Imagine a free-flowing river meandering through Indianapolis, Fishers, Carmel, and Noblesville, touching millions of people across Hamilton and Marion counties.

Paris has the Seine with its iconic bridges and river cruises. Chicagoans can gather along the Chicago River for wine, fitness, and to appreciate the skyline. Cities like Denver, Colorado, Bend, Oregon, and Dayton, Ohio – among many others – have reshaped their waterways for recreation, attracting kayakers, canoeists, and boaters of all ages.

Fifty years ago, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland was so polluted that it caught fire, inspiring the passing of the EPA’s Clean Water Act. Today, it is safe to fish in. The White River will soon embody these aspirations for all of us – as a clean, natural, historic, connected, and active asset for the Central Indiana region to enjoy.

The City of Indianapolis, through its Department of Metropolitan Development, Hamilton County Tourism on behalf of its partners Hamilton County and the cities of Carmel, Fishers, and Noblesville, and Visit Indy are thrilled to share the White River Vision Plan, a comprehensive and coordinated regional vision for enhancement of the White River over coming decades.

This plan is the result of a year-long process spanning spring 2018 to summer 2019. Over that time, thousands of community members along the White River came together at public meetings, riverside events, in private homes, and online to generate more than 13,000 comments and ideas for the river. Their feedback fundamentally shaped the guiding principles that will serve as a touchstone for us all as we work together to implement the plan’s inspiring ideas in the years to come.

This is truly an exciting moment for our region – but the White River has long been our hidden heart. Contemporary Central Indiana communities got their start alongside the banks of the White River, including Indianapolis, Broad Ripple, and Noblesville, each whose downtown grew on the water’s edge.

Early city planning efforts in Indianapolis, driven by noted landscape architect and city planner George Kessler, resulted in the preservation of open spaces along many urban streams as a chain of continuous parks that would extend to every neighborhood in the city. This system of parks, corridors, and historic bridges is now the largest nomination in the National Register of Historic Places and is recognized by the American Society of Landscape Architects as one of the 100 most significant works of landscape architecture in the nation. Over the past few decades, Central Indiana communities have begun embracing the White River and its tributaries. Dedicated civic and environmental organizations and community members have provided a lasting legacy of stewardship. Ongoing clean-up initiatives through DigIndy and more than a decade of ongoing efforts by the City of Noblesville will only expand the potential of this great resource.

Looking forward, we can now clearly picture an ecologically healthy river corridor weaving neighborhoods, institutions, and destinations together to form a defining experience for visitors and a cornerstone element of the quality of life for residents. To accomplish this, we will need to work together and sustain momentum for the White River vision – and we will need your continued enthusiasm, support and collaboration. So, thank you for all you have done so far and for all that is yet to come in making the White River into Central Indiana’s defining natural and cultural treasure.

With gratitude and excitement,

CHRISTINE ALTMAN, HAMILTON COUNTY COMMISSIONER
STEVE DILLINGER, HAMILTON COUNTY COMMISSIONER
MARK HEIRBRANDT, HAMILTON COUNTY COMMISSIONER
JOSEPH H. HOSSÉTT, MAYOR, CITY OF INDIANAPOLIS
JIM BRAINARD, MAYOR, CITY OF CARMEL
SCOTT FADNESS, MAYOR, CITY OF FISHERS
JOHN OITSLEAR, MAYOR, CITY OF NOBLESVILLE
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**Core Team**
- DEPARTMENT OF METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT
- HAMILTON COUNTY TOURISM, INC.
- VISIT INDY
- RECONNECTING TO OUR WATERWAYS

**Project Team**
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- FINELINE GRAPHICS
- HERITAGE STRATEGIES
- HR&A ADVISORS, INC.
- LANDSTORY
- PORCH LIGHT
- PROJECT PHOTO DOCS
- RATIO ARCHITECTS
- SHREWSBERRY
INTRODUCING THE WHITE RIVER DISTRICT
Study Area & Impact Zone

The White River is a powerful flow, bisecting the State of Indiana and bringing together multiple communities along its 362-mile length. The two-forked river empties into the Wabash River, and is part of the Upper Mississippi River Basin – a watershed that covers forty-five percent of our nation. The White River has defined the landscape and settlement of Indiana for thousands of years, and has been both a vital economic resource and social amenity for nearby communities.

The White River Vision Plan study area focuses its attention on a fifty-eight-mile stretch of the river, as well as a half-mile impact zone on either side of the riverbanks. This section of the White River flows through Noblesville, Carmel, and Fishers in Hamilton County and through Indianapolis as it meanders from northeast to southwest Indiana. The study area is anchored in the north by Lafayette Trace Park in Hamilton County and by Southwestway Park at the southern boundary of Marion County. While this Plan focuses on two of Indiana’s most populous counties, it is hopeful the ideas and momentum generated could be extended up and down the river’s reach.
Key Ingredients of the White River District

Between two counties and multiple cities, the study area links a diversity of neighborhoods, tributaries, industries, institutions, and open spaces. The White River Vision Plan is an opportunity to better connect all of these individual elements through the power of a shared river vision, creating a region that is stronger than the sum of its parts.

Within the White River Vision Plan study area, approximately 6,500 buildings lie within the 100-year floodplain. With total annual precipitation projected to increase eight percent by 2050, and extreme weather events increasing rainfall by forty-two percent, the flood potential along the White River also continues to increase. There are six major dams that control flows within the waterway; these impressive structures sometimes create physical barriers for connectivity, but they also create future opportunities. Planning for this infrastructure and the riparian zone along the river has potential to increase ecological health, public safety, recreational opportunities, and economic development by connecting existing natural spaces, habitat, wildlife, and people.

Diverse Edge Conditions

Today, a majority of the land along the White River is privately owned, with just nine percent of the river edge publicly accessible. There is a diversity of edge conditions that form the character of the river, including: agricultural; natural and restored nature; moderate impact construction; high-impact construction; and infrastructural. The character and configuration of these edge conditions informs the level of possible and desired connectivity and uses along the river, both for humans and wildlife.
Natural Areas

More than a dozen critical natural areas are spread out along the banks of the White River in Hamilton County and Indianapolis. These are unique places where native plant communities and native species are still able to dominate the landscape. Key examples of natural areas include Strawtown Koteewi Park, Conner Prairie, Nonie Werbe Krauss Preserve, Newfields, Lilly Recreation Park, and Southwestway Park. Many natural areas and parks within the study area are linked by nature paths, nature trails, promenades, and bridges. These natural areas, parks, and destinations along the White River range in their levels of recreation, cultural, historical, and architectural significance, but all support social and ecological life along the river’s length.

Parks

Parks along the White River are well-loved, and many have undergone either recent upgrades or planning efforts to support long-term investments that reflect the changing needs of the communities they serve. Strawtown Koteewi Park is nearing the end of a long-term master plan to expand park programming and interpretive elements. Carmel-Clay Parks recently upgraded Founder’s Park and is considering opportunities to connect parks and open spaces along the river such as River Road Park and the White River Greenway trail with regional trails across the river in Fishers and with their river right neighbor, Conner Prairie. Broad Ripple Park and Riverside Park have also recently completed master planning efforts with a focus on access between the neighborhoods they serve and the river.

Neighborhoods

The region’s growth is concentrated in Downtown Indianapolis and north in Hamilton County. The study area’s forty-two neighborhoods with diverse demographics all create opportunity to take advantage of shared assets along the waterfront. As a reimagined, continuous, and connected waterway, the White River can serve as a democratic force, belonging to all the diversity of communities its timeless waters touch. Income and ownership disparities form a gradient that generally follows a north-to-south path along the river, with the northern reaches of the study area featuring the highest levels of property ownership and incomes, and the furthest south reaches, some of the lowest. The metropolitan region is otherwise quite diverse – an experience that is expressed in the tapestry of communities along both sides of the river.
The two-county region has experienced growth over the past two decades. Investments along the river should consider the diversity of the region's residents.

Regional Employers

There are a number of major employers and centers of industry within the two-county area, creating clear opportunities for economic development. Some of these major employers include KAR Auction Services, Inc; CNO Financial Group; Baldwin & Lyons, Inc.; Republic Airway Holdings; Anthem, Inc; Eli Lilly & Co.; Allison Transmission; Calumet Specialty Products; and Cummins, Inc.

Several significant river dependent or water related industries along the river include Citizens Energy, Duke Energy, municipal water treatment facilities, and several large excavation and building materials operations.

Institutions

Several strong regional and national cultural and academic institutions anchor the riverfront landscape. These organizations have been leaders in recognizing the value of embracing a relationship with the White River and are turning to the river for new ways to modernize programs, expand operations, and grow capacity to support diverse audiences. Among those forward-thinking and engaged institutions, Conner Prairie, Indianapolis Art Center, Butler University, Marian University, Newfields (formerly the Indianapolis Museum of Art) and Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) have all completed master plans within the last five years that focus their institutions on the river. Other important institutional anchors on the river that drive riverfront recreation, tourism and economic development include White River State Park and the Indianapolis Zoo and the Taylor Nature Center at Strawtown Koteewi Park.

Public Infrastructure

Beyond the destinations, employment and institutional anchors, and open spaces, the river itself and the connectivity it enables should be recognized and celebrated. Thirty-seven vehicular bridges cross this stretch of river, connecting millions of people regionally to jobs, work, and leisure activities. Water treatment facilities draw water for daily use - the water taken from the tap, when taking a shower, drinking water and irrigation all comes from the White River. Like the bridges across the river, these facilities and their functions are inherently tied to the health of the river.
Recent Change

In recent years, Hamilton County and Marion County have experienced a renaissance. Downtown development is accelerating, cultural institutions are expanding, major infrastructure projects are tackling water quality challenges, and park improvements are leading to a flourishing quality of life for the community. Long invisible, the river is awakening from a period of underutilization and ecological degradation.

Regional Growth

Indiana is experiencing population change faster than in previous decades, with Central Indiana leading the state in this population boom. With such rapid growth comes the dual challenge of achieving greater vitality while ensuring livability and sustainability for all. The region has increased from 1.99 million people in 2015 to 2.51 million people in 2017. Growth is projected to continue through mid-century.

Tourism is the eighth largest industry in Indianapolis, and provides significant economic opportunities for Central Indiana. In 2016 alone, the Indianapolis region hosted 28.6 million visitors who spent $5.2 billion regionally. Visitors today include corporate weekday business transient travelers; groups enjoying Indianapolis’ prime convention space; domestic weekend leisure travelers taking in a festival, museum, or music performance; and competitive group sports events from youth through adults. The region’s tourism industry grew 6.1% between 2015 and 2016 (with Hamilton County experiencing 9.3% of growth in 2016).
Ongoing Plans and Projects

There are a number of concurrent projects currently being undertaken by project partners, city governments, non-profits, and private enterprise that align with the principles of this plan and will continue to shape the future of the river for decades. The White River Vision Plan incorporates many projects from previous and concurrent planning efforts into a cohesive and multi-faceted framework. These plans range from new and expanded trailways to parks to large infrastructural systems such as the Dig Indy tunnel system, a network of deep tunnel storage facilities and wastewater treatment plant enhancements. Indianapolis (via Citizens Energy Group) anticipates a 95% reduction of reliance on CSOs to about four times a year in the White River once the Dig Indy tunnel system is complete. Noblesville also plans to reduce CSO events to four times per year through a series of wastewater treatment plant improvements, partial separation of CSOs, and increased sewer conveyance and storage. While each ongoing project has different timelines and scales of influence, all work together to create ecologically resilient and socially meaningful impacts along the White River and the study area. For more detailed information on previous planning projects that were considered in the planning process, refer to the “Task One Inventory & Research” report. Transformative projects like Waterside (former GM Stamping Plant), 16Tech, regional bikeway and trail infrastructure improvements in both Hamilton County and Indianapolis, and the red and blue line bus rapid transit route will only further connect the region to the White River as an attractive destination and shared asset for future generations.
Looking to the Future

Communities along the White River are experiencing a renaissance. Downtown development is accelerating, arts and cultural institutions are expanding their visions, and parks and trails have contributed to a flourishing public realm. The White River is the next frontier. Long neglected and often invisible, the river is awakening from a long period of underutilization and ecological degradation. The White River Vision Plan creates an overarching vision for development and preservation within the study area to bolster positive social, economic, and ecological change.

A Healthy Region

The White River Vision Plan creates clear opportunities to positively impact public health and physical and mental well-being. Recent movements in cities are turning toward the creation of improved and accessible public space and transportation in order to promote stronger, healthier, and more cohesive communities. Offering all people the opportunity to experience nature in their daily lives has proven to decrease stress and promote livability within all communities. Public health also depends upon more networked cities with trails, nature paths, and improved transportation options, in order to create equitable access to services and destinations.

A Resilient Region

One of the primary concerns of the White River Vision Plan revolves around future floodplain management and resilience planning, and how it impacts the communities along its length in the long term. Tippecanoe County on the Wabash and Marion County are forging new policies to better manage stormwater, helping to reduce runoff, pollution flows, and storm surges, and their policies should be emulated. The White River Vision Plan explores the use of healthy native streamside forests and riparian corridors to reduce sedimentation, thereby reducing dependence on dredging, improve water quality, and enhance existing native habitat. Adjacent land management of agricultural areas such as no-till farming and restored riparian buffers can also improve the health of the river. Through revisioning aging dams along the river, infrastructure has the ability to re-shape the hydraulic character of the river upstream and downstream, benefitting hydrology, habitat, and ecology.

The climate in Central Indiana is “humid, continental,” meaning the average temperature in mid-summer is in the seventies and in mid-winter the twenties, and the region expects forty-four inches of precipitation falls each year. This climate is changing, however, based on a 2018 study from Purdue University (Widhalm et al. 2018). From 1895 to 2016, the average temperature in Indiana rose about 1.2°F, especially in the winter. Annual precipitation has also increased, primarily due to an increase in large storms. Researchers at Purdue estimate the increase has been 5.6 inches since 1895. With this increase, the region has seen an increased number and intensity of extreme weather events, triggering river flooding.

An Inclusive Region

While growth often signals prosperity, it also creates uneven pressure on neighborhoods and existing communities. Increased property values can be a benefit, but can also create housing burdens and limit affordability for many members of the community. In recent years, many neighborhoods in the study area have seen home values increase, some up to seventy percent in a short period of time. Others have seen development pressures impact their business operations. The dramatic change signals a need to think critically about inclusive economic opportunities so that the benefits of future growth are equitable and represent the diverse needs of all. This is a recurring value in the White River Vision Plan.
How to Use this Report

The White River Vision Plan is structured to guide growth and decision-making for future initiatives within the next thirty years. The plan document includes a summary of the many facets of the planning process, guiding principles, anchor initiatives, and information on phasing and governance. These elements of the plan were developed in concert with the community – their feedback a guiding force. There is also a brief executive summary and seven standalone technical reports. The framework includes:

Nine Guiding Principles: These principles were formed to guide planning decisions and the overarching vision, and also became lenses for exploration for the many different aspects of the White River. These principles are outlined further in the Riverwide Vision and Principles chapter.

Six Reaches: These zones create six sections of the river, each with distinct character that contributes to the varied nature of the White River experience.

River Anchors: These in-depth explorations of commercial corridors, historic districts, and cultural destinations and catalysts define a vision for new opportunities along the fifty-eight-mile stretch of the White River. Each anchor has site-specific recommendations, as well as suggestions and criteria for selecting additional sites.
THE PLANNING PROCESS
The Planning Process

The White River Vision Plan was formed during a thirteen-month planning process with multiple stakeholders and specialty consultants. Public engagement was an integral part of the process and helped to drive decision-making throughout the plan. The three major planning phases included:

**Discover**
April through September 2018 / Working with the community, the team established plan priorities, reviewed past and ongoing plans/projects, and researched and analyzed the river and its many elements. Such aspects include: history, ownership and land use, development and mobility patterns, and demographic and economic trends, as well as ecological and hydrological conditions along the river.

**Envision**
September through January 2019 / The team created a shared community vision and established a physical framework to achieve the vision. Tasks included planning for programming, destinations, market research, and consideration of unique riverfront features and events. The team also highlighted destinations and future scenarios for preservation, enhancements, and/or expansion. Areas of unusual ecological, historical, cultural, scientific, or aesthetic significance were explored, and defined through character zones known as “reaches.”

**Action**
February through June 2019 / The planning team developed recommendations aligned with the vision and framework, and identified policy implications or changes. The team also defined timelines for implementation and phasing, and created an action-oriented plan to guide the next thirty years.

**Implementation**

- **Discover**
  - April
  - May
  - June
  - July
  - August
  - September
- **Envision**
  - October
  - November
  - December
  - January
- **Action**
  - February
  - March
  - April
  - May
  - June
Community Engagement

Public engagement for the Discovery phase (Phase One) of the White River Vision Plan began in May 2018 and continued through January 2019. The focus of engagement was to gather contact information from interested individuals and parties, to share a comprehensive analysis of the White River, and – perhaps most importantly – to learn about the community’s perspectives about the future of the river. The engagement strategy included an appointed steering committee, representative stakeholder committee, and multiple topical task forces with representation from a variety of interest groups and organizations across the region. Beyond these organized meetings, the strategy drew on in-person public meetings, attendance at myriad neighborhood and community events, a project website, community surveys, and ongoing social media outreach.

- 515+ public meeting attendees and 427 online meeting views
- 350 responses to survey map
- 10,000+ people reached in over 66 existing events
- 1,200 web sign-ups
- 65 river guides
- 1,350 on-line surveys taken

WHITE RIVER VISION PLAN STUDY AREA

- WHITE RIVER
- MILE STUDY BUFFER
- NEIGHBORHOOD CONVERSATION
- PUBLIC MEETING
- EXISTING EVENT

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Miles
Key Findings
The top responses from initial public feedback were in the themes of recreation, healthy growth/development, water access, nature, and trails. Most notably, three-quarters of all public comments identified new activities to help bring more people to the White River. The public responses identified well-loved or notable destinations as well as illuminated how people travel to the river – mostly comprised of a mix of driving, walking/running, and bicycling.

Across all eleven public meetings in July 2018, October 2018, and January 2019, water access and transportation consistently ranked as the most discussed ideas for the White River. Participants noted a need for more water access, both visual and physical – an idea rooted in the limited relationship between the communities along the river and negative perceptions of the river. The community also asked to respect private property along the river. Ideas included opportunities for new trailheads, concerns about bridge construction impacts on bicyclists, and access for events and destinations. Each of these ideas was foundational to the formation of the plan’s guiding principles.

The most mapped ideas in Phase One included places and ways to engage in recreation.

North Reach and South Bluffs are the most natural reaches of the river today. Many would like those places to stay that way.

River connections and river programming are the top two community priorities for investments in the river anchors.

Public Meetings
Outreach and communications were critical to ensuring strong participation from all residents within the study area. On July 10 and 11, three public meetings were held over two days of engagement at Noblesville City Hall, Marian University, and Riverside Park. Public meetings were held during Phase Two to craft a vision and guiding principles for the plan. Those meetings took place on October 23 and 24 in Founders Park, Rhodius Park, and Edison School for the Arts in partnership with Reconnecting to Our Waterways (ROW).

The final round of public meetings took place at the end of January 2019, when the community provided input on anchor projects for each of the river’s reaches. The first and fourth meetings were held at Conner Prairie and Riverside High School on January 29 and 31. A state of emergency was declared due to dangerously cold temperatures on January 30, so the second and third meetings were held remotely via Facebook Live. The City of Indianapolis hosted two make-up Phase Three meetings at the Indianapolis Central Library and Holliday Park on February 13. These meetings hosted more than 515 attendees of diverse backgrounds.

The format of each community meeting began with a short presentation, followed by an open house with themed stations around the room. Subject matter experts from the consultant team were present at each station, where feedback was solicited from each participant and meaningful discussions about challenges...
and aspirations could take place. A large eight-foot-long map of the river was a central place for attendees to place comments, via small flags, and gather to discuss potential futures for the river in the first two phases of public meetings.

Existing Events

Whenever possible, the team also leveraged existing events in order to reach the most stakeholders possible. Targeted focus groups with neighborhood stakeholders were also added to go deeper on critical discussions. This strategy informed a more inclusive and engaging outreach process.

