Monroe County Quality of Place & Workforce Attraction Plan

BLOOMINGTON ECONOMIC
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DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
BLOOMINGTON • MONROE COUNTY

Clear Creek Trail

Contents

Hikers in Hoosier National Forest

What Is Quality of Place?

Of all the places we know, we call only one "home." Home means more than an address. Home is where we feel a sense of belonging and commitment: we know we are valued and cared for there. Home has a special quality of place unlike any other.

Our sense of home is nested within our community, county, region, and state. These also have a quality of place. "Indiana Uplands is a great area to raise a family," we say, or "There's so much growth happening in Monroe County." Areas with a strong, positive quality of place attract people, opportunity, and investment. Young people and families put down roots where their talents and interests can flourish. Retirees move there to enjoy rich local culture and find rewarding new ways to contribute their talents. Entrepreneurs start businesses there. Employers expand workforces there. Together, we prosper.

This magnetic quality of place doesn't happen by chance. It's built, by the people of a community, through strategic, focused work toward a shared vision.

What Is the Purpose of This Plan?

This plan outlines how we can move from pockets of prosperity to a thriving future across all of Monroe County. By honing Monroe County's unique identity and quality of place, we can attract—and retain—enterprising, hardworking people who share our appreciation for the natural beauty of the Indiana Uplands region, for rich cultural experiences, and for good neighbors who care about and support each other. Together we can build an in-demand workforce that draws opportunity to us. Our track record of growth over decades of deep changes to our local economy and the world at large already proves we've got what it takes to adapt to new challenges. We're ready to bring the character and work ethic we've inherited from our limestone heritage, that "Cutter" spirit, into a new age of innovation—and to reap the rewards of our labors.

This plan is the result of an Advisory Team (see page 48) representing many citizens and organizations analyzing years of data, studying strategic plans from throughout the county, listening to focus groups, surveying what residents cherish about our community today and worry about for tomorrow, and putting all the pieces together to understand:

- What is our current quality of place in Monroe County?

- What deters people from staying or moving here?

- As a county, what improvements to our quality of place will draw the people, resources, and opportunities we want for our future—and keep the great talent we already have?

A planning grant from Regional Opportunity Initiatives, Inc. (ROI) made this work possible. This plan exists to serve cities, towns, county commissions, nonprofits, educational institutions, religious organizations, main street organizations, economic development organizations, citizen groups, and others working to build a prosperous future for Monroe County.

Use This Plan To:

- Learn what gives Monroe County its unique identity, what factors our growth and prosperity hinge on, and how enhancing our quality of place will lay the foundation for success (see Our Story, page 7).

- Investigate what feedback from residents, economic data, demographics, and current trends reveal about our county's current quality of place (see What Residents Tell Us, page 11, and What Data Reveals, page 21).

- Understand how that data shapes this plan's goals and strategic direction (Putting It All in Context, page 37).

- Explore what kinds of programs, projects, and changes will help us meet those goals (Solutions, page 40).

- Align policies across the county and collaborate to achieve the plan's vision.

- Apply for implementation grants for projects that align with Solutions (page 40), through ROI or other federal, state, or charitable funding (see page 50 for contact information regarding next steps for ROI application).

- Access data and reports gathered during the discovery process (see Appendices and Supporting Documents for Grantwriters at https://swcindiana.org/ready-communities/plans/).

Lotus World Music and Arts Festival Parade

Our Story

A Community of Makers

Monroe County has long been a community of makers: industrious people driven to build, create, and innovate—together. We've made furniture, televisions, refrigerators, and elevators. We make limestone cladding used in local homes, national monuments, and even the Pentagon. We make award-winning craft beer, wine, and artisanal spirits. We make a surprising range of great food. We make *a lot* of music, theater, and art! We make complex medical devices and biopharmaceuticals. We make online training programs, digital marketing strategies, and cloud-based SaaS software. And at Indiana University, we make leaders, teachers, and entrepreneurs; opera stars, poet laureates, and pro athletes; Nobel-prize-winning scientists and economists; and more.

What do these diverse makers have in common? They share a love of the land, a love of culture, and a love of community. The land is literally our bedrock; Monroe County was built on the limestone industry in the 1800s. Our stone heritage endures in our buildings, our industry, and our character. In Ellettsville, Stinesville, Salt Creek, Clear Creek, and small towns throughout the county, the scrappy, resourceful, team-oriented Cutter spirit lives on in

neighbors who look out for and help each other. Residents care, too, about preserving our rural landscape's natural beauty and character. In Monroe County, we cherish the benefits of outdoor life on 3,751 acres of park land and 121 recreational properties. In Bloomington alone, 35 miles of trails include some of residents' most beloved features, such as the B-line Trail. Ellettsville's Heritage Trail showcases limestone carvings and area history. Annually, thousands of cyclists from all over the nation ride in the Hilly Hundred to explore 50 winding miles of Monroe County and our Indiana Uplands neighbor Owen County.

And of course, we've long been exposed to a wide range of culture, arts, and entertainment. Tibetan monks in saffron robes buy vegetables from an Amish farmer at the Bloomington Farmer's Market. Indiana University (IU) brings in famous writers, scientists, and speakers, not to mention Broadway shows, art, theater, films, ballet, and world-renowned classical music. On IU game days, restaurants are packed with alumni and locals in red sweaters. Art fairs and hometown festivals like Harrodsburg's Heritage Days bring out residents in full force. Thousands visit the Monroe County Fair, where kids show their 4-H animals with pride. And when the sparkling canopy of holiday lights brightens the night winter sky, and the crowd roars with delight, you can feel the community spirit and see it in the faces around you.

Monroe County cherishes its small-town feeling, even with all our big-city cultural offerings. The country and the city are minutes away, no need for endless commuting. People know the names of their neighbors, the kids playing together, and the dogs straining at their leashes. We pride ourselves on being a welcoming, friendly place—a place that feels like home.

A Make-or-Break Moment

Monroe County has so much to offer and is already a special place that visitors often describe as "an oasis." And yet, our future is not assured. Monroe County is growing, but not enough young people who will drive the economy of tomorrow are choosing to call this place home. In fact, when we surveyed current residents, many told us believe they could have better prospects elsewhere. This plan explores the critical factors that will determine our economic future and lays out strategies to ensure that this place remains home for Indiana's best and brightest makers, and draws others from around the nation and the world. Here's a sneak peek at our findings from studying the data and gathering input from county citizens and employers.

Critical Factors for Growth

- Moving beyond pockets of prosperity to develop a strong quality of place across the entire county

- Overcoming the cultural divide between the City of Bloomington and the rest of the county

- Building an environment that will attract, grow, and support a knowledge-based economy and its workforce

- Developing more affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents

- Increasing small county communities' access to resources, culture, services, and leadership

- Closing the gap between our ideals of diversity and inclusion and our current reality

The Bedrock of Our Future

Focusing on quality of place countywide and leveraging it to attract an in-demand workforce is crucial if we hope to achieve Monroe County's long-standing goals for our economic development, residential development, and beyond. Consider these examples from Monroe County's Comprehensive Plan (2012, Appendix A):

- Retain current employers and diversify the economy by attracting new industries.

- Enable housing demand to be met while protecting the unique character of the built and natural environment with equitable new residential opportunity.

- Maintain and enhance the integrity of the County's natural features and protect the economic viability of the County's natural resources.

- Identify transit-oriented development opportunities in designated growth areas.

- Collaborate with other government agencies to provide efficient planning and delivery of services.

As we learned through our discovery process in creating this plan, these goals are equally important to our citizens, and they address those critical variables that will determine our future success. As the home of Indiana University and all its resources and talent, we also have a unique opportunity to help the entire Uplands region shift into the knowledge-based economy. Our workforce is already the most highly educated and hungry for more ways to apply their skills and grow their careers; we have the makings of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that, with attention and intention, can bring greater diversity of opportunity and higher wages for highly skilled work to Monroe County and Indiana Uplands.

Not convinced? Read on to learn what Monroe County residents already know, and the data support, about what makes our quality of place so special, what puts us at risk, and what we need to do, together, to lay the foundation for a prosperous future.

Bloomington Craft Beer Festival at Woolery Mill

What Residents Tell Us

In designing this plan, our first step was discovery: What can we learn from the people most affected by the quality of place in Monroe County, our current residents? What can we learn from the many studies and plans already created by the county, its cities and towns, citizen groups, and nonprofits? In this section, we'll discuss how we gathered citizen input on our assets, opportunities, and deficiencies and the results.

