



The
HORIZON
Project

Today's Vision for a
Dynamic Elkhart County
Tomorrow

Executive Summary

The Horizon Project is funded by:

The Elkhart County Community Foundation, Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau, City of Elkhart, City of Goshen, Elkhart County Economic Development Corporation, AEP, NIPSCO and GTE

Project consultants are:

The Ball State University Center for Economic and Community Development, Koehn Consulting, and the Hudson Institute

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I. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the special citizens of Elkhart County who through their participation in community workshops, action planning teams, focus groups, individual interviews, and working meetings demonstrated a genuine dedication to creating a dynamic Elkhart County tomorrow.

Special thanks to the following organizations and individuals for their support, leadership, and considerable commitment to the Elkhart County Horizon Project.

Project Sponsors:

The Elkhart County Community Foundation
Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau
City of Elkhart
City of Goshen
Elkhart County Economic Development Corporation
AEP
NIPSCO
GTE

Steering Committee:

William P. Johnson, Chair
Diana Lawson, Vice Chair
Larry Andrews
Wilbur Bontrager
Bill Bradley
Mark Brinson
Tom Byers
Deb Conley
Craig Fulmer
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Dave Hess
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Lowell Miller
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Phil Penn
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Jerry Quatman
Earl Taylor
Jerry Trolz

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Action Planning Teams:

Business Retention, Attraction and Redevelopment
Co-Chairs: Dave Ogle and William P. Johnson

Tourism Development
Co-Chairs: Richard Pletcher and Diana Lawson

Land Use
Co-Chairs: Bob Pfaff and Dave Hess

Government Coordination
Co-Chairs: Gordon Lord and John Letherman

Workforce Development
Chair: Juan Manigault

Education P – 12
Chair: Milt Thomas

Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development
Co-Chairs: Allon LeFever and Carl Tiedemann

Social Services
Co-Chairs: Jerry Quatman and Jon Housand

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II. OVERVIEW

Background

By many measures, Elkhart County is a successful, growing community. A closer look reveals a not so reassuring picture.

- In the late 60's, Elkhart County per capita income stood at 110% of the U.S. per capita income. The county still fairs well compared to the region (St. Joseph, Elkhart, Marshall, Kosciusko counties) and the state but in 1999 the county per capita income was only 92.3% of the U.S.
- Manufacturing accounts for 45% of the workforce and 56.2% of total county earnings, compared to 30% statewide and 20% in the U.S. Manufacturing pays the highest annual wage in the County at \$19.92 an hour but that is now only 92.9% of the regional rate, 82% of the state and 80.9% of the U.S.
- 22.4% of the county workforce live in surrounding counties and take 19.7% of their earned income spending power back to those counties.
- In 2000, only 15.5% of Elkhart County citizens over 25 years of age had a 4-year degree or better, compared to 19.4% at the state level and 24.4% nationally.
- Of the 121 undersupplied occupations, most will require advanced skills training but vocational enrollment in the region is below that of the state.

There are many other issues that cause leaders to question the readiness of Elkhart County to compete in the global arena and the necessity for the community to build a thriving, sustainable economy.

- The inner cities are not seen as attractive places to live, locate a business or develop housing; they are badly in need of redevelopment and as a result increasing numbers of professionals are choosing to live outside of the main cities and prime farmland is being threatened by urban sprawl.
- Despite the huge increase in the Hispanic/Latino population, Elkhart County does not present itself as the cultural diverse, open, accepting community preferred by today's high technology workers and businesses.
- The county is highly dependent upon the manufacturing economy. Business consolidation and downsizing have resulted in the loss of higher paying jobs, corporate headquarters and the related white-collar jobs and leadership capacity.
- The county has not seen a significant increase in the use of technology or the development of the skilled workers necessary to move into the advanced manufacturing arena or other high technology related economic sectors.
- A unique cultural diversity enables tourism to play a central role in the local economy. Along with value-added agriculture it provides opportunities to diversify the economy while preserving a valued quality of life.
- Job growth has been accompanied by declining average earnings thus increased pressure on the social and physical infrastructure.

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If Elkhart County is to obtain the same status in the new economy that it held in the old one, citizens must recognize that globalization is not a fleeting trend, as other nations develop the United States and Elkhart County will face ever-increasing competition in all economic sectors. In the words of Horizon Project Chairman William P. Johnson, “globalization is the over-arching international system shaping the domestic policy and foreign relations of virtually every nation and it will not go away!”