Website & Social Media

Website engagement created a more inclusive process by allowing those not able to attend public meetings to have meaningful virtual participation. The website saw 1,200 signups for newsletters and public information, which allowed the team to communicate directly with the public. Updates and events were also advertised on Facebook, gaining 472 views for the Facebook Live public meeting event on January 29th. An online survey was utilized by 1,350 users, providing basic demographic information as well as meaningful input on their desired goals and initiatives within the plan.

Community Leadership

The primary aim of stakeholder engagement for this project is to facilitate inclusive planning, decision making, and to cultivate sustainable regional partnerships committed to implementing a shared vision for White River. The project’s primary partners – the City of Indianapolis’ Department of Metropolitan Development, Hamilton County Tourism, and Visit Indy – have provided steady leadership, project management, and engagement resources to make this project relevant and dynamic.

Early in Phase One, two committees and six task forces were developed. They were formed to educate and engage throughout the planning process, continue relationships in the long-term, consult with stakeholders to guide plan development, and help disseminate project information to stakeholders.

The Steering Committee provided guidance to the White River Vision Plan as it developed. The committee met seven times during the length of this project to ensure planning remained on track and in line with goals and guiding principles. The members of this group are listed in the chart below.

**Steering Committee Representation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Payne Central Indiana Community Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Strohl Citizens Energy Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Cooke City of Noblesville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Greene Concerned Clergy of Indianapolis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>O’Connor Eli Lilly &amp; Co</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Kaufmann Eskanazi Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Stevens Hamilton County Commissioners Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Kiphart Hamilton County Plan Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenton</td>
<td>Ward Hamilton County Surveyor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>Davis Hamilton County Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Porter Indiana State House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>Amstutz Indiana Humanities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Ruckelhaus Indiana State Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Spratt Indiana State Senate</td>
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<td>Yopi</td>
<td>Oshi Indianapolis City-County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Mason Indianapolis Urban League</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Thios IU (IUPUI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Kilian Hamilton County Community Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobi</td>
<td>Wright Marion County Capital Improvement Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>McCaw Central Indiana Corporate Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard</td>
<td>Hoops Visit Indy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Hoffman White River Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolene</td>
<td>Mays-Medley White River State Park</td>
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**GIRL SCOUTS WEIGH IN ON THE FUTURE OF THE WHITE RIVER.**

**FLOAT ALONG THE RIVER WITH FRIENDS OF THE WHITE RIVER.**

**NORTHERN HAMILTON COUNTY PROPERTY OWNERS MEETING.**

**EXHIBITION ON CITY PLANNING EVENT.**
The Stakeholder Committee represents an array of diverse interests and serves as ambassadors for the plan. Their participation allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and interests, and they met four times throughout the planning process. The members of this group are listed in the chart at right.

### Stakeholder Committee Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleen Fanning</td>
<td>Broad Ripple Village Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Kitting</td>
<td>Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Malik</td>
<td>City of Carmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah McGrath</td>
<td>City of Fishers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Reed</td>
<td>City of Noblesville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman Burns</td>
<td>Corner Prairie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan Mueller</td>
<td>DNR Division of Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy Marcinkovic</td>
<td>DNR Outdoor Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin Hinkle</td>
<td>Friends of the White River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth White</td>
<td>Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Patterson</td>
<td>Hamilton County Parks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim Maloney</td>
<td>Hoosier Environmental Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey Thetoni</td>
<td>Indiana Department of Environmental Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim Junk</td>
<td>Indiana Department of Environmental Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leah Nafmis</td>
<td>Indiana Humanities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cathy Ferris</td>
<td>Indiana State Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lori Harmon</td>
<td>Indianapolis Parks Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mike Crexeder</td>
<td>Indianapolis Zoo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cam Redford</td>
<td>City of Indianapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melody Park</td>
<td>City of Indianapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linda Breadfoot</td>
<td>Indy Parks and Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Forsell</td>
<td>Keep Indianapolis Beautiful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deb Lawrence</td>
<td>Marian University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allison Reden</td>
<td>Marion County Health Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Pryor</td>
<td>MIBOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathon Wright</td>
<td>Newfields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Hillman</td>
<td>Nina Mason Pollin Charitable Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rob Oshins</td>
<td>Noblesville Chamber</td>
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<td>Jim Flanders</td>
<td>Northern-Hamilton County</td>
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<td>Rob Versprille</td>
<td>Northern-Hamilton County</td>
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<td>Sarah Tilling</td>
<td>Northern-Hamilton County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie Rhodes</td>
<td>Reconnecting to Our Waterways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sue Petry</td>
<td>River Bend Conservancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greg Harper</td>
<td>ROW White River Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander Umlauf</td>
<td>ROW White River Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie Robinson</td>
<td>City of Indianapolis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Mobley</td>
<td>The Nature Conservancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six topical Task Forces met during the day of public meetings and serve to provide a wealth of technical information. These task forces include key members of the Stakeholder Committees, focused on each of the themes below. These Task Forces include:

- Connectivity and Transportation
- Culture and Heritage
- Design and Programming
- Economic Development and Tourism
- Education and Institutions
- Environment and Water
River Guides

Sixty-five people signed up to be a White River Vision Plan River Guide. After a two-hour long primer and workshop, the River Guides were given a toolkit to help them share important information about the plan throughout their communities. The River Guides visited local events, festivals, parks, farmers markets, libraries, and other neighborhood locations where people typically gather. Many river guides took their roles quite seriously - dedicating full days to river clean ups and actively going door to door within their neighborhoods to get the word out about the plan process and opportunities for residents to engage.

Balanced Outreach

The plan engaged under-represented demographics in order to receive feedback and input from people of all backgrounds. The community organizations included are listed at right.

Community Organizations

- AARP
- Adventist Helping Veterans
- Amvet Post 59
- ARC of Indiana
- Brightwood Community Center
- Burmese-American Community Institute
- Earth Charter Indiana
- Exodus Refugee
- Global Prep Academy
- Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee Race and Cultural Relations Network
- Groundwork Indy
- Hoosier InFaith Power & Light
- IU Pace Achievement Academy
- Indiana Youth Group
- Indiana Latino Institute
- Indianapolis OASIS
- Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center
- IndyHub
- Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership
- La Place
- Mayor’s Neighborhood Advocates
- MIBOR
- NAACP Environmental Justice Committee
- Pike Township School Board
- Sister Soldier Network
- Stand for Children Indiana
- Urban League - Exchange
- Veterans Support Council of Marion County
- Volunteers of America

Existing Events Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishers Rotary</td>
<td>Fishers City Hall</td>
<td>6/19/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Quad</td>
<td>Chapel Church</td>
<td>6/21/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast White River</td>
<td>Home of Deanna &amp; Robert Veazey</td>
<td>7/25/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Friday - Nickel Plate Arts</td>
<td>Nickel Plate Arts</td>
<td>8/3/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art Fair on the Square</td>
<td>Noblesville Courthouse</td>
<td>8/4/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noblesville Business Summit</td>
<td>Noblesville Coffee &amp; Tea</td>
<td>8/10/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thrive Community Day</td>
<td>Indiana State Museum</td>
<td>8/18/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northwest Perry Neighb. Assoc. Meeting</td>
<td>St. Roch Church</td>
<td>8/23/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCAA Annual Art Exhibit Celebration</td>
<td>Carmel Clay Public Library</td>
<td>8/26/18</td>
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<td>Hello Neighbor! by IndyHub &amp; MIBOR</td>
<td>Riverside Neighborhood</td>
<td>8/30/18</td>
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<td>Duck Race</td>
<td>Logan Street Bridge</td>
<td>9/8/18</td>
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<td>Fishers Farmers Market</td>
<td>Fishers</td>
<td>9/8/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broad Ripple Farmers Market</td>
<td>Broad Ripple H.S.</td>
<td>9/8/18</td>
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<td>Riverwood Homeowners Association</td>
<td>Riverwood HOA Clubhouse</td>
<td>9/14/18</td>
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<td>Smithsonian Live Free Day</td>
<td>Conner Prairie</td>
<td>9/22/18</td>
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<td>Rock the Runes</td>
<td>Holiday Park</td>
<td>9/22/18</td>
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<td>Decatur Township Civic Council Meeting</td>
<td>Decatur School of Excellence</td>
<td>9/24/18</td>
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<td>Dragon Boat Race</td>
<td>White River State Park</td>
<td>9/29/18</td>
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<td>Marion Co. Commission on Youth Birthday Celebration</td>
<td>Kutz Stadium</td>
<td>9/29/18</td>
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<td>Broad Ripple Kwan Club</td>
<td>Bankleys Kitchen &amp; Bar</td>
<td>10/2/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Friday - Nickel Plate Arts</td>
<td>Nickel Plate Arts</td>
<td>10/5/18</td>
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<td>Exhibition on City Planning</td>
<td>Harrison Center</td>
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<td>Fishers Farmers Market</td>
<td>Fishers</td>
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<td>Nickel Plate Arts Partners Meeting</td>
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<td>10/9/18</td>
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<td>Noblesville Mayor’s Youth Council</td>
<td>Noblesville City Hall</td>
<td>10/13/18</td>
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<td>Indiana Latino Expo</td>
<td>Indiana Fairgrounds</td>
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<td>Broad Ripple Village Association Meeting</td>
<td>St. Paul’s Episcopal Church</td>
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<td>North West Area Quality of Life Meeting</td>
<td>Flanner House</td>
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<td>Circle the City</td>
<td>Indiana State Museum</td>
<td>10/20/18</td>
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<td>James Place HOA Meeting</td>
<td>Stonycreek E.S.</td>
<td>10/22/18</td>
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<td>Noblesville Main Street Business Owners Meeting</td>
<td>Beards and Brews</td>
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<td>Riverside Civic League (Neighborhood Assoc.)</td>
<td>Riverside Park Family Center</td>
<td>11/18/18</td>
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<td>Indiana Humanities Lunch</td>
<td>Betchly Nature Study Club</td>
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<td>After Harvest Input Session</td>
<td>Strawtown Koteewi Park</td>
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<td>NWQOL Livability Committee</td>
<td>Westside Bart &amp; Taskle</td>
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<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indy Groundwork’s Green Team</td>
<td>Groundwork Indy</td>
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<td>INHP Leadership Team</td>
<td>INHP Glenendale Office</td>
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<td>Bank Club Discussion</td>
<td>Noblesville Public Library</td>
<td>11/26/18</td>
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<td>Concerned Clergy</td>
<td>Julia M. Carson Gov't. Ctr.</td>
<td>12/1/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indianapolis Mayor’s Youth Council</td>
<td>City County Building</td>
<td>12/7/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kessler Wide Neck, Assoc.</td>
<td>Marian University</td>
<td>12/3/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indy Academy (Ubuntu Advisory Council)</td>
<td>Ignite Academy</td>
<td>12/6/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yelp’s Totally Bazaar</td>
<td>Central Public Library</td>
<td>12/8/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keep Indianapolis Beautiful</td>
<td>Keep Indianapolis Volunteers</td>
<td>12/13/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indianapolis Latino Roundtable Monthly Meeting</td>
<td>Indiana Latino Roundtable</td>
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RIVERWIDE VISION AND PRINCIPLES
The Vision and Principles

The vision statement of the White River Vision Plan was crafted to reflect the needs and aspirations of the community for the White River. Through an extensive community outreach process and a series of meetings with the Steering Committee, Stakeholder Committee, and Task Force Groups, the plan identified nine guiding principles that shape the plan's strategies and recommendations. The vision and principles together are foundational to the plan’s success and fundamental to the aspirations of the various stakeholders who contributed to the plan.

Vision Statement

“The White River is Central Indiana’s next frontier: unifying and diverse, productive and protected, timeless and contemporary. The River sets us apart as communities that can work together to realize big dreams. Its healing power guides us toward a resilient future, supports healthy neighborhoods and economies, honors the past, and improves the lives of Hoosiers for generations to come.”

Guiding Principles

1. Restore and Adapt

   Restore the river’s environment and ecology to enhance its natural function, steward its diverse community of life, and adapt to a climate resilient future.

   Restore and Adapt means that this stretch of the White River:
   - Protects and restores the river’s floodplain and builds resilience to changing climate conditions.
   - Strengthens river infrastructure to protect communities from flooding, encourages safe recreation, and restores native plant, fish and wildlife populations.
   - Recapture large economically-productive landscapes (such as quarries and landfills) for ecologically-productive uses like stormwater and flood capture.

2. Steward River Health

   Enhance community stewardship of the river’s health by increasing opportunities for meaningful, lasting connections and experiences that add value to the quality of life of residents.

   Steward River Health means that this stretch of the White River:
   - Improves water quality and reduces stormwater runoff volume.
   - Manages urban and natural ecosystems in a coordinated manner.
Guiding Principles

Increase Year-round Activities

Increase year-round activities that attract people to the river for arts and entertainment, recreation, community gathering, and learning.

*Increase Year-round Activities* means that this stretch of the White River:

- Fosters accessible connections to cultural and recreational programs and places.
- Activates the river year-round with local programming.
- Recaptures large economically-productive landscapes for recreation.
- Increase river views and access through new overlooks and ongoing maintenance of riparian vegetation.
- Connects retail destinations and diverse neighborhoods to recreation and river amenities.
- Ensures the river, public spaces along it, and connections to it are safe and welcoming for everyone.

Draw People to the River

Draw people to, along, into, and across the White River’s publicly-accessible spaces to create vibrant experiences that bring people together.

*Draw People to the River* means that this stretch of the White River:

- Maximizes multimodal connections, both on the river and along streets, trails and greenways – locally and regionally.
- Increases and ensures that all residents have the means to access the river and its destinations.
- Reinforces past transportation and connectivity plans and furthers their implementation and synergy with other projects.
- Fosters a cadence of amenities and consistent brand.

Build on the River’s Stories

Respect and build on the river’s unique historic identity to invite people in and enable them to understand and appreciate the river’s stories.

*Build on the River’s Stories* means that this stretch of the White River:

- Communicates history through multiple means of interpretation, including educational programming and arts installations.
- Creates a unified identity and brand for the White River.
- Fosters the formal and informal pursuit of learning and skill-building.

Build Economic Strength and Identity

Expand the river’s role in our everyday lives to build regional economic strength and community identity.

*Build Economic Strength and Identity* means that this stretch of the White River:

- Supports opportunities to local businesses and business attraction.
- Supports a sense of pride in the river.
- Creates gathering places that attract diverse visitors and grows the regional and national tourism draw
- Promotes inclusive development that supports the local economy and improves the quality of life for all residents.
Guiding Principles

Preserve Places for Everyone
Celebrate the diversity of the region’s communities on the river to preserve places for everyone for generations to come.

Preserve Places for Everyone means that this stretch of the White River:
- Preserves access to affordable, safe and diverse neighborhoods.
- Enhances and protects the character of existing neighborhoods.
- Stabilizes local businesses and expands opportunities for commercial districts.

Honor Ownership and Use Patterns
Balance community sentiments with long-term aspirations that honor ownership and use patterns along the river.

Honor Ownership and Use Patterns means that this stretch of the White River:
- Strengthens the role of existing land owners, residents, organizations and businesses along the river in decision-making.
- Ensures everyone shares in the costs and benefits of change along the river.
- Facilitates continued community outreach and engagement as the plan is implemented.
- Respects private land rights and make public investments only on publicly accessible land.

Partner Across Boundaries
Partner across boundaries to collaboratively manage the White River system and create efficient operations and sustainable governance.

Partner Across Boundaries means that this stretch of the White River:
- Facilitates strong connections between a variety of people and places.
- Fosters the hard work and dedication of the many organizations that were actively bettering the White River before this plan.
- Works at all levels of government to ensure the river is sustainably governed.
- Empowers local governments to steward investments in and along the river.
Vision Plan Framework

The White River is a powerful, unifying, and timeless flow that connects people and communities along its length. The 1,900 acres of continuous water surface between Hamilton County and Indianapolis connects people to 2,800 acres of riverfront or river-connected destinations.

Active River
Connecting destinations and communities, the Active River is a place for social and economic engagement. The White River links together 2,800 acres of riverfront or river-connected destinations. This is approximately the size of approximately sixty-eight Lucas Oil Stadiums!

Free Flowing River
The Free Flowing River is a powerful hydrological force. The White River was named for its sparkling sandy bottom, once a pristine water source with high water quality. Its surface represents 1,900 acres of continuous flow along the fifty-eight mile length between Hamilton County and Indianapolis.

Natural River
As an ecologically rich armature, the study area includes adjacent destinations, floodplains, open spaces, and natural areas. Reclaimed and enhanced, the White River can be a beacon of stewardship, a healthy contributor to the area’s economy, and a tool for improving the lives of the region’s residents.

Connected River
The White River is more than just a course of water. This Connected River links together approximately 11,000 acres of lands along its length, unifying people, economies, and a series of trails and public spaces.
Historic River

History is being written every day, and all who come to its banks participate in the story of the White River. The Historic River has drawn humans to the area for thousands of years, dating from Native American mound-building cultures, to George Kessler and the City Beautiful Movement, all the way to the present-day urban renaissance of downtowns such as Indianapolis, Noblesville, and Fishers.

River Reaches and River Anchors

The White River study area covers diverse landscapes, communities, and historical contexts. To acknowledge the breadth of the fifty-eight-mile-long river corridor, the plan divides the study area into six “river reaches.” The areas captured in each of the six reaches share similar physical characteristics and cultural contexts. By distinguishing unique character zones called “reach,” the plan tailors interpretation and user experiences to leverage the opportunities of every subarea of the river.

Each river reach contains one or more “river anchors” – a project identified as a catalytic planning initiative for demonstrating and realizing the plan’s key principles. Each of these anchor projects is explored in greater detail. These seven anchors (one per reach, with two for Meadow Reach) illustrate the applicability of principles and recommendations all along the river, supporting all nine of the guiding principles. These ideas are a framework to tie together different initiatives, and are meant to create transformative change and exemplary strategies for growth and restoration of the riverfront.
**Framework Implementation**

Implementation of a multi-county plan will require a concerted effort that builds step by step through realization of many interconnected initiatives. The plan describes a series of new or adapted recommendations that reinforce the nine guiding principles. These recommendations were developed from a thorough review with the community, county and city staff, and other stakeholders along the river, and they were vetted and prioritized by the design team in collaboration with the project leadership group.

These recommendations include policies, programs, outreach, capital investments and maintenance and scaled from small neighborhood investments to large county-wide or river-wide projects and policy opportunities. The community considered how recommendations should be phased and guided conversations about an appropriate governance model to facilitate decision-making, fundraising, and investments.
Communities across the globe are experiencing climate-related challenges – floods, droughts, fires, and storms – like no other time in human experience. While Indiana is a relative safe haven from some of the more devastating natural disasters, it also has its own share of disruptive events. The systems of rivers, creeks, and waterways are, in many ways, the most dynamic front line of Indiana’s changing climate.

A plan for resilience along the White River – one that restores and adapts the river and its edges to the changing climate – serves as a beacon of environmental responsibility and leadership for the State of Indiana and beyond. Captured and cleaned stormwater shows the world that Hoosiers value clean water. Broad, rich floodplains demonstrate a commitment to being the best of neighbors – ones that act wisely to prevent impacts to those downstream. Multifunctional infrastructure models the pragmatism and ingenuity that has long made Indiana a hotbed of invention and innovation. The White River is more than a low-lying area filled with rainwater. It is an ever-changing mirror of each community it passes through. How the river is treated is a direct reflection of our vision, values, and commitments.
Restore and Adapt

The flood of March 1913 stands as the flood of record for Central Indiana – bigger than any on record, before or since. It devastated much of the region and left thousands homeless. While a flood of that scale has not happened since, more intense storm events are becoming commonplace as the climate changes. Researchers at the Indiana Climate Change Impact Assessment (IN CCIA) predict that, by 2050, total annual rainfall will increase eight percent statewide, compared to the historical average. Rainfall is not expected to be evenly distributed; instead, twenty-five percent of the increase will happen in winter and twenty percent in the spring. Both minor and moderate flood-stage events are becoming more frequent. In the thirty flood impact areas along the White River, it is not uncommon for streets to flood and waters to surround buildings. Areas in the floodplain will experience more flood events each decade as this trend continues.

There are many methods to preserve and restore the natural functions of the White River’s floodplain: flood storage, flow deceleration, and sediment capture. Another is to build stormwater management best practices at new and existing developments throughout the watershed. Lastly, farmers are inventing and using methods to hold more water and clean pollutants, in order to make streams and the White River more hospitable for people, fish, mussels, and the whole aquatic ecosystem.

Restore and Adapt means that this stretch of the White River:

- Protects and restores the river’s floodplain and builds resilience to changing climate conditions.
- Strengthens river infrastructure to protect communities from flooding, encourages safe recreation, and restores native plant, fish and wildlife populations.
- Recapture large economically-productive landscapes (such as quarries and landfills) for ecologically-productive uses like stormwater and flood capture.
**Existing Conditions**

**Summary**

**Historical Changes**

**LAND CHANGES**

Following major land conversion well over a century ago, the White River and its watershed transformed from field and forest to residential, commercial, and industrial uses. In recent decades, the White River study area has seen dramatic changes due to explosive growth and development in Noblesville, Carmel, Fishers and the northside of Indianapolis. Roughly sixty-eight percent of the study area is now developed, seventeen percent is forest or grass, eleven percent is open water or wetlands, and the remaining four percent is agriculture. The land cover pattern suggests that the White River and its tributaries have been affected by these changes. A significant portion of the study area is in the floodplain. Land use changes in the floodplain – development, land alteration, and adding fill – reduce the natural and beneficial functions of the floodplain, especially maintaining storage capacity during river floods.

**CHANNEL MAINTENANCE**

Channel maintenance is the process of removing woody vegetation from riverbanks and excavating sediment from the channel to increase the storage capacity of the river itself, accelerating the flow of water downstream. While this may move water more efficiently out of the watershed, it usually damages overall stream health. In Hamilton County, the Surveyor is responsible for channel maintenance of regulated drains that make up the majority of waterways and publishes a list each year of drains scheduled for maintenance and reconstruction. In Marion County, the Department of Public Works responds, as needed, to service requests to remove log jams and accumulated debris in the waterways. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources regulates log jam and sediment removal in streams having a drainage area larger than one square mile.

**LEVEES AND LOW-HEAD DAMS**

Levees are earthen embankments designed to prevent the areas adjacent to the river from flooding during high water. Indianapolis maintains an extensive network of twenty-four miles of levees. Two levee segments of twenty-seven total are accredited and recognized by FEMA for reduced flood risk, five levee segments are in the process of accreditation, and one has a letter of map revision filed to change its flood protection status. The remaining nineteen segments are not accredited, meaning the flood protection afforded by the levees cannot be guaranteed. Modification to any of these levees requires the approval of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). In partnership with the USACE, and on its own, the city is expanding the network of levees and floodwalls to provide flood protection to neighborhoods on the northside of Indianapolis.

The levees in place reduce the flood risk for approximately 2,800 residents, businesses, and institutions in the Broad Ripple area and on either side of the White River from 38th Street to Raymont Street. This levee network is a critical piece of the city’s flood control infrastructure, and as such, is heavily regulated and adjacent uses restricted. Levees are maintained and inspected regularly for signs of erosion, woody vegetation, and animal burrows. Recreational trails are permitted on the top of the levee, but no trees are allowed within fifteen feet of the bottom of the levee embankment. These restrictions may impact access points and locations meant to engage people along the river.

Low-head dams are obstructions, typically of concrete, built across the river channel to impound water upstream. Their design allows water to flow over the top of the dam. The water pooled upstream of a low-head dam may be used for water supply, industry, and/or recreation. Depending on their design, low-head dams can create a major barrier for fish and other aquatic species trying to migrate.

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**Hamilton County**

- **Water/Wetlands**: 60%
- **Agriculture**: 4.9%
- **Low Density Residential**: 2.3%
- **High Density Residential**: 2.2%
- **Commercial**: 4.8%
- **Low-Head Dam**: 3.4%

**Indianapolis**

- **Water/Wetlands**: 60%
- **Agriculture**: 4.9%
- **Low Density Residential**: 2.3%
- **High Density Residential**: 2.2%
- **Commercial**: 4.8%
upstream. On the downstream side, low-head dams may create extremely dangerous hydraulic vortex that traps anyone or anything that gets too close.

There are six low-head dams in the study area. These include: Riverwood Dam, Broad Ripple Dam, Williams Creek Cutoff Dam, Emrichsville Dam, Chevy Dam, and IPL/Harding Street Dam. IDNR classifies these low-head dams as low-hazard risks based on their volume, height, and watershed area. As they are currently constructed, none of these dams allow for the safe passage of fish and aquatic species upstream, and prevent canoers and kayakers from safely traveling downstream without having to portage around them.

In the fall of 2018, the Emrichsville Dam failed. Citizens Energy Group (CEG) depends on the pool upstream of this dam for water supply infrastructure and are exploring options to build a new dam upstream, possibly closer to their water intake. This new dam is early in the design phase and may incorporate safe passage for fish and other aquatic species, as well as canoers and kayakers. CEG plans to retrofit the Williams Creek Dam in late summer 2019 to remove the dangerous downstream hydraulic. At this time, it is unclear if the design will allow for safe passage of fish or small recreational boats.
Amount of Flooding and its Cause

Watershed Loses Runoff Too Quickly

IMPERVIOUS COVER AS CAUSE
Impervious land cover including rooftops, driveways, and parking lots prevents natural soil infiltration, and increases stormwater runoff volume, velocity, and pollutant loadings. Paving and building over natural ground reduces what can be absorbed into the soil and quickens runoff to streams and, ultimately, to the White River. The sub-watersheds in both Hamilton and Marion County are expected to increase in impervious cover up to five percent by 2050. This would increase impervious cover in urban areas to thirty-five percent on average, while rural areas would likely increase more slowly.

CROPLAND AS CAUSE
In the White River watershed, roughly fifty-seven percent of the agricultural land in Hamilton County and four percent of Marion County is in row crop production. Row crop fields, especially corn, create more runoff from rainfall than grass-covered pasture. The increased runoff is most pronounced on large fields with soil that is deeply compacted from heavy machinery and left exposed to the elements after harvest and before a new crop develops.

BUILDINGS IN FLOODPLAIN
A significant portion of the study area is in the White River 100-year floodplain. Floodplains are subject to periodic inundation that may result in loss of life and property, disruption of business and government services, and major public expenditures for flood protection, response, and recovery. All of this adversely affects public health, safety, and general welfare. In the study area, there are as many as 6,500 buildings at risk of flooding, flood damage, and flood-related losses. There are roughly 1,400 at-risk buildings in Hamilton County and 5,100 in Marion County. This excludes the 2,800 structures located behind the network of levees in Indianapolis and buildings located in the floodplain elsewhere in the watershed.

INCREASING RAINFALL, IN LARGER STORMS
Precipitation has increased over the past century and is projected to keep rising at an even more alarming rate in the next thirty years. More extreme storm events will occur, and it is not a matter of whether the White River will be impacted but, rather, when. New challenges will result from more intense rains, including greater erosion rates in tributaries and riverbanks.

Research from Purdue University and Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment has found that over the past 120 years, the annual depth of rainfall has increased fifteen percent, or about 5.6 inches. Over the next thirty years, the pace of this increase will quicken; annual precipitation is expected to increase an additional six to eight percent. From 1895 to 1959, the state gained 0.32 inches of rain per decade. Since then, the rate has increased to 1.33 inches per decade, a four-fold increase. The IN CCIA predicts that Indiana will experience a twenty-five percent increase in winter precipitation, twenty percent increase in spring, and a five percent decrease in summer and fall. The extent of dryer periods during summer and fall are more challenging to understand, but less rainfall is anticipated in these seasons. Increased rainfall in the winter and spring is a concern for flooding and water quality since the ground may be frozen and there is limited vegetation to intercept and absorb pollutants.

The most extreme rainfall events, defined as the top one percent of daily total rainfall events, are occurring more frequently and are likely to continue that trend. The IN CCIA stated that it is likely there will be a one- to two-day increase in the average number of days per year with extreme precipitation. Regional observations have also suggested there will be more intense storms, with a forty-two percent increase in the amount of rain falling during extreme events.
Community Priorities

Any attempts to improve this waterway will require cooperation from river-adjacent farmers to leave a buffer between the river and their farm fields, as well as habitat restoration for the fish, including bank stabilization, structure additions, and run-off management.

We must have balance in our ecosystem and we humans have enough development. We need more green preservation.

It’s exciting to see such growing efforts and awareness around our natural resources. Keep up the great work!

Protect my community from flooding - wetlands for neighborhood to prevent flood water running to the river. Restore the riparian wetland and natural system to mitigate the effect of flood events. Collect and reuse rainwater.

River-wide Ideas

Protects and restores the river’s floodplain and builds resilience to climate change.

FLOODPLAIN PRESERVATION & RESTORATION

In a natural, undeveloped state, floodplains provide important regional economic, social, and environmental benefits that are often overlooked when land-use decisions are made by local officials. Floodplains benefit water resources by providing flood and erosion control, filtering harmful sediments and pollutants carried by stormwater runoff, and promoting infiltration and groundwater recharge. They also maintain biodiversity and biological productivity, high-quality wetlands, and critical fish and wildlife habitat.

Floodplains benefit society by providing open space, areas for active and passive recreation, and rich alluvial soils for productive agriculture. They often contain historic and archaeological sites from early settlements.

The best method to preserve the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains is to avoid any land alteration and development in the floodplain. Where avoidance is not practical, however, impacts can be minimized through preservation and restoration of floodplains elsewhere, or by providing compensatory storage somewhere else on the development site.

RIVER MEANDER ZONE PROTECTION

The river meander zone (or fluvial erosion hazard area) is the space the river needs to move so as to maintain equilibrium in the channel and the geological processes of erosion and deposition. How quickly the river moves within the meander zone is determined by local geology, sediment load, slope, vegetation, and land use. Protecting the meander zone is especially important during a flood because this is where the stream is most powerful and will cause the greatest damage to property, utilities, and infrastructure.

The White River, as it flows through Hamilton and Marion Counties, is relatively stationary. The river meander zone width was calculated by IDNR as three times the river’s bankfull width or one hundred feet, whichever is greater, on each side of the river. Within the meander zone, unfortunately, there are numerous buildings, utilities, and critical infrastructure. This is understandable because the river meander zone concept has emerged only recently due to advancements in stream morphology and flood risk reduction strategies. Moving forward, the river meander zone should be protected by setbacks and no-disturbance policies, covering fill, excavations, buildings, utilities, and infrastructure.
Action: Adopt and enforce setbacks and no-disturbance policies in the flood meander zone to avoid erosion hazards and related risk to buildings, utilities, and infrastructure.

**VOLUNTARY FLOODPLAIN BUYOUTS**

Voluntary acquisition or buy-outs of flood-damaged properties is intended to reduce flood losses by moving people and structures out of known flooding areas. Through FEMA’s voluntary acquisition program, flood-damaged properties are purchased, structures are removed, and the land is restored and remains open space in perpetuity. There are roughly 6,500 structures in the floodplain of the White River study area, and acquiring all these properties is not feasible. Targeting areas that repeatedly flood, and where landowners are regularly displaced and willing to sell, is a good place to start.

Action: Explore voluntary acquisition of flood-damaged properties and restore the natural and beneficial functions of the floodplain.

**LOW-HEAD DAM INFRASTRUCTURE MODIFICATIONS**

Modifications to the existing low-head dams, and the addition of new dams in the study area, should equally balance function with stream ecology and public safety. Additional recreation benefits are another opportunity. As they are currently constructed, none of these dams allow for the easy migration of fish and aquatic species. This limits the number and diversity of species in the White River. Fish need to migrate to find food, avoid predators, and spawn. Other aquatic species, such as freshwater mussels, depend on migrating fish to distribute their young.

Low-head dams also alter the natural flow of sediment in a stream. Sediment is trapped and accumulates upstream of the dam. Downstream, to meet the sediment load balance caused by a natural meandering stream, the stream erodes its banks, reducing streamside habitat and water quality. Canoers and kayakers paddling downstream must portage around each of these low-head dams. There is a dangerous hydraulic vortex generated by the Riverwood, Williams Creek, and the former Emrichsville dams. The step dam in Broad Ripple and steep rock/sheet piling drop of the Chevy and IPL/ Harding Street dams can make these unsafe and difficult to navigate for paddlers or recreational users. Improving public safety, fish passage, and overall stream health while maintaining the original low-head dam function is achievable with strategically placed rock-based modifications.

Action: Promote multi-purpose low-head dams to allow for function, ecology, and recreation as part of modifications to the existing dams, and construction of new dam alternatives.

Action: When the function of a low-head dam is no longer needed, the dam should be removed by the facility owner and the ecology of the river restored.

**CHANNEL MAINTENANCE MODIFICATIONS**

Regulated drains are a critical part of the stormwater infrastructure, intended to move runoff away as quickly as possible. The preferred maintenance method is to keep the channel and adjacent easements clear of sediment and woody vegetation. However, this method, typically using dredging, can increase flooding downstream and damage the health of the stream. The dredging process results in a wider and deeper channel resulting in a greater volume of water being conveyed downstream at a higher velocity. It also can resuspend harmful legacy pollutants that have accumulated in the streambed which can impact water quality and aquatic life.

Both two-stage ditches and alternating planted pockets are viable alternatives. A two-stage ditch is a modification of the traditional drainage ditch and has been successfully constructed throughout Indiana. The design mimics the natural meandering flow of a stream and adds benches in the channel to function as a floodplain that filters and stores water during a flood. The result is a more stable channel, flood storage, and nutrient removal without compromising drainage capacity. Another approach is to establish alternating pockets of native trees and native grasses along the regulated drain. The native grasses allow access points for periodic maintenance and, together with trees filter sediments and pollutants, improve overall stream health.

Promote alternative channel maintenance practices to reduce flooding downstream and improve overall stream health.
Recaptures large productive landscapes (quarries, landfills) stormwater and flood capture

REGIONAL FLOOD STORAGE FACILITIES

Indianapolis and Hamilton County have not experienced a flood as devastating as the flood of record from 1913. Hydrology studies forecasting future flooding indicate that precipitation will increase and more frequent and intense storms will occur. This additional rainfall coupled with vast areas of impervious cover and an ever-increasingly efficient agricultural drainage network will result in more runoff and downstream flooding.

To accommodate the predicted future volume of water, communities along the White River need to investigate regional flood storage facilities. These facilities could take several forms: 1) construct large dry detention basins that double as open space for recreation when not temporarily flooded; 2) establish dedicated flood easements on privately owned and undeveloped agricultural land, and if flooded, the farmer’s flood losses would be paid by the benefiting municipality; and 3) route flood water to retired sand and gravel quarries along the White River to provide temporary flood storage.

ON-SITE STORAGE AND TREATMENT OF STORMWATER RUNOFF

Low-impact development and green infrastructure are proven methods to capture and treat stormwater runoff where it begins, at its source. Noblesville, Carmel, Fishers, and Indianapolis have all successfully implemented some level of green infrastructure to address nuisance flooding and improve water quality. However, few incentives or requirements are in place to make these practices standard stormwater management techniques for all private and public development. Enforcing some degree of low-impact development and green infrastructure for every type of development in the watershed could have significant benefits for water quantity and volume control in the White River.

Action: Institute policies or incentives to increase on-site storage of stormwater throughout the watershed to reduce the volume of runoff and pollutant loading to the White River.
**Anchor: Emrichsville Dam**

The Emrichsville Dam anchor site is located in the Protected Reach, which is between 29th Street/Riverside Park to I-465. The Emrichsville Dam was built during 1899-1900 to raise the water level of the White River through Riverside Park and points north, making it more conducive to boating. Turrets on the wing walls at either bank were designed as observatories offering views up and down the river. A hole in a dam along the White River just south of 16th Street has reduced the pool upstream and narrowed the channel. CEG’s emergency water intake is impacted and the pool at the intake must be replaced.

This moment is a tremendous opportunity to redesign the dam for more multi-functional benefits, an idea that can be tested at the Emrichsville Dam site and deployed over time up and down the river. The pilot project proposal maintains the pool elevation, promotes safe recreation and access to the river, and provides mussel recovery and fish passage to improve habitat and water quality.
Site-specific Recommendations

- Incentivize development designed to reduce the carbon footprint and elevate new development above anticipated water levels. Focus retail and any utilities to key areas outside of the floodplain.

- Take advantage of opportunities to capture water upstream and reduce impervious surfaces.

- Build advance partnerships with key landowners to enable voluntary acquisitions or buy-outs within floodplain land, when relevant and supported.

- Integrate recreation opportunities within or around the dam infrastructure.

- Seek partnerships for dam modifications. Establish public-private-nonprofit partnerships to fund low-head dam modifications that incorporates safe passage for river paddlers and improve aquatic habitat while maintaining the dam’s function. Modifications to low-head dams can be incremental over time. These may include providing safe and accessible passage for paddlers around the dam, adding signage, and/or breaking up the dangerous hydraulic vortex downstream of the dam.

- Complete a dam modification feasibility study. Identify conceptual design alternatives and associated costs for low-head dam modification. Explore a variety of systems to allow for safe fish passage and recreational paddlers as well as expected pool capacity upstream. Recommend the preferred alternative and justification.

- Secure funding. Seek funding for design, construction and long-term maintenance from a variety of sources including general operating funds, grants, loans, donations, tax increment financing districts, user fees, etc.

- Modify the low-head dam. Design and construct the recommended alternative from the feasibility study.

- Provide long-term maintenance and monitoring. Ensure optimal function and performance by following operation and maintenance guidance. Partner with IDNR, the Health Department and/or local nonprofit entities to monitor and track changes in stream health and migration of aquatic species over time.
Criteria for Choosing Emrichsville Dam and Other Sites Along the River

CAN MAINTAIN THE FUNCTIONAL USE OF DAM AND POOL
Before it failed, the Emrichsville Dam benefited people along the river for over a century, yet it also had negative effects. In choosing this site and this particular piece of infrastructure as a focus area, the dam’s function, public use, and environmental health of the river should be prioritized and sustained, all while removing the negative aspects of the original structure.

The pool of water behind the original dam ensured a secure and resilient water supply system, delivered by CEG to a large portion of Marion County. Maintaining a pool of water at a particular level is critical for a safe supply of water during high use or drought. Replacing all or a portion of this pool is therefore a primary criterion for this site.

CAN DEVELOP SAFE PASSAGE OVER THE DAM
The loss of the dam severely affected public use. The pool of water was used by various boats, canoes and kayaks, although passage over the dam was difficult and dangerous. Creating safe passage over the dam elevates the recreational potential of the site by improving safety, expanding river use, and increasing connectivity of communities and the public.

CAN RESTORE CONTINUOUS AQUATIC HABITAT
The river’s natural resources have been affected by nearly every change made in the past. When the original dam was constructed, change occurred. When it failed, change occurred again. With each change, the internal sediment balance of the river, oxygen levels, and species movements all shifted. Restoring continuous aquatic habitat that resembles the original state will improve the health and resilience of the river ecosystem.

Other Relevant Areas along the River

LOW HEAD DAMS
The six existing low-head dams along the river in Marion and Hamilton Counties challenge the many goals of the White River Vision Plan, but they also represent an opportunity. Nearly all present the same situation as Emrichsville Dam, despite different ages and functions. To varying degrees, each dam prevents easy and safe passage for river users, limits movement of aquatic species, and affects water quality.

Improvements at all dams can address issues like those at Emrichsville Dam. Maintaining the dam’s function is possible while creating safe passage for river paddlers and improving aquatic habitat. Maintaining the flood pool is important to each of the low-head dams in the study area. Through proper improvements, the pool can be maintained with the addition of a stepped rock structure or similar method to smooth out the river elevation change at the dam. At the very least, safe and effective portages could be identified, built, and well-marked. Other modifications could enable fish passage and reconnect the aquatic life above and below the dams. In this way, each dam can be improved to meet the key goals of the White River Vision Plan. The following dams exist within the study area and are relevant infrastructure opportunities:

- Riverwood Dam
- Broad Ripple Dam
- Williams Creek Cutoff Dam
- Chevy Dam
- IPL/Harding Street Dam
The White River can become a place of immersion in nature – where the landscape feels safe, clean and endlessly intriguing. To build greater stewardship for the river and enable immersion in a healthy system, we want to grow the ability for all residents to tell the story of how the White River can be a clean, safe and remarkably beautiful place where unexpected encounters with wildlife and beauty are waiting around every bend. This theme summarizes the environmental considerations of the river that underpin that story, including ecological health, water quality and hydrologic / infrastructural considerations.
Steward River Health

Two million people – thirty percent of the entire population of Indiana – live in the Upper White River watershed. Too few realize just how much they shape the river’s character by how they use the land, what they do in their homes and workplaces, and what they do directly to the river itself.

