



White River Vision Plan Transition Team Submitted Written Briefs Community/Regional/Equity Stakeholders

The White River Vision Plan Transition Team is appointed and charged with serving as the civic trust to create the regional governance implementation strategy for the White River Vision Plan. The White River Vision Plan Transition Team consists of balanced representatives from both Marion and Hamilton Counties with governance, organizational development, fundraising, and political experience.

As part of the Team process, three sets of representative stakeholders, organized around the Vision Plan's guiding principle groupings of environment, activation/economy, and regional/community/equity, are invited to submit written testimony to guide the Team's discussions.

Included in this packet are responses received from the activation & economy stakeholders.

- Brad Beaver, Resident of Riverwood area in Hamilton County
- LaShawnda Crowe Storm, Artist and Community Builder
- Jim Flanders, Northern Hamilton County Farmer
- Pastor David Greene, Indianapolis Concerned Clergy
- Tom Killian, Hamilton County Community Foundation
- Michael McKillip, Midtown Indy
- Sean Northup, Indy Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Olgen Williams, Haughville Strong Neighborhood

Additional organizations were also invited to submit written briefs but opted not to respond.

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Please limit your response to four pages total. Responses will be public.

Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

Brad Beaver. Riverwood area resident for 25 years. Hamilton County Council member. Lives one-eighth of a mile from the river. Does not live in the actual community of Riverwood but just outside. Parents lived in the Riverwood neighborhood when he was born.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

Flooding is always a concern, but you live by the river and you accept that. I haven't noticed any significant changes in how flooding is occurring. Only once has the river gotten into the house in the time I've lived there. Even then, it was not actually river water but back-up water in the drainage system.

We do still have floods but not in the house. The flooding has seemed less intense more recently than previously. But there also seems to be less debris in the river than previously. People seem to be more respectful of the river in general and are taking better care of it.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

Anyone that is going to have jurisdiction over the river should be either already elected and then appointed to the governance board because they need to be held accountable. There needs to be a balance between the rules and reality. Non-elected officials making rules that go too far can be detrimental. An elected official would need to answer to his or her decisions.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

It depends on the amount of power you're willing to give this board. I've always been against giving someone power over someone else where there is no ultimate accountability. Such as an HOA telling you what color to paint your house – you move into that neighborhood knowing there are rules. But to suddenly have an organization tell you what color to paint your house when there had not been a previous authority would be a challenge.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

That's hard to answer because unless they have some ability to make it better, then governance for governance sake is not helpful. For example, if twice a year you do a clean it up, then that would be an improvement. The governance board needs to exist to make things better, not more complicated.

What scares you about this same prospect?

Again, to have governance telling you what you can and can't do and just making more rules, that might be a problem.

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When I bought my house 30 years ago, there was no jurisdiction. And now I have many who tell me what I can and cannot do to anything on my property, and it adds more bureaucracy. I live partly in the flood way and I must go through more barriers than any developer does. For example, I want to bring in some landscaping dirt, I cannot. But a corporation may be able to hire engineers to make models calculations that support what they want to do because they can afford it.

Rigorous government standards sometimes make the playing field less equal than equal.

If there's a way to equalize this, then it's a good thing. But it seems like additional layers may make it less equalizing.

Perhaps mediating between development and government and the individual homeowner to make it as fair as possible might be a goal. Balancing between "the greater good" and "private ownership" is not easy.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

Trust is the biggest issue in making decisions. Regionalization makes sense for the river because it's a natural resource that is needed by each of the communities along the river. But to regionalize just to be regional does not make sense. Building trust over time will be important.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

A resident should be seated on any governance structure. Residents along the river should have maximum information and be completely transparent about decisions that may be made. Information should be proactively communicated to residents who deserve to know and distributed to them in a way that people will actually get it. For example, some people still don't have internet access so you need to snail mail it. It's wrong to make rules, enact more restrictions or obligations without residents understanding what's going on and having the right to speak up.

Please submit responses to Brad Beaubien by email at bbeaubien@visitindy.com.

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Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

Although based primarily in the heart of Indianapolis, I am also an outdoor enthusiast and am concerned about all aspects of the river and water shed as I am both impacted by and my activities impact the river. We do not live in a bubble. All aspects of the ecosystem are connected, and we must begin to understand it as such to get all those living and impacted by the river to embrace and support its growth and health.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

Health and conservation of the river.