If Elkhart County is to compete in the global environment it must embrace a philosophy of holistic community development by:

- **Investing in an infrastructure of innovation that builds locally grown and locally owned businesses:** financial and regulatory support for new and existing businesses, creative programs and initiatives to support local entrepreneurs and creative economic diversification efforts, plus proactive efforts to develop, modernize and maintain the existing industry base.
- **Building the foundation for sustainable development:** first class school systems, intelligent land use, development of aesthetically pleasing and vibrant downtowns, a healthy balance between the built and natural environment plus a rich cultural and recreational quality of life necessary to keep and attract the best and brightest.
- **Creating the highly skilled workforce necessary to keep and attract technology rich businesses:** build a commitment to lifelong learning; provide the programs and services necessary to move individuals up the skills ladder, partner with and/or locate institutions of higher education in the county.
- **Building the most creative, effective system of government possible:** maximize collaborative efforts, remove inessential duplication, streamline processes and procedures, and remove geographic developmental inequities.
- **Thinking regionally because economies are not local:** understand the regional economy and identify regional industry clusters, work in partnership with other counties in the region and structure county economic development efforts within a regional context.

Chairman Johnson states, “If we are to be successful, the Elkhart County community must make a commitment to unite for the common good with:

- A willingness to accept the need for change,
- A willingness to accept responsibility for the way things are and the way things will be,
- A commitment to a shared common vision for the future,
- A proactive, action oriented mindset,
- A diverse, participatory community leadership base, and
- A community capacity for continued, systematic change.”

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Introduction

In early 2002, a group of forward thinking community leaders collectively determined to organize and finance a Visioning and Community Planning Process. The project Steering Committee, comprised of a broad, cross-section of community representatives, contracted with the Ball State University's Center for Economic and Community Development (CECD) to design, guide and facilitate the planning process. The consulting team was comprised of CECD, Koehn Consulting and Hudson Institute.

Steering Committee

William P. Johnson (Chair) Elkhart County Community Foundation Board	Diana Lawson (Vice Chair) Executive Director, Elkhart County CVB
Larry Andrews Executive Director, Nappanee Chamber of Commerce & Redevelopment Commission	Wilbur Bontrager Elkhart County Community Foundation Board (Middlebury)
Bill Bradley Executive Director, Economic Development Corporation of Elkhart County	Mark Brinson Director of Planning & Development, City of Elkhart
Tom Byers Director of Planning & Development (Elkhart County)	Deb Conley Community Development Coordinator (Elkhart County)
Craig Fulmer Elkhart County Community Foundation Board (Elkhart)	Wes Graff President, Goshen Chamber of Commerce
David Hess Administrator, Elkhart County	Joe Hauflaire Director of Planning & Development, City of Goshen
John Leavitt Elkhart County Community Foundation Board (Nappanee)	Lowell Miller Town Manager, Town of Middlebury
Mark Mow Elkhart Community Schools	Phil Penn President & CEO, Elkhart Chamber of Commerce
Alma Powell Retired School Administrator	Jerry Quatman President, United Way of Elkhart County
Earl Taylor President, Elkhart County Community Foundation	Jerry Trolz Elkhart County Community Foundation Board (Goshen)

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Process

The process was designed to guide the Elkhart County community through the creation of a comprehensive vision of their future and the development of goals and actions necessary to attain that vision. The vision and corresponding actions were developed and supported by input from the community on major issues they saw impacting Elkhart County's future as well as a complete analysis of the general economic climate of the community.

Project objectives:

- Prepare a comprehensive analysis of the demographic, socio-economic and land use features of Elkhart County, identify areas of competitive advantage and areas of stagnation and decline.
- Provide guidance, facilitation and technical assistance in the creation of a comprehensive, community-based strategy for community and economic development based upon the identification of major issues impacting the county's development and overall quality of life.
- Build consensus on how the county should approach major issues through broad based community involvement in (1) interpreting and responding to demographic and economic analysis, (2) developing a comprehensive strategic plan, and (3) developing and committing to an implementation strategy.

The process took approximately one year and included the preparation and presentation of a County and Regional Economic and Demographic Analysis and an extensive community input process including three Community Leadership Public Meetings, ten Focus Groups and ten individual interviews with local leaders. The data and input generated by these activities, plus topic research and background information on the practices of other communities, provided the foundation upon which eight Action Planning Teams created the goals, objectives, action plans and benchmarks that form the core of the Horizon Project Plan.

Action Planning Teams

<p>Business Retention, Creation, Attraction and Redevelopment Co-Chairs: Dave Ogle and William P. Johnson</p>	<p>Tourism Development Co-Chairs: Richard Pletcher and Diana Lawson</p>
<p>Land Use Co-Chairs: Bob Pfaff and Dave Hess</p>	<p>Government Coordination Co-Chairs: Gordon Lord and John Letherman</p>
<p>Workforce Development Chair: Juan Manigault</p>	<p>Education P – 12 Chair: Milt Thomas</p>
<p>Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Co-Chairs: Allon LeFever and Carl Tiedemann</p>	<p>Social Services Co-Chairs: Jerry Quatman and Jon Housand</p>

III. COMMUNITY VISION AND PLAN

Vision:

The vision for Elkhart County's future was created by the Steering Committee from the input provided by approximately one hundred and thirty Elkhart County citizens who participated in the Community Leadership Meetings.

