

CENTRAL INDIANA

UNDERSTANDING THE REGION AND IDENTIFYING CHOICES

CENTER FOR URBAN POLICY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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Traditional Planning Prevails in Central Indiana County Plans

Indiana residents and local decision-makers are asking new questions about the economic, environmental, and agricultural impacts of growth, and other issues related to quality of life and sustainability. Their concern is not surprising considering these facts:

- Recently released Census data show that the population of Central Indiana grew 12.8 percent between 1985 and 2000, while analyses of satellite imagery for the same period show that urban land cover in the region increased by 39.2 percent.
- More than \$44 billion was invested in built structures in Central Indiana in the 1990s; about half of these investments were made in housing.

Central Indiana residents identified growth and development, uncontrolled growth, and overcrowding as the most important problems facing their communities, according to a survey of over 6,400 residents conducted in 2000 by the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment (center).

In Indiana, planning for growth is primarily the responsibility of local governments. Thirty-five of 44 counties in Central Indiana (Map 1) have established plan commissions to help guide future development, and most of these counties have adopted comprehensive plans and land use regulations. Comprehensive plans are important because they establish the legal foundation for zoning ordinances and

subdivision regulations as well as policies that guide decisions about development.

As part of its ongoing project, *Central Indiana's Future: Understanding the Region and Identifying Choices*, the center recently reviewed 25 county comprehensive plans to identify the approaches counties use to plan for change and how these

approaches to planning compare with national trends in planning related to sustainable development and smart growth. Among the center's findings:

- More than 40 percent of the plans are less than five years old, indicating that county leaders are recognizing the need to plan for change
- Professional consultants prepared three-quarters of the current plans
- Virtually all plans appear to meet the state's minimum statutory requirements
- Most plans discuss broad issues related to sustainable development
- Fewer plans embrace principles of smart growth advanced by diverse groups such as the American Planning Association

Map 1: Central Indiana



or the National Home Builders Association

- County plans vary considerably in detail and quality, with most including adequate data and analysis, but few including implementation measures or identifying indicators that can be used to assess progress towards community goals.



The Review Criteria: Conformity, Sustainability, Smart Growth, and Good Practice

Center researchers reviewed 25 county comprehensive plans to obtain basic information about planning in Central Indiana and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of planning documents. A diverse group of stakeholders that included the Indiana Farm Bureau, Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of Realtors, Indiana Builders Association, Indiana Association of Realtors, Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis, and Purdue Land Use Team was invited to help structure the review. Researchers used a template that required 140 different judgments about different aspects of the plans to answer five general questions:

- How old are county plans and who prepared them?
- Do plans conform to state law?
- Do plans talk about the broad issue of sustainability?
- Do plans embrace the principles of smart growth?
- Do the plans contain evidence of good planning practice?

Almost Half of County Plans Updated Since 1995

Plans too frequently become irrelevant and unused. As physical changes occur within a county, plans must keep pace with those changes. Twelve of the 25 plans included in the analyses have been updated since 1995, and four of the eight counties that engage in planning but were not included in the analysis currently are updating their plans (Table 1). On the other hand, more than one-quarter of the plans are more than 10 years old, and five of these are more than 20 years old.

The review also shows that 19 of 25 (76 percent) of the plans were prepared with support from planning consultants. The high number of plans prepared by a consultant could indicate limited internal resources or the need to bring a greater expertise to the planning process. Only six of the 25 counties (24 percent) relied solely on county staff to prepare the plans.

Table 1: Central Indiana County Inventory (as of December 2000)

County	Type of Plan Commission	Plan Adoption Date	Plan Author
Bartholomew	Advisory	1999	In-house
Benton	Advisory	No comprehensive plan	—
Boone	Area	1997	In-house/consultant
Brown	Area	Plan being updated	—
Carroll	Area	Plan being updated	—
Cass ¹	Advisory	Plan unavailable	—
Clay	None	—	—
Clinton	Area	1993	In-house
Decatur	Area	1996	In-house
Delaware	Metro	1999	Consultant
Fayette	Area	1993	Consultant
Fountain	None	—	—
Greene	None	—	—
Hamilton	Advisory	1990	Consultant
Hancock	Area	1991	Consultant
Hendricks	Area	1998	Consultant
Henry	Advisory	1999	Consultant
Howard	Advisory	No comprehensive plan	—
Jackson	Advisory	Plan unavailable	—
Jennings	Area	1994	Consultant
Johnson	Advisory	1997	Consultant
Lawrence	None	—	—
Madison	Advisory	Plan being updated	—
Marion ²	Metro	Plan excluded from analysis	—
Miami	Advisory	1999	Consultant
Monroe	Advisory	1996	In-house
Montgomery	None	—	—
Morgan	None	—	—
Orange	None	—	—
Owen	None	—	—
Parke	Advisory	Plan being updated	—
Putnam	Advisory	1991	Consultant
Randolph	Area	1999	Consultant
Rush	Area	1974	Consultant
Shelby	Advisory	1999	Consultant
Sullivan	None	—	—
Tippecanoe	Area	1981	In-house
Tipton ¹	Advisory	Plan unavailable	—
Union	Area	1970	Consultant
Vermillion	Area	1969	Consultant
Vigo	Area	1984	In-house
Warren	Area	1979	Consultant
Wayne	Advisory	1992	Consultant
White	Area	1995	Consultant

