



Interview Reports

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Summary of Interviews

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.

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Summary of major concerns and strategy ideas

Government

Major Concerns

Historical distrust between Elkhart and Goshen.

More north/south transportation capacity needed.

Strategy Ideas

Build relationships and partnerships; combine services; work toward a unit government.

Develop and maintain C.R. 17 as a traffic corridor and not a retail area.

Education

Major Concerns

Children are not getting a good start in their early years.

Strengthen skills in the workforce.

Strengthen educational attainment.

Every year we have 200 students who leave high school without graduating.

Strategy Ideas

Devote more resources to early childhood services and education.

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.

Involve parents in the educational process.

Keep track of them; keep offering them educational opportunities.

Cultural Diversity

Major Concerns

Social integration of Hispanic immigrants.

Leadership development in the African-American community.

Strategy Ideas

Support English as a required standard; expand after school programs.

Invite African-American participation in all aspects of the community.



Business Development

Major Concerns

Loss of income in comparison with the rest of the county.

Desire for greater economic diversity and vitality.

We have not been clear on what Elkhart County has to offer.

Strategy Ideas

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.

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.

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.

Redevelopment

Major Concerns

Deterioration of center-city areas in Elkhart.

Strategy Ideas

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.

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Community Development

Major Concerns

Be effective in solving problems and making improvements.

Many in the creative class are choosing not to live in Elkhart County.

Entrepreneurs often fail to cooperate and achieve potential synergies.

We have the most unwed teenage mothers in the state.

Financial and educational challenges for single-parent households.

Increase health and decrease health care costs; health care costs are a big concern.

Leadership Development

Major Concerns

Leadership development in the African-American community.

Will the next generation of entrepreneurs meet the challenges.

Strategy Ideas

Look nationally to find best practices in all areas of development; bring in national experts.

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.

Strong leaders are needed to direct some of the entrepreneurial impetus.

First, recognize that this is real and that it is a problem.

Encourage churches to take an active role in providing leadership on issues of family life and morality.

Cooperation between our two major hospitals; form a holding company to own both hospitals.

Strategy Ideas

Invite African-American participation in all aspects of the community.

Identify young talent; provide them with challenges and opportunities.



Focus Group Reports

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African American Perspectives

October 23, 2002

Focus for this group

African-American perspectives on Elkhart County: how to work at integrating cultural minorities and open doors for minority persons to have leadership roles in the larger community.

Composition

This group included six African-American leaders from Elkhart County. They represented a wide range of perspectives: business, church, housing, education, and human services.

Vision for the future

- **Health services:** we need health services in our community; make sure it is affordable; not all have insurance.
- **Build up entrepreneurship:** small businesses are doing the most for the economy.
- **Self-development:** strive to do more than just be above broke. Who am I? Do reading; good curriculum; churches and schools would be best settings.
- **Education:** educating minorities is the foundation; educate people on how to buy and manage a house.
- **One integrated vision:** focus on health, home, education, and transportation.

Improvement strategies

- **Entrepreneurship among African Americans.** A facility is being sought: Incubator to Success. You need trainers who have started things and kept them going. Need access to capital; this is at the top of the list. African-Americans are in management positions at several local banks. School systems should offer a course on entrepreneurship.
- **Leadership development for African-Americans:** one-on-one coaching and group sessions – what does it take to be successful, how to develop a team effort.
- **Housing:** mixed-income subdivisions; expand Section 8 home ownership program.
- **Education:** work with Ivy Tech to get career training.
- **Finances:** explore starting an African-American owned credit union.
- **Personal development:** learn how the self works; we want to develop individuals to have inner strength. Churches can do something.
- **Church outreach:** develop a comprehensive ministry vision for social, spiritual, and economic impact; learn from mega churches in Atlanta; all of it is biblical. Find out what the people need. Don't shove programs down people's throats.
- **Resource persons from Indianapolis:** Indianapolis is among the five best cities for African Americans; invite resource persons from Indianapolis to support African American development efforts in Elkhart County. Draw on entrepreneurs from Indy to help in Elkhart County.
- **Reparations for injustice:** need a global approach to reparations; the crimes against persons of African descent have been committed by every culture.

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Perceptions of Elkhart County

Strengths

- **Development among Hispanics:** Hispanics are getting a lot of help and they are taking advantage of it. They are hungry for education and attend evening classes. Hispanic leadership is already strong. They are buying businesses and homes. They buy from each other. Their leadership is intact.
- **Educational opportunities:** the career center here is one of the best in the state. The automobile students can earn good incomes. Ivy Tech also has programs.
- **Leadership programs:** Chamber leadership programs are good.

Weaknesses

- **Lack of entrepreneurship:** Elkhart is lacking in African-American entrepreneurship. There is not enough visibility, so people can see that they can be business owners. We are big consumers and yet we are not entrepreneurs.
- **Inferior self-perception:** “If it ain’t white, it ain’t right” – tendency to go to a White doctor rather than a Black doctor.
- **Loss of Black-owned businesses:** there are any less minority owned business today than 25 years ago. Segregation insured that Blacks would serve each other. Today Blacks can go everywhere to shop and do business. People go to Grape Road to spend. We have lost some spirit of being on our own. We are criticized for moving toward segregation when we want to strengthen our own community. We need to support our own.
- **Lack of cultural loyalty:** there is no cultural loyalty within the African-American community. It is hard for a business to build a loyal clientele. We do not support each other. People flock to an Asian beauty shop rather than an African American shop. African American businesses need to establish quality and integrity.
- **Enterprises moving out of the African-American community:** Heart City Health Clinic has left; a lot of businesses are moving out of our community.
- **Youth expelled from schools:** low-income Whites and African Americans are getting expelled at young ages.
- **Lack of career direction:** young people have no clue what they want to do. Some college students don’t know what they want to do.

Opportunities

- **Market to the whole community:** the Black entrepreneurs will have to serve the whole market and not just a Black clientele. We must develop products to the Hispanic market.
- **Education on personal money management:** people need education on how to work with money, save, and invest. Save our people from predatory lending.
- **Strengthen parents:** need to work with the parents of these young people; help people develop skills for home ownership and family life; help them know what their priorities are.
- **Develop new transportation options:** to get people to their jobs.
- **Provide education in jails.**



Threats

- **Predatory lending:** people take on unmanageable debt.
- **Paying too much for a house:** Recent immigrants sometimes buy houses for more than it is worth. They may later try to refinance but the house is not worth enough to refinance. They need to learn to negotiate.

Areas for Action Planning Teams

- Healthcare
- Entrepreneurship
- Education
- Housing

Compiled November 2, 2002

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Agriculture

October 24, 2002

Focus for this group

- Agriculture: How to keep and enhance farming as a significant part of the Elkhart County economy. How much farmland do we want to preserve and in what parts of the county? Are there new crops or new industries to develop?

Composition

- This group included three farmers and two agricultural extension agents.

Vision for the future

- **Environmental preservation:** We need clean growth and clean agriculture.
- **Occupational diversification:** neighbor becoming a nurse; a lot of farm wives going back to work. Some farmers sell seed on the side or do equipment repair. For a lot of people farming is a part-time job; less than half are full-time.
- **No vision for a future in agriculture:** "I want you to tell me [about a vision for the future]. . . Tell me what to do. . . I am getting worried. Our farm has been in the family since 1870. My aunts and uncles want it to stay in the family, but it is tempting to subdivide the farm for residential development. I have a nine-year-old son who loves to farm. I am losing rented land all the time when land is sold for development. Not too many farmers are expanding."
- **Total development of the county:** we are going to develop all of Elkhart County. Will it look like Marion County and all the stoplights of Kokomo? Eight farming neighbors recently moved to Minnesota for dairy farming.

Improvement strategies for the agriculture industry

- **Product differentiation:** the quality of food is on people's minds. There is a black market for raw milk in our area.
- **Innovation:** We need to transport an ag business and people here to demonstrate new possibilities.
- **Organic market:** Some talk about the organic market. Beth Neff has an organic growers group. There is a fantastic market for farmers who can make it through the transition. An elevator in Illinois reported a 30% growth in the organic grain market. He can't find enough growers. It takes three years with no chemicals to qualify as an organic producer. Then it is a risky crop. They cannot meet the demand for organic products in the Chicago area.
- **Tourism factor:** Pasteurize milk on the farm as a tourist attraction. Sell it and deliver the old fashioned way.
- **Crop diversification:** Auto parts manufacturer is using Kenaf paper products. Kenaf may need a warmer climate than what we have in northern Indiana.
- **Vegetables:** Old-order Mennonites are raising vegetables and produce – Clear Spring Action Group and a Wakarusa group. Clear Spring is very people-oriented. The Wakarusa group focused on making money. Grocery stores will buy from Clear Spring in Emma



- because of their consistent high quality.
- **Vertical integration:** farmers could buy the Burger Dairy plant and have an expanded role in adding value to basic products.
 - **Forward integration into retail:** examples like Bullard Farms – meet the customers. Not all farmers have the skills and personality to do that.
 - **New markets:** we need more exports and a government that supports us.
 - **Keep farming or sell for housing:** economic efficiency and being able to make an income are the critical factors when farmers decide whether to keep farming or sell their land for development.
 - **Reduce cost of inputs:** Illinois and Iowa farms are forming coops where they can buy agricultural inputs cheaper.
 - **Farming moratorium:** farmers throughout the country could refuse to grow grain for a year to demonstrate how dependant the country is on farmers. Right now we are at the mercy of what will be given to us in terms of prices for farm products.

Improvement strategies for land-use planning

- **Agricultural zones:** Some agricultural zones have been expanded. This offers some protection from the litigators. Farming districts and TIF districts have been started. A number of things have worked out. The Farm Bureau took on implementation responsibilities.
- **Financial incentives:** We have a future in farming if the community want us here. They will have incent us, like they incent other businesses. How important is agriculture to our quality of life? Muncie, Lafayette, Ft. Wayne, Evansville are doing better with attracting white-collar jobs. They are probably using some economic incentive tools. Agricultural protective zoning could be used. Use TIF districts to fund agriculture. Use economic development money to buy out development rights. TIF districts could funnel economic development dollars to farmers – in small amounts.
- **Land use issues:** we are still in dialogue about the three-acre rule for residential development.
- **Development standards:** If land is zoned A-1 for agricultural use, then residential development would have to go in using a Planned Unit Development (PUD) structure. Another approach would be to establish minimum lot size in relation to septic needs.
- **Farmland preservation:** The community has said that it wants to preserve farmland, but the county commissioners say we do not want to stop growth. If we protect the ag community, development will suffer.
- **Public policies:** we have a progressive developer who sits on the state land-use board. He says, “I have to vote for those whom I represent: the home builders.” Elected officials need to take the risk and the rest of us need to compromise on land-use policies.
- **Public policy agenda:** Farmland preservation is not a real issue to commissioners Phil Stiver and Phil Neff. There needs to be more talk about open space and green space. We need to preserve the agribusiness base of the community.
- **Development economics:** there are lower infrastructure costs when residential development is concentrated rather than spread out.

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- **Alliance with tourism:** Tourism and ag could be allies on some issues. Do the tourism people want green-space along the roads?