Recent issues in Indianapolis with the breaking of the damn showcase the vulnerability of our water system and the complex connection community has to the water across sectors.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

The river should offer a broad base of activities that support across generations, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as connect the counties / region. This is a great opportunity to build community and build bridges towards a more equitable understanding about the importance of water in our shared future. Funding and decision-making must be across sectors and independent of existing structures. This is extremely important when it pertains to the governance of this as it could easily lend itself towards favoritism and/or sectors having an outsized voice in the process. This is great opportunity to incorporate a community-organizer(s) at the start of the creation of this work. There must be a component of this work that is self-reflective, grounded in community voices and works across potential and/or perceived dividing lines.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

Decision making abilities that are siloed and tribal in nature. You cannot simply be worried about what happens in one county and/or how one use of the river (farming, recreation, water, etc.) without thinking about the regional impact and/or how said activities may negatively impact communities down river. An extreme top-down hierarchy in decision making will NOT be good. We must get the entire community to embrace the river to make this work. At the root of the

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work must be seeds planted in movement building towards the goals of getting all along the river and water shed to understand its value.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

This is an opportunity to do great work that is focused and coordinated. If handled well it could be great force towards environmental conservation and community building. As such, it is important that the process brings in those that will bring spaces of neutrality and bridge building into the work.

What scares you about this same prospect?

That it moves too fast and does not give ample space for the messiness of cooperation and community building to move forward. It could get so bogged down in bureaucracy and siloed that it becomes neutered at best, divisive and damaging at worse.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

Willing to work in a fashion that is rooted in equitable development. Honestly, much of this work must begin first with exploring the values and goals of each at the table and then be willing to slow down and work towards a win-win-win for all. How we begin is how we end. I would hope that the root of this work is focused around equitable access and inclusive public spaces. In addition, the participants will need to honestly work from a position where they understand, everyone CANNOT get everything they want, but that what can be created is good for us all. There must be spaces for give and take, as well as community voice at the table.

As this process moves forward community organizing principles, as well as a paid position to support community building is a must. You may need 2 or more community builders that different areas throughout the region to be effective. Community building and organizing is not outreach and that difference must be understood as it can be the difference between how the work moves forward.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

AT this point I am not sure as my organization can contribute to this effort in many ways. However, I am willing to take the step to explore the journey to see what makes sense.

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Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

Jim Flanders. Sixth generation representative of numerous farm families in northeast Hamilton County.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

We have more flooding than we used to, partially due to obstructions along the river. Islands at Strawtown needs to be dredged, an artificial dyke at Koteewi Park that makes the north side of the road flood versus the south side. These have been mentioned many times and are not in the plan.

Private property rights are also a concern.

We farm quite differently than we did even 20 years ago to prevent erosion and no longer is silt as much of a problem but sand is, which indicates that farming isn't the main issue and more flooding that brings in other debris.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

Creating a new regional governance board sends chills down my spine. Anytime the government creates anything new, it makes it worse rather than better. If this could eliminate any of these layers and simplify management through a single entity then that is a different story.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

I go back to the list of concerns that when we first got involved, none has been addressed. Any entity that is created will be detrimental to our family's ability to farm.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

If landowners can be a part of the decision-making with a seat on the board, etc. AND if this governance board will simplify and address the concerns, I've stated above by creating policies that protect the river but also the landowner, then this could work. But it will take a lot of effort to do.

If higher-up bureaucracy supersedes rules that make common sense (e.g. state/federal over-regulation) then how will this help us all move forward? How can this governance board be a voice of reason when it feels like so many different opinions and complicated rules make it difficult?

What scares you about this same prospect?

See above. Too many layers, too many rules, not enough common sense.

I am still not sure it even needs to be created. My concern is that even if I have a voice, it will be overshadowed by so many other rules and regulations.

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What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

Different goals and different funding levels. Each administration is going to have their own goals. They may see this as their first step toward their own goals but not necessarily understand how their goals mesh with others along the river. This reminds me of other times like the decision on the Nickel Plate Railroad being pulled up – local governments can do things to get the result they want without real public input.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

I try to do my best to take care of the river as a landowner. I think most of my fellow farmers are trying to do the same. But the concept that there needs to be a bigger entity to manage this and create more layers is puzzling to me.

