

Stakeholder Interviews Summary

Plan Commission members interviewed 45 stakeholders, comprised of business owners, town officials, and regional organizations. This document summarizes the dominant priorities and challenges we heard that impact planning now and for the next 20 years. A table listing all interviews follows.

Priorities

- **Finding revenue within our borders** Like other Indiana towns, Indiana’s Tax Cap constrains town budgets based on existing properties. Porter’s mostly landlocked position means revenue growth must come from creating new businesses and expanding the tax base within the current footprint. Seizing new opportunities for favorable development will require zoning changes consistent with the community we want. It will also require a long-term plan for police and fire services, deferred maintenance, and gaps of our infrastructure. While we cannot spend ahead of a solid plan for revenues, we need to be able to communicate a plan, coordinated across town agencies¹, that signals to prospective developers, businesses, and residents how we will grow together.
- **Recreation and the lake in a small-town setting is our strength**
What is favorable development?
Across stakeholders, the recurring theme was to embrace the recreation economy while maintaining our small-town setting. Future growth should leverage Porter’s position along the National Park, State Park, Lake Michigan, Little Calumet River and South Shore line.
How can we develop successfully?
 - Family-friendly events in Hawthorne and our other parks, connecting the entire community with pedestrian/bicycle access to the train station and National/State Parks, improvements to our lakefront to reduce congestion and add amenities, and marketing of our businesses to visitors will bring revenues and raise the community’s appeal – and with that, property values and residents’ experience of living here.
 - Residential neighborhoods and our schools and library are at the heart the small-town feel. Yost has capacity to grow modestly, so more family residences can be supported.
 - But retail, lodging and services that harmonize well with the recreation economy help revenue even more. Light industrial, in the right location, has and will continue to make good neighbors and a strong tax base. Stakeholders are ready to draw the line on additional truck stops.
- **Capturing our share of population growth** Population growth is constrained in our land-locked situation. But targeted growth is possible, and will support our businesses and small-town assets like our school, library, and park system. Stakeholders believe Porter’s recreational opportunities, excellent transportation and small-town feel will appeal to several desirable markets including out-migration from Chicago, first-time home buyers, and affluent / senior buyers. We need to match land use with the right balance of housing types. Housing design and development standards should harmonize with our small town, natural-resources theme. We must integrate and enforce these standards, zoning regulations, and

¹ Council support is most important. Also, all town commissions and departments would be included in a coordinated strategy, including a revisited and fully implemented branding strategy. The strategy could be coordinated with Duneland schools, Westchester library, regional agencies, town businesses, bordering towns, and our biggest landowners, the National and State Parks.

map. Retail stores and services that residents are requesting may need to be seeded with negotiated mixed use development. Desirable population and services growth will follow.

- **US-20 + IN-49 Corridor Development** The two most important areas for development are the twin visitor and commercial throughfares US-20 and IN-49.

1. The corridor of US-20, IN-49, and the Dunes Park Station has the highest traffic related to recreational visits. This corridor also has some open land.
2. The intersection of US-20 and I-94 has commercial and light industrial properties that bring tax revenue. More and higher value development should be encouraged.

Development will require thoughtfully coordinated rezoning, infrastructure, development / redevelopment, and grants. We must address traffic congestion as well as disconnected pedestrian and bicycle networks. Planning efforts must also anticipate a future transition to electric vehicles.