Perceptions of Elkhart County

Strengths

- **Amish:** They are adapting to changing economic conditions; they purchase farms and divide them; they need to have a barn for horses; they have an independent lifestyle; there are Amish subdivisions; one Amish milks 150 cows; others are up to 70 cows.
- **Manufacturing tradition:** we are great at building stuff in Elkhart County.
- We have quality of life with the natural environment.
- We have a swine producers coop here.
- **1991 strategic planning for the county:** Elected officials get along much better now than they did then. They meet several times a year to talk about common needs. Chambers did not get along at that time; they started a data bank of land for development; there is some talk about having one chamber. The one-stop human services approach did not get started.

Weaknesses

- **State regulations:** Indiana is not friendly to on-farm processing. Pennsylvania is much more open to that. Regulation needs to be farmer-friendly.
- **Independent thinking:** each farm is an individual business; all farmers will never come to one way of thinking; farmers can be really stubborn.
- **Leadership in county government:** one county commissioner admitted that he is not a visionary person – he solves the day-to-day problems. The county commissioners are not a visionary group. Everyone is worried about the next election. We are closer today to doing something than 10 years ago, but no one hurts enough to push to make a decision. The homebuilders are getting worried; they do not want to see any restrictions.

Opportunities

- See section on strategies

Threats

- **No opportunities in farming:** “We have two grandsons out in the field right now. They love farming. I encourage my sons to get four-year degrees at Purdue to give them options in addition to farming. We will lose young people who really want to farm if they don’t have an opportunity. We might not have farming options when our children are ready to make career decisions.”
- **Career patterns:** we will never convince people to go to college and come back.
- **Capital investment:** farm expansion involves large expenditures and a lot of debt, especially in dairy farming.
- **Land for residential development:** housing development – sell the land. Many farmers cash-rent most of their land. Older landlords will give the land to their kids and the kids will want to sell to developers.



- **Farm economics:** When you think about the economics, the total investment is mind-boggling. Our fertilizers all come from the oil supply. We do not have control of the price of the inputs. Fertilizer suppliers want payments now rather than in December, to lock in purchases.
- **Development pressures and road development:** when C.R. 17 gets to U.S. 6, we will see changes. We need to decide if we want to have green spaces.
- **Problems with over-supply:** some farmers have gone into organic and niche markets, such as Chinese vegetables. The prices were good when there were only three farms were supplying the Chicago area. The prices are very sensitive to supply. When more people start producing, the prices go down.
- **Markets:** very difficult hog market today.

Areas for Action Planning Teams

- **Value chain development:** bring in agricultural businesses to add value to our products, such as dairy products.
- **Economic incentives:** to keep farmers on the land, such as TIF districts.
- **Land-use:** We have five or six years before all the agricultural areas will be chopped up by residential development. We have been kicking reforms around for a long time. We need to make developers work in subdivisions. The County Commissioners ultimately make the decisions, but they are known to say: “I don’t get very many calls about [farm land preservation].”

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Business Development Focus Group

October 29, 2002

Focus for this group

Business retention: Concerns about loss of corporate headquarters, white-collar jobs, and community leaders. How can manufacturing and other businesses adapt and thrive in the face of national and global competition?

Business attraction: Concerns about attracting high skill jobs in technology, manufacturing, biotechnology, business services, etc. How to attract the “creative class,” those who are interested in cultural events, public art, preservation of historic sites and districts, museums, galleries, concerts, etc. Will we have the high-skills jobs that our educated young people want?

Composition of focus group

This group included 13 persons representing: manufacturing, law, accounting, real estate development, construction, Chambers of Commerce, economic development agencies, and government.

The Future

Vision for the future

- **Restore the balance:** bring in more white-collar jobs; grow more locally owned businesses; attract businesses that have high professional content; do business with locally owned banks. It may not be possible to restore the balance that is desired. Some communities have done it.
- **Can more white-collar workers be part of our future?** This group is not sure whether or not white-collar workers can be attracted to live in Elkhart County.

Most difficult issues

- **Our choice is more blue-collar jobs or more balance.**
- **What kind of jobs do we want to bring in?** It might be the nature of the beast that it is not possible to reverse the trend toward segregated blue-collar and white-collar residential communities. Elkhart County is thus destined to become more and more of a blue-collar community.
- **Underclass is going nowhere:** education, training, and the ways that parents interact with schools need to be strengthened. We need heavy-handed discipline structures to improve the performance of the parents.
- **Turnover in elementary school students:** instability in housing; children shuffled around to family members; live in a rental property for three months without paying and then move on.



Business development

Strategies for business development

- **Increase productivity:** we need to be more efficient in order to pay high wages; look at capital investment per employee; labor content is smaller; we need to help each other use more high tech processes and tools.
- **Unified effort:** Now we are unified as a county with one economic development agency; we need to market ourselves.
- **Homegrown businesses:** develop more incubator facilities to nurture homegrown businesses. Karl Tiedemann has several incubators. He takes older buildings and refurbishing them. He uses community money and subsidized loans. The incubator is publicly supported. He runs training programs and publishes a newspaper. Some of his client businesses have grown and built their own facilities. His clients have included a machinery company, door company, printer, and roofer. Most stay in his facilities for about 24 months. He has been to Turkey and Iran talking about this program.
- **Student entrepreneurship:** encourage college students – with faculty support – to start businesses in their dorm rooms.
- **Incentives:** use abatements for companies that bring in high salary jobs – like engineering; use incentives to reside in Elkhart County.
- **Facilities:** build some beautiful facilities downtown.
- **Elkhart East development:** can it attract white-collar industries? It might take 40 years.
- **Target industries:** there is good potential to attract new companies that supply the auto industry; bring in high tech manufacturing and have places for highly trained people.

Positive factors for business in Elkhart County

- **Low cost:** labor, facilities, taxes, and everything.
- **Good government approach to business:** how can we help you; minimal governmental intervention; less cumbersome governmental requirements – like building permits; lower costs for building permits.
- **Good real estate tax rates:** everyone pays taxes; very few freebees; few abatements.
- **Good work ethic.**
- **We are great at planning and poor at follow-up:** good county planning, like C.R. 6 and C.R. 17. There was a comprehensive land use study in Elkhart County. We need to stay with the principles that were set forth.

Negative factors for business in Elkhart County

- **Schools:** Elkhart Schools are probably the worst of the bunch; perception is really bad. Student turnover rates are bad; the nature of the student population is the issue. A lot of the people we move in for professional and managerial jobs choose to live in peripheral communities.
- **We are great at planning and poor at follow-up.**
- **Lack of trained employees.**
- **Inventory tax.**

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Current business retention efforts

- **Tax abatement** – that got NIBCO here.
- **Keep property tax rates low:** 11 points here and 16 points in Mishawaka.
- **Meet with companies:** assess where they are in their business life cycle; make them aware of Department of Commerce training programs.
- **RV industry looks good:** have highly trained, high producing people over here.

Business attraction efforts — what have we got to sell?

- Some tax give-aways?
- Location
- Low construction costs
- Low taxes
- Safety in our small communities, but not Elkhart and Goshen.

Use of financial incentives

- There are up to 10 financial incentives to bring businesses to a community.
- This is what we are competing against.
- Are you selling your future when you do this?
- Give away tax revenue and have nothing for schools. It is better to spend standard tax revenues on training and infrastructure.
- All the incentives are short-term. We look good long-term.

Redevelopment

Current efforts

- **Possibilities in Elkhart:** \$30 million by 2010 to take out the old buildings to create the Elkhart Commons, where the river will be used as an entertainment area. The City of Elkhart had \$15-20 million in unused funds. Elkhart is trying to do it with local money. Private developers cannot do it alone in downtown Elkhart. It has to be a partnership. It is a long tunnel to have a profit.
- **Elkhart experience:** in some south-side neighborhoods they put in new streets and sewer and water. Many property owners are fixing things up.
- **Possibilities in Goshen:** we have crumbling buildings where redevelopment may be appropriate: Sash and Door, Western Rubber, and Goshen Rubber. More local money is needed. There is lots of contaminated property, especially Western Rubber. There is a river/race group working in Goshen.

Issues and strategies

- **Tax abatements:** This is where we should use tax abatements; this is where they have worked.
- **Redevelopment challenges:** there is lots of complexity in downtown locations; every block is a million dollar problem.
- **Redevelopment strategies:** An ombudsman is needed to help developers.



- **Problems in downtown areas:** parking and safety; you need people there 24 hours a day to have it safe.
- **Banks project experience:** public cleans up the property and then private developers take it from there.

Regional and national perspectives

- **Regional perspective:** a lot of communities west of Chicago did this 10 years ago. They tore down buildings and build up new ones.
- **Mishawaka experience:** they tore down a lot of buildings; they used tax monies generated from Grape Road to clean up the old down town area.
- **South Bend experience:** they are on the move in nearly every neighborhood; they have a long list of tools to use.
- **Renaissance in downtowns:** We will see an anti-retirement movement soon; retired people will be working part-time; they will feel drawn back to the inner cities; this is happening in downtown Chicago, where they are creating live-and-work places.

Improvement strategies for other sectors

- **Political courage:** other communities have revitalized themselves. The number one component is politics and political courage at the top.
- **Corporate resources:** it is important to have a large corporation to provide money for community revitalization. In Toledo this was Trust Corp., but they got over-extended and folded.
- **Retain educated young adults:** provide college loans that are forgiven when graduates come back in and work in Elkhart County.
- **Traffic system:** push for C.R. 17 as a good traffic artery that will keep the traffic moving.
- **Tax policy:** personal property taxes are too high.
- **Rural development policies:** the three-acre rule is very bad; our county roads are now subdivision streets; the agriculture community controls zoning in the county. Require plats and city water and sewer for every residential building permit.
- **Neighborhood development:** do some HUD projects.

Government and private sector to working together

- **Elkhart city:** the City Council needs to be educated about economic development issues; they need political will to make improvements; Elkhart is crippled right now – both sides of the isle. It was a fiasco when Meijer was denied a curb cut and then decided not to put in a store.
- **Political action:** we need to support and elect qualified candidates. Most people do not want to have their character assassinated in the press. It is hard to change things from inside the governmental structures. In our cities you need five or six people on a council and a mayor to push things.
- **Unit government:** this is always an option for bringing a unified effort and eliminating duplication.
- **Industrial park development:** Do we need a new industrial park? If so, cities and counties could work together on the next industrial park. The location is the biggest issue. Need to work with a small group of developers. Most areas are already developed in a patchwork

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fashion so that it is harder to do big projects reachable by municipal services. Some indicate that we do not need a new big site; we need more customers for existing industrial development sites.

- **Re-development:** becomes more important when we run out of good new industrial sites.

Other perceptions of Elkhart County

Strengths

- **Regional synergies:** Edison lakes and Grape Road are working for Mishawaka. Grape Road is third largest concentration of retail in the Midwest. Grape road is an asset for us.
- **Regional development:** the Hummer plant is in Mishawaka – some suppliers are in Elkhart county.
- **Suppliers:** more suppliers are coming here, especially automotive related.
- **Communities:** we still have a nice community to live in.

