



# Chapter 3

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## 20 Year Vision

A vision statement and six supporting goals were developed using input gathered during the planning process' first Community Open House and refined by the Steering Committee. This vision statement incorporates the community values and factors of livability as identified by Elkhart citizens. It is an inspirational description of what Elkhart would like to be in the future and serves as a guide for decision-making and community expectations. The six goals represent six tenets of the City's desired ultimate physical, social, and/or economic development that strengthen the vision and frame subsequent actions.

*Elkhart is the city with a heart. It is a safe, attractive, and remarkable community featuring well-maintained neighborhoods, vibrant economy, distinctive downtown, environmental stewardship, and a coordinated transportation system offering its citizens a desirable quality of life through access to exemplary schools, public facilities, parks, and services. Elkhart is a well-respected destination of choice for living, working, and recreating achieved by responsible leadership and collaborative partnerships among citizens, the business community, institutions, and government.*

From this vision statement, six principals or goals have been identified that will frame the recommendations. These topical areas include:

- I. Downtown and Cultural
- II. Neighborhoods
- III. Mobility
- IV. Education & Economic Development
- V. Aesthetics, Natural Resources & Open Spaces
- VI. Health and Safety



Participants at the first public open house.

The goal statements are as follows:

**Goal I: Downtown & Culture** - Continue revitalization of Elkhart's downtown to re-establish itself as a center of commercial, civic, cultural, and social activity.

**Goal II: Neighborhoods** - Direct investment, amenities, and new housing development to established residential areas within the City's boundaries to create additional opportunities for diverse ages, income levels, and stages of life in neighborhoods of choice.

**Goal III: Mobility** - Establish and maintain a balanced and connected system for all modes of transportation within the City and to regional networks.

**Goal IV: Education & Economic Development** -

Grow and diversify Elkhart's economy through academic programming, training, and business retention, expansion, and recruitment initiatives. Enhance the skillset and educational attainment of the workforce to qualify it for employment opportunities in a variety of industries and positions.

Elkhart's Vision Wheel



**Goal V: Aesthetics, Natural Resources & Open Spaces**

- Create opportunities for investment, activities, and programs that ensure protection of the City's built and natural environments, maintenance of open space and greenways, and respect for its heritage.

**Goal VI: Health & Safety** -

Coordinate public services and amenities with land use decisions to protect the well-being and quality of life of Elkhart's citizens and its environment.

## Downtown/Cultural

### Goal I

*Continue revitalization of Elkhart's downtown to re-establish itself as a center of commercial, civic, cultural, and social activity.*

Downtown is a part of Elkhart's iconic identity. In most communities, the economic health and vitality of a city is gauged by the condition of its downtown. Revitalization of Downtown Elkhart has been a continuous effort for more than a decade. Elkhart's citizens and City leadership have indicated on numerous occasions that downtown is important and should be an economic development priority for the community. Downtown has many residential, retail, and commercial space competitors throughout Elkhart and the Michiana Region. Responding to this competition and downtown's competitive advantages, the Comprehensive Plan Update recommends preparing downtown properties for a streamlined redevelopment process, capitalizing on downtown's unique qualities, enhancing downtown's civic, cultural, and social niche, and assisting the downtown management organization. The Comprehensive Plan Update supports the previous planning endeavors, in particular the 2004 Downtown Action Agenda, which outline strategies for downtown redevelopment, revitalization, and organizational initiatives.

The following action steps provide guidance to City policy and decision-makers to support the Downtown/Cultural Goal. Policy development requires the leadership and commitment of Elkhart City officials and collaboration with other partners. It is not solely up to the City to implement the following action steps; however, it is necessary that the City create an environment that is conducive to success in this area by dedicating more resources to organizing efforts, setting guidelines, and enforcing ordinances to enhance and promote assets, creating and maintaining partnerships, and galvanizing stakeholders. As Elkhart recovers from the economic recession of the late 2000s, the City should consider updating the Downtown Action Agenda and reviving its partnership with the downtown development organization to advance these action steps.

### Recommendations

- a. Promote mixed-use occupancy in downtown buildings and judiciously permit uses that support the intentions outlined in the Downtown Action Agenda.
- b. Create development opportunity for live/work spaces in downtown buildings.



A view of Main Street in Downtown Elkhart.



