



FORT WAYNE RETAIL STUDY

This study presents a strategic roadmap for revitalizing, sustaining, and expanding local retail, food service, and personal services for three neighborhood commercial corridors in Fort Wayne.



INTRODUCTION

Fort Wayne's commercial corridors are experiencing renewed momentum.

Through collaboration between the City of Fort Wayne Community Development Division and the Summit City Entrepreneur and Enterprise District (SEED), this retail strategy charts a path forward for three vital commercial districts—South Calhoun, East State Village, and Waynedale.

Built on community engagement, detailed market analysis, and shared visioning, the strategy identifies how targeted investments—both public and private—can strengthen local businesses, attract new ones, and create vibrant, family-friendly destinations. At its core, this plan lays the groundwork for district improvement associations that will bolster the implementation of goals spanning business support, marketing, placemaking, accessibility, and real estate development.

As Fort Wayne continues to grow, this strategy ensures these districts grow with it—building thriving, walkable, and resilient neighborhoods that showcase the city's creativity, culture, and entrepreneurial spirit.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

This strategy is informed by two companion documents found in the appendix.

- **Initial Findings & Vacancy Memorandum:** Outlines early analysis of demographics, traffic, retail mix, vacancies, zoning, and the small business ecosystem.
- **Findings & Initial Recommendations Presentation:** Summarizes key insights and translates community input into corridor-specific strategies for business support, marketing, placemaking, accessibility, and real estate activation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This effort was made possible through the vision and participation of the commercial districts' business owners, area residents, property owners, and other neighborhood stakeholders whose ideas shaped every strategy. Special thanks to Greater Fort Wayne Inc., Visit Fort Wayne, City Councilmembers, the Allen County–Fort Wayne Capital Improvement Board of Managers (CIB), City departments, and local business support organizations for their partnership and insight.

PROJECT TEAM



THE CITY OF
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City of Fort Wayne



SUMMIT CITY ENTREPRENEUR & ENTERPRISE DISTRICT

Summit City Entrepreneur and
Enterprise District (SEED)

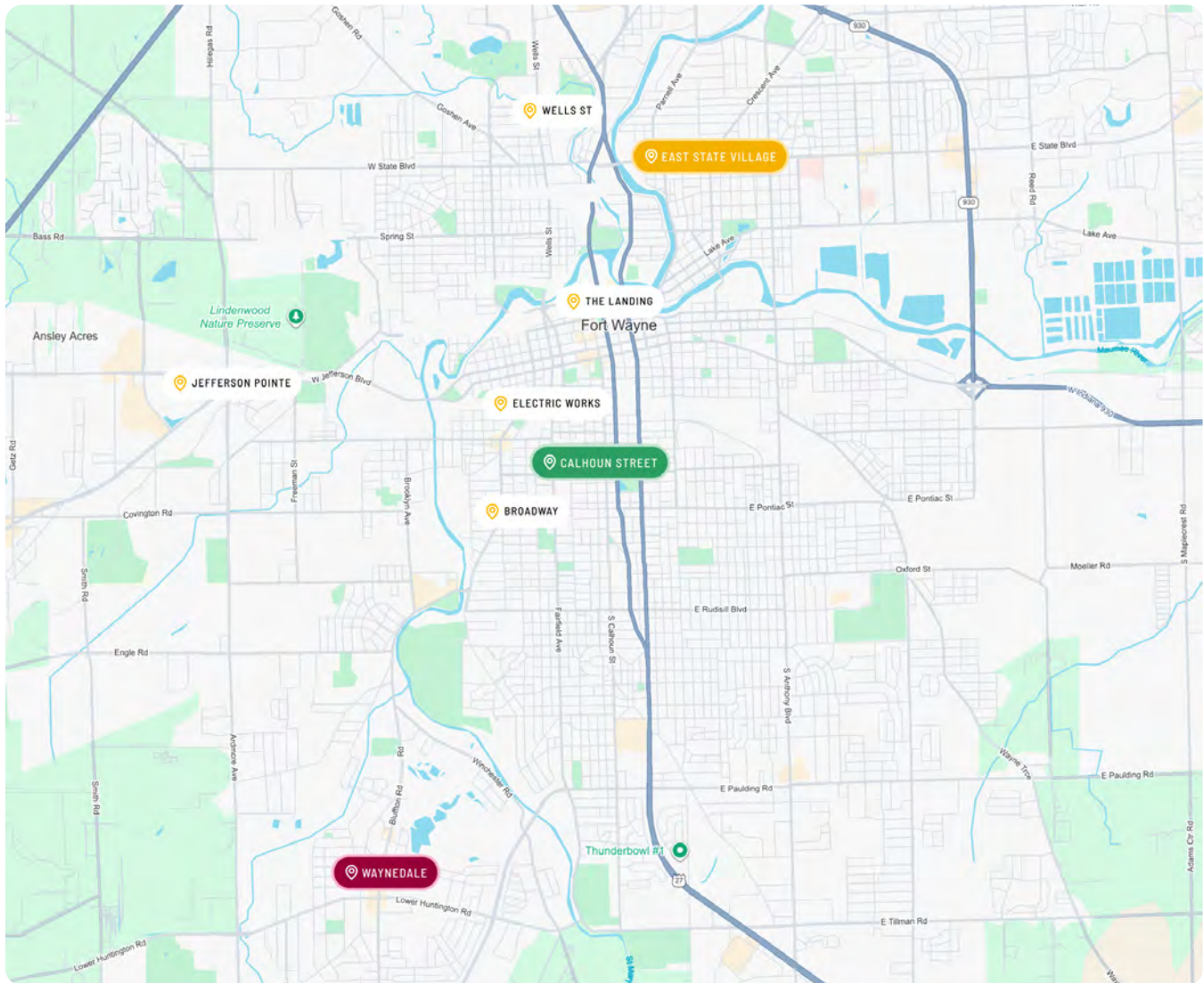


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CONTEXT



Map 01. Fort Wayne Commercial Districts

Fort Wayne and Allen County form a stable, steadily growing region anchored by a vibrant downtown energized by recent investments, from The Landing to Electric Works and ongoing redevelopment throughout the core. Major retail centers like Jefferson Pointe and Glenbrook Square continue to evolve, while corridors such as Wells Street and Broadway demonstrate what's possible when neighborhood-serving districts lean into identity, activation, and reinvestment.

Within this dynamic landscape, the three districts in this study have a powerful opportunity to develop their identity, strengthen their connection to surrounding neighborhoods, and position themselves as authentic, walkable destinations for both local residents and regional visitors.

STUDY AREAS

This study evaluates the retail environment across three distinct Fort Wayne commercial districts:

- **Calhoun:** The South Calhoun corridor from Grand Street to Rudisill Boulevard
- **East State:** East State Boulevard between St. Joseph River and Florida Drive
- **Waynedale:** Three interconnected corridors
 - ✦ Bluffton Road from Old Trail Rd to Church Street,
 - ✦ Old Trail Road from Bluffton Road to Church Street, and
 - ✦ Lower Huntington Road from Fernwood Avenue to Koester Drive

Meeting the commercial needs of these three corridors requires a coordinated tactical playbook, one rooted in strong local leadership and collaboration. This plan jumpstarts that work by strategizing for district improvement associations equipped to drive the fundamentals: business support, bold storytelling and marketing, placemaking that sparks community pride, accessible shops, and strategic real estate development.

Each corridor has its own identity. While many strategies in this study apply citywide, others are intentionally crafted to reflect the unique geography, demographics, and development patterns of Calhoun, East State, and Waynedale. Where appropriate, district-specific actions are highlighted throughout this document and consolidated at the end for easy reference in neighborhood-focused conversations.

To accommodate this differentiation, the following series of recommendations are broken into two sections. Catalytic Priority Projects (pages 5–13) translate the six citywide goals into place-specific action for Calhoun Street, East State Village, and Waynedale. While the subsequent goals (listed below) establish a shared framework applicable in all three nodes or citywide.

Implementation of these recommendations is not assigned to a single entity, yet a shared commitment across multiple partners—including the City of Fort Wayne, corridor leaders, business owners, property owners, neighborhood groups, and external partners such as Visit Fort Wayne, Greater Fort Wayne, SEED, and others.

THE **SIX GOALS** WE'RE MOVING TOWARD, **TOGETHER**

→ GOAL #1

Cultivate district leadership to steward commercial corridor investment and activation

→ GOAL #2

Strengthen business support ecosystem to better address retail business needs

→ GOAL #3

Utilize marketing and programming to attract and retain customers

→ GOAL #4

Invest in placemaking and beautification efforts to signal ongoing investment

→ GOAL #5

Improve accessibility and connectivity to aid in customer attraction and retention

→ GOAL #6

Strengthen Commercial Corridors through Strategic Property Activation and Infill Development

CATALYTIC PRIORITY PROJECTS

To translate analysis into action, this strategy identifies priority projects within key nodes across Calhoun Street, East State Village, and Waynedale. These priority projects emerged through a layered process that combined market analysis, site assessments, stakeholder interviews, and corridor walk audits with robust community engagement. Most critically, the final projects reflect what residents, business owners, and neighborhood stakeholders told us mattered most through district-wide surveys. Together, these projects represent the strongest intersection of community desire, market feasibility, physical opportunity, and catalytic potential, providing each corridor with a focused starting point that can anchor reinvestment, build trust through early wins, and support longer-term transformation.