“Elkhart County will be a globally recognized center for creativity. This reputation will be built by residents who have the courage to take risks and help each other succeed in an environment of tolerance and respect that provides opportunities for all. Outstanding businesses and talented professionals will locate in our county because of the excellent schools, rich cultural life, clean and healthy environment, safe attractive neighborhoods and vibrant downtowns. The entrepreneurial culture of the county will be supported by a highly skilled workforce, a diverse economy, opportunities for life-long learning and effective governmental collaboration and community planning.”

Goals and Objectives:

1. Business Retention, Creation and Attraction

Build upon Elkhart County's renowned entrepreneurial spirit by creating an environment in which new, existing and newly locating businesses can grow, prosper and help diversify the Elkhart County Economy.

Objective 1.1: Develop an Existing Industry Development Program.

Objective 1.2: Establish an Elkhart County Investment Board and Investment Capital Fund.

Objective 1.3: Establish a Technology-Based Incubator.

Objective 1.4: Create a Small Business Development Committee and Entrepreneurial Assistance One-Stop.

Objective 1.5: Study the feasibility of creating a network of incubators in the larger communities.

Objective 1.6: Develop an advanced Telecommunications Infrastructure.

Objective 1.7: Support the expansion and modernization of transportation, and sewer and water systems.

Objective 1.8: Develop a financial incentive policy and programs.

Objective 1.9: Develop a Targeted Industry Attraction Program.

Objective 1.10: Strengthen The Economic Development Corporation of Elkhart County.

2. Redevelopment

Support the redevelopment of downtowns and urban areas to manage sprawl, encourage smart growth, eliminate the appearance of blight and attract and retain the knowledge and creative class worker needed for future business development.

Objective 2.1: Create the Elkhart County Redevelopment Forum.

Objective 2.2: Give brownfields and other redevelopment areas a more competitive edge in attracting commercial and other types of development.

Objective 2.3: Explore the idea of establishing an Obsolete Building Redevelopment Fund.

Objective 2.4: Support the participation of all Elkhart County communities in the IACT Downtown Program.

3. Tourism Development

Build a tourism strategy that enhances the industry's role as an economic development strategy and protects vital rural aesthetics through expanded partnerships, increased public education and awareness, and new tools promoting the expansion of businesses, facilities, and events that both attract visitors and improve the quality of life and place for local residents.

Objective 3.1: Create a single, interlocking brand to market Elkhart County.

Objective 3.2: Promote the expansion of existing and creation of new facilities and events including the development of downtowns for arts, culture and entertainment.

Objective 3.3: Educate the community on the positive community impact of tourism activity.

Objective 3.4: Explore new tourism development funding strategies including the creation of a new taxing authority.

Objective 3.5: Create a comprehensive tourism development land use policy agenda.

4. Workforce Development

Create an adaptive and educated workforce capable of meeting the changing demands of the workplace, and create public-private sector leadership that promotes the workforce and career development continuum as the key for future business growth and economic development.

Objective 4.1: Establish an Elkhart County Workforce Development Advisory Council.

Objective 4.2: Implement or augment a skills assessment and certification system for schools and businesses.

Objective 4.3: Explore the feasibility/necessity of establishing computer-learning centers across the county.

Objective 4.4: Develop campaign that promotes the workforce and career development continuum to all constituent groups.

5. P-12 Education

Build a world-class P-12 education system by encouraging and assisting the Elkhart County Schools and the Elkhart County community in their efforts to fully implement P.L. 221 and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal law.

- Objective 5.1: Establish a positive and safe environment for teaching and learning in every school.
- Objective 5.2: Develop a curriculum that enables each student to meet mandated achievement requirements.
- Objective 5.3: Select and train and/or retrain a staff member that will be responsible for implementing each districts policies, procedures, programs and curriculum requirements for all students.
- Objective 5.4: School Boards in Elkhart County will create an annual Action Agenda for implementing the district's goals.
- Objective 5.5: Each School District in Elkhart County will establish and maintain a proactive Public Relations Program that both gathers input and disseminates information about teaching & learning.
- Objective 5.6: Establish joint venture programs between schools and two, four year and technical schools, so that all high school students have access to post high school credits through AP courses, dual credit courses, school to work internships with local businesses, etc.
- Objective 5.7: Provide access to preschool or nursery school that gives every child high quality readiness training that enables them to begin Kindergarten at age 6.
- Objective 5.8: Coordinate all existing career education programs in all Elkhart County school districts with any new components from the Learning Generation Initiative, Workforce Development or other related organizations.
- Objective 5.9: Through the Community in Schools Program (CIS) develop a vision and plan to help children and young people in Elkhart County develop the skills and abilities necessary to be successful adults.
- Objective 5.10: Develop county-wide forums of teachers and administrators from all school districts to address: computer technology and cooperative purchasing agreements; curriculum (establish best way to use Plato, Workkeys and other assessment /teaching tools); development of a Community Report Card and development of a proactive public relations program.
- Objective 5.11: Establish a forum(s) consisting of educators, business and community leaders to address: annual action agendas, common goals and commitments to the Horizon Plan and future community needs, community development impediments and united positions on state and federal laws impacting education.
- Objective 5.12: Work in partnership with the Indiana Education Roundtable to incorporate as required, recommendations in the ***Indiana P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement*** into the Horizon Project Education Plan.