Let it operate for five years and see if it can work and provide better service to the river and the stakeholders on the river, and then let it sunset. Then that will be a true evaluation.

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Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

The Concerned Clergy of Indianapolis is an advocacy organization that focuses on the areas of economics, housing, and health. Because the White River project will impact all of these areas, the Concerned Clergy is committed to this project and its impact on the African American community.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

The greatest challenges facing the White River is to do address the environmental issues that currently exist. The other great challenge is not allowing developers to promote gentrification to the point where seniors and others will be forced to leave their homes.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

The regional governance entity should work on getting funding and ensure that the community voice is heard and that the current disparities that exist are addressed with any solution or direction taken.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

If the regional governance entity is organized with equity, then decisions can be made.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

There was momentum around this project and it looks like there is some movement to actually get something done that would be good for all of Central Indiana

What scares you about this same prospect?

What scares us the most is it will create greater disparities in the city of Indianapolis as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It could create a greater divide in the community similar to what the building of I65 did to the city in the past.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

Egos and Money!

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

The Concerned Clergy of Indianapolis will be watching and be involved as much as allowed because of the impact it will have on the minority community.

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Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

The mission of the Hamilton County Community Foundation (HCCF) is to mobilize people, ideas and investments to make this a community where every individual has equitable opportunity to reach their full potential – no matter their place, race or identity. As a community foundation, we do three things. We work with donors and their philanthropic interests. We award grants to deserving not-for-profit organizations, and lastly, we lead and convene on important community issues. One of the topics we recognize as a top priority is inclusive economic growth. Within inclusive economic growth, HCCF believes it is imperative to support the ecology and hydrology, accessibility, recreational and cultural opportunities and economic development efforts of the White River. The White River is an asset for our community and HCCF firmly believes in the revitalization of the river. In 2017, HCCF made a \$15,000 investment into the White River Master Plan. While we are focused specifically on Hamilton County, as an affiliate of Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), we also recognize the importance of a regional partnership.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

The greatest challenge facing the White River is and will continue to be improving the water quality. The ecology and hydrology of the river are critically important to the revitalization of the river. Unfortunately, we have turned our backs to the White River for the past few decades and have just recently recognized it as the community asset it is. It will take time, dedication and resources to continue to the clean-up effort.

Another challenge is to ensure that the development along the river is equitable and smart. We need to make sure that during the development process that the communities along the river are not displaced. There is an enormous opportunity to create recreation and economic development alongside and on the river that all residents can enjoy. However, this needs to be done in a way that is equitable and takes into account the effects the projects have on vulnerable residents.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

A regional governance entity made up of diversified stakeholders from both Hamilton and Marion County stakeholders could contribute the following:

- Coordinate ongoing fundraising activities from multiple sources to carry out the implementation of the plan
- Ensure that both counties maintain an environmental focus on the river and their respective jurisdictions
- Provide accountability on the developments of the White River to ensure that they are equitable.



What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

A regional governance entity should not encourage policies or programs that displace underappreciated residents who call the river home and who have for years. A regional governance entity should be charged with ensuring that the voices of underrepresented residents is represented in the decision-making process.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

Taking a regional approach to the White River builds upon the strengths of both Hamilton and Marion Counties. Regional coordination and planning will be crucial for the success of the revitalization of the White River and is too large for one specific entity to manage solely. The regional governance entity will be able to serve as a bridge between multiple units of government and interested stakeholders.

What scares you about this same prospect?

While we don't think this will happen, we fear that overtime that the regional governance entity could lose sight of ensuring projects are done in an equitable and sustainable way. The first projects completed along White River will pave the way and set the precedent for future developments. The initial choices the government structure decides will be critical for how protecting the communities along the river from displacement and the health of the river.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

The biggest barriers to regional cooperation will be economic, political and environmental. Hamilton and Marion counties will have to come together as one and put aside individual priorities for the greater good of the White River. We know that taking a regional approach in the end benefits both counties more than an individual approach. The largest barrier will be coming to an agreeance on the political, environmental and economic differences.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

Hamilton County Community Foundation strives to make Hamilton County a better place to live, work, and play. With our affiliates, we are able to do this through a broader regional lens. With the shared mission placing an emphasis on equity, and the current affiliate regional structure, HCCF is uniquely positioned to serve on the White River governance entity. HCCF staff are aware of the needs and issues in Hamilton County and Central Indiana. HCCF can provide countywide expertise and advocate to for a more equitable White River.