Weaknesses

- **Loss of white-collar jobs:** the ratio with blue-collar jobs has shifted in an undesirable direction.
- **Residential segregation:** businesses can come here, but the managers and owners will not live here.
- **Low incomes:** Indiana needs a substantial property tax since we have low average incomes and income taxes are not adequate to fund governmental functions.
- **Current jobs:** we have manufacturing jobs, low incomes, mobility, and other social costs.
- **Not attractive place to live:** quality of life and school systems are the reasons the doctors do not live here. The Mrs. will want to live in Granger. We do not have oceans, mountains, or sunshine. The schools bother me; the schools are turning people away. We live in a convenience society. All young professionals move to Granger – good schools and good shopping. Lack of things to do and places to spend money in Elkhart County.
- **Neighborhood deterioration:** in some parts of Elkhart over 50% of the housing is rental; this is a big problem; the neighborhoods have gone to hell.
- **Loss of locally generated wealth:** people retire, sell businesses, and move to Florida.
- **Competitive pressures:** Beyer cannot produce at \$20 hour wages and be globally competitive.

Opportunities

- **Movement of workers into Elkhart County:** 24,000 workers a day – that would be a good group to study.

Threats

- **Intensifying competitive pressures:** One company moved 1,300 blue collar jobs out of Elkhart County where they were paying \$20/hour to Mexico where they paid \$4, and then some went to China where they pay less than \$1/hour. We cannot have a low skilled and high paid work force. You can ship components from China; in electronics they have 30% of the world's business.



Educational Attainment

October 30, 2002

Focus for this group

The focus of this group was education: How to enhance the educational attainment of our young people to prepare them for the high-skill jobs of the future. Do we want to pursue a publicly supported college or university in Elkhart County?

Composition

This group included public school administrators, social service executives, school volunteers, business executives, and local government officials. Eight persons were present.

Vision for the future

- **No excuses for failure:** we need to take all the excuses away from kids for not succeeding by providing the resources and opportunities needed for success.
- **Involvement of parents:** we already know that parents need to be more involved; families are very important anchors for children.
- **Anchors for students:** students need to have anchors in the school, people who know their parents – a network of relationships and familiarity. In the past many teachers in the Elkhart schools were from Elkhart, but now most new teachers are not. Who are the other anchors in the schools today?
- **The value of cultural diversity:** emphasize the value of diversity; point out where we excel over Penn. All grade schools now have more cultural diversity than in the past.
- **People skills:** train children and youth to have good people skills.
- **Think positive:** take a positive approach.

Concerns about education

- **Selection of school districts:** people select school districts that appear to do a better job. What information do we give to employers about our school districts? White-collar workers tend to live in Granger. Race is an issue for some in the selection of a school district. People pay 2 or 3 times as much in taxes to live in Granger.
- **Focus for teaching:** teachers focus on passing ISTEP and getting students to graduate; this limits other learning opportunities.
- **Schools are too isolated:** there is a separation between local government and the schools – too many silos. There is also isolation between parents and schools. We need parents who will say to teachers, “I am on your side,” rather than taking an adversarial approach.
- **Impact of Hispanic Immigrants:** Hispanics have grown 465% in the last 10 years. There is a perception that they are a workforce that will take the jobs, but not add to the quality of life in the community. Some have the perception that Hispanics pull down the quality of education.
- **Lack of collaboration:** None of the colleges in Elkhart county talk to each other.

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- **Interpersonal skills:** some students spend too much time in relative isolation in in-school suspension. This is enforced quiet time and students do not have an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills.

Improvement strategies involving the business community

- **Build shared expectations:** the business community should speak with state officials do develop common standards and expectations for schools.
- **Engage corporate leaders:** They are currently disengaged and do not know what is going on in the Elkhart County schools. Often the managers are in Granger and their workers are in Elkhart County. This has to go beyond Chamber of Commerce involvement. All managers need to be aware of Elkhart School strengths.
- **Reducing social class residential segregation:** change the statistical reporting of educational achievement to reflect socio-economic factors; provide better information to the residential real estate community and encourage them to talk about the quality of life in Elkhart County.
- **Clarify the needs of business:** Ivy Tech is frustrated by what the business community needs; there has been talk about it for 15 years, but not much progress. Bring these two groups together.
- **Company support for training:** companies could expand their pool of skilled workers and increase employee loyalty by providing onsite college education; also bring in apprenticeship programs.
- **Workforce education:** the CAPE grant provides resources for providing education onsite at company locations.

Other improvement strategies

- **Support for students:** develop homework help programs in the schools.
- **Connections for kids:** provide better communication on current programs that help kids in the schools; help kids find what they need; help kids get connected.
- **Tutoring and mentoring in the schools:** mentors develop relationships with kids, see teachers interact with kids, and develop a lot more ownership in the schools. Business people can come in over lunch. What makes a difference with kids is a meaningful relationship with an adult.
- **Parent involvement:** Help parents to be better parents. They get the message that they are inadequate. Help parents be skilled to support education with their kids. Encourage more personal conversation with teachers and parents. Some parents do not attend conferences because they feel inadequate.
- **Consolidate youth agencies:** we have way too many non-profits who do the same things with kids; these programs need to be consolidated.
- **Neighborhood approach:** Recreate a neighborhood approach to schools and see schools as anchor buildings – a safe haven. They close now after 3:00. Could we use the buildings to create neighborhoods? Everyone needs to have a stake in the schools; they are not islands. Include the churches as anchor buildings in neighborhoods.
- **Collaboration with local government:** How can city government help the schools? Local governments often have a hands-off approach to the school. The norm is to keep politics



and the schools separate. We do not want the kids to be politicized. Bigger cities are bringing together city government and the schools.

- **School performance measures:** kids need to be compared with expectations in terms of socio/economic class; need more demographics.
- **The value of diversity:** play up the value of diversity in the schools. We should be proud that we are not Penn.
- **Early childhood education:** where are we with the 4 and 5 year olds? They need interpersonal skills training, too. Get involved with the kids earlier. The CAPE initiative is working on early childhood education. The High Scope Program helps children develop interpersonal skills.
- **Funding early childhood education:** Indiana is behind the rest of the county in funding pre-school and all-day kindergarten. We need to lobby the state to fund these programs.

Other perceptions of Elkhart County

Strengths

- **Mentors in schools:** there are currently mentors in schools; these mentors understand the schools and are good advocates. It is powerful when adults come into the schools to join the educational process.
- **Collaboration in Goshen:** the clarion program in the schools did not have space. The Boys and Girls club had the space during the day and provided a place for this educational program. Social services agencies need to interact with the educational world.
- **Anchor in Elkhart:** the Tolson Center is an important anchor for Elkhart youth.
- **Early childhood education:** The Elkhart Community Schools has started full-day kindergarten programs – 5 hours rather than 2 1/2. They have time for teaching interpersonal schools.

Weaknesses

- **Economic history:** in 1977 Elkhart had more millionaires per capita than anywhere else in the country. The millionaires created jobs that did not require a high school degree. There was not a lot of emphasis on graduating and going on to school.
- **Measuring educational attainment:** we do not have information on socio economic level. The income of parents and the education of mother are major factors predicting the educational performance of children. Is it a negative that our kids are from blue-collar families and they score lower?
- **Poor educational attainment statistics:** Poor educational attainment in Elkhart County cannot be attribute to a large number of Amish. The Amish represent only 3-4 percent of the population. The Amish are usually not counted in educational attainment statistics because they never start high school.
- **Graduation Qualifying Exams:** About 55% of Elkhart 10th graders pass the Graduation Qualifying Exam, while 83% pass at Northwood. A larger percentage will pass at some point during their high school years – over 90% for most schools.
- **Lack of skilled workers:** we are heavy on manufacturing and some manufacturers can't find or retain qualified workers, e.g., no sewers at \$13/hour. It has been hard to find sewers for 20 years.

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- **Critique of current workforce:** employees lack basic skills; no interpersonal skills; poor work ethic.
- **Government mandates:** the State and Federal governments drive a lot in education. School-to-work was a big push several years ago. Now it is graduation-qualifying exams, which focus just on math and language arts. Employers want specific skills, but the state is measuring something else.
- **Technology adoption:** we have a lot of entrepreneurs; we do not adopt technology well.
- **Brain drain:** the high achievers leave because the jobs are not here.

Opportunities

- Elkhart Community Schools has young teachers. What do they need?
- Do companies train and invest in their people? Do companies have a long-term commitment?

Areas for Action Planning Teams

- **Business community involvement:** Get business and education to know each other and see how they can work together to support parents and families.
- **Parent involvement in education.**
- **City and school partnerships.**
- **Higher education:** Get the higher education people talking with each other.
- **Early childhood education:** How to get kids ready for the first day of school. Start at birth. Integrate the teaching of interpersonal skills in pre-school and early grade school.



High School Student Perspectives

October 22, 2002

Focus for this group

Youth empowerment – high school student perspectives. What do our youth see as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for our community? What are their ideas for top priority improvements for Elkhart County?

Composition of group

This group included ten high school students, representing five high schools in Elkhart County. Three of the students represented ethnic minorities.

Vision for the future

- **Be one community** rather than lots of little community; get to know each other better.
- **Support for other schools:** support each other's teams going to state; cheer on the bands from other schools.
- **Tolerance:** overlook religious beliefs and relate to a wide range of people; accepting diversity – race and religion.
- **Be kid friendly:** be more family oriented; better community parks; after school care; meet kids from other schools; summer programs for little kids; Boys and Girls Club activities outside in the summer; summer day camps.
- **Rectify neighborhood deterioration:** not have so many bad apartment areas – not a good image; don't like some apartment complexes; get rid of the bad problems; improve some areas; sidewalks are cracked and ugly and there is trash in some neighborhoods; some areas have weeds and are not kept up; some old cars parked on lawns; Elkhart has a beautiful sculpture in the down town; it is an oasis in an ugly part of town.
- **Respect the right to choose:** people should have a choice in how their neighborhood looks.

Perspectives on Elkhart County

Strengths

- **Close knit community:** people know each other; if there is a tragedy, we come together to be there for each other.
- **A lot of events and festivals:** many people's interests are taken care of.
- **Lots of school spirit:** especially around athletics.
- **Something for everyone:** schools have speech and drama teams, academic stuff, and the smaller sports.
- **Some places for kids from different school to get to know each other:** The Post has music and is more of a youth church thing; the 112 club has different music on different floors; Extreme Times has Christian activities; coffee shops; Boys and Girls Clubs; the Refinery.
- **Many places feel safe:** not afraid to be in Goshen.

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Weaknesses – education

- **Problems in education:** education is a big problem – 20 years behind schools out East; they push students harder when younger; we will compete against kids from other parts of the county; more money is going to schools that are doing well; this will hurt us; how can they improve without money?
- **Uneven quality in education:** Central was boring; Goshen teachers get more involved.
- **Inadequate education on sexuality:** this area is so conservative; sex education is a taboo topic; we teach abstinence only; we have high pregnancy rates – it is very high; some schools have day care centers for the children of students – some of the centers are pretty big; we need to prevent the problem.
- **Unequal support for activities:** at Goshen they don't treat all the sports equally; Cheerleading is not given sport status. It is a sport at Concord.

Weaknesses – cultural factors

- **Closed-minded people:** lots of people are closed-minded concerning new people and new ideas; they are closed-minded in religious beliefs; cliques and intolerance start in junior high; some cliques are religion based.
- **Race issues:** at Goshen High School race is too big of an issue; people are expected to hang out only with their own racial group.
- **Too much pressure for religious conformity:** Extreme Time is when youth pastors are brought in; you have a choice to go to it; then on Wednesday lunches youth pastors can come; opinion page of school newspaper is often dominated by religious issues; there is a lot of religion and lots of pressure; religion is like a club that you can join; there are prayer times at the flag pole.

Weaknesses – few activities or opportunities

- **Few job opportunities:** hard to find a job that pays more than minimum wage; not much advertising of jobs for youth; hard to get a job if you are under 18; lose jobs to college students when summer comes – hours cut back, more openings for college students.
- **Very few nighttime options:** have to hang out at Steak and Shake after 11:00 or Taco Bell or Meijer.
- **Hard to find things to do in the winter.**
- **Towns are too small and there isn't anything to do;** unless you want to pay for it; don't know what the night life is like – there isn't any; you have to go to Elkhart to a club; not a lot of diverse things to do; no place to convene; only two movie theaters.
- **Things are so spread out:** you have to travel to Goshen, Elkhart, or South Bend; not even a coffee shop until recently in the Concord area; so many more things to do in South Bend – the mall, more restaurant, and pool halls.



Opportunities – activities for youth

- **Develop and publicize events for youth:** music festivals and concerts; line dances; art festivals; concerts in the area – use the fair grounds and not just during the fair; have diverse groups; don't have to drive to Deer Creek; have concerts at Ox Bow Park.
- **Wider range of places to gather:** a dollar theater; more coffee shops, and bookstores.
- **More sports opportunities:** greater variety in little league sports; junior football league; indoor sporting center; 3 on 3 basketball.
- **More outdoor activities:** activities night at Ox Bow Park, community soccer games, bonfires, flashlight tag, campouts, special nights at campgrounds; ice skating would be awesome; create outdoor rinks; good water park.
- **Publicize existing events:** the one hour concerts right by the Y on the river walk; get the word out to the schools.
- **Good locations:** between Goshen and Concord; The Old Bag Factory has a nice atmosphere – nice old look; Osco location in Concord Mall – make it an open area with good stores, coffee shop, and a dollar movie theater.
- **Countywide leadership academy** for high school students [suggested by an adult observer].

Opportunities – strengthen education

- **Relationship education in schools:** relationship education on sharing and communication should start a lot younger; this strengthens the whole community; some kids see their parents fight every day; include sex education; give contraceptive information; 70% of 18 year olds are sexually active they need education; teachers need to pull their heads out of the sand; kids need to have access to contraceptives.
- **Bring together kids from different schools:** need activities for people from different schools to get to know each other; some get to know each other at work; some sports kids go to summer camps and get to know each other; sports teams could get together and work out in the summer; a school could have a guest speaker and invite kids from other schools; Shared articles for school newspapers from students in other towns; switch school newspapers.
- **Student exchanges would be good:** have more ties; more than just one student; student council exchange; student exchange – you take their classes for a day; “I do not know how other school operates.” Involve a random selection of students.
- **Have people with a shared skill level in the same classes:** some classes have too wide a range of skill levels.
- **Transfer options:** when a school has a strong program it allows students to transfer in for that program; some schools could have a strong emphasis and be specialized. There is also a danger with this opportunity: the schools that students flee could become even weaker.
- **Relationships among teachers:** teachers from different schools could get to know each other; good teachers could help other schools improve; get teachers together to learn from each other.
- **Specialized curriculum:** have lots of classes so you can specialize; it is good to have a lot of choices.
- **School dress practices:** wide range of attitudes toward school dress codes and uniforms;

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some awareness that dress can contribute to the feeling of not being good enough or the feeling of being left out of a group.

Opportunities – other

- **Diversity will always be around:** we will always have judgment with us; we have cliques that are based on people, money, who your parents are; help people get to know each other better.
- **Need better stores:** GAP, Banana Republic, Limited, Old Navy, Express, Abercrombie, and outlet mall like Michigan city.
- **Improve appearance of roadways:** make sure prime roads look good; the entryways currently do not look good.
- Help communities and neighborhoods to work together.

Threats – social factors

- **Coaches re-enforce competition between schools too much** – not to wear colors of other schools; too much animosity; coaches hate the other towns and teams.
- **We are such big rivals:** people in other towns are treated like being in another county.
- **We are so divided into classes:** like the upper class; people are too locked into their own economic group; too much social separation and isolation; Elkhart east side feels too much like a ghetto; Colorado is more accepting; Indy is more accepting.
- **People leave when they grow up:** looking for more tolerance and more job opportunities.
- **Small town familiarity:** don't want to be known by brother, sister, mother, or father.
- **Some areas are not safe:** roll your windows up in the down town areas; cars are being broken into; most high schools are supervised by police, but there is the wish that school parking lots could also be patrolled.

Threats – economic factors

- **Loss of jobs:** the RV industry goes down.
- **Some careers can't be practices here:** like corporate law; need to move to a larger city; our big city is South Bend; it is not that great of a big city; it is not a nice area to live in.
- **Rapid growth:** expanding too fast in Elkhart County – traffic gets too bad, too much construction.

Compiled 11/16/02



Inter-Governmental Cooperation

October 29, 2002

Focus for this group

Intergovernmental cooperation for Elkhart County - how to develop and implement countywide plans and have a community-wide effort.

Composition

This group included 15 persons. Fourteen are leaders in city and county government and one is a business owner.

Vision for the future – governmental issues

- **Need a county strategic plan.**
- **Land use planning:** control urban sprawl and growth; use an area plan commission concept – one advisory body over the county, and the cities of Goshen, and Elkhart. The plan commissions are advisory in nature; city and county governments make ultimate decisions. Our plan commissions are not aware of some issues. The county plan commission focuses on the issues at hand rather than long-range planning.
- **Improve land use:** develop policies so that no lots are sold, unless it is 80 acres that are subdivided. Now we have planning by auctioneer; the 3-acre pattern is a waste. We have to learn to live closer together. We have talked about it for a long time. It has been a county legislative issue since 1977. People in the county want city services. St. Joe County has a 20-acre rule. Cities are losing residents and the counties are gaining. We should require subdivision of all parcels.
- **SM4 storm water management:** this can be a catalyst for intergovernmental cooperation; establish a unified permit with county and cities joining in; other things could start to spin off, like joint building inspection of sites and runoff inspections. Make changes so that there are not so many permit entities. Cities and the county could share these processes. It would save money and avoid duplication.
- **Political action:** direct communication with the state legislature; tax and revenue issues; bring federal dollars to the county.

Vision for the future – other issues

- **Human capital:** strengthen workforce education to develop skilled employees; some companies can't find skilled employees; all companies in the county share a common workforce.
- **Transportation:** get workers to job sites; poor workers do not have cars. Could companies work together? Have a central pooling place and share transportation – like driving the Amish to work locations.
- **Education:** important for where people live. People are moving to Northwood, Northridge, and Penn. Schools are the greatest magnates. How to make the schools more equal. 49% of housing stock in Elkhart is rentals. 23% of families are single parents. Our schools suffer. The parents who can move out of Elkhart, do. Middlebury will spend 70 million on

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new schools. Nappanee has a harder time coming up with the money.

- **Families:** Put the emphasis on families. It is not the teachers and the school systems. Need to get the parents involved in the schools. Many kids do not have a family life. Beck Elementary School had 100% turnover in 1999. This is an uneducated underclass. 93% of juveniles in crime are boys without a father.

Major Concerns

- **Need for shared vision:** not doing well at creating a vision and knowing how to guide the county. We meet the challenges of today, but not the challenge of the future. With the current structure of county government it is hard to know where power is concentrated. It is a very decentralized model of government. We work around an inefficient form of government.
- **Urban sprawl:** county roads with so many houses. There are neighborhoods out in the county and they have no sewer and water.

Regional improvement strategies

- **Regional perspective:** we are a regional economic engine competing with Chicago and Ft. Wayne.
- **Regional strategy:** individual counties have been good with economic development. Now we need to go to the next level –collectively entice industries to come into our region. We need to have the same policies, rather than competing with each other.

Better ways for governmental entities to work together

- **Sharing revenues and services between units of government:** combine and merge services, such as code enforcement. There is pressure in the county to increase services, like picking up the leaves. The county needs to increase services and increase taxes. We are moving toward a move even playing field.
- **Consolidating services:** the 911 Center and emergency management is centralized. This is going to happen in more areas. We should cherry pick the issues and set the example for integrating services. Emergency dispatch is one that needs to be integrated. How many police and fire departments do we need? County law enforcement is slow to cover the whole county. Nappanee could provide law enforcement to the southwest part of the county.
- **Unit government:** Indianapolis was hugely successful with unit government. It is a big factor in their efforts to reinvest in the downtown.

Areas for Action Planning Teams

- **Land use:** subdivisions and development in rural areas.
- **Economic development**
- **Worker issues:** training and transportations.
- **Family and school issues.**

Current inter-governmental cooperation

Joint infrastructure projects



- Infrastructure projects have gone very well for 20 years. They do not get a lot of publicity. When a company wants to locate on the edge of a city, it is easy to get the roads, sewer and water in place.
- It has been hard to organize a sewer district. This is a countywide issue.
- There has been aggressive highway development in the county. This also needs to involve extensions of sewer and water by the cities.
- We need wider participation from the smaller communities.

Consulting assistance

- Smaller communities have had good consulting assistance from the county and the larger cities.
- Lots of growth issues in Nappanee; help received from Goshen and the county.

Contracted services

- Nappanee has contracts with county to do building inspections.

General comments

- Intergovernmental cooperation is increasing.
- We need to hear from our communities about sewer and water issues.
- Cooperation is at an all time high, but there is not good publicity. The publicity goes to some high visibility problem officials.
- Nappanee is partially in Kosciusko County and needs to coordinate with them, too.
- We get along outstandingly among the entities. We are all in this together. Residents regard the whole area as theirs; county people view themselves as part of the local city.
- Mayors, County Councils and Chambers are working well on joint economic development efforts. The “them and us” talk is gone. Also some mixing with St. Joe County. Proud of our efforts. Going beyond parochialism.
- Good agreements between the county and city of Goshen concerning extra-territorial jurisdiction in the county. We need regional planning, especially in the areas of transportation and economic development – probably 2-3 counties.
- Solid waste is a very good example of inter-governmental cooperation. It is run from tipping fees – no tax dollars. We have very high recycling rates – the highest in Indiana.
- Elkhart city and county cooperation is stronger in the last three years.
- A lot of issues are driven by growth of population: Middlebury school system growth; lot of transportation to move people to and from businesses. Funding from state will be much less. Our roads need maintenance and upgrading because of our severe winters and the need for safety.

Other perceptions of Elkhart county

Strengths

- Amish in business. There are dozens of cottage industries, especially furniture. This is a \$15 million dollar industry in Elkhart Co. There is an Amish coop. They have a county woodworking fair at the fair grounds. Cabinet making has the highest career status in the

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Amish culture. The Amish may shift from working in large factories to working in their own small shops.

- We are in the center of a statistical area. We can attract the surrounding workforce. Middlebury has 2/3 of its workforce from other counties. It is blue-collar workers that are coming here. Perhaps we need a workforce development board.

Weaknesses

- Have lost some companies in the transportation industry. This is scary, but there is resilience.
- Federal bankruptcy court – Northern Indiana has the highest rates in the U.S.
- Restructuring in the banking industry – not locally owned any more. Is it harder to get support for new businesses. Credit union has rapid growth in deposits. The Amish have money.

Threats

- Population is not growing equally. White-collar workers are moving to Northridge, Northwood, and Penn. Blue-collar workers are in Elkhart and Goshen.



Older Adult Perspectives

February 7, 2003

Introduction

The focus of this group was: older adult perspectives on Elkhart County. The group included twelve older adults, six from Goshen and six from Elkhart. Several of the participants were African-Americans. All respondents reported that they plan to live in Elkhart County for the foreseeable future.

Ideal vision for Elkhart County for the next 10 years

Education and support for youth

- Improve K-12 educational system
- Do not cut educational funding; keep the art programs; don't cut the teachers
- More youth program; better role models
- Coverage of positive youth activities in the local papers

Political involvement

- Overcome apathy about the political involvement; change the political system; the number of people who vote is much too low
- More personal involvement by many more people in the whole political process
- Need morality in politics
- City fathers need more foresight and vision; the Elkhart down town is embarrassing. We need a comprehensive plan; we need a better plan and better leaders

Personal responsibility

- Personal responsibility; unhelpful ads that say "you deserve more" are used too much
- Society encourages lack of involvement

Needs of seniors

Financial

- Financial security (6 respondents). Others acknowledged that this is probably a federal and state policy issues and not often influenced by local governments.
- Some cannot afford to move into a place like Greencroft. Others pointed out that about a 40% of Greencroft's independent living residents are low-income persons in HUD subsidized apartments and 50% of healthcare residents receive Medicaid.
- Affordable health care, prescription drugs, and hearing aids. People who are on fixed incomes have to take expensive medications. Where are the programs to help with these costs? (2 respondents)
- Long-term care insurance; very small percentage use it; it is confusing; young people do not

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have that mind set to use long-term care insurance.

Health

- Health status services and health care availability (2 respondents)
- Mental health; family situations; don't know where help is available (2 respondents)
- Need foresight all along the way. "I am 79 and take no medication. I have been eating well and getting exercise all my life."
- People move to retirement communities and they get younger.

Social and safety needs

- Seniors need physical activities suited to their activity level; recreational opportunities
- Educational opportunities
- Safety and protection
- Isolation; loneliness; friendships
- Grandparents raising grandchildren

Resources

- Legal aid needed that they can afford
- People are not aware of the services of the county council on aging. There is a senior insurance and financial services program.
- Transportation

Suggestions for Action Planning Team

Social services

- Need better publicity about how local agencies are serving poor seniors
- Educate people in their 40s about long-term care insurance
- Financial counseling; start thinking about it at age 40
- Encourage parents to save for kids' college education. Sometimes grandparents pay for college.
- Need a low-income senior place in Elkhart for activities. Nappanee has done well.
- Teens to contact older adults in their homes; could be a phone call. Some churches do that. Meals on wheels serves this function.
- Living in congregate housing helps overcome isolation
- Encourage older adults to volunteer as tutors. One respondent tutored at Beardsley school for three years. Greencroft matches adults and students. One respondent was matched with a Hispanic child.

Workforce Development

- Retrain workers who have lost their jobs; develop new skills
- Build a university campus in Elkhart
- Can Goshen College broaden its mission to the local community to meet more of the local needs?



Cultural Diversity

- We have many Hispanics in the community; be visionary; be proactive; we need an institute or some other resource; don't just complain; it is a challenge
- Our churches provide the moral compass; but they are behind on thinking about class and race; they could lead rather than follow

Inter-governmental Cooperation

- Jail population; use inmates to clean up and beautify; build recreation areas; let them be productive
- City government to help senior citizens; be responsive to needs such as water in a basement when a new street was put in.

Older adult perspectives on Elkhart County

Strengths

- Local resources
- Park program and walking trails (lots of affirmation)
- Large number of social service agencies
- Educational programs from grade school to college
- Good retirement homes
- Recreational facilities
- Good libraries
- Elkhart county foundation — a perpetual resource
- Lots of Lilly matching grants
- Habitat for Humanity providing housing for low-income persons

Economy

- Diversity of employment
- Economically very stable

Religion

- The Bible belt environment is good for families; not so many extremes like on the East and West coasts
- Strong religious community

Culture

- Heritage in music; once the music center of the country

Weaknesses

Economy

- Lack high tech industry; that is the way of the future; unless we can attract high tech we will be out of it for the future
- We lose all of our kids because they want high tech occupations
- Diminishing employer base; companies are leaving the area

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Transportation

- The truck traffic in the Goshen down town; state road 19 between Nappanee and Elkhart
- Transportation needs for the low income people with entry-level jobs; they can't get to work
- We need air service back.

Criminal justice

- Crime; jail population; seems high from reading the papers
- Making bigger jails; people need to walk the straight and narrow
- Need new laws to prevent some people from getting away with murder

Culture and values

- People are not saving; they want it now
- We gave our children a lot; they are spoiled

Education

- The performance and image of the school system in Elkhart — low test scores; schools and realtors have been meeting; some parents are reluctant to send students to Elkhart public schools
- The state government won't let us have a college here; our youth go elsewhere to college

Government

- Political situation; it is dumb; the two party system is not working in county politics; only Republicans are elected.
- Have term limits; get rid of the old-boy system; we need intelligent young people in political office

Resources

- Need a senior center for low income people; Elkhart has nothing

Opportunities

Criminal Justice

- Ways to stop kids doing terrible things; they have not been taught not to do terrible things; there has been a breakdown of discipline in homes and schools; help the parents get out of their current mode of parenting; children are left alone too much
- Alternative rehabilitation for criminals; rather than sending them to jail
- Rehabilitation of criminals

Education

- School system is facing serious problem; tax base is decreasing; programs being cut; bring in industry that will pay taxes
- The way educators run things; too much emphasis on sports; more emphasis on raise academic abilities; praise academic progress; need better priorities; Notre Dame has the right idea.
- We need to teach English to new immigrants. They do better in school when they have English skills and some go to college.



Religious Community

- Faith-based funding from the federal government; opportunity for faith-based organizations to help kids be prepared to become parents; need instructions for being parents

Economy

- Grow and attract high tech industries

Other

- Elkhart Truth serves the community by featuring kids who do positive things

Threats

Health issues

- Use of illegal drugs
- Health problems; communicable diseases; young people do not understand the threat; there is too much early parenting by teenage parents; they are getting younger

Family issues

- Families not knowing what the standards are; the future will be worse;
- Parents are depending on medication to meet the needs of their children rather than spending time with their children

New immigrants

- Hispanics; many are illegal; they are draining our social service system; they get a lot of free help (tax supported); one pastor reported having 125 Hispanics in a church and estimated that 90% were illegal
- Reliance on the recreational vehicle industry which offers low skill jobs; the Hispanic influx is driven by opportunities in the RV industry
- Hispanics speak Spanish at home and they need to be able to speak English. Concerned about both parents and children. Schools are doing pretty well on getting students to speak English. Hawthorn Elementary School has 40% Hispanic students and they work only one hour a day on English.

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Young Adult Perspectives and Leadership Development

October 18, 2002

Focus for this group

- What are the concerns of young adults in their 30s?
- How can we put many of them on paths to become leaders in the community?

Composition

- This group included 6 young adults in their 20s and 30s and 7 persons involved in leadership development.

Vision for the future

- **Attract our college-educated young people:** jobs, activities, entertainment, unique restaurants (like a French bistro) and night clubs, recreational facilities, boathouses on rivers, river walk, millrace, Pumkinvine Nature Trail, sculling on rivers, social clubs and organizations; something new – not what my parents did.
- **Enrichment programs for schools**

The most difficult issues for the next 10 years

- Viewing ethnic diversity as a positive resource.
- Being attractive to college-educated white-collar workers.
- Strengthening the public schools so that professionals and executives will chose to live in Elkhart County.
- Revitalizing center-city areas.

Leadership interest areas

- **Education:** transient nature of the student population; low test scores.
- **Elderly:** set up an organization that brings together children and the elderly; adopt a grandparent.
- **Revitalization of our downtowns:** positive image of the core areas of the cities; preserve buildings.
- **Cultural activities:** support and publicize what we have and create new activities.

Leadership career path

- Make connections and get to know current leaders; it is hard to get to know people when you are new. Chamber leadership programs assist in making connections.
- Everyone has potential. They have to be tapped by someone in a current leadership role.
- Develop a relationship with an older mentor who moves you along, trains you and pushes you.
- Get involved in a wide range of activities.



Barriers to leadership advancement

- Lack of financial resources; sometimes you need to have the money and be a major donor to be on a board.
- Not having time and flexibility to attend daytime meetings and two-hour lunches.
- Family obligations for persons with young children.
- Employers who do not see that it is important to be involved in the community, such as being on a non-profit board.

Perceptions of Elkhart County

Strengths

- **Business activity:** hub of employment; influx of workers from other communities; tourism accessibility.
- **Local culture and values:** entrepreneurship; climate of wanting to work together; ownership in the community; giving spirit; charitable mindedness.
- **Natural resources:** lots of water – rivers and lakes.

Weaknesses

- **Not attractive to many young professionals:** Large manufacturing base with less opportunities for college educated young adults; not a lot of white collar job opportunities; lack of activities for young people; educated young people move to Indy and Chicago; the county is boring; not a lot of cultural events for younger individuals; it is not a community that is alive; German executives from Bayer said that in Elkhart County “even little kids have a rotten time.”
- **Some persons in middle and upper management do not want to live in this county.** Realtors steer people to Granger. Our own county realtors do not support us. They talk about the schools. Education is not strong – Elkhart Schools particularly. Our diversity is a threat to some people in terms of safety – afraid of Blacks and Hispanics. Granger is pristine White. Lake Wawasee and Syracuse are attractive areas for executives and professionals. Our symphony struggles for support. One spouse refused to move to Elkhart County and stayed in Toledo for culture. Local cultural groups do not get strong support.
- **Lack of a countywide attitude and relationships:** “I have never sat in a room with people from Goshen and Nappanee before.”
- **Educational attainment is mixed:** some schools are good and some are not; many do not live up to their potential; many in the community are satisfied with being at the state average rather than wanting to be excellent.
- **Weak visual appearance:** entrances and exits to Elkhart are horrific; terrain is flat; what visual beauty we have is not marketed well.
- **Signs of economic decline:** Falling real estate values in the heart of our cities; businesses are not locally owned any more; we have lost unique Italian restaurants.
- **Signs of social stress:** Divorce rate in Elkhart County is in the 90th percentile of the country.

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Opportunities

- **Focus on and build on strengths:** safe communities; strong work ethic, unique Amish culture; unique restaurants; opportunities for the children of immigrants; affordable housing and high ownership rates; opportunities to live on waterways; Goshen College music facilities; strong family units in some small towns; current cultural events; IUSB and Ivy Tech offerings.
- **Mobilize human resources:** encourage our best and brightest to run for public office; create leadership opportunities for young talent; create structures for countywide relationships and efforts; attract people who can learn, provide high value in work processes, and earn more.
- **Build ownership in neighborhoods:** legislate ownership requirement in trailer parks.
- **Strengthen schools:** resources for the disabled and enriched programs for the highly skilled.

