

SECTION ONE
PLAN PURPOSE



COMMUNITY
CONDITIONS
ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 7, 2022



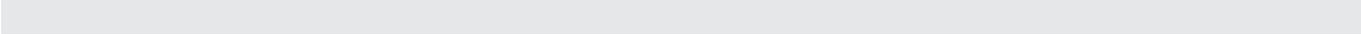
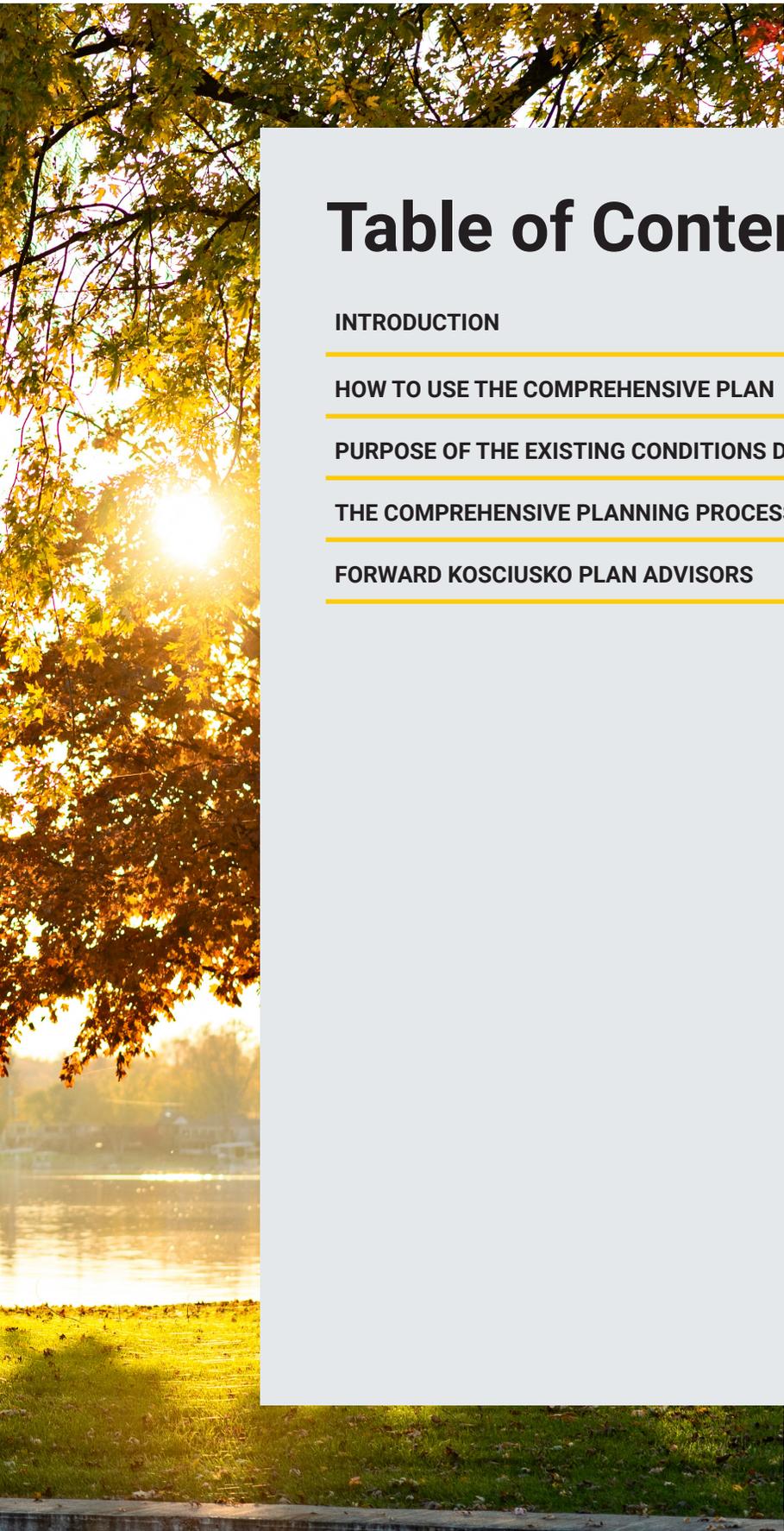


Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
HOW TO USE THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN	3
PURPOSE OF THE EXISTING CONDITIONS DOCUMENTS	5
THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS	7
FORWARD KOSCIUSKO PLAN ADVISORS	9

Kosciusko County Courthouse, Warsaw, IN | Visit Kosciusko County



FORWARD Kosciusko County
is intended to represent
all of us and will be **OUR**
tool to build a better future
together.



In its simplest form, planning is a process that brings individuals or groups together to think about a shared goal for their future. When communities plan, it provides for an opportunity to think through specific and unique needs that directly relate to the residents, business owners, employees and visitors of a specific area. By undertaking a planning process, a community can develop and achieve a character of its own. Planning is a community's chance to tell their story and craft their individual dream for the future. Each City, Town and unincorporated area within Kosciusko County is different. The FORWARD Kosciusko County planning effort, is a collaborative opportunity to identify the uniqueness of each of our communities, while also finding ways to stitch our unique assets into a community fabric that ties all of Kosciusko County together.

FORWARD Kosciusko County is a one-of-a-kind update to the County's current 1996 comprehensive plan. The effort, led by Kosciusko County, the local incorporated communities and their strategic community partners, encourages residents, community leaders and community organizations to come together to discuss local challenges, identify unique community features and determine how Kosciusko County and the local communities can grow, evolve and improve. In doing so, the final outcomes will allow for stronger guidance on economic development initiatives, housing development and design, parks and recreation programs, public transportation and county-wide trail connectivity, the design and maintenance of public facilities, as well as the management of local governmental programs.

Milford Memorial Day Festival, Milford, IN | Visit Kosciusko County

PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A comprehensive plan is a guidance document for local staff and leaders to reference when making decisions about the growth and development of the community. In its simplest form, the primary purpose of the plan is to outline a community-wide vision that looks 10 – 20 years into the future. Indiana Code (Series 500 Title 36-7-4) encourages cities, towns, and counties to adopt a comprehensive plan that includes three key elements:

- A statement of objectives for the future development of the jurisdiction;
- A statement of policy for the land use development of the jurisdiction; and
- A statement of policy for the development of public rights of ways public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

Aside from the elements specified in the Indiana Code, the organization of a comprehensive plan can take many forms based on the needs of the community. The final FORWARD Kosciusko County document will be comprehensive both in scale and scope, with recommendations for the entire County, and all incorporated communities for land use, housing, economic development, transportation (vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle), utilities, parks and recreation, community facilities, health and wellness initiatives, placemaking components and implementation.



HOW TO USE THE **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The final Plan will provide the framework for regulatory tools like zoning, subdivision regulations, annexations, and other County or City/Town policies. The Plan will not be a regulatory tool in and of itself.

While the plan addresses physical elements of the County, it is general in nature and is intended to guide policies and best practices related to development. The FORWARD Kosciusko County Plan will describe strategies for improving our public health, safety and support services; enhancing our lakes, waterways, natural areas and recreational amenities; and supporting growth in our local businesses, industries and tourism destinations. These strategies are intended to be implemented over the course of a 10-20 year timeframe. The Plan will be created with the intention that various community partners will help facilitate the implementation. It is not just for public officials and staff members but anyone who is interested in the future of Kosciusko County. Depending on the user, the final document can be implemented in various ways.

Residents and business owners can use this document as a guide when making real estate decisions such as where to buy a home or where to locate a business, considering renovating properties, or looking for potential programs and incentives to help their business.

Developers or builders might use this document to understand the development policies and priorities, identify areas for development, and/ or review the current and future population, employment, and market trends.

Municipal staff, especially members of the County Area Plan Commission or local Board of Zoning Appeals, should use the Plan to guide land use decisions, prioritize capital improvement projects and programs, and pursue funding to assist in implementation.

A comprehensive plan alone does not ensure change will occur. It must be implemented on a daily basis by elected officials, commission members, city staff and local stakeholders. FORWARD Kosciusko County is intended to encourage cooperation, collaboration and continued, shared investment amongst all implementation partners.

Alley improvement, Syracuse, IN | Syracuse- Wawasee Chamber of Commerce



PURPOSE OF THE **EXISTING CONDITIONS DOCUMENTS**

An existing conditions document serves as an interim deliverable within the comprehensive planning process. The document summarizes the data gathered, highlights common themes revealed through community feedback, and identifies key findings from the preliminary phases of the process. Often times, the key findings identify local and regional trends, opportunities, and challenges that could impact how Kosciusko County evolves over the next several years. To do so, it is important to understand both sides of story – data and perceptions. Collecting and analyzing demographic, socioeconomic and market data can tell us about the people, housing market, workforce, and economics of a community. While data sources can shed light on any number of existing conditions, it does not include information from the people that know their community the best. To supplement the multiple data sets available, multiple community conversations were used to identify other unique sets of issues and opportunities that are based on what residents and visitors experience by living and working in the area. Ultimately, this analysis will serve as the foundation for the goals and recommendations that will follow.

In addition to this introductory document, the existing conditions assessment is organized into six topical reports.

1. **Project History** – This document provides an overview of the County’s history, summarizes both regional and local efforts, and highlights county-wide collaboration.
2. **Current Conditions** – This document provides a detailed analysis and inventory of the people, places, systems, destinations, and key findings for each incorporated area and then one high-level summary for the unincorporated area of Kosciusko County.
3. **Ideas and Perceptions** – This document summarizes the community engagement process and provides an analysis of the County’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT).
4. **Market Opportunities**- This document provides a detailed analysis on the economic conditions within the County and the retail futures of specific regional areas and submarkets.
5. **Child Care Needs Assessment**- This document provides an analysis on existing child care opportunities and potential challenges that may be inhibiting new centers of facilities from establishing with local communities.
6. **Fiscal Capacity** – This document provides a fiscal conditions assessment to analyze fiscal structure, trends, and capacity for accommodating and leveraging development in the county.

Mentone Egg Festival, Mentone, IN | Mentone Chamber of Commerce

The development of the comprehensive plan and associated engagement activities is broken up into four phases. Each phase is detailed below:

Phase 1: Launching the Project

The primary objectives for phase one included collaborating with the Outreach Committee, making decisions based on community needs, and creating a measurable strategy for outreach and engagement.

Phase 2: Information Gathering

The primary objectives within this phase included collaboratively reviewing community and county-specific conditions, and determining what the future might look like. Throughout this phase, the community was engaged via stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, public workshops and a community-wide survey.

Phase 3: Ideas and Strategy Development

The primary objectives for phase three included collaborating on land use scenarios, analyzing the benefits and implications of ideas, and identifying an appropriate growth strategy for the future.

Phase 4: Community Driven Implementation

The primary objectives for phase four include collaborating to identify project partners, analyzing the availability of county resources, and creating a useable set of implementation tools. Following the finalization of the comprehensive plan, the project team will assist the County through the adoption process.



THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

While the FORWARD Kosciusko County process officially launched in January of 2021, the strategic thinking around county-wide collaboration was being developed far earlier.

In 1990, Lilly Endowment Inc. launched the Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT) initiative to help establish and further develop community foundations throughout Indiana. The Endowment supported various GIFT initiatives since 1990, all designed to strengthen Community Foundations and their ability to meet needs in their communities. The Kosciusko County Community Foundation (KCCF) successfully completed the first six GIFT initiatives. In 2018, the Endowment announced the seventh phase of Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT VII). As part of GIFT VII, the KCCF was awarded, in March 2019, a Community Leadership Planning Grant to undertake a county-wide citizen outreach.

Between July and August 2019, KCCF contracted Becker Consulting to conduct eleven Hometown Chats, inviting citizens to share concerns and aspirations for their communities and compare broad community input with issues previously identified by KCCF's board and community leaders. Additionally, KCCF staff facilitated a chat with the Chamber of Commerce's Young Adult Professionals members to solicit input from young community leaders. The top four issues that were identified in the Hometown Chats were: the need for community planning and long term visioning, access to affordable housing, access to local childcare, and workforce preparation. The number one priority identified was the need for community planning and long term visioning, which is why the community has prioritized the multi-jurisdictional comprehensive plan.

With one of the top priorities being Community Planning and Visioning, KCCF, Kosciusko County and K21 Health Foundation, in partnership with the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG), came together to invest in a multi-jurisdictional strategic planning process aimed at identifying the unique, local assets and challenges. The analysis of these assets and challenges would help in establishing a shared vision and creating an actionable plan for the communities to achieve their goals.

In June of 2020, MACOG initiated the pre-planning process by bringing together the project steering committee to discuss the overall process, the intended outcomes and the development of the request for proposals to assist in the selection of a planning consultant. A final planning consultant team led by Taylor Siefker Williams Design Group was selected in December of 2020. In January of 2021, the project team officially kicked-off an anticipated 14-month planning process which is detailed on the facing page.

Land Use and Growth Workshop, Warsaw, IN | TSWDG



FORWARD KOSCIUSKO

PLAN ADVISORS

A successful county-wide planning process ensures that residents and businesses from all four corners of the County are engaged and heard. In order to do this, the project team recruited several different guiding groups to help communicate information. There were 5 primary groups acting as plan advisors. Each guiding group is identified below:

Project Steering Committee – This group consists of 31 individuals that were tasked with guiding both the planning process and the development of the final recommendations of the plan. In total, the steering committee consisted of two individuals from each incorporated community, three representatives from County government, two individuals from the Area Plan Commission, and four individuals from strategic implementation partners including the Kosciusko County Community Foundation, K21 Health Foundation and the Kosciusko Economic Development Corporation.

Project Leadership Group – This group is made up of elected and appointed officials and stakeholders from strategic businesses and community organizations. At the end of each phase of work, these individuals were given the opportunity to review key findings and participate in the development of the plan's final recommendations.

Community Committees – These stakeholder groups include individuals who represent a wide array of community interests including local employers, commercial and residential developers, community organizations, public safety officials, leaders in education, and local engineers and planners. Through multiple Zoom meetings, digital presentations and in-person meetings, these individuals and small groups were invited to share thoughts and comments on County-wide aspirations, goals and challenges.

Outreach Committee – This group, consisting of local representatives, community organizations, and members of the local media, was tasked with assisting in the development of project communication logistics, tools, and engagement techniques that were used throughout the process.

Residents of Kosciusko County – Equally as important to the other committees, Kosciusko County is home to nearly 80,000 residents that serve as community experts. All members of the community were encouraged to share their big ideas, frustrations and concerns, and hopes for the future.



Dixie Sternwheeler, North Webster, IN | Visit Kosciusko