Steward River Health means that this stretch of the White River:

- Improves water quality and reduces stormwater runoff volume.
- Manages urban and natural ecosystems in a coordinated manner.
Existing Conditions

Lost Biodiversity in the River and Its Causes

Certain wildlife can be a strong bio-indicator – the “canary in the coal mine” – of an entire ecosystem’s health. In the case of the White River, it is fish and mussel abundance and biodiversity. Not surprisingly, fish and mussels in the White River are affected by past and present human use of the river and surrounding watershed. Dams, water pollution, and past over-harvesting all contributed to their diminished abundance and number of species. This, in turn, affects their ecological connections to other species living in or using the river, producing a cascade effect on biodiversity and a negative feedback loop on water quality.

DAMS

Ironically, dams can help improve local mussel habitat by holding back sediment and raising oxygen levels by water agitation, but they are also solid barriers to fish movement and the mussels that depend on fish to move their larvae. Dams can be designed or retrofitted in a way that allows fish passage over them, producing a cascade effect on biodiversity and a negative feedback loop on water quality.

WATER POLLUTION

Past impacts to the river ecosystem and its biodiversity began in the 1800s with forest clearing for mixed agriculture. As more people settled, agriculture and drainage systems expanded and towns and cities developed. Generally speaking, a stream in a watershed with more than ten percent impervious cover or twenty-five to fifty percent row crops will show signs of degradation. Stream banks and beds eroded from too much water, and sediment loads increased, burying fish spawning grounds and mussel beds. As urbanization expanded in the twentieth century, stream temperatures warmed and overall aquatic habitat deteriorated due to pollution. This favored the invasive Asian clam and European carp. The Asian clam competes with native species of mussels for habitat and resources, and the carp disturbs the river bottom by rooting and eating vegetation and competing with native fish for resources.

Runoff and direct discharge of chemicals and waste further harmed water quality by reducing oxygen levels or by outright poisoning. This regularly resulted in large fish kills – 160 were recorded from 1960 to 1992. Despite best efforts by all, they occasionally still happen. In 1994, a CSO (Combined Sewer Overflow) event killed 510,000 fish in the Indianapolis reach of the river, and a chemical release in 2000 killed a large number of fish. Mercury and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in river sediment also brought the White River a fish consumption advisory.

Although small changes in water management were begun in the early 1900s, the 1972 Clean Water Act significantly improved water quality. Wastewater handling improved, runoff from pavement and fields was better managed (including changes in crop tillage practices), and some wetlands were restored. For example, in Muncie, Indiana, loose, bacteria-laden streambeds in 1972 were converted to sand, gravel, and bedrock by 2000 – and fish responded, increasing from thirty to sixty-nine species. Despite periodic fish kills, since 1980 a focus on cleaning up wastewater and increasing oxygen levels has led to a rebound in the Indianapolis area, too – the number of fish species has increased from nine to sixty-three.

OVER-HARVEST IN THE PAST

Both mussels and fish have suffered from over-harvest in the past. Mussels were heavily harvested from the White River from the 1890s through the 1960s for the button and cultured pearl industries. This harvest depleted many species and dramatically reduced the abundance and water-cleansing effect of mussels in the river. Harvesting mussels was made illegal in 1991, but their recovery has been slow.

Overfishing and declining fish stocks in the late 1800s prompted governments to introduce the European carp to America. Unfortunately, carp disturb river and lake bottoms by rooting out and eating aquatic vegetation and competing with native fish for resources. By the early 1900s people began to see carp as a problem, while harvest regulations were enacted on native fish and hatcheries built to bolster native fish populations.
Lost Biodiversity on Land and Its Causes

FRAGMENTATION AND SHRINKING HABITAT

Before 1830, the region was blanketed by several forest types: oak-hickory on dry ground, oak-maple-tulip and beech-maple on moist sites, maple-elm-cottonwood in floodplains, and sycamore-cottonwood forests on riverbanks. That setting has changed, with forest now covering only about eleven percent of the White River study area, developed lands about 52 percent, and cropland about twenty-three percent. Most forested areas are small fragments of one to ten acres in size, which cannot support the rich bird and wildlife populations once present.

INVASION BY NON-NATIVE PLANTS

Invasive plants cover a large proportion of the White River watershed to the exclusion of many native species. Common invasive plants include honeysuckle, white mulberry, tree-of-heaven, reed canary grass, narrow-leaved cattail, and purple loosestrife. Controlling invasive plants requires considerable investment and long-term attention to prevent their return.

POOR LAND MANAGEMENT

As with any human-influenced system, the White River corridor has a gradient of conditions, from natural and restored areas to highly disturbed and damaged ones. Like most ecosystems, as human influence increases, biodiversity tends to decrease. Having experienced nearly 200 years of land use to extract the maximum benefits for people, it is not surprising that White River ecosystems have lost species, been invaded by non-native species, and suffered erosion, pollution, and low production of wildlife.

On the one hand, it was once seen as necessary to convert the land to agriculturally productive uses. Healthy and resilient ecosystems benefit people – and there is an increasing understanding of ecology and the techniques that will reduce the negative effects of land use on ecosystems. For example, no-till agriculture, wetland restoration on wet cropland, and cover cropping greatly reduce the amount of runoff, sediment, and nutrients leaving cropland. Such practices are becoming more common in Central Indiana. Likewise, timber harvest using government grants and cost-share will allow better site preparation – such as removing invasive trees and shrubs – and promote the germination and growth of native trees to replace those being removed.

Polluted Water and Its Causes

Humans naturally gravitate to rivers, creeks, and water. Today, the White River has an image problem. People perceive that the river is polluted, which keeps people away. The story of degradation and, more importantly, recovery, must be told.

The White River has a wonderful internal capacity for self-cleaning, if given a chance. This “assimilative capacity” of rivers is overwhelmed when ten to twenty-five percent of a watershed is paved and roofed, sending water directly to a river, or when a quarter to a half of a watershed is cropped with few controls on the amount and purity of water leaving the land. Two of the most important contributors to water pollution are bacteria and sediment-linked phosphorus. (Chemical runoff from roads and industrial effluent also contribute to the problem, but controlled through the MS4 Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System permitting required of all cities and towns under the 1972 Clean Water Act. No similar regulatory structure exists for agriculture.)

BACTERIA

Bacterial pollution clouds the present and future use of the White River. It is a public health issue, with as many as eight in one thousand people predicted to become ill each year from contact with the river’s waters. Even when bacteria levels are low, as they can be, the perception is of a polluted river. The future story must also be of human health and enjoyment.

Escherichia coli, or E. coli bacteria levels in waters are used as an indicator of other, associated harmful bacteria in the water that could make one sick. The bacteria is natural and lives in people, mammals, and other wildlife. Although coming from many sources, some data suggest that populations can build up in urban water courses, which are then are flushed to rivers by storms. The good news is that E. coli and associated bacteria are killed
by sunlight – sunny streams and wetlands typically have low E. coli counts if there isn’t a large upstream source. E. coli counts in the river were astonishingly high in the 1970s, but things have much improved. Nevertheless, today’s threshold for allowable levels of E. coli is still regularly exceeded in the White River. Higher rainfall in late April and through May and again in September and October typical elevated the E. coli levels at water quality sample sites. In other times of the year, bacteria counts are often below the regulatory threshold.

Efforts to reduce bacteria in the river must involve everybody, as everyone contributes in some way. Depending on location, the source of the E. coli bacteria differs:

1. Below Lake Indy: Nearly All From Combined Sewer Overflows: The main sources of E. coli in the White River are CSO overflow events and storm sewer outfalls in towns and cities. During big storms, the CSO are overwhelmed and may release raw human sewage into the river. Broken sewer pipes are another urban source. Other minor contributors may be Canada geese and pets. The CSO situation is being addressed and E. coli counts from CSOs will be much reduced in the next three to six years. The Marion County Public Health Department analyzes water quality samples from April through October, when many people are on the water. Where E. coli levels exceed state water quality standards, the Department posts signs to warn people they should not get in the river. Look for these signs when visiting parks, greenways, and canoe launches.

2. Above Lake Indy: Over Three-Quarters From Agricultural and Urban Runoff: Manure applications to fields plus confined animal feedlot operations (CAFOs) are common sources of bacteria in runoff in agricultural areas. During high-rainfall events, agricultural pollution enters streams and ditches, and eventually rivers. A minor source of E. coli may be old and failing septic tanks in more rural areas.

Sediment and Phosphorus: A Clear, Green and Brown River

TOO MUCH RUNOFF ERODES RIVER BANKS AND BEDS

After a heavy rain, the White River is brown with sediment dislodged from beds and banks of tributaries and the river itself. This is due to the scouring effect of frequent and excessive pulses of water. Sediment is a symptom of too much water in the river from too much drainage in the watershed. Pavement, rooftops, and cropland accelerate the water entering the river, causing it to rise and fall with even small rainstorms. Plants struggle to survive the frequent up and down water level and larger scouring events. Sediment already in the river moves with the storm flow, adding to the mix. Sediment also washes directly in from storm sewers, ditches, and construction sites. Worsening the situation is the ever-increasing amount of rainfall in the region, most coming in larger storms.

SEDIMENT IN WATER BRINGS PHOSPHORUS AND ALGAE

At the other end of the spectrum, between rains, especially in summer, the White River is tinted green from trillions of microscopic green algae. At such times one cannot see more than two to three feet into the water. This is the work of too much of a good thing – nutrients that stimulate the growth of these tiny life forms. The essential element, phosphorus, is the primary cause, coming from many places: streets and parking lots, cropland, storm sewers, home septic systems, wastewater treatment plants, even geese and dog droppings. Much of the phosphorus is bound to particles of sediment; if you stopped sediment from reaching the river, you would stop most of the phosphorus. Between storms in early spring, late fall and winter, when water temperatures are low, the water finally runs clear because the algae growth slows down.
Community Priorities

What are we doing to ensure that there is ecological integrity throughout the development process? The White River is an amazing habitat for fish, mussels, eagles, and other wildlife. I want to help make sure it stays that way.

We live on the river, connect with our neighbors, and are committed to making our environment and river healthy and enjoyable. We want to help.

As a paddle board enthusiast, I love being on the White River and take the time to clean up trash while paddling. I look forward to a day when we don’t worry about raw sewage in our water and people see the river as a place to play and commune with each other and nature.

I grew up playing in the White River downstream about 50 miles, back in the 80’s before everyone had access to the internet and pollution facts. My relatives still live in the area and my hope is that a part of your goals include cleaning up the polluted riverway so that it can be enjoyed by all communities along the stream.

River-wide Ideas

Improves water quality and reduces runoff volume

COORDINATE WATER QUALITY WORK

Several organizations have long engaged in monitoring and improving the White River’s health. In the summer of 2018, the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust announced $4.9 million in grants to launch the Partners for the White River collaboration; part of that funding will support the White River Alliance to coordinate monitoring among other partners including the Nature Conservancy and Hoosier Environmental Council. The White River Vision Plan encourages continued collaboration among these organizations to become more effective at addressing water quality issues. Some key organizations involved in monitoring the river’s water quality are:

- White River Alliance
- Hoosier Environmental Council
- Friends of the White River
- Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Hamilton County SWCD
- Marion County Public Health Department
- Hamilton County Health Department
- Reconnecting to Our Waterways

Action: Create a Water Quality Cooperative group. The activity of a water quality cooperative will be to share information, identify important water quality projects, and secure and distribute funds to implement projects. For example, a single source for information on past and current water quality projects on the White River could be tapped by cooperating organizations to better understand one another’s priorities and identify projects that fill gaps in water quality improvement efforts.

In another example, the SWCD’s sediment reduction initiatives reach farmers willing to plant cover crops that grow and absorb rainfall after crops are harvested. “Edge-of-field” practices, like constructed basins, also store water and remove sediment. The Hamilton County SWCD has been mailing private landowners along the river, inviting them to participate in a cost-sharing program for controlling invasive plants and planting cover crops. The Marion County SWCD is planning to replicate that program.
PUBLICIZE RIVER MONITORING DATA

An informed resident population will act wisely to promote its interests. Making White River monitoring data widely available, in a form that anyone can understand, will advance water quality improvement and conservation work along the White River.

Key organizations involved in river monitoring are:

- Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources (fish and mussels)
- Indiana Water Quality Monitoring Council (water quality, macroinvertebrates)

Action: Track and Publish River Data: The first steps in publicizing river monitoring data will be to identify a lead organization that would track the most informative data and publicize it. A simple, annual status report for a few key parameters, amply illustrated, would tell the story.

- Hoosier Riverwatch (water quality, macroinvertebrates)
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management (water quality)
- White River Alliance (water quality)

SUCCESS STORIES

To date, the Central Indiana Land Trust has purchased or protected more than 5,500 acres of natural habitat, including land in the White River study area. The Indiana Forest Alliance, to further its goal of increasing tree canopy cover in Marion County, is mapping all remaining forests, most of which are only eight to thirteen acres in size.

SHARE EXISTING CONSERVATION PROJECT PLANS

An abundance of planned projects already exists. Making these plans available from one source will allow cooperating organizations to understand each other’s priorities and reveal gaps in conservation efforts. Sharing lessons learned and the preferences of different communities along the river will increase the effectiveness of cooperating organizations. Some important recent studies are:

- Central Indiana Greenway Plan: Identifies opportunities along trails to plant forests where they enlarge or connect existing forests.
- Indy Greenways Full Circle Master Plan: Identifies opportunities to connect isolated wetlands and floodplains, restore the natural function of floodplains, and plant trees in greenway corridors.
- Plan 2020: Identifies opportunities to incorporate natural resource restoration and management in plans for ten new parks, in updates of park master plans, and during implementation at parks where master plans are completed.
- Greening the Crossroads: Identifies the interconnected green infrastructure of natural areas and open spaces in Hamilton and Marion Counties that sustains air, water, people, and wildlife.

COORDINATE FOREST AND HABITAT CONSERVATION WORK

Several organizations have been working to identify, protect, restore, and manage forests and other habitats along the White River. Some of the most active organizations are:

- Central Indiana Land Trust
- Indiana Forest Alliance
- Indy Parks and Recreation
- Hamilton Co. Parks and Recreation
- Indy DPW Land Stewardship
- Keep Indianapolis Beautiful

Action: Create a Forest and Habitat Conservation Cooperative group. The work of a forest and habitat conservation cooperative will be to share information, identify important conservation projects, and secure and distribute funds to implement projects. It will use this information to identify forests that are not protected, to assess the quality of the forests, and establish priorities for preserving high quality forests and forest cover in general. This work will orient future park selection, acquisition from willing landowners, and other conservation around the highest priority forests on private lands. Of course, private landowners can play a major role in forest and habitat conservation and would be served by a conservation cooperative.

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Southwestway Park is located in the South Bluffs Reach between I-465 and Southwestway Park. South of Indianapolis, at the far end of the White River study corridor, Southwestway Park contains some of the most outstanding geological features and intact ecological communities in Central Indiana. Southwestway’s highest ground, Mann Hill, and the adjacent White River valley are part of a delta complex formed in the last glacial period. Not only is Mann Hill unique in the White River corridor, but the ecological communities are among the best in the study area. The park is also located among the longest existing stretch of free-flowing river in the study area.

Southwestway Park features large blocks of mature, continuous forest large enough to support flocks of long-distance migratory birds and locally uncommon species of breeding birds such as the northern parula warbler and wood thrush. The Park is a destination for local wildlife with sufficient habitat to attract flying squirrels, gray fox, river otter, box turtle, and tree-roosting bats. Southwestway Park is owned and managed by the City of Indianapolis, and opportunities currently exist to purchase additional land on both sides of the White River to increase potential for conservation. The park’s archaeological heritage and natural resources can be highlighted through interpretive wayfinding and signage.

The park, which is currently used for mountain biking and team sports, will transform into a destination for overnight camps and tubing adventures that take advantage of access to this navigable waterway. Large swaths of land next to the river can be restored to natural habitat areas to support the native birds and plant species that were once abundant in this region.
Site-specific Recommendations

- Complete a natural areas inventory; identify habitat core and transition areas.
- Complete a natural resource management plan and coordinate the implementing organizations.
- Secure a ten-year long restoration and management program.
- Create a new entrance and boat access near Southport Road.
- Enhance environmental education activities.
- Create educational spaces, such as a ranger “outpost” building and small “nature center.”
- Add ranger-led talks and interpretive signage about the ecology and geologic history of the park.
- Seek grants for an archeologist-educator.
- Partner to purchase adjacent farmland and mining areas for conservation.

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RIVER HEALTH
Use the free flowing river to create places for tubing, kayaking

ACCESS
Create a park entrance off Southport Road

HISTORY
Allow the public to interact with the historic significance of this area and engage with archeological projects

ENVIRONMENT
Reforest undeveloped elements of the park

EXPERIENCE
Program with regional events, overnight camps, concerts

COMMUNITY
Protect valuable farmland from development
SOUTHWESTWAY PARK RE-IMAGINED AS A ECOLOGICALLY-RICH NATURE EXPERIENCE.
Criteria for Choosing This Place and Other Sites Along the River

- Contains large habitat blocks. Important for habitat connectivity, and a destination for local and migrating birds and other wildlife. Habitat connectivity upstream and downstream can be enhanced by acquisition or easements on land to enlarge and connect the network of nearby natural areas.
- Public or private land dedicated to conservation
- Local Organization to Manage Natural Resources
- Natural Resource Interpretive Potential

Other Relevant Areas along the River

- Strawtown-Koteewi Park
- Allisonville/Conner Prairie
- Town Run Park
- Nonie Krauss Nature Reserve
- Oliver’s Woods
Who has walked along the White River during a cool fall day and captured a glimpse of autumn’s rich hues reflected in its surface? Who has experienced the depths of winter’s cold, where the icy water of the river streams and crackles in turn? What memories exist of the cooling touch of the river during a hot Indiana summer night swim? And what of the first buds of spring, when the sounds of birds and bugs emerge to break winter’s long silence?

The White River is a place of constant change, where the region’s seasons express their breadth and uniqueness. A dynamic canvas where the communities of the region can experience of time and change, the River presents a show for all to see, but one that is sadly often without audience. The Vision Plan seizes this moment to awaken regional awareness, calling for the sharpening of the senses to the River’s phenomenon and the intentional year-round activation of the river.
Increase Year-round Activities

The White River connects diverse communities, land uses, and edge typologies within its fifty-eight-mile length. For a connected river that links myriad destinations, people-focused programming should provide new experiences to encourage continuous exploration and resonance for a diversity of visitors and communities. Year-round programming such as innovative entertainment, highlights of dynamic ecology, and flexible gathering spaces can differentiate the White River as a national attraction. Public spaces and destinations should resonate with visitors throughout the calendar year and each day, creating places that are meaningful and sustainable for generations.

The strategies within this section of the plan leverage existing destinations and social activities, while laying a framework for potential future programming and destinations that further enhance an active riverfront.

*Increase Year-round Activities* means that this stretch of the White River:

- Fosters accessible connections to cultural and recreational programs and places.
- Activates the river year-round with local programming.
- Recaptures large economically-productive landscapes for recreation.
- Increase river views and access through new overlooks and ongoing maintenance of riparian vegetation.
- Connects retail destinations and diverse neighborhoods to recreation and river amenities.
- Ensures the river, public spaces along it, and connections to it are safe and welcoming for everyone.

*PADDLING DOWN THE WHITE RIVER CLOSE TO DOWNTOWN INDIANAPOLIS.*

*SNOW TUBING IN THE WINTER AT STRAWTOWN KOTEIWI PARK.*

*THE WHITE RIVER URBAN WILDERNESS TRAIL IN THE SUMMER. IMAGE SOURCE: FRIENDS OF THE WHITE RIVER.*
Existing Conditions

Summary

Seasonality

As the seasons in Central Indiana change, the White River’s morphology and ecological characteristics also change. Throughout the year, these characteristics cycle depending on temperature, sun exposure, rainfall, and larger climatic patterns. The expression of a frozen icy river in the winter is vastly different than a flooded river in the spring or a dry river in a summertime drought.

The majority of activities and events take place in the spring and summer during warm, sunny days. Many events and activities do extend through autumn and into the holiday season. However, beginning in January and lasting until early spring, a lull in outdoor activities may be defined as a “fifth season,” where the White River Vision Plan must focus on programming in order to make the White River an attraction for not just three-quarters of the year, but all year long.

Serving High-need Communities

To provide year-round activities and programming, the White River Vision Plan offers opportunities for equitable access to open space, programming, and opportunities to enhance health and wellness. This goal is particularly focused on high-need communities who will benefit directly from initiatives that provide cultural and recreational programs and places. High-need communities are diverse, low-income neighborhoods with high populations of children under the age of eighteen and adults over the age of sixty-five.

The region’s growth is concentrated in Downtown Indianapolis and suburban areas, with regional population climbing from 1.99 million to 2.51 million since 2015. Hamilton County and the Indianapolis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) have grown and are projected to grow faster than Marion County. Marion County has a large cohort of young adults aged eighteen to thirty-four, while Hamilton County has more children under eighteen and adults ages thirty-five to fifty-four, suggesting a higher concentration of families. Hamilton County, as a whole, also has higher incomes and a greater concentration of college graduates than Marion County and the region. Between 2010 and 2017, Hamilton County and the region gained residents across all income levels. In this same period, Marion County lost higher income residents.

Working-age residents are critical to the region’s growth and future. The population of seniors and children is growing across the region while the population of working-age adults is declining. There is potential, as part of the White River Vision Plan, to invest in public realm and other improvements that can provide attractive and safe recreational options connected to their communities. These improvements can work together to help retain those who live in the area and entice visitors to relocate to the area.
Community Priorities

I think making improvements to enhance the area near the riverfront is a great idea. I would most like to see a mix of minimally developed natural areas, and areas with some sort of attention getting feature. I would like to suggest adding disc golf courses at some of the parks. They are relatively inexpensive to build, low maintenance, and they promote physical activity.

There could be many ways for Hoosiers to exercise and relax on the river! I have canoed on this river with the Boy Scouts and it is beautiful! A plan to improve would be great; makes me think of Riverwalk in San Antonio.

I love the creativity that went into having gondolas on the river in the summer months. I have so many more ideas!

River-Wide Ideas

Fosters accessible connections to cultural and recreational programs and places.

In order to provide broad and equitable opportunities, the diverse cultural and physical aspects of the river should be reflected in future riverfront activities. This includes programs that are available and accessible to people of all physical ability, age, and socioeconomic status. Cultural and recreational programming should represent needs and histories of diverse communities along the length of the White River. A range of events, destinations, and activities will ensure that the White River is beloved by all, for generations to come.

- Action: Centralize Events Information: All river activities should be consolidated into one calendar for both counties. This calendar should become interactive, and allow organizations access to help build upon the calendar year-round.
- Action: Create a dedicated fund for special events, concerts, festivals.

Recaptures large productive landscapes for recreation.

Recreational spaces along the river consist largely of parks, trails, and large natural areas. In order to leverage large open spaces for recreation, the White River Vision Plan reimagines opportunities to recapture larger productive landscapes, such as dams and landfills, that are nearing the end of their useful lives in industry.

Harkening to the history of Indiana limestone, a number of quarries or gravel pits exist along the river corridor, in varying degrees of activity. Quarries along the White River offer large expanses of space for possible recreation programming and stormwater and floodwater capture. At times, quarries have already hosted concerts. Through adaptive reuse of these sites, their dramatic topography could offer a place to hold spring flooding during
large storm events, host summer events and concerts, integrate fall quarry climbing or “mountain” biking, be filled for winter ice skating or showcase an ice sculpture festival. These spaces need to be evaluated for public health and safety prior to introducing new programs, but offer tremendous opportunity to adapt manipulated landscapes for new social and environmental uses.

Envisioned as enhanced public destinations, these infrastructure enhancements could be associated with improved connections to nearby neighborhoods. Urban beaches, enhanced trailheads, and a mix of flexible and planned programs can be leveraged to provide neighborhood amenities to adjacent communities.

- Action: Acquire available post-production quarry lands close to the river for flood storage and program quarry events during the summer and winter months with outdoor adventure activities.
- Action: Revise long-term land use strategies to coordinate the river vision with nearby post-industrial land opportunities.

Increase river views and access through new overlooks and ongoing maintenance.

There are many areas along the river where people do not currently realize how close they are to the water due to overgrown vegetation, development, or infrastructure that block sightlines. Through maintenance and adjustments to existing trails, pathways, natural areas and park spaces, there are many opportunities to improve visual and physical access to the water. In some locations, this means opening up overgrown vegetation that blocks sightlines. By selecting key areas for access, maintenance can be concentrated to areas that yield the most impact. In other locations, new or enhanced bridges or landings can allow residents to be connected to the river with additional sensorial experiences. By being able to touch the river, see it freeze and thaw, hear the flow, and understand its ecology through interpretive signage, people can be reminded of how the river brings nature into their lives.

- Action: Remove invasive woody and herbaceous plants, plant native trees and shrubs, install native seed, manage and monitor along the river’s edge.

Connects retail destinations and diverse neighborhoods to recreation and river assets.

Connecting existing retail and commercial destinations to recreational assets along the river is a simple strategy to create more river attractions. The addition of a more inviting connection can bring people from existing economic centers to riverfront destinations. This strategy enhances the local economy and offers a wider variety of destinations, without displacing existing retail and commercial activity. They can be easily achieved in the short term while acting as catalytic strategies for the long term. As development continues to increase along the White River in Marion and Hamilton Counties, new construction should build on the momentum of progress in these activated areas, providing a diversity of river-centric experiences.

- Action: Study the feasibility for relocating public utility facilities away from the riverfront and out of the floodplain, and create more spaces for the public to experience the riverfront.
- Action: Pilot a green street program within commercial districts and along commercial corridors that includes sidewalk investments to either side of the street, adds shade trees, demarcates safe crossings to riverfront activities, and captures and stores stormwater.

RECAPTURE AND ADAPTIVELY REUSE YEAR-ROUND
1 Lafayette Trace Park
2 Strawtown Koteewi Park
3 White River Campgrounds
4 Edge Adventure Park
5 River Bend Campground
6 Riverwood Canoe Landing
7 Potter’s Bridge Park
8 Blatnelly Nature Study Club
9 White River Greenway Trail
10 Forest Park
11 White River Canoe Company
12 Conner Prairie
13 River Road Park
14 Heritage Park
15 Nonie Werbe Krauss Park
16 Heritage Park (Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens)
17 Hazel Landing Park
18 Town Run Trail Park
19 Broad Ripple Park
20 Marott Park
21 Brickman Educational Trail Park
22 Holiday Park
23 Friedman Park
24 Butler University and Athletic Fields
25 Central Canal/Trail
26 Newfields
27 The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art and Nature Park: 100 Acres
28 Lake Sullivan/Sports Complex
29 Riverside Regional Park
30 Lake Indy Boat Ramp
31 Municipal Gardens Family Center
32 Carroll Stadium
33 Indianapolis Canal/Cultural Trail
34 NCAA Hall of Champions
35 Indianapolis Zoo
36 White River State Park
37 White River Gardens
38 Victory Field
39 The Rock Flat at the White River
40 Lucas Oil Stadium
41 Edson School of the Arts/Riley Park
42 Lily Recreation Park
43 Southside Landfill/Crossroads Greenhouse
44 Southwestway Park

DESTINATIONS

WHITE RIVER
MILE STUDY AREA BUFFER
DESTINATION
GREEN SPACE

0            1             2                  4                 6
Miles

DRAFT
Ensures the river, public spaces along it, and connections to it are safe for everyone.

To create places along the river that are activated year-round, they should be designed as accessible spaces that make people feel safe. This initiative is an opportunity to strengthen infrastructure and make it code compliant, whether modified dams and levees or enhanced pedestrian and bike trails. Public health and safety should be kept in mind when new connections are made to the riverfront, providing proper access pathways, lighting, and appropriate maintenance to support seasonal programming. Consideration should be given to accommodate vehicular access to seasonal maintenance vehicles and emergency responders. Appropriate program selection along the river should consider potential risks and carefully site programs that are complementary to skill level and age groups (i.e. toddler playgrounds should be sited away from river embankments). Activation of destinations can create places where infrastructure, human engagement, and ecology overlap and enhance neighborhood character.
ANCHOR: DOWNTOWN INDIANAPOLIS

Downtown Indianapolis is located in the Protected Reach between 29th Street and Riverside Park to I-465. Downtown Indianapolis is characterized by large civic open spaces and sweeping views of the river, made possible by a system of levees and riverfront industrial and commercial land uses. The Protected Reach is the most dense and urban reach within the study area. As the state capital, Indianapolis is an economic, cultural, and residential hub for the Central Indiana region. A stable business district and burgeoning downtown culture is driving residential growth in downtown. Museums, dining, shopping, and special events drive a robust tourist economy throughout the year. Yet, very few of these destinations leverage their proximity of the White River.

Development catalysts in places like 16 Tech and Waterside (formerly the GM Stamping Plant) will shift the heart of downtown activity further west to the riverfront and re-engage the assets of the west side through new neighborhoods, citywide events, in-river spectacles, trail loops, and east-west connections over river bridges for pedestrians and bicyclists.
Site-specific Recommendations

- Formalize the river access point at White River Parkway Drive and extend the White River Trail across the old railroad truss bridge connecting Near West neighborhoods to 16 Tech and the Riverside neighborhood.

- Incorporate separated bike and pedestrian infrastructure into all future bridge renovation or reconstruction projects.

- Seek projects that connect bike and pedestrian trails into regional river trails and to job centers.

- Address connections between southside of downtown and Southwestway Park. There is significant potential for P-3 projects and collaboration with existing industries in this stretch.

- Build a riverfront beach and viewing platform below the Emrichsville Dam to provide community water access, viewing space of spectacles on the river and views of downtown from different heights.

- Modified check dams allow for human engagement through perched cantilevered constructs over the river, or shallow cascades allowing kayakers and riparian species to pass. New vertical connections can safely convey visitors between the river and up its embankment.

- Introduce interpretive graphics/art and signage to educate visitors about river systems, riparian species and local heritage.

- Remove invasive woody and herbaceous plants, plant native trees and shrubs, install native seed, manage and monitor plantings.

- Include fish ladders and rock arch rapids to create recreational river runs for boaters and restore an important wildlife corridor.

- Enhance Reverend Mozel Sanders Park to emphasize connectivity to the river and city and focus on its important role as a trailhead for numerous connecting trails.

- Pilot a green street program on Belmont Street that includes sidewalk investments to either side of the street, adds shade trees, demarcates safe crossings to the Park and riverfront investments and captures and stores stormwater.

- Work with IndyParks to implement catalytic riverfront projects at Riverside Park that provides equitable access between surrounding neighborhoods and the river.

- Work with neighborhoods to come up with an art/interpretive installation to tell the story of each neighborhood at key river connection locations.
THE EMRICHSVILLE DAM RE-IMAGINED AS AN URBAN BEACH WITH WATER SPECTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE THE RIVER HIGH AND LOW.
Criteria for Choosing This Place and Other Sites Along the River

- Serve as significant economic centers and tourism attractions
- Near large infrastructural opportunities such as levees and floodwalls
- Mix of uses and benefits, including infrastructure, recreation, flood storage, heritage, post industrial sites, cultural and retail destinations, and connectivity to existing neighborhoods
- Presence of trail connections, whether complete or in need of maintenance
- Connections to existing assets and institutions
- Significantly sized outdoor recreational opportunities for all seasons, with an opportunity to offer regionally unique experience/destination project
- Mix of land uses favoring residential uses; regional/national destinations; private property considerations balanced with improved connectivity; large landowners; culture and heritage education; and interpretation opportunities

Other Relevant Areas along the River

- White River Greenway
- Nickel Plate Trail
- Noblesville Riverwalk
- Downtown Noblesville
- IUPUI
- Indianapolis Art Center
- White River State Park
- Newfields
- Indianapolis Zoo
- Quarry conditions south of Downtown Indy
- Potters Bridge Park
- Crown Hill Cemetery
- Butler University
Flowing from the most wild and remote places of the planet to the dramatically urbanized spaces of our densest cities, water is the great connector. It knows no geo-political boundaries. It winds and wanes based on systems of geology and climate far bigger than humans can construct. From droplets of rain to trickling creek to great winding valleys, rivers are and always have been critical places of movement of people and wildlife.

The White River Vision Plan knits together human-made systems of roads, trails and transportation systems with the wild and meandering length of the White River. The plan leverages the river system for its unique attributes – of continuity and connectivity – to provide both freedom from and connection to the rigorous grid of midwest urbanization.

**DRAW PEOPLE TO THE RIVER**
Draw People to the River

Connectivity, for all and through all modes of transportation, is central to the White River Vision Plan. A range of options for safe and easy access is key to enabling more people to see, experience, and appreciate everything the White River has to offer. Development of safe, accessible, varied, and meaningful connections will increase opportunities for transportation, recreation, economic viability, and health and wellness while strengthening physical and social connections within and between various communities. Ultimately, increased connectivity will lead to more frequent activity, create a deeper appreciation of the White River, and improve public health outcomes for the region.

Draw People to the River means that this stretch of the White River:

- Maximizes multimodal connections, both on the river and along streets, trails and greenways — locally and regionally.
- Increases and ensures that all residents have the means to access the river and its destinations.
- Reinforces past transportation and connectivity plans and furthers their implementation and synergy with other projects.
- Fosters a cadence of amenities and consistent brand.
Existing Conditions

Summary

Transportation choices

The Pacers Bike Share and Blue Indy car share programs currently exist in downtown Indianapolis, and five dockless scooter companies have been approved and hold licenses for operation in Indianapolis. The City of Noblesville has recently begun their bike share and, according to city officials, the program is proving to be very popular.

Additional transit facilities are planned and under construction in Marion County. Most significant is the Red Line, the first line in IndyGo’s planned BRT system (Bus Rapid Transit) that is scheduled for completion in early September 2019. It will run between Broad Ripple and the University of Indianapolis, through downtown. The route is within a quarter mile of more than 50,000 residents and nearly 150,000 jobs – a quarter of all jobs in Marion County. Buses are scheduled to arrive every ten minutes, and operate twenty hours each day, seven days a week. In the coming years the Purple Line will connect the northeast side of the city with downtown, while the Blue Line will transverse the city east-west along Washington Street. Currently there are no forms of mass transit in Hamilton County.

Roadways

Major arterial roadways cross and run in parallel to the White River. Hamilton County has the benefit of more than twelve east/west corridors and two major north/south corridors crossing or paralleling the river. The width of these roadways varies, but in their existing state, they are sufficient to provide a separated, multi-use trail and or bikeway on at least one side. As roads are created or renovated throughout the study area, many roads should be designed to safely support multimodal transportation and incorporate green infrastructure elements. Narrower drive lanes afford more room for separated bicycle and pedestrian trails and can reduce traffic speeds, resulting in safer zones for bikers and pedestrians. In some settings, landscape medians and parkways create character and space for incorporation of bioswales or other green infrastructure elements, supporting a complete streets approach.

Greenways and Trails

Trail network gaps along the White River in Hamilton and Marion Counties have been identified, informing places where accessible trails can create a continuous connective network. The gaps are a result of funding issues, private landholders, protective covenants, limited public right-of-way, or local jurisdictional restrictions.

There is a hierarchy of greenways along the length of the White River, all of which were inventoried with consideration for surface treatments, trail widths, alignments, amenities,
materiality, wayfinding, slopes, vegetation, and overall visual character. These typologies include:

- **Paths:** Man-made dirt paths cleared of vegetation and ranging from one to four feet in width were found in remote, natural, undeveloped areas. These connectors between parking areas and the river are often referred to as fisherman’s paths. Most were rutted due to soil erosion and lack of maintenance and were also too haphazard, narrow, or steep to meet accessibility standards.

- **Trails:** Paved paths with either compacted, crushed stone or asphalt found in public parks and recreation areas, as well as some naturalized, remote areas. They were constructed to meet accessibility standards. Within Marion County, the Monon Trail, Fall Creek Trail, White River Greenway Trail, and the Pennsy Trail are typically twelve-foot-wide paved asphalt paths with branded graphics.

- **Promenades:** Wide, stone permeable paths or impervious hardscape pathways near dense, urban areas.

- **Bike Lanes:** On-street bike lanes in both counties are approximately five feet wide and delineated with painted striping in the pavement. As integrated with the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, bike lanes are part of a contemporary complete street with lighting, street furnishings, tree plantings, and rain gardens. Preference is for protected and separated bicycle lanes in lieu of on-street painted lines.

### Barriers to Connectivity

Less than half of the river is publicly-owned or accessible, and much of the public lands along the north and south reaches of the river comprise environmentally sensitive areas or contain major utilities. Consideration will need to be sensitive to privately-owned land, as well as areas where there is regular flooding.

Limited access is an issue in certain areas where the river banks are steep, rugged and dense with vegetation with little or no clear view of the river. While these conditions exist only in certain areas along the length of the river, they also serve ecological function. Areas dominated by scrub or invasive vegetation would be ideal locations for native landscape restoration initiatives and incorporation of accessible pathways.

Access to the river from major public rights-of-way is an issue throughout the study area. While bikeways and pedestrian ways are being incorporated into some of the roadways and bridges, there are missed opportunities for allowing multimodal access down to the river edge. Future initiatives must consider grades, and access to the river for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Specific to trail networks, it will be critical for the jurisdictions to cooperate in order to allow for a seamless and contiguous system. Collaborative efforts will involve building consensus and developing mutual agreements to maintain a well-funded, managed and successful trail and greenway network.

Planning, implementation and long term maintenance and operations costs associated with multi-modal facilities are also critical aspects and need to be incorporated as part of the management strategy from the beginning in order to assure long-term viability and sustainability.
Community Priorities

I would like to see as much public access as possible to the river, with many parks, trails, and open space along its banks. Cleaning up the river is also a very high priority.

We can be better and more safely connected to the river - via hands on, experiential, and recreational activities that compliment and enhance our understanding of this lifeline.

We would love to see more direct and visual connections to the water. Provide connections via the river to destinations along the river. Eliminate levees through downtown Indy and address flood waters in a way that does not create such a physical and visual barrier to the river.

Public access to waterways is vital to the quality of life in a community. Public access increases home values and encourages more development.

River-wide ideas

Maximize multimodal connections, on the river and along streets, trails and greenways, locally and regionally

Regional and local enhancement of transportation networks support a more connected White River. This includes enhancement of right-of-ways, bike lanes, trails, pathways, and amenities along the riverfront so that all complement one another. As existing public right-of-ways and roads are improved or new ones constructed, all must consider, or even require, alternative modes of transportation in conjunction with any existing completed network plans. INDOT is beginning to approve pedestrian and bicycle trails within their right-of-ways where widening is not anticipated and is critical to expanding these facilities state-wide. By implementing a hierarchy of trail systems and river amenities, people will be drawn to the river for a diversity of activities that are both retail/commercially based as well as recreational.

We can be better and more safely connected to the river - via hands on, experiential, and recreational activities that compliment and enhance our understanding of this lifeline.

Action: Invest in multimodal routes and safe pedestrian and bike crossings between future BRT transit stops within a half mile of the river and river destinations.

Action: Prioritize transportation projects that expand connectivity for alternative transportation modes to reduce congestion along the river and expand the regional trail network.

Action: Incentivize residential and employment developments that are located in close proximity to alternative transportation hubs.

Action: Require all transportation projects to include sidewalks and safe crossings.

Action: Explore the potential to offer public Wi-Fi in riverfront parks and on trails.

Reinforces past transportation and connectivity plans and further their implementation and synergy with other projects

All connectivity improvements should integrate with past or concurrent planning efforts, and support the White River Vision Plan’s overarching guiding principles. To achieve synergy with other transportation projects, a multi-modal lens should be used to integrate connection, walkability, and livability in communities. New infrastructure should consider the presence and visibility of the White River as its organizing and orienting element, supporting improved connections both physically and visually.

Action: Grow the regional bike and pedestrian network by continuing to implement existing and ongoing local and regional plans like the Indy Greenways Master Plan and the MPO Regional Bikeways Plan. Specific recommendations important to the White River include the following trails projects - Eagle Creek Greenway completion, B&O Trail, Midland Trace Trail, Pleasant Run Greenway completion, White River Greenway completion, Little Buck Creek Greenway, Northtown Trail, Southwest Trail, and 86th-82nd Street Connector.
Fosters a cadence of amenities and consistent brand

A hierarchy of different amenities along the riverfront will be located in a rhythm that best serves recreational and ecological context. Developed in a consistent language, this strategy proposes four main types of amenity zones, all with distinctive character and uses. For example, in Hamilton County alone, there are seven public parks and eleven boat ramps/canoe launches along the river with opportunities to expand and develop parallel trails to connect the myriad of destinations. All areas should aspire to be ADA-compliant with a focus on safety, sustainability, low-maintenance, and durability. Amenities can take a range of scales and incorporate a variety of activities. Typologies include:

The Lunch Spot: A small rest area along river with bench seating, informational signage, and mile marker, as well as seating and/or trash receptacles.

The Scenic Route: A larger street-side rest area more urban in character that includes: seating, monument signage and/or public art, hardscape, interpretive signage station, signalization, a viewing terrace (if applicable), connector trail to river (if applicable), and potential parking.

The Active Edge: A large trailhead outfitted with: kayaking facilities, restrooms, bike racks, monument signs and/or public art, direct water access, interpretive education components, picnic areas, a viewing tower, and a potential 20-30 space parking lot.

The Destination: The last river type is the most robust, and is envisioned as being located near an HQ office/admin bldg, library, or other community building. It could include: a large event space, maintenance headquarters, outdoor event space, a large parking lot, kayaking and biking facilities, restrooms, monument signs, public art, direct river access, picnic areas, a viewing tower, and a large parking area.
ANCHOR: OLIVER’S CROSSING

This anchor is located in the Quarry Reach between 82nd Street and 29th Street. Hidden among intersecting transportation systems, the Oliver’s Crossing area today is home to large retail and housing developments that contain disconnected islands of open space and trails, amid expansive riverfront views. Oliver’s Woods, a 53-acre nature preserve, is an untapped ecological and recreational resource for the communities that surround it. Connections between retail and housing can be emphasized and celebrated with more walkable districts that are designed with lit pathways, dining, strategic overlooks and water views.
Site-specific Recommendations

- Connect the river into the planned Nickel Plate Trail to Noblesville via the planned trail along 82nd/86th Street.
- Explore options to reclaim vacant and underutilized riverfront lands within floodplain for public access.
- Work with INDOT and the Clear Path 465 project to enhance river visibility from roadways by thinning vegetation close to the river and incorporating alternative noise barriers which could include dense vegetative screens and use of more transparent materials.
- Incorporation of public art as part of screen wall systems through painted panels, murals or relief elements using customized form liners.
- Design bridges to provide clear visibility of the existing, natural surroundings.
- Collaborate with developers to achieve flood resilience in buildings and landscapes.
- Use incentives and best practices in resiliency for riverfront residential in appropriate sites.
- Improve streetscapes with outdoor furnishings and pedestrian scaled lighting to balance traffic and reduce speeds between retail nodes.
- Integrate green infrastructure stormwater management practices to treat and capture runoff from impervious areas.
- Create a series of “campus quad districts” that groups disparate developments together around a set of amenities that capitalize on the river and quality of life infrastructure.
Criteria for Choosing This Place and Other Sites Along the River

- Job centers along the river
- Major infrastructure crossings with underutilized land
- Vacancy utility land and highways lands
- Bridge upgrade projects

Other Relevant Areas along the River

- I-465 (north and south of Downtown Indianapolis) Keystone Avenue Bridge
- 16 Tech
- Waterside
- Park opportunity between Logan and Conner Street Bridges
- 96th Street and Allisonville Road
- 96th Street Bridge
- College Avenue Bridge
- 38th Street Bridge
- Washington Street Bridge
- I-70 Bridge
The White River is a unique place that owes its special qualities not only to its environmental characteristics, but also to the ways that humans have interacted with the river since they first occupied this landscape. A timeless flow of people and ideas, the river has the potential to connect Indiana residents to those that came before and those future generations to come via the power of shared storytelling.

From the region’s earliest settlers to the newest to be welcomed to the White River’s diverse communities, the river has been and can be a narrative navigational device – locating people in place and time. The Vision Plan identifies those traces of the past that can be uncovered and illuminated – and the tools with which we can do that. Shedding light on the rich and evolving stories of the river will unlock its potential as a unifying thread and give greater meaning in unity to its fragments of the past.

BUILD ON THE RIVER’S STORIES
Build on the River’s Stories

Over time, the shape of the river has demanded specific crossings and bridges. Builders of canals, roads, railroads, and dams have molded it, to improve transport, tap its water, and gain its power. Industry and settlements have required its drinking water and its capacity to move wastewater. Indiana’s second and final state capital was sited here – with the State Capitol today located only a long block away from the stone that commemorates the historic 1825 meeting where the decision was made. As a part of the Mississippi River Basin with its rich ecosystem, it was even a source of mussels that fed prehistoric populations, and whose pearly shells supported a button industry at the turn of the twentieth century.

The river’s sense of place today is bound up in both its nature and its history – its stories. To deepen that sense of place, those stories must be brought to light. A key recommendation of this chapter is to create a system to tell stories about the river’s environment and history in ways that enhance the river’s modern identity and heighten users’ appreciation of the river as Central Indiana’s foremost natural, recreational, and historic asset.

Build on the River’s Stories means that this stretch of the White River:

- Communicates history through education, arts and placemaking.
- Creates a unified identity and brand for the White River.
- Fosters the formal and informal pursuit of learning and skill-building.

DEEP TIME AND INDIGENOUS ERA

PRE-1690 Miamis and the River

EARLY SETTLEMENT

1818 Early Settlement

EARLY REPUBLIC

1847 Rails over Rivers

CIVIL WAR GAS BOOM AND CITY BEAUTIFUL

1886 Industry Boom

1909 Kessler Plan

EARLY TO MIDDLE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1915 Pollution Concerns

1920 Roaring Twenties

LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO TODAY

1950 Post-War Housing Boom

1981 White River State Park Master Planning

1997 Environmental Crossroads
**Existing Conditions**

**Summary**

The White River’s landscape contains evidence of layers of history easily discerned to the interested observer. Highlights of that history and the resources that help to tell the story for all who reach its banks.

**Origins**

Central Indiana’s geological hallmark is evidence of glacial activity about 2.6 million years ago through about 17,000 years Before Present (BP). Rich habitat for early humans emerged along the White River about 4,000 years after the last glacier. Southwestway Park preserves at least seven prehistoric archeological sites, including early evidence of human occupation from the Archaic period. Strawtown-Koteewi Park, a 750-acre park in northern Hamilton County that was once home to native people’s settlements, exhibits archeological artifacts dating from 550 BP to 750 BP. The survival of archeological sites outside Southwestway and Strawtown-Koteewi has been affected by the combination of quarrying and construction along the river.

**Modern Settlement**

The first European settlers came to the region in the 1700s, in increasing numbers after the War of 1812. By 1816, European and American settlers led Indiana and Ohio to statehood, even though Native American tribes occupied much of the land in these territories. In 1818, these tribes ceded their lands in six treaties with the U.S. government. In this same period, William Conner, a fur trader and frontiersman, came to the region to invest in farms, mills, and distilleries and founded Hamilton County and Noblesville. His 1832 brick home along a prairie in a loop of the White River is now part of Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, which interprets early settlement and Native American heritage.

Agriculture thrived along the river’s fertile banks, with settlers coming from far and wide to lay claim to land in growing towns like Carmel – where Quaker farmers found soils similar to their previous Pennsylvania homes – Fishers, Noblesville, and Indianapolis.

**Transportation Framework**

The White River was originally a key factor in siting Indiana’s capital, Indianapolis, in the expectation that it would provide a major advantage in transportation. It was the city’s central location in the state and the Midwest, however, along pathways both east-west and north-south, that caused it to prosper. After a false start with a canal to address the river’s shallow, unreliable flow, railroading proved to provide better access to hungry markets in the
East, St. Louis, and Chicago. Seven railroads converged in Indianapolis early in the history of railroading. Noblesville also benefited from an early railroad. Splendid truss railroad bridges from the late nineteenth century still cross the river in both cities.

After the Civil War, Indianapolis created the nation’s first “union” station to bring independent lines together for transshipment of passengers and freight. Previously, long-distance movement required in-city transportation from one railroad to another, often to lines of different widths. During the Civil War, for example, Northern troops destined for the Battle of Chickamauga in Tennessee debarked from the end of their east-west transport on an “Ohio gauge” line and stepped onto a different train with a different gauge that would carry them (ultimately) to Chattanooga.

The White River and its tributaries provided drinking water and a source of power for a variety of mills. Hamilton County’s historic settlements of Riverwood and Clare originally started as milling communities that took advantage of the river’s power to capture energy and power mills. Later, the Holliday Hydroelectric Power Plant harnessed the river’s power.

Noblesville was laid out as a grid of streets along the White River’s high banks at the center of Hamilton County soon after Indiana’s founding. It is a classic midwestern county seat with a courthouse listed in the National Register. Built between 1877 and 1879, the massive brick and limestone Second Empire style courthouse exhibits similar ambitions for enduring, high-style public edifices as seen downstream in Indianapolis, where the State Capitol’s graceful architecture anticipates the Beaux Arts style by more than a decade. Noblesville’s small downtown is also listed in the National Register, as are the Catherine Street and Conner Street historic districts, whose prosperous late-Victorian residences are evidence of the short-lived Gas Boom that began in Central Indiana around 1890.

In the late nineteenth century, the growing number of factories in both Hamilton and Marion counties used the White River to dispose of their wastes. Pollution, however, became a recognized problem early in the twentieth century that persisted for more than a hundred years. In 1999, a chemical discharge originating in Anderson decimated aquatic life for fifty-seven miles downstream, killing an estimated 4.6 million fish. The incident spurred redoubled action through federal and state policies and investment.

Landscape and Planning History

At the turn of the twentieth century, wealthy cities aspired to beautification, a trend called the City Beautiful movement. In 1909, German-born landscape architect and pioneer city planner George Edward Kessler (1862-1923) created a new city plan inspired by the White River and its tributaries. Today, the Indianapolis Park and Boulevard System he designed continues to shape the city, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The 30th Street bridge is an excellent example of his designs.

The City Beautiful movement subsided around 1920. As Indianapolis continued to prosper, properties such as Oldfields – today the Oldfield-Lilly House & Gardens, part of the Newfields art museum campus and a National Historic Landmark – and a number of outlying neighborhoods within the White River corridor continued to evolve residential high styles, collectively known today as the Country House Era. Marian University incorporates two such estates that are easily seen today off Cold Spring Road.

Hinkle Field House (1928), a National Historic Landmark on the Butler University campus marks the end of an era. As the Great Depression took hold after 1929, public works supported the city’s prosperity. Along the White River are two excellent examples, the Indianapolis Veterans Administration Hospital, a National Register historic district (1931-1950, now a non-VA medical facility); and Lockefield Gardens (1935-1938), listed in the National Register as “one of the Nation’s first groups of federally initiated, funded, and supervised
peacetime housing projects” and “because of its unparalleled importance to the local black community.” Original structures remain along Blake Street north of the State Capitol.

Among the more spectacular architectural treasures from the “mid-century modern” period after World War II is Butler University’s Irwin Library (1963) by Minoru Yamasaki, one of the most prominent American architects of the twentieth century.

In between the Hamilton County courthouse and the State Capitol, the river’s landscape today largely exhibits modern influences – suburbs and neighborhoods – and economic evidence of the glaciers in the form of extensive sand and gravel quarries, especially in Hamilton County. North of Noblesville, it is possible to see earlier farm landscapes and evidence of both the (failed) Central Canal and such other historical sites as Potter’s Bridge, the last covered bridge still standing in Hamilton County.

More Evolution Ahead

The White River is endowed with a wealth of stories to inspire future generations. Its waters and rich resources drew human populations here as soon as the glaciers began to withdraw and plants and animals began to colonize the barren land alongside the new river left in the glacier’s path. Early American voyageurs and settlers found similarly congenial habitat in an era when any human had to find subsistence within their immediate environs.

In the wakes of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, community-building began in earnest as many more colonizers arrived and began the shaping of the river in new ways. The White River became a single thread, vital for water supply, across a region of thriving communities rapidly adopting new technologies throughout the nineteenth century, beginning with railroading and such agricultural innovations as McCormick’s reaper.

If the river began to endure pollution by the end of that century, it also enjoyed beautification as a centerpiece of Kessler’s landscaping masterwork for Indianapolis early in the twentieth century. Later in that century, however, in many locations the White River began to fade from view – aided by all-too-necessary levees. Such individual initiatives as parks in Hamilton County and the White River State Park preserved the community’s relationship to the river. It took the shock of a major pollution event in 1999 to catalyze public determination to renew the region’s connections to the White River.

With the completion of this White River Vision Plan, a new era for the river corridor begins. The physical structures and places reflecting the river’s “layers of history” need only to be revealed with imagination and ingenuity. Through interpretation, the arts, and education, current and future generations can discover how humans have always been sustained by the river – and imagine a future where that relationship can continue to benefit both humans and the river itself.

Community Priorities

Please listen and act on the input of the community. Preserve the culture and history of the river and develop it with vision to the future as a living, evolving process for future generations.

I can’t wait for Indy to finally embrace its big beautiful river!!

is beloved river is part of our heritage. I think it should be enhanced and better utilized. My hope that as it is developed it is done with elegance and charm.

Programs highlight the natural beauty and amazing resources that is the White River. Too many people do not know it is in our backyard.
River-wide Ideas
Communicates history through multiple means of interpretation, including educational programming and arts installations.

The White River corridor was a rich habitat for prehistoric humans whose only voice is the evidence of their occupation, underground and thus invisible and often ignored. It is thought that Southwestway Park, as a largely undisturbed landscape at the far southern end of the corridor, possesses the richest remaining archeological record. Discoveries at Strawtown-Koteewi Park at the northern end are also important. Until a thorough survey is made of the corridor, however, their relative importance cannot be established. The survival of archeological sites outside these parks has been affected by the combination of quarrying and construction along the river, historically and in the present, but sometimes a surprisingly preserved record remains even in disturbed locations. A thorough archeological survey to locate and document other sites is needed, especially in any locations where this plan calls for significant disturbance.

- **Action:** Thoroughly map historic and interpretive resources related to the White River. Ensure that programs are in place to recognize these resources when changes are planned by public agencies and private owners.

- **Action:** Seek greater preservation of resources by public or private owners. Use this information as a form of research to support interpretation and work to list significant historic resources in the National Register of Historic Places.

- **Action:** Create an interpretive plan to guide the long-term evolution of a robust system that enables corridor residents and visitors to discover a wide variety of stories drawn from both nature and history. Engage with cultural and educational institutions, adjacent neighborhoods, river advocates, agencies, and other stakeholders.

- **Action:** Conduct a thorough public survey of prehistoric archeological resources, with support from relevant public agencies. This will raise greater public interest through sustained interpretation (without necessarily naming sites involved).

Fosters the formal and informal pursuit of learning and skill-building.

Accessible historical interpretation for the general public is quite limited, and even organizations dedicated to the river’s well-being have not taken advantage of its history and stories to build public appreciation for the White River. Therefore, overall planning for improved interpretation would benefit greatly from more research. While the White River’s history is somewhat available to the diligent researcher able to piece together stories from here and there, no good overall picture exists. Interpretive planners need such information to guide growth of an overall approach to highlighting more stories and enabling more discovery of history as a part of the White River experience.

Existing interpretive resources in the corridor are rich resources opportunities to tell more stories of the river and its history. These include the White River State Park, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Newfields, the Indianapolis Art Center, Holliday Park, Conner Prairie, Noblesville’s ever-growing effort to provide access to the town’s stories through tours and trails, and Strawtown-Koteewi Park. These initiatives also represent an important pool of institutional knowledge and experience that could inform a collaborative approach in making such connections.

- **Action:** Engage educators in creating educational guidelines and learning objectives with a focus on K-12 engagement with schools and families. Passport programs which encourage stamping a booklet at multiple historic destinations can help educators and families to collaborate on expanding educational programs.
Interpretive Plan

Ultimately, an understanding of the White River region’s history, chronology, and historic resources can be encompassed in a series of broad interpretive “theme statements” that are designed to convey context and pique the interest of audiences. Such statements should be capable of sparking virtually any story, natural or historical – and encompassing stories already being told. Reference to these themes across many sites is a subtle way of reinforcing an overall sense of the whole, throughout the corridor, and can help visitors moving from place to place gain a sense of sustained connection.

These theme statements can then be used to guide choices of media and programming to highlight stories that convey these themes in compelling ways. Media choices might range from the typical “books on sticks” outdoor signage to more adventurous efforts involving artwork, restoration (judicious), landscaping, or non-textual markers (e.g., brass insets artistically embedded in pavement). Sometimes, simply calling attention to a remnant in the landscape and letting observers bring their own reflections to an object may be more compelling than actual explanation. An example of such a mysterious object is a large tank just upstream from the landscaped portion of White River State Park on the river-left side (east). Clearly industrial, various experts have been consulted about its possible origins without resolving the mystery. It bespeaks a past along the river that has yet to be studied and explained.

To help kick off discussion for the interpretive strategic plan, the plan suggests these interpretive theme statements:

• Living Along a River: The White River has drawn humans to its banks for thousands of years. From prehistoric settlements to improvements on the principles of the City Beautiful Movement, evidence of human preferences for living along a river can be found almost anywhere along the White River.

• The Power of a River: Water means power. Free-flowing or moving through canals, water can move people and goods. Captured through dams, it can power mills that create a wide variety of products. Water sweeps away human structures through the natural power of flooding. The White River has seen a series of efforts by humans to enlist its power, or capture its power, or evade its power. Evidence of these efforts to harness the White River can still be seen throughout this landscape today.

• A Natural River, Then and Now: The White River is named for its sparkling sandy bottom, seen through the clear waters observed by early Europeans and created over geological time since the glaciers weighed down this landscape. Throughout its recent history, the White River’s watershed has seen many changes that make its name more goal than reality. Pollution has been a threat for well over a century. Today, it is possible to find evidence of hope that the White River’s name will once again be true to its nature.
ANCHOR: STRAWTOWN-KOTEEWI PARK

This anchor is located in the North Reach between Lafayette Trace Park and 206th Street. Strawtown Koteewi Park is a well-loved resource, known for its existing natural and cultural heritage as well as multiple exciting initiatives already underway. As a regional treasure, Strawtown Koteewi Park can play a greater role in showcasing the presence of the White River, with improved trails, expanded multi-modal options and new boardwalks providing a connective experience and gateway to the White River. Ecological improvements in the river’s floodplain can further enhance the experience of nature while improving the health of the river ecosystem and serving as a model for the region.
Site-Specific Recommendations

- Design and construct a trail from Potter’s Bridge Park to Cicero, Indiana, with a spur connecting to Strawtown-Koteewi Park along the north side of 234th Street. Employ signaled pedestrian/bicycle/horseback rider crossings.
- Install a viewing tower destination and zip line experience in alignment with the Hamilton County Park Department’s Strawtown-Koteewi Master Plan.
- Construct a new “soft” launch (specifically for non-motorized vessels) for hand-carried watercraft.
- Incorporate bird blinds, with educational signage about river wildlife, and accessible ramps/water access along the river within the park boundaries.
- Install public art and signage along the trail and at other recreational facilities. Interpretation should distinguish between public and private assets, interpret river and ecological systems and farming methods, and highlight stories of development, technology, and historical events and people.
- Interpret the history of the Strawtown crossroad village and historic buildings there, working with property owners of public spaces to identify suitable on-site installations and efforts.
- Remove invasive Asian bush honeysuckle along the levee to promote the development of ground layer plants. Restoration should not affect the integrity of the levee. Ground layer vegetation enhances maintenance through allowing light to understory planting.
- Enhance the museum (exhibits, collections, programs, events) at Strawtown-Koteewi.
- Work with property owners along the trail and other areas of public access in the neighborhood of the park to identify and mitigate for public-use nuisances and address safety concerns.
- Continue to pile pilings for boardwalks or other structures in appropriate locations within the floodplain, and employ qualified professional archeologists to implement the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.
- Partner with the Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District and farmers in the subwatersheds of tributaries at Strawtown and northward. Demonstrate (and interpret) advanced water quality measures such as cost-share/grants to enhance cover cropping, no-till planting methods, grassed waterways, riverbank buffers.
- Enhance the park’s Floodplain Forest & Prairie/Savanna by removing invasive woody and herbaceous plants, planting native trees and shrubs, installing native seed, and actively managing and monitoring ecosystem restoration.

**Site-Specific Recommendations Diagram**

1. Continue to incentivize agricultural conservation
2. Build boardwalk trails in flood zones
3. Build a separated multi-modal trail along 234th Street that connects Strawtown-Koteewi and Cicero
4. Extend conservation districts to significant tributaries into the river
5. Use interpretive wayfinding to pay tribute to the historic crossroads for early people and settlers
6. Support new investments in recreation and economic development
7. Enhance the park’s Floodplain Forest & Prairie/Savanna by removing invasive woody and herbaceous plants, planting native trees and shrubs, installing native seed, and actively managing and monitoring ecosystem restoration
8. Continue to implement park master plan - expand archery, incorporate horse trails, expand the lake, etc.
Criteria for Choosing This Place and Other Sites Along the River

- Availability of public space/right-of-way
- Opportunity to enhance public use (e.g., if building a platform, can arts/history inspire the design)
- Nature of the story or stories
- Ease of and access for maintenance
- Size of audience, and how many would engage with a given interpretive installation

Other Relevant Areas along the River

- Lafayette Trace Park
- Potter’s Bridge Park
- Forest Park
- Conner Prairie Wetlands
- Heritage Park at White River
- Hazel Landing Park
- Burr Oak Nature Preserve
- Marott Park Nature Preserve
- Holiday Park
- Oliver’s Woods (and archipelago of natural areas)
- IUPUI experimental ecology site and wilderness trail
- Southwestway Park
It is no secret that waterfronts are places of great economic value. Cities around the world are reclaiming their once-industrial shorelines for emerging higher and better uses, often with great economic benefit. Known far and wide as a series of communities that can rally behind a big idea, Indianapolis and Hamilton County know how to get things done. The White River is that next frontier.

The Vision Plan is a vehicle for that next big adventure – a place where the region’s hopes and dreams for a vibrant future manifest in a physical reality of growth and change. As a complement to both the places of great natural beauty and the strong existing river neighborhoods, the Vision Plan identifies areas of potential future change that can be tapped for economic development and opportunity.
Build Economic Strength and Identity

Indianapolis and Hamilton County are driving population growth in the state of Indiana. This momentum is the result of strong economic growth, adding jobs to the labor force and growing industry presence, and quality of life improvements, including growing wages and affordable housing options, investments in the public realm, and accessible programming for the region’s diverse residents and visitors. With such rapid growth comes the challenge of ensuring livability and sustainability for all, as well as the opportunity of greater vitality. Investment in the White River will create new career opportunities in recreation and tourism, including entry-level and management-level opportunities that can prepare workers for other industries; support diverse, community-driven programming efforts; and advance an inclusive governance structure that includes all community voices, including those from historically underrepresented groups.

Build Economic Strength and Identity means that this stretch of the White River:

- Supports opportunities to local businesses and business attraction.
- Supports a sense of pride in the river.
- Creates gathering places that attract diverse visitors and grows the regional and national tourism draw
- Promotes inclusive development that supports the local economy and improves the quality of life for all residents.
Existing Conditions

Summary

Residents, workers, and visitors interact with the River in different ways. The White River has tremendous potential to draw residents, workers, and visitors from the immediate area, the region, and around the country. Each of these groups may interact with the White River in different ways and have different needs. Residents within the region are likely the largest share of visitors to, and users of, the White River and any adjoining facilities. Key interests of residential populations include water-based recreation, such as kayaking and fishing, recreation at facilities such as trails, playgrounds and waterside outdoor space, and community events and programming.

Workers and businesses in the area may be most interested in development along the White River for its potential to serve as an amenity for workers, accommodate complementary real estate development, host private event space and corporate venues, and for any potential mobility improvements, such as multi-use trails that may make it easier for residents and commuters to travel to and from workplaces.

Visitors to the area may enjoy the same amenities as local residents, workers, and businesses, providing an additional user group for outdoor recreation, cultural and historical attractions, large-scale events such as concerts, and destination retail.

The White River Vision Plan can help attract and retain the talent needed for economic development. Job growth has recently been driven by retail, hospitality, healthcare, and education. While industry mix is similar across the region, Hamilton County has attracted more white-collar jobs while Marion County has a broader base in manufacturing. Regional employment has grown steadily since 2010 and is projected to continue to grow, although at a slower pace. Improvements made as part of the White River Vision Plan can help gain new residents and businesses, including those in export sectors that are targeted for growth such as life science, aerospace, transportation and industrial equipment, pharmaceuticals, and technology.

Community Priorities

I would like the river to be safe and clear for all activities but I want any development to be compatible with environmental sustainability. I don’t want the development to be profit-driven; it should be well thought out and sustainable.

I would like to see a small property tax increase to fund more development near the river including business and residential property.

Fixing what we have (while) adding new exciting initiatives along the river to bring further quality of life and the resultant economic development. Love it!

Paddling the White River brings me much joy and peace. I’d love the opportunity to help others discover, appreciate, and bring prosperity to the river.
River-wide Ideas

Supports opportunities for local businesses and business attraction

Business and talent attraction and retention is a key regional goal. Employers and employees are seeking improved amenities near job centers, multi-modal transit pathways, event spaces and even sponsorship opportunities. The White River is a collector for all these amenities. Economic development in the region will benefit from many of the activation strategies explored in “Increase Year-Round Activities.” Beyond those activities, building on and enhancing the local brand through programming will reinforce the competitive nature of Central Indiana among other peer and regional cities.

Conversations with stakeholders in public meetings, committee meetings and neighborhood discussions have made it clear that there is no single identity for the White River. In fact, perceptions of the river vary among communities in the north and communities in the south and between the experiences people have on either side of the river. With this plan and next steps, the White River is poised to become one of the unifying threads of identity and brand in the region.

A unifying brand for the river will provide a way of celebrating experiences and projects along its length and create momentum for economic growth and talent attraction.

Supports a sense of pride in the river

Local programs should leverage community assets and respond directly to community needs with new events or messages. As part of the implementation team, a dedicated program task force can help track trends river-wide and make sure that new events or programs keep pace with changing demographics. They can also be responsible for ongoing community engagement to ensure that next steps continue to leverage local character, and that programs across the river are complementary and not redundant. Enhanced programming is both a powerful attraction as well as a potential source of revenue. This same program task force can be responsible for finding means to measure the potential for program revenues to contribute to individual and collective operating costs along the river.

White River investments that enhance the Indianapolis region’s brand are especially important for bolstering the significant tourism economy. The tourism industry provides significant economic opportunities, with most driven by destinations in Indianapolis. In 2016, there were an estimated 28.6 million total visitors to the Indianapolis region and tourism was the eighth largest industry in the region in terms of total jobs. Major drivers of tourism include large events, cultural offerings, outdoor recreation, businesses and universities, youth/amateur attractions, and family and friends.

"Action: Create a dedicated program task force to help track trends, ensure programs are accessible to changing demographics, and continue community engagement into implementation.

Action: Pursue designations for neighborhoods along the river that have significant cultural or historic resonance with the river.

Action: Leverage existing institutional partners to expand year-round events and programs and market activities through Hamilton County Tourism and Visit Indy channels.

Creates gathering places that attract diverse visitors and grows the regional and national tourism draw

The White River’s mystique and history within the region are essential ingredients for creating places along the river that attract residents, workers, and visitors for a spirit of place that they cannot find anywhere else. A focus on creating gathering places can be building to many projects that reinforce the White River Vision Plan, including street and façade improvements, residential rehabilitation, infill, and mixed-use projects, and improvements to parks and public spaces. As a strategy for the White River, enhanced amenities can support this effort, strengthening connections between people across the region and elevating their links to and appreciation for their physical surroundings. When implemented, enhanced places draw
together design, economics, and programming, paying close attention to cultural, social, and physical characteristics that define a place.

Enhanced amenities and places can be strategic, creative, or tactical. All three strategies have potentially relevant applications along the White River. Strategic investments are most closely tied to economic development and creating places that can attract talent and appeal to knowledge workers. As an example, actical public space improvements are often tied to incremental, small-scale projects that are often events-based and temporary and can create momentum for long-term, substantial investments.

According to the American Planning Association, creative public space investments should include a “process where community members, artists, arts and culture organizations, community developers, and other stakeholders use arts and cultural strategies to implement community-led change.” The Central Indiana arts and culture community already has strong ties to the river, from physical assets like Conner Prairie, Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center or the Indianapolis Zoo to private entities like Newfields, the Indianapolis Arts Center.

This strategy is particularly relevant for the future design and implementation of signature parks, neighborhood destinations and natural spaces. This could range from expanded interpretation at Strawtown-Koteewi Park to energizing strategies for Federal Hill Commons and the Riverwalk in Noblesville to highlighting the link between the Broad Ripple canal and river. Importantly, each of these places should be designed and programmed to be multi-functional and meet the needs of many groups: residents, workers, students, and tourists.

Promotes inclusive development that supports the local economy and improves the quality of life for all residents

The success of the White River as a community-wide asset should be measured by how well it serves the needs of all communities and contributes to a healthy, equitable community. This means looking closely and planning proactively for impacts to communities that are amidst accelerating growth as well as those that are experiencing stability or slower evolution. Across the country, community leaders are becoming increasingly aware that new development, trails and public park improvements often changes surrounding land values and uses, and that this change has both positive and negative outcomes on community success.

Inclusive development touches all sectors - housing, transportation, parks and open space, community development, and arts and culture. As the plan is implemented, it is important to plan ahead and build in strategies to ensure that development benefits everyone. It will also be important for community engagement, at both regional and neighborhood scales, to continue so that projects can be tested for their impacts and for changing needs and sensitivities. The following are key actions that can be taken to manage change along the White River and work toward equitable capture of the plan’s benefits.

- Action: Ensure new public riverfront investments are directly connected to commercial corridors and districts on either side of the river.
- Action: Support existing and future small, local businesses, particularly within existing smaller downtown areas like Noblesville, Fishers, Carmel, Broad Ripple, and Rocky Ripple.
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ANCHOR: NOBLESVILLE

This anchor is located in the Meadow Reach, between 206th Street to Conner Prairie/126th Street. Noblesville’s investment in recent Riverwalk improvements has already catalyzed a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasm. As such, it is possible now to build on that momentum to expand and extend that value creation and vitality through the implementation of more active, engaging and continuous riverfront park experiences, economic development that leverages this investment and an enhanced network of green infrastructure and mobility improvements.
Site-Specific Recommendations

- Upgrade existing boat launches at Forest Park, west of the river and south of the planned Pleasant St. bridge connection.
- Support planned Pleasant Street extension and old rail bridge conversion to a pedestrian bridge that will connect the existing Riverwalk to West Noblesville while remaining sensitive to the historic neighborhood fabric. Use the project to connect to regional trails like Midland Trace and Nickel Plate.
- Incentivize development designed to reduce carbon footprint and elevate new development above anticipated water levels. Focus retail and any utilities to key areas outside of the floodplain.
- Pilot a green street projects as part of ongoing road infrastructure improvements in a visible location Downtown. Continue to support best stormwater management practices.
- Strategically purchase land south of Downtown to extend the Noblesville Riverwalk and connect the Riverwalk south along the river.
- Study the feasibility of removing State Route 19 between Federal Hill Commons Park and the river.
- Study the relocation of public utility facilities away from the riverfront floodplain and create more places for the public to experience the riverfront.
- Support ongoing planning efforts for the Nickel Plate Trail.
- Provide shade and amenities along commercial streets; Provide space for pedestrians and consider linkages across streets that connect between local businesses and the riverfront.
- Terrace riverbanks to curb erosion and create ‘high points’ for long views of the river.
EXTENDING FEDERAL HILL COMMONS DOWN TO THE RIVER’S EDGE TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING, VIEWS BACK TO DOWNTOWN, AND STABILIZE THE RIVER BANKS.
Criteria for Choosing This Place and Other Sites Along the River

- Downtown Noblesville is experiencing development pressures and is working to address affordability
- Mix of land uses that favor residential uses and lower scale commercial/retail
- Active efforts to preserve neighborhood character and historic structures
- Underutilized riverfront lands owned by public agencies

Other Relevant Areas along the River

- Carmel
- Broad Ripple
- Rocky Ripple
- Meridian Kessler
- Near Westside
- New developments on large parcels such as 16 Tech and Waterside
Communities across the country are actively engaged in a decades-long conversation about who benefits from strategic planning. If not actively considered and engaged in the planning process, many communities, and often those with the least resources, can be left behind in a tide of change. Even worse, some can be unintentionally harmed in urban evolution. Planning for change sensitively often means planning also for preservation.

The Vision Plan stakes a clear marker in this ground – that it is intentional in both its inclusion and generosity of spirit. Consideration of the values and unique characters of the river’s diverse constituency is central to its process. Integration of strategies to preserve and strengthen existing neighborhoods is core to its intended outcomes. Engagement of the many voices, hearts and minds of its advocates is intrinsically linked with its future vision.
**Preserve Places for Everyone**

Within Indianapolis and Hamilton County, the White River is bounded by over forty-two distinct neighborhoods. Every neighborhood's special character and mix of amenities contributes to a strong sense of place within each community, but, often, this strength of character has not made its way to the river's edge. This principle is meant to inform strategies to engage existing communities with the river, as well as plan for future development that celebrates riverine ecology, encourages socialization, and enables residents and businesses to remain as the areas around them grow and change. There is no single solution for creating equitable communities with better access to resources and opportunities for economic advancement. Instead, a layered approach considering local businesses, affordability, transportation and quality of life improvements is required.

*Preserve Places for Everyone* means that this stretch of the White River:

- Preserves access to affordable, safe and diverse neighborhoods.
- Enhances and protects the character of existing neighborhoods.
- Stabilizes local businesses and expands opportunities for commercial districts.
Existing Conditions

Summary

Neighborhood Demographics

Residents in Hamilton County and Indianapolis value access to the region and to affordable communities all along the river. The region’s diverse neighborhoods and demographics have many opportunities to take advantage of their shared waterfront assets. More than just transportation links, many connections across the White River also provide critical access to parks and local food destinations like grocery stores. Overall the metropolitan region has a strong sense of diversity – an experience that is expressed in the tapestry of communities along both sides of the river, noted in the sampling of neighborhood images at right.

Many communities along the White River have limited to no physical access to the White River, but are well connected across the river to neighboring communities on the opposite side of the river. When it comes to demographics, the White River appears to be invisible – community patterns shift from north to south and are consistent on either side of the river. The role of the river as a connector is evident in the demographic patterns of Hamilton County and Indianapolis which follow a gradient of wealth north to south radially out from urban centers like downtown Carmel, Fishers, Noblesville and Indianapolis - a pattern typical of many land-locked communities where property values decrease as distances increase from the core. Neighborhoods along the river that have high need are identified by high residential vacancy rates, low median household incomes with a large percentage of non-working populations (seniors and children under the age of eighteen). High need neighborhoods are clustered along the west bank of the White River in Hamilton County, south of Noblesville and bordering the downtown in Indianapolis on both sides of the river.

Transportation and Connectivity

The effects of all modes of transportation, including street cars, passenger and freight rail lines, canals and the automobile, on shaping the region’s urban form and the function of many riverside places is evident along major corridors radiating out from the center of the region. Central Indiana is home to a number of streetcar neighborhoods with historic-scaled urban grids, tree-lined streets and retail establishments clustered along the ground floors close to where trolley or interurban stops once brought people into and out of the city. While some of these corridors have sustained their vibrancy, others have experienced disinvestment as they lost the transit service that originally made them viable.

Other neighborhoods evolved to support suburban car traffic, while some communities, like Fishers and Noblesville, are experiencing increased investment in their town centers with a mix of retail, restaurant and café establishments, and denser residential development along more pedestrian-friendly corridors. Today, interests in multiple modes of transportation for commuting and recreation are making walking, biking, and other alternative transportation options ingrained as a part of normal life. All of these changes in communities along the river encourage a refocusing on vibrant community centers with appropriately scaled buildings, safe access to basic services, and an enhanced public realm.
Community Priorities

We want to become an area that benefits the current residents by providing affordable housing and eliminating food deserts for years to come. Our desire is to build a community centered around diversity and bringing everyone together to strengthen the people who have built Stringtown into what it is today.

I am thankful that the river is finally the priority that it deserves to be. As we prepare a vision of how we want it to look, I hope that the vision is inclusive. Particularly, there are people of color and poor may not have access to public events for various reasons, but still deserve to be a part of shaping the vision for what the river will one day become.

I’m a life long residence of Indianapolis, growing up in the West Indianapolis section of the city which is in close proximity to the White River. My love for this city, my neighborhood, and the people in them desires for a more inclusive, and fun place to live. Will minorities, African Americans in particular, be given equal opportunities from a grassroots effort to invest small amounts of capital in efforts to allow locals to invest in their communities?

I value the role that the river has played in my community and excited about potential new roles it can play.

River-wide Recommendations

Preserves access to affordable, safe and diverse neighborhoods

The health of the region can be measured by their ability to sustain a quality of life. Access to amenities is part of this metric. The White River Vision Plan improvements expand the choices that people have to walk or bike between destinations, to access active recreation spaces and trails, and to find and stay in housing that meets resident needs. At the same time, these improvements can bring the potential risk of increasing demand on diverse, stable communities along the river today and driving up prices. The region needs to grow intentionally to accommodate potential population increases while also instituting policies and practices that promote economic and social diversity.

Urban infill development is one of the most sustainable growth patterns, reinforcing places that can build on existing utilities and transportation services. The White River Vision Plan promotes focusing growth in areas along the river where basic services already exist or could be expanded over time. Further, enabling the growth of more housing units, through sensitively scaled density and a mix of unit types, is a central principle to promoting affordability; any measures that restrict units can increase prices.

Downtown Carmel, Downtown Fishers, Downtown Noblesville, Broad Ripple, Rocky Ripple, Castleton and others already have many of the amenities and infrastructure with opportunities for infill development to support the goals for affordable and safe neighborhoods. These areas have or are proximate to high concentrations of jobs and
businesses to help attract new residents to the river and limit the burden of commuting for work or services. As demand continues in these areas, new projects should offer a range of housing options through mixed use development; varying price points, densities and types of units; and both rental and home ownership opportunities. Reinvestment in neighborhoods should reward those who have been long-time residents with improved livability and the ability to capture value. New development will provide a mix of housing types and price points that helps elevate the neighborhood for all.

» Action: Car ownership can be a meaningful space.

Enhances and protects the character of existing neighborhoods.

With growth and change comes the challenge of protecting what is already loved and appreciated about Central Indiana’s great neighborhoods. Many of the White River neighborhoods boast incredible historic buildings and a scale of development that is human-scaled and walkable. Sensitive infill and gentle densification will be important to affordability, but should also be calibrated to neighborhood character.

Preservation and adaptation of contributing building stock across each downtown and residential neighborhood in the region helps to protect cultural memory, retain affordability, and offer a village center experience that is unique to each place. Adaptive reuse is a creative way to allow incremental change in scale and use, while preserving appropriate densities or design sensitive to each place.

Parking is an important factor as well. Often, parking requirements, if not carefully aligned with both market demand and alternative transportation goals, can drive the creation of site-by-site solutions that create an overabundance of restricted surface parking in small, urban areas. A thoughtful district approach to parking supply and management can instead result in better affordability for projects and help to achieve broader goals. This will also help to preserve valuable riverfront and urban center space for public realm improvements like trails and expanded open space.

» Action: Promote infill development and the rehabilitation of vacant structures and ensure building codes encourage the rehabilitation of older structures, rather than demolition and new construction.

» Action: Protect public access to the river. Ensure large scale riverfront developments provide public access between the river and commercial amenities.

» Action: Work with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to nominate culturally and historically significant communities under the National Register of Historic Places.

Stabilizes local businesses and expands opportunities for commercial districts.

As online retail continues to gather a strong share of the retail market, commercial districts along and near the White River have a unique way to compete and differentiate their offerings by taking advantage of the unique riverfront experience, walkable amenities and quality, local retail options. At the same time, as improvements occur, lease prices may rise and it can become even more challenging for local businesses to compete for affordable space to operate.

A local business stabilization program for commercial districts and corridors can help ensure that improvements can be tied to programs that address small business needs and are designed to support local proprietors. These programs can be used to attract reinvestment to communities that have suffered from foreclosures and abandonment with the intent of assisting local entrepreneurs with more limited resources to gain access to economic opportunity, help create jobs, and deliver a unique sense of place. At the same time, they can also be used to strengthen already vibrant retail corridors with policies to preserve and curate the desired retail mix.

Local and small business support programs can employ a number of strategies, depending on the governing entities and funding source. This could include direct purchase and rehabilitation of properties; financing support mechanisms for redeveloped or foreclosed properties; programs to assist with storefront improvements or re-branding; establishment or participation in a land bank; or a clean-and-green program to enhance public space.

» Action: Create programs to help existing retailers increase sales by bringing in expertise who can work with municipalities, economic development organizations, local property owners, and retailers to maximize sales revenue and reduce turnover.

» Action: Create programs to help existing retailers increase sales by bringing in expertise who can work with municipalities, economic development organizations, local property owners, and retailers to maximize sales revenue and reduce turnover.
ANCHOIR: BROAD RIPPLE

Broad Ripple Village is located within the Village Lakes Reach, from 82nd Street to 29th Street. Broad Ripple Village is a ‘canal’ village that has the potential to expand its identity to also become a strong ‘river’ village. Within the village’s retail heart, new connections up and over existing levees can be paired with small infill projects that strategically preserve existing architectural scale or character in the core of the Village. East along Broad Ripple Avenue, new development with places to access the river will create dynamic waterfront views, enhancing the relationship between Broad Ripple Park and activities along the canal. By leveraging the area’s strong identity, building on past planning efforts, and connecting to recent infrastructure investments, Broad Ripple will retain what’s special today while better embracing the White River.
Site-specific Recommendations

- Connect over the levee at 64th Street to Holliday Park and between the Monon Trail/Westfield Boulevard and public utility property.
- Create policies or programs to promote reinvestment in existing residential sites.
- Explore tools to promote more affordable unit types and a variety of offerings.
- Remove invasive woody and herbaceous plants, plant native trees, shrubs, and seed; and create a program to manage and monitor progress.
- Renovate the dam to balance water health and recreation.
- Modify the current stepped installation with fish ladders and to maintain the upstream pool.
- Relocate parking and redevelop waterside sites; explore shared parking opportunities to coordinate future development.
- Work with Citizen’s Energy to provide public access over the levee to the river.
- Implement projects such as boat access and launch, riverbank restoration, riverwalk, and terraced river’s edge.
- Implement North Midtown Riverwalk and explore connecting 64th Street to Holliday Park.
- Work with artists and the Indianapolis Art Center to create temporary or permanent art installations along the river and canal.

**ECONOMY**
- Convert a strong canal village into a strong RIVER village.

**RIVER HEALTH**
- Help to implement past planning efforts including Broad Ripple Park Plan, and the Riverwalk.

**COMMUNITY**
- Preserve existing building stock and create gentle infill development.

**ENVIRONMENT**
- Retrofit dam to create better wildlife habitat in Marott Nature Preserve.

**PARTNERSHIPS**
- Partner to create meaningful places alongside necessary infrastructure.

**LAND USE**
- Incentivize development that supports community needs and desires.

**EXPERIENCE**
- Move parking away from canal and create vibrant spaces close to river’s edge.

**ACCESS**
- Create paths and carve views/overlooks over and along the levees.

**HISTORY**
- Establish the commercial core as a national register historic district.
Broad Ripple is reimagined with infrastructure investments and public realm improvements, including partnership opportunities with organizations like Indianapolis Art Center to strengthen residents' relationships to the river.
Establish criteria for choosing this place and other sites along the River

- Presence of historic commercial corridors and/or districts
- Medium to high mix of commercial and residential uses and density
- Increase in number of development starts
- Noticeable increase in property values/decrease in values

Identify other Relevant Areas along the River

- Rocky Ripple
- Near Westside
- Downtown Indianapolis
- Reverend Mozel Sanders Park
- Riverside Park
- Haughville
From the earliest days of habitation along the river to the most recently improved stretches, people have always longed to mark their presence along the great White River’s banks. It is along these banks that many over many years have invested time, energy, and resource - tending farm fields, building great institutions, and laying the infrastructural groundwork for communities to prosper.

Pride of ownership and pride of place are themes that echoed through the halls and rooms of community conversation during the vision planning process. There were few things that people were more passionate about that their own particular corner of the world - and that passion is channeled into the Vision Plan’s recommendations.
Honor Ownership and Land-use Patterns

Over ninety percent of the properties along the White River within Hamilton County and Indianapolis are privately owned, thereby providing land owners the unique capacity to steward and enhance the landscape’s ecosystem services. Honoring ownership not only sustains the next generation of family and community, but also keeps the plan in the hands of those who are vested in the river’s success far beyond their lifetimes. This principle both advocates for sustainable land development, conservation, and enhanced resiliency but also ensures that decisions as part of this plan’s implementation continue to engage the diverse stakeholder group who have shepherded the river’s success up to this point.

_Honor Ownership and Use Patterns_ means that this stretch of the White River:

- Strengthens the role of existing land owners, residents, organizations and businesses along the river in decision-making.
- Ensures everyone shares in the costs and benefits of change along the river.
- Facilitates continued community outreach and engagement as the plan is implemented.
- Respects private land rights and make public investments only on publicly accessible land.
**Existing Conditions**

**Summary**

The greater Indianapolis region has received a number of accolades over the past several years, including a top 15 biking city (Indianapolis), best city for renters (Indianapolis), best neighborhoods for families (Fishers), best place to live (Carmel), best place for young professionals to live in the state (Noblesville), and the region is one of the top food destinations in the country — all indicators that the region is thriving.

As a result of these successes the Indianapolis metro area will continue to lead population growth in the state. The entire region will see a 26% increase in its population to about 2.5 million people. Hamilton County continues to be the fastest growing county in the state. Both Hamilton County and Indianapolis could face a number of challenges as a result of this growth. These include rising housing costs and the loss of natural and agricultural land to development. As the region grows, we need to balance development with preserving existing land use patterns and opportunities to enhance environmental health. These growth patterns are already visible in the shift in land uses over the past few decades. Many industrial lands and factories that once dominated the riverfront are now positioned for mixed-use waterfront developments like 16 Tech and Waterside in Downtown Indianapolis. A similar trajectory is possible for farmland along the White River, where the popularity of towns like Noblesville, Fishers and Carmel for young professionals and families are increasing the demand for new residential development within driving distance to job centers along the I-465 corridor and in Downtown Indianapolis.

Not only is regional growth driving new forms of development along the river, but it is also increasing the number of people interacting with the river on a daily basis. The White River Vision Plan seeks to increase opportunities for public access while preserving the natural experience, variety of land ownership and use needs and privacy of many segments along the river.

**River-wide Recommendations**

Strengthens the role of existing land owners, residents, organizations and businesses along the river in decision making.

As the river becomes more attractive as a destination, the number of users will increase and so will the need for increased enforcement of river land rights and the protection of existing land uses. Education and community consensus will be necessary to determine effective ways to protect the

**Community Priorities**

We have no plans to take property away from owners. We hope to provide plenty of public access points and education about respecting the river to those that get on the water.

I’m a social worker at a local non-profit serving individuals experiencing homelessness. Many of our clients are residents along the White River and have lived there for many years. We are concerned about the future of their homes and would appreciate the opportunity to be involved in future discussions related to development along the White River.

A healthier, more accessible White River improve quality of life, raises property values, some but actually invites more people to the neighborhood because of a greater entrée of outdoor recreation amenities.

I hope that the vision does not include any eminent domain. I would like to see the county take over the riverbank which would hopefully get peoples cars and junk off the river. A trail along the river would be nice...
Facilitates continued community outreach and engagement as the plan is implemented.

The White River Vision Plan covers a number of jurisdictions and hundreds of unique property owners, river enthusiasts, and visitors. The best way to continue the collective momentum that has been built through this process will be to continue to engage these diverse interests as part of a coordinated effort towards plan implementation. More than 16,000 connections were made in this process, a number that will continue to grow as the plan is implemented. The ongoing work of plan partners, committees and task forces have created a growing understanding of what it means to successfully communicate and come together around common goals. This strategy recommends that these dialogues continue as a preferred governance model is released and as the plan is implemented. A few ways to continue the conversation and educate people about this effort are detailed in the actions below:

» Action: Work with neighborhoods to come up with an art/interpretive installation to tell the story of each neighborhood at key river connection locations.

» Action: Host a series of workshops with community leaders to review the plan and train them to share the plan with their neighborhoods and in more public forums.

» Action: Develop clear and consistent signage to distinguish between public and private assets and make public investments track incident reports along the river.

» Action: Work with local law enforcement to police parks, open spaces and natural areas and unprogrammed open spaces to ensure the safety of visitors and property owners alike.

» Action: Create a marketing strategy to continue outreach to people who live, work, or visit along the river and continue to maintain MyWhiteRiver web and social media tools, including Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

» Action: Ensure no net loss of open space within a half mile commensurate with population growth.

Respects private land rights and make public investments only on publicly accessible land.

The most rural sections of the river are also among the most serene. Natural vegetation hugs the river and creates an oasis of water and nature in an otherwise active corridor. The river along this stretch is typically made up of natural resource areas and farmland, often blurring the definition of property boundaries for people hiking in an open space or canoeing down the river.

Over the course of the planning process, the project partners and design team met with a wide variety of organizations, individuals, including residents, businesses and property owners from many backgrounds to learn about their experiences with and aspirations for the White River. Specific concerns on behalf of land owners adjacent to the river have been expressed regarding privacy, noise, trespassing, litter and other unlawful activities by users of the river. Awareness and education are important first steps to ensure river and public space users understand the rich tapestry of ownership and respect private land on the river. As projects materialize and more people connect with and on the river, local law enforcement should police both popular parks and unprogrammed open spaces to ensure the safety of visitors and property owners alike.
ANCHOR:
CONNER PRAIRIE
(ALLISONVILLE)

This anchor is within the Meadow Reach, from 206th Street to Conner Prairie/126th Street. Currently an active and productive stretch of the river, the stretch of river between 116th and 160th Street may also be subject to significant change over the long term as the region and river evolve. With the expansion of Conner Prairie westward across the river, there are opportunities to showcase the river through experiential learning opportunities, Fishers and Carmel park destinations and other regional amenities and preserve existing ownership and land use patterns. North of 146th Street, restored ecological zones can enhance water quality, bring native wildlife back to the White River, and reduce negative impacts from active landfill operations through remediation and repurposing land for public benefit.

Honor Ownership and Use Patterns means that this stretch of the White River:

• Strengthens the role of existing land owners, residents, organizations, and businesses along the river in decision-making.
• Ensures everyone shares in the costs and benefits of change along the river.
• Facilitates continued community outreach and engagement as the plan is implemented.
• Respects private land rights and make public investments only on publicly accessible land.
Site-specific Recommendations

- Consider purchasing the Noblesville landfill site for open space and connect the Nickel Plate prepared trail across river through landfill site (including bridge construction).
- Work with the City of Fishers, Carmel and Noblesville to improve pedestrian crossings, especially at roundabouts. Consider incorporation of art, pattern and color to street crossing surfaces.
- Remove invasive woody and herbaceous plants, plant native trees and shrubs, install native seed, manage and monitor along the river’s edge.
- Engage Central Indiana Land Trust and Indy Land Stewardship to protect natural areas and connections to public lands along the river north of 96th Street.
- Identify natural area/transition locations and write natural area conservation plan to manage recreational use at the edges of significant natural resource areas.
- Work with Conner Prairie to identify opportunities for partnerships that increase river awareness of the river and support implementation of the Museum’s Master Plan, including public partnerships with the City of Fishers and the City of Carmel (Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation Department) to support a new river ecology education center.
- Implement soil and water quality recommendations from the Indiana Agriculture Strategic Plan 2027.
- Incentivize private investment in rain gardens, green roofs, permeable pavements, and rain barrels to capture and manage stormwater and reduce the impact on the river.
- Determine capacity and design mechanism to route/discharge flood water during major flood rain events.
- Strategically acquire riverfront properties available for voluntary acquisition that support the vision and guiding principles of the plan including large continuous parcels, retired quarries and other industrial sites.
- Establish a means of on-going communication for reporting back to the public, the stakeholders and steering committee the status of the plan and implementation progress.
Criteria for Choosing This Place and Other Sites Along the River

- Mix of land uses and large property owners: This section of the river is changing at a rapid pace to support growth in Fishers and Carmel. Industrial land and farmland are giving way to single family development creating a unique tapestry of riverfront adjacencies and opportunities to consider strategic public access that does not limit the operations of productive uses around the river.

- Regional or national destinations: Conner Prairie anchors this stretch of river and serves as a key gateway between rural sections of Hamilton County and developed areas of southern Hamilton County and Indianapolis. There are many regional and national destinations along the river that can drive active strategies for river programming.

- Private property considerations related to connectivity: The consistent natural edge of the river often blurs property lines, making it difficult to discern public versus private lands.

Other Relevant Areas along the River

- IUPUI and other universities
- Indianapolis Art Center
- Newfields
- White River State Park and Indianapolis Zoo
- Post-extraction quarry lands south of Downtown Indianapolis and north of 465
- Potters Bridge Park
- Crown Hill Cemetery
- Butler University
Globalization and technological shifts have created a world more connected than ever before but, in many ways, have also contributed to an increasing sense of isolation and fragmentation. At the same time, some of the greatest challenges facing the growing communities of the country require bigger and broader collaboration - across time, boundaries and ecosystems. New forms of coalition and partnership building are the heart of success stories from communities around the globe - and the White River has landed that trend at the center of Indiana.

The Vision Plan and its process has built a robust new series of partnerships and relationships, building on existing networks of advocates and broadening the charge to include new voices. At its very core is a commitment to unprecedented regional cooperation - a united and visionary coming together for the greater good with the river at the center.
**Existing Conditions**

**Summary**

The White River Vision Plan process has proven that many adjoining local governments can work in harmony to create a vision for the greater good of their counties and their shared asset, the river. The study area included Marion and Hamilton Counties, uniting each within a larger vision for the fifty-eight-mile long river stretch. There are a multitude of non-profit organizations along the river which are advocates and stewards for its success, such as Reconnecting to Our Waterways and the White River Alliance, among many others.

To support the vision of the plan, there is a great opportunity to reinforce collaboration through a new governance model which will guide implementation in coming decades.

A coordinating entity or consortium of entities is required to hold the White River Vision Plan and drive implementation, leveraging the participation of many organizations, non-profits, volunteers, governments, and state/federal agencies. The governance entity needs to be able to balance diverse regional interests, secure funding, add value, provide coordinated recommendations for implementation, maintain momentum.

**River-wide Ideas**

**Private-Public Partnerships**

The successful implementation of any program to improve the form and function of the White River will depend on private-public partnerships. There are several existing programs and organizations where private sector and landowners can voluntarily participate in river stewardship and add to connecting natural and undeveloped areas. Some approaches are 1) rewarding best practices through the USDA conservation programs; 2) expedited permit review and/or waived permit fees; and 3) encouraging conservation partnerships for private landowners with local land trusts such as the Central Indiana Land Trust (CILTI) and the Audubon Pollinator Golf Course Program.

> **Action:** Establish cooperative public-private partnerships throughout the watershed

**Governance Model**

The bold vision set forth by the White River Vision Plan will require an equally dynamic and strong governance structure to ensure its successful implementation. There must be multi-jurisdictional leadership, capacity, and funding to implement the variety of proposed plan elements, both those unique to individual communities and those that span the full fifty-eight miles of the study area. Once established, the White River governance structure can serve as a model for multijurisdictional projects in Indiana and across the country.

The governance entity (or entities) must have all required functions to implement the White River Vision Plan’s resulting projects and future plans. Public accountability is important, and the entity should be able to demonstrate and measure success, not only of the plan implementation, but also the effectiveness of the governance entity, as viewed by stakeholders. Stakeholders will evaluate the potential success of the governance structure based upon the feedback received during the vision planning process; their feedback and recommendations formed the White River governance structure. This report aims to advance decision-making related to governance, providing a framework to set up both short-term and long-term governance entities.

**Overview of functions required to implement the White River Vision Plan**

The governance model for the White River Vision Plan must coordinate all project-related needs, such as strategic planning, marketing, and advocacy. The entity must provide implementation support, in the form of fundraising and partnerships as well as technical assistance. It is important to note that most capital projects will still be implemented by the individual municipalities where they are located. Still, the entity will develop projects with these partners, or support them through additional funding and other means, as well as guide construction and development initiatives. After project completion and development along the waterfront, planning for ongoing operations will be necessary. This includes coordination with local jurisdictions, the potential need for supplemental maintenance and operations, coordinated programming, earned income program, and providing security for safe spaces.
Community Priorities

- Get local experts involved early. Regulate strict laws to ensure no encroachment or pollution. Create more awareness about the marine species so that the public is involved and recognizes how important it is.

- I would like to see a new community based tax district to help defray expenses and reinvest in our existing communities.

- Realize that every action has a reaction. We will be diligent in realizing that what we do upstream will affect those downstream. Less commercialization and more naturalization.

- The vision plan will create a fully protected and restored riparian corridor, which is respected and preserved, in perpetuity, by public officials.

Timeline for functions

It may be that not all capacities listed above (Coordination, Implementation Support, Capital Project Development, and Ongoing Park Operations) are necessary at once, and do not need to be in place on day one. The project stakeholders should determine when these functions are required, and if a phased approach is beneficial. It is likely that coordination, strategic planning, fundraising, advocacy, and marketing will always be necessary, while capital project management and ongoing park operations can be phased depending upon the implementation of built projects. It will be important to build on the momentum developed by this planning process, both with the public and key stakeholders, and to put a transition plan in place that allows quick action and clear communications.

Criteria for a successful governance structure

Being able to execute the required functions is only one component of a successful governance structure. The ideal governance
structure must be able to meet the following criteria to serve as the steward for the White River Vision Plan.

CRITERION 1: EFFECTIVENESS
The governance model must be able to implement the organizational mission and mandate, and offer all required functions (Coordination, Implementation Support, Capital Project Development, and Ongoing Park Operations). Effectiveness is also judged in the flexibility to evolve or change as the requirements for strategic planning and project implementation change over time.

CRITERION 2: ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY
To ensure economic sustainability, the governance model should have the ability to solicit, accept, and spend funds from multiple sources. This could include: general funds/bonds; bid charge, TIF, special levy, real estate proceeds, food and beverage, events and promotion, parking fees, philanthropy, or corporate sponsorship. This access to sufficient, reliable funding sources allows them to execute capital projects and sustain operations.

CRITERION 3: POLITICAL VIABILITY
Accountable to the public with mechanisms for transparent reporting on progress
Viewed as adding sufficient value to generate cross-jurisdictional support and participation from diverse stakeholders, including residents, landowners, and public officials

CRITERION 4: FEASIBILITY
The governance model should have an established precedent, including legal and regulatory precedents on function. There should also be an ease and timing for implementation that is sustainable in nature.
Capital Improvement Phasing
[TBD]

Capital Improvement Implementation

Riverwide / System Capital Projects Summary
[TBD]

Focus Area Capital Projects Summary
[TBD]

Overall Vision Plan Capital Improvement Implementation Summary
[TBD]