

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Plan is not merely a technical document; it is a testimony of a vision shared by its citizens. The delineation of that vision is therefore very important to the Plan.

In addition to garnering input from citizens, the process of developing the new comprehensive plan was overseen by a Steering Committee with broad representation from the City and County. The Committee provided input and feedback at all stages of the new comprehensive plan.

### 2.2 PUBLIC INPUT

In addition to merely gaining information, public participation accomplishes several goals in the process of developing the Comprehensive Plan, labeled the four “D’s”<sup>1</sup>:

- *Deprofessionalization* – citizens, and not just professionals, take charge in planning the community;
- *Decentralization* – decision-making is not dependent upon a few specific groups;
- *Demystification* – people better understand planning and its impact on their lives, and ensure the development of “user-friendly” plans; and
- *Democratization* – people are directly involved in decision making.

Several opportunities were available for citizens to participate in the process of developing the new comprehensive plan. First, several public meetings were held to garner public input. Second, a more focused issues symposium explored three of the more pressing issues in greater detail. Finally, a web site was set up for electronic participation in the development of the Plan.

**2.2.1 Public Meetings.** Four public meetings were held in various locations of the City and County during June of 1998. Two of the meetings were in the County, at Yorktown High School and Delta High School. The other two meetings, at Central High School and Southside High School, were in the City of Muncie.

Attendance varied by location, with 12 persons attending the Delta High School meeting, 27 persons attending the Yorktown High School meeting, 41 participants attending the Southside High School meeting, and 58 participants attending the Central High School meeting.

The results from the meeting were as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> After Jones (1990:11).

*2.2.1.1 Yorktown High School.* Participants at this County location generally saw quality-of-life issues as being local strengths, including the following items:

- Nice people;
- Good volunteerism;
- Ball State University;
- The County's central location;
- Low taxes; and
- Ball Memorial Hospital.

Opportunities for the County focused around the growth of BSU, development along the White River, and providing tax incentives to new businesses. Weaknesses generally revolved around government, infrastructure, and economic development, including the following items:

- Non-professional government;
- Poor infrastructure;
- Poor maintenance of public facilities;
- Poor political perception;
- High taxes (contradicting what was listed as a strength); and
- A lack of community pride.

Threats focused around the continued loss of jobs, high taxes, media negativity, and the deterioration of the Downtown.

*2.2.1.2 Delta High School.* Participants at this meeting listing the following items as strengths:

- Ball State University;
- Cultural offerings;
- Workers and facilities;
- A good geographic location;
- A low cost of living;
- Good medical services; and
- Agriculture.

Opportunities included BSU, historical places, and the community's youth. A long list of weaknesses was generated at this location, including the following:

- Uncontrolled growth;
- Poor appearance of development;
- Deteriorated neighborhoods;
- A lack of planning;
- High property taxes;

- Apathy;
- Low wages;
- Low level of public services;
- Lack of leadership;
- Low voter turnout;
- Poor quality of government;
- Constant controversy;
- Fragmented communities;
- Muncie's unattractive Downtown; and
- Xenophobia.

Threats that were listed included the loss of productive farmland from non-agricultural uses, the loss of youth to the community, the attraction of low-skill, low-wage jobs to the community, and the lack of implementing good plans.

*2.2.1.3 Central High School.* A surprising degree of consensus emerged from this group, the large number of participants (58) notwithstanding. Strengths were found in the following items:

- Ball State University;
- Ball Memorial Hospital;
- The Minnetrista Cultural Center and the arts programs it supports;
- The Horizon Center; and
- The White River.

Opportunities focused around Muncie's Downtown, parks and recreational facilities development, a sports center, empty manufacturing space (for industrial recruitment), and inter-governmental cooperation.

Participants generally saw taxes and local government as weaknesses. The newspaper was seen as negative, as were existing alternate transportation modes. People generally listed drugs and crime as threats, along with urban sprawl and a lack of commitment to planning. The continued loss of jobs, and high property taxes were also seen as threats.

*2.2.1.4 Southside High School.* Participants at this meeting generally saw the following items as strengths:

- Ball State University;
- Ball Memorial Hospital;
- The Convention Center;
- The White River;
- Prairie Creek and the Cardinal Greenway; and
- Good people and volunteerism.