Challenges

- **Housing** Single family homes have near universal appeal, and they are consistent with the preservation of a small-town feel. But growth across the spectrum of entry-, mid- and high-end involves different options. Certain options drew out negative opinions from stakeholders (and survey respondents). Many stakeholders recognize the benefits of higher-density high-end development, especially close to the Dune Park train station. However, most people shared concerns about how rental units would impact town services. They fear that rental units would degrade in quality over time. In general, respondents view condominiums more favorably. But even their advocates warn against public opposition of higher-density housing of any kind. Residential regulations will need to address solar panels and EV charging for new and redeveloped projects.
- **Lincoln Street.** Lincoln Street is a defining element of 'small-town' and inspires loyalty. Currently, though, it has few offerings to residents and visitors. There are significant structural limitations. Lincoln is congested at peak times, and the railroad owns part of the road and occupies all of the south side. There are buildings in poor repair, a concentration of bars, and heavy truck traffic. These will require creative solutions. Small steps to enhance appearances and improve signage were suggested, but more is needed. Business owners expressed willingness to help. Before investing, we need to understand why the previous Downtown Master Plan was not implemented.
- **Impediments to change**
 - Porter is landlocked and has parcels with accessibility challenges. To grow and to make optimal use of our land, we need zoning aligned with our strategy and creative solutions.
 - With small staff and budgets, Porter is at a disadvantage in tapping grants and competing for favored development. Support can come from elected officials, partner agencies and volunteers.
 - Porter has resisted change, like many small towns but also perhaps for understandable historic reasons. Stakeholder interviews and survey comments show broad support for very targeted development. However, we should anticipate some resistance. We can address any reluctance with communication and consensus building.

Stakeholders Interviewed

Interviewers:

TD Tara Duffie
 LM Laura Madigan
 RM Rob Albrecht-Mallinger

Stakeholder Name	Role	Interviewed by
Monday, July 26th		
Brian Bugajski	Director, Porter Parks	TD, RM
Todd Allen	Chief of Police	
Margo Machnik	Business owner, Economic Development Commission	
Mark Markovich	Developer	
Erik Wagner	Council, Redevelopment Commission	
Jim Burge	BZA, Economic Development Commission	
Keith Martinez	Business owner, Porter Barber Shop	
Jackie Ruge Perkins	Business owner, First State Bank of Porter	
David Phillips	Council, Redevelopment Commission	
Brian Finley	Redevelopment Commission	
John Bell	Business owner, Bell Trucking	
Don Craft	Police Commission	
Eric Hellmuth	Storm Water Board	
Bill Lopez	Council, Storm Water Board	
Allison Hultman	Redevelopment Commission	
Brian Lewandowski	Developer	
Tuesday, July 27th		
Kris Krouse	Shirley Heinze Land Trust	TD, RM
Jay Craig	Fire Department	TD, LM
Mike Barry	Development / Building Commission	TD, RM
Wednesday, July 28th		
Mark Lecy	Business owner, Pedal Power	TD, RM
Maura Durham	Duneland Chamber of Commerce	
Jamie Spanier	Public Works	
Ernesto Martinez	Discovery Charter School	
Greg Stinson	Town Council	
Thursday, July 29th		
Henry Huyser	BZA	TD, LM
Monday, August 2nd		
Heather Ennis Raeann Trakas	NWI Forum	TD, RM
Liz Tilden	Business Owner, Pat's Liquors	
Sandip Lidhar	Business Owner, Quik Stop	TD, LM
Brittan Hanlon	Business Owner, Hamlin Grooming	
Tuesday, August 3rd		
Paul Labovitz	National Park Service	TD, RM
Ty Warner	Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission	

Stakeholder Name	Role	Interviewed by
Tim Short	Business manager, Worthington Steel	
Dave Cincoski	Chesterton Town Manager	
Wednesday, August 4th		
Josh Huwig	Yost School	TD, RM
Thursday, August 5th		
Lorelei Weimer	Indiana Dunes Tourism	TD, RM
Friday, August 6th		
Reggie Korthals	Consultant to Stormwater Board	TD, RM
Mitch Barloga	Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission	
Monday, August 9th		
Bob Bednarek	ATS Trucking	TD, RM
Tuesday, August 17th		
Chip Pettit Greg Lindy Tim McGinty Scott Cherry	Duneland School District (Skillman Corp.)	TD, RM
Submitted via email		
Elka Nelson	Economic Development Commission	email
Rev. Erik Bernth	Pastor, Augsburg Lutheran Church	email