

Summary of Interviews  
**The Horizon Project**  
Compiled October 30, 2002

## **Introduction**

Key opinion leaders and resource brokers in Elkhart County were interviewed in September and October 2002 as part of The Horizon Project

## **Project objectives**

This work contributed to fulfilling the following project objectives:

- 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) responding to and interpreting demographic and economic analysis, (2) development of a comprehensive strategic plan, and (3) committed and energetic implementation of the plan. Persons and groups responsible for implementation will be identified.

## **Goals for individual interviews**

- Build involvement and ownership in The Horizon Project
- Become informed about economic and demographic analysis and the SWOT analysis done at the first community leadership workshop
- Provide additional interpretation of the economic and demographic analysis
- Identify potential strategies for building on current strengths and opportunities and for reducing or eliminating weaknesses and threats
- Identify possibilities for radical innovation in economic and community development
- Identify persons, companies, and organizations, who should be involved in shaping the future of Elkhart County.

## **Persons Interviewed**

- Gordon Lord, attorney for Elkhart County government
- Don Pletcher, President, Damon Corporation, modular home manufacturer.
- Tom Corson, President, Coachmen Industries, Recreational vehicle manufacturer
- Suzie Warner, member of numerous local and state boards and commissions, especially in the field of education
- Myrl Nofziger, Co-owner of Hoggenboom-Nofziger Corporation, real estate developers.
- Rex Martin, President, NIBCO, manufacturer of pipes and flow systems
- Dick Pletcher, President, Amish Acres, Inc., restaurant and tourist destination
- Art Decio, President, Skyline, Inc., mobile home manufacturer.

## Summary of major concerns and strategy ideas

### Major Concerns

### Strategy Ideas

#### Government

Historical distrust between Elkhart and Goshen.	Build relationships and partnerships; combine services; work toward a unit government.
More north/south transportation capacity needed.	Develop and maintain C.R. 17 as a traffic corridor and not a retail area.

#### Education

Children are not getting a good start in their early years.	Devote more resources to early childhood services and education.
Strengthen skills in the workforce.	Get major companies involved in the high schools; devote more resources to post-secondary education; encourage Goshen College to develop two-year programs focused on specific skills and occupations.
Strengthen educational attainment.	Involve parents in the educational process.
Every year we have 200 students who leave high school without graduating.	Keep track of them; keep offering them educational opportunities.

#### Cultural Diversity

Social integration of Hispanic immigrants.	Support English as a required standard; expand after school programs.
Leadership development in the African-American community.	Invite African-American participation in all aspects of the community.

**Business Development  
Major Concerns**

**Strategy Ideas**

<p>Loss of income in comparison with the rest of the county.</p>	<p>Concentrate resources on emerging and innovative industries; concentrate on innovative applications of technology; develop a countywide effort; build on our core competencies; develop unified tax abatement policies.</p>
<p>Desire for greater economic diversity and vitality.</p>	<p>Amish are starting many cottage industries; some will grow; create business incubator programs; get educators involved in business startups; just get out of the way and let people be creative; reinvent the magic of entrepreneurship; strengthen tourism; grow health care to be one of our major industries; attract industries who need a plentiful water supply.</p>
<p>We have not been clear on what Elkhart County has to offer.</p>	<p>Develop a unified image for marketing Elkhart County; draw on local creative talent – from theater to advertising – to develop a marketing campaign to ourselves and to the country.</p>

**Redevelopment**

<p>Deterioration of center-city areas in Elkhart.</p>	<p>Rebuild safe, clean, and attractive neighborhoods; build on the presence of the rivers – waterfront for residential and commercial development – and water sports; develop a center of higher education downtown on waterfront property; provide incentives for redevelopment.</p>
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## Community Development

### Major Concerns

### Strategy Ideas

Be effective in solving problems and making improvements.	Look nationally to find best practices in all areas of development; bring in national experts.
Many in the creative class are choosing not to live in Elkhart County.	Increase talent, technology, and tolerance of diversity; be open to new people and ideas; enrich public school programs; strengthen centers of higher education; expand bike path systems; highlight cultural heritage and music industry heritage; support cultural events; develop creative housing – turn warehouses into condominiums.
Entrepreneurs often fail to cooperate and achieve potential synergies.	Strong leaders are needed to direct some of the entrepreneurial impetus.
We have the most unwed teenage mothers in the state.	First, recognize that this is real and that it is a problem.
Financial and educational challenges for single-parent households.	Encourage churches to take an active role in providing leadership on issues of family life and morality.
Increase health and decrease health care costs; health care costs are a big concern.	Cooperation between our two major hospitals; form a holding company to own both hospitals.

## Leadership Development

Leadership development in the African-American community.	Invite African-American participation in all aspects of the community.
Will the next generation of entrepreneurs meet the challenges.	Identify young talent; provide them with challenges and opportunities.