

TOWN OF VERA CRUZ COMMUNITY REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vera Cruz, situated along the Wabash River, has unique challenges and opportunities relating to floodplains, natural conservation, and limited commercial development. Public input underscored the need to maintain the town's rural charm and recreational possibilities tied to the river corridor, as well as the importance of adequate stormwater and sewer infrastructure. These insights, supported by county-level comparison data, shaped Vera Cruz's Vision Principles to prioritize flood risk mitigation, preserve the quiet character of the town, and encourage careful use of natural assets for tourism or community events. Implementing these principles involves targeted improvements to drainage systems, possible creation of new riverfront amenities or boat access points, and selective infill housing that respects Vera Cruz's physical constraints and heritage.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Vera Cruz is a small rural town situated along the Wabash River, with a historic identity and strong environmental considerations. Understanding its land use patterns, zoning framework, and infrastructure needs is essential for shaping a sustainable master plan.

With limited commercial and residential development, Vera Cruz remains predominantly rural, surrounded by agriculture and conservation areas. Future planning efforts will focus on preserving the town's character while addressing critical infrastructure needs.

The Wabash River and flood-prone areas present both environmental challenges and opportunities for recreation and conservation. Implementing stormwater management strategies and infrastructure improvements will be crucial for reducing flood risks and supporting sustainable development.

By assessing these current conditions, this section provides a strategic framework for balancing preservation and growth in Vera Cruz based on Vision 2035.

TOWN OF VERA CRUZ

The Town of Vera Cruz, located along the Wabash River, is one of Wells County's smallest incorporated areas. Its rural character, proximity to natural features, and historical development patterns make it unique within the county. As Vera Cruz looks toward the future, understanding its natural constraints, zoning regulations, land use patterns, and infrastructure will be essential for guiding sustainable growth while preserving its environmental and historical assets.

Vera Cruz is defined by its relationship with the Wabash River, which runs along the town's western boundary. This provides both a scenic and ecological asset while also creating flood-related challenges that impact development opportunities. Flood hazard areas, including 100-year and 500-year flood zones, indicate locations where new development may be restricted or require mitigation strategies. Additionally, wetlands and tree-covered areas contribute to the town's rural landscape, offering ecological and conservation benefits.

- Flood-prone areas, primarily concentrated along the Wabash River and surrounding low-lying zones, require careful planning for development and infrastructure investments.
- Wetlands and tree coverage provide natural buffers, supporting environmental preservation and limiting areas suitable for future growth.
- Parks and open space opportunities contribute to recreational access, benefiting both residents and visitors.

Maintaining a balance between environmental preservation and development feasibility will be critical to the long-term sustainability of Vera Cruz.

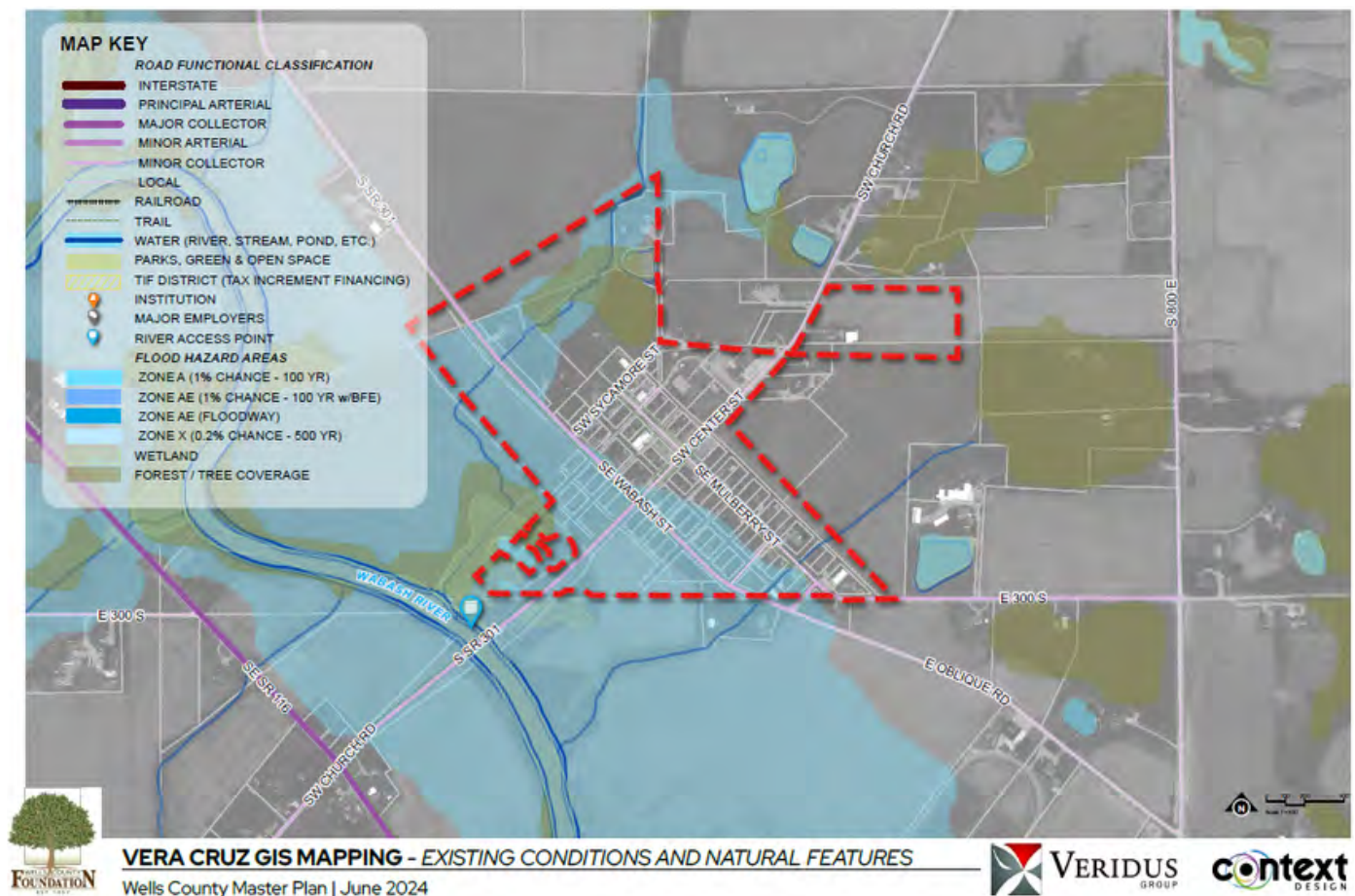


Figure 52: Vera Cruz Existing Conditions Map; Source: Context Design

Vera Cruz's transportation network and infrastructure provide access to regional destinations while supporting local connectivity. While the town does not have major highways, State Road 301 and local roads serve as the primary routes for residents and businesses. The proximity to the Wabash River has historically influenced development, but flood risks require strategic infrastructure investments.

- State Road 301 serves as the town’s main transportation corridor, linking Vera Cruz to the broader Wells County region.
- TIF districts (Tax Increment Financing) help encourage investment and redevelopment in strategic areas.
- Major employers and institutions contribute to Vera Cruz’s economic activity, though on a smaller scale than larger Wells County communities.
- Public utilities and infrastructure investments will be essential for maintaining service levels while addressing flood mitigation strategies.

Ensuring that transportation improvements, public services, and infrastructure investments align with growth opportunities and environmental constraints will be key to Vera Cruz’s future development.