- c. Clear unkempt properties to create turn-key sites for business location in priority areas.
- d. Scale and design new structures to be compatible with adjacent buildings and context.
- e. Establish cooperative agreements between the City and private property/business owners to advance Elkhart's downtown revitalization efforts such as facade improvements and maintaining sidewalks.
- f. Continue support of the downtown development organization.
- g. Update the downtown plan.

## Neighborhoods

### Goal II

*Direct investment, amenities, and new housing development to established residential areas within the City's boundaries to create additional opportunities for diverse ages, income levels, and stages of life in neighborhoods of choice.*

Neighborhoods are the places where everyday life occurs. They create and form communities and flourish with the availability of quality and proximate housing, schools, jobs, health care, public safety, retail, and services. Elkhart's residential population has experienced a modest increase since 2000. The demand for new housing, however, is stagnant and older neighborhoods near the center of the City are continuing to experience high vacancy rates. Residential growth has occurred primarily through annexation of subdivisions in suburban areas adjacent to Elkhart's outer City limits. The Comprehensive Plan Update emphasizes the need and desire to maintain and reinvest in existing residential neighborhoods within the existing City limits. This maintenance and reinvestment involves physical improvements to housing stock and gateways, public and private sector financial commitments, revised review and approval processes, and programmatic support to reinforce Elkhart's residential neighborhoods. Through these various means, it is important to provide housing products at various price points that appeal to homebuyers and renters demanding a quality home in or near the center city.

Housing in the City of Elkhart should be affordable and attractive to all citizens, regardless of incomes or whether they rent or own their homes. The following action steps provide guidance to City policy and decision-makers to support the Neighborhoods Goal. Policy development requires the leadership and commitment of Elkhart City officials and collaboration with other partners. It is not solely up to the City to implement the following action steps;

however, it is necessary that the City create an environment that is conducive to success in this area by dedicating more resources to organizing efforts, setting guidelines, and enforcing ordinances to enhance and promote assets, creating and maintaining partnerships, and galvanizing stakeholders. Neighborhood associations are the essential partners in accomplishing these action steps.

## Recommendations

- a. Dedicate efforts and funding to improving current “at risk” residential neighborhoods with the highest potential for long-term stability.
- b. Address vacant residential properties to reduce any adverse effects of abandoned properties on stable neighborhoods.
- c. Develop a program to create and maintain neighborhood entrances and common areas in areas that do not have a homeowners association.
- d. Create or re-establish and promote neighborhood identities.
- e. Establish residential character guidelines for infill housing within established neighborhoods.
- f. Prepare specific neighborhood revitalization plans and implementation strategies for targeted neighborhoods.

## Mobility

### Goal III

*Establish and maintain a balanced and connected system for all modes of transportation within the City and to regional networks.*

Elkhart’s transportation system includes air, rail, water, and surface. A balanced transportation system provides opportunity for all means of travel in a cooperative and coordinated manner to meet the needs of the community. It is also fully integrated with adjacent land uses, serves the travel demands and desires of citizens, and is compatible with the natural environment. A transportation system that provides safe, convenient, and efficient movement of traffic is vital to a community’s well-being. It has significant influence on the appearance, character, and economic viability and is an important consideration when current and future land use decisions are made. It affects the “where, when, and way” that development takes place and creates access to markets, employment, and investment.

The Comprehensive Plan Update’s recommendations pertaining to mobility include strategies that increase efficiency and safety while meeting the access and needs of all motorized and non-



*The RiverWalk is an important part of the pedestrian system in Downtown Elkhart.*

motorized modes of transportation. These recommendations are intended to assist public officials, developers, and other interested parties in making decisions relating to land use, public right-of-way improvements, funding opportunities, future public investment, and other transportation issues.

The following action steps provide guidance to City policy and decision-makers to support the Mobility Goal. Policy development requires the leadership and commitment of Elkhart City officials and collaboration with other partners. It is not solely up to the City to implement the following action steps; however, it is necessary that the City create an environment that is conducive to success in this area by dedicating more resources to organizing efforts, setting guidelines, and enforcing ordinances to enhance and promote assets, creating and maintaining partnerships, and galvanizing stakeholders. The Michiana Council of Governments (MACOG) is a key collaborator with the City in the development and maintenance of Elkhart's transportation system.

