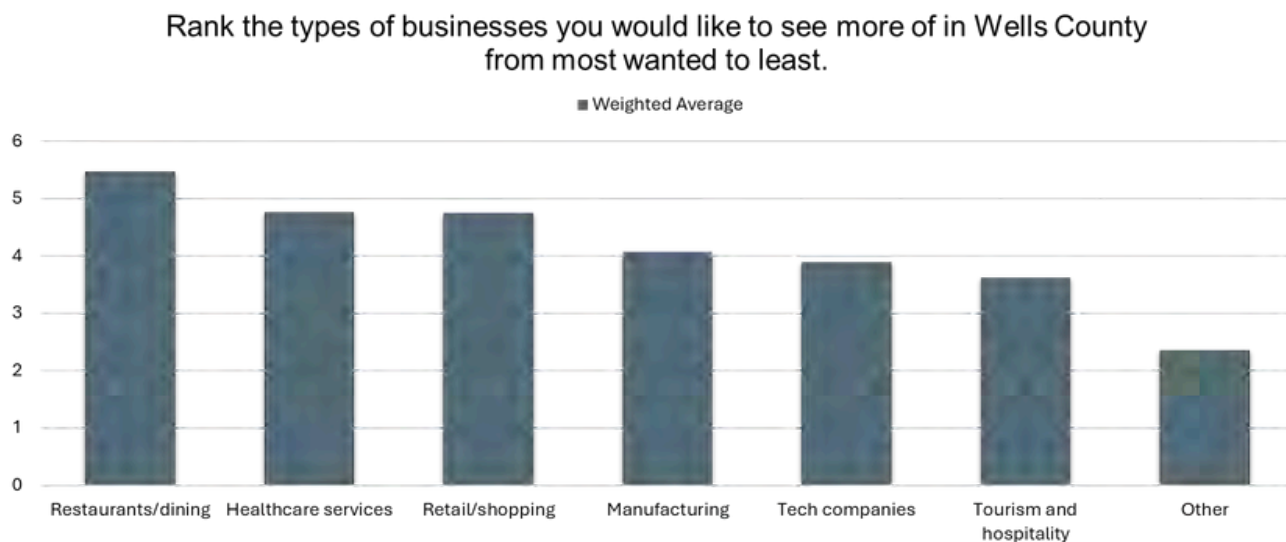


Figure 25: Q14; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The overall rating for transportation infrastructure in Wells County was 54 out of 100, indicating significant room for improvement. Respondents identified the following priorities for needed infrastructure improvements:

1. Road Improvements (50.88%)
2. Pedestrian-Friendly Streets/Sidewalks (37.74%)
3. Countywide Trails (25.74%)
4. Street Bike Lanes (18.13%)
5. Other (13.44%)

These rankings highlight a strong focus on road maintenance and safety, as well as a growing interest in walkability and alternative transportation options.



Figure 27: Q17; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

AMENITIES AND RESOURCES

Respondents ranked the amenities and services that would most improve quality of life in Wells County as follows:

1. Recreational Facilities (23.78%)
2. Expanded Healthcare Services (25.45%)
3. Parks and Green Spaces (19.61%)
4. Community Centers (15.99%)
5. Arts and Culture Events (11.40%)
6. Other (3.76%)

The strong demand for recreational facilities aligns with other survey results showing a desire for indoor entertainment options, while expanded healthcare services reflect ongoing concerns about local medical care and accessibility.

Rank the types of amenities and services that would most improve the quality of life in Wells County from best to worst.

