# Thriving Communities
# Thriving State
### INDIANA UNIVERSITY PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE

## SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS ONLINE

As part of the public rollout of the *Thriving Communities, Thriving State* project, staff from the Public Policy Institute conducted a series of five regional forums around the state in 2015 to gather feedback from local leaders and residents about the past, present, and future of their respective communities. At these events, attendees participated in roundtable discussions about their commuity (self-selected as either urban, mid-sized, or rural/small town). For those who were unable to participate in person, comments and feedback were collected electronically through the project webpage. The following is a summary of the online comments that were submitted from residents of urban, mid-sized, and rural/small town communities in Indiana.

## Urban
## What are your biggest concerns about the future for urban communities in Indiana?

- Infrastructure/transportation
  - Not adequately maintaining/upgrading streets, sewer, etc.
  - Lack of quality public, 21$^{st}$ century mass transit system
  - Poor quality, availability of high-speed internet even close to downtown
  - Poor water infrastructure planning and management
  - Planning and investment are too oriented towards serving the interests of automobiles and not people

- Crime/neighborhoods/housing
  - Urban poverty leads to higher crime and deteriorating neighborhoods
  - Substance abuse is growing problem
  - Shortage of affordable, quality housing
  - Disintegration of the family unit exacerbating the impact of poverty
  - Gentrification displaces low-income and non-homeowner residents
    - Redevelopment is often limited to single lots as large tracts are not available for private development
  - Too many vacant commercial buildings that need to be updated or demolished

- Education/schools
  - Local schools are failing
  - State K-12 policy is too parochial and designed to save money, not to invest in education
  - Education system not doing a good job of preparing students for a 21$^{st}$ century, information economy
  - College affordability combined with difficult job market putting financial burden on college graduates

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- Government/Politics/Leadership
  - Poor civic engagement/low voter turnout
  - Gerrymandered legislative district do not reflect communities they represent
  - Property tax caps limiting the ability of cities to address their unique needs and implement bold vision
  - Annexation laws make it difficult for urban communities to provide adequate services and infrastructure expansion planning
  - Planning and investment is short-sighted and not strategically concerned with the long-term wellbeing of urban communities
  - Block zoning segregates housing and the delivery of services and is a barrier to creating integrated communities

- Attitude/culture
  - Anti-tax attitude limits ability of government to do more than merely meet basic community needs

- Economy/people
  - Income inequality and pockets of urban poverty
  - People with economic means move to the suburbs
    - Young professionals head to the suburbs after having children
  - Difficulty in attracting and retaining "creative class"

- Environment/health and well-being
  - Lack of urban greenspaces
  - Public spaces are not valued and created
    - Not enough parks and greenspace
    - Kids disconnected from nature and the outdoors
  - Urban communities need more pedestrian and bicycle friendly paths and trails
  - Inadequate healthcare for poor communities

# What assets do urban communities in Indiana have to build upon?
- Cultural/Urban amenities
  - Entertainment and retail options
  - Museums, sports, restaurants
  - Authentic urban living

- Community/Civic Engagement
  - Strong corporate investment
    - Eli Lilly, Cummins, etc.
  - Tremendous civic and community leadership
  - Strong sense of community
  - Great tradition of public/private partnership

- People
  - Diverse population by age, race, religion, education, and income
  - Friendly and welcoming culture

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- Economy
  - Great employers
  - Large employment base to draw employers
    - Large tax base

- Education
  - Lots of education options, school choice
  - Great colleges and universities that are connected to their urban communities

- Infrastructure
  - Great highway connectivity
    - Easy to get around for such a large city (Indianapolis)
  - Growing investment in making walkable/bike-able communities
  - Well managed and affordable utilities

- Quality of place
  - Proximity to natural beauty (Brown County, State parks, Lakes and waterways)
    - Quality greenspace (White River Park, Monon Trail)
  - Great cost of living compared to similarly situated urban communities
    - Affordable housing options
    - Low taxes