Priority nodes are geographic focus areas identified through this project where targeted, near-term actions can have the greatest impact.

CALHOUN STREET

Located just south of downtown and accessed through a historic viaduct, South Calhoun Street is a linear, north-south corridor shaped by distinctive commercial and industrial architecture. While regional traffic primarily flows along Clinton and Lafayette (average daily traffic of 17K and 16K, respectively), the corridor's lighter traffic volumes (average daily traffic of 6K) present a powerful opportunity to reposition South Calhoun as a walkable, destination-oriented district—one designed for discovery rather than pass-through travel.

South Calhoun serves a dual role: supporting nearby neighborhoods while benefiting from its proximity to downtown. This dynamic has fostered a strong mix of food and beverage destinations alongside everyday neighborhood goods and services. Market analysis and resident feedback point to the greatest opportunity in expanding Neighborhood Goods & Services, with strong interest in a grocery store and additional dining and retail options that meet daily needs without competing directly with nearby corridors. By focusing on targeted tenant recruitment, activating vacant properties as gathering spaces, and investing in real and perceived safety, beauty, and placemaking, South Calhoun can better reflect the aspirations of both residents and business owners.

To build momentum along the length of the corridor, this strategy concentrates on three priority nodes—areas already supported by active businesses, adaptable building stock, and complementary uses. Strategic investment, programming, and placemaking within these nodes will create visible centers of activity, catalyze reinvestment, strengthen local businesses, and reinforce South Calhoun Street as a connected, vibrant commercial destination.



Map 02. Family-Friendly Neighborhood-Serving District (near Creighton Ave.)



Map 03. Neighborhood-Serving Core (near Pontiac St)



SOUTH CALHOUN - A NEW CULTURAL AND ENTERTAINMENT ANCHOR

South Calhoun Street lacks a large cultural or entertainment anchor (e.g., museum, theater, performing arts center). This type of destination would drive substantial tourism and visitation to the district. The first step is to conduct a feasibility study for a cultural or entertainment destination anchor, evaluating the viability, site selection, and community impact of such an establishment. There is great community support for the reactivation of the Rialto Theater. Strategies for its reactivation are addressed on pages 29 and 33.



Map 04. Gateway Dining & Entertainment District

CORRIDOR-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a district improvement association by leveraging the leadership and strategic plans of the Packard Area Planning Alliance (PAPA) and Blue Jacket (pg. 17)
- Evolve brand identity by engaging residents in storytelling campaign and refining brand to reflect historic character and cultural and culinary diversity (pg. 28)
- Craft distinct marketing strategy that highlights international food and beverage tenants and the corridor's role as a cultural and culinary destination (pg. 28)
- Develop a programming strategy through culinary tours, outdoor markets, and cultural festivals, and by activating the exterior and nearby parcels of the Rialto Theater (pg. 29)
- Establish a funding mechanism to support the district improvement associations' activities by evaluating the potential for a future Downtown Improvement District (DID) expansion (pg. 31)
- Create signature gathering places, targeting the Rialto Theater and connections to Reservoir Park (pg. 33)
- Enhance corridor appeal by installing branded gateway signage and improving facade conditions (pg. 34)
- Strengthen pedestrian connectivity by improving physical connections to the Pontiac Street corridor and investments by Hanna Street, approximately 0.5 miles away (pg. 38)
- When filling unmet demand in grocery, entertainment, and family-oriented food and beverage categories, consider opportunities to recruit a cultural or entertainment anchor (pg. 39)
- Encourage infill development on vacant and underutilized lots (pg. 42)

EAST STATE VILLAGE

Stretching from the east bank of the St. Joseph River west to Florida Drive, the East State study area is a distinctive commercial corridor shaped by Northside Park, which divides the district into two complementary nodes—a more auto-oriented area to the west and a small urban village to the east of the park. This central green space is both a defining asset and an organizing feature, creating unique development and activation opportunities for both areas.

The western node is characterized by larger parcels and historically auto-oriented uses, including surface parking and limited commercial activity. These larger sites present longer-term opportunities for catalytic reinvestment, new destinations, and community-serving uses. By contrast, the eastern node, known as East State Village, features smaller parcels, historic storefronts, and an existing cluster of businesses that already support a more walkable, neighborhood-scaled environment—making it well-suited for near-term interventions, storefront activation, and placemaking.

Across East State Village, the tenant mix is diverse but incomplete. Market analysis and resident feedback point to gaps in grocery options, additional food and beverage destinations, and neighborhood-serving retail. There is strong unmet demand for cafés, sit-down restaurants, and everyday retail that would encourage residents to visit more often. Addressing safety, traffic speeds, and pedestrian comfort—alongside expanding retail choice—would significantly increase foot traffic, strengthen customer loyalty, and support business sustainability.

To focus investment and build momentum, this strategy prioritizes the eastern node, where the breadth of the existing business mix and availability of small activation opportunities can drive sustainability and growth—while continuing to reinforce and enhance the walkable character of the western node as the district's long-term opportunity for catalytic growth.

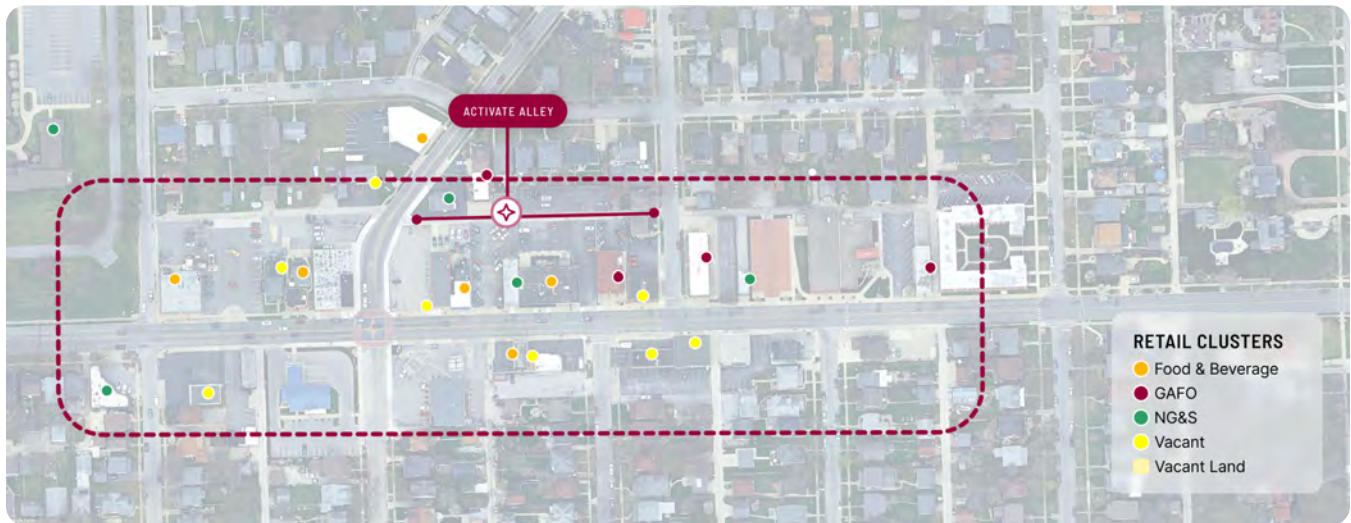


Map 05. East State Village Priority Node and Recommendations



EAST STATE VILLAGE - ALLEYWAY TRANSFORMATION

The Alleyway between Lynn Ave (north) and East State Blvd (south), between Crescent Ave (west) and the Tecumseh Library Branch (east), serves an important role of connecting customers to parking and businesses. This recommendation focuses on transforming this alley into a safe, inviting, creative space. This space can offer visitors and residents something unexpected—an experience that feels special and memorable. Improvements might include better lighting, public art installations or murals, planters and greenery, café seating, and decorative paving that signals “this space is meant to be enjoyed.” Programming for special events could activate these alleys further with small-scale performances, art walks, or food vendor pop-ups, turning them into intimate gathering spots that complement larger public spaces.



Map 06. East State Village Alleyway Transformation



Colfax Ave BID hosts Colfax Ave Cleanup, Denver, CO



Public Street Plaza in Portland, OR



"The Porch" at 30th St Station, Philadelphia, PA

CORRIDOR-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a district improvement association by convening engaged business owners monthly to identify leaders and establish organizational goals (pg. 17)
- Establish a branding and marketing committee to ensure the brand reflects the corridor's vibrancy and direction (pg. 27)
- Craft a distinct marketing strategy that cross-promotes the corridor as a go-to dining destination before and after local events (pg. 28)
- Develop a programming strategy that has robust, family-friendly activities (pg. 30)
- Create an inviting environment that positively transforms the alley north of East State between Crescent and California Avenues, allowing for occasional programmed events (pg. 33)
- Resolve parking challenges by studying conditions, evaluating shared parking options, and enhancing parking signage and wayfinding (pg. 36)
- Strengthen pedestrian connectivity by installing directional signage from major assets to the district and adding visible and safe crosswalks (pg. 38)
- Fill unmet demand by activating underutilized lots as family- and pet-friendly activations and attracting family-friendly businesses to vacant storefronts (pg. 40)
- Explore infill development within priority node parking lots and advance a small area plan for the western node (pg. 42)



WAYNEDEALE

Located on the southwest edge of Fort Wayne, Waynedale functions as a neighborhood-serving commercial district shaped by suburban development patterns and steady pass-through traffic. Bluffton Road serves as a primary vehicular spine, carrying commuters from the city's southern edge toward the urban core, while Lower Huntington Road—anchored at Old Trail Road—forms the district's most concentrated commercial node.