6. Government Coordination

Establish a functioning, recognized Elkhart County Intergovernmental Forum and structure for expanded intergovernmental communication, cooperation, and collaboration involving leaders of county government, the towns and cities of Elkhart County, and when appropriate, other local governmental units and agencies. Through the Intergovernmental Forum develop a mindset, philosophy and culture for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of local government in Elkhart County through creative and farsighted planning, spending, and programming.

- Objective 6.1: Cause local governmental units to formally commit to participating in the Intergovernmental Forum.
- Objective 6.2: Establish a regular meeting schedule and standard agenda format for Forum Meetings.
- Objective 6.3: Recognize, embrace and when appropriate, act upon the ultimate Horizon Project Development Plan.
- Objective 6.4: Identify and encourage cost and revenue sharing opportunities at and between local and county government levels.
- Objective 6.5: Identify actual and desired levels of public service and the feasibility of closing the gap plus the potential for merging programs and eliminating duplication.
- Objective 6.6: Identify strengths and weaknesses in the Elkhart County economy, social structure, and culture, and to the extent possible utilize local and county government to build upon the former and mitigate the later.

7. Land Use

Create a well-planned community that enables compatible development in industrial, commercial, residential and agricultural sectors while maintaining visual appeal, preserving green space, and protecting the natural environment.

- Objective 7.1: Establish a Land Use Advisory Council of city and county planners and other essential experts to guide a comprehensive land use planning process.
- Objective 7.2: Develop a combined city/county comprehensive land-use policy plan.
- Objective 7.3: Identify in the comprehensive plan all current green space with the intention of developing protective mechanisms.
- Objective 7.4: Develop uniform, countywide ordinances by which the comprehensive plan policies will be implemented and encourage development that increases density and utilizes existing infrastructure.
- Objective 7.5: Request interim review by appropriate governmental bodies of curb cut policies, county zoning and subdividing ordinances, including the Three Acre Rule.

8. Social Services

Insure adequate and affordable social services are provided to meet the needs of all Elkhart County residents.

Objective 8.1: Inventory and assess the current Elkhart County social services catalog and its responsiveness and applicability to current needs.

Objective 8.2: Create the optimum Elkhart County Social Services Network.

Objective 8.3: Insure sustainable funding sources are available to maintain the necessary level of services to Elkhart County.

Objective 8.4: Create the environment and infrastructure necessary for the expansion and development of a leadership base essential to the growth and development of the Elkhart County.

IV. BENCHMARKS

The Horizon Project leadership will create an ongoing Horizon Project Commission to guide the implementation of the plan. A number of Implementation Teams will undertake responsibility for meeting certain goals and/or objectives and will measure the success of their efforts against the following benchmarks:

- **Close by 5% the gap between Elkhart County and the national per capita personal income by 2010.**
- **Elkhart County will establish a locally available research and investment capital fund in the minimum amount of \$10 million.**
- **The number of net new businesses in preferred growth sectors will increase by 5% by 2010.**
- **The total economic impact generated by visitors to Elkhart County will increase 25% by 2010, exceeding \$350,000,000.**
- **Elkhart County will see an increase in assessed valuation in current TIF districts and/or increase in the number of projects over a specified time period.**
- **The percentage of Elkhart County residents with college degrees will equal or exceed the state level by 2010.**
- **The percentage of non-college bound, high-school graduates from each school district, participating in vocational education programs will equal or exceed the state percentage by 2010.**
- **The percentage of high-school students passing the GQE (ISTEP) will meet or surpass the state average in each Elkhart County School Districts by 2010.**
- **Dropout rates in each Elkhart County school district will equal or fall below the state average by 2010.**

- **Average hourly earnings in total private employment will be within 5% of the national average by 2010.**
- **Elkhart County will see a well-functioning Intergovernmental Forum that results in measurable savings in all municipal budgets and a measurable increase in revenue sharing activities.**
- **The Elkhart County poverty ranking will be below the 70th percentile by 2010.**
- **Elkhart County will significantly reduce the duplication in social service programs.**