Threats

- **Decline of center city areas:** people who are able leaving; the increasing number of rental housing units; students frequently move to new locations; loss of retail; higher crime rates; discomfort with racial diversity.
- **Environmental contamination:** Elkhart County is first or second worst in the nation for carcinogens in the air according to EPA data. These are largely industrial contaminants from plastics and laminants. Being downwind from Gary steel mills may also be a factor.
- **Health risks:** We are a medical hot spot for cancer.
- **Lack of acceptance of diversity:** race and gender.
- **Declining sense of safety:** people are concerned about public safety. “We don’t let the kids ride their bikes around town.”
- **Automobile culture:** We drive to shop and dine.
- **Good social services may attract poor people:** the poor in Elkhart County are poorer than anywhere else in Indiana. We pay a lot of attention to the social service side and helping people. Do people move here because we have a good social safety net? What does it cost us to bring in a low skill worker?

Improvement strategies

- Leadership development: have Chamber leadership groups meet together.
- Rentals need to meet high standards. Hold the owners accountable. In Indy if there are two drug arrests in a rental, the owner pays a fine. This has cleaned things up.
- Legislate ownership requirement in trailer parks.
- Work at center city revitalization by securing grants that are available and creating partnership with downtown businesses for improvement projects.
- Develop more countywide projects to bring people together around common interests.

Radical ideas for improving the economic and community life

- Any high school graduate will be supported financially for post-secondary education with a stipulation to come back and work in Elkhart County for five years.
- Quality childcare for anyone who needs it.



- Outdoor amphitheater for music like Deer Creek; 17,000 – 20,000 seats; put it in a corn field.
- Create a program for kids in the school systems: high intensive English program for Hispanics.
- New office space in the center city areas.
- High school is mandatory; no quitting at age 16.

Areas for Action Planning Teams

- Develop waterways.
- Community centers – outdoor activities.
- Countywide projects; use the media effectively to create awareness and ownership
- Community website.

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Key Issues Report

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Key Issue/Priority: Economic/Business Development

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Competition – national and global; implications for incentives, property tax rates, and the workforce (15)
- Build on entrepreneurial spirit; grow our own businesses (12)
- Lack of broadband capacity (8)
- Midwest location; close to many large markets (5)

Strengths

- Manufacturing base with key products (3)
- Affordable housing (3)
- Midwest location; close to major markets (4)
- Low cost of living
- Competitive utility costs
- Tourism industry
- We are so fortunate to be blessed with a good water supply (2)
- Economic and Tourism hub – within 150 miles; 20% of GNP and 20% of national workforce

Weaknesses

- Loss of corporate headquarters and related white-collar jobs and leadership capacity (4)
- Lack of high-speed, broadband capacity is a problem (5)
- Dependency on manufacturing; need to diversify
- Lack of diversity within the manufacturing sector
- Lack of economic incentives, both state and local
- Poor balance in job classification stratification; losing middle-income jobs
- No direct air service

Opportunities

- Deeper support for entrepreneurs/locally grown businesses (2)
- Build on competitive advantage of our location – proximity to resources and markets (2)
- Technology development and application, jobs (3)
- Expand and attract companies involved in biotechnology
- Creation of more service-sector jobs
- Attract industry that compliments existing industries
- Support local bank infrastructure
- Attract businesses and workers to Elkhart County because of the low cost of living
- Diversify the economic base
- Aging population will create demands for more healthcare services
- Be more proactive in attracting the “creative class” i.e. more cultural events, public art,

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preservation, museums, galleries, concerts, etc. – these people start technology and biotech companies.

- Develop local capital – charge banks to focus on local growth

Threats

- Losing manufacturing jobs to other communities and other countries (5)
- Loss of quality jobs
- Loss and lack of venture capital
- Over-dependence on recreational vehicle and mobile home industries

What the research tells us

- In 1999, 97% of Elkhart County personal income came from gross earnings – which are calculated by place of work, but 22.4% of the county workforce live in surrounding counties and take 19.7% of that earned income spending power back to those counties. Overall private earnings were 101.3% and 104.8 % of the state and region respectively, but only 90.8% of U.S. earnings average.
- Real personal income grew by 32% between 1989 and 1999 – above the state and the region, but behind the national level at 33.3%
- Between 1969 and 1999 Elkhart County per capita income fell from 110.5% of U.S. per capita income to 92.3% (18.2%) BUT 13.4% of that decline happened between 1969 and 1979 – the decline slowed significantly between 1979 and 1999 from 97.1% to 92.3% (4.8%). During the same period of time Indiana moved from 96.6% of US per capita income to 91.6% and the BEA region went from 99.3% of U.S. per capita income to 85.4% - Elkhart County fairs far better than the region and better than Indiana at 91.6% of U.S. per capita income the county also has a per capita income at 100.8% of Indiana's.
- Between 1989-1999 manufacturing employment declined 3.75% in the U.S. but in Indiana it grew by 7.1% and in Elkhart County it grew by 17.6% - mostly in the largest industries.
- Manufacturing accounts for 56.2% of total county earnings, compared to 30% statewide and 20% in the U.S.
- Manufacturing pays the highest average annual wage in Elkhart County at an average of \$19.92 an hour but that is only 92.9% of the regional rate, 82.0% of the state, and 80.9% of the U.S. (excludes Government/Gov. Enterprises, only employs 5.5% of the workforce).
- 45% of the workforce is employed in manufacturing, services at 18.1% and retail at 13.9% employ the next largest numbers of people, but average hourly earnings are only \$11.67 and \$8.17 respectively.
- 'Basic' industries (produce goods and services that are exported outside the local economy) form the underpinnings of the local economy. The research identifies:
 - Those that are growing locally, growing nationally but exceeding growth elsewhere: **Travel Trailers and Campers (employment grew from 4,917 to 7,859 1989-1999), Fabricated Metal Products (347-1,022), Lumber and Other Building Materials Dealers (271-832), Sheet Metal Work (400-775), Truck trailers (50-645)**
 - Those that are growing locally, doing poorly nationally (local factors make them successful – suppliers to other local growing businesses?): **Motor Homes; Truck and Bus Bodies; Metal Door, Sash, Frames, Molding and Trim, Plastic Products**



- Those that are growing locally but slowly – could be caused by local factors or factors beyond local control, i.e. foreign competition: **Mobile Homes, Musical Instruments, Goods (Fabricated, Rubber related)**
- Those that are declining locally in both absolute and relative (to nation) terms: **Motor Vehicle Parts and Accessories, Pharmaceutical Preparations, Plastic Foam Products, Public Building and Related Furniture, Wood Kitchen Cabinets.**
- Non-basic businesses (serve only the local market) but are growing and to the degree that they are not fully serving the local market could provide opportunities for import substitution – people buying the good or service elsewhere might buy it in the community if it was available:
- Those that are experiencing growth locally and gaining employment share, are performing well nationally but not local specializations: **Offices and Clinics of Doctors of Medicine, Business Services, Accounting, Auditing and Bookkeeping Services, Offices and Clinics of Dentists, Home Health Care** (growth in business services key to area growth).
- Those that are experiencing growth locally and gaining employment share, not performing well nationally, not currently local specializations: **General Medical and Surgical Hospitals; General Building Contractors –residential; General Building Contractors – nonresidential; Colleges, Universities and Professional Schools.**

Implications/opportunities for action

- Business development is most effective when pro-active and results from the cooperative efforts of professionals, local elected and appointed officials, business, education and civic leaders.
- Economies are regional - target marketing efforts to those industries and businesses that fit the local and regional economic profile. Consider doing regional Cluster Analysis.
- According to site-selectors they prefer to look at a 'region' rather than an individual community. Is Elkhart County and surrounding counties working together collaboratively in order to expand the chances of bringing a business to the area?
- Consider creating a new, unified, countywide economic development entity to implement new strategies – should involve all major public, private and non-profit groups.
- Manufacturing is still strong but the pay scales are not as high as they were and there is decline in some sectors. What opportunities exist to pursue the development of more advanced manufacturing facilities, medical devices (a regional strength), and other technology dependent industries?
- Diversification of the economic base and economic development strategies – maximize tourism, grow your own - create business climate that supports the development of new/ small business.
- Consider establishing a small business/micro-loan program to stimulate the development of new locally –based businesses.
- Establish a comprehensive incentive package targeting existing business expansion and industries targeted in your attraction strategy.
- While incentives are still a significant part of the business location game - everyone has incentives to give, they are generally not discussed until sites have been narrowed to the final few, and they are most often used as a tie-breaker. The determination will depend upon

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whether or not the community has what's necessary to stay in the game to the last lap.

- Create an organized and systematic Existing Industry Development Plan to help retain and expand the current Elkhart County businesses – especially those basic industries in growth sectors with the potential to enhance and broaden the Elkhart County economy. Provide customized, one-on-one technical support to local businesses – financial, modernization, export assistance etc.
- New business locations are still few and far between and are still driven by issues critical to that particular industry sector. For the high-tech sector, workforce is very high on the list of location factors and their workforce is attracted to high quality of life communities – recreation, night-life, broad acceptance of diversity – hence, so are they.
- Develop skills of existing and future workforce – skills needed by today's businesses for the higher paying/tech related jobs.
- Publicize your plan and celebrate every success.

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Loss of income in comparison with the rest of the country
- Desire for greater economic diversity and vitality
- We have not been clear on what Elkhart County has to offer

Strategy Ideas

- 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
- 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
- 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

Input from Focus Groups

Major Concerns

- We have lost white-collar jobs and have gained blue-collar jobs
- Danger of losing more manufacturing jobs to Mexico, China, etc.
- We have an underclass that is going nowhere
- Hispanic businesses are much stronger than African American businesses; Hispanics buy from each other; African Americans do not
- Strengthen entrepreneurship in the African American community
- Drop in innovation in established industries
- Falling numbers of African American owned businesses
- The poor are getting poorer; rolls are up for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families



- Many jobs do not pay well
- Few job opportunities for high school students (part-time and summer jobs)

Strategy Ideas

- Support a county-wide effort for economic development; support homegrown businesses
- Increase productivity; increase capital investment per employee; use high tech processes and tools
- Increase parental involvement in the education of their children
- Mentoring; incubators; high schools could offer entrepreneurship courses; career center is one of the best in the state; increase the availability of credit; explore starting an African-American owned credit union
- Encourage college students to start up entrepreneurial ventures, with assistance from college teachers
- Indianapolis has a vibrant African American business community; invite successful leaders from Indianapolis to support efforts in Elkhart County
- Use abatements to attract companies that pay high wages and salaries; attract high-tech manufacturing companies; consider attracting suppliers to the Hummer plant in Mishawaka
- Companies could advertise openings in school newspapers

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Key Issue/Priority: Redevelopment

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Redevelopment of brownfield areas: underutilized and abandoned houses and buildings (14)

Strengths

- None listed

Weaknesses

- None listed

Opportunities

- Maximize the use of developed areas through better land use policies (2)
- Better land use planning: improve core areas in cities and gateways to cities, and redevelop brown-fields and vacant land within cities
- Develop greater tax uniformity in the cities and the county
- Preserve farmland through the redevelopment of underutilized land already within cities
- Downtown Development

Threats

- None listed

What the research tells us

- Central Elkhart (City of) saw stagnant growth rates between -2.3 and 5.2% (location of many brownfields?)
- Development pressures in Bristol, Elkhart, Goshen areas are threatening prime farm land

Implications/opportunities for action

- Declining downtowns/central cities are a disincentive to development of any kind
- The values of current citizens and existing business match those of all people and businesses – real downtowns/vibrant central cities are essential quality of life components
- Redevelopment is an essential component of economic development, community development land use planning

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Deterioration of center-city areas in Elkhart.