Waynedale's retail mix is largely oriented toward Neighborhood Goods & Services (NG&S), providing essential conveniences for nearby residents. While this foundation is a strength, gaps remain in Food and Beverage (F&B) and General Merchandise, Apparel, Furnishings, and Other (GAFO) retail categories. Overall, unmet demand is modest, suggesting the corridor's greatest opportunity lies not in expansion, but in reinforcing successful existing businesses and strategically retenanting spaces as turnover occurs. Residents consistently expressed interest in more locally owned cafés, sit-down restaurants, alternative grocery options, and everyday retail that adds variety and creates reasons to linger.

The corridor's suburban form—defined by large parcels, pad-site development, and limited connectivity between businesses—creates challenges for corridor-wide reinvestment. As a result, this strategy focuses on the main street portion of Waynedale along Lower Huntington Road, where vacancies, existing storefronts, and well-positioned parking areas offer the strongest opportunity for transformation. By concentrating investment, placemaking, and programming in this core area, Waynedale can evolve from a primarily pass-through corridor into a central gathering place for the surrounding community—one that supports local businesses, reflects neighborhood identity, and creates a more walkable, welcoming commercial heart.

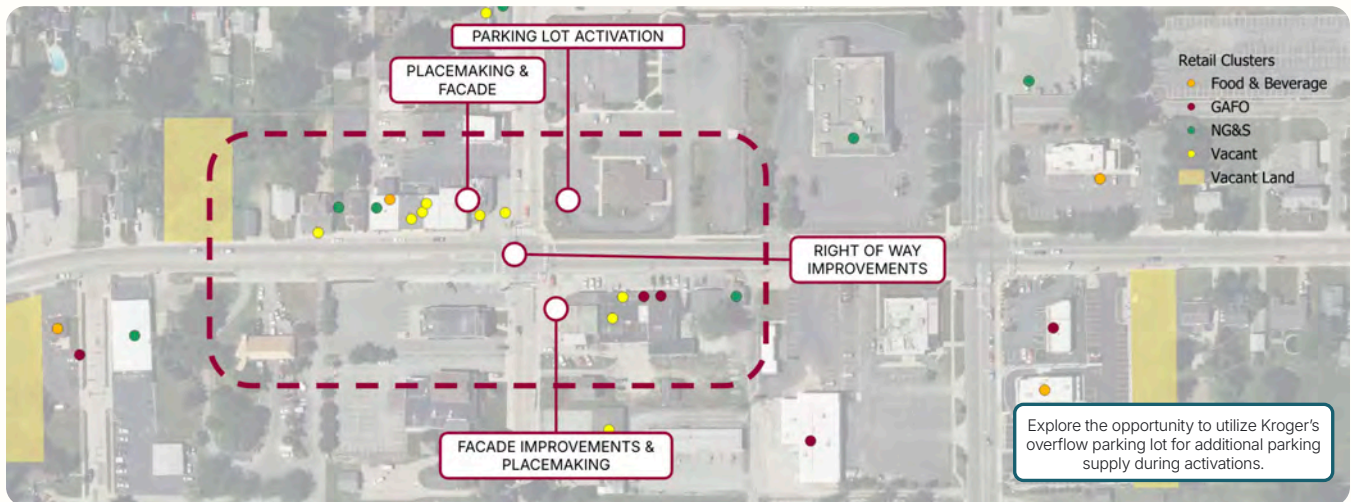
→ Explore the opportunity to utilize Kroger's overflow parking lot for additional parking supply during activations.



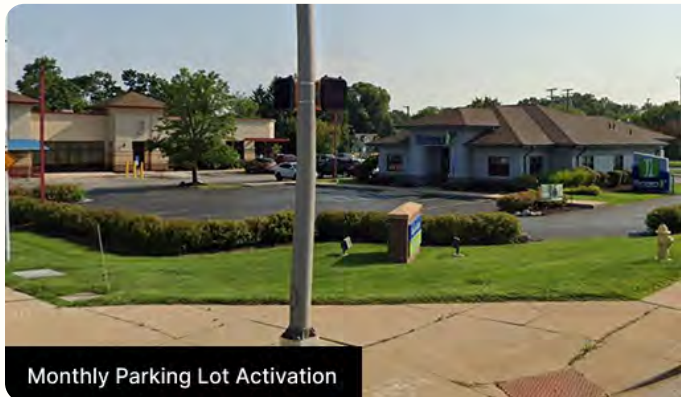


WAYNE DALE - A CENTRALIZED GATHERING PLACE

Waynedale's Lower Huntington and Bluffton Road commercial area does not have a central convening place that is a hallmark of neighborhood culture. This recommendation proposes a new public space—such as a plaza, parklet, or community square—that would give residents and visitors a visible “heart” of the commercial district. This space could showcase Waynedale's cultural identity by hosting regular events like street festivals, seasonal markets, or music series, while also serving as a daily hub where neighbors casually meet, dine outdoors, or experience local art.



Map 07. Waynedale Centralized Gathering Place



CORRIDOR-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

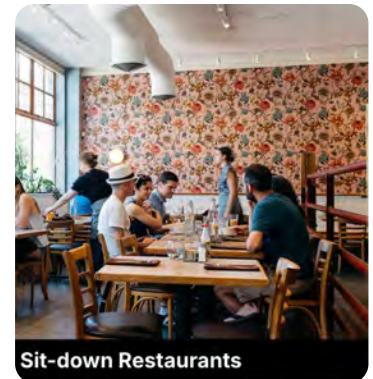
- Explore creating a district improvement association through the ongoing planning process to identify potential leaders (pg. 17)
- Craft a marketing strategy that celebrates legacy businesses and pride through a storytelling campaign and expands the district's identity associated with food production businesses (pg. 28)
- Develop a programming strategy rooted in quarterly farmers and makers markets (pg. 30)
- Establish funding supports to create a cleanup initiative addressing heavy truck impacts to the corridor's visual and environmental state (pg. 31, 34)
- Create a signature gathering place by activating the four corners of Old Trail Road and Lower Huntington Road (pg. 33)
- Improve right-of-way conditions by installing gateway signage (pg. 34)
- Strengthen pedestrian connectivity by filling gaps in sidewalk and crosswalk infrastructure, enhancing connections to the nearby Pokabache Connector Trail, and installing bus shelters (pg. 38)
- Fill unmet demand by strategically tenancing vacant spaces with amenities desired by the community (i.e., entertainment, boutique food producers, sit-down restaurants, and cafes) (pg. 40)
- Support infill and redevelopment projects focused on mixed-use, housing density, and public space activation (pg. 43)



Map 08. Regional Farmer's Markets - Waynedale has the opportunity to add an additional farmers market to service the region's southern end.



Coffee Shops



Sit-down Restaurants



Boutique F+B Producers



Family-friendly Entertainment

GOAL 1

Cultivate district leadership to steward commercial corridor investment and activation

Strong district leadership is essential for coordinating the diverse stakeholders needed to stabilize, activate and grow Fort Wayne's commercial corridors. Establishing and investing in place management organizations, such as business associations or community development corporations, will ensure long-term alignment between public and private partners. Without these organizations, ongoing revitalization efforts risk fragmentation and reduced impact due to limited city resources and inconsistent goals among corridor stakeholders. This strategy can be scaled and replicated across additional corridors and stakeholder groups to build consistent leadership capacity citywide.

STRATEGY #1: DEVELOP A DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION TRAINING PROGRAM

Leverage the FORT-ify Neighborhood Accelerator model to formalize a district improvement association.

- Assign a designated city staff member to manage program development. If city staff are unavailable for additional responsibilities, consider contracting this role to a private consultant.
- Establish a 9-12 month planning phase to define goals, funding, and curriculum, and fundraise to meet program goals.
- Seed an initial pilot funding round to enable organizations to organize and deploy initial project(s)
- Partner with expert trainers in vacant space activation, marketing, programming, small business support, and organizational structure, among other topics.
- Provide leadership coaching to clarify roles, strengthen collaboration, and help build organizational structures.
- Conduct quarterly check-ins with corridor organization leaders to evaluate progress and refine program design.
- Redesign funding availability based on district improvement associations' revenue structures, annual incomes, and strategic plans.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Identify existing or hire a new staff member who can manage program development
- 2 Create an organizational readiness assessment and visual guide outlining structure options
- 3 Secure seed funding to hire trainers and coaches, and provide implementation grants.



SEED (Lead)



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Community Development



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FORT-IFY NEIGHBORHOOD ACCELERATOR

Fort Wayne has success in supporting community organization growth through the FORT-ify program, which provides a structured training program with paired resources for strategic investments, programming, and other activities. FORT-ify participants will take part in monthly in-person workshops, work with city staff to develop a Quick Action Plan (QAP), and complete hands-on activities between workshop sessions to put what they're learning into practice in their neighborhoods. The key areas of focus we cover in the FORT-ify activities and workshops include:

- Community Listening & Asset Based Approaches
- Association Governance and Succession
- Civic Engagement & Advocacy
- Fundraising & Grant Writing

CASE STUDY: PATHWAYS TO BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS (BIAS) PROJECT - SEATTLE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City of Seattle's Only in Seattle District Business Capacity Program is designed to foster an equitable and vibrant city by strengthening neighborhood business districts as hubs of local commerce, community, and culture. The program supports organizations in transitioning into formal Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), enabling them to generate assessment-based revenue that complements existing funding sources. Importantly, 100 percent of assessment revenue is retained locally, giving districts direct control over how funds are invested.