The following list of opportunities was also generated:

- BSU;
- IVY Tech;
- Vacant structures (for redevelopment/reuse);
- City parks programming;
- Adult and community education;
- Improved local government cooperation; and
- Downtown revitalization and redevelopment.

Weaknesses focused on the perceived political division and corruption in local politics. Poor infrastructure and the loss of manufacturing jobs were also listed. The following items were listed as threats:

- A lack of jobs;
- Apathy;
- A lack of regulation enforcement;
- A loss of business;
- Local government; and
- Insufficient planning.

*2.2.1.5 Conclusions.* People generally saw the existing institutions in the community, such as BSU and Ball Memorial, as strengths. Other types of public-oriented facilities, such as the Horizon Center, Prairie Creek, Minnetrista, and the Cardinal Greenway, were also generally viewed as strengths. Overall, natural resources and recreational opportunities were seen as strengths.

Patterns in items listed as opportunities are less apparent. Recreational opportunities and governmental cooperation were apparent, as well as Downtown revitalization and BSU.

Government-related issues were cited as weaknesses more than any other category, including taxes, intergovernmental cooperation, and poor public facilities and services. The economic difficulties of the community and a sprawling pattern of land use were also listed as weaknesses.



*Ball Memorial, Muncie, Indiana*

The list of threats included many economic development and neighborhood atrophy items, including crime, Downtown deterioration, and drugs. People are concerned about the youth leaving the community.

**2.2.2 Agricultural Survey.** An agricultural survey (see appendix to this chapter) was developed in order to gain input from the farming community on agricultural issues.

**2.2.3 Electronic Participation.** A world wide web site ([www.mdccomplan.com](http://www.mdccomplan.com)) was established to inform viewers of the Comprehensive Plan process and status. Email addresses to project staff were listed on the site, allowing viewers to email comments.

Email participants saw many positive attributes about Muncie and Delaware County. In particular, the geographic proximity to Indianapolis was seen as a strength, as were several community institutions, such as Ball State University and Ball Memorial Hospital. Participants generally saw opportunities in public facilities projects, such as extending SR 67 to the south, creating an expressway from I-69 to the Central Business District, and utilizing the Cardinal Greenway. Urban design and redevelopment issues, such as revitalizing the Downtown, making better connections to BSU and Ball Memorial Hospital, and requiring landscaping on new businesses, were also seen as opportunities.

Participants also felt that communication across neighborhoods and organizations presented a weakness, as did general apathy. The loss of young people and the community's school system were seen as weaknesses. The continued deterioration of the Downtown was seen as a threat.

## 2.3 ISSUES SYMPOSIUM

During the public meetings, several issues arose that were deemed worthy of further exploration. These three issues were economic development, parks and open space, and agricultural preservation. In order to explore these issues, an "Issues Symposium" was developed. This symposium invited members of the community to explore these issues. The group was broken down into workshops surrounding the three issues. Following a short presentation by individuals with professional knowledge of the subject area, participants in each workshop discussed problems and potential solutions. The larger group reconvened following the workshops, in order to share their findings with all the participants.

This section discusses the findings of the Symposium.

**2.3.1 Agricultural Preservation.** The State of Indiana has closely felt the impacts of unrestrained urban development and its impacts on agricultural production. Despite its relatively small size (ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in the Country in land area), Indiana is rated 8<sup>th</sup> in the value of its agricultural exports (p.21), and has the second highest proportion of prime farmland in the United States (p.6). According to the Task Force, rural areas are experiencing population growth at a rate exceeding that of the State (9.6% v. 5.3%; p. 9).

Urban areas in the State grew by 17% between 1982 and 1992, increasing the total urbanized area by about 233,000 acres (365 square miles; p.9).

Delaware County-Muncie provides an excellent case study of these forces at work. Map 3-4, in Chapter 3, compares the developed area of the City of Muncie in 1962 and 1998. During that time period, the City’s developed area approximately doubled; however, the population in 1998 was about the same as it was in 1962. In order to accommodate the same number of people, the City doubled its size, thereby increasing the costs of the provision of public services and losing productive farmland.

According to the Census of Agriculture, during the period of 1982 to 1992, Delaware County lost approximately 22,000 acres or 11% of its farmland. The number of farms experienced a similar drop, from 965 farms in 1982 to 688 farms in 1992 (a 29% drop). The degree of loss varies by the type of farm, as is indicated in the following table:

**Table 2-1 Loss of Farmland**

	1982	1992	% change
<b>1-9 acre farms</b>	86	68	-11%
<b>10-49 acre farms</b>	303	195	-36%
<b>50-179 acre farms</b>	282	198	-30%
<b>180-499 acre farms</b>	202	133	-34%
<b>500-999 acre farms</b>	65	56	-14%
<b>1,000-over acre farms</b>	27	38	41%
<b>TOTAL</b>	965	688	-29%

Particularly hard-hit are smaller farmers, with the exception of the smallest farms, which are presumably not the sole source of income for the inhabitants. Note that the category of the largest farms has experienced growth over the time period.

The following issues were identified by focus group participants as being pertinent to agricultural preservation and urban sprawl in the community:

- **Encourage urban development:** Several participants voiced their belief that much of the development taking place in unincorporated areas could easily be accommodated in existing urban areas if those areas were redeveloped and had adequate public facilities. Public policies that increased the desirability of urban infill sites would help stem the tide of sprawling development patterns. Development standard incentives were mentioned as one possible set of tools to achieve this goal.

Several participants noted that under existing ordinances and procedures, it is difficult to receive permission to construct higher density housing, particularly in the urban fringe areas. What results then, is the demand of low density housing being built on “country” lots that are not subdivided. This creates a classic

sprawling pattern which is more costly to provide services to and in some cases interferes with the ability to efficiently farm.

It was also noted that many people moving to rural areas did so because of a perception of negative influences in urban areas. Issues such as high crime and poor schools were seen as driving people out of the municipalities.

- **Difficulties arising from lax requirements:** Most participants agreed that existing ordinances were quite permissive in allowing development in unincorporated areas. Developer obligations and dedications in unincorporated areas were seen as relatively minor given the scope and location of developments, and did not properly address all of the costs of providing public services to those developments. The existing minimum lot size of 5 acres currently allowed in agricultural areas was viewed as lax. Participants also expressed their belief that obtaining variances to existing regulations was too easy.
- **Development nodes:** Participants expressed an interest in a regulatory policy that restricted new development to areas outside of existing incorporated areas. This variant of the “growth boundary” concept would designate several population nodes, outside of which growth boundaries would be drawn.
- **Workforce Training:** The perceived poor quality of public school education as compared to other districts in the State, and its effects upon major employers choosing Muncie-Delaware County was discussed. Participants viewed the increasing number of computers relative to student enrollment as a positive trend.
- **Demand for rural residences:** Participants condemned the current practice of farm auctioneers splitting farmland for auctioning. Still, they recognized the legitimacy of the demand for rural residences, and stated their ideal of a balance between the demand for rural residences and farm production. Regulations that permitted development on non-productive farmland while restricting development elsewhere were cited as one possible tool. Conservation easements that restricted land use to agricultural production were also discussed.
- **Agriculture focus group:** An outgrowth of this session was the creation of an agricultural focus and workshops where lot size and preservation of farmland and farming operations were discussed in more detail. It is anticipated that this group would be used for input on future ordinance revisions.

**2.3.2 Economic Development.** Participants in the focus group were asked to define the term “economic development”. The purpose of this discussion was not to arrive at a synthesis definition, but rather to see the different perspectives and concerns that people have regarding economic development and to better understand that economic development means more than just creating jobs. The following ideas, issues, and definitions were stated by the participants:

- Promotion of economic well-being, as defined in job creation, population increase, and maximizing opportunities for advancement.
- The creation of wealth.
- Quality-of-life issues, including an attractive and sustainable community.
- A positive force that builds for the future and results in a better way of life.
- Acting strategically and building upon the strengths of the community.
- An atmosphere of cooperation.
- The heartbeat of the community.
- Increasing community resources, including the community's tax base.

Many of the economic and demographic analyses discussed in Chapter 3 (following) were presented to the participants. Also, staff from Hammer Siler George Associates (HSGA) discussed the Targeted Industry Analysis (TIA) they were conducting for the metropolitan region. This material was presented to the focus group to give participants a sense of the assets and liabilities inherent in the region for implementing economic development activities. Several issues were identified in the TIA, as shown in the following list:

- There is a lack of supply of competitive business park sites.
- Conflicts exist among local governments' political parties.
- There is a lack of professional government management.
- There is a lack of tax resources for capital projects, operations, and management of public facilities and services.
- Ball State University has not been spinning off well-paying local jobs, as one would normally expect.
- The time and distance to travel to air carrier and cargo services is prohibitive.
- A mismatch seems to exist between local job skills and the needs of potential employers.
- Ball State University's level of research is relatively low, leading for little potential in spinning off technology-based companies from the University into the community.
- Absorption of industrial ground is effectively 15 acres per year, but there are no high-quality industrial parks currently in the inventory.

The Delaware County-Muncie Chamber of Commerce recently completed its Economic Adjustment Plan, which utilized funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The Plan provides a framework for the regional economy's recovery from several key industry relocations. The Plan begins with an analysis of the impacts of several industry shutdowns and/or relocations within recent months. Interviews with downsizing or relocating companies and a citizen participation process are then utilized to arrive at economic development goals and strategies.

The strategy component of the Plan emphasizes activities that promote the diversification of the regional economy, and pays particular attention to small business development (including the development of a business incubator), the development of a new business park, a shell building program for improving site marketing, and a program to market dislocated workers. Workforce education and improving the quality of life were also identified as key issues.

The following issues were identified by focus group participants as being pertinent to economic development in the community:

- **Development Framework Issues:** Concerns over the physical pattern of land use and development and the lack of a clear vision or future development guide was a paramount concern. The historic sprawling pattern of development was especially a concern, as participants voiced the need for “core-fringe balance” and the increased service costs that a lack of balance could induce. Also, the need for specific, targeted development strategies and corridor master plans for State Roads 67 and 332 were discussed. Questions were asked about what was planned for those corridors, and how a positive character could be assured .
- **Opportunities for Industrial Development:** Industrial development within existing urban areas was seen as an issue. Should there be different policies to encourage adaptive re-use of older industrial facilities in parks as well as on free-standing sites that are scattered about the existing urbanized area? Should there be a push for new master planned business parks? Questions were also voiced regarding the needs of inner city areas. Downtown Muncie was a special area of concern, with current employment clusters of government and financial services, and an emerging convention and entertainment center being the current economic activity generators in the area. Would it be feasible to promote Downtown for new business park development? Participants discussed the need for strategies to bring industry and employment to these areas.
- **Ball State “Products”:** Questions were raised about the typical destination of Ball State graduates and what could be done to keep more of these “exported products” in Muncie and Delaware County. The lack of amenities and activities to attract and/or retain young persons was a concern. One suggestion was to increase active recreation amenities and community quality of life. Participants wanted to know where the Ball State graduates ending up going and why.
- **Workforce Training:** The perceived poor quality of public school education as compared to other districts in the State, and its effects upon major employers choosing Muncie-Delaware County was discussed. Participants viewed the increasing number of computers relative to student enrollment as a positive trend.
- **Exporting of Workers:** The substantial out-commuting patterns of residents of the County to jobs outside the County raised questions about the long-term

prospect of those families remaining in the County without prospects for meaningful employment in the County.

- **New Employment Needs:** A need was expressed to attract both “new generation” businesses as well as more businesses to the area to support an expanding employment base and opportunities that match the skill-sets of the Muncie-Delaware County workforce. The Targeted Industries Study effort currently underway will be critical to this repositioning effort and to properly plan for appropriate space and land development needs to support this attraction

**2.3.3 Parks and Open Space.** Physical development and demographic changes are altering the demands of residents on open space, greenways, and recreation facilities. Today’s residents also value the diverse benefits of open spaces and the variety of functions open spaces serve. Mantell et. al. (1990, 114) identifies these functions:

- They provide economic resources. Open spaces are economically useful for agriculture, livestock grazing, and forestry. Undisturbed wetlands are vital to fisheries and water quality. The scenic beauty of open space attracts tourists.
- They provide direct health and safety benefits. Open spaces help recharge groundwater aquifers. Undeveloped watersheds protect the quality of public drinking water supplies. Conservation of floodplains prevents the loss of life and property damage. Forested areas cleanse the air and moderate temperatures.
- They provide recreational opportunities. Open spaces serve as national, state, local, and private parks, preserves and recreation areas; archaeological preserves; and historic and cultural sites. They serve as urban greenbelts, greenways, and trails and provide public access to shores and rivers.
- They preserve ecological resources. Open spaces protect animal and plant habitat, wilderness areas, scientific reserves, and unique and threatened species and ecosystems.
- They promote aesthetic values and create community identity. Pastoral and open landscapes create scenic vistas and parkways. They separate and maintain the distinct identity of communities and create cultural landscapes.

At the symposium, a brief presentation was made regarding a parks classification system that addresses the natural and urban diversity of open spaces throughout Delaware County. This system (see Figure 1) addresses a wide range of open spaces from urban wilderness where natural values predominate to manicured gardens and urban squares where social values have priority and large crowds can gather.

With a common vocabulary in place, participants were divided into small groups to discuss pertinent issues and arrive at alternate schemes for implementing green corridors in the community.

Participants noted the increased demand for open-space recreational opportunities. Residents of Muncie and Delaware County are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of a walkable, livable, and sustainable community, and how open space and greenways contribute to those goals.

There are difficulties to meeting this increase in demand. The financial capabilities of the Muncie Department of Parks and Recreation are tested with the maintenance of existing facilities, let alone any proposed increase in capacity. In fact, the Parks Department has rejected several proposed private dedications for park land due to the Department's difficulties in maintaining property.

While these difficulties do not necessarily rule out any new facilities, a strict evaluation may be expected. Under this evaluation, the Parks Department makes sure that proposed facilities provide benefits that directly relate to the values and goals of the community.

Participants discussed many different options for providing additional greenways and open spaces within the community. These options included the following:

- Greenway planning along urban waterways and other corridors. These greenways would be especially suitable for the development of off-street bikeways and pathways. This planning supports a number of other planning goals, including flood plain management, fish and wildlife habitat protection, and water quality planning. Other benefits include aesthetic enhancement and passive recreation such as simply large publicly accessible open or green spaces.



*Example of off-street pathway*

- Requiring new growth to the west of Muncie to be connected via open space corridors. Corollary activities would include the increasing of residential densities, requiring sidewalks, and requiring small, neighborhood-based parks.
- In order to increase the revenue flow of the Muncie Department of Parks and Recreation, cash generation activities could be implemented. Examples of these enterprise operations could be snack shops at major trailheads, and bike and skate rental shops as have occurred along the Monon Trail in Indianapolis.

With these ideas on how to increase recreational opportunities in place, the participants arrived at the following list of recommendations:

- Partnerships with schools, particularly elementary schools, for the provision of recreational space should be explored.

- Linear parks and other greenway concepts should be used to connect schools and recreation facilities, as is feasible.
- The Downtown is the heart of the community. Options for increasing connections to the Downtown should be explored.
- New residential developments should be required to install sidewalks and/or roadside trails.
- Significant habitats along waterways should be protected.
- Outside funding sources for implementation should be investigated and utilized.
- The White River and the Mississinewa River should see the development of greenways and bicycle trails.

## 2.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A myriad of public issues resulted from the various participation techniques utilized in the new comprehensive plan process. When all of the comments are considered, some general trends and patterns begin to emerge:

- *The growth, development, and redevelopment of the community is important to most people.* People sense that the pattern of development that has taken place in recent years has introduced new problems into the community. Also, people want to see the inner-city neighborhoods and areas revitalized.
- *People desire to live and work in an attractive community.* Some elements of the community are well-designed and attractive, while others can utilize improvement. The addition of “gateways” along major entry corridors was suggested, as were downtown design projects and design/landscaping standards for new development.
- *Economic development is important.* People are keenly aware of the economic difficulties that the community has experienced. The ability to make the transition through this time period was expressed through references to economic growth, local schools and universities, job training, and other items.
- *Intergovernmental relations offer potential for improving the community.* Currently, people perceive competition between the City of Muncie and Delaware County.



*Minnetrista & Oakhurst Gardens Grounds,  
Muncie, Indiana*