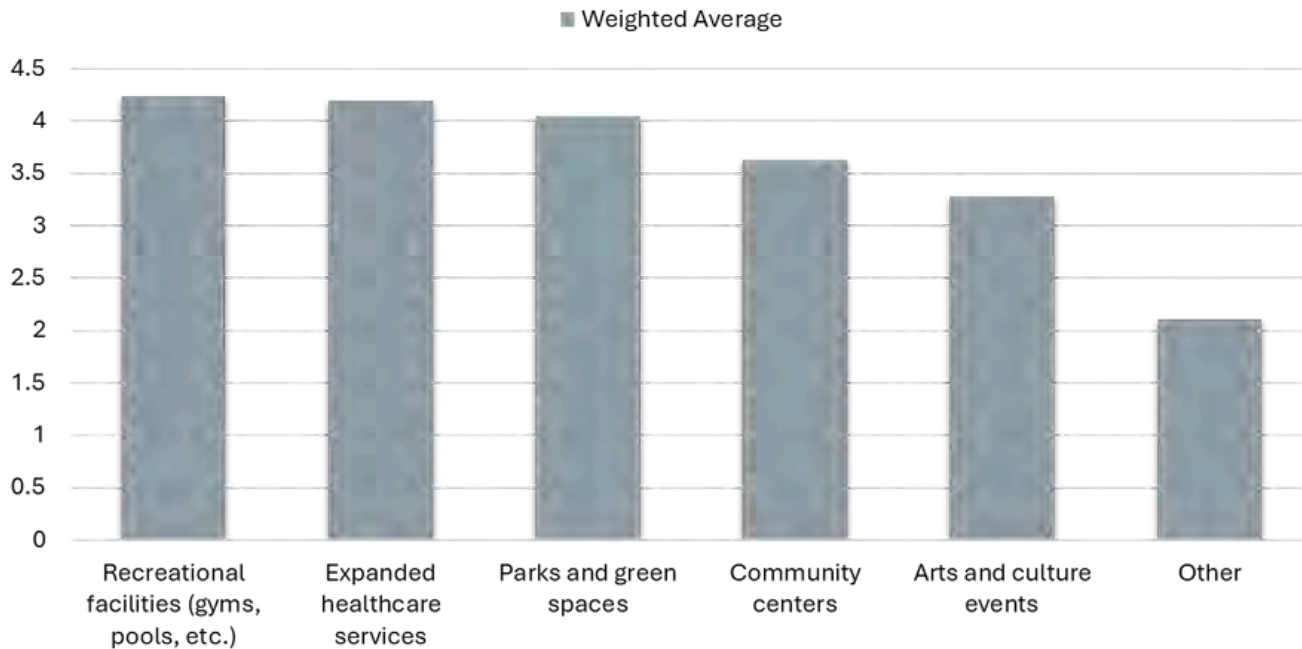


Figure 29: Q19; Source: Wells County Master Plan Survey

COMMUNITY REPORTS

Moving forward, this report is divided into sections that focus on Wells County as a whole and each individual municipality within the county. This structure ensures that both countywide priorities and community-specific needs are addressed in a way that supports coordinated growth, development, and implementation that aligns with the Vision 2035 Plan.

The Wells County section includes both the incorporated and rural areas, providing a broad perspective on land use, infrastructure, and economic development that impacts the entire county. This section establishes the foundation for planning policies, infrastructure investments, and growth management strategies that guide decision-making at the county level.

Following the countywide analysis, the report is divided into sections for each incorporated community, including Bluffton, Ossian, Uniondale, Poneto, and Vera Cruz. Each community has a dedicated section that focuses on its current conditions, community engagement, future vision, focus areas, and implementation strategies. This breakdown ensures that planning efforts are tailored to local needs while remaining aligned with the countywide vision.

By organizing the report in this way, the master plan provides a structured and actionable guide for growth, investment, and long-term planning in Wells County and its communities. This approach allows for targeted strategies in each jurisdiction while ensuring that planning efforts remain cohesive and coordinated across the county.

WELLS COUNTY COMMUNITY REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wells County's overarching goal is to preserve agricultural integrity while accommodating responsible growth. By consulting county-level comparison data and conducting a countywide survey, the plan identifies the need to diversify local industries, encourage small business development, and support larger-scale employers that fit with the county's rural character. Participants in public meetings repeatedly emphasized the importance of improved roads, updated utilities, and broader broadband coverage, illustrating a strong public desire for dependable infrastructure. From these inputs, Wells County developed Vision Principles that focus on fostering civic engagement, aligning local and regional collaboration, and providing a robust foundation for investment in roads, stormwater management, and rural broadband. In turn, these principles along with ideas from Vision 2035, lead directly to action items such as adopting farmland-preservation zoning, dedicating resources for targeted infrastructure projects, and creating partnerships to advance workforce training initiatives.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Understanding the physical and land use characteristics of Wells County is essential for shaping a master plan that supports growth, economic development, and community well-being. This section examines the county's current zoning, infrastructure, environmental assets, and land use patterns, providing a foundation for strategic decision-making.

Land use patterns in Wells County reflect a balance between agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial development. Agriculture remains the dominant land use, shaping both the economy and the rural character of the county. While commercial and industrial areas are concentrated near major transportation corridors and population centers, maintaining a balance between economic expansion and the preservation of open spaces is key to long-term prosperity.

Infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting growth and connectivity. The county recognizes the need for continued investment in infrastructure improvements, particularly in aging underground utilities and stormwater management systems. Many communities are prioritizing the replacement and upgrading of infrastructure to ensure service reliability and accommodate future growth. Additionally, enhanced drainage solutions for stormwater management will play a vital role in preserving road infrastructure and mitigating flood risks.

Environmental considerations, including floodplains and protected areas, influence land use decisions and development potential. At the same time, the county's natural assets, such as Ouabache State Park and the Wabash River, offer opportunities for recreation, tourism, and environmentally integrated development. These resources contribute to Wells County's appeal, providing both ecological and economic benefits, particularly in communities seeking to blend natural surroundings with development plans.

By assessing these current conditions, this section provides a comprehensive overview of Wells County's development landscape, guiding strategies that balance economic vitality, infrastructure investments, and environmental stewardship to support the county's future growth.