To launch new BIAs, Seattle's Office of Economic Development provides one-time seed funding to support early organizing, planning, and setup. The program then guides organizations through a structured process that builds both shared vision and long-term capacity. This approach begins by convening stakeholders to articulate a collective vision and develop a startup action plan, followed by ongoing outreach and partnerships to broaden support. Organizations are supported as they formalize governance, begin implementing priority actions, and build the operational capacity needed for sustainability. This includes establishing reliable funding streams, staffing and volunteer structures, and mechanisms to regularly revisit and update the district's plan.

The resulting action plan provides a clear roadmap across core focus areas—organizational development, business development, clean and safe initiatives, events and programming, and marketing and communications—ensuring districts are equipped to move from planning to implementation. Each year, the organizations, in partnership with Seattle's Office of Economic Development, develop revised action plans with opportunities for additional resources (i.e., staff, consulting, or financial). Note, OED organizational funding may extend beyond a year if needed. While Seattle operates at a larger scale, this framework demonstrates how targeted seed funding and structured capacity-building can help local organizations evolve into durable, locally governed district stewards.



Contact Casey Rogers, Business Improvement Areas Policy Advisor, Casey.Rogers@seattle.gov

More Information at seattle.gov/economic-development/business-districts/business-improvement-areas-

STRATEGY #2: ESTABLISH DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATIONS

Create and empower district improvement associations to maintain property and business inventory, coordinate investment, marketing, and events, and aid in the long-term stewardship of each district—serving as the foundation upon which subsequent recommendations and implementation efforts will build.

- Identify individuals and organizations positioned to lead revitalization efforts, offering board seats to members of nearby neighborhood associations to support with marketing and community integration
- Align property owners, businesses, residents, and partners around shared goals (e.g., tenant recruitment, investment, beautification, and district identity).
- Establish an appropriate organizational structure tailored to local capacity and priorities.
 - ✦ Design sustainable revenue structures to support the organization's mission and programmatic activities based on a mix of membership dues from nearby residents and property and business owners, corporate and philanthropic sponsorships, and signature fundraising events.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 **East State Village:** Convene engaged business owners monthly to identify leaders and establish organization goals
- 2 **Waynedale:** Use the ongoing planning process to socialize this strategy, identifying key stakeholders (e.g., developers, business owners, and civic partners) to shape the future leadership structure.
- 3 **South Calhoun**
 - ✦ Convene the Packard Area Planning Alliance and Blue Jacket as initial leaders, bringing together businesses and residents to guide the direction.
 - ✦ Integrate node-based recommendations into the Packard Area Planning Alliance's strategic plans to balance business growth with neighborhood priorities



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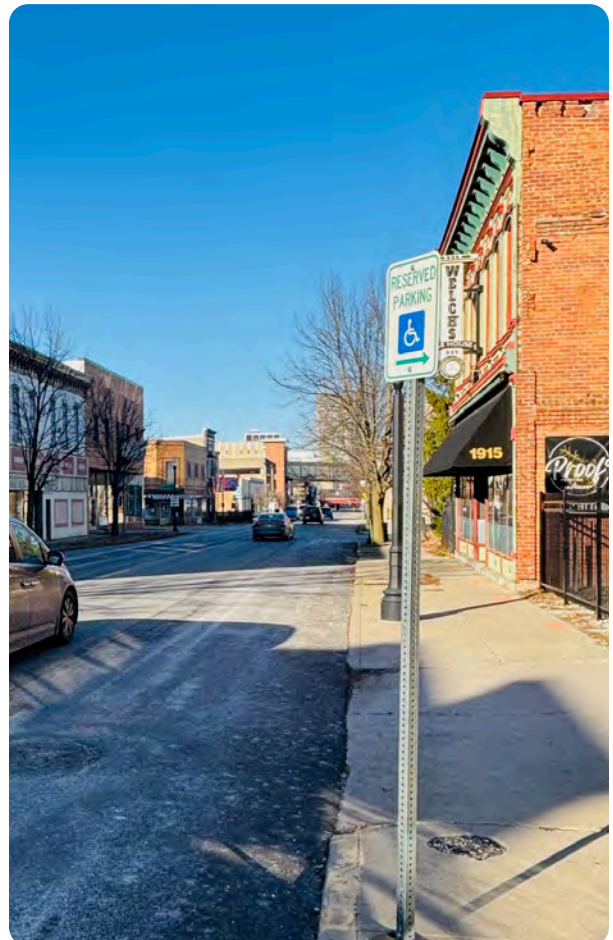
GOAL 2

Strengthen business support ecosystem to better address retail business needs

AndAccess evaluates ecosystem resources as Material Support, Knowledge Support, or Network Support. Material Support can be used to purchase materials, expenses, or services. This includes direct funding (grants or loans) or business or professional services paid for by a third party. Knowledge Support offers educational guidance but CANNOT be used to purchase materials, expenses, or services. For example, drop-in legal clinics would fall into Knowledge Support while a grant or program that pays to retain legal services would be considered Material Support. Network Support introduces advocates, mentoring, or other support organizations and networks to small business owners. Events, cohort-based programs, and referrals are considered Network Support.

Fort Wayne's small business ecosystem is vibrant and well-supported, offering entrepreneurs access to public grants, educational programs, and a strong network of partner organizations. The City's Summit City Entrepreneur and Enterprise District (SEED) provides comprehensive grants and training, complemented by programs from the Black Chamber of Fort Wayne, the Women's Entrepreneurial Opportunity Center, and the Fortitude Fund, among others. Together, these initiatives create an environment rich in opportunity, particularly for early-stage entrepreneurs and neighborhood-based businesses, while also supporting high-growth sectors.

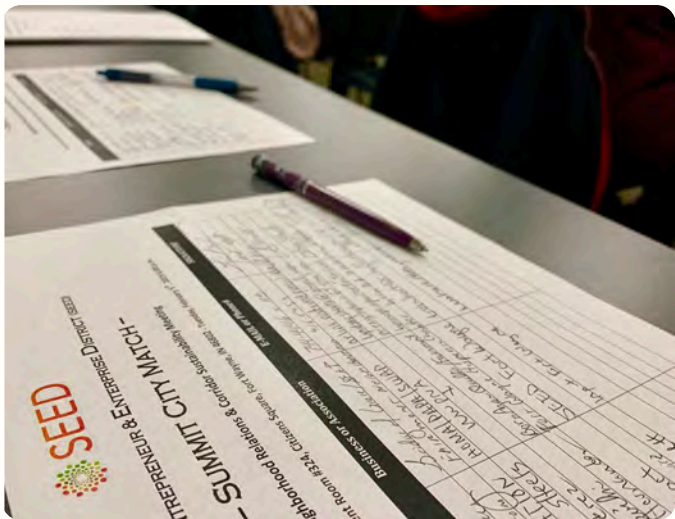
However, improvements to navigation tools and additions to existing programs can make resources more accessible to Fort Wayne entrepreneurs. While FuseNEI provides a directory, the ecosystem lacks a unified entry and navigation tool to help business owners locate the resources, deadlines, and applications relevant to their business. There is also an absence of site selection tools, such as a directory or map of available commercial spaces, to connect entrepreneurs with viable properties. Approximately a quarter of vacant spaces are listed on Moody's, 3% on Crexi, and 40% on Loopnet, which leaves most of the vacant properties unlisted and unavailable to prospective tenants through digital research. Additionally, essential business services, like marketing, legal, and accounting are typically provided as knowledge support within the context of workshops, clinics, or cohort-based programs. Providing additional grants (outside the context of the SEED Business Grant) or direct connections to business service providers is important for businesses who need to overcome specific challenges in a short period of time. Finally, entrepreneurs would benefit from clearer, more user-friendly guidance on regulatory processes, including streamlined documents and video tutorials to demystify startup, permitting, and compliance processes.



STRATEGY #1: DEVELOP A MORE ACCESSIBLE PROCESS FOR ENTREPRENEURS TO ENGAGE WITH CITY PROCESSES AND RESOURCES

Build an inclusive, transparent system that ensures small businesses have a consistent voice in decision-making and easy access to support resources. This approach should make it easier for entrepreneurs to navigate city programs and grow their businesses.

- Engage citywide business support ecosystem partners and businesses supported to identify opportunities to increase collaboration, generate more businesses seeking neighborhood-based opportunities, and reach hard-to-reach populations (e.g., Burmese business owners).
- Leverage citywide business support ecosystem partners to design a citywide engagement strategy to increase business input in neighborhood policy, corridor planning, and public investment decisions.
- Increase marketing of SEED's role in assisting business owners with city processes, permitting, site selection, and grant applications via online, social media, and direct outreach conducted by district improvement associations.
- Identify a strategy to create a centralized resource for small business support referrals and resources.
- Develop an early warning system to identify at-risk businesses and connect them with stabilization resources before closure



HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Develop and launch a citywide survey of business owners to identify communication preferences, engagement barriers, and trusted networks for outreach, especially focusing on Burmese business owners and the people and organizations that support them
- 2 Use survey results to design an engagement model that blends digital tools with neighborhood-based touchpoints to achieve goals above



SEED (Lead)
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STRATEGY #2: REVISE PROGRAMS TO INCREASE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND REDUCE CONSTRUCTION DISRUPTION

Ensure that existing small business programs are easier to access, more transparent, and less disruptive to operations. Continue to incentivize vacant storefront activation through facade improvement grants, tenant build-out assistance, and encourage reinvestment in occupied spaces by developing funding supports to modernize existing businesses, upgrade signage, and improve equipment.