- Government/Leadership
  - Strong tradition of making necessary reforms and executing bold visions
    - Unigov, Sports oriented urban center
  - Cooperative/collaborative environment between public, private, and non-profit sectors
  - Local government good at maintaining basic service delivery
    - Good at responding to local needs effectively and efficiently

## What are some examples of recent successes in urban communities in Indiana?

- Specific Projects
  - Evansville
    - Revitalization of Franklin Street in Evansville
    - Habitat of Evansville collaboration with Glenwood School neighborhood
    - Vanderburgh County library system
    - Loft program in downtown Evansville
  - Fort Wayne
    - Fort Wayne downtown redevelopment
    - Grand Wayne area in Ft. Wayne (including Tin Caps urban stadium)
    - Riverfront development in Fort Wayne
  - Indianapolis
    - Neighborhood revitalization of downtown neighborhoods in Indy (Fountain Square, Herron Morton, Cottage Home)
    - Canal project in Broad Ripple
    - Mid-North TIF District in Indianapolis (bike lanes)

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- Land use on Mass Ave. in Indianapolis
- Downtown Indianapolis (Market Square, Warehouse District)
- Indianapolis Cultural Trail
- Pacer bike share program
- IMPD partnerships with local non-profits to address crime and youth
  - Carmel
    - Downtown development
    - Creation of arts district
    - Efforts towards creating density
  - Bloomington
    - Completion of B-Trail
    - Downtown mixed use housing and hotel development
    - South Dunn St. development

- General
  - Public private partnerships to redevelop neighborhoods
  - City planning that recognizes the importance of density and mixed-use building
  - Enhanced cultural amenities and improved delivery of public services
  - Resurgence of "urban" living movement → walkable communities, cultural amenities, social life
  - Growing awareness of public art and greenspace

# What should we be doing to make a dramatic positive difference 10 years from now in urban communities?

- Community/engagement/culture
  - Promote volunteerism and strengthen neighborhood identity
  - Embrace diversity
  - Promote greater civic awareness and participation
  - Comprehensive plan to address the causes and effects of poverty

- Investment
  - Rebuild core infrastructure
  - Provide comprehensive, high quality public transit
    - Invest in greenways and alternative transportation options
  - Enhance sewer and water infrastructure
  - Extend/improve telecommunications infrastructure statewide
  - Improve/Update/Maintain urban corridor to make communities more attractive to visitors and outsiders
  - Mandate sewer provision for all development to restrict the use of septic systems statewide
  - Develop strategies to combat urban blight
    - Provide loans to encourage development in depressed neighborhoods
    - Offer incentive for private developers to redevelop and infill
    - Create community wide land bank or land trust program

- Government/leadership
  - Relax property tax caps or replace lost revenue to local governments
  - Adopt reasonable annexation policies
  - Grant cities more autonomy to present referendums to fund public transportation and supplement budget shortfalls
  - Correct the unfair tax burdens between urban and suburban communities
  - Democratize development decisions
  - Stop thinking and planning in years and start thinking/planning in decades
    - Think regionally and globally about how to let cities thrive
  - Support efforts to enhance quality of place

- Education
  - Adequately fund public schools to enhance public education
    - Implement deliberate effort to attract and retain families
  - Connect college students to the business community
  - Limit/eliminate the voucher program

- People/identity
  - Think strategically how to retain young people with families
    - Losing too many young families to the suburbs
    - Tax policy unfairly burdens urban cores to the benefit of wealthier suburban residents
  - Promote efforts to connect people as a region
  - Support families to help reduce poverty and encourage community participation

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## Mid-sized

## What are your biggest concerns about the future for mid-sized communities in Indiana?

- Growth/development
  - Exponential growth makes planning and development difficult
    - Communities losing their "charm" and identity
    - Difficult to meet demand for services and grow in a thoughtful and controlled manner
  - Crime, traffic, and poverty that comes with growth
  - Lack of diversified local economy
    - Many communities too dependent on single industry or large employer