¹ Plan unavailable to the center by time analysis was begun

² Marion County excluded from analysis due to unusual governmental structure



Most Plans Conform to State Law

Indiana planning law (IC 36-7-4-502) establishes three criteria for comprehensive plans. Each comprehensive plan must have a statement of:

- Objectives for future development of the jurisdiction
- Policy for land use development of the jurisdiction
- Policy for development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

These requirements are quite general and provide local governments considerable flexibility. Because most counties do not explicitly link statements of policies and objectives in their plans to these requirements, conformity was inferred from policy recommendations that adhere to the spirit of the requirements. Of the 25 counties in the evaluation, 24 counties (96 percent) appear to meet all three of the statutory requirements.

reviewed 30 comprehensive plans to see how they addressed six broad principles of sustainability: harmony with nature, livable built environment, equity, infrastructure development, responsible regionalism, and place-based economy. They found that counties that were not explicit about the goal of sustainability were just as likely to include policy recommendations that actually promote sustainability.

Center researchers adapted the methods used in the North Carolina study to review Central Indiana plans for evidence of six principles (Table 2). The findings suggest that a majority of the plans discuss most of the sustainability principles, although one plan discusses none of them. Plans are more likely to discuss broad issues such as developing local economies (88 percent) and developing in harmony with nature (92 percent) than they are to discuss narrow issues such as equity (71 percent) and development infrastructure (50 percent).

Most Plans Discuss Principles of Sustainable Development

One of the benefits of looking at plans is to identify issues important to counties and how they compare with trends in planning practice. Many places across the country have made sustainable development a goal of planning. Sustainable development refers to development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own

needs. This conception of sustainable development implies economic growth, along with fair distribution of resources, but not at the expense of environmental systems that provide the basis for growth. In an award-winning study, researchers at the University of North Carolina recently

Many Plans Discuss Aspects of Smart Growth

As issues over the economic and environmental impacts of growth have emerged, organizations such as the American Planning Association and the National Association of Homebuilders have begun to promote ideas associated with smart growth.

Table 2: Sustainable Development Principles

Principles	Key Identifier	Plans that Addressed the Principle
Harmony with nature	Plant or animal biodiversity; using existing infrastructure; preservation of natural resources and/or agricultural land	92%
Livable built environment	Plant or animal diversity; pedestrian uses; compatibility of uses; job creation; minimization of new infrastructure	92%
Place-based economy	Preservation of natural resources or agriculture; energy use and emission standards	88%
Equity	Affordable housing; impact fees	71%
Responsible regionalism	Competitive advantage; job creation; energy use and emission standards	63%
Infrastructure development	Impact fees or requirements that developers pay marginal costs of new infrastructure	50%



Table 3: Smart Growth Principles

Principles	Key Identifier	Plans that Addressed the Principle
Planning for growth	References to population growth or population loss and how the community has prepared to deal with the change	96%
Quality of life	References to parks, open space, sense of identity, friendships, or essays about the positive attributes of the community	92%
Compact urban form	Infill development or growth in currently developed areas with infrastructure in place	75%
Maximizing existing infrastructure	Using infrastructure that already exists	75%
Variety and choice in housing	Affordable housing; advocating different types of housing, whether it is lower or higher price	67%
Planning and funding infrastructure	Use of a capital improvements plan	50%
Historic preservation	References to preserving historic structures or districts	50%
Balance multi-modal transportation system	Public transit and or alternative forms of transportation like greenways, bike paths, and pedestrian walkways or sidewalks	46%
Improving development review processes	Allowing more ease for implementation and permitting flexibility	33%
Reasonable, predictable, fair plan review processes	More predictable review process for both developers and public in terests	29%
Mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods	Sidewalks and development with different types of uses; receptiveness to mixed use	21%

Although these organizations do not agree on all principles, there is general agreement that better planning can lead to development that is both more profitable and environmentally sound. Smart growth is consistent with sustainable development but focuses more on the physical aspects of land development and issues in urban design such as mixed-use land uses.