→ Facade Grant Program

- ✧ Create a partnership with banks or CDFI's to provide bridge loans or lines of credit that allow undercapitalized businesses to have the funds needed to meet reimbursement criteria.

→ SEED Business Grant

- ✧ Allow awards for services multiple times per year, up to a maximum amount.
- ✧ Create an accessible database of approved service providers that business owners can continue working with after the grant process is completed

In order to implement this recommendation, either 1) issue an RFP to list providers and/or 2) establish a competitive bidding process for awardees if the total contract is above a certain amount

→ Review and improve construction disruption mitigation programs

- ✧ Improve documentation of utility locations to streamline construction timelines and minimize disruption to local businesses.
- ✧ Expand and strengthen construction mitigation programs to include small business support funds, early-notice protocols, signage assistance, and coordinated marketing during construction.
- ✧ Create a city-business communication plan outlining early engagement and notification standards, contact points, and response procedures during major infrastructure projects. Construction should occur in a manner that gets the maximum amount of work done within the shortest timeframe, and gives business owners the maximum advanced notice.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Conduct a review of recent construction corridor construction programs to document lessons learned and business impact
- 2 Form a construction coordination task force of city departments, utility providers, business support organizations, and business representatives to refine notification processes and resource availability



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SEED (co-lead)



Utilities



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Public Works

STRATEGY #3: EXPAND EXISTING OR CREATE NEW PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS ECOSYSTEM GAPS

Address unmet needs across Fort Wayne's entrepreneurial ecosystem by expanding existing programs and introducing new initiatives in six key areas: legal, marketing, operations, real estate, funding, and construction mitigation. Focus on context-specific challenges - address needs related to business stage, industry type, and access gap.

→ Legal

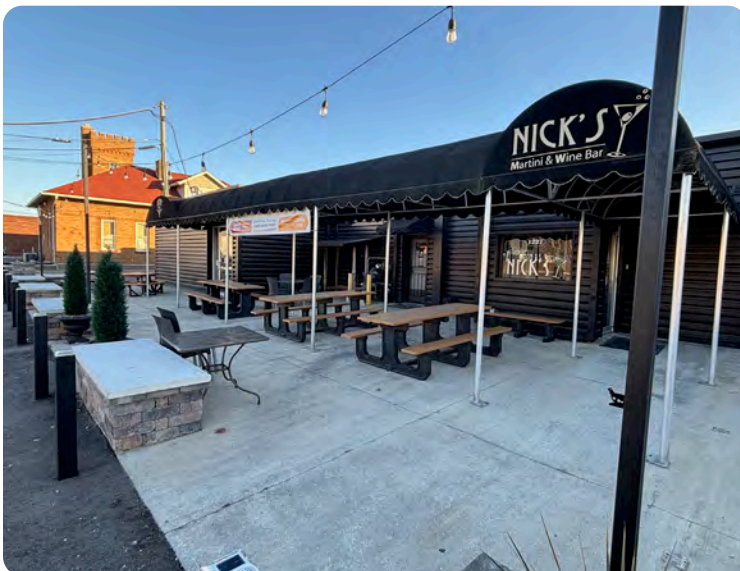
- ✧ Partner with local organizations to provide affordable legal and contract support, including lease review and compliance guidance.

→ Marketing

- ✧ Build partnerships with Visit Fort Wayne, district improvement associations, and media outlets to increase business and corridor visibility through coordinated online and local marketing campaigns. This effort will market both the businesses and the corridor at large.
- ✧ Identify and promote marketing professional services contractors that tailor services to small businesses in Fort Wayne

→ Operations

- ✧ Develop industry-specific "How to Open a Business" guides, starting with common industries opened by small businesses with unmet demand and the most state and local regulations—i.e., food and beverage establishments (e.g., restaurants, food trucks, bars, beverage manufacturing) and personal services (e.g., barbers, salons, spas). Include additional guides for complementary licenses and permits required (e.g., liquor licenses, cafe permits, etc.)
- ✧ Offer succession planning coaching to help owners transition or sell their businesses successfully.



CASE STUDY: DISCOVER LONG BRANCH

With the planning and construction of the Purple Line, Long Branch's (MD) locally-owned eateries and shops are at risk of cultural displacement. The Purple Line Corridor Coalition in partnership with local stakeholders such as the Montgomery Housing Partnership and the Latino Economic Development Corporation secured funding to support the marketing of the district and its businesses. Over the years, a series of social media and influencer marketing campaigns, special events, and the recent creation of a website and business league, has enabled many of the businesses to attract and retain new and existing customers.

The Long Branch Business League's \$100 membership fee include a series of member benefits, including:

- Preferred access to store design improvements and grants
- Free advertisings in the quarterly newspaper, The Truth about Long Branch (La Verdad de Long Branch)
- Greater visibility in marketing materials and campaigns
- Be listed by name as a sponsor at community events such as the 5K race
- The satisfaction of supporting the lead organization fighting for the survival and growth of all Long Branch small businesses



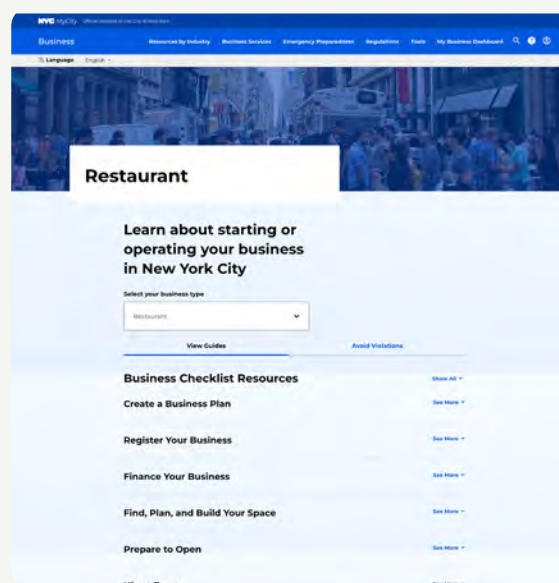
More information at: <https://discoverlongbranch.com/>

CASE STUDY: NYC STARTING AND OPERATING BUSINESS WEBPAGE

New York City offers comprehensive framework for each department that impacts the business from business plan through operations, including a series of recommendations to avoid violations. Resources on these pages include links to free classes and legal support, federal, state and local regulatory requirements, financial and insurance supports, workforce development support, and a series of strategies to avoid violations.

Business types addressed:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| → Auto Repair Shops | → Dry Cleaner |
| → Bar | → Food Manufacturer |
| → Contractor | → General Retail |
| → Convenience Store | → Goods Manufacturer |
| → Day Care | → Grocery Store |
| → Doctor's Office | → Health Club |
| → Pharmacy | → Salon |
| → Professional Office | → Urban Agriculture |
| → Restaurant | |



More information at: <https://nyc-business.nyc.gov/nycbusiness/resources-by-industry/restaurant>

CASE STUDY: 37 OAKS UNIVERSITY'S INTRODUCTION TO STOREFRONTS COURSE

37 Oaks University's Introduction to Storefronts course offers a practical model for preparing entrepreneurs to successfully transition from idea to brick-and-mortar business. Delivered through on-demand learning, live webinars, and in-person classroom formats, the course equips participants with essential knowledge about site selection, lease considerations, operational expectations, and the realities of running a product-based storefront.

More information available at: <https://www.37oaks.com/courselist>

→ Real Estate

- ✧ Develop a brick-and-mortar readiness series to prepare entrepreneurs for physical space, focus on the fundamentals of commercial leasing, and navigate the permitting process; see case study on previous page
- ✧ Create a Vacant Space Directory that builds upon the work of Greater Fort Wayne, third-party websites (i.e., Moody's, Loopnet, Crexi), and local brokers and property owners to catalog conditions, building sizes, and move-in readiness levels for prospective tenants and developers; work with district improvement associations to update directory at least once annually
- ✧ Link directory with a commercial space needs survey that helps business owners identify spaces that fit their needs - see the Downtown Denver Partnership's "[Find Your Space](#)" survey tool as an example
- ✧ Launch a commercial space pilot program that offers reduced permitting barriers, dedicated coaching, and funding pathways for tenants seeking a location in the priority nodes.
 - **Reduced Permitting Barriers:** Select types of rehab and/or new business industries to receive benefits (e.g., a new restaurant would like to open in Waynedale's priority node and the city provides day-of permit review)
 - **Dedicated coaching:** Identify industry-specific mentors who help with site selection, construction, and opening (e.g., restaurateur has up to 20 hours in coaching to call a paid mentor for emergent challenges)
 - **Funding Pathways:** Work with CDFI's to create industry specific checklists and budget templates that fit their underwriting process - restaurant, barbershop, etc. – with dedicated marketing (e.g., the restaurateur is connected with a CDFI to explore capital options tailored for their business needs and stage)
- ✧ Catalyze and incentivize alternative retail models—such as multi-tenant spaces or shared storefronts—to reduce cost barriers and expand access to affordable commercial space.