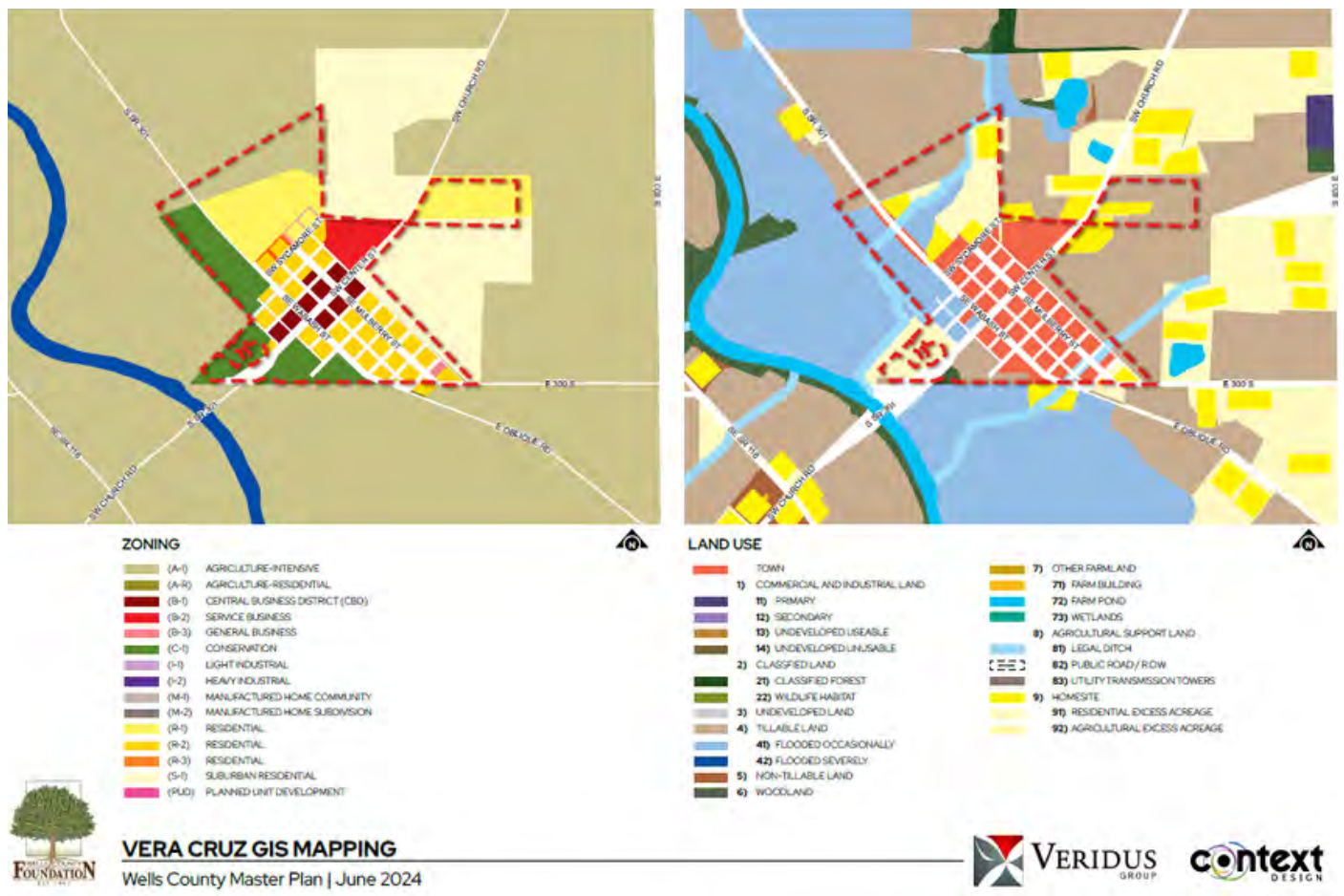


Figure 54: Vera Cruz Zoning and Land Use Map; Source: Context Design

Vera Cruz’s zoning structure and land use patterns reflect its small-town scale, with a compact core of residential and commercial development surrounded by agricultural land and conservation areas. The town’s zoning supports limited commercial growth while ensuring residential and agricultural uses remain primary land uses.

- Agricultural zoning (A-1, A-R) surrounds the town, reinforcing farmland preservation and limiting excessive urban expansion.
- Residential zoning (R-1, R-2, R-3, suburban residential) is concentrated in the town center, providing housing options for residents.
- Commercial zoning (B-1, B-2, Central Business District) is limited to the town's main corridors, allowing for small-scale retail and services.
- Conservation and floodplain areas limit development potential but play an important role in protecting the Wabash River's ecosystem.

The land use map highlights additional areas designated for undeveloped land, flood-prone zones, and agricultural uses, ensuring that future growth aligns with the town's rural character and environmental constraints.

Vera Cruz's existing conditions, land use patterns, and infrastructure assets provide a foundation for future planning that prioritizes sustainability and resilience. By maintaining a balance between residential growth, environmental preservation, and infrastructure investments, the town can continue to serve as a rural community that embraces its connection to the Wabash River. Strategic planning efforts will ensure that Vera Cruz remains a livable, flood-resilient, and historically significant town within Wells County.

ANALYSIS OF VACANT PARCELS IN VERA CRUZ

The map highlights vacant parcels in orange, showing a dispersed pattern throughout Vera Cruz. The majority of these parcels are located within the central grid of the town, indicating infill opportunities, while a few larger vacant parcels are positioned along the eastern boundary, suggesting potential expansion areas.

Several parcels are near the main roads and water bodies, which may impact future development considerations. The overall distribution reflects a mix of small, undeveloped lots within the town core and larger vacant areas on the outskirts. When new development opportunities arise, it will be important to reference the Vision 2035 Plan in order to align future land use goals.

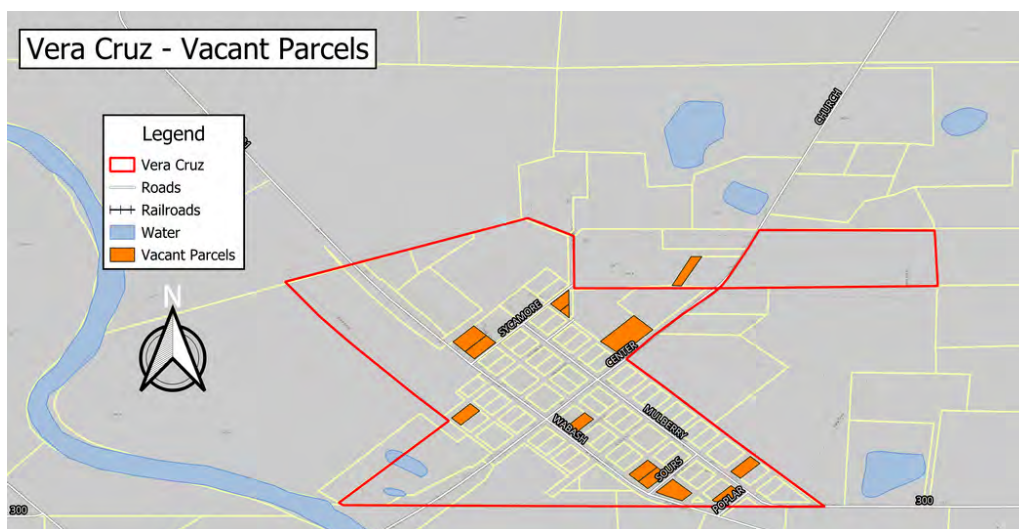


Figure 53: Vera Cruz Vacant Parcels Map; Source: Wells County GIS

COMMUNITY MEETING

As part of the planning process, a community meeting was held in Vera Cruz to hear directly from residents about the town's current conditions, future opportunities, and local priorities. The discussion revealed a deep sense of pride in the town's small-town character, strong community ties, and access to natural resources like the nearby river and Ouabache State Park.

Participants shared aspirations for growth, such as adding a general store or new housing, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining Vera Cruz's safe, family-oriented atmosphere. Infrastructure challenges, particularly related to drainage, roads, and the aging sewer system, were recurring concerns. Attendees also brainstormed ideas for enhancing the local park, creating new trails, and drawing more families and small businesses to the area. The feedback collected during the meeting helped shape the following high-level SWOT summary.

STRENGTHS

- Tight-knit, family-focused community with low crime and strong local relationships.
- Access to outdoor amenities: Ouabache State Park, the river, and a local park with a boat launch.
- Local pride in cleanliness and safety.
- Small number of existing businesses and a community church that draws people in.

WEAKNESSES

- Poor road conditions, aging storm drainage, and high sewer bills (\$100/month).
- Floodplain limits development; FEMA restrictions reduce land use flexibility.
- Safety concerns: speeding, stop sign violations, and lack of a tornado siren.
- Town-owned property with limited use and minimal communication infrastructure.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Add new housing and recruit young families.
- Develop underutilized lots—ideas included a general store, splashpad, and music venue.
- Revitalize the park and connect to the State Park via trails or a riverwalk.
- Establish a stronger brand identity ("Village of Vera Cruz") and host more community events.

THREATS

- Blight risk from neglected junkyards, private properties, and vandalism near the river.
- Environmental risks from flooding and lack of drainage capacity.
- Increasing traffic and outsiders potentially disrupting community safety.
- Limited funding, leadership capacity, and communication with the county.

FUTURE VISION

Vera Cruz's future vision is shaped by community feedback and environmental considerations, ensuring that growth, preservation, and infrastructure planning align with local priorities. Through surveys, public meetings, and stakeholder input, a set of vision principles has emerged, defining the town's direction for the future.

This section outlines Vera Cruz's vision principles, which emphasize sustainable land use, floodplain management, and public infrastructure investments. Given the town's proximity to the Wabash River, careful planning is needed to balance development with flood mitigation efforts while ensuring that residents have access to quality services and public spaces.

These principles will inform policies on land use regulations, infrastructure planning, and conservation efforts, ensuring that Vera Cruz preserves its rural charm while accommodating responsible growth. As these strategies are refined in the implementation section, Vera Cruz will continue to develop in a way that respects its natural surroundings and supports community well-being.

VISION PRINCIPLES: TOWN OF VERA CRUZ

Vera Cruz will grow as a connected, family-friendly community that embraces its natural surroundings and small-town charm. By enhancing outdoor spaces, improving infrastructure, and supporting smart growth initiatives, the town will create a safe and welcoming environment for residents of all ages. These vision principles will guide Vera Cruz's future, ensuring thoughtful development that strengthens the community while preserving its unique character.



1

Enhanced Connectivity and Outdoor Emphasis

2

Safe, Modern, and Family-Friendly Community

3

Smart Growth and Revitalization

Vera Cruz's Focus Areas focus on environmental sustainability, floodplain management, and infrastructure improvements to support the town's long-term growth. This section translates the town's vision principles into actionable strategies, ensuring that development is balanced with natural preservation.

- Managing land use in flood-prone areas to minimize environmental risks.
- Investing in stormwater infrastructure to enhance flood resiliency.
- Encouraging small-scale residential growth while preserving the town's rural character.
- Improving public infrastructure, including roads and utilities.
- Protecting green spaces and natural assets, particularly near the Wabash River.

TO OUAQUACHE STATE PARK

TO OUAQUACHE STATE PARK

SR-301

SR-304

SR-116

SR-104

WABASH RIVER

FUTURE TRAILHEAD

SW CHURCH RD

SW MULBERRY ST

E-300-S

E-OBlique RD

VICINITY MAP

OUAQUACHE STATE PARK

NEW ON-STREET SHARED-USE BICYCLE PATH

EXISTING PAVED BIKE TRAIL AT OUAQUACHE STATE PARK

NEW MULTI-USE PATH ALONG THE WABASH RIVER TO OUAQUACHE STATE PARK

FUTURE TRAILHEAD

LEGEND

- New on-street shared-use bicycle path to Ouabache State Park
- New multi-use path along the Wabash River to Ouabache State Park
- Existing sidewalk
- New sidewalk
- Streets
- Railroad
- Waterways
- Floodplain
- Woodland
- Buildings

NORTH

WELLS COUNTY MASTER PLAN | 2026

Building on these priorities, Vera Cruz’s approach to growth is centered on environmental sustainability, floodplain management, and infrastructure improvements that align with the town’s rural character and natural assets. The map highlights key projects aimed at enhancing flood resiliency, expanding recreational connectivity, and improving public infrastructure.

A major focus of the map is the proposed multi-use path along the Wabash River, which will enhance access to natural areas while supporting sustainable land use near flood-prone zones. This connection also extends to Ouabache State Park, reinforcing Vera Cruz’s role in the regional trail network and outdoor recreation initiatives. Additionally, a future trailhead is planned within town, serving as a key access point for both residents and visitors.

To further support floodplain management and infrastructure resilience, the map outlines planned stormwater infrastructure investments that will help mitigate environmental risks and protect developed areas. These improvements are crucial in ensuring that Vera Cruz can accommodate future growth while minimizing flood-related challenges.

While the map focuses on green infrastructure and connectivity, Vera Cruz’s broader strategy includes small-scale residential growth, road and utility enhancements, and the preservation of natural spaces. By carefully balancing development with conservation, Vera Cruz is shaping a future that prioritizes sustainability, community well-being, and long-term resilience.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation framework for Vera Cruz ensures that community priorities are addressed effectively, supporting the town’s vision for sustainable development and infrastructure resilience. Through two detailed matrices, this framework provides clear guidance for growth and public investment.

The first matrix outlines each priority along with key objectives, identifying:

- Responsible Parties: Local government, infrastructure agencies, and funding partners.
- Potential Funding Sources: Grants, flood mitigation funds, and development programs.
- Cost: The estimated total cost for each strategy on a scale of \$ - \$\$\$\$.
- Priority Level: A ranking system to assist with project sequencing.
- Timeline: Estimated completion periods for maintaining progress.

The second matrix outlines specific action steps, ensuring that each goal is managed efficiently and leads to tangible results. These matrices will help Vera Cruz prioritize resources, address infrastructure challenges, and support balanced growth, ensuring that the town remains resilient and well-planned for the future.

TOWN OF VERA CRUZ VISION 1

Enhanced Connectivity and Outdoor Emphasis

	Strategy	Responsibility	Funding	Cost	Priority	Timeline
1	Establish Vera Cruz as a gateway to Ouabache State Park by developing trails and pathways that connect the town to the park, fostering outdoor recreation opportunities.	• Friends of Ouabache State Park • Wells County Trails • Wells County Tourism • Wells County Economic Development	• EDIT • General Fund • Grants • READI	\$\$\$	High	18 - 24 Months, Ongoing
2	Support businesses that cater to outdoor lifestyles, creating a symbiotic relationship between the town's economy and the park's natural appeal.	• Wells County Economic Development • Vera Cruz Elected Officials	• General Fund • EDIT	\$\$	Medium	3 - 5 Years

Vision 1, Strategy 1: Establish Vera Cruz as a gateway to Ouabache State Park by developing trails and pathways that connect the town to the park, fostering outdoor recreation opportunities.

Objectives	Tactics
Develop Trail Connections to Ouabache State Park	• Identify and secure land or easements needed to create a direct trail connection between Vera Cruz and Ouabache State Park. • Pursue grant funding and partnerships with state and local agencies to finance trail construction and maintenance. • Install wayfinding signage, trailheads, and rest areas to enhance accessibility and usability for hikers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts.
Enhance Outdoor Recreation Opportunities	• Develop a local trail system within Vera Cruz that links neighborhoods, parks, and key community areas to the state park connection. • Incorporate bike-friendly infrastructure, such as racks and repair stations, to encourage cycling as a primary mode of access to the park. • Partner with White River Canoe Company to explore opening a second location near Vera Cruz, offering rentals and guided river trips.
Market Vera Cruz as a Gateway to Outdoor Adventure	• Create promotional materials and signage that highlight Vera Cruz as the ideal starting point for exploring Ouabache State Park and the Wabash River. • Partner with local businesses to offer trail- and river-related services, such as bike rentals, camping supplies, and canoe or kayak rentals. • Develop a visitor information hub in town featuring maps, park details, and recreation opportunities, including Wabash River access points and paddling routes.

Vision 1, Strategy 2: Support businesses that cater to outdoor lifestyles, creating a symbiotic relationship between the town’s economy and the park’s natural appeal.

Objectives	Tactics
Attract and Support Outdoor-Focused Businesses	- Recruit businesses such as outdoor gear shops, bike rental services, and camping supply stores that align with the recreational appeal of Ouabache State Park and the Wabash River. - Offer tax incentives or grants for businesses that cater to outdoor tourism and recreation. - Partner with White River Canoe Company or similar outfitters to establish a rental and tour service near Vera Cruz, providing canoe, kayak, and paddleboard options for visitors.
Enhance Local Hospitality and Retail Offerings	- Encourage the development of cafés, diners, and lodging options that serve hikers, campers, and paddlers visiting the area. - Work with local entrepreneurs to establish pop-up markets, food trucks, and seasonal retail stands that cater to outdoor enthusiasts. - Develop a branding initiative that positions Vera Cruz as a gateway for adventure, highlighting its connection to the state park and Wabash River.
Create Outdoor-Focused Community Events	- Organize seasonal events such as trail races, fishing tournaments, and paddling excursions to draw visitors and support local businesses. - Partner with Ouabache State Park to offer joint programming, such as guided hikes, nature workshops, and eco-tourism experiences. - Develop an annual outdoor festival celebrating the town’s recreational assets, bringing together local businesses, vendors, and outdoor enthusiasts.

TOWN OF VERA CRUZ VISION 2

Safe, Modern, and Family-Friendly Community

	Strategy	Responsibility	Funding	Cost	Priority	Timeline
1	Modernize the downtown park to enhance safety and appeal as a central hub for families and children.	- Elected Officials - Park Board	- General Fund - Park Fund - Grants - Donations	\$\$\$	High	18 - 24 Months
2	Improve public safety with traffic-calming measures to address speeding and ensure safe neighborhoods.	- Elected Officials - INDOT	- General Fund - MVH - CCMG - Grants	\$\$\$	Medium	2 - 10 Years
3	Invest in updated infrastructure, including sidewalks, roads, and drainage systems, to create a clean, accessible, and functional environment for residents and visitors.	- Elected Officials - INDOT	- General Fund - MVH - CCMG - Grants	\$\$\$\$	Low	2 - 10 Years

Vision 2, Strategy 1: Modernize the downtown park to enhance safety and appeal as a central hub for families and children.

Objectives	Tactics
Upgrade Park Infrastructure for Safety and Accessibility	• Replace outdated playground equipment with modern, ADA-compliant structures to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for children. • Install new fencing, clear sightlines, and defined entry points to create a safer and more welcoming park layout. • Upgrade walking paths with smooth, durable surfaces and clear wayfinding signage to improve accessibility for all ages.
Enhance Park Amenities to Attract Families and Visitors	• Add new picnic shelters, seating areas, and shade structures to create a more comfortable gathering space for families. • Install public restrooms and drinking fountains to improve convenience for park visitors.
Activate the Park with Community Events and Programming	• Organize seasonal activities such as movie nights, farmers' markets, and fitness classes to encourage year-round use. • Partner with local schools and organizations to host educational programs, sports leagues, and family-friendly events. • Create a volunteer-led "Friends of the Park" group to help with maintenance, beautification projects, and fundraising efforts.

Vision 2, Strategy 2: Improve public safety with traffic-calming measures to address speeding and ensure safe neighborhoods.

Objectives	Tactics
Implement Traffic-Calming Measures in Key Areas	• Install speed bumps, raised crosswalks, and curb extensions in residential areas and near parks to slow down traffic. • Add clear and visible pedestrian crossings, especially in high-traffic zones, to improve safety for walkers and cyclists. • Evaluate and adjust speed limits in critical areas to better reflect neighborhood safety needs.
Enhance Signage and Road Visibility	• Upgrade street signs with reflective materials and better placement to improve visibility, especially at night. • Install "Slow Down" and "Children at Play" signage in residential neighborhoods to encourage cautious driving. • Add flashing warning signals at key intersections or near school bus stops to alert drivers to pedestrian activity.

Vision 2, Strategy 3: Invest in updated infrastructure, including sidewalks, roads, and drainage systems, to create a clean, accessible, and functional environment for residents and visitors.

Objectives	Tactics
Upgrade and Maintain Sidewalks for Accessibility	• Repair and replace damaged sidewalks to ensure safe and accessible pedestrian routes throughout town. • Extend sidewalks to connect key areas, such as parks, community spaces, and residential neighborhoods. • Install curb ramps and tactile paving at crossings to improve accessibility for individuals with mobility challenges.
Improve Road Conditions and Traffic Flow	• Resurface aging roads and fill potholes to create smoother and safer driving conditions. • Enhance street lighting in key areas to improve visibility and safety for pedestrians and drivers. • Establish a regular road maintenance schedule to ensure long-term infrastructure reliability.
Enhance Drainage Systems for Flood Prevention	• Clean and maintain ditches, culverts, and storm drains to prevent flooding and water buildup. • Install or upgrade drainage infrastructure in areas prone to standing water or erosion. • Work with county and state agencies to secure funding for stormwater management improvements.

TOWN OF VERA CRUZ VISION 3

Smart Growth and Revitalization

Strategy	Responsibility	Funding	Cost	Priority	Timeline
Support moderate growth through single-family home development on larger lots and targeting commercial infill opportunities in the downtown area to address blight and vacant properties.	- Elected Officials - Park Board	- General Fund - Park Fund - Grants - Donations	\$\$\$	High	18 - 24 Months

Vision 3 Strategy: Support moderate growth through single-family home development on larger lots and targeting commercial infill opportunities in the downtown area to address blight and vacant properties.

Objectives	Tactics
Encourage Single-Family Home Development on Larger Lots	• Identify and rezone suitable areas on the town’s outskirts to accommodate new residential growth with spacious lots. • Partner with developers to promote home construction that aligns with the town’s character and resident preferences. • Improve infrastructure, including roads and utilities, to support future residential expansion while maintaining open space and rural appeal.
Target Commercial Infill to Revitalize Downtown	• Develop incentives, such as tax abatements or grants, for businesses to renovate or repurpose vacant downtown buildings. • Streamline the permitting process for commercial redevelopment projects to encourage investment. • Support mixed-use development that integrates retail, office, and residential spaces to create a more vibrant and active downtown.
Address Blight and Vacant Properties	• Establish a property improvement program to assist owners in repairing and revitalizing neglected buildings. • Enforce property maintenance codes to encourage upkeep of vacant and underutilized sites. • Work with county and state agencies to secure funding for demolishing unsafe structures and preparing sites for redevelopment.

TOWN OF PONETO

COMMUNITY REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Poneto section of the plan is guided by data that suggests relatively stable demographics but also a need to revitalize older housing and enhance local infrastructure. Survey results and public meeting discussions echoed residents' desire for modest residential expansion coupled with adequate water, sewer, and transportation services. Poneto's Vision Principles thus focus on preserving the rural heritage while exploring small-scale development that can expand the tax base and introduce new business opportunities. Action items include encouraging infill or renovation of existing homes, coordinating with county agencies for targeted infrastructure improvements, and promoting a mix of local entrepreneurial activities that suit Poneto's agricultural backdrop, smaller population, and the Vision 2035 Plan.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

The Town of Poneto is a rural community with a strong agricultural base, positioned along State Road 218. Understanding its land use patterns, infrastructure needs, and environmental assets is essential for guiding sustainable growth and economic development.

Poneto's land use is primarily agricultural, with residential and commercial areas concentrated in the town center. Maintaining this balance between farmland preservation and controlled development will be key to ensuring sustainable growth that aligns with Vision 2035.

The town recognizes the importance of infrastructure investments, particularly in stormwater management, road improvements, and utility upgrades. As Poneto looks to the future, continued investment in essential infrastructure will ensure long-term viability and resilience.

By examining these existing conditions, this section provides a comprehensive overview of Poneto's development landscape, ensuring that growth is managed strategically while maintaining the town's rural identity.

TOWN OF PONETO

The Town of Poneto, located in southern Wells County, is a small but historically significant community with strong ties to agriculture, transportation, and rural development. While Poneto maintains a predominantly residential and agricultural character, its strategic location along State Road 218 provides opportunities for economic growth and infrastructure improvements. This section examines the town's natural features, zoning, land use patterns, and infrastructure, offering insight into how future development can be guided to support long-term sustainability.

Poneto's natural landscape is defined by its proximity to Rock Creek and Elk Creek, which run near the town and provide both environmental benefits and development challenges. Flood hazard areas, including 100-year and 500-year flood zones, are present along these waterways, requiring consideration for stormwater management and development restrictions. Wetlands and tree-covered areas further contribute to the town's ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, recreation, and conservation efforts.

- Flood-prone areas along Rock Creek and Elk Creek require careful planning for infrastructure and future growth.
- Wetlands and tree coverage provide environmental protection, reducing flood risks and improving water quality.
- Parks and green spaces offer recreational opportunities, enhancing quality of life for Poneto’s residents.

As Poneto continues to grow, maintaining a balance between development and environmental protection will be essential to ensuring sustainable land use and infrastructure resiliency.

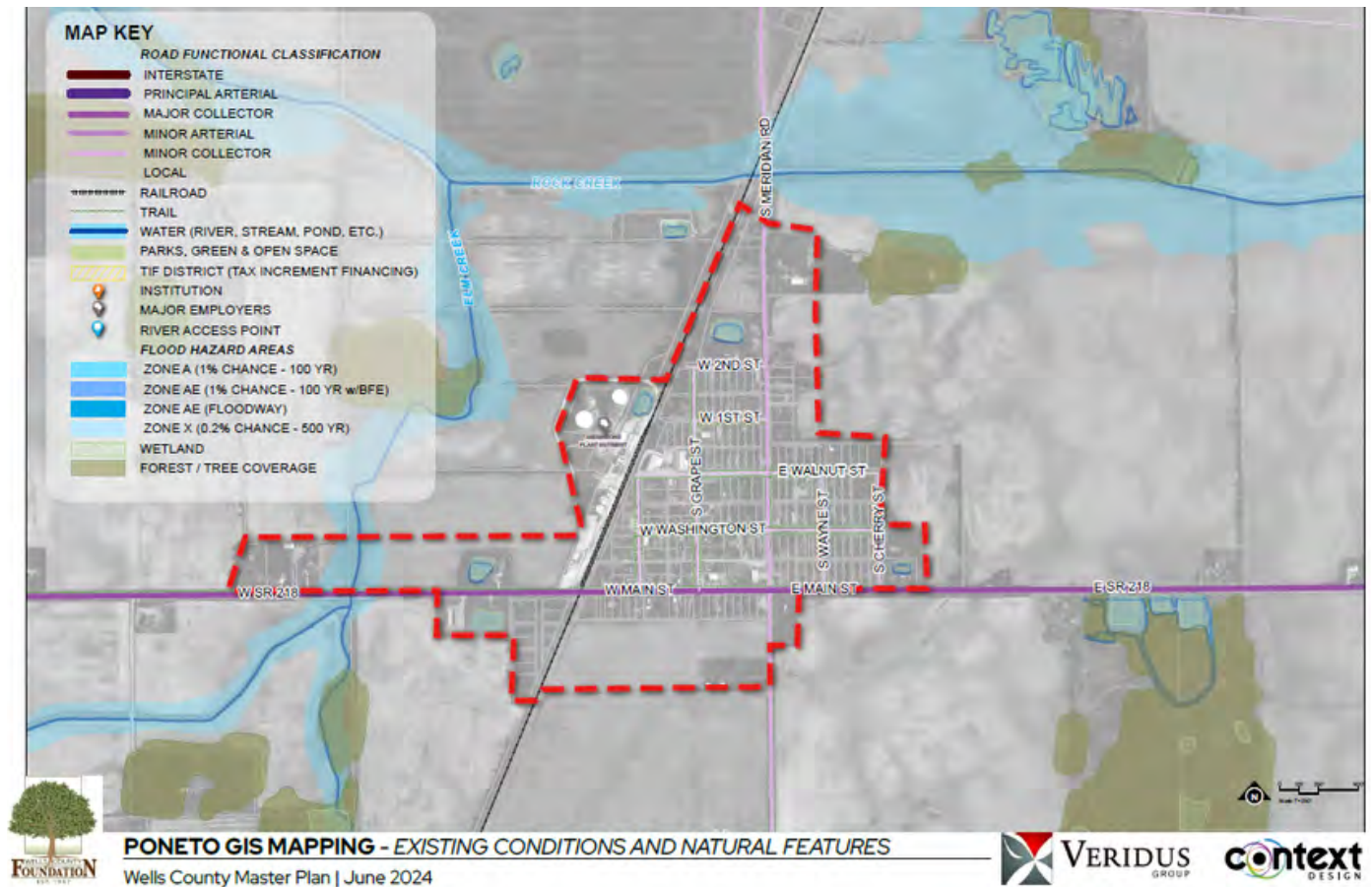


Figure 56: Poneto Existing Conditions Map; Source: Context Design

As Poneto continues to grow, maintaining a balance between development and environmental protection will be essential to ensuring sustainable land use and infrastructure resiliency.

Poneto’s transportation and infrastructure network plays a key role in supporting its economic viability and quality of life. The town is connected to the broader region via State Road 218, which serves as the primary transportation corridor. While Poneto does not have major highways or interstates, its local road system and proximity to rail infrastructure provide key connectivity opportunities for residents and businesses.

- State Road 218 facilitates access to neighboring communities and regional markets.

- TIF districts (Tax Increment Financing) support redevelopment and infrastructure investment in strategic locations.
- Major employers and institutions contribute to the town's local economy, providing jobs and essential services.
- Public utilities and infrastructure investments will be crucial for maintaining service levels and supporting sustainable growth.

As Poneto looks to the future, ensuring that infrastructure investments, transportation improvements, and land use planning strategies align with community priorities and economic opportunities will be critical for its long-term success.

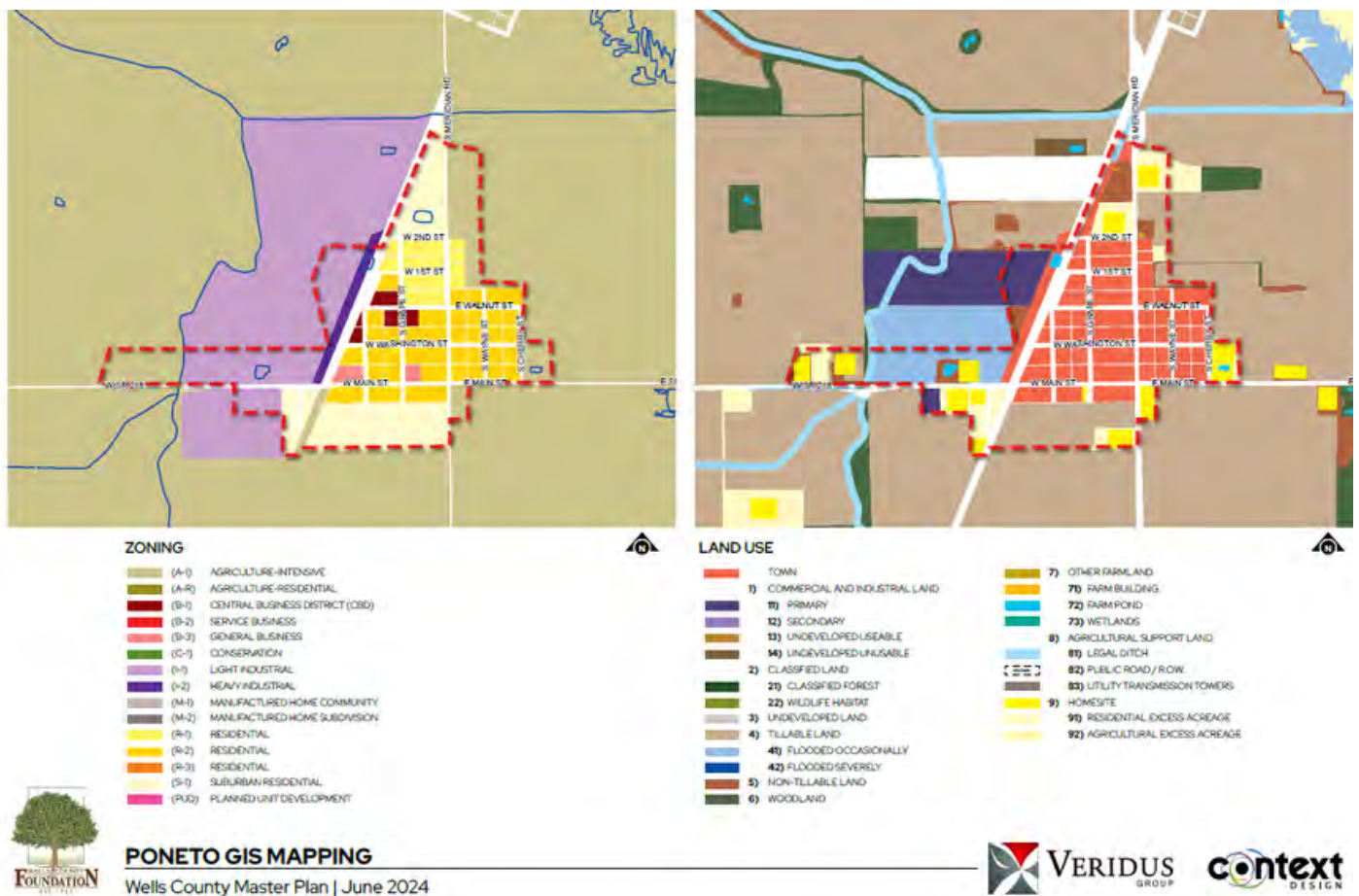


Figure 58: Poneto Zoning and Land Use Map; Source: Context Design

Poneto's zoning and land use patterns reflect its rural character, with agriculture and residential development forming the core of the community. The town's zoning framework ensures that agricultural preservation remains a priority, while also allowing for residential expansion and commercial activity along key corridors.

- Agricultural zoning (A-1, A-R) dominates the surrounding areas, reinforcing the town's rural setting while enabling limited development.

- Residential zoning (R-1, R-2, R-3, suburban residential) is concentrated in the town center, providing a mix of housing types.
- Commercial zoning (B-1, B-2, Central Business District) is focused along State Road 218, supporting small businesses and local services.
- Industrial zoning (I-1, I-2) is present near the northwestern portion of town, offering opportunities for future employment growth.

The land use plan highlights additional areas for undeveloped land, conservation zones, and flood-prone areas, ensuring that growth remains aligned with environmental considerations.

Poneto's existing conditions, land use framework, and infrastructure assets provide a solid foundation for future planning efforts. By balancing agricultural preservation, residential expansion, and commercial development, the town can sustainably grow while maintaining its small-town identity. Strategic infrastructure improvements and land use policies will help Poneto remain a resilient and connected community within Wells County for generations to come.

ANALYSIS OF VACANT PARCELS IN PONETO

The map shows vacant parcels in orange, distributed throughout Poneto with a notable concentration in the southern and central sections of the town. Many vacant lots are located within the established street grid, suggesting infill potential, while larger parcels are positioned along the railroad corridor to the northeast and southwest, indicating industrial or commercial possibilities.

Clusters of vacant land along Main Street, Washington Street, and Cherry Street highlight areas with multiple undeveloped properties. The presence of several parcels near water bodies and transportation routes may influence future land use considerations. It will be important to align future development opportunities with the Vision 2035 Land Use Plan, as the vacant parcels fall within areas designated for various future land uses.

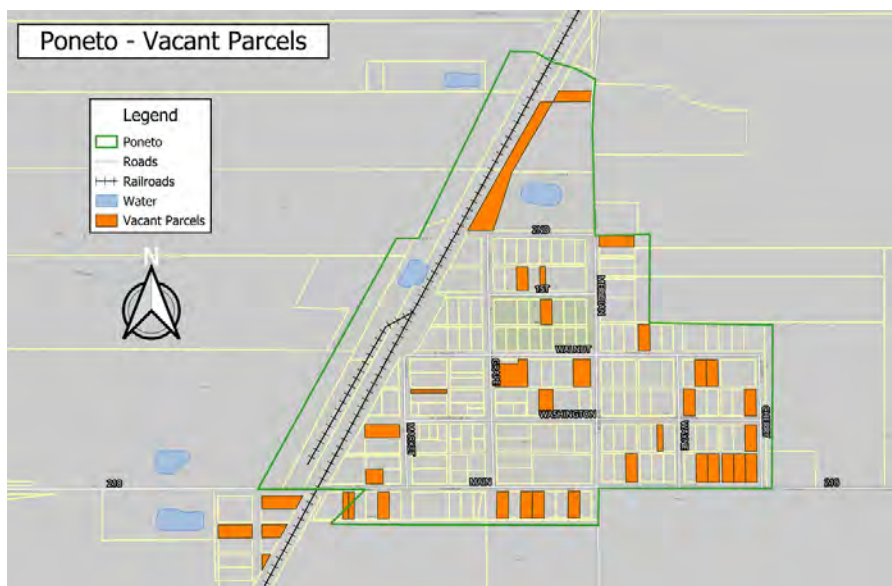


Figure 57: Poneto Vacant Parcels Map;
Source: Wells County GIS

COMMUNITY MEETING

At the Poneto community meeting, residents gathered to share what they value about their town and to identify key areas for improvement. The meeting was open and candid, revealing both a deep appreciation for the town's strong sense of community and a recognition of the infrastructure and engagement challenges that need to be addressed moving forward.

Many participants expressed pride in the town's close-knit atmosphere, active churches, responsive leadership, and the quality of local schools. Others highlighted concerns about the long-term sustainability of infrastructure, particularly the sewer system, public safety issues, and a general lack of coordinated planning or communication tools. The dialogue also reflected a desire to revitalize community life, support new development, and build stronger connections among residents of all ages.

The insights below reflect the collective voice of the community and help inform future priorities for the town.

STRENGTHS

- Strong relationships: Residents know and support one another.
- Responsive leadership and well-maintained public services.
- Churches and schools are active and central to community life.
- Affordable housing and town-wide fiber access.
- Volunteer spirit.

WEAKNESSES

- No clear long-term plan/development vision.
- Aging sewer infrastructure and expensive to maintain.
- The town park is non-compliant and underutilized.
- Safety concerns at key intersections and limited police presence.
- Lack of effective communication tools (e.g., no Facebook page).

OPPORTUNITIES

- Vacant lots and highway access offer space for housing or retail (e.g., Dollar General).
- Community events and traditions could be revived.
- Potential to increase civic engagement through better outreach.
- Partnering with churches and nonprofits to extend local services.

THREATS

- Infrastructure failure, especially with the sewer system, would be costly.
- Perceptions of crime and lack of enforcement undermine safety.
- Disengagement and mistrust of local government processes.
- Vacant or neglected properties may discourage future investment.

FUTURE VISION

Poneto's future vision is informed by community input and regional priorities, ensuring that growth aligns with the town's agricultural roots and small-town character. Through stakeholder engagement and public meetings, residents have expressed their goals for land use planning, infrastructure improvements, and economic development.

This section introduces Poneto's vision principles, which focus on maintaining agricultural integrity, enhancing residential opportunities, and improving essential infrastructure. Investments in stormwater management, road maintenance, and small business development will ensure that the town remains sustainable and resilient in the years ahead.

These principles will guide future policy development, ensuring that land use decisions, infrastructure projects, and community investments align with Poneto's long-term vision. The implementation section will refine these priorities into actionable steps, providing a clear path forward for sustainable and balanced growth.

VISION PRINCIPLES: TOWN OF PONETO

Poneto will continue to be a safe, connected, and welcoming community that prioritizes quality living and responsible growth. Through strong local leadership, infrastructure improvements, and a commitment to community engagement, the town will enhance its small-town charm while preparing for the future. These vision principles will guide Poneto's development, ensuring a vibrant and sustainable community for generations to come.



1

Safe, Connected, and Attractive Community

2

Engaged and Collaborative Governance

3

Quality Living and Growth for the Future

FOCUS AREAS

Poneto's Focus Areas focus on agricultural preservation, residential development, and infrastructure upgrades to support the town's future growth and quality of life. By translating its vision principles into a structured plan, this section ensures that land use decisions align with long-term goals.

Key growth priorities for Poneto include:

- Preserving agricultural land while allowing for measured residential growth.
- Investing in roadway and utility infrastructure improvements.
- Encouraging small business development to support the local economy.
- Enhancing stormwater management systems to improve resiliency.
- Maintaining the town's small-town character while supporting future growth.

The below map illustrates designated growth areas and planned infrastructure investments, ensuring Poneto's development aligns with community values and sustainability. These Focus Areas provide a clear guide for decision-makers, ensuring that Poneto remains a strong and well-planned community.