Quality of Place Survey

An anonymous online survey was created and distributed to current county residents through targeted emails through major employment groups and neighborhood associations, as well as to the community at large through the *Herald-Times*, which also ran an editorial in support of the survey. The survey yielded over 1,870 responses from all over the county. Visit https://swcindiana.org/ready-communities/plans/ to access the survey questions (Appendix B, QPWA Survey Questions 2019) and raw data (QPWA Survey Raw Data 1.28.19).

Key Survey Results

- Residents most value Monroe County's cultural amenities, parks & trails, and friendly/welcoming feeling.

- Residents most worry about the lack of affordable housing, lack of high-paying jobs, the negative impact of new development on local character, and inadequately addressed social issues (i.e., homelessness and addiction).

- Too many residents would consider leaving Monroe County, and the top reason they gave was to get a better job.

Most respondents, nearly two-thirds, were long-time residents who've lived in Monroe County fifteen years or more. Just under a third of respondents (30%) were originally from Monroe County.

Their top reasons for staying were:

1. Proximity to family

2. Job/employment

3. Outdoors/nature (nearly tied with cultural amenities and Midwestern hospitality)

Respondents who moved here and stayed cited these top reasons:

1. To pursue higher education

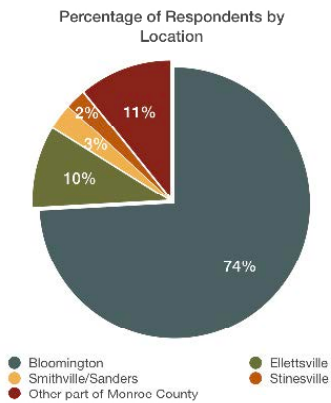2. Job/employment

3. Proximity to family

It's worth noting that proximity to family ranked highly for both natives and nonnatives; that is, Monroe County attracts people who already know the region and have connections here. More than a third of respondents report moving away and then moving back to Monroe County. Further, 57% of respondents said that given the opportunity, they would consider moving away from Monroe County.

The biggest threats to Monroe County's development, residents said, were:

1. There is not enough affordable housing.

2. There are not enough well-paying jobs.

3. New developments are negatively impacting the character of Monroe County. We aren't adequately addressing social issues. (tied)
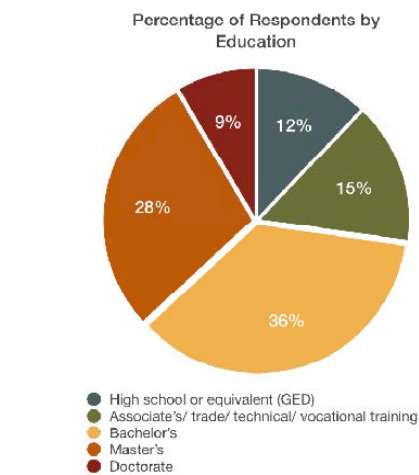
Respondent and County Demographics

74% of survey respondents were from the City of Bloomington. Bloomington makes up only 58% of the total population of Monroe County, so the results are somewhat skewed toward Bloomington residents. Ellettsville, Stinesville, and Smithville/Sanders were also slightly overrepresented, with only residents from other areas of Monroe County being represented at a lower rate than their proportion of the total population. However, data were disaggregated by location, and the key findings were stable across all residents, regardless of their particular location in the county.


Percentage of Respondents by Location

Legend: Bloomington, Ellettsville, Smithville/Sanders, Stinesville, Other part of Monroe County

74%, 11%, 10%, 4%, 2%

Source: Monroe County QPWA Survey, 2019

The survey is heavily skewed toward women, with two-thirds of total respondents identifying as female. The survey also skewed toward those with higher education; 70% of survey respondents had at least a bachelor's degree or higher, while only 45.8% of the county as a whole possess a bachelor's degree. Despite respondents' generally high level of education, more than half had a family income of less than $75,000.

Percentage of Respondents by Education

- High school or equivalent (GED)
- Associate's/ trade/ technical/ vocational training
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate

Source: Monroe County QPWA Survey, 2019

There was a good mix of ages from survey respondents, with a strong representation from the young adult (25–34) category, which has been traditionally lacking in Monroe County and is a slower-growing population. White residents made up the vast majority of survey respondents at 93.5%. Respondents also included those who self-identified as Latino, 1.2%; as African American, 1.1%; as Asian, .7%; as Native American or Alaska Native, .1%; as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, .1%; and as two or more races, 3.3%. White residents make up 86.4% of the county's total population, so the results are somewhat skewed toward white respondents. This is particularly noteworthy, as two of the top five assets valued by survey respondents were the friendly town atmosphere, and the welcoming nature of the community. In a county that is overwhelmingly white, these survey results do not necessarily represent the lived experience of racial and ethnic minorities in Monroe County, as our focus group results show.

Percentage of Survey Respondents by Age

- 75 +
- 25 to 34
- 65 to 74
- 18 to 24
- 55 to 64
- 45 to 54
- 35 to 44
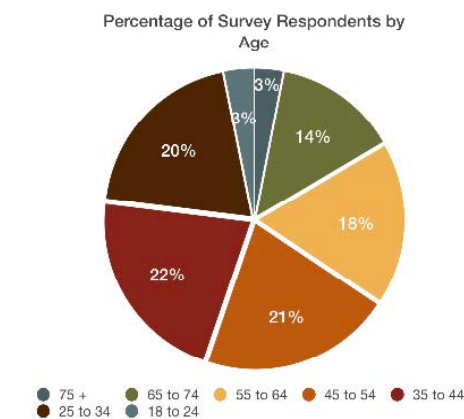
Source: Monroe County QPWA Survey, 2019

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held to gather in-depth feedback from six key subpopulations, including:

- Ellettsville residents (representing the largest county municipality outside of Bloomington)

- Stinesville residents (representing one of the smallest communities in the county)

- Young professionals (HYPE, Helping Young Professionals Excel, through the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce)

- HR professionals specializing in talent recruitment for area employers

- Minority residents

- "Bloomerangs," residents who have moved away and come back

- Additional input was sought through one-on-one outreach to nonprofit and citizen group leaders.

For raw data from each group, visit https://swcindiana.org/ready-communities/plans/ to access Appendix C, QPWA Focus Group Notes 2019.

Key Focus Groups Results

- Residents of Monroe County's smaller towns and villages prefer to live outside Bloomington; they value the different character, strong sense of community, and rural landscape of the county at large.

- Small towns would like to improve infrastructure, develop economically, and make other civic improvements, but may lack the full-time, paid, experienced leadership to make that happen.

- Residents from across the county cited a desire for more sidewalks and additional lighting on paths and sidewalks.

- Small towns need community hubs to stay vibrant: places and events where neighbors can connect and feel bonded to each other and their town.

- More quality community spaces and events that bring together the entire community population—rural residents, minorities, young professionals, and retirees—are needed.

- Minority residents do not feel the sense of welcoming community that Monroe County prides itself on. The legacy of the KKK in the region is remembered and felt today. Recruiters have trouble attracting diverse candidates to the region, to Monroe County, and to Bloomington.

- Young people don't feel the county offers adequate social and professional opportunities to connect and grow; they too lack a community hub.

- People who are not already familiar with and in some way bonded to Monroe County have a very hard time finding ways to connect to each other and this place.

- County residents do not feel their small towns receive adequate resources and development compared to Bloomington.

Ellettsville

Ellettsville is home to Monroe County's second-largest population. The Town of Ellettsville is home to Monroe County's second-largest population and has the most robust civic infrastructure outside of Bloomington with approximately 40 full-time employees, including a fully staffed Public Works Department, Planning Department, Fire Department, Police Department, and Clerk-Treasurer's Office. The Town has received around $250,000 in Community Crossings grants over the past three years (see https://www.in.gov/indot/3665.htm and https://www.in.gov/indot/3571.htm) and has repaired numerous streets with those funds; Ellettsville is also in the process of applying for several grants for trails and other amenities to improve its quality of living.

Ellettsville residents like having quick access to IU and Bloomington's culture and entertainment—but make no mistake, they do not want to live in Bloomington! They like Ellettsville's beautiful natural landscape and rolling hills. They *prefer* Ellettsville for what makes it different from Bloomington. It's more affordable to live there, and more conservative politically. Residents like its small-town feeling, and enjoy what they describe as "less red tape and bureaucracy," the "unfriendly" side of big-city government. They're proud of how Ellettsville is growing. Schools have improved a lot, and more kids can participate in sports and arts than in the more competitive Bloomington schools. I-69 has made proximity to Indianapolis and the airport even easier.