→ Funding

- ✧ Encourage banks, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and philanthropic partners to provide micro, low-interest, and convertible loans, lines of credit up to \$10,000, and interest subsidy grants with a focus on under-capitalized and neighborhood-based entrepreneurs.
- ✧ Expand incentive programs that address unmet retail and service demand in each corridor.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Convene key funding and training partners to align program goals, funding availability, and eligibility criteria
- 2 Pilot one category experiencing unmet demand or targeted needs across corridors to test the commercial space pilot program's resource coordination; select a category based on ecosystem partner skillsets and internal resource capacity
- 3 Conduct a workshop with local brokers and property owners to establish a shared data platform for Vacant Space Directory.



GFW (Real Estate)



Brightpoint (Finance)

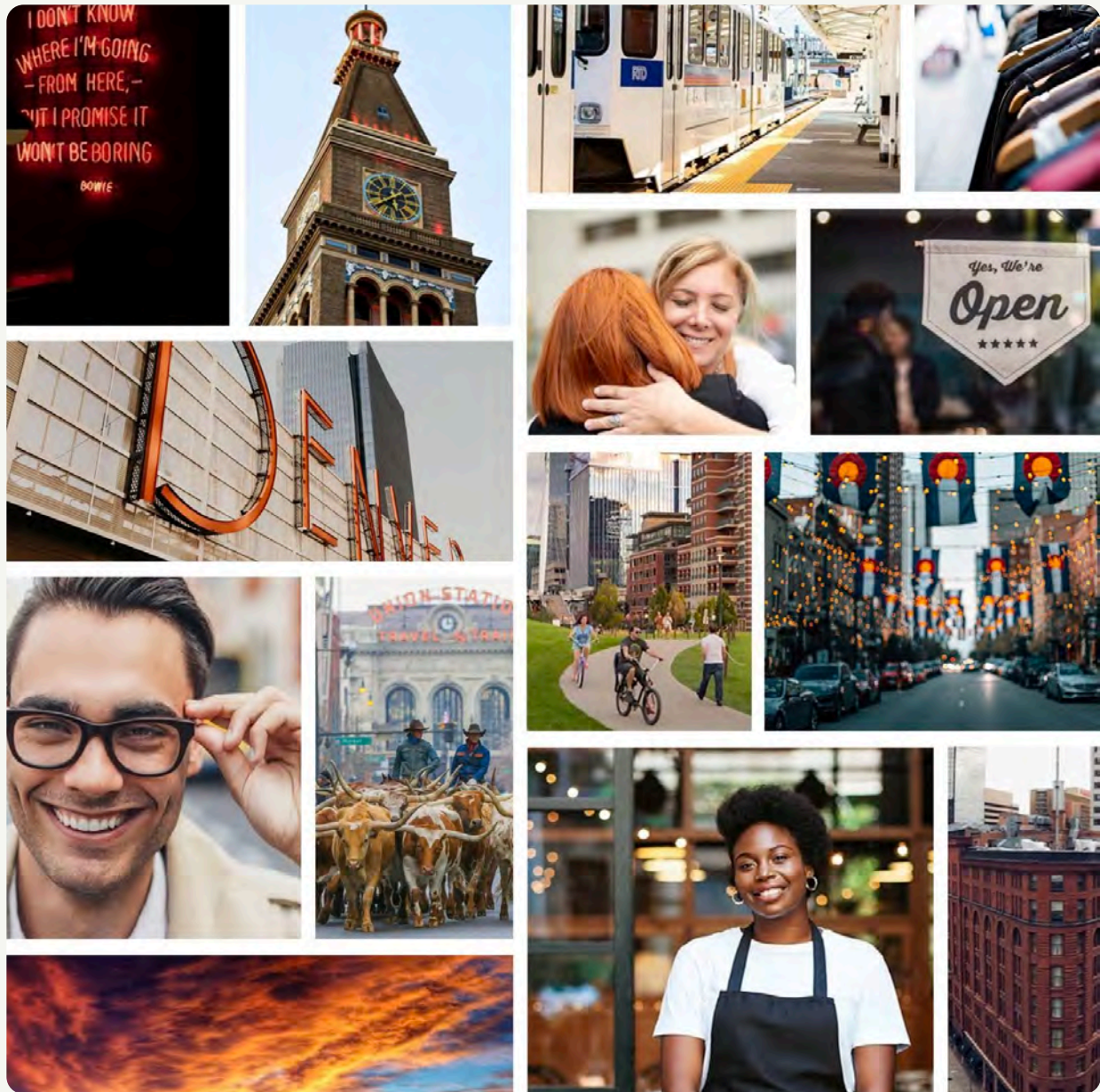


CDCs (Finance)



SCORE (Legal)

BEST PRACTICE: WHY DOWNTOWN DENVER?



Why Downtown Denver? is a marketing campaign by Downtown Denver Partnership that positions Downtown Denver as a place for businesses to locate, offering site selection resources to business owners, property owners, and brokers. One of the key offerings on this site is a space survey that matches business profiles with one of the downtown districts and connects prospective tenants with brokers to assist in securing a lease. Once participants answer a series of questions, the website offers a recommendation on the neighborhood that most closely aligns with preferences and directs users to the neighborhood profile and map full of updated vacancy information.

More information at: <https://www.whydowntowndenver.com/>

GOAL 3

Utilize marketing and programming to attract and retain customers

Calhoun, East State Village, and Waynedale have recently developed visual brand identities that provide a strong foundation for future marketing and programming. However, without a coordinated deployment strategy, these brands risk losing momentum as competing districts, such as Wells Street, Broadway, and The Landing, continue to strengthen their reputation as shopping and dining destinations. Each corridor's distinct identity within Fort Wayne's landscape can be leveraged through consistent branding, storytelling, and events that position them as vibrant, must-visit destinations for residents and visitors alike.

STRATEGY #1: EVOLVE BRAND IDENTITY IN TANDEM WITH INVESTMENT AND DISTRICT GROWTH

While the current brand identities for Calhoun, East State Village, and Waynedale provide a solid foundation, continued refinement and expansion to fully represent each district's broader geography, evolving investment, and long-term vision is recommended.

- Expand brand identity systems, including websites, social media pages, and marketing collateral, to strengthen external communication, storytelling, and visibility.
- Calhoun Street
 - ✧ Engage residents through surveys, events, and storytelling campaigns that foster a sense of ownership and reinforce Calhoun Street's role as a shared community asset.
 - ✧ Refine the district's brand to celebrate its historic charm and walkability, while broadening its identity to include priority nodes and adjacent blocks as infill development is completed.
- East State Village
 - ✧ Establish a branding and marketing committee internal to the district improvement association to evaluate the effectiveness of the current identity and guide future revisions, ensuring the brand reflects the corridor's vibrancy and direction.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Leverage [Visit Fort Wayne's neighborhood webpages](#) to serve as initial websites, eventually providing opportunities to link to external webpages for each district improvement association.
- 2 Identify and secure funding to hire branding and marketing consultants.
- 3 Develop a work plan and timeline to create websites, brand collateral and social media templates that reinforce each district's unique identity.

**Future District
Improvement
Association**

District Improvement

VisitFortWayne®
INDIANA

Visit Fort Wayne



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Community Development
Department of Neighborhoods

Neighborhood Development

STRATEGY #2: CRAFT DISTINCT MARKETING STRATEGIES TO EXPAND AWARENESS OF DISTRICTS AND BUSINESSES

Each study area (i.e., Calhoun Street, East State Village, and Waynedale) plays a unique geographic, physical and economic role in Fort Wayne's commercial landscape. Tailored marketing strategies will help elevate their visibility, strengthen their identities, and attract both local and regional audiences.

- Co-develop and implement district-specific marketing strategies
 - ✧ Leverage Visit Fort Wayne bloggers to create press kits and evergreen content for 3-5 standout businesses in each corridor, showcasing their stories and neighborhood appeal.
 - ✧ Create a citywide biannual training and strategy program to create district improvement association and individual business marketing strategies, identify feature opportunities, and measure impact.
 - ✧ Incorporate all three neighborhoods in the Visitor Fort Wayne Visitor's Guide.
 - ✧ Ensure food and beverage outlets on the north end of the corridor are included in Dining Maps produced by Visit Fort Wayne
 - ✧ Proactively identify restaurants to enroll in Savor Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne's Restaurant Week
- Calhoun Street
 - ✧ Highlight exceptional food and beverage tenants with international cuisine as anchors of the district's identity.
 - ✧ Collaborate with local media and Visit Fort Wayne to share their stories, attract new visitors, and reinforce Calhoun Street's role as a cultural and culinary destination.
- East State Village
 - ✧ Cross-promote the corridor as a go-to dining and entertainment destination before and after local events, in partnership with nearby parks, the Coliseum, schools, and neighborhood groups.
- Waynedale
 - ✧ Celebrate Waynedale's legacy businesses and local pride through storytelling campaigns and a "Shop Waynedale" initiative that encourages residents to support long-standing community anchors and nearby neighborhood-serving businesses
 - ✧ Expand the identity associated with food production businesses

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Establish a working committee to develop pathways for Visit Fort Wayne and other stakeholders to support the district improvement associations' marketing efforts
- 2 Meet with district improvement associations to create a shared log of marketing channels (e.g., social media pages, newsletters, etc), contacts, and production timelines to integrate into marketing strategy
- 3 Identify and engage 3-5 businesses in each corridor for the initial press kit development phase.