Strategy Ideas

- 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.

Input from Focus Groups

Major Concerns

- Neighborhoods where no one wants to live
- Businesses are moving out of the African American community in Elkhart.
- Decline of center-city areas
- Redevelopment takes a great deal of financial support

Strategy Ideas

- Create human and economic commerce in downtown areas; provide incentives for businesses to be downtown
- Develop waterways; build beautiful office facilities downtown; use abatements to encourage re-development in core city areas; use public funds to clean up areas and then work with private developers to create new uses
- Enlist the support of major corporations

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Key Issue/Priority: Educational Attainment

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Strengthen educational attainment; preparing the current and future workforce (36)
- Strengthen early childhood education and services (6)

Strengths

- Educational opportunities

Weaknesses

- Lack of educational attainment (5)
- Lack of early childhood educational services (2)
- Wide range of performance in school districts
- Lack of affordable [public] higher education

Opportunities

- Energize youth as our future workforce

Threats

- Brain drain – educated young people seek jobs elsewhere

What the research tells us

- There is a variance in the performance of local schools
- Elkhart Community Schools have the highest per pupil expenditure, the lowest average teacher salary, the lowest passing percentages rates on the ISTEP +, 2nd lowest SAT scores, 3rd and 6th highest “intending to pursue higher education
- Northridge HS (Middlebury) has the 3rd highest per pupil expenditure, 4th highest average teacher salary, highest passing percentage rates on ISTEP+, highest SAT scores, highest # intending to pursue higher education
- Goshen HS has, 2nd highest per pupil expenditure, 2nd highest average teacher salary, 2nd lowest passing percentage rates on ISTEP+, 5th lowest SAT scores, 4th lowest # intending to pursue higher education – BOTTOM LINE there is no direct correlation between the resources expended at schools and the performance of students
- In Elkhart County, in 2000, 15.5% of people over 25 years old had 4yr degree or better, compared to the state at 19.4% and national at 24.4%
- In Elkhart County, in 2000, 24.3% of people over 25years old did not have High School Diploma compared to 17.9% at the state level and 19.61% at the national level
- The Elkhart County elementary school population is projected to grow by 11.1%, the high school population is projected to grow by 20.1% by 2010
- According to standards, 258 new teachers will be needed to maintain current service levels in 2010



- Building sizes are adequate by national standards but will need to be expanded to provide 251 more classrooms

Northern Indiana State of the Workforce 2002 Report

- Elkhart County has the highest growth rate in state of K-6 population – need strategies to cope
- Of the 121 under-supplied occupations, most will require advanced skills training
- Vocational enrollment in the region is below that of the state
- All employees report that the Hispanic/Latino workers are more loyal, productive, and dependable and demonstrate a higher work ethic than other segments of the workforce.

Implications/opportunities for action

- If we cannot attribute the variation in HS performance to the imbalance in resources - to what can it be attributed? School officials may be well aware of many of the reasons and of existing research that provides other clues, we need to determine what efforts are on-going, are they having any affect, do they just need better support, or is it time to look at something new?
- Clearly some schools have a higher percentage of challenged students, but if the perception is that the school system is weak, individuals and businesses will be reluctant to locate in the area.
- Develop/expand youth leadership skills and opportunities through civic involvement
- Focus more attention on the understanding/acceptance of other cultures
- The education attainment level in the current labor force is a concern as it is in many communities. Can more be done to deliver easily accessible adult education – electronically or otherwise? Is their /could there be a countywide Business Education Council that meets on a regular basis to address issues of school-to-work, customized, job-related training, portable credentials (GED, Associate Degrees, Technical Certification etc.)
- Pursue opportunities to expand relationships with local colleges/universities to deliver accessible adult education?
- Explore the potential of building/developing/attracting other institutions of higher education to Elkhart County
- A well-educated, highly skilled workforce attracts technology oriented, higher paying business and industry and vis-a-versa.

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Children are not getting a good start in their early years.
- Strengthen skills in the workforce
- Strengthen educational attainment

Every year we have 200 students who leave high school without graduating

Strategy Ideas

- Devote more resources to early childhood services and education

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- 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
- Involve parents in the educational process
- Keep track of them; keep offering them educational opportunities

Input from Focus Groups

Major Concerns

- Public schools in Elkhart and Goshen are not attractive to some professional families
- Low income Whites and African Americans are getting expelled from school at young ages
- Lack of career direction among young people
- Some large high schools have a 25% dropout rate
- High turnover rates among students in some grade schools
- Some schools have large numbers of recent immigrants
- Many executives and professionals have the perception that Elkhart schools are really bad

Strategy Ideas

- Enrich school curriculum and extra-curricular activities; any high school graduate will be given financial support for post-secondary education
- Work with parents; help them develop skills for home ownership and family life
- Get involved in volunteer mentor programs
- Make school mandatory though age 18
- Provide high-intensity English programs



Key Issue/Priority: Government Coordination/Land Use Planning

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Strengthen county-wide land-use planning: roads, utilities, sewer, water, sprawl, growth management (44 persons with this priority)
- Strengthen cooperation and coordination among elected officials and among local, county, and regional planning agencies; also concern for coordinated implementation (37)
- Lack of public transportation (2)

Strengths

- Good inter-governmental cooperation

Weaknesses

- Lack of land-use planning; no master plan for infrastructure development (4)
- Fragmentation of efforts – governmental and private; sometimes relates to the use of incentives (3)
- Inadequate community leadership (2)
- Poor management of growth
- To improve the quality of life and attract anyone to our area, we must consider the physical (biological) community to meet human needs.
- Need collaboration among municipalities, across county borders – regionally.
- Lack of public transportation
- Inadequate road transportation capacity
- Weak north-south transportation routes
- No direct air service

Opportunities

- Maximize the use of developed areas through better land use policies (2)
- Better land use planning: improve core areas in cities and gateways to cities, and redevelop brownfields and vacant land within cities
- Develop greater tax uniformity in the cities and the county
- Preserve farmland through the redevelopment of underutilized land already within cities
- This Horizon Project effort to develop a countywide approach with more collaboration (5)
- Develop the attitude of being a county team rather than parochial city approaches

Threats

- Property taxes discourage business growth, retention, and attraction
- Lack of infrastructure planning, especially roads
- Urban sprawl
- Lack of public dollars makes it difficult to be proactive, e.g., infrastructure development and

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guiding growth

- Excessive government regulation and un-funded mandates
- Environmental impact of business and farming practices
- Poor quality of surface water

What the research tells us

- The highest density areas are central Elkhart and central Goshen
- Population decentralization is occurring as people move outside of developed areas
- Between 1990 and 2000, highest growth rates have occurred in less dense areas – east of Elkhart and southwest of Goshen (27.2% - 34.8%)
- Growth rates in the Bristol area have been as high as 42.2%
- Most prime farmland is located in the southern two-thirds of Elkhart County
- Growth pressure from Bristol, Elkhart and Goshen is threatening portions of this prime farmland
- Central Elkhart saw stagnant growth rates between -2.3 and 5.2%

Implications/opportunities for action

- If the county feels that protection of prime farmland is of importance, appropriate policies and development controls will need to be implemented to guide development to more suitable locations. Consider:
 - Instituting agricultural land preservation policies
 - Conservation Easement and Impact Fees
 - Implementing a detailed site plan review process
 - Using farmland preservation techniques such as the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system for site plan review
 - Determining Urban Service Boundaries
 - Instituting Cluster Development Overlay Zone
 - Adopting Agricultural ‘Buffer Zones’
 - Raising minimum lot sizes for new subdivisions in unincorporated areas of the county
 - Strengthening cooperation and coordination among local county and regional planning agencies
 - Proactively determine what changes each community wants
 - Expand involvement by the county in the redevelopment process
 - Review and amend the county and city land use plans
 - Evaluate the creation of an Elkhart County Unified Planning Agency
 - Redevelop Brownfields
 - Support established neighborhoods
 - Make sure the plan approval process is not an impediment
 - Support public/private partnerships
- Physically attractive communities, with managed growth and development help attract and keep businesses and population; they also help maximize diversification of the economic base through tourism development, attraction/retention of corporate headquarters, business support services, and high-tech companies – those demanding a higher quality of life.



- Development/preservation of agriculture offers opportunities as an economic development strategy – value-added, import substitution, alternative crops, etc.

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Historical distrust between Elkhart and Goshen.
- More north/south transportation capacity needed.

Strategy Ideas

- Build relationships and partnerships; combine services; work toward a unit government.
- Develop and maintain C.R. 17 as a traffic corridor and not a retail area.

Input from Focus Groups

Major Concerns

- Community revitalization requires a great deal of courage on the part of elected officials
- Control sprawl
- The three-acre rule for the development of rural agricultural land is very bad: encourages urban sprawl and takes a lot of land out of cultivation
- Create more transportation options
- Some elected positions are filled by persons who have modest skills for the position

Strategy Ideas

- Provide needed support to elected officials
- Develop county-wide water and sewer system
- Require rural development to be in 80-acre subdivisions; require connection to municipal sewer and water systems
- Companies could provide incentives for car pools
- Support highly skilled persons for public office

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Key Issue/Priority: Cultural Diversity

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Cultural diversity – must deal with it well, including housing and social services (20)

Strengths

- Caring; shared values

Weaknesses

- Lack of ability to embrace cultural diversity

Opportunities

- Build Hispanic leadership
- Greater integration of diverse cultures
- Capitalize on cultural diversity

Threats

- Dual language problems
- Comfort with the status quo

What the research tells us

- 1990-2000 the Hispanic/Latino population grew by 486%, from 2,869 to 16,300, from 1.8% of the population to 8.9% - 2 and a half times the state concentration (3.5%), but less than the national percentage.
- **All employees report that the Hispanic/Latino workers are more loyal, productive, and dependable and demonstrate a higher work ethic than other segments of the workforce. (Northern Indiana State of the Workforce 2002)**

Implications/opportunities for action

- Many Indiana communities are experiencing increases in the Hispanic/Latino population and are unprepared to deal with integrating them fully into community life. In many instances these new citizens are the primary source of new and needed employees. Failing to maximize the potential of all community citizens can prove very costly in the long run.
- For the high-tech industry sector, a skilled workforce is close to number one on the list, they and their workforce is attracted to high quality of life communities – recreation, night-life, and broad acceptance of diversity.

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Social integration of Hispanic immigrants.



- Leadership development in the African-American community.

Strategy Ideas

- Support English as a required standard; expand after school programs.
- Invite African-American participation in all aspects of the community.

Input from Focus Groups

Major Concerns

- Cultural diversity is not viewed as a positive resource by many

Strategy Ideas

- Support the norm for relating to a wide range of people.