- Investment/funding
  - Adequate investment in public infrastructure to attract developers and businesses
  - Insufficient funding to maintain roads and bridges
  - School funding that reflects the financial realities of growing student population in communities with exploding population growth

- Government/leadership/policy
  - Lack of home rule and inability to creatively raise revenue to meet community demands
  - Zoning and development laws that incentive sprawl

- Community
  - Drug and its associated behaviors are destroying communities
  - Poverty strains places strains on local government budgets and the delivery of social services
  - Decline of sense of community and interconnectedness
    - Lack of engagement and participation in political and civic life
  - Creating communities that attract and retain young people

## What assets do mid-sized communities in Indiana have to build upon?

- History/community
  - Unique locally owned restaurants, wineries, breweries, historic theaters, fine dining
  - Strong civic organizations, such as community foundations
  - Strong sense of community
  - Beautiful architecture and historic buildings
  - Well-educated and engaged population
  - Tradition of successful events and festivals

- Attitude/vision
  - Friendly and welcoming
  - A strong sense of community
    - Respect for community and neighbors
  - Common goals collectively pursued

- Quality of life/size
  - Big enough to provide amenities, but small enough to maintain strong sense of community
    - Smaller population helps to sustain civic connections among residents
    - Quality shopping, dining, and entertainment with "small town feel"
  - Safe place to raise a family
  - Quality schools
  - Clean air, open spaces
    - Not overcrowded
  - Quality, affordable housing

# What are some examples of recent successes in mid-sized communities in Indiana?

- General
  - High philanthropy rates
  - State tourism efforts

- Specific Projects
  - Franklin
    - Converting flooded area into a forest
  - Johnson County
    - Indy Brew Bus tour loop into Johnson County
    - ASPIRE Johnson County
    - Journey Johnson County – volunteer tourism effort
  - Plainfield
    - Rails/trails and high-quality public recreation facilities
    - Plainfield High School – quality school and beautiful facility
  - Fishers
    - Amphitheatre – strong public support and free programming
    - Connor Prairie and Prairie Plates
  - Valparaiso
    - Downtown revitalization
      - Use of roundabouts to improve traffic flow
      - Focused effort for sports and attractions
    - ValpoNEXT – citizen led initiative to develop vision to drive community forward
  - Carmel
    - Arts and Design District
  - Noblesville
    - Nickel Plate Arts programs
  - New Albany
    - Downtown revitalization
    - Walking bridge connecting Jeffersonville to Louisville

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# What should we be doing to make a dramatic positive difference 10 years from now in mid-sized communities?

- Investment
  - Expand transportation options and work to connect large communities more effectively
    - Expand trails and bicycle connections regionally
    - Prioritize building walkable, accessible, connected communities
  - Improve/Better maintain existing infrastructure
  - Create incentives for downtown investment
    - Allow for greater TIF flexibility
  - Build a better recycling program. Tear down buildings that are in poor condition and make others build there prior to tearing up farm land and acreage. Only allow a certain number of big businesses to build. These businesses create lots of pollution and destroy the environment in almost every aspect
  - Fund the cultivation of arts and culture

- Education
  - Develop/Fund comprehensive education policy
    - Pre-K through adult learning opportunities
  - Support local community schools that foster a sense of community

- Government/Policy
  - Increase revenue that state provides to mid-sized cities and counties
  - Increase the minimum wage to promote family stability

- Attitude/Vision/Engagement
  - Protect our reputation for Hoosier hospitality by promoting tolerance for others
  - Take action to address decline in political engagement and civic connectedness

- Economy
  - Be more aggressive in attracting professional employers
  - Create business friendly climates
    - Take efforts to attract high-tech jobs

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## Rural/small town

## What are your biggest concerns about the future for rural/small town communities in Indiana?

- Government/policy
  - o The loss of property rights if Planning and Zoning is instituted in Montgomery County
  - o Tax policy that is unfair to mid-sized communities
    - State ties the hands of local government in delivering public services by restricting ability to raise revenue
    - Tax caps hurting local government