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Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

Midtown Indy is a nonprofit community services organization committed to improving the quality of life and economic vitality of the district's 17 diverse neighborhoods. The White River forms the northern and western boundary of the district and serves as natural asset, recreational amenity, and source of drinking water. Midtown Indy brings people, neighborhood associations, businesses, and cultural organizations together to encourage collaborative initiatives that result in a more economically attractive, healthy, and sustainable Midtown region. The White River Vision Plan is of vital importance to this work.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

- Reducing nonpoint source pollution to improve water quality
- Eliminating construction in floodway/floodplain to reduce flooding
- Increasing community access to a public resource
- Protecting riverine flora and fauna to improve biodiversity

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

First and foremost, the regional governance entity (RGE) could serve as an advocate for the White River in Central Indiana and present a united front to the multiple layers of federal, state, and local entities that have jurisdiction over the river, its banks, and adjacent properties. This could augment existing advocacy groups that lack active participation from state and local appointed and elected officials.

In matters of pollution, access, and protection, a high-profile RGE could be a powerful force for embedding stewardship components in zoning codes and land use plans. This could result in limiting construction in recharge areas and help mitigate flooding events.

The RGE could generate a dependable revenue stream to fund biological restoration and pollution mitigation strategies to augment fluctuating state and local funds for such endeavors.

Working with state, local, and regional education partners to develop lesson plans that spur the incorporation of the river as an outdoor laboratory could help develop the next generation of river advocates.

As a decision-making body, the RGE should embody the spirit of inclusiveness and transparency that helps democracy thrive.

Why? To meaningfully address the climate crisis, communities need adaptable, inclusive civic institutions that foster collaborative, creative action immediately. The RGE should aspire to be such a model and cross all boundaries, whether political, cultural, or economic.

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What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

It remains to be seen whether Central Indiana residents would support the RGE if it were to become a taxing entity or if it evolved into a legislative policy initiating/enforcing entity. A significant portion of the population believes that there are too many governmental entities, and that they cannot act either responsibly or competently.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

The high ideals and aspirations of the initial proposal.

What scares you about this same prospect?

Establishing another bureaucracy that loses momentum after such a promising start.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

Politics. Money. Mistrust of government.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

Midtown Indy could use its proven success at convening diverse constituencies to help educate neighbors about the RGE, generate volunteers for public activities, and spur innovative policies. Our mission and commitment to equity, health, and sustainability together with our decade of experience and extensive network of relationships with anchors, neighborhoods, and businesses would position us to be a contributor to the governance entity in a number of ways, be it sharing information, serving as a representative of our stakeholder community, potentially providing back bone support for local projects, and advocacy for the larger objectives of the governance entity.

Please submit responses to Brad Beaubien by email at bbeaubien@visitindy.com.

Sincerely,

Michael A. McKillip

Executive Director – Midtown Indianapolis, Inc.

5/29/2020

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Please limit your response to four pages total. Responses will be public.

Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

The Indianapolis MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) plans for and distributes federal transportation funds for highways, transit, bikeways, trails, and sidewalks to move people and goods in Central Indiana. Established in 1972, the MPO has grown to include more than 35 members representing cities, towns, counties, and other transportation agencies throughout the Central Indiana region, an area that stretches from the northern boundary of Hamilton County to the southern boundary of Johnson County, and Danville to Greenfield. Our board, which meets every other month, is made up of the chief elected officials of each city, town, and county in the region, plus additional planning partners like INDOT, the Airport Authority, IndyGo, CIRTA, FHWA, and others.

Historically, the MPO has had no particular organizational tie to the White River, except to fund bridge projects over it and road and trail projects along it. The MPO is in the midst of implementing a new strategic plan though, which will expand the MPO's model of "convene, inform, plan, and fund" to other regional issues beyond transportation, including land use, economic development, housing, and the environment.