### **Recommendations**

- a. Incorporate facilities for all modes of transportation into road resurfacing and reconstruction projects.
- b. Install sidewalks within all residential neighborhoods.
- c. Install internal sidewalk network in all new commercial, industrial, and institutional developments.
- d. Install multi-purpose paths along all major and minor arterials.
- e. Install bicycle lanes along the routes recommended by the Pedal Panel.
- f. Link all internal pedestrian systems (i.e. sidewalks) with the larger, citywide pedestrian/bicycle transportation network.
- g. Provide for seamless connections among transportation modes including bus, pedestrian facilities, and bicycle facilities.
- h. Create sustainable funding source for facility construction and maintenance.

## **Education & Economic Development**

### **Goal IV**

*Grow and diversify Elkhart's economy through academic programming, training, and business retention, expansion, and recruitment initiatives. Enhance the skillset and educational attainment of the workforce to*



*qualify it for employment opportunities in a variety of industries and positions.*

The local and regional economy is fundamental to a community's quality of life and its citizens' standards of living. A healthy economy creates employment opportunities, supports the tax base, attracts residents, funds public facilities and government services, and establishes a community where people want to live. Education and economic development are reciprocally linked in that an educated population positively contributes to economic growth and sustainability and a growing economy expands and increases the quality of educational opportunities.

Economic development has both individual and collective rewards. Increased personal income and wealth increases the tax base so a community can provide the level of services that citizens expect. Likewise, education also has both individual and collective rewards. An educated and skilled individual has the ability to pursue employment opportunities that offer a higher level of salary, thus increasing personal wealth and contributing more to the local tax base. Tax money is reinvested in the community's educational system which produces additional skilled workers required by current and potential employers. A community that provides a workforce to meet the changing needs of employers will be most attractive for sustainable economic development efforts.

Elkhart prides itself on a skilled workforce. City leaders have recognized for years the importance of diversifying the skill set of its residents through conventional and innovative education and job training endeavors. As economic trends shift, a diversified workforce will not be solely dependent on one industry to provide employment and will be better positioned to handle economic ebbs and flows. The Education & Economic Development Goal of this Comprehensive Plan Update reinforces the education-economic development relationship and outlines techniques to capitalize on the region's diverse educational resources to advance the City's traditional economic development efforts of business retention, attraction, and expansion. The regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) maintained by MACOG is focused on workforce development issues while the Horizon 2.0 (the second generation of Elkhart County's collaborative economic development strategy) are focused on expanding educational opportunities.

In addition to the City of Elkhart's Economic Development Department, the lead advocate of economic development in Elkhart County is the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). Since 2000, the EDC has been instrumental in attracting and retaining quality businesses in the County and is the City's key partner in fostering Elkhart's economy. The following action steps



*Residents enjoy a walk around Island Park.*

provide guidance to City policy and decision-makers to support the Education & Economic Development Goal. Policy development requires the leadership and commitment of Elkhart City officials and collaboration with other partners, such as the EDC. It is not solely up to the City to implement the following action steps; however, it is necessary that the City create an environment that is conducive to success in this area by dedicating more resources to organizing efforts, setting guidelines, and enforcing ordinances to enhance and promote assets, creating and maintaining partnerships, and galvanizing stakeholders.

### Recommendations

- a. Continue the City's economic development efforts of business recruitment, retention, and expansion.
- b. Clear unkempt properties to create turn-key sites for business location in priority areas.
- c. Identify new and emerging markets where Elkhart has a competitive advantage in terms of location, skills of workforce, economy of scale, building inventory, incentives, or other decision-making factors.
- d. Identify and pursue funding opportunities that support the educational and training needs of existing and emerging businesses in the City.
- e. Ensure regular communication among school district, higher education institutions, continuing education providers, Chamber of Commerce, and other representatives from the business community to marry local employment opportunities with academic and training curriculums.
- f. Continue participation in the Horizon 2.0 initiative.
- g. Develop new, non-monetary incentives to entice new investors and retain existing businesses.
- h. Cluster similar and complementary businesses to create economies of scale, encourage resource sharing, market an area's identity, and provide a convenient and memorable experience for customers.
- i. Direct new development and investment to areas within the current City limits rather than in undeveloped/greenfield areas.
- j. Continue to revise the 2013 Annexation Strategy.

Aesthetics, Natural Resources & Open Space

Goal V

Create opportunities for investment, activities, and programs that ensure protection of the City’s built and natural environments, maintenance of open space and greenways, and respect for its heritage.

Elkhart’s heritage and natural resources are essential components of the community. Most notably, the St. Joseph and Elkhart Rivers have shaped the development of the City and their presence contributes to the community’s character, environmental quality, and recreational amenities. Because Elkhart’s natural resources are inherent components of the City, the provision of adequate greenspace and the protection of sensitive environmental areas must be considered as necessary public facilities similar to infrastructure and utility services. Additionally, heritage preservation is also an important local government service and a sensible investment, returning multiple benefits from modest expenditures. The intent of the Aesthetics, Natural Resources & Open Space Goal of this Comprehensive Plan Update is to protect significant, scarce, non-renewable resources and develop ways to capitalize on these assets while advancing preservation endeavors. To achieve this goal, environmental and heritage stewardship should be approached as a shared responsibility. Efforts will require coordination among City departments, not-for-profit organizations, the private sector, and other local, state, and federal agencies to work together to maintain Elkhart’s unique sense of place.

The following action steps provide guidance to City policy and decision-makers to support the Aesthetics, Natural Resources & Open Space Goal. Policy development requires the leadership and commitment of Elkhart City officials and collaboration with other partners. It is not solely up to the City to implement the following action steps; however, it is necessary that the City create an environment that is conducive to success in this area by dedicating more resources to organizing efforts, setting guidelines, and enforcing ordinances to enhance and promote assets, creating and maintaining partnerships, and galvanizing stakeholders. The Elkhart County Soil and Water District Conservation, the City Plan Commission, Purdue University Extension, and community volunteers are all key collaborators with the City in the efforts to protect and enhance Elkhart’s existing built and environmental resources.

## Recommendations

- a. Facilitate public-private partnerships and cooperative agreements in beautification and preservation efforts.
- b. Create sustainable urban forests on vacant land and potentially contaminated sites.
- c. Promote community gardens and local food production.
- d. Prepare and maintain a natural resource inventory and assessment.
- e. Incorporate sustainable design in all new developments, redevelopments, and infrastructure projects.
- f. Install multi-purpose paths along the greenway routes recommended by the Pedal Panel.
- g. Require architectural design of structures within overlay districts to be compatible with development context and corridor character.
- h. Establish design guidelines for gateways to influence signage, landscape design, parking, and building orientation.
- i. Establish separate urban and suburban design guidelines.
- j. Review and revise local historic district plan and ordinance.

## Health & Safety

### Goal VI

*Coordinate public services and amenities with land use decisions to protect the well-being and quality of life of Elkhart's citizens and its environment.*

The advantages of amenable intergovernmental relations include thoughtful and proficient land use decision-making processes, coordinated growth management and preservation, efficient delivery of services, and economies of scale. Growth and development cross jurisdictional boundaries and departmental responsibilities. There are no requirements for comprehensive plans to address intergovernmental collaboration. However, as one of the six primary goals of this Comprehensive Plan Update, the health and safety of the Elkhart community includes maximizing public resources through cooperation, streamlined processes, and consolidated efforts to provide for responsible use of land and logical growth. By coordinating decision-making and approval processes, the City of Elkhart can better connect and align transportation systems, City services, and other infrastructure and resources with neighborhoods, commercial centers, institutions, and recreational facilities.

The following action steps provide guidance to City policy and decision-makers to support the Health & Safety Goal. Policy development requires the leadership and commitment of Elkhart City officials and collaboration with other partners. It is not solely up to the City to implement the following action steps; however, it is necessary that the City create an environment that is conducive to success in this area by dedicating more resources to organizing efforts, setting guidelines, and enforcing ordinances to enhance and promote assets, creating and maintaining partnerships, and galvanizing stakeholders. The Elkhart County Health Department, the County Soil and Water District Conservation, and the Builders Association of Elkhart County, Inc. are all key collaborators.

## Recommendations

- a. Coordinate decision-making and approval processes among City departments.
- b. Coordinate transportation and land use planning.
- c. Coordinate installation of pedestrian/bicycle facilities with programs associated with public health and community wellness.
- d. Identify key vacant sites and buildings for redevelopment or conservation.
- e. Minimize the appearance of blight.
- f. Remediate brownfield sites.
- g. Establish an Elkhart City-Elkhart County Conservancy District to manage utility resources.
- h. Strive to build civic facilities and other City buildings using sustainable and green building principles.