- Community/investment
  - o Smaller communities are struggling to compete as world becomes more regional/global
    - Need support for businesses to locate to smaller communities
  - o Ability of smaller communities to meet the needs of an aging population
  - o Insufficient resources to finance local government, maintain roads, fund p-12 education, and meet public employee benefits/pension obligations
    - Residents and leaders lack the willingness to take bold action to change the trajectory of rural communities

- Environment
  - o Surging white tail deer population damages the environment and puts motorists in danger

- People/well-being
  - o A dangerous disparity in income and educational attainment
  - o Drugs and associated criminal activity
  - o Limited availability of healthcare and educational opportunity
  - o Poor employment prospects
    - Lack of jobs and under-skilled workforce
  - o Lack of understanding of the value/importance of education

  - Attrition/decline
    - o Small businesses in rural communities are fighting to survive
    - o Businesses that close leave behind vacant and unmaintained commercial property that deters investment
    - Vicious cycle – businesses leave, taxes must go up

## What assets do rural communities in Indiana have to build upon?

- People/community/culture
  - o Citizens that are creative and resourceful
    - hardworking
  - o Friendly people with a strong sense of community
    - Support for one another
    - Pride in history

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- o Great community engagement
    - ▪ Support local businesses, loyal to community

- Quality of life
    - o Low cost of living
    - o Very little crime
    - o Open air, space to move, natural beauty
    - o No traffic/low congestion
    - o Slower pace/Relaxed living
    - o Family-oriented living
        - ▪ Close to urban centers, but with small town feel

- Land/infrastructure
    - o Transportation options for seniors
    - o Productive farm land and water resources
        - ▪ Tax income for agriculture helps support communities
    - o Lots of room to build homes with land

# What are some examples of recent successes in rural communities in Indiana?

- General
    - o Increased internet access
        - ▪ Expanded broadband/fiber optic connects rural schools, local government, and the public to the global economy and makes attracting businesses possible
    - o Stellar Communities program
    - o Increased opportunities for expansion to four lane highway

- Specific Places
    - o Montgomery County
    - o Lebanon
    - o Milltown Elementary (Crawford County) is a four star school
    - o Salem High School (Washington County) marching band won the state championship
    - o Downtown revitalization and arts projects in Auburn, Kendallville, and Ligonier

# What should we be doing to make a dramatic positive difference 10 years from now in rural communities?

- Legislation/Policy
    - o Get rid of Planning and Zoning
    - o Place deer on the nuisance animal list
    - o Return to single class high school basketball
    - o Return to Eastern Standard Time
    - o Get rid of the Local Option Income Tax which discourages economic growth
    - o Stop awarding property tax abatements
    - o Repeal/Raise the property tax caps

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- Education
  - Make college more accessible and affordable
  - Fund quality after-school and summer school programs

- Investment
  - Support quality public schools
  - Create endowments for small, local non-profits to meet community needs
  - Expand access to high-speed broadband internet
  - Provide water and sewer to rural communities

- Environment
  - Protect fresh water and aquifer from agricultural runoff

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# General comments

## What should we be doing to make a dramatic positive difference 10 years from now in Indiana?

- Government/leadership
  - Create full-time legislation or extend the legislative session
    - Too short and too easy for a single issue to distract from really important issues
  - Leadership development for people of all ages
  - Enhance civics education so residents can better engage with processes
  - Rational redistricting that reflects communities, not politics
    - Creation of non-partisan redistricting commission with community input
  - Implement significant ethics reform to restore trust in government
  - Consolidate/Streamline/Modernize government to ensure efficiency and responsiveness
  - End partisanship and the elevation of party over good policy
    - One party rule is not good for Indiana
  - Eliminate redundant/wasteful township government

