Town of Highland, Indiana



Comprehensive **Plan**

2026

Approved by the Highland Town Council on 10/12/26 (Resolution 2026-37)



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update provides a forward-looking roadmap for reinvestment, quality-of-life, economic vitality, and responsible governance. As a largely built-out community with a strong identity and long-established neighborhoods, Highland's future depends not on outward expansion, but on thoughtful reinvestment in its corridors, infrastructure, housing choices, public spaces, and local economy. This Comprehensive Plan establishes a coordinated vision and clear implementation path to guide decision-making for the next 20 years.

Highland is a community defined by stability, civic pride, strong parks and schools, and a strategic location within northern Lake County. At the same time, it faces familiar challenges of mature communities: aging infrastructure, older commercial corridors, limited land for new development, changing demographics, evolving regional pressures, and the need for greater transparency in public investment. Through a year-long planning process, including extensive public engagement, Steering Committee guidance, stakeholder discussions, and detailed analysis of existing conditions, the Town and its residents have crafted a shared vision for a vibrant, connected, and resilient future.

The Comprehensive Plan's recommendations focus on five central ideas: revitalize key corridors and Downtown, expand housing choices, improve mobility and safety, enhance quality-of-life, and strengthen fiscal stewardship. Collectively, these actions guide Highland toward long-term stability and ensure that public and private investments deliver measurable benefits.

This Comprehensive Plan is complemented by the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan, which provides site-specific concepts, development scenarios, and implementation guidance for priority redevelopment areas, including the Town Theater Block, Public Works site, Ultra site, and key corridor gateways.

The Comprehensive Plan establishes the policy framework, land-use direction, and implementation structure, while the Redevelopment Plan provides detailed guidance on physical development, site configuration, and phasing. When site-specific recommendations are needed, the Redevelopment Plan shall serve as the primary reference document.

A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLANNING PROCESS

The foundation of the Plan is the community's voice. More than 493 survey responses, 40 stakeholder interviews, four Steering Committee meetings, and multiple public outreach events, including the July 4th Festival and a public design charette, resulted in clear, consistent themes:

- ★ Residents value Highland's small-town character, strong neighborhoods, schools, and parks.
- ★ Aging commercial corridors: Kennedy Avenue, Ridge Road, and Indianapolis Boulevard need focused reinvestment.
- ★ Traffic safety and walkability are top concerns.
- ★ Housing choices are limited, especially for seniors, young adults, and working families.
- ★ Parks and community events are major strengths but require reinvestment and modernization.
- ★ Residents want transparent, accountable communication about Town spending and redevelopment decisions.

These themes directly shaped the Plan's goals, strategies, and implementation actions.

PLAN VISION AND CORE THEMES

The Plan is organized around six major themes, each reflecting issues consistently raised through public involvement:

1. **Land Use & Growth Management**
   Direct reinvestment where it has the greatest impact; preserve stable neighborhoods; leverage redevelopment sites; and align land use policies with evolving community needs.
2. **Corridor & Downtown Reinvestment**
   Revitalize Kennedy Avenue, Ridge Road, and Indianapolis Boulevard; strengthen Downtown as Highland's civic heart; eliminate vacant and underutilized properties; improve streetscape and gateways.
3. **Mobility & Safety**
   Improve walkability, crossings, and trail connectivity; address corridor safety issues; implement Vision Zero principles; modernize infrastructure to meet future demands.
4. **Housing Choice**
   Diversify housing options for all stages of life; permit missing middle housing near key corridors and Downtown; encourage adaptive reuse of commercial structures; ensure rental quality and neighborhood stability.
5. **Quality-of-life**
   Reinvest in parks, playgrounds, and trails; expand cultural programming; enhance accessibility; increase resilience through green infrastructure and stormwater management.
6. **Fiscal Responsibility & Transparent Investment**
   Prioritize ROI-driven redevelopment; enhance financial transparency; modernize capital planning; align incentives with community benefit.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

A detailed analysis of Highland's existing conditions provides important context for the Plan:

- ★ Highland's population is aging, with rising demand for senior housing and accessible services.
- ★ The community has disproportionately high single-dwelling housing, with limited multi-dwelling or mixed-use options.
- ★ Commercial corridors face vacancy, aging infrastructure, and fragmented development patterns.
- ★ More than 76 percent of land is residential, with only 4.5 percent vacant, making infill and redevelopment essential.
- ★ Sidewalk gaps, limited crossings, and traffic safety challenges affect daily mobility.
- ★ Parks and recreation assets are strong but aging, requiring modernization and accessibility improvements.
- ★ The Town must navigate significant infrastructure challenges, including rising maintenance costs and ongoing regional sewer and drainage issues.

These realities underscore the need for strategic, coordinated reinvestment rather than piecemeal improvements.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Plan includes five overarching goals:

1. Strengthen Downtown, corridors, and key redevelopment sites.
2. Expand housing options for all ages and life stages.
3. Improve mobility, safety, and multimodal connectivity.
4. Support economic vitality with a focus on ROI and reinvestment.
5. Enhance quality-of-life, resilience, and transparent governance.

These goals are supported by measurable objectives and specific strategies that guide implementation across land use, housing, mobility, economic development, fiscal management, and public services.

CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES

To ensure early progress, the Plan identifies a set of **Critical Path Strategies (CPS)**, which are high-impact actions to be completed within the first three to five years. These strategies address areas where early wins are both achievable and essential to long-term success:

- ★ Adopt a modernized zoning code.
- ★ Complete a Streetscape Master Plan for the three priority corridors.
- ★ Establish a Downtown Management District.
- ★ Implement priority recommendations from the SS4A Safety Study.
- ★ Identify and prioritize gaps in sidewalks and trails.
- ★ Adopt a Complete Streets Ordinance.
- ★ Zone for missing middle housing near corridors and Downtown.
- ★ Support adaptive reuse of commercial structures for housing.
- ★ Create a Town-wide event and programming strategy.
- ★ Develop a stormwater resilience and green infrastructure program.
- ★ Create a Return on Investment (ROI) tool for incentives.
- ★ Publish an Annual “State of Redevelopment and Infrastructure” Report.
- ★ Develop a public-facing Capital Improvement Plan and Program (CIPP) dashboard.

These CPS items are paired with brief justifications and clear five-step task lists, providing staff, elected officials, and community partners with a practical roadmap for implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A strong plan requires a strong implementation framework. The Comprehensive Plan includes:

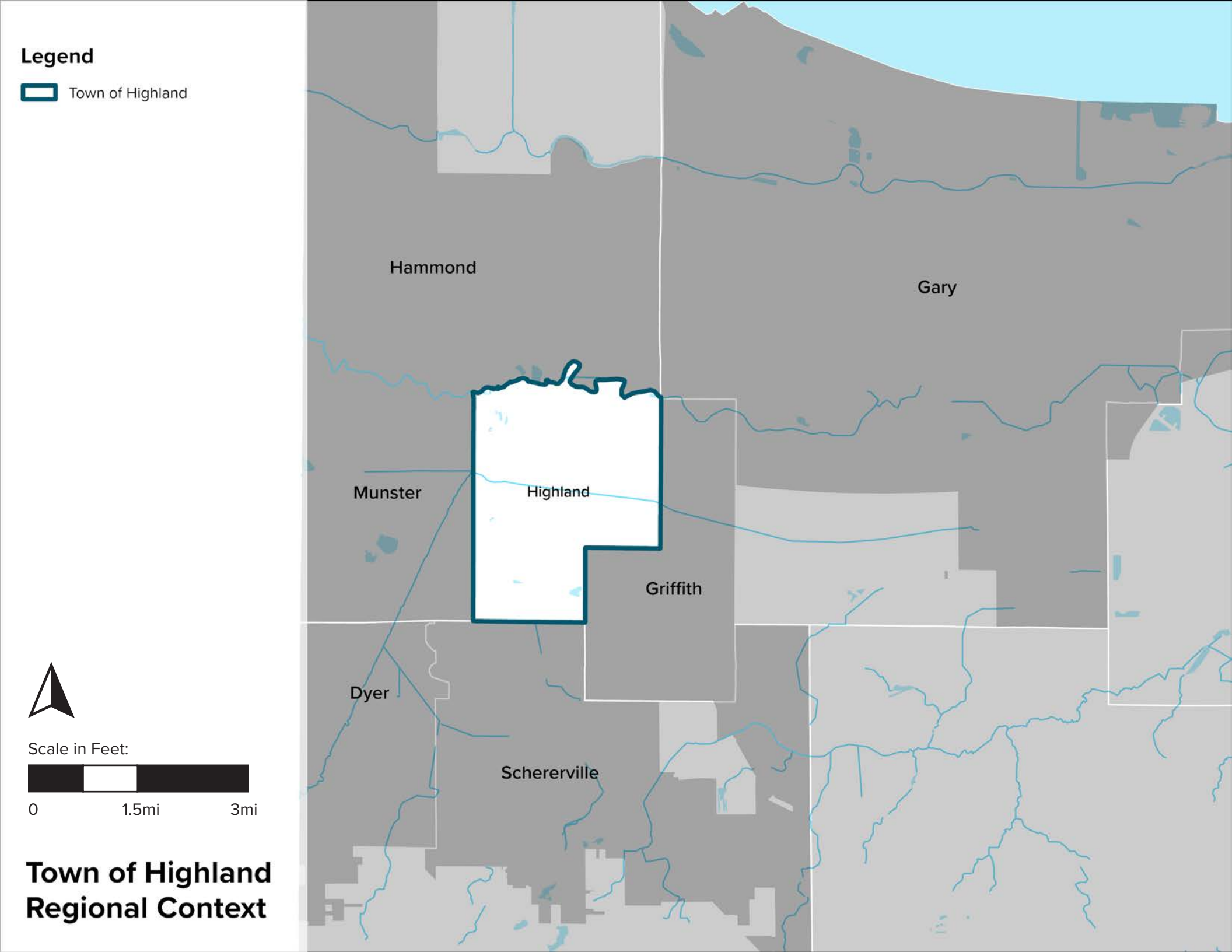
- ★ A detailed **I**mplementation Matrix linking strategies to responsible parties, timeframes, and cost categories.
- ★ Clear guidance for annual review, updating, and reporting.
- ★ Tools to improve transparency, including a public-facing CIPP dashboard and annual redevelopment report.
- ★ A focus on measurable outcomes, ensuring that investments support long-term sustainability.

This approach ensures that Highland's actions stay aligned with community priorities and that progress can be clearly tracked over time.

CONCLUSION

The Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan is a forward-thinking yet realistic blueprint for reinvestment, revitalization, and resilience. It reflects a community with great pride in its heritage and a clear desire to modernize thoughtfully while preserving what makes Highland unique. By focusing on strategic redevelopment, diversified housing, improved safety, enhanced mobility, strengthened quality-of-life, and transparent public investment, Highland is positioned to thrive for decades to come.

The Plan represents not just a document, but a shared commitment to a vibrant Downtown, thriving corridors, stable neighborhoods, renewed public spaces, and a transparent, accountable future. The implementation steps set the foundation for progress, but ongoing collaboration among residents, businesses, institutions, and Town leadership will define the next chapter in Highland's story.


Legend
Town of Highland
Hammond
Gary
Munster
Highland
Griffith
Dyer
Schererville
Scale in Feet:
0
1.5mi
3mi
Town of Highland
Regional Context

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Highland is a community in northern Lake County, Indiana, with a population of approximately 23,480. Highland combines a strong small-town character with regional accessibility, sitting near major corridors such as US 41, Kennedy Avenue, and the future South Shore Line extension, providing connections to Munster, Hammond, Chicago, and surrounding communities.

Highland's established neighborhoods, accessible parks and trails, and active community events foster a high quality-of-life for residents. The Town's Downtown and commercial corridors offer opportunities for redevelopment and mixed-use investment, while nearby natural and recreational assets, such as the Little Calumet River corridor, contribute to community livability. Highland's location and resources position it to balance growth, reinvestment, and preservation effectively.

Highland's location within northern Lake County places it at the crossroads of long-established regional mobility routes, employment centers, and natural systems. While surrounded by larger and growing communities, Highland maintains a distinct identity rooted in its neighborhoods, civic institutions, parks, and long-standing traditions. This combination of regional connectivity and small-town familiarity shapes the community's expectations for the future. Residents value the convenience afforded by major corridors and transit access, yet remain committed to protecting the character and stability of their neighborhoods.

As a fully built-out municipality with limited available land and no opportunities for outward expansion, Highland's future depends on reinvestment, redevelopment, and thoughtful use of its existing physical footprint. Much of the Town's built environment was constructed during the postwar decades, and the age of this infrastructure presents both challenges and opportunities. Aging commercial centers, legacy industrial sites, and maturing neighborhoods all require strategic attention to ensure they continue meeting the needs of current and future residents.

Given Highland's reliance on a network of major arterials, rail corridors, and utility easements, the Town's land use pattern is strongly shaped by its transportation and infrastructure systems. As traffic volumes, development pressures, and regional mobility initiatives evolve, Highland must balance redevelopment opportunities with safe, multimodal transportation options and coordinated infrastructure investment. The Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for aligning these interdependent systems so that growth and reinvestment occur in a cohesive and fiscally responsible manner.

This Comprehensive Plan update arrives at an important moment for Highland. Shifts in demographics, retail markets, housing preferences, and mobility patterns are reshaping communities across the region, and Highland is no exception. Residents participate actively in civic life, express pride in public amenities and schools, and consistently voice a desire for improved communication and transparency. These qualities give Highland a strong foundation for the future, enabling the Town to embrace innovation while preserving the values that make it unique.

Above all, this Comprehensive Plan is built on the insights and experiences of Highland's residents, businesses, institutions, and community partners. Through public engagement, stakeholder conversations, and detailed analysis, a shared vision emerged: a Town that reinvests in its established assets, provides diverse housing opportunities, strengthens its mobility network, supports local businesses, and promotes a high quality-of-life for all. This plan serves as a roadmap for achieving that vision through intentional, transparent, and forward-looking decision-making.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TOWN OF HIGHLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

Highland faces the challenge of being a largely built-out community while accommodating ongoing population shifts, redevelopment opportunities, and regional pressures. Aging infrastructure, legacy zoning codes, and limited vacant land require a forward-looking vision to guide redevelopment, housing diversification, transportation improvements, and quality-of-life investments.

The Highland Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for policies, programs, and capital investments that reflect community priorities:

- ★ Supporting targeted redevelopment and revitalization of key corridors and downtown areas.
- ★ Enhancing housing diversity, including workforce, senior, and entry-level options.
- ★ Improving mobility, safety, and regional transportation connections.
- ★ Strengthening parks, trails, and recreational amenities for all residents.
- ★ Ensuring transparent and fiscally responsible public investment.
- ★ Preserving community character, identity, and neighborhood stability.

This plan provides a clear, community-driven framework to coordinate growth and investment over the next twenty years and beyond.

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A Comprehensive Plan serves as a community's strategic guide for growth and development. It provides a policy framework that encompasses land use, transportation, infrastructure, housing, recreation, and economic development, enabling decision-makers to manage change while achieving community objectives.

The Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update will serve as a roadmap for the future, reflecting local values and establishing clear priorities for public and private investment.

Key characteristics of a Comprehensive Plan include:

- ★ A vision statement that reflects community aspirations.
- ★ Goals, objectives, and strategies that guide policy and implementation.
- ★ Public engagement to ensure decisions reflect local priorities.
- ★ A living framework that can adapt to evolving needs and circumstances.

The Comprehensive Plan is a living document that the Town should update as land use, transportation, infrastructure, resources, demographics, and community priorities evolve.

ABOUT THE PLAN

The primary purpose of the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan is to guide the community's future growth, reinvestment, and quality-of-life improvements through proactive planning and broad community engagement. As a largely built-out community with evolving needs, Highland requires a strategic framework that supports redevelopment, modernizes infrastructure, and responds to demographic shifts while preserving the Town's identity and established neighborhoods.

This plan aims to:

- ★ Support targeted development and redevelopment that strengthens key corridors and the Downtown.
- ★ Modernize infrastructure, mobility systems, and public services to meet current and future demands.
- ★ Expand housing choices that serve residents of all ages, incomes, and lifestyles.
- ★ Promote economic vitality and attract new investment within commercial districts.
- ★ Enhance the Town's parks, trails, gathering spaces, and environmental assets.
- ★ Strengthen transparency, fiscal responsibility, and long-term stewardship of public resources.

The Plan focuses on six key themes:

- ★ Policy Land Use & Growth Management
- ★ Corridor & Downtown Reinvestment
- ★ Mobility & Safety
- ★ Housing Choice
- ★ Quality-of-life
- ★ Fiscal Responsibility & Transparent Investment

This Comprehensive Plan incorporates by reference the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan as an implementation-focused companion document. The Town shall rely on that plan for detailed site planning, redevelopment concepts, and development expectations within designated Priority Redevelopment Areas.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update represents the community's ideas, input, and aspirations. It was created using an asset-based approach, building on what makes Highland strong while identifying opportunities for improvement and growth.

Phase 1 – Information Gathering

The planning process began with a detailed Existing Conditions Report, which analyzed Highland's demographics, housing, economy, infrastructure, natural resources, and parks. Public input gathered through community surveys, stakeholder interviews, and local meetings provided valuable insights into residents' priorities, including managing growth, improving traffic flow, attracting more businesses, and expanding parks and recreation amenities.

Phase 2 – Draft Plan Development

The planning team synthesized data and community feedback to establish goals, objectives, and strategies across each focus area. This phase emphasized collaboration with town staff, the Steering Committee, and the public to ensure the plan reflected a shared vision for the future.

Phase 3 – Implementation and Adoption

The final phase focused on defining specific action steps, identifying responsible government parties, establishing timeframes, and exploring funding opportunities. These recommendations form the core of the plan's Implementation Chapter and Critical Path Strategies, ensuring that ideas translate into tangible outcomes.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SUMMARY

The Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update provides a coordinated framework for decision-making, investment, and long-term policy direction. It serves as a benchmark for evaluating progress toward Highland's vision for a vibrant, connected, and resilient community.

The plan is organized into the following sections:

- ★ Introduction: Defines the plan's purpose, scope, and process, and outlines Highland's existing context, assets, and opportunities for reinvestment.
- ★ General Background and Public Participation: Summarizes Highland's Existing Conditions Report, community survey results, stakeholder meetings, and public engagement that shaped the plan's priorities and direction.
- ★ Direction-Setting: Presents topic-specific goals, objectives, policies, and strategies across each major topic: land use, corridors and Downtown, mobility and safety, housing, quality-of-life, and fiscal responsibility, supported by data, community feedback, and best practices.
- ★ Implementation and Critical Path Strategies: Outlines clear recommendations for moving forward, including short- and long-term actions, responsible agencies and partners, potential funding sources, and metrics for tracking progress.



EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT SUMMARY

Before making any recommendations for the future, it was important to understand Highland's story, history, people, assets, and ongoing growth. The consulting team conducted a comprehensive Existing Conditions analysis (Appendix – Existing Conditions Report) that reviewed demographics, housing patterns, infrastructure systems, the local economy, and the natural and recreational environment.

Town of Highland Existing Conditions Report Key Trends:

1. Median age continues to rise, indicating increasing demand for senior housing, services, and mobility options.
2. Household size is below the County and State averages, showing a shift toward one- and two-person households.
3. Highland is more diverse than the State and peer communities, though slightly less than Lake County overall.
4. A landlocked community with no annexation opportunities contributes to a limited new housing supply.
5. Slow housing growth over the past 15 years, with older housing stock dominating existing neighborhoods.
6. Imbalance in housing types: Over 72 percent of housing is single dwellings; multi-dwelling makes up less than 1 percent of land use. That restricts housing affordability and options for seniors, young adults, and smaller households.
7. Leakages in categories such as clothing, furniture, and restaurants reveal opportunities for targeted business attraction.
8. High-traffic corridors, such as US 41, Ridge Road, and Kennedy Avenue, experience congestion and safety challenges.
9. 76.9 percent of land is residential, limiting space for future commercial or industrial growth without redevelopment.
10. Vacant land (4.5 percent) and underused commercial parcels represent opportunities for reinvestment and infill development.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

During the 12-month planning process, the project team provided various ways for the community to participate and share feedback on the future of the Town of Highland. Public Engagement opportunities for the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update included the following components:

- **Stakeholder Interviews** – Gathered targeted feedback from local experts, business owners, and organizational leaders.
- **Steering Committee Meetings** – Guided by diverse community leaders and representatives from different sectors.
- **In-person Public Events** – Created opportunities for in-person interaction with residents during community events in the Town.
- **Online Survey** – Gathered detailed resident feedback on priorities, challenges, and future goals.

STAKEHOLDERS

In October 2025, stakeholder meetings were held to gain a deeper understanding of specific community issues. The project team conducted one-on-one and group discussions with approximately 40 key stakeholders representing major employers, local organizations, developers, utility providers, and residents. The conversations focused on:

- Quality-of-life
- Economic development
- Housing attainability
- Mobility/Infrastructure conditions
- Recreational amenities
- Traffic safety issues
- Redevelopment opportunities

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee consisted of 18 community members selected by the Town of Highland project team. Members represented a diverse range of perspectives, including town officials, the Economic Development Commission, business owners, the Building Commissioner, and residents. The Steering Committee met approximately five times during the project and reviewed all project materials before public release. Committee members were selected because of their knowledge and interest in the future of the Town of Highland.

All members assisted with:

- Attending and participating in all scheduled meetings,
- Complete the community survey and share it within personal and professional networks,
- Help advertise and attend public engagement opportunities, and
- Review draft deliverables, as needed.

The Steering Committee consisted of the following members:

- Adam Kern
- Alex Robertson
- Blaine Roberts
- Catherine Perrin
- James Kissee
- John Kennedy
- Lance Ryskamp
- Larry Kondrat
- Mary Albrecht
- Ray Borowiec
- Tom Black

Steering Committee Meeting #1 – May 2025

The purpose of the first meeting was to provide a project overview, ensure that members understood their roles and responsibilities as steering committee members, discuss the public engagement plan, and initiate conversations about community assets and challenges. The meeting's first part wrapped up with an explanation of "What is a Comprehensive Plan?" and a discussion about the committee members' expectations for the planning process.

Steering Committee Meeting #2 – August 2025

The purpose of the second meeting was to review key findings from the Existing Conditions Report (ECR), recap public engagement to date, discuss and refine plan goals, and identify the themes of the Comprehensive Plan Update. The second part of the meeting focused on a group exercise where committee members were asked to draft future "headlines" and immediate goals for the following topics:

- ★ Transportation & corridor
- ★ Economic development
- ★ Housing
- ★ Parks & recreation
- ★ Redevelopment
- ★ Quality-of-life
- ★ Culture & brand/Natural resources & resilience

Steering Committee Meeting #3 – October 2025

Meeting three focused on presenting the survey findings, public engagement, open house, and introducing the redevelopment study. The consultant teams and town staff agreed that the Comprehensive and Redevelopment Plans should work closely together to ensure they communicate effectively. In the second half of the meeting, the Kending Keast Collaborative firm presented the redevelopment study.

Steering Committee Meeting #4 – November 2025

The fourth Steering Committee meeting focused on identifying where Highland should prioritize its limited land-use, zoning, and capital investment resources, given the Town's built-out and landlocked conditions. Through a hands-on mapping exercise, participants evaluated corridors, neighborhoods, and redevelopment sites to determine key focus areas for reinvestment. The committee members used large land-use maps to categorize specific locations into five policy themes: major redevelopment opportunities, infill/reuse areas, neighborhood stabilization needs, key corridors or districts, and locations requiring targeted investment to reverse decline. The members discussed priorities, marked important sites, and highlighted their top redevelopment and reinvestment targets. The results from this exercise guided the development of Highland's Land Use Policy.

IN-PERSON PUBLIC EVENTS

American Structurepoint attended three public events to engage with residents. The goal of this in-person public engagement was to collect input from all generations of the Town of Highland on various aspects of the community, including quality-of-life, housing, future redevelopment options, infrastructure, and other relevant topics.

Public Engagement Events

- ★ July 4th Festival – July 3rd, 2025
- ★ Public Open House – September 18th, 2025
- ★ Public Charrette Workshop – November 3rd, 2025

Interactive boards encouraged residents to vote on the Town's priorities, identify desired future amenities, and share comments about community needs. Participants showed strong interest in maintaining roads, Downtown conditions, bringing in more restaurants and local small shops, enhancing walking and biking trails, and improving government transparency.

Online Survey

The consultants created an online survey (see appendix) to involve more people in shaping the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update. The survey was launched in June and remained open for a few months. It asked residents about current conditions, community assets and challenges, existing and future recreational amenities, future improvements, and the vision for the Town. The survey received 493 responses, all from residents of the Town of Highland.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Here is a summary of the main themes from the public engagement for the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update. The process involved community discussions that provided valuable insights into residents' priorities, challenges, and hopes for the Town's future. Across all engagement methods, participants highlighted Highland's small-town atmosphere, community pride, strong parks and schools, a solid base of neighborhood stability, and strong regional access, as well as the importance of improving transparency and communication from local government.

Key themes:

- **Transportation safety and traffic management:** Residents strongly support more consistent enforcement and targeted safety improvements near schools, neighborhoods, and commercial corridors.
- **Economic development and business support:** Stakeholders noted the importance of supporting local businesses, revitalizing commercial areas, and promoting responsible growth. Residents would like to see the Town focus on attracting services, restaurants, and investments that align with the community priorities.
- **Community identity and gateways:** The public engagement feedback emphasized protecting municipal identity while supporting beautification, placemaking, and revitalization of key corridors.
- **Redevelopment priorities:** High-impact sites and corridors are the primary focus for economic development, infill, and housing initiatives.
- **Collaboration and communication:** Desire for transparent communication, continued public involvement, and coordinated efforts between the Town, neighboring communities, schools, and agencies. Residents want regular updates on project progress and information on how to stay engaged.
- **Sustainability:** Several written comments emphasized sustainability, resilience, and long-term environmental stewardship. These themes are addressed throughout the Comprehensive Plan, particularly in the Quality-of-life, Infrastructure, and Implementation chapters, through policies related to reinvestment, lifecycle cost awareness, infrastructure renewal, and environmental resilience. Because these considerations are integrated across multiple goals, policies, and action strategies, the Plan does not include a stand-alone sustainability chapter; instead, sustainability principles are embedded throughout the document and reflected in the Plan's overall direction and implementation framework.



This section covers the topics identified during the Comprehensive Plan Update planning process. Following a discussion of overall community visioning and goal-setting, certain components of the comprehensive plan are introduced; each component has its own section with four elements, including:

- Overview – topic introduction
- What did we learn? – key takeaways from the Existing Conditions Report
- What did we hear? – key takeaways from public input
- Where do we want to go? – contains objectives, strategies, and case studies

VISION STATEMENT

Highland is a vibrant, connected, and welcoming community that embraces reinvestment while preserving its small-town character.

The Town is committed to strengthening its established neighborhoods, revitalizing key commercial corridors and Downtown, and expanding housing choices for residents of all ages and abilities. Highland's future is built on safe and accessible mobility for all, a thriving local economy supported by strong community partnerships, and high-quality parks, trails, and public spaces that enrich daily life.

Through transparent governance, responsible public investment, and a shared focus on long-term resilience, Highland will remain a community where families choose to live, businesses choose to invest, and residents of all backgrounds feel proud to call home.

GOALS

This Plan's goals support the vision the community wants to accomplish. Each goal statement identifies desired outcomes. These goals are carefully designed to encompass focus areas and link all objective statements to familiar themes. In total, the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update comprises five goal statements. These goals respond to the challenges and aspirations expressed by the community and are intended to foster a more vibrant, cohesive, and attractive Town of Highland.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE GOALS

1. **Land Use Policy**: Guide reinvestment and growth through a coordinated land use framework that strengthens neighborhoods, prioritizes redevelopment, and supports a high-quality built environment.
2. **Corridor and Downtown Reinvestment**: Revitalize Highland's key corridors and Downtown through targeted reinvestment, enhanced design, and redevelopment that reinforces community identity and economic vitality.
3. **Mobility and Safety**: Create a connected, accessible, and safe multimodal transportation network that supports walking, biking, transit, and driving for residents of all ages and abilities.
4. **Housing Options**: Expand and diversify Highland's housing choices to meet the needs of seniors, young adults, families, and workforce residents while preserving neighborhood stability.
5. **Quality-of-Life**: Enhance parks, recreation, cultural amenities, and environmental resilience to support a healthy, vibrant, and engaging community for all residents.
6. **Fiscal Responsibility and Transparent Investment:** Ensure responsible, data-driven public investment through transparent decision-making, strategic use of incentives, and long-term financial stewardship.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The objectives are specific statements that guide policy and can be used to measure progress. The statements are policy objectives related to the previously mentioned goal topics. These statements are aspirational and are intended to guide the Town of Highland toward its future goals and overall Community Vision. **Objectives were developed using the following inputs:**

- ★ Past planning documents
- ★ Input from the Steering Committee members
- ★ Input from the various public engagement method
- ★ Input from stakeholder meetings, and
- ★ Findings from the Existing Conditions Report

Strategies are concrete initiatives intended to carry out an idea, goal, or objective identified in the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update. Each strategy corresponds to a specific project, program, or policy tool for implementation. The implementation section of this Plan lists a selection of Critical Path Strategies, high-priority strategies that the Town should implement over the next three to five years.

LAND USE POLICY

OVERVIEW

Land use patterns in the Town of Highland have been shaped by more than a century of development influenced by major transportation corridors, utility easements, rail lines, and drainage systems that define the community's physical form. As a fully built-out and landlocked community, Highland must rely on strategic redevelopment, infill, and reinvestment rather than outward expansion to meet future needs. Aging commercial centers, legacy industrial parcels, and key corridors such as Indianapolis Boulevard, Kennedy Avenue, and Ridge Road continue to function as the Town's economic spine, but also present some of its most significant revitalization opportunities. At the same time, stable residential neighborhoods, the Erie Lackawanna Trail, high-voltage transmission corridors, and areas adjacent to the Little Calumet River create unique land use relationships that influence redevelopment potential, mobility, and quality-of-life. This section examines how Highland's historic development pattern interacts with current conditions and community priorities, and provides a policy framework to guide reinvestment, support housing diversity, strengthen corridors and districts, protect neighborhood stability, and ensure fiscally responsible land-use decisions for the next generation.

In addition to the character districts described below, the Town designates specific Priority Redevelopment Areas, as identified in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan. These areas represent the highest opportunity for coordinated reinvestment and are expected to accommodate more intensive redevelopment, including mixed-use, vertical development, and site reconfiguration.

Development within these areas shall be guided by the concepts, design direction, and implementation strategies outlined in the Redevelopment Plan. The Redevelopment Plan establishes Development Guidelines applicable to redevelopment sites and corridors, including:

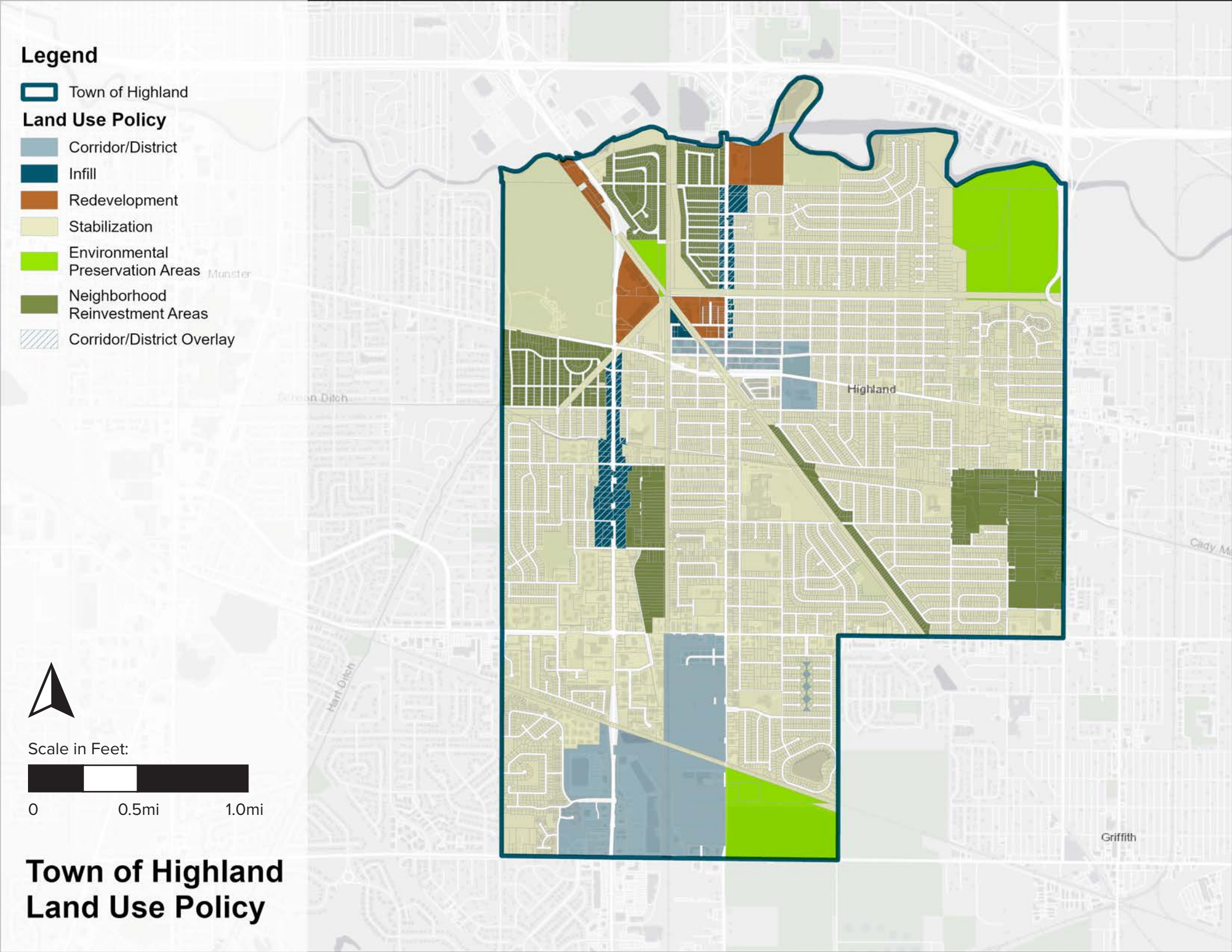
- ★ Building placement and frontage conditions
- ★ Parking location and access
- ★ Streetscape elements and pedestrian environment
- ★ Mixed-use configuration and block structure

These guidelines are hereby incorporated by reference as:

- ★ Primary design guidance within designated redevelopment areas
- ★ Supplemental guidance outside those areas, where applicable

Zoning, overlay districts, and development agreements should be updated or applied to:

- ★ Codify these guidelines where feasible
- ★ Allow flexibility where site constraints (utilities, access, infrastructure) require deviation


Legend
Town of Highland
Land Use Policy
Corridor/District
Infill
Redevelopment
Stabilization
Environmental Preservation Areas
Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas
Corridor/District Overlay
Munster
Highland
Griffith
Hart Ditch
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1.0mi
Town of Highland
Land Use Policy

WHAT WE LEARNED?

- ★ Highland's historical development pattern was shaped by a layered network of transportation and utility corridors, including rail lines, major roadways, and transmission corridors, which continue to define neighborhood edges, commercial districts, and redevelopment constraints today.
- ★ Indianapolis Boulevard, Kennedy Avenue, and Ridge Road have long served as the Town's primary commercial and mobility spines, concentrating retail, services, and higher-intensity land uses while also segregating some neighborhoods due to heavy traffic volumes and wide rights-of-way.
- ★ The historic rail corridors, including the still-active freight line and the former Erie Lackawanna corridor (now a major regional multi-use trail), created linear divides that influenced neighborhood boundaries and industrial siting; today, they offer both redevelopment opportunities and multimodal connectivity anchors.
- ★ The Erie Lackawanna Trail has shifted the character of adjacent areas, with trail-oriented commercial and residential reinvestment emerging as a land use opportunity along its length, supporting walkability and recreation-based economic development.
- ★ High-voltage transmission corridors, most prominently those running near LaPorte Street and adjacent north–south easements, restrict traditional development but provide opportunities for open space preservation, stormwater functions, utility access, and potential multi-use trail extensions.
- ★ Several east–west and north–south drainage and utility corridors intersect the Town, such as the Cady Marsh Ditch corridor, creating natural breaks in the urban fabric that influence parcel configurations, infrastructure upgrades, and opportunities for green infrastructure or recreational enhancements.
- ★ Because Highland is built out and bordered by other communities, these transportation and utility corridors play an outsized role in determining where redevelopment, infill housing, and commercial reinvestment can occur, as parcels along or near these corridors often present some of the largest redevelopment opportunities.

WHAT WE HEARD?

- Residents and stakeholders frequently noted that major corridors such as **Indianapolis Boulevard, Kennedy Avenue, and Ridge Road** feel visually inconsistent and underutilized, with aging buildings, fragmented land uses, and a lack of cohesive design standards.
- Community members expressed concern that these arterials act as **barriers between neighborhoods**, especially where traffic volumes, wide rights-of-way, and limited pedestrian crossings reduce walkability and create a sense of separation.
- Many participants highlighted opportunities to **better leverage the Erie Lackawanna Trail**, describing it as an asset that could support more trail-oriented development, improved access to businesses, and enhanced recreational connections.
- In both survey responses and stakeholder interviews, residents expressed interest in **redeveloping vacant or underutilized sites along major corridors**, noting that these areas have the greatest visibility and potential to reshape Highland's identity.
- Several residents commented on the visual and functional impact of **utility and high-voltage transmission corridors**, noting that while these corridors limit traditional development, they could support green space improvements, screening, or recreational uses.
- Stakeholders emphasized that long-standing industrial and utility adjacencies, especially near the rail lines and drainage corridors, create **conflicts between land uses**, suggesting the need for updated zoning, buffering, and reinvestment strategies.
- Public feedback also reflected a desire for **a more unified land-use policy along the corridors, including clearer direction on where mixed-use development, higher-density housing, or neighborhood-serving commercial uses** should be encouraged.
- Many residents expressed that Highland's development pattern feels "locked in" by its infrastructure grid and municipal boundaries, reinforcing the importance of **intentional redevelopment and infill** rather than outward expansion.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

- ★ Redevelop or adapt aging shopping centers and big-box sites.
  - o **Strategy:** Implement site-specific redevelopment concepts and development frameworks as outlined in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan, including but not limited to the Town Theater Block, Public Works site, and Ultra site.
- ★ Recruit new restaurants, entertainment venues, and hospitality businesses to meet demand.
  - o **Strategy:** Issue RFP for select business types locating in redevelopment areas or downtown districts.
  - o **Strategy:** Identify revenue sources for subsidizing startup operations and property renovations.
- ★ Use incentives selectively, tied to ROI benchmarks and fiscal health.
  - o **Strategy:** Limit incentives to Priority Redevelopment Areas as defined in this Plan and further detailed in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan, including the Town Theater Block, Public Works site, Ultra site, and key corridor gateway locations.
- ★ Support small business growth as part of corridor revitalization.
  - o **Strategy:** Develop coworking and small business incubator spaces to support fledgling startups.
- ★ Encourage mixed-use infill and diversification of older commercial areas.
  - o **Strategy:** Focus on small-scale infrastructure improvements (such as sidewalks and drainage) in targeted revitalization areas and districts.
  - o **Strategy:** Develop a database of developable sites for use with small business owners.
  - o **Strategy:** Within Priority Redevelopment Areas, encourage multi-story mixed-use development, internalized or rear parking, and coordinated block or site planning consistent with the Redevelopment Plan concepts.

PRIORITY REDEVELOPMENT SITES

The Comprehensive Plan designates key reinvestment areas along Highland's primary corridors. These areas correspond directly to the **Priority Redevelopment Sites** identified in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan.

The Redevelopment Plan governs the following sites for detailed design and implementation:

- ★ Public Works Site (Kennedy Avenue Gateway)
- ★ Former Town Theater Block (+ EMCORE)
- ★ Former Ultra Site
- ★ Former Coach USA Site
- ★ North Kennedy Avenue Corridor
- ★ Indianapolis Boulevard Corridor

For each of these areas:

- ★ **Policy Direction (This Plan):** Establishes the intended land use pattern, redevelopment character, and role within the Town's overall growth strategy.
- ★ **Implementation Direction (Redevelopment Plan):** Defines site layout, building form, access, infrastructure constraints, and redevelopment feasibility.

All development proposals within these areas shall:

1. Be consistent with the Future Land Use Map and policy framework of this Comprehensive Plan; and
2. Demonstrate consistency with the site-specific concepts and development guidelines in the Redevelopment Plan.

Where conflicts arise:

- ★ The Comprehensive Plan governs land use policy and long-range intent
- ★ The Redevelopment Plan governs site design, configuration, and implementation strategy

LAND USE CHARACTER DISTRICTS

CORRIDOR/DISTRICT

Purpose

To strengthen Highland's major commercial and mixed-use corridors by encouraging reinvestment, improving visual character, and supporting active, walkable destinations that connect neighborhoods and key activity centers.

Uses

- ★ Primary – Mixed-use buildings along key corridors and in Downtown, including ground-floor retail or services with upper-story residential or office; standalone retail, services, and office uses that reinforce corridor activity.
- ★ Secondary – Civic and institutional uses (schools, churches, municipal facilities), small parks and plazas, structured or well-screened surface parking, and compatible medium-density residential immediately behind the corridor frontage.

INFILL

Purpose

To promote context-sensitive development that fills gaps within established neighborhoods, enhances stability, and aligns new investment with the existing residential scale and character.

Uses

- ★ Primary – Context-sensitive residential infill (single-dwelling, duplex, and townhome units) that matches or gently increases the surrounding neighborhood scale; small-scale mixed-use buildings on corners or along existing commercial frontages.
- ★ Secondary – Civic and cultural facilities, public open spaces and plazas, structured parking, and limited light industrial or maker-space uses where compatible with adjacent residential and commercial development.

REDEVELOPMENT

Purpose

To transform underutilized or obsolete sites into higher-value mixed-use districts that support housing diversity, economic reinvestment, and improved land use efficiency. "Priority Redevelopment Areas" within this district are further defined in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan and are expected to accommodate higher-intensity development and coordinated site planning beyond typical redevelopment conditions.

Uses

- ★ Primary – Higher-intensity mixed-use redevelopment, including multi-unit residential, townhomes, and commercial uses (retail, services, and offices) on underutilized or obsolete sites such as aging shopping centers, big-box sites, and former industrial or institutional properties.
- ★ Secondary – Civic and cultural facilities, public open spaces and plazas, structured parking, and limited light industrial or maker-space uses where compatible with adjacent residential and commercial development.

STABILIZATION

Purpose

To preserve and strengthen Highland's established neighborhoods by supporting reinvestment, maintaining housing quality, and ensuring long-term residential stability.

Uses

- ★ Primary – Established single-dwelling residential neighborhoods, including existing duplexes where already present, with a focus on maintenance, reinvestment, and incremental improvements rather than major land use change.
- ★ Secondary – Neighborhood parks and playgrounds, elementary schools and faith-based institutions, and small-scale, node-based neighborhood commercial at select intersections that serve residents.

NEIGHBORHOOD REINVESTMENT

Purpose

To target strategic public and private investment that addresses decline, improves safety and housing conditions, and supports equitable, sustainable reinvestment without displacement.

Uses

- ★ Primary – Existing residential (single-dwelling, small multi-dwelling, and manufactured housing where present) with targeted reinvestment, code compliance, and rehabilitation to prevent further decline and displacement.
- ★ Secondary – Neighborhood-serving civic, social service, and community-support uses; small parks and open spaces; and limited neighborhood commercial, where it supports reinvestment without introducing incompatible traffic or intensity.

CORRIDOR/DISTRICT OVERLAY

Purpose

To apply enhanced design, access, and frontage standards along key corridors and district centers, reinforcing community identity and creating cohesive, pedestrian-friendly environments. Corridor design expectations, access management strategies, and gateway treatments should be implemented consistently with the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan.

Uses

- ★ Primary – All uses permitted in the underlying zoning districts that support the corridor's intended character, typically mixed-use, commercial, and higher-density residential, subject to enhanced design and frontage standards.
- ★ Secondary – Public and institutional uses, public spaces, parking structures or shared lots, and streetscape elements (public art, gateways, plazas) that reinforce corridor identity and walkability while remaining subordinate to primary active uses.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Purpose

To protect and enhance environmentally sensitive lands and open space, particularly floodplains and natural drainage areas, by limiting development, preserving natural functions, and reducing risk to life and property while supporting long-term environmental health, resilience, and public safety.

Uses

- ★ Primary – Natural open space, floodplain and wetland areas, stream corridors, drainageways, and conservation lands; passive recreation such as trails, greenways, and nature observation areas that do not compromise flood storage or ecological function.
- ★ Secondary – Stormwater management and flood mitigation facilities, habitat restoration and conservation projects, utility infrastructure designed to withstand flood conditions, and limited public or civic uses (such as trailheads or interpretive signage) that are compatible with environmental preservation goals and floodplain regulations.

CORRIDOR AND DOWNTOWN REINVESTMENT

OVERVIEW

This section establishes policy direction for corridor and Downtown reinvestment. Detailed site concepts, redevelopment scenarios, and design expectations are provided in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan and should be used in conjunction with this Plan. The future success of Highland's commercial corridors and Downtown depends on strategically reinvesting in aging properties, strengthening community identity, and improving the quality and functionality of key activity areas. Note the incorporation of corridor and district overlays in the "land use" section above. Throughout the planning process, which included the Existing Conditions analysis, stakeholder interviews, Steering Committee discussions, and community survey responses, a consistent message emerged: Highland must modernize and reposition its established corridors and Downtown Area to stay competitive in the region. The "What We Learned" section highlights the Town's strong retail base and redevelopment potential, while the "What We Heard" section confirms the strong community support for corridor and Downtown reinvestment.

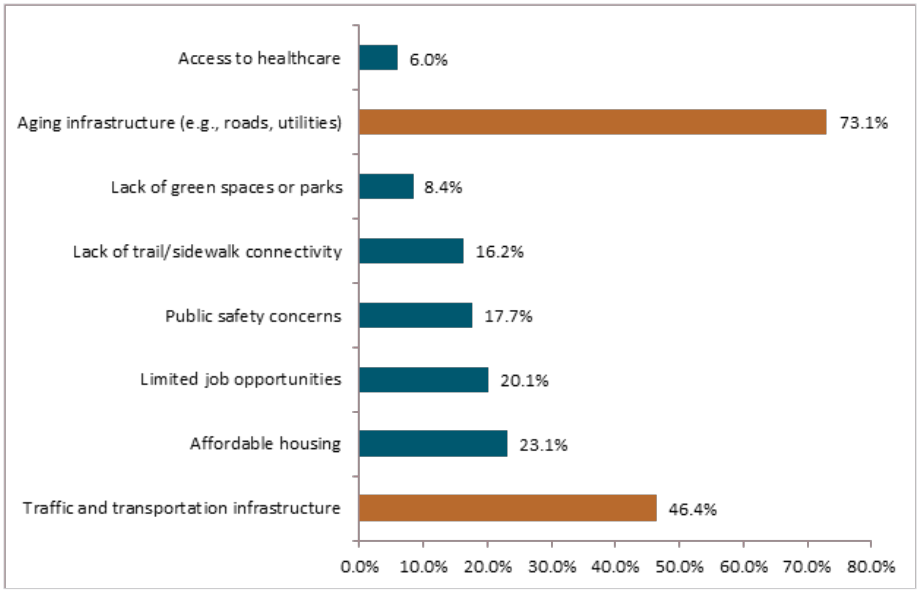
WHAT WE LEARNED?

- ★ Highland's strong retail identity (motor vehicle surplus and general merchandise surplus) is offset by leakage in food service, clothing, and recreation, indicating opportunities for Downtown and along the corridor.
- ★ Based on the existing land use map, approximately 411 acres of parcels are classified as vacant land, along with aging commercial properties that offer opportunities for near-term redevelopment.
- ★ The Redevelopment District Plan reviewed in the Past Plans section of the Existing Conditions Report focused on revitalizing Downtown as Highland's civic center. This priority remains significant due to current economic changes.
- ★ Compared to nearby municipalities, like Munster, Schererville, and Dyer, neighborhood towns are experiencing faster growth, putting pressure on Highland to reinvest in its established corridors to stay competitive.
- ★ The analysis of current conditions and internal meetings highlighted that Indianapolis Boulevard, Ridge Road, and Kennedy Avenue are crucial commercial corridors as they host most of Highland's retail establishments and serve as the main employment hubs for the area.

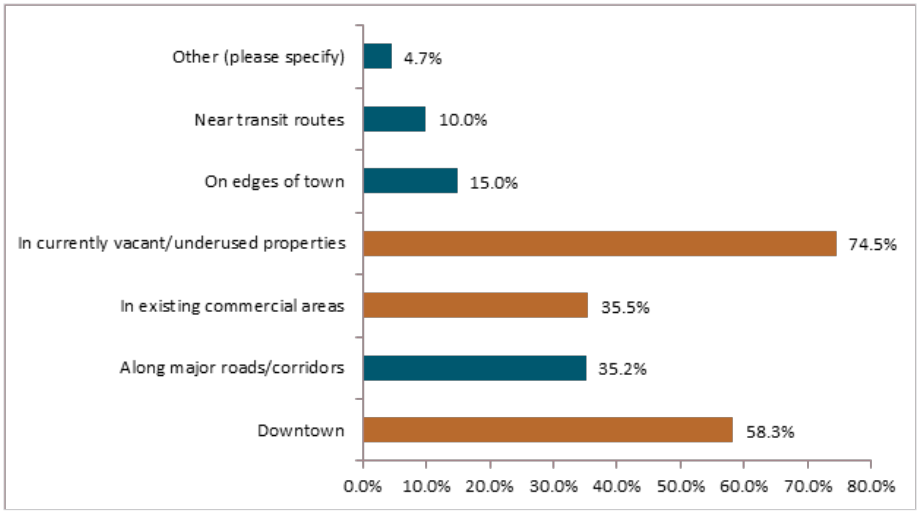
WHAT WE HEARD?

- Many survey respondents and in-person participants described vacant buildings and empty lots as “eyesores” that diminish the Town’s economic potential and community pride.
- In open-ended survey responses, residents suggested improvements such as streetscape upgrades, landscaping, improved lighting, and facade updates to make corridors and downtown areas more inviting.
- Stakeholders noted that current business regulations and approval processes discourage new investments; simplifying and offering incentives for redevelopment are necessary.
- Some community feedback emphasized the need to focus redevelopment efforts on high-impact sites, such as vacant lots, brownfields, and underutilized properties.
- In-person feedback, survey respondents, and stakeholders all highlighted the need for gateways on Kennedy Avenue, Calumet Avenue, and Ridge Road to build a community identity, strengthen branding, and make a positive first impression of the Town.
- From the survey, 73.4 percent of participants identified “aging infrastructure,” and another 46.8 percent cited “traffic and transportation infrastructure” as a current challenge facing the Town.
- About 43.4 percent would like to see Downtown Highland become a more vibrant, pedestrian-friendly area with more local businesses. In-person participation also supported this view by emphasizing the importance of investing in wayfinding and new businesses in downtown areas. Additionally, 28.2 percent of respondents want Downtown to be a lively mixed-use district with more housing, businesses, and activities.

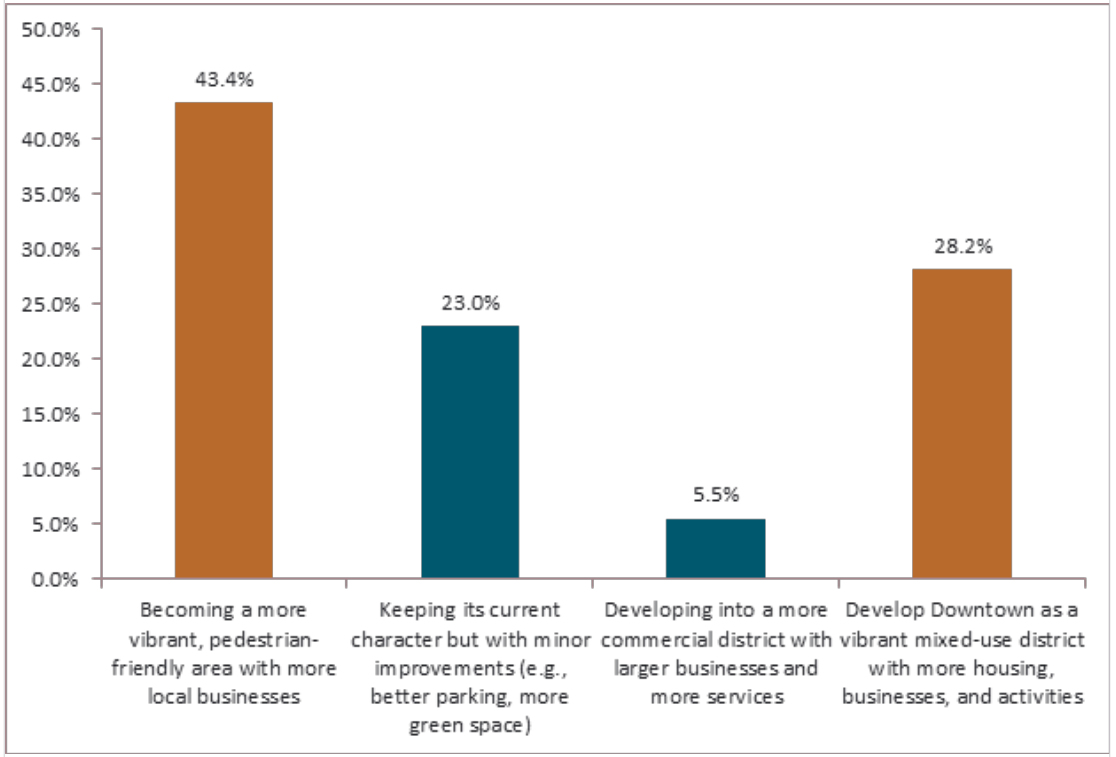
Survey Question: What are the biggest challenges facing the Town of Highland today? (Select up to 3)



Survey Question: Where should future development be prioritized? (Choose all that apply)



Survey Question: How do you envision the future of Downtown Highland?



WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Community engagement methods, internal meetings, and analysis of existing conditions shaped the objectives and strategies of this section. The objectives and strategies identified for the Corridor and Downtown Reinvestment are designed to guide the Town of Highland toward a more vibrant, accessible, and economically resilient future. The objectives and strategies outlined in this section will enable the Town to prioritize its corridors, make Downtown a destination, activate potential redevelopment areas, and strengthen the Town's identity by creating gateways.

In this plan, the Kennedy Avenue and Indianapolis Boulevard corridors are identified as primary redevelopment corridors, where land use, transportation, and economic development objectives must be coordinated.

The Redevelopment Plan provides detailed corridor strategies, including:

- ★ Streetscape typologies and cross-sections
- ★ Access management and driveway consolidation strategies
- ★ Pedestrian and trail connectivity improvements
- ★ Gateway and identity elements
- ★ Constraints related to utilities, right-of-way, and traffic operations

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

- ★ Reinvest in priority corridors (Kennedy Avenue, Indianapolis Blvd, Ridge Road) with streetscape, facade, and infrastructure upgrades.
  - **Strategy:** Implement a Streetscape Master Plan that will improve connectivity between Downtown and potential redevelopment areas.
  - **Strategy:** Apply for the CreatINg Places Program, available to Indiana communities to help secure funding for multiple projects, including streetscape beautification and public space enhancements, such as wayfinding signage/local branding.
- ★ Activate Downtown as a destination with mixed-use redevelopment, placemaking, and civic/public space enhancements.
  - **Strategy:** Establish a Downtown Management District for events, maintenance, and business recruitment.
- ★ Prioritize redevelopment sites, such as vacant retail, underutilized industrial, and river-adjacent, for the highest ROI and community impact.
  - **Strategy:** Advance redevelopment of priority sites in accordance with the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan, including phased implementation, site assembly strategies, and public infrastructure coordination.
- ★ Encourage adaptive reuse of legacy commercial and institutional buildings for housing, retail, and civic uses.
  - **Strategy:** Update zoning ordinances to allow for adaptive reuse projects, which will allow developers to convert older commercial buildings into coworking, maker spaces, or mixed-use spaces.
- ★ Brand and identity improvements through corridor design standards, gateways, and public art.
  - **Strategy:** Install gateway features at key entries, especially near the new Kennedy Bridge and Indianapolis Blvd. Gateway features, public art, and branding elements should align with the identity framework and key locations identified in the Redevelopment Plan.

CASE STUDY: CREATING PLACES PROGRAM[1]

The CreatINg Places program, facilitated by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA), is designed to support place-based projects that strengthen community identity and activate downtown areas. The program uses a donation- and reward-based crowdfunding model known as "crowdgranting." Through this approach, residents, businesses, and supporters contribute to projects via an online platform. If the fundraising goal is met within a designated timeframe, IHCDA provides a dollar-for-dollar match.

Who is eligible to apply?

- ★ Non-profit entities (with 501c3 or 501c4 status) and Local Units of Government are eligible to apply.

Grant dollars

- ★ Projects must have a minimum total development cost of $10,000, with IHCDA providing matching funds ranging from $5,000 up to $50,000. If a project does not reach its fundraising goal by the established deadline, it does not receive matching funds, reinforcing strong community buy-in and local support.

Contact

- ★ Bridget Anderson. Email: *Bridget@patronicity.com.*

Example: Putnam County Mural Festival[2]

The Putnam County Mural Festival is an example of how the CreatINg Places program can activate downtown through arts-based placemaking. The Mural Festival project brought together artists, local organizations, and community members to create a series of murals throughout downtown Greencastle, transforming underutilized walls into vibrant public art. Funded through community crowdfunding and matched by IHCDA, the murals helped create a walkable arts destination, increased foot traffic, and reinforced downtown's identity as a cultural and social hub.

This successful story is just one example of the many projects supported by the CreatINg Places program that the Town of Highland can reference. Highland could combine public art investments with broader downtown goals, such as supporting local businesses, encouraging the redevelopment of upper-floor residential or commercial spaces, and strengthening downtown's identity as a destination. The crowdfunding model would also allow residents, businesses, and visitors to invest directly in downtown improvements, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. Over time, like the Putnam County Mural Project website, Highland's mural program could become a signature downtown feature, boosting tourism and reinforcing Highland's dedication to creative placemaking and vibrant public spaces.

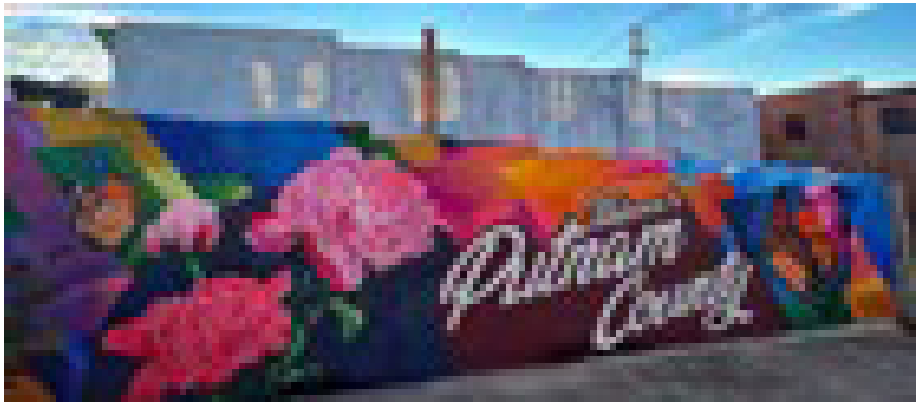
1 Source: IHCDA: CreatINg Places
2 Source: Projects | Putnam County Mural Festival | Patronicity

Center Wall – Greencastle, IN. Before.



Source: 2022 Mural Fest | Putnam County Mural Project

Center Wall – Greencastle, IN. After.



Source: 2022 Mural Fest | Putnam County Mural Project

MOBILITY AND SAFETY

OVERVIEW

Strengthening mobility and safety is a core priority for Highland, and the findings throughout the planning process directly shape the direction of this section. The “What We Learned” analysis illustrates clear systemwide needs: gaps in the trail and sidewalk network, crash patterns concentrated on major corridors, and high-volume arterials that challenge safe walking and biking conditions. The Existing Conditions Report findings align closely with “What We Heard” from residents, stakeholders, and survey participants, who consistently emphasized the need for safer streets, improved pedestrian crossings, trail connectivity, and concerns about speeding, distracted driving, and truck traffic.

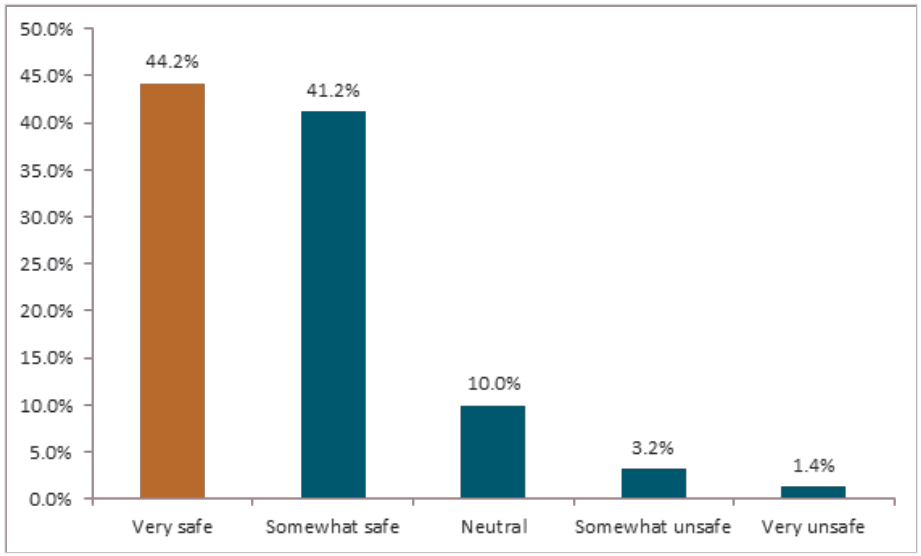
WHAT WE LEARNED?

- The Erie-Lackawanna Trail and its connectors form a strong base for active transportation, but gaps remain between neighborhoods and civic destinations.
- Crash history and high-injury areas emphasize the need for improved pedestrian crossings, traffic calming measures, and complete street designs on key corridors.
- There are high-volume arterials, such as Indianapolis Blvd, Kennedy Avenue, and Ridge Road, that carry significant regional traffic and create challenges for pedestrians and cyclists.

WHAT WE HEARD?

- Stakeholders emphasized walkability, trail safety, bike lane features, and traffic safety issues, including speeding, distracted driving, and regional truck traffic.
- Survey responses show a clear preference for safer streets, improved pedestrian crossings, and more accessible mobility options for seniors and youth.
- Several residents emphasized the importance of a consistent, visible police presence in neighborhoods and along corridors for safety.
- About 44.2 percent of the survey respondents find walking or biking in Highland very safe.
- About 73.1 percent of respondents identified aging infrastructure, such as roads and utilities, as a concern. Additionally, 46.4 percent of respondents highlighted traffic and transportation infrastructure as a current challenge for the Town.

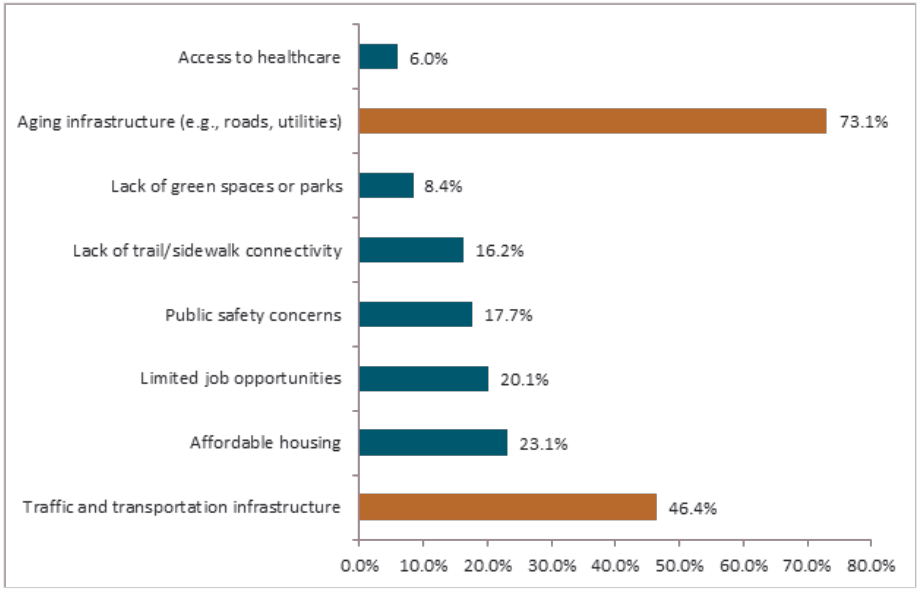
Survey Question: How safe do you feel walking or biking in Highland?



Survey Question: Are there areas where you would like to see improved pedestrian or bicycle safety? Open-Ended Question.

- ★ Kennedy Avenue – most frequently mentioned location:
  - Residents find this road unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- ★ Indianapolis Blvd and Ridge Road:
  - Residents find this intersection unsafe and difficult to cross.
- ★ Sidewalk conditions:
  - Residents want sidewalks added where missing, especially along Kleinman, Ridge Road, Wirth Avenue, and Johnston.
- ★ Lighting, safety devices, and visibility on trails:
  - Residents want improved visibility at street crossings, better crosswalk markings, and emergency call boxes.

Survey Question: What are the biggest challenges facing the Town of Highland today? (Select up to 3)



WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Community engagement methods, internal meetings, and analysis of existing conditions shaped the objectives and strategies of this section. The objectives and strategies identified for the Mobility and Safety section are designed to guide the Town of Highland towards building a connected, safe, and accessible transportation system that supports walking, biking, driving, and transit for residents of all ages and abilities. The objectives and strategies outlined in this section will enable the Town to prioritize the creation of a multimodal transportation system that improves mobility options, supports economic activity, and enhances the community's overall safety and well-being.

Objectives & Strategies

- ★ Improve sidewalks, crossings, and bike lanes on major corridors.
  - **Strategy:** Develop and follow a Capital Improvement Plan and Program.
  - **Strategy:** Apply for NIRPC TIP funding for corridor safety enhancements.
  - **Strategy:** Implement protected bike lanes on Kennedy Avenue as redevelopment occurs.
- ★ Connect neighborhoods, Downtown, and parks with a safe trail/sidewalk network.
  - **Strategy:** Improve bike and multi-use trail connectivity throughout the Town and with neighboring communities, notably to the new Kennedy Avenue bridge leading into the Little Calumet River Trail.
  - **Strategy:** Require new developments in Ultra Site and Town Theater Block to include public trail easements.
- ★ Leverage regional rail and transit access to expand mobility choices.
  - **Strategy:** Coordinate with NICTD and GPTC to expand local bus connectivity to the South Shore Line stations.
- ★ Apply Vision Zero principles to reduce crashes and improve safety.
  - **Strategy:** Implement the recommendations of the SS4A Safety Study completed in 2024.
- ★ Integrate complete streets design in corridor reinvestment projects.
  - **Strategy:** Adopt a Complete Streets ordinance guiding all capital projects.
  - **Strategy:** Incorporate complete streets principles in infrastructure components of redevelopment area plans and Priority Redevelopment Areas identified in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan.
  - **Strategy:** Implement access management strategies along key corridors, including consolidation of curb cuts, shared access, and rear or side-street access, consistent with redevelopment plan recommendations.

CASE STUDY: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND PROGRAM (CIPP)

A Capital Improvement Plan and Program (CIPP) is a multi-year planning and budgeting tool that identifies, prioritizes, and schedules major public investments, such as transportation infrastructure, utilities, and multi-use paths, over a defined period, typically five to ten years. The “plan” component establishes long-term priorities and estimated costs, while the “program” translates those priorities into a shorter-term, implementable schedule tied directly to the municipality’s annual budget and funding sources. Together, a CIPP helps a community move from vision to action in a fiscally responsible and transparent way.

As the Town of Highland seeks to improve sidewalks, crossings, and bike lanes along major corridors, a CIPP can be an effective implementation approach. Active transportation improvements often require significant capital investment, coordination with roadway projects, and alignment with grant cycles. In early 2025, Highland completed a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan, which identifies high-injury corridors, priority intersections, and safety issues affecting pedestrians and bicyclists. The Safety Action Plan can help identify safety-driven projects, such as sidewalk gaps, unsafe crossings, high-speed roads, and bike path gaps, for inclusion in the CIPP. A CIPP will identify when and how those types of improvements will be implemented and funded.

Example: Town of Whitestown Capital Improvement Plan and Program

Similar to the Town of Highland, in 2025, the Town of Whitestown adopted a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan along with a Capital Improvement Plan and Program. Whitestown’s CIPP organizes capital projects by category, includes cost estimates and funding sources, and clearly ties projects to community growth, safety, and mobility needs. Sidewalks, trails, roadway improvements, and multi-modal facilities are planned several years in advance and coordinated with development activity and roadway expansions.

For Highland, a similar approach would allow the Town to systematically implement sidewalk, crossing, and bike lane improvements recommended in the Comprehensive Safety Action Plan. By embedding these projects within a clearly defined CIPP, much like Whitestown, Highland can ensure that safety improvements on major corridors are not only policy goals but also funded, scheduled, and delivered as part of a coherent, long-term investment strategy.

HOUSING OPTIONS

The Housing Options section is informed by the Existing Conditions Report data and broad community engagement, both of which emphasize the need for more diverse, affordable, and age-friendly housing in the Town of Highland. The "What We Learned" findings highlight demographic shifts, including an aging population and a predominantly single-dwelling housing stock that does not adequately meet the needs of seniors, young adults, and smaller households. The Existing Conditions Report findings align with "What We Heard" from residents, stakeholders, and survey respondents, who expressed a desire for a greater variety of housing types, including workforce housing, senior living, mixed-use units, and smaller, more attainable homes.

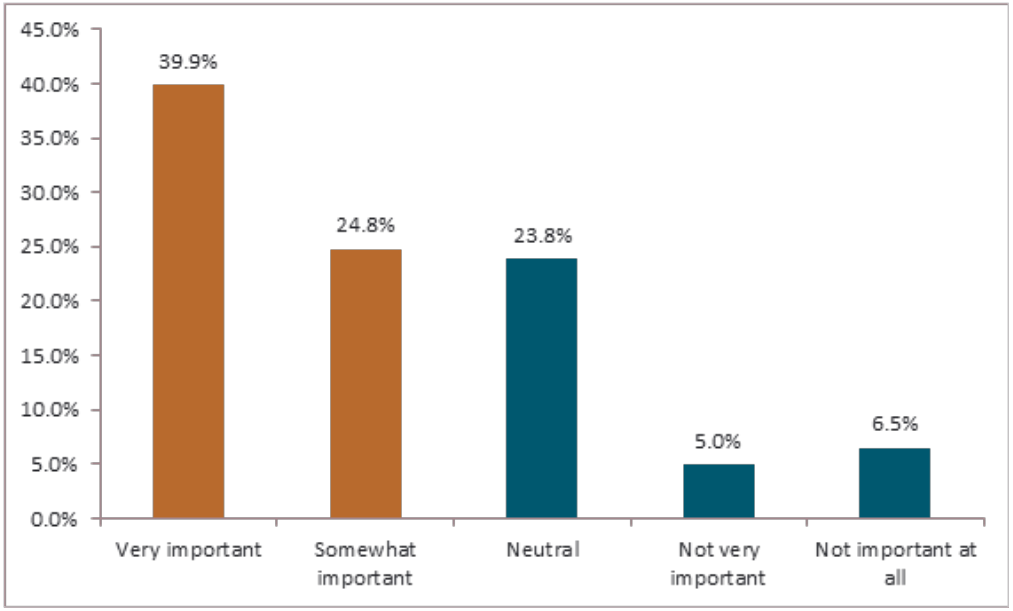
WHAT WE LEARNED?

- ★ The Existing Conditions Report analysis indicated a rising median age (42.8), increased demand for senior-friendly housing, aging-in-place options, and accessible neighborhoods.
- ★ With 22.0 percent of its units renter-occupied, Highland must balance rental needs while maintaining neighborhood stability.
- ★ The current housing stock is unbalanced, with 72.0 percent single-dwelling homes; multi-dwelling developments make up less than 1.0 percent, restricting options for young adults, small households, and aging seniors looking to downsize.
- ★ The slow housing growth in Highland is attributed to limited vacant land, underscoring the need for redevelopment and infill strategies.

WHAT WE HEARD?

- ★ Both stakeholders and survey respondents highlighted a lack of diverse housing options, including senior housing, workforce housing, entry-level homes, and condominiums.
- ★ Mixed-use housing, particularly residential over retail in downtown areas, is a priority for attracting younger families and supporting downtown vitality.
- ★ In-person event participants and survey respondents highlighted the need for housing policies that balance affordability, quality, and compatibility with existing neighborhoods.
- ★ Workforce and senior housing were seen as priorities by stakeholders.
- ★ About 64.0 percent of survey respondents indicated that providing housing for residents of all ages and abilities is important.
- ★ Additionally, residents emphasized that housing should support stable neighborhoods, maintain property values, and enhance school systems.

Survey Question: How important is it for Highland to provide housing options that meet the needs of residents of all ages and abilities?



WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Community engagement methods, internal meetings, and analysis of existing conditions shaped the objectives and strategies of this section. The objectives and strategies identified for the Housing Options section are designed to guide the Town in providing a balanced mix of housing choices that serve residents of all life stages, from starter homes to senior housing options, while preserving neighborhood character and supporting long-term stability. The objectives and strategies for this section focus on diversifying the housing stock through redevelopment and infill, expanding attainable housing near key destinations, improving oversight of rentals, promoting adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings, and encouraging sustainable, energy-efficient design.

Objectives & Strategies

- ★ Provide housing for all life stages, such as starter, workforce, senior, and move-up.
  - **Strategy:** Update zoning ordinances to allow more flexibility for duplexes, townhomes, and mixed-use residential within Priority Redevelopment Areas and corridor-adjacent locations identified in the Redevelopment Plan.
- ★ Encourage attainable housing and workforce housing near jobs, schools, and transit.
  - **Strategy:** Work with local lenders to establish a first-time homebuyer counseling program for obtaining credit and understanding the homebuying process.
  - **Strategy:** Identify areas with greater transit access to possibly focus redevelopment incentives and first-time homebuyer subsidies.
- ★ Monitor and balance rental vs. ownership trends to stabilize neighborhoods.
  - **Strategy:** Monitor short-term rental activity and regulate as needed.
  - **Strategy**: Evaluate the ability to utilize the Lake County Community Economic Development Department's (LCCEDD) low-interest loan program for owner-occupied home repairs.
- ★ Support adaptive reuse of older buildings into new residential options.
  - **Strategy:** Convert vacant offices along corridors into residential lofts.
  - **Strategy:** Promote mixed-use repositioning of existing big-box structures.
- ★ Promote energy-efficient, sustainable housing design.
  - **Strategy:** Partner with NIPSCO to promote energy-efficiency incentives.

QUALITY-OF-LIFE

OVERVIEW

The “What We Learned” analysis of this section shows that the Town benefits from an extensive network of parks, recreation amenities, and trails, but also faces challenges related to aging facilities, stormwater management, and the need to plan for climate resilience in floodplain-adjacent areas. These findings align with “What We Heard” from residents and stakeholders, who emphasized the importance of accessible parks, updated playgrounds, improved walkability, and more community events for all ages. Public engagement feedback also highlighted concerns about outdated facilities, the need for better branding and communications, and a strong desire for multi-generational recreational opportunities.

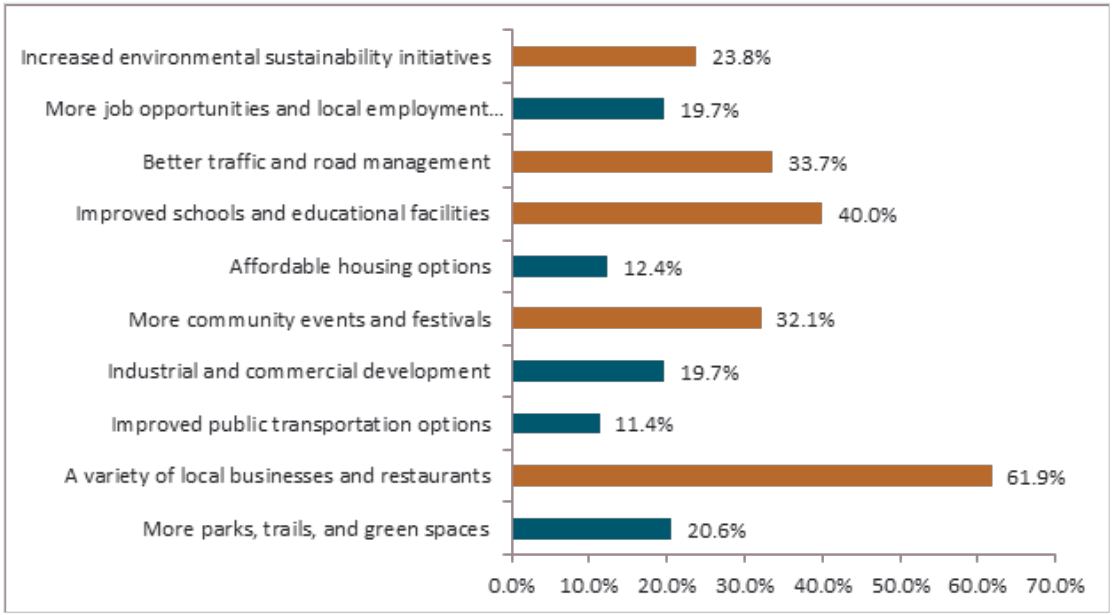
WHAT WE LEARNED?

- The Town of Highland has a strong park and recreation system. There are 21 parks, a Fieldhouse, a Fitness Center, and an extensive trail network that form a major foundation for quality-of-life.
- Some floodplain areas along the Little Calumet River and the Cady Marsh Ditch require thoughtful land-use planning, stormwater management, and climate resilience planning.
- The Town has a higher diversity index (64) than most peer communities, creating opportunities for multicultural programming and events.
- Existing park facilities, stormwater systems, streets, and utilities need reinvestment to maintain service reliability and community satisfaction.

WHAT WE HEARD?

- Highland’s parks, trails, and co**mmunity events** are valued assets; however, many facilities, such as playgrounds, are outdated or non-ADA-**compliant**.
- According to Town residents, community events (Fourth of July Festival, BBQ Fest) and recreation amenities attract residents and visitors.
- Stakeholders emphasized the importance of walkability, safe streets for children, and accessibility for seniors.
- There is strong support for multi-generational amenities, including senior programs and updated playgrounds for children under 5.
- Community pride and downtown presentation are areas of concern; stakeholders suggested branding improvements and enhanced communication with residents.
- Survey respondents emphasized the need for community programming, including farmers’ markets, festivals, car shows, outdoor dining, and family-friendly events.

Survey Question: What would you like to see more of in the future of Highland? (Select up to 3)



WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Community engagement methods, internal meetings, and analysis of existing conditions shaped the objectives and strategies of this section. The objectives and strategies identified for the Quality-of-life section are designed to guide the Town in enhancing its quality-of-life by investing in well-maintained parks and public spaces, expanding recreational and cultural programming, and protecting green spaces and natural areas. These objectives and strategies work together to sustain Highland as a vibrant, active, and welcoming community.

Objectives & Strategies

- ★ Upgrade park facilities, playgrounds, and trails for all ages.
  - **Strategy:** Implement recommendations listed in the Town of Highland Parks Master Plan.
  - **Strategy:** Create a continuous riverfront corridor.
  - **Strategy:** Coordinate with Lake County Parks to create regional trail connections.
- ★ Protect and expand green space, floodplains, and natural areas.
  - **Strategy:** Identify underutilized natural areas for potential recreational use.
  - **Strategy:** Ensure redevelopment areas contribute their fair share to green space and recreational opportunities.
- ★ Strengthen Highland's cultural programming, festivals, and brand.
  - **Strategy:** Develop a year-round event series at the downtown plaza.
- ★ Invest in resilient infrastructure for stormwater and climate adaptation.
  - **Strategy:** Develop a GIS database of stormwater management assets and conditions.
  - **Strategy:** Incorporate resilience criteria into CIPP prioritization.
- ★ Ensure transparent, accountable decision-making in community investments.
  - **Strategy:** Continue to live-stream and record public meetings.
  - **Strategy:** Implement a top-to-bottom update of the Town's website to ensure ease of use and transparency.
  - **Strategy:** Publish annual reports on community investments.

CASE STUDY: INTEGRATED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, PROGRAMMING, AND TRANSPARENCY

Downtown Programming and Community Identity

Many communities use centrally located public spaces to host recurring events that activate downtown areas year-round. Establishing a consistent, year-round event series, such as concerts, cultural festivals, holiday celebrations, farmers' markets, or family-friendly programming, can help build a recognizable community brand while supporting local businesses and encouraging repeat visitation.

A planned and branded downtown event series allows residents to anticipate programming, strengthens Highland's identity as a gathering place, and provides opportunities to celebrate local culture and history. Over time, these events become part of the community's identity and help reinforce a positive perception of the downtown area.

Transparency Through Digital Streaming

Clear and accessible communication is essential to maintaining public trust in community investments. Many municipalities support transparency by livestreaming and recording public meetings, ensuring that residents who cannot attend in person still have access to local decision-making processes. Archiving these recordings on the town website further enhances accountability and long-term access.

A comprehensive update to the Town's website can serve as the central hub for community engagement and transparency. An effective municipal website clearly organizes information related to public meetings, budgets, capital projects, events, and town services. Improving ease of use enables residents to quickly find relevant information, thereby reinforcing confidence in local government operations.

Annual Reporting and Accountability

Publishing annual reports on community investments is another best practice that supports transparency and accountability. These reports typically summarize completed and ongoing projects, financial investments, community outcomes, and future priorities. When paired with clear visuals and accessible language, annual reports help residents understand how public funds are being used and how projects align with broader community goals.

Annual reporting also provides an opportunity to highlight successes related to downtown programming, infrastructure investments, and community initiatives, reinforcing Highland's brand and commitment to responsible governance.

Example: Town of Whitestown, Indiana

The Town of Whitestown, Indiana, serves as an example of how municipalities can effectively combine community programming with transparent communication and digital accessibility. Whitestown's website serves as a user-friendly platform, offering easy access to town meetings, development updates, community events, and public information. The site clearly communicates the town's priorities and investments, serving as a primary tool for resident engagement.

In addition, Whitestown emphasizes consistent community programming and utilizes digital platforms to promote events, share updates, and document public decision-making processes. This coordinated approach strengthens community identity while ensuring that residents have a clear understanding of how decisions are made and resources are allocated.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY & PUBLIC INVESTMENT

OVERVIEW

The “What We Learned” findings emphasize the importance of strategically utilizing TIF districts, diversifying the Town’s retail-dependent economic base, and enhancing transparency regarding capital planning and redevelopment expenditures. These findings align closely with “What We Heard” from residents, who expressed the need for clear communication, responsible budgeting, and prioritizing maintenance of existing infrastructure before pursuing new projects.

WHAT WE LEARNED?

- ★ Three TIF districts provide redevelopment tools, but they must be used strategically on high-impact, high-value sites.
- ★ Highland’s economic base is heavily tied to retail sectors that are vulnerable to market shifts; diversifying the tax base is essential.
- ★ The Existing Conditions Report highlights the importance of transparent communication regarding capital planning, redevelopment decisions, and public spending.

WHAT WE HEARD?

- ★ Residents expressed a strong desire for the transparent and accountable use of public funds.
- ★ Many survey comments emphasized the importance of maintaining existing infrastructure before funding new projects, including roads, sidewalks, parks, and public buildings.
- ★ Residents want improved communication and engagement, including notifications about projects, print newsletters, and digital tools for reporting issues.
- ★ There is interest in streamlined services, such as online utility payments, easier permitting, and grant programs to support private property improvements.
- ★ Survey respondents repeatedly called for balanced investments that enhance the quality-of-life while preserving the character of the Highland area.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Community engagement methods, internal meetings, and analysis of existing conditions shaped the objectives and strategies of this section. The objectives and strategies identified for the Fiscal Responsibility & Public Investment section are designed to guide the Town to create a transparent, accountable, and sustainable public investment framework that supports long-term fiscal health and community confidence. With the objectives and strategies identified for this section, the Town aims to prioritize investments that maximize public benefit, use redevelopment tools wisely, maintain essential infrastructure, and clearly communicate decisions and outcomes to the community.

It should be noted that the Redevelopment Plan identifies significant infrastructure and engineering constraints that directly influence redevelopment feasibility, including:

- Utility corridors (electric transmission, pipelines, water mains)
- Limited right-of-way along key arterials
- Traffic capacity and safety requirements
- Floodplain and drainage considerations

Redevelopment concepts must be evaluated against real-world constraints before implementation, prioritizing feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and long-term maintainability.

Objectives & Strategies

- Establish a Return on Investment (ROI) framework for redevelopment incentives and partnerships.
  - **Strategy:** Incentive decisions and public participation in redevelopment projects shall be evaluated in conjunction with the development feasibility principles and “but-for” framework outlined in the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan.
  - **Strategy**: Require a standardized fiscal impact worksheet for all proposed incentives, evaluating life-cycle service costs, projected tax revenues, and alignment with redevelopment priorities. This worksheet will be used to assess proposed projects based on factors such as anticipated economic impact, alignment with Priority Redevelopment Areas, infrastructure efficiency, fiscal return, and consistency with adopted plans. This framework is intended to support transparent, defensible decisions about the use of public incentives.
- Use TIF and public-private tools strategically on high-impact sites.
  - **Strategy:** Maintain an open spreadsheet that shows TIF revenues and obligations, as well as the expiration dates of existing districts.
  - **Strategy:** Develop a CIPP that incorporates high-value infrastructure projects.

- Align redevelopment with long-term service and infrastructure costs.
  - **Strategy:** Develop a CIPP that incorporates high-value infrastructure projects.
  - **Strategy:** Develop a CIPP dashboard that will provide a publicly accessible summary of planned and ongoing capital projects, including project status, funding sources, and alignment with Comprehensive Plan priorities. This tool is intended to improve communication with residents and stakeholders while supporting internal coordination across departments.
  - **Strategy:** Incorporate life-cycle cost analysis into development review, prioritizing projects that reduce net infrastructure burdens and minimize long-term operational and maintenance costs.
- Publish transparent reports on redevelopment decisions and outcomes.
  - **Strategy:** Produce an annual "State of Redevelopment Report" summarizing incentive use, TIF district performance, major redevelopment outcomes, and progress toward Comprehensive Plan goals.
  - **Strategy**: Create a public-facing online dashboard tracking active projects, capital investments, and performance indicators such as infrastructure condition, TIF revenues, and project timelines.
- Build community trust through clear, accountable governance practices.
  - **Strategy:** Establish a community notification protocol for major capital projects, including mailed notices, website updates, and social media announcements, to improve transparency and communication.
  - **Strategy**: Expand digital tools, including online permit tracking, service request portals, and budget visualization tools, to make government operations more accessible and user-friendly.



IMPLEMENTATION

The Implementation chapter translates the Comprehensive Plan's goals, objectives, and strategies into a coordinated program of actions for the Town of Highland. As a built-out community with limited expansion opportunities, Highland's future success relies on its ability to reinvest in existing assets, modernize its infrastructure, encourage targeted redevelopment, and manage resources responsibly. Implementation, therefore, focuses on prioritizing the most impactful actions: those that support housing diversity, strengthen key corridors and Downtown, enhance mobility and safety, improve quality-of-life amenities, and promote transparent and fiscally responsible governance.

This chapter outlines the key steps required to implement the Plan's recommendations, including the responsible parties, timeframes, funding sources, and sequencing considerations. It also highlights cross-departmental coordination, opportunities for public–private partnerships, and the role of regional agencies such as NIRPC, NICTD, Lake County, and utility providers. Together, these elements ensure that the Plan moves from vision to action.

This Implementation chapter is structured to provide both near-term, actionable steps and longer-term strategic direction. The plan distinguishes between:

- **Critical Path Strategies (CPS):** A focused set of high-priority actions intended for implementation within the first three to five years following plan adoption. These strategies include detailed, step-by-step "Actions to Follow" to guide immediate execution.
- **Supporting Strategies:** Broader policy-aligned actions that contribute to achieving the plan's goals over time. While these strategies are described at a higher level, they are intended to be advanced through annual work programs, capital improvement planning, and future subarea or redevelopment planning efforts.

To support implementation across all strategies, the Town will apply a tiered sequencing framework, organizing actions into short-term, mid-term, and long-term time horizons. This framework provides flexibility while ensuring that all strategies can be translated into specific actions as resources, partnerships, and opportunities evolve.

PURPOSE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the Implementation Framework is to ensure that the Town's investments and policy decisions over the next 10–20 years are aligned with community priorities and grounded in fiscal responsibility. Specifically, the framework is designed to:

- ★ Prioritize actions that deliver the highest return on investment and long-term community benefit.
- ★ Coordinate land use, mobility, housing, economic development, and capital planning decisions.
- ★ Focus redevelopment and reinvestment in areas where infrastructure capacity, market conditions, and community need align.
- ★ Support transparent decision-making through clear timelines, annual reporting, and measurable performance indicators.
- ★ Develop a tool that enables staff, decision-makers, and community members to track progress, adjust priorities, and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

REDEVELOPMENT PLAN INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK

The Town of Highland Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan, the February 2026 Draft, serves as the Town's primary implementation document for corridor-focused reinvestment and catalytic redevelopment. While this Comprehensive Plan establishes overarching policy direction, land use intent, and investment priorities, the Redevelopment Plan provides:

- ★ Site-specific development concepts and test fits
- ★ Corridor-level design guidance and cross-sections
- ★ Infrastructure and access considerations
- ★ Market positioning and redevelopment strategies
- ★ Implementation tools, including regulatory, incentive, and capital investment strategies

TYPES OF IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

Implementation actions fall into five categories, each essential to realizing the vision of the Comprehensive Plan:

- **Subarea and Redevelopment Plan Implementation**
  - Execution of site-specific redevelopment strategies, land assembly, infrastructure coordination, and development partnerships consistent with the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan.
- **Policy and Regulatory Updates**
  - Updates to zoning, subdivision regulations, design standards, parking requirements, and other development controls to align with the Plan's goals.
- **Capital Improvements**
  - Infrastructure, facility, and public space investments are integrated into the Town's Capital Improvement Plan and Program (CIPP).
- **Programs and Initiatives**
  - Ongoing or new programs that support economic development, housing, neighborhood stabilization, mobility, and quality-of-life.
- **Partnership and Coordination Efforts**
  - Collaboration with other public agencies, regional partners, businesses, educational institutions, and nonprofits.
- **Operational Enhancements and Governance**
  - Improvements to Town processes, communication practices, budgeting transparency, and interdepartmental coordination.

It should be noted that the Redevelopment Plan organizes implementation into four primary categories:

- Regulatory (corresponding to "policy and regulatory updates" above;
- Incentives (corresponding to "programs/initiatives" and "partnership/coordination" above);
- Leading Public Investments (corresponding to "capital improvements", above); and
- Capacity Building (corresponding to "operational enhancements/governance", above).

Below are tables of recommended strategies; some of these are elaborated in more detail in the following "Critical Path Strategies" section. The strategies are organized into short-term (0–3 years), mid-term (3–7 years), and long-term (7+ years) actions. This sequencing reflects the relative timing, complexity, and resource requirements of each strategy. While Critical Path Strategies are prioritized for near-term implementation, all strategies are intended to be advanced over time through ongoing planning, budgeting, and redevelopment efforts. The cost level icons "$", "$$", and "$$$" are meant to give a rough sense of overall resource requirements.

Topic Area 1: Land Use & Growth Management

Strategy	Description	Short-Term (0–3 Years)	Mid-Term (3–7 Years)	Long-Term (7+ Years)	Lead / Partners	Cost Level
Adopt a Modernized Zoning Code (CPS 1)	Align zoning with redevelopment and housing needs	Initiate zoning audit; draft updated ordinance; engage stakeholders	Adopt and begin implementation of updated code; monitor early outcomes	Periodically update code to reflect market and policy changes	Town; Plan Commission; Consultant	$$
Create Land Use Policy Map & Character Districts	Guide reinvestment and land use decisions	Finalize and adopt map and districts; integrate into planning processes	Refine districts based on redevelopment activity	Periodically update to reflect evolving conditions	Town	$
Utilize and periodically update the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan	Unlock strategic redevelopment	Apply plan to priority sites; coordinate with ongoing projects	Update plan to reflect redevelopment progress and new opportunities	Maintain as a living document for ongoing redevelopment	Town; Redevelopment Commission; Consultant	$$–$$$
Update Design Standards for Corridors & Node Areas	Improve visual character and consistency	Initiate design standard updates; coordinate with zoning revisions	Adopt and implement updated standards	Refine standards based on redevelopment outcomes	Town; Consultant	$$
Launch Annual Development Trends & Buildout Report	Track land use performance	Establish reporting framework; publish initial report	Continue annual reporting; refine metrics	Maintain long-term monitoring and policy adjustment	Town	$

Topic Area 2: Corridor & Downtown Reinvestment

Strategy	Description	Short-Term (0–3 Years)	Mid-Term (3–7 Years)	Long-Term (7+ Years)	Lead / Partners	Cost Level
Complete Streetscape Master Plan (CPS 1)	Align corridor reinvestment with unified vision	Prepare master plan; identify priority projects	Implement phased streetscape improvements	Complete corridor buildout and long-term maintenance	Town; Consultant; Partners	$$–$$$
Establish Downtown Management District (CPS 2)	Coordinate branding, events, maintenance	Define structure; adopt framework; initiate operations	Expand programming and maintenance functions	Sustain long-term operations and funding	Town; Businesses	$–$$
Vacant & Underutilized Buildings Initiative (CPS 3)	Return aging buildings to use	Inventory properties; develop outreach program	Facilitate redevelopment through partnerships and incentives	Maintain ongoing reinvestment program	Town; Redevelopment Commission	$$
Facade & Signage Improvement Program	Support small business reinvestment	Design program; secure funding; launch pilot	Expand program participation	Maintain as ongoing reinvestment tool	Town	$$
Corridor Branding & Wayfinding System	Strengthen identity and navigation	Develop branding and signage plan	Install signage and wayfinding elements	Update and maintain system	Town; Consultant	$$

Topic Area 3: MOBILITY & SAFETY

Strategy	Description	Short-Term (0–3 Years)	Mid-Term (3–7 Years)	Long-Term (7+ Years)	Lead / Partners	Cost Level
Implement SS4A Recommendations (CPS 1)	Improve safety and reduce crashes	Initiate priority safety projects	Continue phased safety improvements	Maintain and expand safety program	Town; INDOT	$$–$$$
Identify Sidewalk and Trail Gaps (CPS 2)	Guide connectivity investments	Conduct inventory and prioritization	Implement priority gap projects	Complete network connectivity	Town	$–$$$
Adopt Complete Streets Ordinance (CPS 3)	Ensure multimodal consideration	Draft and adopt ordinance	Integrate into project review processes	Maintain and refine policy	Town	$
Improve School-Area Safety	Protect vulnerable users	Implement crossings and calming measures	Expand improvements to additional locations	Maintain safety improvements	Town; Schools	$$
Traffic Calming Toolkit	Standardize neighborhood tools	Develop toolkit and policies	Implement across neighborhoods	Update toolkit as needed	Town; Consultant	$$

Topic Area 4: HOUSING CHOICE

Strategy	Description	Short-Term (0–3 Years)	Mid-Term (3–7 Years)	Long-Term (7+ Years)	Lead / Partners	Cost Level
Zone for Missing Middle Housing (CPS 1)	Expand housing diversity	Amend zoning; identify target areas	Encourage development through incentives	Achieve broader housing mix	Town; Developers	$–$$
Adaptive Reuse for Housing (CPS 3)	Add housing through reuse	Identify candidate buildings; update policies	Support redevelopment projects	Expand reuse opportunities	Town; Developers	$$–$$$
First-Time Homebuyer Programs	Support workforce housing	Identify funding and partners	Implement programs	Expand participation	Town; Partners	$$
Universal Design Standards	Improve accessibility	Introduce guidelines and incentives	Integrate into development review	Normalize across housing stock	Town	$

Topic Area 5: QUALITY-OF-LIFE

Strategy	Description	Short-Term (0–3 Years)	Mid-Term (3–7 Years)	Long-Term (7+ Years)	Lead / Partners	Cost Level
Event & Programming Strategy (CPS 1)	Activate public spaces	Develop and launch programming plan	Expand events and partnerships	Sustain long-term programming	Town	$–$$
Stormwater & Green Infrastructure (CPS 2)	Improve resilience	Conduct assessments; design solutions	Implement priority projects	Expand system improvements	Town; Consultant	$$–$$$
Park Facility Modernization	Improve recreation	Upgrade priority facilities	Continue phased improvements	Maintain and expand system	Town	$$–$$$
Trail Amenity Expansion	Enhance trail system	Install lighting, signage, safety features	Expand amenities network	Maintain and upgrade system	Town	$$
Public Art & Placemaking	Strengthen identity	Initiate public art program	Expand installations	Maintain and refresh features	Town	$$

Topic Area 6: FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY & TRANSPARENT INVESTMENT

Strategy	Description	Short-Term (0–3 Years)	Mid-Term (3–7 Years)	Long-Term (7+ Years)	Lead / Partners	Cost Level
ROI Tool for Incentives (CPS 1)	Evaluate redevelopment benefits	Develop tools and criteria	Apply and refine tools	Institutionalize tool	Town	$
Public-Facing CIPP Dashboard (CPS 2)	Improve transparency	Develop dashboard	Integrate with budgeting	Maintain and expand system	Town	$–$$
Annual Redevelopment Report (CPS 3)	Track progress	Establish reporting framework	Publish annually	Maintain reporting system	Town	$
Fix-It-First Policy	Prioritize maintenance	Adopt policy	Integrate into budgeting	Maintain policy application	Town	$
Long-Term Revenue Strategy	Ensure sustainability	Conduct financial analysis	Implement revenue strategies	Adjust for long-term needs	Town; Consultant	$$

CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES

Critical Path Strategies are the highest-priority initiatives that the Town should advance in the next three to five years. These strategies were selected because they:

- ★ Align closely with community priorities identified through public engagement.
- ★ Address immediate needs or opportunities.
- ★ Provide strong fiscal and quality-of-life benefits.
- ★ Lay the groundwork for long-term reinvestment and redevelopment.

The next section of this chapter identifies the Critical Path Strategies for each major topic area: Land Use, Corridor and Downtown Reinvestment, Mobility and Safety, Housing Choice, Quality-of-life, and Fiscal Responsibility, along with responsible parties, supporting partners, funding sources, and anticipated timeframes.

1. LAND USE & GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Strategy: Adopt a Modernized Zoning Code Focused on Redevelopment and Infill

Purpose: Align land use regulations with the Town's redevelopment goals, housing diversity needs, and corridor priorities.

Justification: Much of the Town's zoning framework was written for a community that was growing outward, rather than one that is now fully developed and focused on reinvestment, infill, and redevelopment. The existing code does not adequately support mixed-use opportunities along major corridors, adaptive reuse of older commercial buildings, or the diverse housing options needed for seniors, young adults, and working families. It also lacks the clarity, flexibility, and design standards necessary to guide redevelopment in a way that protects neighborhood character while encouraging economic vitality. Updating the zoning code will align local regulations with contemporary market conditions, infrastructure realities, and community expectations, providing a transparent, predictable, and fiscally responsible framework for future private investment.

Lead Agency:

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Conduct a zoning code audit and peer benchmarking to identify outdated standards, legal risks, and best practices for redevelopment, housing diversity, and corridor reinvestment.
- ★ Align the zoning framework with the Comprehensive Plan by evaluating district structure, permitted uses, development standards, and character districts.
- ★ Engage stakeholders and users (including developers, businesses, neighborhoods, institutions, and staff) to identify real-world challenges and opportunities.
- ★ Draft and refine the updated zoning code, including districts, use tables, standards, graphics, and procedures, based on technical review, case testing, and public feedback.
- ★ Prepare and adopt the final code package, including transition provisions for nonconformities and existing approvals.

Related Plan Themes:

Land Use and Growth Management

Time Frame:18-24 Months

Estimated Cost: Budget (consultant): $75,000

2. CORRIDOR & DOWNTOWN REINVESTMENT

Strategy: Implement Priority Redevelopment Sites

Purpose: Advance catalytic redevelopment in key locations.

Justification: As a fully built-out community, Highland's long-term growth depends on strategic reinvestment rather than outward expansion. Several vacant, underutilized, and aging properties, particularly along key commercial corridors and within Downtown, represent high-value opportunities to catalyze broader economic revitalization, strengthen community identity, and improve the Town's tax base. However, without a coordinated redevelopment strategy, these sites may remain stagnant, continue to detract from community character, or redevelop in ways that do not align with local priorities. By identifying and advancing priority redevelopment sites, the Town can focus public resources where they will have the greatest impact, reduce development uncertainty, coordinate infrastructure investments, and attract private partners to deliver transformative projects that support corridor reinvestment, Downtown revitalization, and long-term economic competitiveness.

Lead Agency:

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Public Works

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Establish development strategies for Town-controlled sites
- ★ Initiate land assembly where needed
- ★ Coordinate infrastructure and access improvements
- ★ Issue RFPs aligned with redevelopment concepts
- ★ Execute development agreements before land disposition

Related Plan Themes:

Corridor and Downtown Reinvestment

Time Frame: Special

Estimated Cost: Special

Strategy: Complete a Streetscape Master Plan for the Three Priority Corridors

Purpose: Reposition Indianapolis Blvd., Ridge Road, and Kennedy Avenue as attractive, pedestrian-oriented corridors.

Justification: Indianapolis Boulevard, Ridge Road, and Kennedy Avenue serve as Highland's primary commercial and mobility corridors, but much of their existing streetscape is aging, visually inconsistent, and oriented toward past traffic patterns rather than today's expectations for walkability, safety, and high-quality reinvestment. Residents and stakeholders consistently identified these corridors as areas in need of improved lighting, sidewalks, landscaping, façades, and overall appearance to create more welcoming gateways and support strong commercial activity. A coordinated Streetscape Master Plan will provide a unified design vision, establish consistent standards, and guide phased infrastructure upgrades, ensuring that future public investment maximizes return and catalyzes private redevelopment. The plan will also strengthen Highland's identity, improve multimodal connectivity, and enhance the everyday experience for residents, visitors, and businesses.

Lead Agency:

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Public Works

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Define corridor study areas and document existing conditions, including safety data, multimodal needs, right-of-way constraints, and key destinations.
- ★ Develop preliminary design alternatives and corridor identity concepts (streetscape elements, branding, multimodal treatments, intersections, gateways).
- ★ Engage stakeholders and the public through targeted outreach and visual workshops to refine design priorities and preferences.
- ★ Evaluate and select preferred concepts based on feasibility, safety, cost, ROI, and coordination with INDOT, NIRPC, utilities, and redevelopment plans.
- ★ Prepare the final Streetscape Master Plan, which includes a design manual, a phased implementation strategy, capital cost estimates, funding sources, and responsibilities.

Related Plan Themes:

Corridor and Downtown Reinvestment

Time Frame: Begin within 12 months; phased implementation over 3–5 years

★ **Estimated Cost:** $50,000 per corridor

Strategy: Launch a "Vacant & Underutilized Buildings Initiative" Phase 1

Purpose: Revitalize aging commercial properties to bring them back into productive use.

Justification: Aging commercial buildings, vacant storefronts, and underperforming sites along Highland's major corridors and in its commercial districts significantly impact community character, economic vitality, and public perception. Public engagement repeatedly identified vacant buildings as "eyesores" and priority locations for reinvestment, especially along Ridge Road, Kennedy Avenue, and Indianapolis Boulevard. These properties often face challenges such as outdated layouts, deferred maintenance, code deficiencies, or ownership uncertainty, which deter reinvestment. A Vacant and Underutilized Buildings Initiative provides a proactive, coordinated strategy to identify, evaluate, and reposition these properties for productive use. By combining data analysis, pre-inspection programs, targeted incentives, and outreach to property owners and prospective tenants, the Town can accelerate redevelopment, improve corridor aesthetics, support small business growth, and increase the fiscal productivity of key sites.

Lead Agency:

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Create a comprehensive inventory of vacant, underutilized, and obsolete buildings, including parcel data, zoning, building conditions, ownership, utilities, and redevelopment potential.
- ★ Map the properties in GIS to identify clusters along priority corridors and near redevelopment sites.
- ★ Develop a vacancy typology (e.g., long-term vacant, functionally obsolete, code-deficient, strategic redevelopment opportunity).
- ★ Conduct parcel-level assessments to document façade conditions, structural issues, parking/access, and potential reuse constraints.
- ★ Engage downtown business owners individually to understand their goals, challenges, and willingness to participate in reinvestment efforts.
- ★ (Subsequent phases): Target redevelopment incentives to priority sites identified in the inventory.

Related Plan Themes:

Corridor and Downtown Reinvestment

Time Frame:18-24 Months

Estimated Cost: Free (Phase 1)

3. MOBILITY & SAFETY

Strategy: Implement Priority Recommendations from the SS4A Safety Study

Purpose: Reduce crashes and improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

Justification: Highland's SS4A Safety Study identifies targeted improvements to reduce crashes, enhance walkability and bike access, and address the high-injury network along major corridors, including Kennedy Avenue, Indianapolis Boulevard, and Ridge Road. Public engagement for the Comprehensive Plan strongly reinforced the need for safer pedestrian crossings, traffic calming measures near neighborhoods and schools, and improved conditions for trails and sidewalks. Implementing the priority recommendations of the SS4A Study will enable the Town to move quickly on high-impact, data-driven projects that are fundable and aligned with Vision Zero principles. These actions will not only reduce serious injuries and fatalities but also support corridor reinvestment, enhance connectivity to Downtown and the Erie Lackawanna Trail, and improve safety for all users, residents, visitors, students, seniors, and people walking, biking, and driving.

Lead Agency:

Public Works

Police Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Select the top priority SS4A projects based on crash data, public input, feasibility, and alignment with corridor reinvestment goals.
- ★ Develop preliminary engineering concepts for selected projects, focusing on crosswalk upgrades, traffic calming measures, bike accommodations, and intersection safety enhancements.
- ★ Pursue implementation funding by preparing competitive applications for NIRPC TIP, SS4A Implementation, Safe Routes to School, and HSIP programs.
- ★ Implement quick-build safety improvements (such as high-visibility crossings, temporary curb extensions, or delineators) at the highest-risk locations.
- ★ Monitor results and adjust as needed, using before-and-after safety data and public feedback to refine or expand treatments.

Related Plan Themes:

Mobility and Safety

Time Frame: Immediate (0–12 months) and ongoing

Estimated Cost: Depends upon improvements

Strategy: Identify and Prioritize Sidewalk and Trail Gaps

Purpose: To create a clear, data-driven framework for closing Highland's most critical sidewalk and trail gaps, ensuring that limited resources are directed toward projects with the greatest impact on safety, connectivity, accessibility, and quality-of-life.

Justification: Highland's active transportation network boasts strong assets, particularly the Erie Lackawanna Trail and a well-distributed park system; however, sidewalk and trail gaps continue to limit mobility, walkability, and safe access to key destinations. Public input emphasized that the absence of sidewalks on streets such as Ridge Road, Kleinman, Wirth, and Johnston makes walking difficult or unsafe, particularly for children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. The rebuilt Kennedy Avenue bridge and regional trail connections create new opportunities that require coordinated planning. Identifying and prioritizing sidewalk and trail gaps will enable the Town to allocate funding efficiently, pursue competitive grants, coordinate with regional partners, and develop a phased construction program that systematically improves safety and connectivity across Highland.

Lead Agency:

Public Works

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Parks Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Create a comprehensive GIS inventory of all sidewalk and trail segments, including width, condition, ADA compliance, lighting, and gaps.
- ★ Develop prioritization criteria based on safety (crashes, speed data), connectivity (schools, parks, downtown, transit), equity, feasibility, and public demand.
- ★ Score and map priority gaps using the adopted criteria to identify the highest-impact locations for short- and medium-term improvements.
- ★ Coordinate gap priorities with partner agencies (NIRPC, Lake County Parks, NICTD, adjacent municipalities) to align with regional trail and mobility initiatives.
- ★ Adopt a phased plan that identifies immediate "quick-win" projects, medium-term connections, and long-term network investments to guide capital budgeting and grant applications.

Related Plan Themes:

Mobility and Safety

Time Frame: 18-36 months

Estimated Cost: Free (for planning)

Strategy: Adopt a Complete Streets Ordinance

Purpose: Ensure that all capital projects consider the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and accessibility.

Justification: Highland's major corridors, such as Indianapolis Boulevard, Kennedy Avenue, and Ridge Road, carry significant regional traffic but often lack the multimodal features needed to safely accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and individuals with mobility limitations. Public engagement revealed strong concern about speeding, crossing safety, sidewalk conditions, and the lack of consistent pedestrian facilities near schools, parks, and commercial areas. A Complete Streets Ordinance establishes a formal policy that requires all transportation projects, new construction, reconstruction, and major maintenance to consider the needs of all users from the outset. Adoption of this ordinance will help Highland align its infrastructure investments with community priorities, improve safety outcomes, support corridor reinvestment, and enhance competitiveness for state and federal funding programs that increasingly prioritize compliance with Complete Streets standards.

Lead Agency:

Town Council

Public Works

Building Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Draft a Complete Streets policy framework based on national best practices and tailored to Highland's corridor conditions, safety issues, and multimodal needs.
- ★ Engage key stakeholders, including Public Works, Police, Planning, Parks, NIRPC, and the public, to review goals, design principles, and implementation requirements.
- ★ Develop project evaluation criteria to guide the application of Complete Streets elements (e.g., sidewalks, crossings, bike facilities, transit access, ADA features) across different street types.
- ★ Prepare final ordinance language for Plan Commission review and Town Council adoption, including procedures for exceptions, reporting, and performance monitoring.

Related Plan Themes:

Mobility and Safety

Time Frame: 12 months

Estimated Cost: Free

4. HOUSING CHOICE

Strategy: Zone for Missing Middle Housing Near Corridors and Downtown

Purpose: Provide more attainable, walkable housing options.

Justification: Highland's housing stock is dominated by single-dwelling homes, with very limited options for seniors, young adults, smaller households, and workforce residents. Public input highlighted the need for more attainable housing choices, especially near walkable amenities, parks, schools, Downtown, and transit connections. At the same time, corridor-adjacent areas and neighborhood edges offer locations where modest increases in density can support economic vitality without disrupting established residential blocks. Zoning for Missing Middle housing, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and small multi-dwelling buildings provides opportunities for aging residents to downsize locally, for new households to enter the community, and for reinvestment to occur in areas with strong infrastructure capacity. Updating zoning to allow these housing types in targeted locations supports neighborhood stability, improves affordability, and aligns with Highland's long-term goals for reinvestment and fiscal sustainability.

Lead Agency:

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Identify strategic areas near corridors and Downtown where Missing Middle housing is compatible with existing neighborhood scale and has access to parks, schools, transit, and commercial amenities.
- ★ Review and update zoning districts to permit duplexes, townhomes, small multi-dwelling units, and mixed-use residential as permitted or special uses in appropriate locations.
- ★ Develop clear design and compatibility standards (including height, scale, parking, buffering, and lot configuration) to ensure that new Missing Middle housing integrates seamlessly with adjacent residential character.
- ★ Prepare illustrative examples and visualizations to help residents, decision-makers, and developers understand how these housing types can be integrated sensitively.
- ★ Adopt zoning amendments through public review (Plan Commission ➔ Town Council) and guide developers and homeowners on how to utilize the updated standards.

Related Plan Themes:

Housing Choice

Time Frame: Within the zoning code update

Estimated Cost: Included in zoning code update (above)

Strategy: Support Adaptive Reuse of Commercial Structures for Housing

Purpose: Activate aging retail centers and expand housing supply.

Justification: Highland's aging commercial corridors contain numerous buildings, particularly older retail centers, vacant offices, and obsolete storefronts, that no longer meet contemporary market demands. At the same time, the Town faces a shortage of diverse and attainable housing options for seniors, young adults, and smaller households. Adaptive reuse of these commercial structures for residential purposes can help address both challenges, converting underperforming properties into productive, tax-generating housing while reducing land consumption and strengthening corridor vitality. Public input indicated strong interest in revitalizing vacant buildings and bringing more residents closer to Downtown, transit, trails, and neighborhood amenities. By enabling and encouraging adaptive reuse, Highland can modernize its corridors, expand housing choice, and catalyze reinvestment at key nodes.

Lead Agency:

Building Department

Redevelopment Department

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Identify commercial buildings suitable for adaptive reuse based on vacancy, building condition, structural feasibility, access to infrastructure, and proximity to amenities.
- ★ Amend zoning and building regulations to explicitly permit residential or mixed-use conversions, including flexibility for floor area, parking, setbacks, and adaptive reuse design standards.
- ★ Develop an adaptive reuse guidance packet outlining code requirements, incentives, design expectations, and example projects to assist developers and property owners.
- ★ Target incentives strategically, such as TIF support, tax abatement, or expedited review, for high-impact reuse projects in priority corridors and redevelopment districts.
- ★ Engage developers, architects, and property owners through outreach, feasibility workshops, or tours to build interest and momentum around reuse opportunities.

Related Plan Themes:

Housing Choice

Time Frame: Begin within 18 months

Estimated Cost: Free for planning; incentives vary

5. QUALITY-OF-LIFE

Strategy: Create a Town-wide Event and Programming Strategy

Purpose: Strengthen identity, culture, and community connection.

Justification: Highland's community events, such as the Fourth of July Festival and local seasonal activities, are among the town's most valued assets, consistently celebrated for fostering pride, connection, and a strong sense of place through public engagement. However, residents also expressed a desire for more year-round programming, family-friendly activities, multicultural events, and opportunities that animate Downtown and other public spaces. A Town-wide Event and Programming Strategy will create a coordinated approach to planning, marketing, and hosting events across seasons and locations, ensuring that programming is inclusive, aligned with community interests, and designed to support local businesses and redevelopment goals. This strategy will strengthen Highland's cultural identity, activate gathering spaces, and provide consistent opportunities for residents of all ages to engage, celebrate, and connect.

Lead Agency:

Parks Department

Redevelopment Department

Community Partners

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Conduct a community-wide inventory and assessment of existing events, programming partners, venues, and logistical needs to understand current strengths and gaps.
- ★ Engage residents, businesses, and cultural organizations to identify desired event types, audiences, seasons, and locations, especially opportunities to activate Downtown.
- ★ Develop a year-round programming calendar that balances flagship events with smaller recurring activities (e.g., markets, concerts, pop-ups, fitness programs).
- ★ Establish a coordinated management framework clarifying roles, partnerships, staffing needs, and responsibilities for event planning, marketing, and operations.
- ★ Create a branding, marketing, and communications plan to promote events through digital platforms, signage, print materials, and partnerships with local organizations.

Related Plan Themes:

Quality-of-life

Time Frame: 12-24 months

Estimated Cost: N/A

Strategy: Develop a Stormwater Resilience and Green Infrastructure Program

Purpose: Address floodplain challenges along the Little Calumet River and Cady Marsh Ditch.

Justification: Highland's proximity to the Little Calumet River and the Cady Marsh Ditch, combined with aging stormwater systems and increasing precipitation variability, creates ongoing flooding and drainage concerns for residents and businesses. Public engagement highlighted stormwater management as a key priority, especially in neighborhoods adjacent to floodplains and areas where older infrastructure struggles to handle runoff. A coordinated Stormwater Resilience and Green Infrastructure Program will help the Town modernize its drainage systems, reduce localized flooding, improve water quality, and integrate sustainable practices into redevelopment and capital projects. This effort will also support long-term fiscal responsibility by reducing maintenance burdens and enhancing the resilience of public infrastructure in the face of changing climate conditions.

Lead Agency:

Public Works

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Conduct a systemwide assessment of stormwater infrastructure, including condition, capacity, drainage problem areas, and floodplain interactions along the Little Calumet River and Cady Marsh Ditch.
- ★ Develop green infrastructure design guidelines (e.g., bioswales, rain gardens, permeable pavements, detention retrofits) for use in capital projects and redevelopment sites.
- ★ Prioritize high-need locations for green infrastructure and drainage improvements based on flooding frequency, environmental benefit, cost-effectiveness, and co-benefits such as park enhancements.
- ★ Pursue external funding and partnerships, including IDEM grants, FEMA mitigation programs, and collaboration with Lake County, utility providers, and environmental organizations.
- ★ Integrate stormwater resilience criteria into the Capital Improvement Plan and Program (CIPP) to ensure that all major investments incorporate long-term drainage and resilience considerations.

Related Plan Themes:

Quality-of-life

Time Frame: 24-36 months

Estimated Cost: Free (for assessment and external funding); $50,000 for a consultant for design guidelines and high-need location identification

6. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY & TRANSPARENT INVESTMENT

Strategy: Create a Return on Investment (ROI) Tool for Incentives

Purpose: Prioritize projects that deliver measurable fiscal and community benefits.

Justification: As a built-out community with limited land for expansion, Highland must ensure that every redevelopment incentive, whether TIF support, tax abatement, or infrastructure participation, delivers a measurable community benefit. Public input emphasized the need for transparency, responsible budgeting, and clear communication about how public funds are used. An ROI tool will help the Town consistently evaluate incentives by comparing the long-term fiscal impact of proposed projects with the demands they place on public services and infrastructure. This tool will enable Highland to prioritize high-value redevelopment opportunities, enhance negotiations with developers, and foster public trust by demonstrating that incentives are awarded on the basis of objective, data-driven criteria. By adopting an ROI framework, the Town can align redevelopment decisions with its broader goals for economic vitality, corridor reinvestment, housing diversity, and fiscal sustainability.

Lead Agency:

Redevelopment Department

Clerk-Treasurer

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Define evaluation criteria, such as projected tax revenues, job creation, service and infrastructure costs, neighborhood impact, and alignment with Comprehensive Plan priorities.
- ★ Develop a standardized ROI model (spreadsheet or software-based) that quantifies fiscal return, net present value, breakeven timelines, and non-financial community benefits.
- ★ Test the tool on recent or pending redevelopment proposals to refine assumptions, calibrate cost factors, and ensure usability across different project types.
- ★ Adopt an incentive review policy requiring all redevelopment proposals requesting public support to complete the ROI analysis as part of the approval process.
- ★ Train staff, boards, and redevelopment partners on how to apply the tool, interpret results, and use ROI findings to inform incentive recommendations and negotiations.

Related Plan Themes:

Fiscal Responsibility and Transparent Investment

Time Frame: 12 months

Estimated Cost: $25,000 (for standardized ROI model)

Strategy: Develop a Public-Facing Capital Improvement Plan and Program (CIPP) Dashboard

Purpose: Improve transparency in spending, timelines, and project status.

Justification: Residents repeatedly emphasized the need for clearer communication about Town projects, spending, and long-term infrastructure priorities. As Highland directs more resources toward reinvestment, such as roads, utilities, stormwater, parks, corridors, and redevelopment, providing the public with an easy way to track ongoing and planned improvements becomes essential to building trust and maintaining accountability. A public-facing CIPP dashboard will offer a transparent view of capital projects, timelines, budgets, funding sources, and progress updates. By presenting information visually and in real-time, the dashboard will help residents understand where their tax dollars are going, how projects relate to broader community goals, and what improvements are forthcoming. It will also enhance internal coordination, improve grant readiness, and support data-driven decision-making across Town departments.

Lead Agency:

Public Works

Clerk-Treasurer

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Define dashboard content and data fields, including project descriptions, locations, costs, funding sources, timelines, and status indicators (planned, in progress, completed).
- ★ Compile and standardize project data across departments, including Public Works, Redevelopment, Parks, Utilities, and Clerk-Treasurer, to ensure consistent reporting.
- ★ Select a dashboard platform (web-based GIS, interactive map, or open-data tool) that supports visual displays, project filtering, and regular updates.
- ★ Design the dashboard interface, including maps, charts, lists, and narrative summaries, with a focus on clarity, accessibility, and ease of public use.
- ★ Launch the dashboard and establish an annual update cycle to ensure that new projects, status changes, and budget adjustments are consistently reflected.

Related Plan Themes:

Fiscal Responsibility and Transparent Investment

Time Frame: 18 months

Estimated Cost: IT Consultant

Strategy: Publish an Annual "State of Redevelopment and Infrastructure" Report

Purpose: Increase communication, accountability, and public engagement.

Justification: Public engagement has made clear that residents want greater transparency regarding town spending, redevelopment decisions, infrastructure conditions, and project progress. As Highland focuses on reinvestment rather than expansion, communicating how and where funds are allocated, and what outcomes those investments produce, becomes essential to sustaining community trust. An annual "State of Redevelopment and Infrastructure" report provides a single, user-friendly document that summarizes key achievements, ongoing projects, capital priorities, TIF performance, infrastructure status, and progress toward Comprehensive Plan goals. This report will help residents understand how public investments are improving safety, supporting redevelopment, strengthening quality-of-life, and safeguarding fiscal health. It also positions the Town as a transparent, data-driven organization and creates a consistent framework for evaluating year-to-year progress.

Lead Agency:

Town Manager

Redevelopment Department

Public Works

Actions to Follow:

- ★ Define report content and performance metrics, including redevelopment activity, TIF revenues and obligations, infrastructure improvements, safety upgrades, and progress on Critical Path Strategies.
- ★ Compile annual data from all relevant departments, Public Works, Redevelopment, Planning, Parks, Building/Code Enforcement, and Clerk-Treasurer, to create a comprehensive snapshot of Town investments.
- ★ Develop a clear, accessible report format that uses graphics, maps, dashboards, and plain-language summaries to communicate key findings to residents.
- ★ Present the report publicly each year, through the Town Council, website, social media, and community meetings, ensuring residents can easily access and understand the information.
- ★ Track performance trends over time, using annual reports to identify gaps, adjust priorities, and refine future capital planning and redevelopment decisions.

Related Plan Themes:

Fiscal Responsibility and Transparent Investment

Time Frame: First report within 12 months

Estimated Cost: Free

COORDINATING IMPLEMENTATION WITH ANNUAL BUDGETING AND THE CIPP

To remain effective and actionable, implementation must be linked directly to:

- **Annual Budgeting:** ensuring resources are allocated to priority actions.
- **The Capital Improvement Plan and Program (CIPP):** ensuring projects are sequenced, funded, and timed appropriately.
- **Departmental Work Plans:** establishing shared responsibility among Planning, Public Works, Redevelopment, Parks, and Building/Code Enforcement.

The Town should review this chapter annually as part of its budgeting and capital planning cycle, making adjustments to reflect progress, new opportunities, and evolving community needs.

The Town shall also review and update the Gateway Corridors Redevelopment Plan periodically (recommended every 3–5 years) to reflect market conditions, infrastructure changes, and implementation progress.

MONITORING PROGRESS

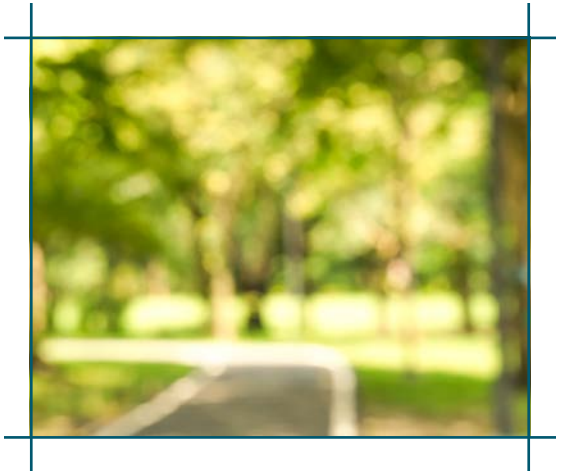
Implementation is a continuous process. The Town should adopt a simple monitoring framework that includes:

- **Annual progress reports** summarizing completed actions, ongoing work, and updated priorities.
- **Performance indicators** are tied to key outcomes, including redevelopment activity, housing diversity, infrastructure conditions, park improvements, economic vitality, and public engagement.
- **A publicly accessible dashboard** to reinforce transparency and encourage ongoing community participation.

The Town recognizes that not all strategies can be fully defined at the time of plan adoption. Accordingly, this Implementation chapter is designed to function as a living framework, allowing the Town to advance priority actions immediately while maintaining the flexibility to refine and sequence additional strategies over time. This approach ensures that the Comprehensive Plan remains both actionable in the near term and adaptable to changing conditions.







APPENDIX A: EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

Town of Highland, Indiana Comprehensive Plan



Existing Conditions **Report**

2025



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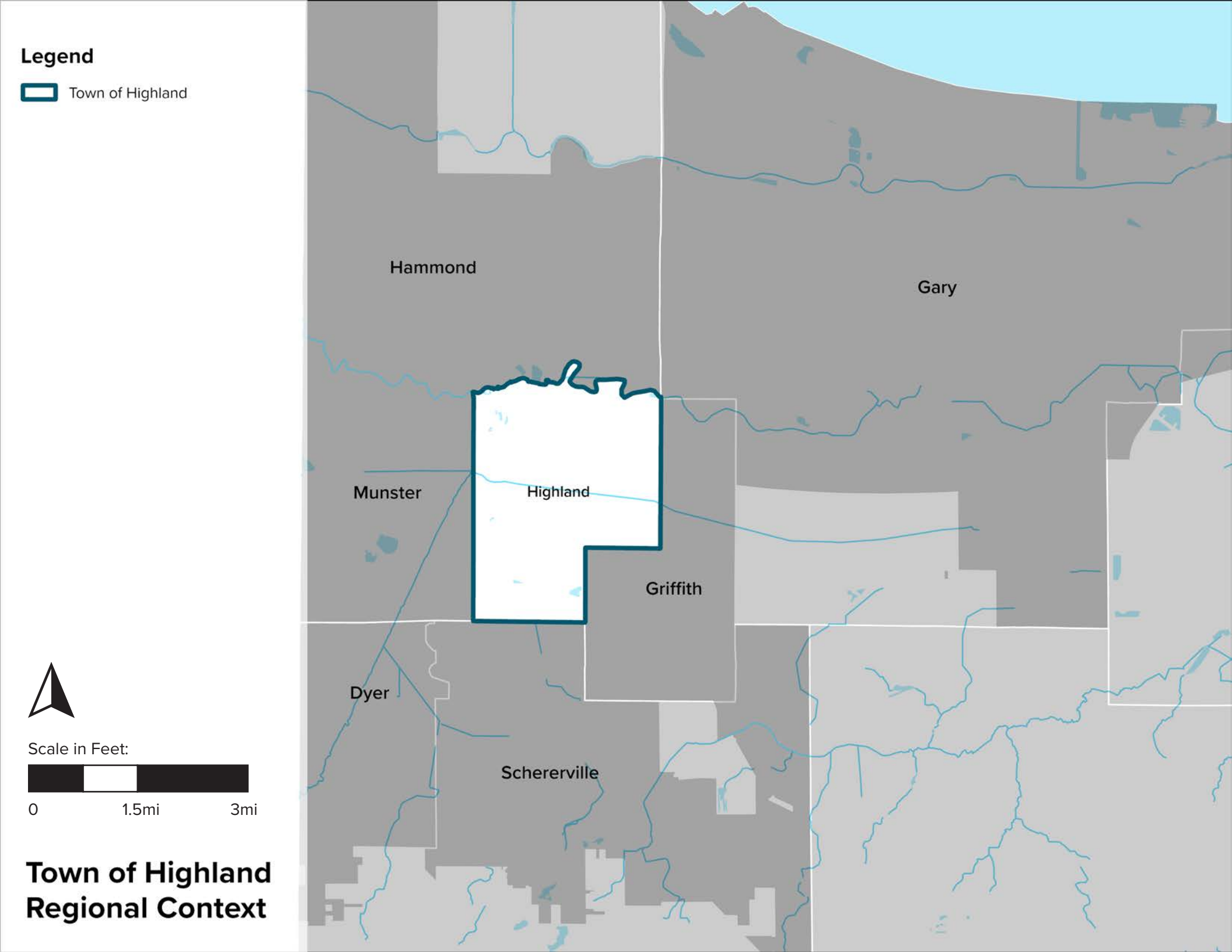
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Existing Conditions Report provides a detailed snapshot of the Town of Highland as it prepares to chart its future through the 2025 Comprehensive Plan. This document captures the community's current strengths, challenges, and emerging trends, offering data and insights that will directly inform planning priorities and decision-making.

Highland's long-established neighborhoods, central location in northwest Indiana, and strong regional transportation connections provide a solid foundation for future growth and revitalization. At the same time, shifting demographics, evolving housing needs, aging infrastructure, and changing economic dynamics present new challenges—and new opportunities—for the Town.

This report examines Highland's demographic profile, land use patterns, transportation network, housing stock, economic base, environmental features, public facilities, and community services. Key findings highlight where targeted investment, thoughtful policy changes, and collaborative community action can help Highland adapt and thrive.

This information is the launching point for a planning process that will define Highland's vision for the coming decade. The findings presented here will inform the Comprehensive Plan's long-term goals and actionable strategies to promote livability, economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and a strong sense of place. Through this process, Highland can build on its community character while preparing to meet the needs of future generations.


Legend
Town of Highland
Hammond
Gary
Munster
Highland
Griffith
Dyer
Schererville
Scale in Feet:
0
1.5mi
3mi
Town of Highland
Regional Context

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Highland is located in northwestern Lake County, Indiana, which is the state's farthest county to the northwest. Highland is just over two miles east of the Illinois-Indiana border and approximately five miles south of the southern shores of Lake Michigan.

The Town benefits from strategic regional connectivity. Interstate 94 runs just north of the Town, providing direct access to downtown Chicago in under an hour. US Route 41 (Indianapolis Boulevard) runs north-south along Highland's western edge, connecting the Town to Hammond and Interstate 94 to the north and Schererville to the south. Indiana State Road (SR) 912 can be accessed northeast of the Town via Cline Avenue, allowing entry to Interstates 90, 94, US-12, and US-20.

Highland shares borders with the following municipalities:

- Munster to the west
- Hammond to the north
- Griffith to the east
- Schererville to the south

This Existing Conditions Report provides a foundation for understanding Highland's current context, its assets, challenges, and trends, as the Town embarks on updating its Comprehensive Plan. The report sets the stage for developing a shared vision and actionable strategies to guide Highland's growth, enhance its quality of life, and sustain its unique community character in the years ahead.



LAKE COUNTY 2018 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN[1]

The Lake County 2018 Comprehensive Plan is a strategic guide for future land use and development across Lake County. Its purpose is to assess current conditions and establish actionable goals for sustainable growth, community development, and resource preservation. The Plan was designed to assist decision-makers in creating policies and regulations that shape land use, infrastructure, and the protection of natural and cultural assets.

While the Plan does not override municipal planning efforts, such as those in the Town of Highland, it promotes inter-jurisdictional coordination for issues that impact both County and municipal levels. Four core principles guide the Plan:

Preservation

Protect agricultural land and rural economies through managed development.

Managed Growth

Support economic diversity and infrastructure investment while safeguarding agricultural areas.

Sustainability

Promote environmentally responsible development and protect natural resources.

Coordination

Ensure planning efforts are fiscally sound and support effective governance.

The Plan also outlines goals in key areas such as land use, housing, transportation, economic development, community character, parks and open space, agriculture, and community facilities. Its relevance to the Town of Highland lies in its regional vision and the importance of coordinated planning to address shared challenges.

1 Source: *Lake County 2018 Comprehensive Plan*.

HIGHLAND PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN (2021-2025)[2]

The Highland Parks and Recreation Master Plan provides a five-year strategy to enhance the Town's park system and recreational offerings. The mission of the Plan is to enrich the community through safe, sustainable, and inclusive parks and programs that improve residents' quality of life. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan informs the Comprehensive Plan by shaping future land use, connectivity, and quality-of-life strategies—ensuring that parks, trails, and open spaces remain integrated with broader community development goals and accessible to all residents.

- Maintenance and development of 21 parks and over 140 acres of open space, including the Erie-Lackawanna Trail.
- A commitment to gathering diverse public input and using national standards and local needs assessments to guide planning.
- A dynamic plan that allows for annual review and adjustment to support strategic budgeting and implementation.
- Eligibility for Indiana Department of Natural Resources grant funding, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- Ongoing collaboration with neighboring municipalities to meet broader community needs.

The goals of the Plan include:

The Plan establishes priorities for future investment, infrastructure improvements, and recreational programming. It positions the Parks Department to secure funding, foster community involvement, and improve access to recreational opportunities for all Highland residents.

2 Source: *Highland Parks and Recreation Mission and Master Plan*.

REDEVELOPMENT DISTRICT – COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2006)[3]

The Plan was adopted as a guiding framework for the next 15 years. The Redevelopment District – Comprehensive Plan provides long-term strategies to shape physical development, redevelopment, and preservation in Highland's large, historically significant portion, from the Little Calumet River to Downtown. The Plan serves as a reference for the Town, local stakeholders, and future developers in revitalizing the area's economic base, improving quality of life, and establishing a renewed sense of place. It sets forth a series of goals to promote high-quality development, increase employment and investment, eliminate blight, and encourage inclusive economic growth. These objectives are organized into seven cornerstone strategies:

1. **Build the Place** – