

# **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR BROWN COUNTY, INDIANA**

Approved by the Board of Commissioners on \_\_\_\_\_

**2011 Revisions**

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## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MISSION STATEMENT**

To provide guidance on decision making regarding Brown County land use, public service and zoning that enhances the quality of life for the residents based on the county's natural beauty and rural atmosphere.

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is important to understand that the updated comprehensive Plan will be the foundation and justification for the zoning ordinances and zoning maps revisions, as well as updated regulations. Equally important is the use of the comprehensive plan as a reference base for rezoning and all special exception cases heard by the Area Plan Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals, respectively. There is a special need to understand that planning should identify and encourage those land uses that have been positive over time, especially those that contribute to the distinctive character of this "special place" called Brown County. Planning can guard against rapid change and growth that are incompatible with existing infrastructure and the county's "quality of life vision."

### **HISTORY OF BROWN COUNTY**

The area now known as Brown County was acquired by the United States from the Native Americans in the 1809 Treaty of Fort Wayne. In 1820 William Elkins became the first pioneer to clear land and build a log cabin in what became Johnson Township and by 1830 an estimated 150 settlers had arrived.

Until 1835, the Brown County acreage was a part of Monroe, Bartholomew and Jackson counties and in that year a petition was presented to the Indiana legislature requesting a new county. On February 4, 1836, the legislature passed a bill providing for the formation of a county named Brown in honor of Major General Jacob Brown, a hero of the War of 1812. The county was 16 miles by 20 miles, totaling 320 square miles.

The census of 1840 reported a population of 2,354, and by 1890 there were 10,308 people in Brown County, living primarily by agriculture and logging. During the next 40 years the county population was reduced by half.

In 1908, the train brought the county's first artists. As word spread, a group of 25 artists formed the Brown County Art Colony. Soon after, the attraction of the artists and beauty of the hill country drew tourists. In 1926 the Brown County Art Gallery was founded.

During the 1930's the development of Brown County State Park and road improvements ended the county's isolation. By 1935 the Hoosier National Forest held 35,000 acres in Brown County and a Soil Conservation Service office had been opened; and, since 1935, over 1,000 ponds and lakes have been constructed. In 1941 the Federal Government bought 3,000 acres in northeast Hamblen Township to become part of Camp Atterbury. By 1950, shops lined Van Buren Street in Nashville and the Brown County Art Guild formed in 1954. In the 1950's Cordry and

Sweetwater lakes were built and in 1959 the surrounding 2,700 acres and the two lakes became a conservancy district. This has become the most heavily populated area of the county. In 1952 the passenger train service ended.

By 1966 little of Johnson Township remained in private hands after land was taken for Lake Monroe, so the remainder was divided between Van Buren and Washington townships, establishing the four townships as we know them today: Washington, Van Buren, Hamblen and Jackson. Population in 1980 was 12,377. In 1982 the Deam Wilderness, consisting of 3,000 acres, was established in southwest Brown, Jackson and Monroe counties. By 1990 the population had grown to 14,080. At that time the migration rate to Brown County was the second highest in the State of Indiana.

Also by 1990, over 80% of eroded farmland, due to inappropriate land use, had been healed and there were several small animal and crop farms. Raising tobacco and Christmas tree farming reached a peak circa 1990 and have gradually decreased since then. Only 95,018 acres of Brown County were taxable by 1990, contributing to the challenge of financing local government.

Since 2000 the State Forester has encouraged best management practices for logging and timber stand improvement on public and private woodlands. Of the county's 207,360 acres, 12.5% are suitable for farming and 68% are forestland.

During the 2000's, additional expenditures for the county and the school system resulted from reassessment problems and property tax delays. A record-breaking flood in 2008 and subsequent recovery added heavy burdens to many homeowners and businesses.

In 2010, a major portion of the acreage in Brown County continues to be non-taxable contributing to the difficulty of the financing of local government. A few examples of the non-taxable land include but limited to, National and State Forest, State Park, Church Camps, Land trust, Charitable owned, and others.

At this time in Brown County, the Cordry and Sweetwater lake areas are the most heavily populated. Tourism continues as the primary business and numerous art and craft studios are scattered throughout the county, their products being sold locally and throughout the country. Visitors are curious about the rural lifestyle, the history of the local people, and the artists and continue to be drawn to scenic Brown County year round.

## **GROWTH TRENDS FOR BROWN COUNTY**

People continue to come to Brown County both to visit and to live. We must plan to ensure that the residents' reasons for choosing Brown County as a place to live are protected and preserved. Population projections are of crucial importance in future planning. Except for a spurt in 1989, the United States birthrate has been dropping since 1957. Since many young people leave Brown County for better job opportunities, demographers consider Brown County an "old" county.

Understanding the growth trends and population projections for Brown County is critical to moving forward with development planning.

Brown County experienced growth from 14,131 in 1990 to 15,135 in 2003. The trend then reversed itself and has decreased in each of the years since to 14,548 in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, Indiana Business Research Center). It should be noted that the population of individuals 65 and over has increased slightly each year since 1990.

The estimate of total housing units in 2009 is 8,192, an increase from the 2000 reports of 7,163 total units. Also in 2009, it was reported that 5,800 units were occupied. Since tourism is a big part of Brown County, it is important to report that 940 of those units are considered as seasonal or for recreational use.

The Stats Indiana software program projects that by 2015, the estimated population in Brown County would be at 15,307. However, the future residential growth in Brown County will be contingent upon the availability of areas capable of withstanding residential growth. With the assistance of this Comprehensive Plan, proper planning can be established to preserve the county's natural beauty and rural atmosphere and still allow for the projected growth.

### **ELEMENTS THAT GUIDE THE PLAN**

The long-range welfare of Brown County and its residents are dependent upon careful adherence to sound planning principles. Some of these principles are universal and would apply to any county, while others are unique to Brown County itself. Ultimately, not only the list of principles but also the relative weight given to each principle will be different for every county. It is important that this comprehensive plan explain the principles (elements) that should be followed when making decisions and also the relative importance of each principle, as this will help those who must make difficult decisions. This will be especially important in those situations where a decision must balance competing principles.

While most other counties are quite properly concerned with their future growth and welfare in terms of such concepts as economic development, impact of transportation routes, and proximity to urban centers, these are not the only factors to be considered in anticipating or planning the future well-being of Brown County. The real wealth of Brown County is its unique and abundant physical features and cultural characteristics. For example, when one drives along the peaceful rural roads of Brown County, billboards and off-premise commercial signs do not intrude into the scene, and this allows one an experience that once was common but now is rare. In this and other ways—its natural beauty, rural character, slow growth, and the diversity of its people—Brown County satisfies some of the nostalgia for a time when life seemed simpler and more manageable. Those who choose to visit here and live here recognize that this is a mixture of reality and illusion, yet they find the compromise acceptable.

Thus, the desire to preserve becomes a major element in guiding a comprehensive plan for Brown County. The desire to preserve has always been important in Brown County; this desire is a common theme throughout the art culture and it is the basis for the creation and maintenance of Brown County State Park, Yellowwood State Forest and other public areas. But the desire to preserve extends not only to natural features but also to ways of life. It is this principle that provides the most plausible guideline for the county's future growth, by appropriate utilization

and careful protection of our natural and cultural values. This does not say that Brown County need forego growth or economic development, only that such activities must take place with careful regard to conserving the county's natural and cultural heritage.

The desire to discourage economic decline and foster economic development are two sides of the same coin, and both are important elements in guiding a comprehensive plan for Brown County. Of the two, the desire to discourage economic decline is the more important, for without it, there will be too few residents to preserve anything. In this regard, existing economic activities, such as farming, logging, arts and crafts of all sorts, tourist-oriented businesses, and businesses that supply the goods and services that make community life possible—grocery stores, restaurants, drug stores, banks, health care businesses, construction-oriented businesses, home maintenance businesses, etc.—should be protected, encouraged, and accommodated, as long as they remain compatible with the desire to preserve. For the same reason, the ability of residents to commute easily to jobs in neighboring counties and to operate mail-based, telephone-based, and internet-based businesses in Brown County should be protected and, where possible, enhanced. And finally, the desirability of Brown County as a place to live in retirement also should be protected and, where possible, enhanced.

These are the considerations that underlie the Brown County Plan, hereafter considered in terms of the land use and public facilities.

## Overall Goals

These goals are by no means in order of importance.  
Numbers are strictly for reference purposes.

1. To preserve, protect and ensure wise and efficient use of limited and non-renewable natural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.
2. To encourage the preservation of Brown County's rural and scenic atmosphere.
3. To encourage land use that considers the effect on the health, safety and welfare of people and the environment.
4. To provide and require adequate standards for future economic development in the county that recognizes compatible relationships among land use and the environment.
5. To recognize the importance of sustainable forest management and agriculture within Brown County so that practices are compatible with environmental sustainability.
6. To provide for safe and reliable transportation and communication systems in the county to serve the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.
7. To consider the impact of changing land use development on adjoining land-owners.
8. To develop land use policies and regulations that are appropriate for the county.
9. To maintain or improve enforceable ordinances.
10. To encourage programs that help the public understand ordinances and practices.

# **Land Uses:**

## **Development (Residential Uses)**

### **Objectives**

1. To identify areas within the county that are appropriate for residential development according to the overall goals.
2. To encourage residential development in areas where public capital expenditures, service costs and environmental constraints are affordable financially and ecologically.
3. To identify the appropriate density of residential areas in relation to land capacity, other surrounding land uses, infrastructure and environmental impact.
4. To encourage a variety of housing types to meet the needs of the county's residents.
5. To establish land use criteria that will minimize conflicts between residential lifestyles and other land use options.
6. To require utility services and road capacity within multiple lot subdivision, planned urban developments and multi-family complexes.
7. To protect the integrity and stability of existing residential areas from encroachment by incompatible uses.
8. To encourage open space and natural area provisions within subdivisions, planned urban developments and multi-family complexes.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Growth and revitalization of existing residential areas within the county should be encouraged.
2. New residential areas should be developed with buffers between them and commercial and industrial areas.
3. Residential development should be encouraged only in areas where both approved water supply and approved sewage handling facilities can be provided.
4. Residential development standards should at least meet the minimum State of Indiana's guidelines for construction permits within 100-year-flood hazard areas. In those flood hazard areas, cut and fill should be discouraged and restricted.
5. Residential development should have minimal impact on adjoining property, neighbors or public roads.
6. Residential development and design should be encouraged to protect agricultural and forested areas and quality of open space.
7. Design of new residential subdivisions should be encouraged to occur in a compact pattern.
8. Future residential development should be encouraged in already developing areas or near existing communities to provide for more economical infrastructure.
9. Concepts of design and landscape should be encouraged when they protect and preserve natural features such as vegetation, topography and water. A design should fit the site rather than the site manipulated to fit the design.

10. There should be a minimum separation of driveway cuts onto public roads to maintain public safety and traffic flow. Joint driveways with adjoining properties should be encouraged.
11. Construction should follow acceptable erosion control and soil conservation techniques.
12. Restoration or rehabilitation of existing structures should be encouraged.

## **Development (Commercial Uses)**

### **Objectives**

1. To identify areas within the county that are appropriate for commercial development according to the overall goals.
2. To encourage commercial development in areas where public capital expenditures, service costs and environmental constraints are affordable financially and ecologically.
3. To identify the appropriate density of commercial areas in relation to land capacity, other surrounding land uses, infrastructure and environmental impact.
4. To protect the integrity and stability of existing commercial areas from encroachment by incompatible uses.
5. To encourage open space and natural area provisions within commercial developments.
6. To recognize that commercial development should serve the community's economic development needs.
7. To encourage commercial development that takes into consideration the county's environment and culture.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Growth and revitalization of existing commercial areas within the county should be encouraged.
2. New commercial areas should be developed with: limitations on curb cuts, use of sign controls, landscaping, setbacks, off-street parking, common service areas, pedestrian/vehicle separation, and buffers between commercial and residential areas.
3. Commercial development should be encouraged only in areas where both approved water supply and approved sewage handling facilities can be provided.
4. Commercial development standards should at least meet the minimum State of Indiana's guidelines for construction permits within 100-year-flood hazard areas. In these flood hazard areas, cut and fill should be discouraged and restricted.
5. Commercial development should have minimal impact on adjoining property, neighbors or public roads.
6. Construction should follow acceptable erosion control and soil conservation techniques.

## **Development (Industrial Uses)**

### **Objectives:**

1. To identify areas within the county that are appropriate for industrial development according to the overall goals.
2. To identify and encourage the types of industry that are complementary to and compatible with the physical, human, economic and environmental resources of Brown County.
3. To encourage the retention and expansion of existing industry within the county.
4. To identify the appropriate density of industrial areas in relation to land capacity, other surrounding land uses, infrastructure and environmental impact.
5. To protect the integrity and stability of existing industrial areas from encroachment by incompatible uses.
6. To encourage open space and natural area provisions within industrial developments.
7. To recognize that industrial development should serve the community's economic development needs while maintaining its environmental integrity.
8. To encourage industrial development that takes into consideration the county's environment and culture.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Industrial land uses should be located and designed only in accordance with the capability of the site to accommodate such development.
2. Industrial development standards should at least meet the minimum State of Indiana's guidelines for construction permits within 100-year-flood hazard areas. In those flood hazard areas, cut and fill should be discouraged and restricted.
3. Rezoning of land for industrial uses should be discouraged in areas that are inappropriate.
4. Zoning regulations should recognize the different needs and impacts of various types of industrial uses.
5. The design of industrial sites should adequately provide for the internal traffic circulation and other operational needs including employee parking, loading, storage, etc.
6. Open space on industrial lots should be properly environmentally managed.
7. A buffer should be maintained between industrial uses and residential uses.
8. Outdoor storage and salvage should be screened when visible from a public roadway.
9. Construction should follow acceptable erosion control and soil conservation techniques.
10. Industrial development should be encouraged only in areas where both approved water supply and approved sewage handling facilities can be provided.

## **Environmental Concerns**

### **Objectives**

1. To identify and encourage conservation and protection of the county's natural resources.
2. To maintain and enhance the quality of water, air and land.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. The preservation of environmental resources such as forests, geological features, water and wildlife should be evaluated whenever there are changes in land use.
2. Transportation and utility system improvements should not be encouraged through areas that possess unique geological or vegetative features, or in areas that have a limited ability to support development.
3. Development should follow standard practices that protect and preserve the quality of existing or potential supplies of water.
4. Wetlands should be identified, preserved and protected.
5. Soil erosion should be minimized in all land developments.
6. Development should have minimal detrimental environmental impact on adjoining property, neighbors or public roads.
7. Drainage standards for new development should provide that development runoff rates are similar to pre-development runoff rates.

## **Open Space and Public Recreation Areas**

### **Objectives**

1. To develop methods which identify and preserve property in the county that is appropriate for public recreation and open space.
2. To encourage open space and public recreational uses in locations such as historic areas, 100-year-flood hazard areas, waterways, environmentally significant and scenic areas.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Public recreational areas should be developed according to their potential to enhance their community and neighborhood.
2. The dedication of open space should be encouraged.
3. Public access to public open space and recreational areas should consider the impact on private property.

## **Forestry and Agricultural Land Use**

### **Objectives**

1. To protect the integrity and stability of existing forestry and agricultural areas from encroachment by incompatible uses.
2. To encourage sustainable forestry and agricultural land use in Brown County.
3. To establish standards that protect agricultural land uses from unnecessary encroachment and protect forest land from degradation.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Forestry and agricultural land uses should be encouraged and continued.
2. Large lot requirements should be continued in areas set back from state and county roads, currently zoned as forest reserve.
3. Alternative development concepts, such as clustering may need to be considered when attempting to preserve agricultural and forestry land and open space.
4. Agriculture and forestry lands should be considered when siting other development uses. Residential, commercial, industrial and recreation uses or planned unit development should be sited to protect agricultural and forestry lands.
5. All confined feeding operation shall meet all Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) guidelines.

# **Public Services:**

## **Emergency Services**

### **Objective**

1. To provide health, safety and public welfare for county residents.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Encourage dry hydrant installation in new and existing ponds or lakes for neighborhood fire protection.
2. Encourage property owners to clearly identify their property with posted 911 location numbers.
3. Encourage the updating and public access of the Global Information System (GIS).
4. Developments should encourage emergency vehicle accessibility.
5. Developments should incorporate fire hydrants or flush valves whenever possible.

## **Roads and Transportation**

### **Objective**

1. To improve traffic flow and safety on all roads in the county.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Efforts should be made to separate pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic.
2. Adequate rights-of-ways should be secured by the county for use in road maintenance and safety activities as well as utility purposes.
3. Encourage line-of-sight requirements at all intersections.
4. Developments should have minimal access points to roads.
5. Due regard should be given to the adequacy of current roads prior to building new roads.
6. Development should be located in a manner that will minimize traffic congestion and not unduly burden nearby areas.
7. Encourage preservation of scenic roads and bridges.

## **Sewage Treatment and On-Site Septic Systems**

### **Objective**

1. To provide safe sewage treatment systems.

### **Supporting Policies**

1. Any development requiring sewage treatment systems must be able to qualify for a septic system that complies with the applicable regulations established by the Indiana State Department of Health and any relevant Brown County Ordinances.
2. Septic system sites should be clearly mapped and identified to show location of storage tank and absorption field.
3. Septic systems near any public body of water may require special guidelines such as setbacks and lot size to protect the quality of water.
4. Placement of any sewage treatment system should take into consideration its effect on nearby properties.
5. Maintenance of sewage treatment systems is strongly encouraged.
6. Encourage sewage treatment systems to be as ecologically sound as possible.