But with small-town advantages come small-town challenges. Some residents are resistant to the growth and changes that have occurred. Residents crave even more infrastructure improvements—lighting, sidewalks, and trails—than those the Town has added in recent years. There's a sense that Ellettsville doesn't have a brand identity to draw people in. One participant described the need to reconnect to root identity and pride: "We were important to reconstructing the pentagon after 9/11. When the trucks were taking the limestone out east, we lined the streets and waved at the trucks. It was inspiring, and it reminded us of how important we are in U. S. history. We need to reclaim that part of our character."

Stinesville

Residents are passionate about the tiny town of Stinesville: nearly 10% of its small population of approximately 200 residents came to the focus group. Like Ellettsville residents, they prefer the small-town feeling of safety and connection. This close-knit community helps each other.

But Stinesville has suffered some major blows. With the closing of its diner and its only school—the only public space for the community—residents fear for their future. "You have to have a reason to stay here, to have family here," they told us. "With no economic development, no public transportation, no broadband, no childcare, poor access to health care, housing stock in poor repair," and few paths or sidewalks, they wonder, and rightly so, what could entice new residents or businesses to take a chance on Stinesville.

Young Professionals

The young professionals focus group gave important feedback from the perspective of a highly skilled, diverse population that is actively searching for the right community to call home for their talents: the kind of workforce we aspire to retain, cultivate, and expand. None of the participants were married, nor had they graduated from high school in Monroe County; their average tenure in Monroe County was 3.55 years. As members of the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce's HYPE group for young professionals, they referred to "Bloomington" more than "Monroe County" in their comments. They were very aware of our unique combination of close proximity to the outdoors, sophisticated cultural amenities, and ease of access. Several had lived in bigger cities and knew from firsthand experience that the cost of living in places with similar cultural offerings is higher. Participants commented, "I can do everything I like here without the stress of big city living," and "Everything is so close!"

And yet, they also anticipated that if they truly wanted to advance their careers, they would have to leave to make more money elsewhere. They like the area, they may not want to leave, they may even consider returning—but first they will need to move somewhere else to raise their salaries. They stated that Indiana University's pay is lower than average, and that salaries are inflexible; IU is able to keep wages low, they said, because people want to live in the area and appreciate IU's benefits package. "We get criticized for leaving our jobs as young people," one participant remarked, "but that is the only way to increase our wages."

Young professionals described Bloomington as a progressive regional anomaly: one person commented, 'Some people question [why you would move to] Indiana, but if they know Bloomington, they seem to understand why you would come here." They see our diversity as very limited and dominated by students, who leave. That lack of diversity makes this place seem too small. They also said: IU is not diverse as an employer; Jewish, Asian, Bosnian refugees say it's not welcoming; conservatives don't feel welcome in Bloomington.

In addition to not seeing their professional opportunities or cultural fit, young professionals weren't sure there was a social or civic place for them in our community. They noted that it was hard to meet people; the culture caters to students and older people, but not to their demographic. Organizations, commissions, and non-profits, participants said, are made up of people who don't adequately address the needs of under-35-year-olds.

Other comments: shopping is bad; public transportation poor; it's too hard to get across town (from the west, industrial side of Bloomington to the east side where IU and downtown are).

Talent Acquisition Professionals

HR professionals are in a unique position to understand what attracts a workforce, and what deters it, from moving here. Their feedback aligns with what other focus groups shared.

What attracts people here?
- Existing connections to area, job opportunities for spouse
- Culture: recruiters "sell" Bloomington, not Monroe County
- Parks, nature, high number of woman-owned businesses
- Lower housing costs as compared to other urban areas
- Less traffic, lack of commute, ability to live in the country close to town
- Good schools

What are deterrents, if they're known ahead of time?
- Very hard to meet people outside family groups
- Bad shopping
- Lack of daycare
- Lack of diversity, especially for minorities

What do employers struggle with?
- Lower-wage hourly jobs and second and third shifts are very hard to fill.
- People want more flexibility than employers offer.
- People leave because of salary: deciding to commute to Indianapolis, or spouse gets new job.

Minority Residents

Our interviews with African American and Latino residents (in a focus group and one-on-one conversations) offer a bracing reality check to Monroe County's internal perception of its diversity and welcoming culture.

First, participants noted that they did not find our community to be diverse, not even at Indiana University, and they don't experience it as inclusive. "It thinks it's more progressive than it actually is," one person commented. Several referenced the legacy of the Ku Klux Klan and their discomfort with it. They described a complacency in local efforts to be inclusive and a need for area progressives to rethink their behaviors. IU recruits minorities to teach here by "selling" our reputation of diversity; but when new faculty get here, they realize that product doesn't exist.

The minority experience covers different economic situations, participants pointed out. Immigrants who are university affiliated feel more welcome than immigrants who are not, especially those who lack resources. Problems such as poverty, lack of housing, and lack of childcare impact minority residents' access to job opportunities disproportionately. People feel disenfranchised. There is very little cross pollination and contact between minority groups.

Second, participants noted the existence of a small black community with a strong identity, and said they stay here for that community. They also spoke to the importance of reaching back into the community to "bring people along to opportunity."

Bloomerangs

A small group of Bloomerangs, residents who moved away and then came back, echoed the young professionals group: they appreciated the outdoor benefits, open mindedness, and lower cost of housing compared to bigger cities. Some returned for family reasons; others found remote work that allowed them to live here. They noted a shortage of job opportunities, the persistent east/west divide within the city of Bloomington, and the difficulty of finding ways to become involved in government.

Kids Playing at Waldron, Hill and Buskirk Park

What Data Reveals

After gathering input from employers and residents of Monroe County, the next step in our discovery process was to gather quantitative and trending data from the many studies and plans our community has already finished over the years, and to start synthesizing their findings. In this section, we'll discuss what the data show about our current quality of place and workforce attraction, and where our strengths and weaknesses for the future lie. (Visit https://swcindiana.org/ready-communities/plans/ to explore all the data sources consulted for this plan.)
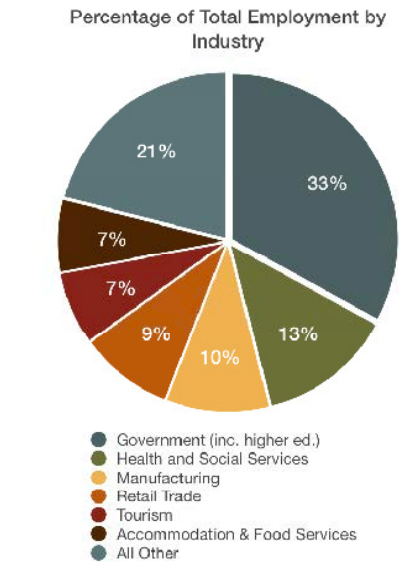
What Drives Our Current Economy

The economy of the world and our county has changed since the Showers Brothers Furniture Company opened and employed 1,200 at its peak in the 1920s. Monroe County has a low unemployment rate, even after the loss of many large-scale manufacturing employers starting in the 1990s (such as RCA, ABB Power T & D, Otis Elevator, and GE). This is a testament to the adaptability of our workforce.

Key Data Points

• Monroe County has survived profound changes in its industrial base and is taking steps to enter the knowledge-based economy, but further groundwork must be laid for the economy of the future.

• Monroe County attracts considerably more retirees than people of working age.

• Monroe County education level is already the highest in the state, and unemployment is below the state average.

• Household income, however, is below the national and the state average.

• Percentage of households that cannot meet a survival budget is higher than the state average.

• Housing costs in Monroe County are the highest in Indiana, and housing supply is insufficient.

• Diversity is a proud branding touchstone for Monroe County, but our reality does not align with our ideals or our self-image.

• The City of Bloomington's policies and priorities often conflict with the county's needs.

Manufacturing is still the third-largest industry in Monroe County, behind government (which includes Indiana University employees) and health and social services. Baxter, Boston Scientific, Catalent, and Cook have created an employment hub in life sciences that offers a range of employment opportunities running from hourly to executive positions. Our arts scene has blossomed, and spending from visitors who enjoy Monroe County's combination of culture and outdoor recreation fuels 6,648 jobs directly and indirectly. Tourism spending grew faster in Monroe County in 2017 than in the state as a whole (4.2% versus 3.7%; see Appendix D, Economic Impact Monroe County Tourism 2017).

Of the top five industries, the most lucrative earnings come from government and manufacturing, with average earnings around $76,000 (see Appendix E, Monroe County Wages by Industry 2018). However, both Indiana University and manufacturers offer a range of positions that include highly paid administrative and executive positions as well as low hourly wages; those average earnings may be skewed by the highest-paying roles. Further,

Percentage of Total Employment by Industry

- Government (inc. higher ed.)
- Health and Social Services
- Manufacturing
- Retail Trade
- Tourism
- Accommodation & Food Services
- All Other

Government includes state employees at Indiana University and Ivy Tech; IU employees dominate the category.

Source: Appendix D, Economic Impact Monroe County Tourism 2017, p. 12

manufacturing offers half as many jobs as government and in fact has lost 1,000 jobs from 2001 to 2018. Meanwhile, many jobs that are impacted by tourism, such as accommodation and food services, are growing, but average earnings are under $19,000. Retail trade has also lost jobs, with average earnings just over $30,000. And while Monroe County is known as a cultural destination for its offerings in the arts, paid jobs in the arts are few and income low.

In short, where are the high-wage jobs of the future going to come from?

Population Growth

The high-wage jobs we seek won't come from population growth, if current trends continue. In recent years (2010–2017), Monroe County has been fortunate, among the counties in Indiana Uplands, to experience growth (Appendix F, STATS Indiana Monroe County Population growth 2010-2017). However, when we look at *how* our population is growing in terms of attracting an in-demand workforce for the future, we see that growth in the oldest age group has far outpaced growth of working-age citizens. It's also worth noting that in the 45 to 64 age group, a third of the growth occurred in a single year—2011—perhaps due to a surge in recruiting that year. Since then, the growth of this experienced sector of the workforce has slowed considerably. (Note: regarding the youngest working-age group of 18 to 24, while Indiana University enrollment has grown, their population has actually decreased slightly.)

While the growth in retirement-age population speaks well to our existing quality of place in Monroe County (the cultural and natural resources that residents enjoy), it underscores what current residents have told us: there are not enough high-quality employment opportunities to draw younger people.

We might also recall that in the Quality of Place Survey, most people who moved here or stayed here stayed because of family connections. Similarly, a study by Visit Bloomington noted that 67% of visitors came for leisure or recreation, and half of those—fully a third of all visitors—are visiting family and friends. Only 14% of visitors came to Bloomington on business, by contrast (Appendix G, Bloomington Visitor Profile 2018). We can do a better job of drawing people to Monroe County who don't already have reason to come here, particularly residents and visitors who might become enterprising, entrepreneurial members of our workforce and local economy.

Percentage of Population Growth by Age

- 31% 65 +
- 43% 45 to 64
- 26% 25 to 45
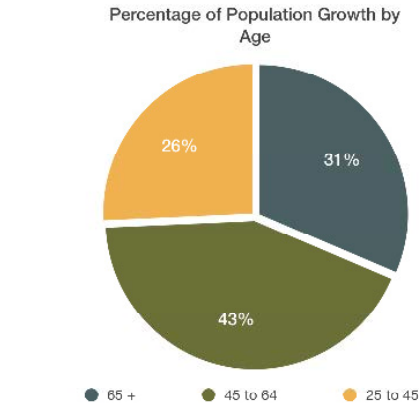
Source: Appendix G, Bloomington Visitor Profile 2018

Education and Wages

Will the new high-paying jobs we seek come with a more educated workforce? Yes and no. Monroe County faces a conundrum: it has the most educated workforce in Indiana Uplands and in the state, lower unemployment than the Indiana average, and yet, despite learning and working hard, residents don't earn here what they could earn elsewhere—and they know it. When asked on our survey, almost 60% of current residents would consider moving. Their top reason? To get a better job.
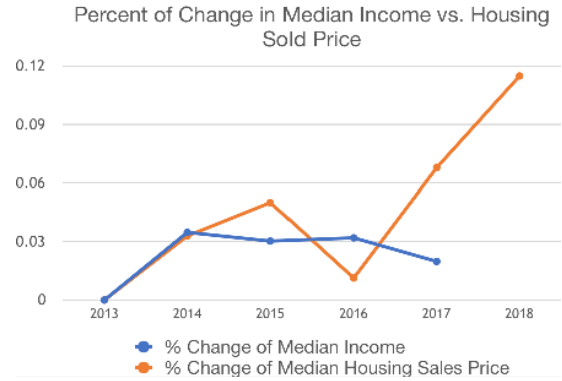
Over half of all residents over age 25 hold an associate degree or higher; high school graduation rates are also high. This raises questions about how the existing population's

education level correlates with the workforce needs of Monroe County employers, and how workforce supply impacts wages.

We must start by acknowledging that the lower wages are real, not a statistical distortion caused by the large student population, though that does affect our numbers on paper (in our 22% poverty rate, for example). While the number of children needing free and reduced lunch is lower than in the state as a whole (34.9% of school children qualify for free or reduced lunches versus the state average of 47.1%; see Appendix H, Kids Count Poverty Data Monroe County 2017), other data indicate that a third of families are struggling:

- 30 percent of households in Monroe County cannot meet the minimum income needed to maintain a household survival budget per the ALICE methodology; the state average is 25%. (ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.)

- 69 percent of the city's rental households are considered cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing costs. (See Appendix I, ALICE Report Monroe County 2016.)

Monroe County residents, too, tell us they are struggling. As we have seen, in focus groups and survey comments, low salaries and limited opportunities for career advancement were recurring themes. "Not enough well-paying jobs" was ranked the second-highest concern on our Quality of Place Survey, only slightly behind "Not enough affordable housing"—a related issue, as the chart shows. Median income is dropping, and selling prices for housing are escalating. With a more balanced cost of living, some residents might express less dissatisfaction with wages.

Percent of Change in Median Income vs. Housing Sold Price

- % Change of Median Income
- % Change of Median Housing Sales Price

Source: Appendix J, Bloomington MLS Housing Costs v Income 2013-2018

Highly educated workers noted that even jobs at Indiana University, the region's major employer, paid less than equivalent positions elsewhere in the nation. Young professionals noted that the only way to advance their careers or earn more money was to change jobs, and to move—even if it meant moving to a more expensive city in another state, even if they did not want to move.

Feedback about the employer perspective, through our focus group of talent recruiters, revealed important differences in how employers approach filling high-paying and low-paying jobs. When possible, employers like to "grow their own" talent from locals, but often they "buy" talent from out of Monroe County or the state to fill high-paying positions. For those earning high enough salaries to afford housing in Monroe County, and used to paying much more in bigger cities, the cost of living seems low by comparison, and the cultural advantages deep.

Meanwhile, employers struggle to fill low-wage hourly positions and second and third shifts. One factor may be that Monroe County's highly educated population is not appropriate for those positions. But Monroe County's workforce has a century of tradition in hourly manufacturing jobs as well. As housing costs rise, and childcare access remains a challenge, workers calculate the value of wages carefully. Even with more STEM-focused industries, today's manufacturing jobs do not pay as well as the lost jobs of RCA, GE, and other shuttered factories from forty years ago. A week of childcare for one toddler costs over $200, which will be more than half of a $10-an-hour worker's weekly after-tax paycheck. Factor in commuting costs, and it quickly becomes a losing proposition. In the absence of second and third shift childcare options, the available labor pool diminishes considerably.

Finally, it's worth noting that over 6,000 Monroe County residents commute to work outside the county (see Appendix K, STATS Indiana Commuting Data Monroe County 2016), including over 1,300 who take their skills to Naval Support Activity Crane in Martin County (see Appendix L, State of Bloomington Regional Economy 2018 BEDC for more details). As the third-largest employer in the state, Crane offers valuable opportunities to highly skilled workers.

Childcare Access

As the human resources professionals in our focus groups noted, lack of access to childcare is an obstacle for them in filling jobs, and as residents also told us, it's an obstacle in being able to take a job. "Access" can mean the ability both to pay a provider and to find a provider.

Cost quickly becomes an insurmountable obstacle to employment, especially for those with multiple children under five and those earning low hourly wages; a single parent living in poverty would pay an impossible 61% of income for high-quality childcare for one child (see Appendix M, ELAC Childcare Dashboard Monroe County 2018). The cost skyrockets with additional children, even in two-parent homes where both parents work. In fact, the Indiana Institute for Working Families found that a Monroe County adult with a preschooler and a school-age child needs to make $27.72 per hour or $58,535 annually to cover the costs of childcare and the most basic costs of living. In a family with two adults, one preschooler, and one school-age child, if both parents were working, each would have to earn $15.56 per hour, for a combined annual income of $65,730. (See Appendix N, Indiana Self Sufficiency Report 2016 for details.) In both examples, the cost of childcare will exceed the cost of housing.

Even with support for the cost of childcare, access remains challenging. In a focus group of low-income residents held by the City of Bloomington in 2017, one participant noted: "Childcare is unattainable for those without [subsidy] vouchers; even with vouchers, transportation is an issue" (see Appendix O, City of Bloomington ALC Childcare Draft 2 Report 4-16-17). Getting the voucher is itself an obstacle and the process is cumbersome and not streamlined. As participants noted, quality of available childcare is an issue as well: per a 2018 ELAC Needs Assessment (see Appendix P, ELAC High Quality Childcare Monroe County 2018), 71% of Monroe County children who need childcare are not enrolled in high-quality childcare. Through community and state efforts, access and quality are improving. There has been an 163% increase in the number of high-quality child care sites in Monroe County since 2012, thanks to Monroe Smart Start; another 200 eligible four-year-olds can access free pre-K through the On My Way Pre-K program that Monroe County was selected to pilot (https://www.monroesmartstart.org/about/history/). However, as expressed in employer and community member focus groups, affordable, high-quality childcare remains out of reach for many.

Healthcare Access

Access, again in terms of both number of providers and cost, is also an issue in Monroe County's healthcare and mental health care. In its Community Health Needs Assessment 2018 of Monroe, Lawrence, and Owen counties, IU Health Bloomington Hospital found that Monroe County ranks as a Medically Underserved Area by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA; see Appendix Q, Community Health Needs Assessment 2018 IU Health Bloomington Hospital). To cite one factor, we have 1,630 patients for every 1 primary care doctor, compared to 1,500:1 in Indiana and 1,030:1 in top-performing US counties for healthcare access (per 2018 data on www.countyhealthrankings.org). This shortage affects all county residents, regardless of income level or health insurance,

although the report notes that "health insurance is difficult to access for many . . . leading to inadequate access of health care services." In fact, Monroe County's uninsured rate (12%) is double that of top-performing US counties and higher than Indiana's rate (11%). While residents needing mental health care have access to more providers (440:1) than in the state as a whole (700:1 for the state and 330:1 for top performers), HRSA still designates Monroe County as a Mental Health Care Professional Shortage Area.

These shortages are reflected in data collected by Indiana Workforce Development and Indiana Career Connect to compare frequently posted jobs against the applicant pool (that is, comparing what jobs employers need to fill against what jobs applicants seek). In November of 2018, for Region 8 (which includes Monroe County and seven other counties in Indiana Uplands), six of the top 20 categories of frequently posted jobs feature healthcare and mental health professions (such as registered nurses, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, healthcare practitioners, medical technicians, therapists, mental health and substance abuse social workers). None of the top 20 jobs applicants sought were a match. (See Appendix R, Labor Market Review IN WFD Nov 2018.) Clearly, Monroe County has a need to improve access to healthcare, including mental healthcare, and also some opportunities to build a workforce specializing in the skills to fill those needs.

Growing the Knowledge-Based Economy of Our Future

This conversation about the costs of living in Monroe County and high-paying jobs can seem circular: our current highly educated workforce says they consider leaving Monroe County in order to earn higher wages, yet we hope to bring jobs that pay those higher wages by attracting a skilled workforce—which current residents may see as even more competition for the same pool of current jobs. Meanwhile, jobs remain open that employers can't fill.

Solving this chicken-or-egg problem requires both broadening our vision and focusing our approach. First, we cannot afford to lose, and indeed should grow, our current top employers, and we know that while we have highly educated residents, we are short on residents highly educated in the specific skills that are needed: STEM skills. We will need to develop and expand training, education, and outreach programs that "grow our own." Monroe County is uniquely positioned, with Indiana University at its hub, to drive the region's growth through training and education in STEM careers. Ivy Tech's Center for Life Sciences, Marchant School of Nursing, and other science-related certifications and curriculum offer additional vital resources to aligning in-demand skills with our job supply. Richland Bean Blossom School Corporation's STEAM initiative, which is financially supported by County Government/Westside Economic Development Area, is taking action at the K12 level. Second, the days of expecting a few major employers to carry our economy are over:

Monroe County learned the hard way how hard it is to recover when hundreds of jobs are lost in one factory closing. The future for Indiana Uplands as a region lies in diversifying in the direction that the economy of the nation is trending: knowledge-based economy and the highly skilled, high-paying jobs it provides—the jobs younger generations seek. Monroe County already has a handful of successful knowledge-based companies, and our nascent tech scene can flourish, with support. The Mill, a nonprofit coworking and business incubator space, recently opened in Bloomington with the support of public and private sectors. The Mill transformed a building from our industrial heritage—the Showers Company—into a modern, chic, appealing space with all the amenities of the modern age. A walk through The Mill proves it has already drawn a community of skilled, entrepreneurial, self-driven, and importantly, younger people—the Cutters of today.

Developments like The Mill create entrepreneurial networking hubs where the in-demand workforce of the future feels at home. We have the potential to increase our appeal to a growing population: remote workers. In the knowledge-based economy, Monroe County could hold a powerful appeal for people who already hold highly skilled, high-paying jobs and no longer need to commute to a big city. Instead they can enjoy our rich cultural offerings, beautiful natural landscape and recreation, no traffic, and housing prices that will seem very affordable in comparison to major metropolitan hubs. This population could bring powerful networking, entrepreneurship, and learning opportunities to our tech scene.

The Mill is great news for Bloomington, and for Monroe County. But meanwhile, outlying communities still lack broadband and basic infrastructure that even more established industries require. As we seek to diversify our economy, Monroe County will need to raise the level of connectivity across the entire county. Further, we will need to support and collaborate across Indiana Uplands to leverage the intellectual assets of Indiana University, Ivy Tech, Crane, and more toward a robust regional knowledge-based economy. But to grow our workforce in any industry, Monroe County must finally confront and resolve its housing issues.

Housing

Data show that housing is a root cause of Monroe County's workforce challenges. First, as noted earlier, the cost of housing, while low relative to the rest of the nation, is high relative to the county's lower-than-average income. For many working residents, the perceived benefit of living in Monroe County, with all its natural resources and cultural benefits, is outweighed by this cost of living gap. Although retirees coming from other parts of the

country will see our housing stock as comparably affordable, for residents in their prime working years, housing costs remain high relative to the wages they can earn here.

Second, the supply of housing has not kept up with the population growth over the past 20 years. The ratio of population to units increased from .91 in 2001 to 2.33 in 2017 (see Appendix S, Monroe County Building Permit v Population Data 1998-2017). There simply is not enough housing and hasn't been for decades. As the chart shows, total permits for apartments and houses—particularly for sought-after single-family homes—are outpaced by population growth.
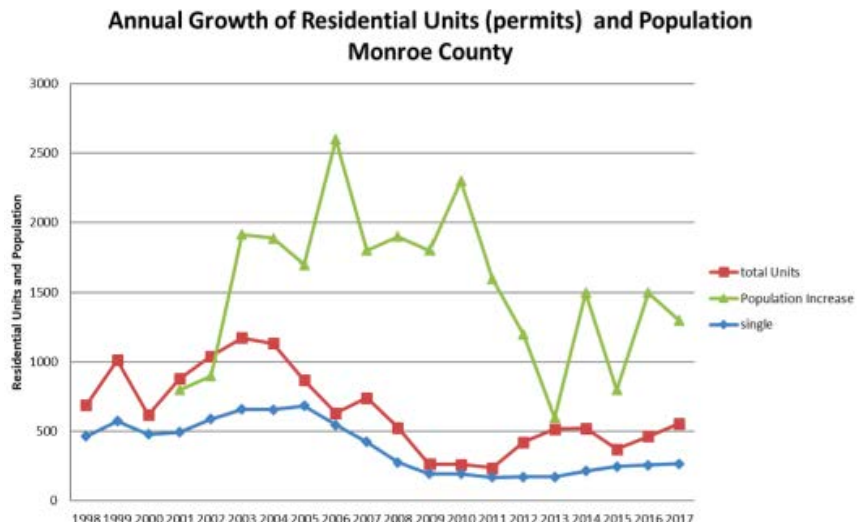
Source: Appendix S, Monroe County Building Permit v Population Data 1998-2017

In this case, popular perception is at odds with the countywide facts. The 2018 City of Bloomington Comprehensive Plan (Appendix T) estimated a need for an additional 12,225 units by 2040 (both rental and owner-occupied), which requires adding 556 a year; in 2017, only 257 were added. To make matters worse, 2,600 units will become obsolete by 2040 (see Appendix S, Monroe County Building Permit v Population Data 1998-2017). Despite this shortfall, survey respondents from throughout the county—even areas not undergoing the construction boom in Bloomington—indicated a concern that development will destroy the area's unique character.

This apparent contradiction—residents want more housing, but they don't approve of new development—may be better understood if we examine two factors. First, the nature of the most visible new development to all county residents, apartments in Bloomington, is clearly driven by the market for student housing and the ability to charge higher rents. The

working people of Monroe County, however, do not see that housing as adding to their own affordable options. Student housing has long caused conflict: in the 1990s, Bloomington residents were worried that core neighborhoods were being destroyed when single-family homes were broken up into student apartments. The City addressed that concern with new caps on the number of unrelated people who could live in a rental house, and the apartments we see downtown are one result of that effort. However, as we see, while that shift helped preserve the character of neighborhoods, it did not increase available affordable housing for our county's workforce.

The second factor in public perception of rental housing growth may be tied to another survey response: residents' concern that Monroe County is not addressing social issues adequately. This is almost certainly a response to the increased visibility of panhandling and awareness of an escalating problem with addictions, particularly opioids. We see this reflected in the data from Monroe County Public Library's 2017 community survey (see Appendix U, MCPL Strategic Direction Community Feedback 2018-2020).

The top five concerns from that survey were:

1. Homelessness
2. Opioids/addictions
3. Affordable housing
4. Health care/mental health care
5. Crime/safety

These are slightly different priorities than the Quality of Place Survey, perhaps due to the library's unique role in the community and its location. The main branch draws patrons from across the county to downtown Bloomington, where they may encounter homeless citizens and witness the impact of rising addiction rates firsthand.

These two highly visible shifts in the county seat—more and taller apartment buildings, more visible signs of homelessness and addiction around public spaces—may contribute to the feeling that respondents expressed in the Quality of Place Survey: a concern that new development is changing the unique character of not just Bloomington, but of the county. These changes may look like "big city" problems, and while residents appreciate the county's big city benefits of culture, they also overwhelmingly value the small-town advantages throughout the county and most of all the small-town feeling of human connection.

In short, they fear the loss of Monroe County's special quality of place. Respondents' concerns about current development focused on the student housing market, however, should not be interpreted as concerns about all new development. Respondents strongly asserted the need for more housing that would meet the needs and budgets of working citizens, the middle class, and long-term residents.

One thing is clear: we will struggle to retain our current workforce until we solve the problem of adequate affordable housing. If we expect to attract a new workforce, it becomes even more critical.

Diversity and Inclusion: A Matter of Perspective

Finally, an examination of diversity is in order. Monroe County prides itself, and promotes itself, as a diverse and welcoming community to all people. Students from all over the world live and work in Monroe County, and businesses cater to those populations, as seen in the range of Bloomington's much-loved restaurants: Thai, Korean, Afghani, Indian, Japanese, and more. The Lotus World Music & Arts Festival and PrideFest celebrate diversity. Bloomington prides itself on progressive attitudes and has received national recognition from organizations that track and rate city policies. Woman-owned businesses thrive. Indiana University ranks in the top 50 LGBTQ-friendly colleges and universities, and *The Advocate* ranked Bloomington the "fourth-gayest city in the country." Survey respondents ranked "friendly town atmosphere" and "welcoming nature of the community" as their third and fourth most-valued assets about Monroe County.

However, this sense of diversity within Bloomington is not reflected in county demographics.

- While the Asian population in Monroe County is high (7% versus 2.4% in the state and 5.8% in the US), those numbers are driven by the transient student population.

- Black residents comprise only 3.6% of Monroe County, compared to 9.7% across the state and 13.4% in the US.

- Hispanic residents comprise 3.5% as well, compared to 7% across the state and 18.1% in the US. (United States Census Bureau)

It is also not reflected in the experiences and perspective of Monroe County's minority populations, who do not experience Monroe County as either diverse or inclusive. In focus groups, young professionals, leaders of nonprofits that serve minority communities, and Indiana University employees recruited from other cities report that their experience does not align with the image—or with the messages they received during recruiting. Repeatedly

the history of the Ku Klux Klan in the region was cited as a legacy that endures and has a chilling effect on the experience of minorities in Monroe County. Respondents also cited the perception of the state as a whole as non-inclusive as a factor influencing their assessment of quality of place in Monroe County. Lower-income minority residents are even more likely to experience Monroe County as an unwelcoming place, particularly outside the City of Bloomington.

Resolving this gap between perceived and felt inclusion is critical for Monroe County's future. The gap deters us from retaining and attracting talent, and we know that younger generations are increasingly diverse. More importantly, the ethical values of our community demand that we live up to our ideals.

The Bloomington/County Divide

This gap between perceived and felt inclusion plays out in other dimensions than race and ethnicity: it also plays out in a deep divide between the priorities and experiences of the county as a whole and those of the county seat, the City of Bloomington.

There is a political divide: the county leans more conservative than Bloomington, and in focus groups and survey comments, residents remarked that conservatives are not made to feel welcome in Bloomington and choose to live elsewhere. Rural county residents report poor customer service experience with the county seat; county taxes are perceived as benefitting Bloomington disproportionately.

There is a geographic divide, exemplified by the east side/west side cultural split in Bloomington itself: the east side is perceived to be the home of Indiana University employees and academic types, whereas the west side—where most of the industry is located—serves the county at large and its rural population.

There is also a profound resource divide. Monroe County includes both incorporated cities and towns (Bloomington, Ellettsville, and Stinesville) and rural communities (Smithville-Sanders, Unionville, Harrodsburg, Kirksville, and so on). While the cities and towns have civic infrastructure and ability to raise funds (Stinesville, with only 217 residents, is an exception), the rural communities often don't, and more likely have to rely on township government and volunteers.

Monroe County residents share a love of the natural landscape and cultural resources. Monroe County boasts an impressive range of social services, nonprofits, and citizen organizations working hard to meet gaps and provide services. The leadership roster is

deep, the programs targeted and needed. How easy it is to access to those resources, however, depends on where you live. We've already examined the housing conflict. Transportation offers another compelling example:

- Bloomington's strategic planning documents focus on the need to encourage residents to not use their cars, promoting walking or biking as an alternative, slowing driving times with traffic calming devices, and levying parking fees downtown. Although reports indicate that more parking is needed, the city is loath to build structures to accommodate traffic they are trying to discourage—and protective of the special feeling of the downtown area. Residents appreciate that Bloomington offers big-city attractions without big-city traffic, and they want to keep it that way.

- For most other county residents, however, the only option is driving their cars. In fact, over 15,000 workers from outside Monroe County commute in to the county; it's unknown how many commute from within Monroe County to Bloomington. There is no Park & Ride service for commuters or residents.

- Bloomington buses don't have the resources go outside of city limits, Rural Transit's services are limited, and there is no ability to raise taxes for a Regional Transit Authority. While Bloomington Public Transportation Corporation shows a steep increase in ridership since the 1990s, it peaked in 2014 (see Appendix V, Monroe County QPWA Highlights 2019); competition from Uber and Lyft for discretionary ridership may be a contributing factor. Limited resources prevent service to in-city areas such as Tapp Road, service on Sundays, and service to locations such as Ivy Tech on the west side or the Cook complex. In other words, the service is not compatible with the actual needs of the county population.

- Transportation also presents obstacles to accessing cultural resources, higher education, and health care, most of which is clustered in Bloomington. Residents of the many small communities outside the county seat will find it challenging to access these at all without a car; but even those with cars may not understand how to find parking close enough to the IU campus to take advantage of it.

This divide is also visible in the rich offering of parks and trails available in Bloomington, though there are multiple County parks in the western part of the County, including a trail system with a level of service similar to the B-Line Trail. It's visible in the ready access to broadband, and the infrastructure of sewers, lighting, sidewalks and more that Bloomington residents take for granted—basics that Smithville-Sanders and other county areas are still

struggling to fund and implement, as evidenced both by strategic planning documents and our focus group feedback. Without the tax revenue advantages of Bloomington or Ellettsville, and paid full-time personnel to locate resource opportunities such as grants and manage implementation, these localized county visions prevent outlying areas from becoming attractive as more affordable housing options.

The current growth of Monroe County and our vision for the future requires an end to local mindsets. When quality of place is higher across the county, demand for housing can spread more evenly across the county, lowering costs by increasing supply, and bringing development to areas that crave it. The county's transportation challenges are linked to its workforce challenges and to access to healthcare and services. As we see in the growth of Ellettsville, many Monroe County residents will actively prefer a small-town life in the country—as long as they retain close access to amenities and can see a future for the community. Our problems may feel localized to Bloomington, Ellettsville, Stinesville, Smithville-Sanders—or even to Monroe County—but the solutions will be shared.

Key Strategic Takeaways

1. Monroe County's growth can best be managed by raising the quality of place across the entire county, while respecting the unique character of local communities. Pockets of prosperity are insufficient to the need and are not compatible with the high value residents place on equity and inclusion.

2. To compete with other areas in the country, highly educated residents need more opportunities for career growth, particularly for the 24-34 age group.

3. The opportunities of the future will be in the knowledge-based economy. Monroe County must prepare the infrastructure and cultural supports for the workforce of that economy.

4. The disproportionately high cost of housing versus low wages negatively impacts all but the highest-earning residents.

5. More housing, and more affordable housing, are needed across the county for low- and moderate-income home owners and renters.

6. County residents living in cheaper outlying areas do not have equitable access to resources located in or managed by Bloomington (including arts, social services, and more). Small-town needs and priorities must receive more attention from the county seat.

7. Younger generations are increasingly diverse; Monroe County (and the Uplands Region as a whole) must identify specific ways to become truly inclusive, or we will not retain and attract the workforce of the future.

Fall at Hoosier National Forest

Putting It All in Context

Monroe County boasts an extensive list of quality of place assets: historical, cultural, natural, and geographic (see Appendix W, Monroe County Assets List QPWA 2019). We already leverage these well to attract tourism, students, and workforce. The high education level, Cutter spirit, and maker culture of Monroe County are powerful human and cultural assets. But in order to create a competitive advantage to attract and retain a workforce for the knowledge-based economy and a prosperous future, we need to address the deeper structural and cultural barriers to our growth.

We have seen that growth and prosperity in the City of Bloomington alone does not translate to growth for all Monroe County residents, and indeed, it hasn't been enough to retain or attract people to Bloomington. Our deficiencies as a county are not hidden from residents past, present, or future. In the same way, growth and prosperity will not happen in Monroe County without growth in Indiana Uplands as a whole.

After collecting community engagement feedback, studying the data, and synthesizing its implications, we can now ideate broad goals and strategies.

Eliminate structural barriers to workforce attraction and retention

- Dramatically increase affordable housing supply—rentals and homes—for moderate-income workers, hourly workers, and nonstudents.

- Establish a timeline and interim benchmarks for housing to catch up with population growth.

- Increase public transportation options that connect communities and residents in the county to jobs and resources.

- Balance Bloomington's desire to stay small and keep traffic to a minimum with the need for county residents to travel Bloomington's roads to access jobs, services, and resources.

- Support the transition to a modern knowledge-based economy by developing aligned infrastructure, broadband, and other resources.

- Increase access to quality childcare.

- Increase access to healthcare, including mental health and addictions services.

Eliminate cultural barriers to workforce attraction and retention

- Cultivate county connections and countywide identity.

- Close the cooperation and planning gap between Bloomington and the county's rural communities.

- Strengthen the quality of place of small communities.

- Address, directly and with sustained, countywide effort, the need for increased minority engagement and opportunity.

- Raise the general population's awareness of the diversity/inclusion gap.

- Nurture places and opportunities for diverse populations, young professionals, new residents, and entrepreneurial retirees to network with peers, make friends, and connect to the community.

- Improve government access and diversify participation.

- Expand arts and culture access across the county.

- Increase countywide access to resources located in or controlled by the county seat in Bloomington.

The Heritage Trail in Ellettsville

Solutions

After collecting data, synthesizing our findings to identify Monroe County's needs, and putting them into context of broad goals, our final step was to envision solutions. In doing this work, we kept our end goal in mind: to improve Monroe County's quality of place, and to retain and attract the in-demand, highly skilled workforce that will draw diverse opportunities, innovation, and high-paying jobs to Monroe County.

We've grouped the projects into tiers of priority that align with our data results and key takeaways. The bulleted projects are not inclusive of every possible solution; we welcome innovative approaches that meet the priorities and match our criteria in unanticipated ways.

Project Criteria

- **They impact quality of place and workforce attraction on a large scale.** Many organizations already do important work to close gaps and meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens; this plan seeks to meet the needs of the bigger county population.

- **They benefit and bring resources to county communities outside of Bloomington.** Although Bloomington has the largest population, it also has the most programming and leadership support. Our goal is to improve the quality of place across Monroe County.

- **They are feasible.** Creating a countywide public transportation system, for example, is a long-term goal. However, that should not and must not prevent us from targeting, today, specific public transportation projects that can benefit significant numbers of county residents.

Tier 1 Priorities & Projects

Dramatically Increase Affordable Housing Supply for Low- and Moderate-Income Homeowners and Renters

- Review and revise city and county policies on water and sewer line extensions. Infrastructure drives development.

- Build communities around existing, unused infrastructure of water and sewer (for example, the hundreds of acres on the Westside that would be developed if Adams Street were simply extended to connect to the vacant land).

- Encourage the development of appealing housing and stronger communities outside of Bloomington. Create and fund economic development leadership positions for rural communities who want to add infrastructure, develop land, and attract residents. This could be several targeted positions or even one planning expert to serve as the planner and advocate for unincorporated areas. Although Indiana University offers many possibilities for support (i.e., SPEA interns), smaller areas do not have the necessary full-time experienced leaders to successfully coordinate and direct activities.

- Research best practices in broad-scale housing solutions using publicly-owned land. The county-owned Thomson site in the city, or the upcoming redevelopment of the old hospital site, offer singular chances to meet community needs that are outside current market priorities.

- Develop or expand programs for all Monroe County residents that assist first-time homebuyers with down payment and closing costs beyond the typical programs that serve lowest-income residents. (HAND currently has a program that serves only Bloomington residents; however, the amount of assistance—$5,000 maximum—is not enough to help due to the high cost of housing.)

- Support the completion of a new county consolidated development ordinance (CDO) that simplifies the county's antiquated zoning code and provides additional opportunities for residential development and additional density.

Cultivate County Connections and Countywide Identity

- Seek county solutions to local problems; align policies and collaborate.

- Help residents embrace the differences between Monroe County's rural communities and its cultural hub in the city of Bloomington as diversity that offers us rich choices. Recognize and promote small-town life as an enjoyable piece of the Monroe County experience.

- Promote county events and festivals to all residents to get more crossover attendance and crosspollination of people and ideas. Encourage Bloomington residents to explore the county.

- Support Ellettsville, Stinesville, Harrodsburg, Smithville-Sanders, Unionville, and the many townships within the county in creating community gathering spaces where residents can meet, network, and collaborate on their future.

- Improve Bloomington's governmental customer service to county residents: make the friendly, helpful Cutter spirit the standard.

- Create community spaces that cater to minority and underserved populations from across the county, and ensure that existing cultural hubs (for example, places like the Banneker Community Center) receive ongoing investment and care to reflect our commitment to diversity.

- Create educational campaigns on diversity for county residents to raise awareness of how to make all our neighbors and residents feel welcome. Consider a "We serve all" campaign for businesses, designed in collaboration with minority organizations and community leaders.

- Create discounts (like the ones students get) and opportunities for county residents to enjoy IU cultural events. Ensure that parking and Park & Ride options to cultural events are clear, well-publicized, and practical.

Increase Public Transportation Options

- Create infrastructure for commuter traffic that allows workers from outside of the county to access jobs, such as Park & Ride. As housing costs are less in surrounding counties, there may be an increase in commuting with the partial completion of I-69.

- Focus first on adding specific, strategic bus routes to high-priority locations, such as Cook, Ivy Tech, and the Westside, and find innovative ways to pay for service.

- Increase public transportation (such as Rural Transit) outside the city of Bloomington.

- Find creative ways to expand existing public transportation to hit a "tipping point" of service, with more stops, faster service, service on Sunday, and so on: make public transportation a truly viable and attractive option for all citizens.

- Plan county development with public transportation needs in mind; build communities with bus stops.

- Make commuting, parking, and public transit options more widely and easily known by residents and visitors alike.

- Leverage the research strengths of Indiana University to identify cutting-edge public transportation funding solutions.

Support the Transition to the Modern Economy

- Build an environment conducive to remote employees; expand access to broadband and provide other needed supports that encourage people to bring their twenty-first-century, knowledge-based skills to Monroe County, no matter where their current employer is located.

- Create locations and occasions that allow new residents, remote workers, and young professionals to meet, network, and become part of the community: socially, professionally, civically. People who become involved in their communities bond to those communities. Non-natives and recruiters emphasized the difficulty of meeting people and becoming part of the community. Our "family" must expand to include newcomers.

- Cultivate "second life" opportunities to connect and invest in our community for older entrepreneurs and skilled retirees.

- Create one-stop orientation guides for people moving here for work.

- Address the inclusion perception/reality gap with dedicated programs to support a strong, visible, engaged minority community. Support the development of leadership skills and positions for minorities.

- Support regional development that creates jobs close to our county, to counteract our relative geographic isolation and discourage people from immediately moving if their job changes.

- Offer paid training for jobs that are hard to fill. Unemployment is low, and most residents cannot afford to stop earning at one job while they train for another.

Tier 2 Priorities & Projects

Increase Access to Childcare

- Create more spaces that are affordable, year-round, high quality, in proximity to jobs, and aligned with public transit options. Childcare should support working people's needs and fill gaps in current offerings. Infant care is a priority, as is affordability for hourly workers. Childcare that is part-time, too expensive, and out of the way will not impact the workforce deeply enough.

- Increase the number of childcare providers by making those lower-wage positions more appealing through add-on benefits; pursue creative options. For example, a benefits pool that provides health insurance may attract parents who have been out of the workforce raising their own children.

- Offer subsidized professional development to help childcare workers stay certified.

- Support increase in quality of care with professional development and coaching to childcare sites to achieve level 3 and 4 status on the Indiana Paths to Quality rating scale.

Expand Arts & Culture Access Throughout the County

- Connect trails between and among the urbanized areas and rural communities (for example, connecting Bloomington, the westside of the county, Ellettsville, the southern/limestone part of the county, and Stinesville, potentially even to Owen County). Connectivity makes trails much more useful and well-used.

- Bring arts and cultural events to community centers outside of Bloomington; promote a sense of ownership and pride in our strong arts culture across the county.

- Create more space for artists out in the county, where it may be more affordable.

- Create a limestone tourist attraction easily accessible from I-69 to promote our Cutter heritage and identity.

- Add sport turf at Karst Farm Park to increase our competitiveness with other Indiana cities for sports tourism.

Increase Access to Healthcare, Including Mental Health and Addiction Services

- Find creative ways to attract or produce more primary care providers and more mental health service providers.

- Promote and expand local educational programs that build the medical skills needed to fill the worker shortage in our region's frequently posted healthcare positions.

- Expand rural options for accessing healthcare services (for example, through improving public transportation as noted in Tier 1, or monthly health screenings at community hubs) and developing healthy lifestyles (for example, trails, community gyms, and so on).

- Support services and programs that address underlying causes of homelessness.

- Continue regional collaboration to address the needs of people experiencing substance abuse disorders and raise awareness of available services.

- Grow supportive employment opportunities to help transition people recovering from substance abuse disorders.

Tier 3 Priorities & Projects

Improve Government Access and Diversify Participation

- Connect the city-county technology to share data smoothly.

- Find better ways to deliver local government services to residents. Evaluate the delivery of services, and make customer-friendly improvements.

- Create strategic, intentional paths for younger people, minorities, and newer members of the community to get on organizational boards and bring fresh perspective. Create training opportunities to develop a new generation of leadership.

Acknowledgments

Quality of Place Advisory Team

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Sean Starowitz, City of Bloomington
Tina Peterson, Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County
Dan Peterson, Cook Group
Gary Brinley, Ellettsville Chamber of Commerce
Christopher Emge, Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
Erin Predmore, Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
Christi McBride, Hoosier Hills Career Center
Joe Carley, Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement
Kerry Thomson, Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement
Carol Weiss-Kennedy, Indiana University Health – Community Health
Dean Lem Watson, Indiana University School of Education
Adam Gross, Ivy Tech Community College
Markay Winston, Monroe County Community School Corporation
Shelli Yoder, Monroe County Council
Geoff McKim, Monroe County Council
Marilyn Wood, Monroe County Public Library
Steve Smith, Smith Brehob
Deborah Myerson, South Central Indiana Housing Opportunities
Kevin Tolloty, Town of Ellettsville
Efrat Feferman, United Way of Monroe County
Mike McAfee, Visit Bloomington
Robin Branch, WorkOne South Central
Rob King, WorkOne South Central

Learn More

Appendices and Supporting Documents for Grantwriters

To access the data generated by the Quality of Place survey, the existing plans and data consulted for this plan, and other supporting documents, please visit:
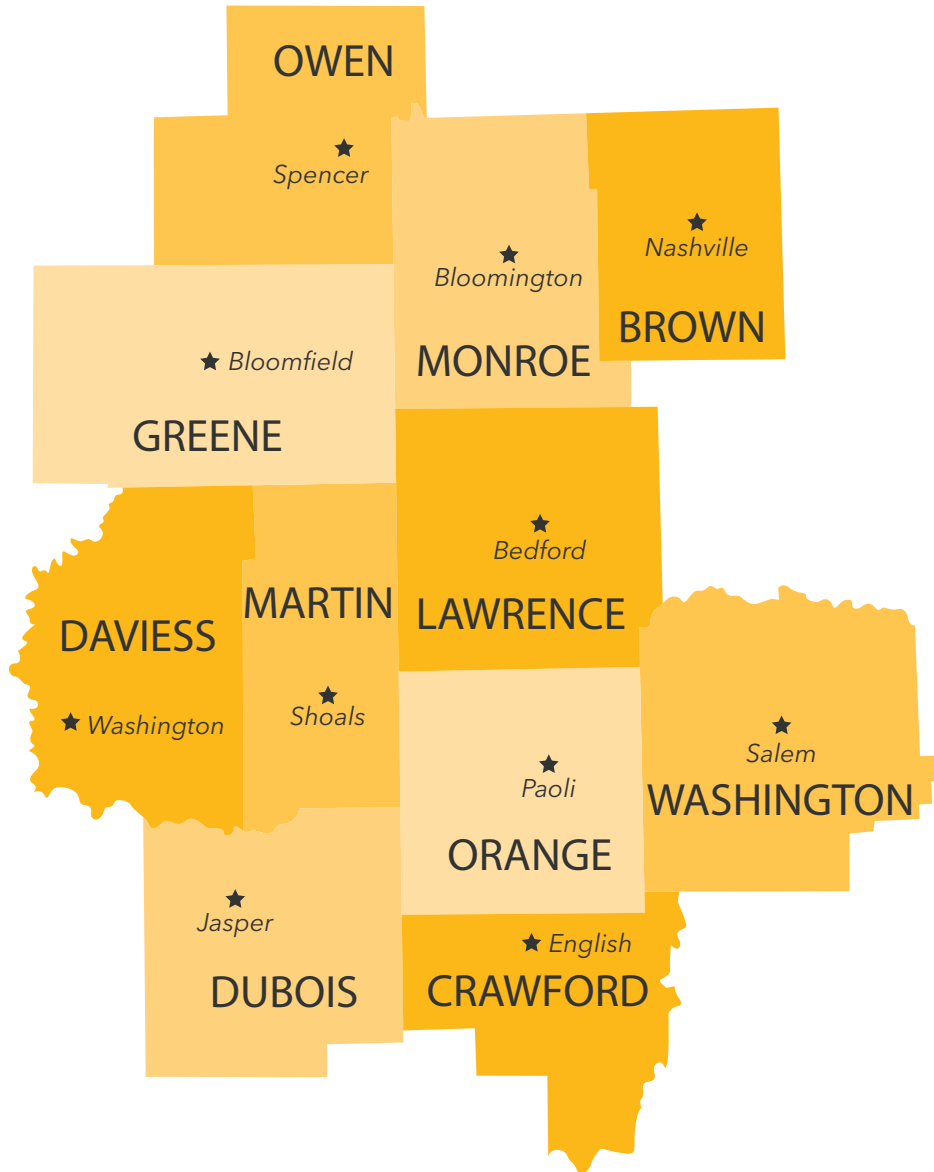https://swcindiana.org/ready-communities/plans/

ROI

For questions about how to use this plan to apply for Regional Opportunity Initiatives funding, please visit: http://swcindiana.org/regional-opportunity-initiative/

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Indiana Uplands Region

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DAVIESS

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