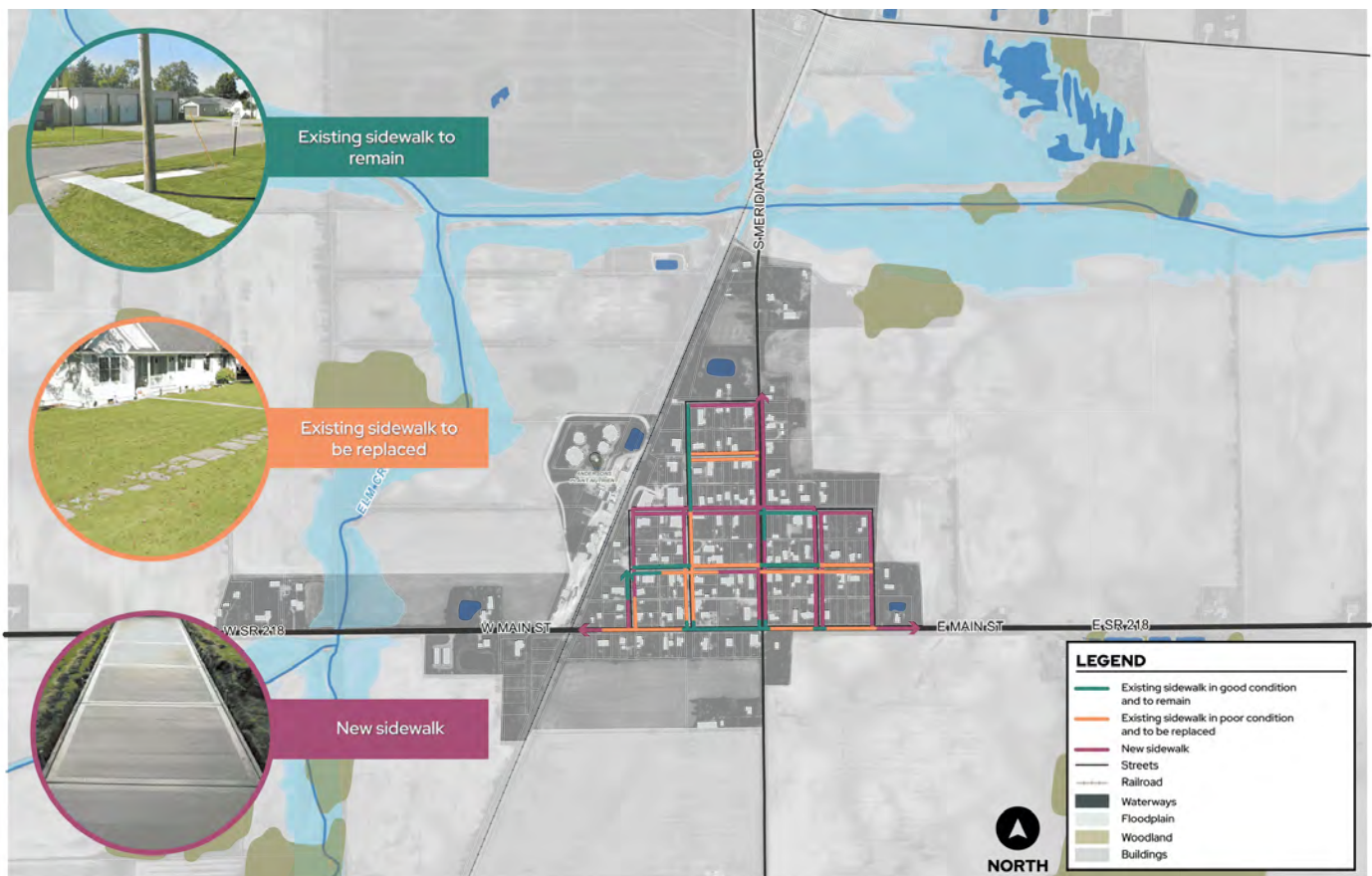


Figure 59: Poneto Future Vision; Source: Context Design

Building on these priorities, Poneto’s growth strategy emphasizes infrastructure upgrades that enhance walkability and connectivity while maintaining its small-town character. The map focuses on sidewalk improvements, ensuring that the town’s pedestrian infrastructure supports both existing and future development.

The map highlights existing sidewalks that are in good condition and will remain, areas where aging sidewalks will be replaced, and locations for new sidewalks to expand connectivity. These improvements will enhance safety, accessibility, and walkability throughout the town, reinforcing Poneto’s commitment to a high quality of life for residents.

While sidewalk infrastructure is the primary focus of the map, Poneto’s broader development strategy includes roadway and utility upgrades, stormwater management enhancements, and measured residential growth. These initiatives support the town’s vision of preserving agricultural land while allowing for strategic expansion, encouraging small business development, and ensuring long-term sustainability.

By investing in infrastructure improvements that align with community needs, Poneto is ensuring that future growth is balanced, well-planned, and supportive of its rural character. These Focus Areas will guide decision-makers in maintaining Poneto’s charm while fostering a resilient and connected future.

IMPLEMENTATION

Poneto’s implementation framework provides a structured plan for managing growth, infrastructure improvements, and economic development. Through two comprehensive matrices, this section establishes a clear pathway for achieving the town’s long-term goals.

The first matrix details each goal and priority, including:

- Responsible Parties: Town officials, infrastructure partners, and funding agencies.
- Potential Funding Sources: Grants, transportation funds, and economic development programs.
- Cost: The estimated total cost for each strategy on a scale of \$ - \$\$\$\$.
- Priority Level: A classification system for effective project sequencing.
- Timeline: Projected timeframes to maintain progress and accountability.

The second matrix identifies the specific action steps required to ensure that each goal is met, providing a step-by-step approach to implementation. These matrices will serve as a guide for Poneto’s leadership, ensuring that growth is well-managed and infrastructure investments align with community needs.

TOWN OF PONETO VISION 1

Safe, Connected, and Attractive Community

	Strategy	Responsibility	Funding	Cost	Priority	Timeline
1	Enhance public safety and the perception of safety through improved town services, enforcement of ordinances, and the maintenance of clean, well-kept properties.	- Elected Officials - Wells County Sherriff's Department	- General Fund - Sheriff's Funding	\$\$\$	High	18 - 24 Months
2	Invest in strong infrastructure, including sidewalks, water, sewer, and broadband, to ensure connectivity and a foundation for future growth while improving the appearance and livability of the town.	- Elected Officials - Utility Providers - Wells County Economic Development	- General Fund - Utility Fund - TIF - EDIT	\$\$\$	High	18 - 24 Months, Ongoing

Vision 1, Strategy 1: Enhance public safety and the perception of safety through improved town services, enforcement of ordinances, and the maintenance of clean, well-kept properties.

Objectives	Tactics
Improve Town Services to Support Public Safety	• Expand regular maintenance schedules for streets, sidewalks, and public spaces to ensure safe and functional infrastructure. • Assess the feasibility of increasing law enforcement presence or establishing a neighborhood watch program. • Improve emergency response capabilities by working with county agencies to enhance fire, EMS, and law enforcement coordination.
Enforce Ordinances to Maintain a Clean and Orderly Community	• Strengthen enforcement of property maintenance codes to address abandoned vehicles, overgrown lots, and neglected structures. • Implement a proactive approach to code enforcement by conducting regular property inspections and offering compliance assistance programs. • Provide resources or incentives for property owners to repair or improve the appearance of their homes and businesses.
Enhance Community Appearance and Public Spaces	• Organize town-wide cleanup events to encourage residents to take pride in their community. • Install additional street lighting, benches, and landscaping to improve aesthetics and visibility in key areas. • Encourage property owners to participate in beautification efforts through a façade improvement program or volunteer initiatives.

Vision 1, Strategy 2: Invest in strong infrastructure, including sidewalks, water, sewer, and broadband, to ensure connectivity and a foundation for future growth while improving the appearance and livability of the town.

Objectives	Tactics
Expand and Improve Sidewalk Infrastructure	• Identify gaps in the sidewalk network and prioritize repairs or extensions to improve walkability and safety. • Ensure sidewalks are ADA-compliant, adding curb ramps and tactile paving where needed. • Incorporate landscaping and street lighting along sidewalks to enhance aesthetics and pedestrian comfort.
Upgrade Water and Sewer Systems	• Assess the current water and sewer infrastructure to identify aging systems in need of replacement or expansion. • Secure funding through state and federal grants to support water and sewer upgrades that accommodate future growth. • Implement a maintenance program to ensure long-term system reliability and reduce service disruptions.
Improve Broadband Access for Connectivity	• Partner with internet service providers to expand high-speed broadband access throughout Poneto. • Identify funding opportunities to support broadband infrastructure investments, particularly in underserved areas. • Promote digital connectivity initiatives to support remote work, education, and local businesses.

TOWN OF PONETO VISION 2

Engaged and Collaborative Governance

	Strategy	Responsibility	Funding	Cost	Priority	Timeline
1	Build stronger relationships between the community, elected officials, and county government by promoting open communication, transparency, and collaboration.	Elected Officials	General Fund, really aren't need	\$	High	18 - 24 Months
2	Foster community engagement through town hall meetings, social media, and events that bring residents together to strengthen trust and shared purpose.	Elected Officials	General Fund	\$	High	18 - 24 Months
3	Focus on initiatives that promote community togetherness through events experiences that celebrate Poneto's identity.	- Elected Officials - Park Board	General Fund	\$	Medium	2 - 5 Years

Vision 2, Strategy 1: Build stronger relationships between the community, elected officials, and county government by promoting open communication, transparency, and collaboration.

Objectives	Tactics
Promote Open Communication Between Residents and Local Government	• Establish a town website or social media page to share updates, meeting agendas, and community announcements. • Implement a quarterly town hall meeting where residents can engage directly with elected officials and provide feedback. • Create a resident newsletter (print or digital) summarizing key decisions, upcoming projects, and town initiatives.
Enhance Transparency in Local Decision-Making	• Publish meeting minutes, budgets, and policy decisions online to ensure public access to government actions. • Develop an easy-to-use public feedback system for residents to submit concerns, questions, or ideas to town leadership. • Provide an annual “State of the Town” report outlining progress on infrastructure, safety, and community initiatives.
Strengthen Collaboration with County Government	• Hold regular meetings with county officials to align on infrastructure, public safety, and economic development priorities. • Advocate for county resources and funding opportunities that support Poneto’s growth and quality of life. • Partner with regional organizations to coordinate planning efforts and improve services for residents.

Vision 2, Strategy 2: Foster community engagement through town hall meetings, social media, and events that bring residents together to strengthen trust and shared purpose.

Objectives	Tactics
Host Regular Town Hall Meetings to Encourage Resident Participation	• Schedule quarterly town hall meetings to discuss upcoming projects, gather community input, and address resident concerns. • Rotate meeting locations or offer virtual attendance options to ensure accessibility for all residents. • Use interactive formats, such as Q&A sessions and small group discussions, to foster meaningful dialogue.
Utilize Social Media and Digital Platforms for Community Engagement	• Create and maintain an official town social media page to share important updates, meeting notices, and community events. • Develop an online suggestion box or feedback form where residents can submit ideas and concerns. • Post regular "Meet Your Officials" spotlights to introduce residents to town leaders and encourage direct engagement.
Organize Community Events to Strengthen Trust and Connection	• Plan annual town gatherings, such as picnics, festivals, or holiday celebrations, to bring residents together in a relaxed setting. • Partner with local businesses and organizations to sponsor or co-host events that encourage civic pride. • Establish volunteer opportunities that allow residents to actively contribute to town improvements and initiatives.

Vision 2, Strategy 3: Focus on initiatives that promote community togetherness through events and experiences that celebrate Poneto’s identity.

Objectives	Tactics
Establish Signature Community Events	• Organize an annual town festival featuring local food, music, and activities that celebrate Poneto’s small-town charm. • Host seasonal events, such as a summer picnic, fall harvest festival, or holiday tree lighting, to bring residents together. • Develop a community awards program to recognize outstanding residents, businesses, and volunteers.
Encourage Public Art and Cultural Initiatives	• Install murals, historical markers, or public art projects that reflect Poneto’s heritage and community spirit. • Partner with local artists and schools to create rotating art exhibits in public spaces. • Support storytelling initiatives, such as oral history projects or a community scrapbook, to preserve Poneto’s past and celebrate its future.
Foster Neighborhood and Civic Engagement	• Organize neighborhood meet-and-greet events to strengthen connections between residents. • Develop a community service day where volunteers can participate in beautification projects, park cleanups, or local improvement efforts. • Encourage local businesses and organizations to sponsor or participate in town events, reinforcing a sense of shared purpose and pride.

TOWN OF PONETO VISION 3

Quality Living and Growth for the Future

	Strategy	Responsibility	Funding	Cost	Priority	Timeline
1	Define a clear vision for Poneto's future by addressing housing needs through infill development on vacant properties and supporting appropriate new home construction.	- Elected Officials - Wells County Economic Development - Wells County Area Planning	- General Fund - TIF	\$\$	Medium	2 - 5 Years
2	Attract small-scale commercial development, such as a convenience store or gas station, to serve residents while improving the town park and public spaces to enhance the overall quality of life.	- Elected Officials - Wells County Economic Development - Wells County Area Planning	- General Fund - TIF - EDIT	\$\$\$	Low	6 - 10 Years

Vision 3, Strategy 1: Define a clear vision for Poneto’s future by addressing housing needs through infill development on vacant properties and supporting appropriate new home construction.

Objectives	Tactics
Encourage Infill Development on Vacant Properties	• Identify and catalog vacant lots suitable for residential development and promote them to builders and prospective homeowners. • Offer incentives, such as reduced permit fees or tax abatements, for new housing construction on underutilized properties. • Establish design guidelines to ensure infill housing blends with the character of existing neighborhoods.
Support New Home Construction That Aligns with Community Needs	• Work with developers to build a mix of housing options that appeal to young families, retirees, and professionals. • Ensure zoning and land use regulations allow for moderate residential expansion while maintaining Poneto’s small-town charm. • Invest in infrastructure improvements, such as water, sewer, and roads, to support future residential growth.
Promote Homeownership and Housing Affordability	• Develop partnerships with financial institutions to offer first-time homebuyer assistance programs. • Encourage the rehabilitation of older homes through grants or low-interest loan programs for repairs and improvements. • Host housing forums or workshops to connect residents with resources for purchasing, renovating, or building homes in Poneto.

Vision 3, Strategy 2: Attract small-scale commercial development, such as a convenience store or gas station, to serve residents while improving the town park and public spaces to enhance the overall quality of life.

Objectives	Tactics
Attract Small-Scale Commercial Development	• Identify and market key locations for a convenience store, gas station, or other essential services that meet residents' daily needs. • Offer tax incentives or reduced permitting costs to encourage small business investment in Poneto. • Work with regional economic development organizations to recruit businesses that align with the town's size and character.
Enhance the Town Park as a Community Hub	• Upgrade park amenities, such as playground equipment, picnic shelters, and walking trails, to encourage greater use. • Add landscaping, benches, and lighting to improve aesthetics and safety. • Develop programming, such as community movie nights, fitness classes, or seasonal events, to activate the park year-round.
Improve Public Spaces for a More Livable Community	• Invest in streetscape enhancements, such as decorative lighting, planters, and signage, to make public areas more inviting. • Establish a beautification initiative to encourage property owners to improve storefronts and residential landscaping. • Create pedestrian-friendly pathways connecting key areas, such as the park, downtown, and future commercial development sites.

The Wells County Master Plan 2026 is more than a vision, it is a comprehensive action plan built by the people of Wells County, for the future of Wells County. Rooted in community feedback and shaped by regional and national trends, the Plan provides a framework for sustaining the county's rural identity while seizing opportunities for thoughtful growth and economic resilience.

Reflecting the County's Collective Voice

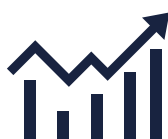
From an extensive online survey and countywide public meetings, the planning team heard directly from the people who live and work in Wells County. Participants prioritized education and public safety, called for more job opportunities and attainable housing, and advocated for expanded healthcare access. While the majority affirmed that the pace of growth was "just right," there were strong undertones that housing growth was "too slow." Housing emerged as a central issue, with strong support for more single-family and senior-friendly homes, along with concerns about rising housing costs. Business development priorities emphasized restaurants, healthcare, and retail services, while infrastructure needs focused on road improvements and enhanced pedestrian amenities like sidewalks and trails. Accordingly, the plan identifies and addresses each of these priorities.

Leveraging Regional Strengths and National Trends

Wells County is uniquely positioned to harness national migration trends favoring rural and suburban areas, especially among remote workers and those seeking affordability and quality of life. As part of the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, the county benefits from regional collaboration and strong transportation connectivity. Comparatively, Wells County leads its neighboring counties in several areas: housing affordability, cost of living, socioeconomic status, and bike accessibility. These competitive advantages make the county increasingly attractive to residents and employers alike.

Building Toward a Resilient, Connected Future

The plan sets forth vision principles emphasizing enhancing quality of life, encouraging collaboration, supporting a resilient economy, and cultivating local pride. Each strategy is paired with implementation tactics, timelines, responsible parties, and potential funding sources. In addition, the Appendices provide critical reference materials: land use and zoning maps, focus area overlays, vacant parcel inventories, and detailed community survey data. While the plan is county-wide, each city and town, Bluffton, Ossian, Uniondale, Poneto, and Vera Cruz, has its own vision, goals, and next steps, allowing communities to easily extract and act on their unique section.



Wells County's future is one of deliberate, community-guided progress, one that honors its rural roots while adapting to modern needs. By continuing to collaborate, listen, and invest with intention, Wells County can grow in a way that respects its heritage while looking forward to the future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The table below summarizes this report to provide data-backed priorities, trends, assets, and objectives that Wells County can use to guide its future growth.

Category	Takeaways
Community Survey/ Meeting Priorities	• Education & Public Safety • Job Opportunities & Attainable Housing • Healthcare Access & Community Amenities
Future Trends	• Migration toward smaller communities offers growth potential. • Broadband and training investment will attract remote workers. • Flexible housing options will meet the changing demographic needs for smaller households.
Comparative Strengths	• Housing Affordability • Socioeconomic Stability • Cost of Living • Bike Accessibility
County-Wide Goals	• Enhancing growth and quality of life • Fostering inter-municipal collaboration • Promoting entrepreneurship and workforce readiness • Supporting civic engagement and placemaking