- Investment
  - Build or expand high-speed passenger rail as part of comprehensive regional mass transit system
    - Connect urban communities by rail
    - Complete Governor Daniels vision for statewide trails system
  - Invest in education for all Hoosiers
    - Expand preschool and early childhood education programs
    - Make higher education more accessible and affordable
  - Complete I-69 and partner with Kentucky to build I-69 bridge over the Ohio River
  - Maintain/replace infrastructure to promote growth
  - Improve access to quality and affordable housing
  - Invest in people, not businesses
    - Ensure that that most disadvantaged Hoosiers have access to resources and services to help break the cycle of poverty

- Policy/legislation
  - Decriminalize marijuana or allow for medical marijuana
  - Limit or prohibit concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)
  - Repeal property tax cap/Identify alternative revenue sources to supplement local government budgets
  - Eliminate incentives for sprawl and encourage urban redevelopment
  - Develop policies to meet the needs of aging communities, especially in rural areas and small towns
  - Address poverty by adopting policies to mitigate its causes and effects:
    - Support efforts to reduce teenage pregnancy
    - Develop re-entry programs to help with those released from incarceration to help them develop job skills and find employment
  - Incentivize historic preservation with tax credits

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- o   Consolidate small rural schools to connect them to greater resources and opportunities
- o   Depoliticize education policy
  - ▪   Fund all schools
  - ▪   Let teachers teach
- o   Make state income tax more equitable

- Attitude/culture/vision
  - o   Encourage proactive and comprehensive thinking
    - ▪   Remove incentives for short-term thinking
  - o   Encourage regionalism and collaboration over parochial and competitive mindset
  - o   Build authentic communities of tolerance
    - ▪   Celebrate and embrace diversity

- Economic/employment
  - o   Work to bring high-wage, middle class jobs to all communities
  - o   Promote strong business climate through investment in technology

- Environment/nature
  - o   Protect our natural resources
  - o   Create more public green spaces in every community
  - o   Reduce our dependence on coal for energy

# What issue would you most like to see addressed in Indiana?

- Infrastructure/investment
  - o   Inadequate public transportation
    - ▪   Create mass transit system to connect regional centers
  - o   Extend access to affordable high-speed internet to all communities
  - o   Help local government maintain/fund needed infrastructure
    - ▪   Help protect and manage water resources
  - o   Create incentives for urban infill development and promote density
  - o   Invest in quality of place
    - ▪   Support public art, landscaping, lighting, public spaces,
    - ▪   Think design, not just functionality

- Legislation/policy
  - o   Support the middle class by raising the minimum wage
  - o   Limit school vouchers and increase funding for public schools
  - o   Decriminalize marijuana
  - o   Relax restrictions on annexation
  - o   Raise/Repeal property tax caps
  - o   Reform welfare, social services to eliminate fraud and promote efficiency
  - o   Tougher gun control laws

- Economy/employment
  - o   Support positive business climate

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- Government/leadership
  - Create nonpartisan legislative districts to reduce partisanship and division
  - Judicial system should be entirely state funded
  - Increase transparency and utilized open and fair accounting
  - Give local governments the autonomy to fund essential services
    - Allow for local government revenue replacement
  - Provide adequate funding/staffing for state regulatory agencies
  - Truly promote home rule and let local government control their own future
    - More local control over education, agriculture, zoning, utilities, etc.
  - Find ways to collaborate and cooperate
  - Increase civic engagement
    - Better engage communities in the political process

- Well-being/people/community
  - Proactive efforts to combat poverty
    - Address growing educational and income inequality
  - Address crime and illicit drugs
  - Help connect rural/small communities to larger regional centers and greater economic opportunity
  - Access to high quality healthcare
  - Promote fitness/wellness through state programs and incentives
  - Protect our natural assets and environment
  - Invest/Promote urban greenspace

- Education/People
  - Elevate educational attainment/Reduce dropout rate
  - Better connect schools and students to higher education
    - Increase accessibility/affordability of higher education
  - Support children in poverty, immigrants, the aged
  - Protect the family unit
    - All families, not just the a traditional model that doesn't reflect the way people live and love

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