To learn how Central Indiana counties are addressing principles of smart growth in comprehensive plans, researchers checked plans for evidence of 11 relevant items (Table 3). The analysis revealed that while none of the plans uses the term smart growth, at least half the plans discuss seven of the 11 principles. Four plans address eight or more of the principles, and a minimum of 10 plans addresses each principle. Almost all of the plans address broad principles related to planning for growth (96 percent) and quality of life (92 percent), while plans are least likely to address principles related to increasing flexibility in

permitting processes (33 percent); creating fair, predictable review processes (29 percent); and creating mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods (21 percent).

County Plans Vary in Detail and Documentation

Planners are taught to prepare plans using a systematic process in which they work with the public to identify goals, collect and analyze socio-demographic, economic, and environmental data, develop and evaluate alternatives, select and implement policies or alternatives, and then monitor implementation. Center researchers derived from this conceptual model a means to assess whether plans reflect professional guidelines. This process and set of guidelines have collectively been identified as good practices.



Plans were checked for use of appropriate data, consideration of regional issues, types of data analyses, scope of policy recommendations, emphases on implementation, and other issues such as public participation, the role of different sectors, and clarity of text.

Researchers found that the county plans vary considerably in detail and documentation. For example, researchers checked plans for 10 types of information: population, economic, and housing data, and inventories of land use, transportation systems, habitat, wetlands, soils, agriculture suitability, and water infrastructure (Table 4). Almost all plans, more than 90 percent, include inventories of land use, transportation systems, and water and wastewater infrastructure.

The link between data inventory and data analysis is rather tenuous. To better show the link between data collection and analysis, Table 4 lists the 10 types of data most commonly collected for comprehensive plans and five commonly used types of data analyses. Eighty-three percent of county plans do include a population forecast, which tracks closely with the 87 percent of plans that collected historical population data. A strong link is evident between doing an agriculture inventory (75 percent) and an agricultural suitability analysis (79 percent).

Only half of the plans, however, document having done a build-out analyses for land use, transportation, or water and wastewater infrastructure changes.

On average, only about half of the plans identify important regional issues that could impact development patterns within the county. Researchers checked plan language for identification of five regional concerns: population growth, regional growth and annexation, transportation changes, employment changes, and housing growth. Issues such as commuting patterns or population growth outside county bounds are discussed in 71 percent and 46 percent of plans, respectively. However, counties are lax in recognizing the importance of addressing implications of regional housing demand on their county. Only 21 percent of the plans identify how housing growth or decline outside of their county could impact their county's housing market. This is quite surprising, given that \$20 million in housing investments were made in the Central Indiana region during the 1990s. County plans fared much better in their discussions of regional employment growth and decline; 63 percent of the plans identify the ways regional employment changes are likely to impact their county.

Table 4: Data Inventory and Analysis

Data Inventory	Percent of Plans With Inventory	Data Analysis	Percent of Plans With Analysis
Land use inventory	92%	Build-out analysis	50%
Transportation inventory	92%	Build-out analysis	50%
Water/waste infrastructure inventory	92%	Build-out analysis	50%
Historical population	87%	Population forecast	83%
Soil data	83%	Identification of areas of special concern	58%
Environmental habitat	66%	Identification of areas of special concern	58%
Environmental wetland	62%	Identification of areas of special concern	58%
Economic inventory	79%	Shift-share	13%
		Fiscal implications	54%
Agricultural inventory	75%	Agricultural suitability	79%
Housing inventory	66%	—	—



The review also shows two-thirds of the counties provide more opportunities for public participation than required by law. Indiana law requires at least one public hearing prior to adoption of a comprehensive plan. Counties use a variety of methods in addition to hearings, including public meetings, symposia, and workshops; citizen steering committees; and public opinion surveys.

Perhaps most importantly, researchers found that the plans typically make recommendations about important sets of issues, but that most of them do not provide details about implementation that are important for success (Table 5). Although three-quarters of the plans identify the person or agency responsible for implementation, only 40 percent discuss costs, just 25 percent include implementation schedules, and

only one lists benchmarks for assessing progress towards policy objectives. Comprehensive plans commonly include recommendations in seven related areas: housing, energy use, land use (including agriculture), transportation, economic development, environment and natural resources, and public facilities and capital improvements. Counties were most likely to make recommendations about land use, transportation infrastructure, the environment and natural resources, and capital improvements, and least likely to make recommendations about energy.