As part of this effort, the MPO will provide staffing assistance to the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority (CIRDA) and the soon-to-be-formed Central Indiana Economic Development District (EDD). The RDA maintains the regional development plan to prioritize state funding, and the EDD will prioritize projects for federal Economic Development District funding. These two boards would be excellent partners for a White River organization.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

Limiting and mitigating pollution sources, finding consistent funding sources for proposed improvements, and changing local perceptions of the river as a recreational and cultural asset.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

Advocating for State and Federal funds to execute the plan, as well as advocating for local government to prioritize supportive infrastructure, economic development, and tourism projects. The entity will also be critical in building consensus around the priority order of projects, and coordinating local support for regionally-significant projects even if they physically sit in a neighboring jurisdiction. The entity will be able to advocate for supportive projects to be include in regional plans like the regional development plan, the LRTP, the TIP, and CEDS.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

Redundancy is a concern. The new entity should strive to work closely with established funding authorities and avoid competing with LPAs for common funding sources.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

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The prospect that a dedicated set of experts will be able to advocate for the river in regional discussions, and the simple fact that the various communities are cooperating so effectively.

What scares you about this same prospect?

Redundancy and internal competition, as stated above.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

Limited local funding, major differences in project priorities, and inherent competing interests. Also a lack of capacity to consider issues at a regional level. None of these issues are intractable.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

The entity should work very closely with the RDA and the EDD, as well as the MPO's Policy Committee. Somewhat less clear is how the MPO's environmental advisory committee will interface with a White River entity, including partners like the White River Alliance and the Central Indiana Drinking Water Collaborative. The MPO is committed to supporting the efforts of all these bodies, and minimizing duplication. We see no major concerns in the White River Vision Plan's list of activities for the new regional governance entity.

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Briefly describe your organization or interest, its relationship to the White River, and its primary geographic area of interest.

The name of the organization is Haughville STRONG Neighborhood Association (hereinafter referred to as the "Association").

MISSION AND PURPOSE OF ORGANIZATION

The Association's purpose shall include the following specific and primary purposes, without limitations, and may be undertaken whether the Association acts independently or collaboratively with public and private entities and government agencies:

Haughville STRONG Neighborhood Association (HSNA) facilitates community inclusiveness, awareness, investment and involvement to promote a safe, sustainable and vibrant neighborhood.

THE ASSOCIATION'S PRIMARY GOALS

1. Facilitate a conversation between neighbors, public officials and interested organizations about neighborhood opportunities and challenges;
2. Support and encourage area improvements and the promotion of the neighborhood;
3. Create awareness of issues affecting Haughville including the general welfare of people and public safety, commercial and housing development, land use, housing standards, zoning issues, traffic patterns/problems and street improvements/modifications;
4. Encourage a spirit of community through neighborhood events and initiatives;
5. Encourage and facilitate informed residents' participation on issues, provide a forum for public discussion on neighborhood concerns and distribute information to the neighborhood on matters of interest; and
6. Act as a liaison with governmental bodies, churches, institutions, developers, schools and business in and around Haughville, and by working with other neighborhood associations in Near West and surrounding areas.

NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES

- North: 16th Street
- East: White River Parkway
- South: Michigan Street
- West: Tibbs Avenue

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the White River in the next 30 years?

It is a costly, complicated process of cleaning up toxic river pollution that still haunts the groundwater. Laden with chemicals that can cause cancer and developmental disabilities, the subsurface water flows into the White River from north of Hamilton County and Indianapolis

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before it winds through the city and down to White River State Park. Along the way, toxics pile up, contaminating fish in the river. Like many pollutants that affect animal and human health

The cleanup should be part of a widespread effort from north to south. In order to recoup some of the costs of the cleanup; in most places, those costs and the necessary investments in infrastructure have fallen on local tax-payers. While environmental advocates continue to pursue strict pollution regulations, much of the momentum in cleanup should come from working together and trying to solve problems outside the courtroom.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities could a regional governance entity undertake to help address these challenges? Why?

A role of willing to work with local residence along the waterway. Looking into private and government partnerships. Research for funding all over the county.

What role or types of activities, funding, or decision-making abilities would not be helpful for a regional governance entity to undertake? Why?

Do not know of any at this time. I will need to see more data what has been done since Mayor Goldsmith's regional plans.

What excites you about the prospect of a regional governance entity that increases regional focus and collaboration around the White River?

The opportunity to give input in controlling our destiny for the future of the community.

What scares you about this same prospect?

The lack of truthfulness that may show up.

What do you see will be the biggest barriers to regional cooperation?

The wiliness to listen to grassroots groups.

How could you see your organization's own mission, work, and governance structure fitting into, or working alongside, a regional governance entity?

As an equal partners' at the table.

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