**Future District
Improvement
Association**

District Improvement
Associations (Lead)

VisitFortWayne
INDIANA

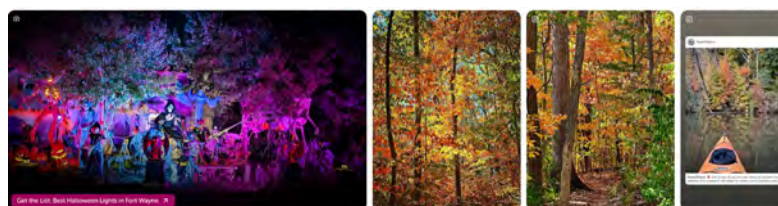
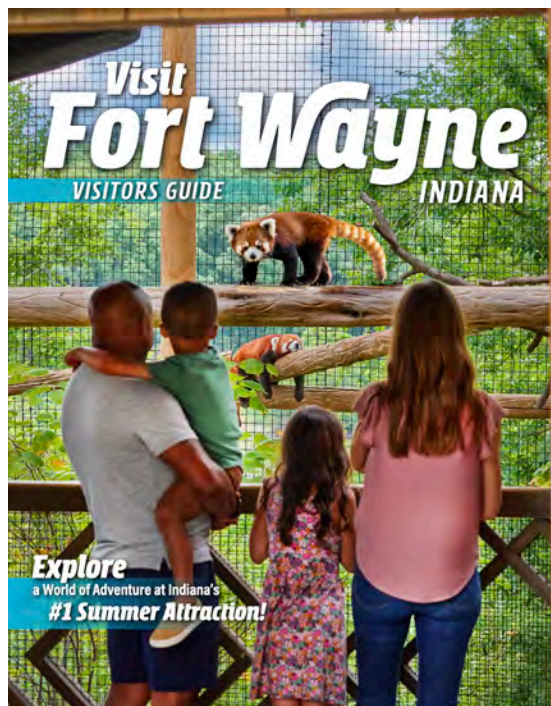
Visit Fort Wayne



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Community Development

VISIT FORT WAYNE



STRATEGY #3: DEVELOP A PROGRAMMING STRATEGY FEATURING RECURRING ACTIVATIONS

Programming gives customers a reason to choose one district over another—especially in a competitive market where similar businesses exist across corridors. A coordinated, recurring calendar of events led by independent businesses, neighborhood associations, and district improvement associations can create consistent excitement, repeat visitation, and stronger local loyalty.

- Engage local businesses to identify existing programming efforts and opportunities to expand or coordinate them at the corridor level.
- Establish programming as a core responsibility of each district improvement association, with a focus on events that align with each corridor's identity and customer base.

✧ Calhoun Street

- Leverage the corridor's historic character and growing reputation as an international food destination by hosting culinary tours, outdoor markets, and cultural festivals.
- Explore activating the Rialto Theater's exterior and surrounding parcels as signature event sites to anchor programming, building on the prominence of the asset in residents' perception of the corridor; host outdoor events such as "Lights On at the Rialto" featuring film nights or food trucks at 2702 Calhoun St, the parking lot across Pontiac St.

BEST PRACTICE - RELIGHTING THE HUNTRIDGE

The recent relighting of the historic Huntridge Theater in Las Vegas offers a powerful lesson for corridors like South Calhoun: iconic anchors can spark momentum long before full redevelopment occurs. By simply illuminating the marquee and activating the surrounding public realm, project partners reignited neighborhood pride, drew new foot traffic, and signaled that long-awaited investment was finally underway.



✧ East State Village

- Consider monthly family-friendly activities such as a sip-and-shop in partnership with the neighborhood associations, outdoor movies at Northside Park and underutilized parking lots, and pop-up markets at the northeast corner lot of Crescent Ave. and East State Blvd. to sustain visibility and community connection

✧ Waynedale

- Launch quarterly farmers and makers markets in the parking lot of 6731 Old Trail Rd. that celebrate local artisans, food producers, and small businesses while reinforcing Waynedale's community-driven identity.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Formalize district improvement associations before launching a programming strategy to ensure clear roles, coordination, and accountability.
- 2 Develop a shared annual programming calendar of events hosted by local businesses that allows each corridor to serve as a launching point for promotions; share the calendar with neighborhood marketing channels identified in Strategy #2.

**Future District
Improvement
Association**

District Improvement
Associations (Lead)

VisitFortWayne
INDIANA

Visit Fort Wayne



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GOAL 4

Invest in placemaking and beautification efforts to signal ongoing investment

Festivals and events throughout Fort Wayne already provide vibrant opportunities for residents and visitors to gather, celebrate, and support local businesses. South Calhoun Street, Waynedale, and East State Village are well-positioned to capture more of this consumer spending and economic activity through targeted placemaking and beautification investments. By transforming underutilized lots into public plazas and improving lighting, landscaping, and streetscape design, each corridor can create a more welcoming, memorable experience for visitors and locals alike. These visible improvements not only enhance quality of life, but also signal confidence and opportunity, encouraging further private investment in real estate, business growth, and long-term district vitality.

“Placemaking is the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in.

- Michigan State University Land Policy Institute

STRATEGY #1: ESTABLISH FUNDING SUPPORTS FOR PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENT

Placemaking requires both creativity and capital. To accelerate corridor transformation, the City and its partners should establish dedicated funding and partnerships that expand resources for property owners, local organizations, and businesses to invest in beautification and activation projects.

- Develop partnerships to support placemaking on private properties, including the installation of murals, sculptures, landscaping, and parking lot improvements
- Engage property owners to co-design exterior upgrades and coordinate investments that align with district identity and design goals.
- Establish a dedicated fund for temporary activations and small-scale public space improvements such as pop-ups, art installations, or community seating
- Create dedicated funding to support corridor organization in implementing a Clean & Safe strategy that enhances coordination among businesses through community cleanup events and the installation of security cameras and lighting, among other interventions.
 - ✧ For Calhoun Street, collaborate with Downtown Fort Wayne (Improvement District) to evaluate a potential boundary expansion during 2035 renewal, ensuring access to sustained clean and safe services along the corridor.
 - ✧ For Waynedale, create a cleanup initiative as a key task of the district improvement association to address the visual and environmental impact of heavy truck use and associated waste/debris
 - ✧ In East State Village, improve both real and perceived safety by strengthening pedestrian crossings, lighting, and traffic calming, while increasing corridor desirability through targeted beautification and activation of vacant and underused sites.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Create a standing working committee with Arts This Way, the Department of Neighborhoods, and SEED to coordinate grant writing, funding deployment, outreach and implementation.
- 2 Secure initial funding through placemaking grants, corporate sponsorship or city beautification funds.



SEED (Lead)



Arts This Way



Community Development
Department of Neighborhoods

Neighborhood Development



Public Art Commission



STRATEGY #2: CREATE SIGNATURE GATHERING PLACES THAT ROOT EACH CORRIDOR'S IDENTITY IN CHARACTER AND MEANING

Invest in visible, high-impact public spaces that celebrate each district's history and character while encouraging community interaction. These gathering places—temporary or permanent—should blend design, art, and activation to create memorable experiences and reinforce corridor identity.

→ Calhoun Street

✦ Rialto Theater

- Activate the Rialto Theater and surrounding public realm—beginning with lighting the existing marquee
- Collaborate with the Rialto Theater owners, South Calhoun businesses, and City leadership to develop and implement a long-term activation plan.

✦ Study the long-term potential to reinforce connections to Reservoir Park through improved urban design, landscaping, and signage that guide pedestrians between the park and Calhoun's businesses.

→ East State Village

✦ Transform the alley north of East State Boulevard between Crescent and California Avenues into a unique pedestrian experience with lighting, public art, and gathering spaces.

✦ Install murals in parking lots to improve safety perceptions, add visual vibrancy, and serve as creative wayfinding that highlights local businesses.

→ Waynedale

✦ Redesign underutilized space on existing parcels to establish town square-style gathering spaces at the four corners of Old Trail Road and Lower Huntington Road, integrating painted crosswalks, green space, public seating on private property, and seasonal programming in parking lots.

WAYNE DALE TOWN SQUARE

- **Phase 1:** Engage local businesses to vend their goods and services on sidewalks and in parking lots, or to host vendors during select
- **Phase 2:** Improve parking lot conditions and facades to designate the priority node as a public gathering place
- **Phase 3:** Improve right-of-way conditions (see Strategy #3)

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Identify potential pilot locations and design partners for near-term activation
- 2 Establish a relationship with the owner of the Rialto Theater to explore activation
- 3 Develop corridor-wide “signature spaces” toolkit with design templates, programming ideas, and funding models to guide implementation in each district.



Community Development (lead)

STRATEGY #3: IMPROVE RIGHT-OF-WAY CONDITIONS TO ENHANCE CORRIDOR APPEAL AND COMFORT

Invest in high-visibility improvements along sidewalks, intersections, and gateways to elevate the everyday experience of residents, visitors, and businesses. Thoughtful enhancements to lighting, landscaping, and pedestrian infrastructure not only increase safety and comfort but also signal ongoing reinvestment and community pride.