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Key Issue/Priority: Community Development/Social Services

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Opportunities to attract commuters to become residents; implications for housing, quality of life, and education (13)

Strengths

- High quality of life (3)
- Availability of jobs (2)
- Cultural diversity
- Educational opportunities

Weaknesses

- Severity of poverty in concentrated areas
- The community is overtaxed by the high need for social services
- Lack of decent affordable housing
- Current capacity of medical services is not able to meet demand, especially access to dental care
- Social services, family values, family erosion, single head of family – services to strengthen single head of family or weak dual parent families; most juvenile crime comes from weak parenting skills; support of developing children in education, interpersonal skills need to be enhanced (3)
- Gentrification of inner cities; crime/drugs we have poor people who are poorer than anywhere else in Indiana

Opportunities

- Attract commuting workers to be residents in Elkhart County (2)
- Improve quality of life through better social services
- Establish a Nursing School (2); two good hospitals, aging society
- Use natural resources for parks and recreation
- Governmental entities have good bond ratings, so that they can borrow cheaply to make infrastructure investments
- Energize youth as our future workforce

Threats

- Increase in non-traditional families
- Drugs
- Crime and personal safety
- Perceptions that crime and educational attainment levels are worse than they actually are
- Dual language problems
- Aging population may place a greater burden on the working generations



- Average per capita income is lower than the national average
- Poor persons are poorer than state averages
- Lack of skilled workers for technology industries because of poor educational attainment and the brain drain of educated workers to other parts of the county
- Comfort with the status quo
- Lack of fun

What the research tells us

- Between 1990 and 2000 the Elkhart County population grew by 17% (27,988). This was almost double the state rate of 9.7%
- 54% of the growth has been natural, the remainder has been migration into the county
- 20.8% of the current population is in the 5-18 year olds (school age); 60.3% 18-65 years old (workforce); 10% over 65 years old
- The growth rate is projected to slow a little to 15.4% between 2000 and 2010 with a slightly larger percent of 65+ year olds
- The Social Services Impact Model used indicated the following:

Child care – not meeting current need

- In 2000, Elkhart County had only 132 licensed day care facilities with a maximum capacity of 2,556 children – it is estimated that 5,230 children, under 5 years are requiring day care. An estimated 5,785 children under 5 years old will require childcare by 2010

Parks and Recreation – not meeting current need

- Planning standard is 15 acres per 1000 population for park set-asides. There is a current deficit of 240 acres to meet standards and a projected deficit of 664 acres by 2010 – based on planning standards

Health Services – not meeting current need

- The county currently has 460 hospital beds and according to current standards needs 531. The model indicated that a total of 844 beds would be needed in 2010, if demand were to be served at the county level. Increases in population and an aging population will put further pressure on the demand for qualified health care personnel, especially nursing which is struggling to meet current demands at state and national level. The intense competition among local/regional hospitals will determine the extent to which local demand continues to be filled by local service providers.

Public Safety

- The model does not indicate any shortage in current police personnel; police vehicles; fire personnel; fire vehicles; EMS personnel; and EMS vehicles. There will be a normal demand for increases in these resources for 2010

Libraries

- Experiencing growth pressures but also a shift in demand due to the electronic revolution.

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Book stocks will need to be increased slightly but building size and seating needs must change due to change in usage

Kids Count Study:

- While per capita income rose and unemployment dropped in the county between 1990 and 1999, the percentage of children in poverty increased from 9.9% to 11.7%
- Child abuse and neglect decreased significantly in Elkhart County between 1990 and 1999
- The number of home schooled children increased from 15 – 479, between 1990 and 1999
- The percentage of low birth weight babies increased between 1990 and 1998 – during the same period the percentage of mothers receiving prenatal during the first trimester dropped from 74.5% to 69.6%
- While the rate of infant deaths decreased between 1990 and 1998, the rate of child deaths has increased
- Non compliance with youth tobacco access laws has risen from 9.1% in 1997 to 30% in 1999

Northern Indiana State of the Workforce 2002 Report

- Elkhart County has a decrease in available childcare, despite having the greatest number of children (in the region) in the child-care age range

Implications/opportunities for action

- Is there an opportunity to attract the commuting labor force to move to Elkhart County? Is it a shortage of appropriate housing? Are the school systems a problem? Is quality of life a concern?
- Is the creation of an Elkhart County School of Nursing a possibility?
- The demand for social services seems to exceed the supply. Why is that happening? What strategies might assist in reducing the demand?
 - If childcare needs were met, would that enable more parents to take a job or obtain training and/or education?
 - If public transportation were available, would that also allow people to get to work and maintain employment?

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Be effective in solving problems and making improvements
- Many in the creative class are choosing not to live in Elkhart County
- Entrepreneurs often fail to cooperate and achieve potential synergies
- We have the most unwed teenage mothers in the state
- Financial and educational challenges for single-parent households
- Increase health and decrease health care costs; health care costs are a big concern

Strategy Ideas



- Look nationally to find best practices in all areas of development; bring in national experts
- 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
- Strong leaders are needed to direct some of the entrepreneurial impetus
- First, recognize that this is real and that it is a problem
- Encourage churches to take an active role in providing leadership on issues of family life and morality
- Cooperation between our two major hospitals; form a holding company to own both hospitals

Input ideas from Focus Groups

Community Development – Culture, Values, and Ambiance

Major Concerns

- People leave Elkhart County when they grow up, looking for more tolerance and more job opportunities.
- College-educated young people do not want to live here
- Intolerance of diversity in race and religion; closed-minded people
- Too much pressure for religious conformity in some high schools
- Provincialism; lack of a county-wide attitude
- Divorce rate is in the 90th percentile for the nation
- Teenage pregnancy rate is one of the highest in the state
- We live in an automobile culture and assume we need to drive everywhere to shop and dine
- Athletic rivalries inhibit county-wide attitude
- Few activities for young people
- Weak visual appearance for entrances into Elkhart

Strategy Ideas

- Build a culture which values diversity
- Develop attractive jobs, activities, entertainment, recreation, restaurants, etc. Create higher visibility of music events at Goshen College; create a large outdoor amphitheater
- Develop appreciation for new people and new ideas
- Encourage persons to relate to a wide range of people
- Develop projects with county-wide involvement; use media effectively to create awareness and ownership; create non-competitive county-wide activities for high school students; create ways for teachers from all school systems to get to know each other
- Provide more comprehensive education on relationships and sexuality in the high schools
- Support the teams from all communities that are doing well
- Provide better publicity; start more outdoor activities;

Community Development – Healthcare

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Major Concerns

- Lack of access to healthcare services
- Elkhart County is first or second in the nation for carcinogens in the air according to EPA data; we are a medical hotspot for cancer
- Lack of health services near the African American community in Elkhart; Heart City Health Clinic recently relocated
- Substance abuse is a large problem; a large part of the workforce struggles with addictions
- 70% of 18 year-olds are sexually active

Strategy Ideas

- Develop partnerships with major employers; support provider organizations that are considering sliding scale fee structures; advocate for universal health insurance; reduce costs through greater collaboration between hospitals in Goshen and Elkhart
- Pay for rehabilitation rather than more jails
- Provide better education on sexuality and contraceptives

Community Development – Neighborhoods & Housing

Major Concerns

- Quality of housing
- High levels of social isolation
- Lessen dependency on social service agencies

Strategy Ideas

- Develop mixed income subdivisions; expand use of Section 8 housing programs; provide education on home management; have a modular housing development in downtown Elkhart; legislate ownership requirement in trailer parks; hold rental owners to high standard; owners should pay fines if there are drug arrests in their rental units
- Build stronger neighborhoods and volunteer associations
- Build supportive neighborhoods and other social structures, such as churches

Community Development – Social Services

Major Concerns

- Integrated community development is needed; bring together health, home, education, and transportation
- Childcare is a huge need
- Seniors are becoming a huge part of the social services needs

Strategy Ideas

- Churches can provide the vision and programs for balanced community development
- Secure resources to provide better compensation for childcare workers



Community Development – Personal Development

Major Concerns

- Self-doubts among African Americans: “if it ain’t White, it ain’t right.”
- Personal financial management
- New immigrants buy houses at inflated prices
- Increase self awareness and responsibility
- Hispanics have a hard time getting a drivers license
- Many youth age 16 to 24 have no housing and no job skills

Strategy Ideas

- Provide African American mentors and role models
- Provide education on personal money management
- Educate new immigrants on how to negotiate lower house prices
- Provide education on how to build inner strength; churches can provide self-development training.
- Review drivers license policies and procedures

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Key Issue/Priority: Leadership Development

What you told us

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Danger of being too comfortable with the status quo (6)

Strengths

- Entrepreneurial spirit (reported by 9 tables)
- Strong work ethic (4)
- Small town environment with big city can-do attitude
- Conservative values (hard work, honesty, family, etc.)
- Caring; shared values
- Good community leadership (3)
- Political will to make changes and improvements

Weaknesses

- Lack of ability to embrace cultural diversity
- Poor image – old manufacturing community
- Failure to adopt daylight savings time
- Fragmentation of efforts – governmental and private; sometimes relates to the use of incentives (3)
- Inadequate community leadership (2)
- Lack of development of future leaders
- Successful business owners earn their money in Elkhart county and then leave the county for retirement and spend their money elsewhere

Opportunities

- This Horizon Project effort to develop a countywide approach with more collaboration (5)
- Develop the attitude of being a county team rather than parochial city approaches
- Energize youth as our future workforce
- Emphasize positive aspects and potential

Threats

- Exodus of corporate headquarters to other communities; losing the ability to support local activities (2)
- Not leading in a positive way on cultural diversity (2)
- Lack of leadership for cooperation among communities



- Lack of implementation following a planning process
- Loss of central business districts

What the research tells us

- In relative terms Elkhart County has done fairly well economically but, the economic base is not as strong as it was, there has been a decline in per capita income and continuing instability of the state, national and global economy.

Implications/opportunities for action

- The state is struggling with a budget deficit, which is, and will continue to affect the finances distributed to communities.
- Communities face increasing operating costs, more un-funded mandates and a decline in the resources needed to address them – this situation contributes to the challenges facing community leaders.
- The participants in the Community Leadership Workshop very clearly state that, only through collaborative, forward thinking leadership will Elkhart County create and implement a vision for the future and a strategic plan designed to overcoming current challenges, manage change and build a strong, inclusive and economically sustainable community.
- The loss of middle and high-income jobs has undoubtedly resulted in a shortage of community leaders. Other communities have found success in overt efforts to bring new and young people into leadership positions

Input from Individual Interviews

Major Concerns

- Leadership development in the African-American community.
- Will the next generation of entrepreneurs meet the challenges.

Strategy Ideas

- Invite African-American participation in all aspects of the community.
- Identify young talent; provide them with challenges and opportunities.

Input from Focus Groups

Major Concerns

- Stronger leaders are needed in the African American community
- Develop new leaders
- Leaders need to have a county-wide vision

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Strategy Ideas

- Provide leadership training in groups and one-on-one coaching; increase African American participation in Chamber leadership programs
- Help potential young leaders get to know older and established leaders; established leaders need seek out new leaders; develop formal or informal mentor relationships; employers need to encourage community involvement
- Chambers could do some cooperative leadership development programming