Table 5: Plan Recommendations and Details on Implementation

Planning Element	PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	
	Key Identifier	Percent of Plans
Implementation responsibility	Identification of person or agency responsible for plan implementation	75%
Costs of implementation	Identification of how costs of plan recommendations will be paid for, strategies for securing funds	42%
Implementation schedule	Time-line for implementation of plan recommendations	25%
Assessment of progress	Identification of methods for measurement of plan's success	4%

Planning Element	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	
	Key Identifier	Percent of Plans
Environment and natural resources	Recommendations for emissions, energy use, environmental protection	92%
Land use including agricultural uses	Recommendations for land uses (residential, commercial, industrial) and agricultural uses	92%
Public facilities and capital improvements	Recommendations for infrastructure development, capital improvements plan	92%
Transportation	Recommendations for new or improved transportation routes, roads, bridges, airports	92%
Housing	Recommendations for housing development, placement, density, or cost	79%
Economic development	Recommendations for job retention or creation, economic incentives, financing future development	75%
Energy use	Recommendations relating to energy use regulations	13%



Review Shows Strengths and Weaknesses of County Plans

Overall, this review reveals both strengths and weaknesses of county plans and the types of choices local leaders can make if they want to change how they plan. Many of the plans are less than five years old, but one-third of the plans are more than 10 years old. These older plans may be outdated, and the strategies they recommend may be ill suited for coping with issues resulting from ongoing changes in population and in the economy. Even in places where populations are declining, land uses change, and urban cover increases. Up-to-date plans can help ensure decisions about change are responsive to the concerns of local residents.

The fact most counties use consultants in planning has implications for efforts to improve the quality of planning in the region. Counties hire consultants for their technical expertise, although the outcomes of planning depend as much on preferences of local leaders and residents as the skills of consultants. Programs to improve planning in Central Indiana must address planning consultants as well as local officials and residents.

Counties are addressing broad issues related to quality of life and sustainable development, but they appear to be placing less emphasis on the more pragmatic issues associated with smart growth. To the extent they focus on broader principles rather than principles of design, plans may be limited in their ability to shape development patterns. The idealism of plans needs to be tempered with practicality.

The data analyses undertaken for the county plans appear weak, with few analyses methods employed as a base for informed policy decisions. Additionally, county plans do not appear to have adequately addressed implementation issues such as the timing of adopting key policies or methods to measure progress toward meeting community goals.

It is important to note that the results presented here are based solely on the values and behaviors reported within comprehensive plan documents. In some cases, plans may not document the full richness of community discussions due to constraints in time and resources.

In addition, the existence of a plan or mention of any particular strategy within the plan does not guarantee effectiveness. Plans and their included strategies must be connected to implementation tools, such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and capital improvements planning. As mentioned above, plans in Central Indiana make only tenuous links to implementation.

Further analysis is needed regarding the use of planning documents to influence development decisions and the links between those documents and community decision-making. The center will publish an analysis of county zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations in summer 2001. Work also is underway to provide similar analyses for municipalities in Central Indiana and to assess the connections among plans, implementation tools, and decision-making. A better understanding of planning within the region is essential to addressing effectively the goals and concerns of citizens.



Central Indiana's Future: Understanding the Region and Identifying Choices

The Center for Urban Policy and the Environment has launched a new research project—Central Indiana's Future: Understanding the Region and Identifying Choices—funded by an award of general support from the Lilly Endowment. The aim of the project is to increase understanding of the region and to inform decision-makers about the array of options for improving the quality of life for Central Indiana residents. Researchers from several universities are working to understand how the broad range of investments made by households, governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations within the Central Indiana Region contribute to quality of life. The geographic scope of the project includes 44 counties in an integrated economic region identified by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

One research effort involves analyses of comprehensive plans, subdivision regulations, and zoning ordinances—all tools local governments use to plan for growth. These analyses involve an assessment of the policies and principles communities have adopted to guide land use decisions and to protect resources and quality of life. This inventory of county comprehensive plan is the second installment in a series of analyses of local planning initiatives.

The Center for Urban Policy and the Environment is part of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis. For more information about the Central Indiana Project or the research reported here, contact the center at 317-261-3000 or visit the center's Web site at www.urbancenter.iupui.edu.

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