- Expand sidewalk capacity and add seating to encourage street life, social interaction, and longer visits.
- Implement a “Lights On” initiative to keep storefronts illuminated in the evening, improving nighttime ambiance and perceived safety.
- South Calhoun Street
 - ✦ Install branded gateway signage at the viaduct’s north side and Leith Street to announce the South Calhoun Corridor and reinforce its growing identity.
 - ✦ Assess neighborhood code compliance violations and offer a facade grant program to property owners to remedy violations.
- East State Village
 - ✦ Continue with proposed Connected Community Grant beautification measures—such as street trees, planters, and pedestrian-scale lighting—to create a welcoming, walkable environment along East State Boulevard.
- Waynedale
 - ✦ Install gateway signage at Lower Huntington and Bluffton Roads to highlight Waynedale’s distinct brand and local identity.
 - ✦ Study the feasibility of launching a corridor cleanup initiative to mitigate the visual and environmental impacts of heavy truck traffic and associated debris.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Develop an outreach campaign to engage business owners in the “Lights On” initiative, providing guidance, incentives, and recognition for participating properties. Collaborate with Indiana Michigan Power to expand the use of existing rebates. See more at <https://electricideas.com/at-work/prescriptive-rebates/>.
- 2 Identify funding sources for right-of-way improvements, including city beautification grants and state or federal infrastructure programs.
- 3 Engage property owners and business associations in maintenance partnerships to ensure long-term upkeep and quality.



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Indiana Michigan Power



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PRESCRIPTIVE REBATE PROGRAM



For Indiana commercial and industrial customers I&M offers a variety of predetermined cash rebates to help cover the cost of energy-saving commercial projects. From kitchen equipment to lighting to HVAC and VFD systems, our rebates cover many of the most popular energy efficiency upgrades. Got a more unique project in mind? Check the reverse side for details on our custom incentives.

ELIGIBILITY: Pre-approval required on all projects with an estimated rebate of >\$20,000. Rebates are capped at \$250,000 per site and \$500,000 per company per program year across all programs. See website for current eligibility requirements.

STEPS TO PARTICIPATE:

1. Confirm your energy efficiency measure is located on the Prescriptive Rebate list and is a one-for-one unit upgrade.
2. Purchase and install your energy efficiency equipment.
3. Submit your completed application along with a copy of your W-9, tax exempt letter (if applicable), equipment spec sheet(s) and invoice(s) within 90 days of project completion.

For more details, contact the program team at 833-997-0708 or visit ElectricIdeas.com/Prescriptive.

GOAL 5

Improve accessibility and connectivity to aid in customer attraction and retention

Calhoun, East State Village, and Waynedale's roadways connect residents across Fort Wayne, yet their long-term economic success depends on more than just vehicle traffic. The customer experience hinges on convenience, safety, and visual cues that make each district easy to navigate and inviting to visit. By improving pedestrian infrastructure and parking coordination, these districts can increase customer retention and expand their local and regional appeal.

STRATEGY #1: RESOLVE EAST STATE VILLAGE'S PARKING CHALLENGES

Parking availability in East State Village is often cited as an issue. While there is technically enough parking to serve business needs, visitors frequently perceive a shortage due to limited signage, unclear ownership, and lack of coordination between businesses. Clarifying, formalizing, and marketing shared parking will improve access and reinforce East State Village's reputation as an easy-to-visit, walkable destination.

- Evaluate a district-wide shared parking strategy that converts perceived shortages into coordinated access opportunities and identifies overflow options for high-traffic periods.
- Enhance parking signage and wayfinding with consistent design—using more recognizable and uniform signage, more visibly placed, to guide visitors to available lots from key entry points such as East State Boulevard and Crescent Avenue.
- Formalize existing informal parking agreements among neighboring businesses and explore new partnerships to expand shared access.
- Publicize shared parking locations through signage, neighborhood association communications, and the future district website and social media accounts.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- 1 Conduct a shared parking utilization study.
- 2 Develop design templates for wayfinding signage consistent with the East State Village brand.
- 3 Coordinate with property owners and nearby institutions to identify partnership opportunities.



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STRATEGY #2: STRENGTHEN PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY NEAR PRIORITY NODES

Improving walkability and connections between key destinations will make each corridor safer, more comfortable, and more appealing to both residents and visitors. Enhancing crosswalks, sidewalks, and transit access—paired with wayfinding and signage—will create a more cohesive and connected experience citywide.

→ South Calhoun

- ✧ Improve physical connections to the Pontiac Street corridor to better link ongoing investments east of Calhoun and reinforce corridor continuity. Note, the Southeast Strategy included similar recommendations.

Waynedale

- ✧ Continue with the proposed sidewalk and crosswalk projects to address gaps—particularly along Lower Huntington Road and near Waynedale Park—to ensure a safer pedestrian experience.
- ✧ Enhance connections to the Pokabache Connector Trail to increase visibility and attract visitors to local businesses.
- ✧ Install covered bus shelters at key stops within the priority node to create comfort for pedestrians and emphasize Waynedale's role as a complete, active district.

→ East State Village

- ✧ Install directional wayfinding signage from major assets—such as Northside Park and Lakeside Park—to guide visitors to the East State Village retail district.
- ✧ Add visible and safe crosswalks along East State Boulevard between Parnell and Crescent Avenues to improve family-friendly pedestrian access and calm traffic. This recommendation is currently in the implementation phase.

HOW TO GET STARTED

1 Explore grant funding to support implementation



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Public Works
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Public Works



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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Development Department



Community Development
Department of Neighborhoods

Department of Neighborhoods



GOAL 6

Strengthen Commercial Corridors through Strategic Property Activation and Infill Development

Across Calhoun Street, East State Village, and Waynedale, underutilized and vacant properties create both a challenge and an opportunity. When strategically activated by commercial or residential development, these spaces can anchor family-friendly destinations, attract new investment, and build corridor vibrancy. Coordinated infill development, targeted business recruitment, and proactive property management will transform key nodes into thriving hubs for dining, recreation, and community life.

STRATEGY #1: ADDRESS ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP

Reduce long-term vacancies and bring inactive properties back into productive use through coordinated policy, partnerships, and incentives.

- Develop and adopt policies to identify absentee property owners and encourage active leasing, sale, or community activation of their vacant properties while creating disincentives for prolonged vacancy or neglect. By re-engaging these properties, corridors can stabilize investment and signal visible progress to residents and visitors alike.

HOW TO START

- 1 Convene a workgroup with legal representatives, Community Development, Greater Fort Wayne Inc., SEED, and property owners to develop policy recommendations and engagement protocols that help address absentee ownership.
- 2 Maintain an inventory of chronic vacancies and absentee owners within each corridor, integrate into Vacant Space Directory to deprioritize for small businesses seeking space (see Goal #2, Strategy #3 for more information)



SEED (Lead)



Community Development



Greater Fort Wayne, Inc.

STRATEGY #2: FILL UNMET DEMAND THAT ADDRESSES SERVICE GAPS AND REFLECTS NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

Each study area has distinct market gaps and cultural assets that can guide business recruitment, land use, and activation efforts. Filling these gaps—especially in food, entertainment, and neighborhood goods—can strengthen the commercial mix while reinforcing corridor character.

- Calhoun Street
 - ✧ Recruit tenants in grocery, entertainment, and family-oriented food and beverage tenant categories.
 - ✧ Explore a cultural or entertainment anchor (e.g., a musical instrument museum, performance venue, large brewery/distillery, etc.) north of W. Williams St. between S. Harrison and S. Clinton Streets to draw regional visitors and celebrate the corridor's creative potential.

→ East State Village

- ✧ Activate underutilized lots at Crescent & East State and Kentucky & East State with family- and pet-friendly amenities (e.g., parks and play equipment, shaded seating, pet-friendly patio zones, pet relief stations) that attract everyday use.
- ✧ Attract family-friendly businesses and repurpose vacant storefronts to fill local service gaps.

→ Waynedale

- ✧ Collaborate with property owners to strategically tenant vacant spaces with amenities (i.e., entertainment for families and youth, boutique food producers, sit-down restaurants, healthcare services, and other types of third spaces/informal gathering places like coffee shops)

HOW TO START

- 1 Develop a shared tenant pipeline database featuring local farmers market vendors, food trucks, and accelerator program graduates to match available spaces with viable tenants.
- 2 Coordinate a tenant recruitment campaign with Greater Fort Wayne Inc. and local brokers.



SEED (Lead)



Greater Fort Wayne, Inc.





STRATEGY #3: EXPLORE INFILL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO BOLSTER DENSITY

Encourage infill development that complements corridor character, enhances walkability, and increases residential density to support existing businesses. Strategic use of district incentives, city partnerships, and small area plans can guide balanced, high-quality redevelopment.

→ Calhoun Street

- ✧ Encourage infill development around priority nodes—including multifamily development and parking lot conversions—by layering district incentives and pursuing strategic property acquisitions to boost foot traffic and corridor vitality.



Map 9. Family-Friendly Neighborhood-Serving District (near Creighton Ave.)

→ East State

- ✧ Develop a small area plan for the western node to explore opportunities for mixed use, multi-family, and limited retail, particularly on large underutilized parcels.
- ✧ Identify infill opportunities in the East State Village priority node's parking lots to strengthen corridor continuity once a shared parking strategy is established.



Map 10. East State Infill Development

→ Waynedale

- ✧ Support infill and redevelopment projects focused on mixed-use, housing density, and public space activation to reinforce Waynedale's community-centered identity.



Map 11. Waynedale Infill Development

HOW TO START

- 1 Encourage and foster key stakeholders to acquire, develop, and/or dispose of strategic redevelopment parcels within key nodes
- 2 Develop site-specific concept plans for 2–3 strategic parcels per corridor to showcase development potential.



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