

2. Introduction

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The City of Evansville

Evansville, Wisconsin, is located in south-central Wisconsin, twenty miles south of the state capitol and eighteen miles northwest of Janesville.

Evansville is the fastest growing community in Rock County. It offers a historic backdrop for its business and industrial sectors. The streets of Evansville Wisconsin are an architectural museum of homes that date from the 1850s to the modern era.

From Leonard Leota Park to shops and stores, Evansville provides a unique richness of life for its residents and visitors.

What Planning is?¹

- Planning is an orderly, open approach to determine local needs, goals and priorities, and develop a guide for action.
- Planning is a concentrated effort by a community to reach a balance between the natural environment and residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural development.
- A plan is an outline for public officials and private citizens to use in making informed decisions that will affect their community.
- Planning is a process that helps a community prepare for change rather than react to it.

Planning is not...

- An attempt to replace market forces of supply and demand. It helps shape and channel market forces by establishing certain guidelines to manage development.
- Action. A plan is only a guide for action and implementation.
- An instrument for immediate change. Change will occur incrementally as the plan is implemented.
- Static. Good planning requires continual review of implementation successes and failures, citizen desires and the surrounding environment so that the plan can be adjusted as needed.
- Zoning. A comprehensive plan is a foundation and guide for many tools that may be used to implement the plan. Zoning is one of these tools. Utilities, capital improvements planning, and subdivision regulations are examples of other tools.

Background

The City of Evansville's 1986 Master Plan functioned as a basic land use plan with little emphasis placed on utilities, community facilities and intergovernmental coordination. In 1996, the City of Evansville completed an update of the 1986 plan that included changes to the plan map, coordination efforts with the Town of Union and Rock County to discuss future development strategies, and updated goals, objectives and policies.

In January 2002, the City of Evansville formed a Smart Growth Planning Committee (SGPC), selecting OMNNI Associates as a consultant in July of 2003. The 2003 Smart Growth Plan, adopted in June 2005, exemplified the City's ongoing wishes to act proactively – to set its own ground rules for the types of development that will benefit the City. A kickoff meeting, intergovernmental meeting, stakeholder workshops, map forum, open house, community survey, and working meetings were all conducted in the course of gathering input, laying the groundwork for this plan. An update to the plan was adopted in October 2015, stands as a demonstration of the City's proactive values for future development. The chapters incorporate 2010 census information and identify implementation progress, refining and extending the plan horizon to the year 2035. The 2022 update to the plan incorporates 2020 census data and verified community preferences through survey data.

¹ Mike Koles, Comprehensive Planning Fundamentals, UW-Extension, 2000.

Why Develop a Plan?

This plan is being made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing coordinated and harmonious development of the City which will, in accordance with existing and future needs, promote public health, safety, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development.

Scope of This Document

This 20-year City of Evansville Comprehensive Plan, includes four major components:

- A profile of the demographic, economic and housing characteristics of the City;
- An inventory and assessment of the environment, community facilities, and natural resources;
- Visions, goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies; and
- A land use map that depicts the future land use patterns in the City.

This plan was developed under the authority of 1999 Wisconsin Act 9, Wisconsin's "Smart Growth" Law. The law requires that a 20-year comprehensive plan be developed and adopted by all units of government that wish to have a role in land use issues. The law authorizes municipalities to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans to serve as guides for the development of their communities, and requires that land use decisions are consistent with the plan.

The City of Evansville Comprehensive Plan is divided into a series of chapters following the nine (9) required elements defined in the Smart Growth Law:

1. Issues and Opportunities (Chapter 3)
2. Housing (Chapter 4)
3. Transportation (Chapter 5)
4. Utilities and Community Facilities (Chapter 6)
5. Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources (Chapter 7)
6. Economic Development (Chapter 8)
7. Land Use (Chapter 9 and 10)
8. Intergovernmental Cooperation (Chapter 11)
9. Implementation (Chapter 12)

In addition, the state requires that these elements be developed in concert with Wisconsin's 14 goals for local planning. These goals are highlighted throughout this plan and listed below.

1. Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.
2. Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
3. Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces and groundwater resources.
4. Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.
5. Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
6. Preservation of cultural, historic and archaeological sites.
7. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.

Vision: An overall statement related to each of the nine required elements expressing the City's expectations for the future. These statements provide a framework and context to consider when making future land use decisions.

Goal: A statement that describes, usually in general terms, a desired future condition. Goals will usually only address one specific aspect of the vision.

Objective: A statement that describes a specific action or condition that is to be attained within a stated period of time. Objectives include ordinances changes, new programs, and other tasks. The objectives serve as a "to do" list to implement the plan. To be effective, objectives must be evaluated regularly and updated as necessary.

8. Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
9. Providing an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.
10. Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
11. Promoting the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional and local levels.
12. Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.
13. Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
14. Providing an integrated, efficient and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

Public Involvement

The *City of Evansville Comprehensive Plan* was developed in an environment rich with opportunities for public input. To gain citizen understanding and support throughout the planning process the public was provided with a variety of meaningful opportunities to become involved in the process. What follows is a description of the primary opportunities for public input in the planning program. The adopted *Public Participation Plan* is provided as an Appendix to this plan.

Community Surveys

In 2014 a Community Survey administered by University of Wisconsin Oshkosh was sent to all residents in Evansville, 712 responses were received. A 2015 Visual Preference Survey was also completed with over 200 participants. In 2022 a Community Survey based on the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh was promoted through mailings, yard signs, and digital means, 439 responses were received. The 2015 Visual Preference Survey was also repeated in 2022 with over 200 participants. The results of the surveys are presented throughout this plan to highlight resident opinions and interests. The surveys are summarized in greater detail in Chapter 3. A copy of the survey results are provided in the Appendix.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Meetings including neighboring units of government helped to coordinate the elements of this Plan with the region. During this update process, discussions with the Evansville School District, the Town of Union and Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) recognized successes, challenges and existing plans that Evansville should be aware of.

Community Mapping

A tabletop sized map of Evansville was presented at a City-staffed station during the 2015 Community Activity Fair to collect public input and comments from attendees. At the same time, people were taking the opportunity to sit at a laptop computer provided for completing a Visual Preference Survey designed for Evansville residents. This event allowed ideas to be shared in an informal setting. The product of this mapping exercise and the conversations it inspired were used in developing the *City of Evansville Future Land Use Maps*.



FIGURE 2A: 2015 ACTIVITY FAIR

City Values

During the “kick-off” meeting held in August 2003, participants were asked to identify the values that influence people to remain, take pride in, and become actively involved in the community. These values were very similar

to a values list generated at a 2001 public gathering hosted by the Evansville Community Partnership. The 2014 and 2022 City-Wide Survey results indicate these values remain important.

These value statements provide direction for implementation of the *City of Evansville Comprehensive Plan*. Moreover, these values clearly indicate that residents share a strong sense of community identity and pride closely associated with the rural character and natural areas that make Evansville a desirable place to live. Some examples of the early 2000s value statements include:

- We value the beautiful City parks.
- We value the golf course.
- We value the strong sense of community history defined by historical buildings/ architecture, traditional downtown and beautiful homes.
- We value our well-maintained historic district.
- We value our resident involvement in the community.
- We value our ease of daily living because everything is close by and easy to get to (i.e. dentist, doctor, post office, schools, shopping, restaurants).
- We value our sense of safety and closeness of the community – everyone knows everyone.
- We value the peaceful, rural agricultural setting beyond City limits.
- We value local events that build community (i.e. 4th of July Parade, Community Garage Sale, Community Theater).
- We value our great library.
- We value our generous businesses who give money and time to community projects.
- We value our housing choices.
- We value our trees.
- We value Lake Leota.
- We value the school district.
- We value our central location between Madison, Janesville and Beloit.
- We value the fact that Evansville is a great place to raise a family.
- We value our small City size.

Residents are Satisfied with Evansville as a Place to Live

The 2014 Survey showed, 94% of residents are satisfied (62%) or very satisfied (32%) with Evansville as a place to live. The 2022 Survey showed, 89% of residents are satisfied (63%) or very satisfied (26%) with Evansville as a place to live.