

FIELD TOUR NOTES: Pierceton, Indiana

Overview

The information discussed during the field tour has been organized into four key categories to allow for easy review and comparison between communities. The categories are defined below:

General Considerations:

A portion of the information discussed during the field tour meetings was to provide general information the community, the history and the residents living and working within the area. Items that could not be included in the three categories below have been accounted for in this General Considerations category.

Aspirations:

Aspirations are the goals/ objectives/ projects that the community hopes to achieve during or after this planning process.

Strengths/ Opportunities:

Strengths are internal, positive attributes of your department and/or system. These are things that are within your control. Opportunities are external factors in your environment that are likely to contribute to your success.

Weaknesses/ Threats:

Weaknesses are negative factors that detract from your strengths. These are things that you might need to improve on to be competitive. Threats are external factors that you have no control over. You may want to consider putting in place contingency plans for dealing with them as/ if they occur.

Summary

On Friday, February 26, 2021 members of the project team met with Myra Mast, Clerk Treasurer, and Matt Brubaker, Town Council president, at the Town Hall building to discuss Pierceton's existing conditions, aspirations, strengths, and overall needs. James Turnwald, Stephanie Overbey, Katie Clark, Scott Siefker and Alec Pormen were in attendance from the project team.

General Considerations:

- The Town of Pierceton has a population of approximately 880 residents.
- The Town is actively working to use Community Crossing funds for road maintenance.
- The Town is actively working with the Kosciusko County Economic Development Corporation (KEDCO) to expand housing in developable areas of town, primarily working class, family, and senior housing.
- Town staff are looking into an OCRA grant for utility improvements. They are currently working with a local engineer to conduct a water audit so that they can submit for funding to complete a master utility study.

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- The Town has not yet decided what to do with the K21 funds. Engagement was conducted through social media to gauge local ideas and interests. Included in the feedback were ideas on a dog park, a new community building, or splash pad.
- Pierceton has a strong base of community led fundraisers and projects.
- Most of buildings downtown/on Main Street are occupied.
- Pierceton does not have a Town manager. The previous Town manager left the position, and it was decided to not fill the vacancy at the time.
- The Town is currently home to many older families, with children aging out of the school system. This is worrisome because it could lead to a drop in school enrollment which could impact local facilities.
- Pierceton is within the Whitko School Corporation. Pierceton has its own elementary school, located on Seventh Street near the southern end of the Town boundary. Middle School and High School facilities are located outside of Pierceton.

Aspirations:

- Public restrooms were identified as a need during the Hometown Chat. While there is interest there are also concerns with the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of a facility like this. Currently leaders are exploring the opportunity to partner with local restaurants to offer public restrooms.
- The Town wants to explore entering the fire territory. A fire territory is an agreement between two or more existing government entities for the purpose of providing fire protection and emergency services.
- Creation of a new community building/center.
- The completion of a full utilities study.
- Development of senior living facilities.
- Development of the 180 acres the Town currently owns. This area, located east of SR 13, is currently farmed.

Strengths/Opportunities:

- Pierceton has their own Chamber of Commerce, who is currently trying to find grants for downtown sidewalk improvements.
- The Town is known for its antique stores, they are a major draw for visitors.
- There are two parks within Pierceton, one of which is in partnership with the Township. For the park located along Seventh Street, the Township contributes money to maintain the ball fields on site.
- The park holding the baseball fields has a walking trail running behind it, there have been visions of expanding this trail to the wetlands west of the park.

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- Currently, the Town has two buildings available to rent for events are Town hall or the Depot, but there are talks about constructing a new public community building.
- Pierceton owns a large amount of undeveloped land to the east (180 acres) that could be used for a variety of developments. The only issue is part of this land was previously used as a drainage area for the Town's sewer plant. These previous uses could impact future development.
- The sewer plant was recently expanded and can now handle increased levels of development.
- The Town has annual antique and motorcycle event days in April, Pierceton Day's (parade and fair) in August, and the Tomato Festival in late August.
- The school is home to an annual craft fair (not put on by the school) that attracts craftsmen from all over the state.
- There is an annual fish fry that draws in a crowd from the region.
- Brower Park has farmers markets through the summer months.
- The Town has its own library.
- Pierceton has a fire station (a 20 member, all volunteer crew) that covers the Town and Township. EMS is through Lutheran Health Services.
- There is a senior center in town.
- The Town has its own police (five people on staff), including take home cars.
- There is an undeveloped property west of the Town boundary with frontage along Pierceton Road. This could be an opportunity for future development.
- Within downtown there are currently only 1-2 vacant locations. There is minimal turnover amongst downtown businesses.

Weaknesses/ Threats:

- There is no senior housing within Pierceton.
- The Town has a few issues with unsafe building codes, with a particular focus on abandoned properties. The Town is actively working to improve these homes but to date have had limited success. As a part of the efforts the Town has adopted state guidelines on what constitutes an abandoned property.
- Pierceton does not have a Parks Board (not enough participation) or a five-year Parks Master Plan.
- Seniors looking to downgrade housing often must move to Warsaw.
- The Town used to have a grocery, but that moved out and a Dollar General came in its place.
- There is no formal Main Street organization. Currently the local Chamber of Commerce oversees downtown and promotes local business opportunities.

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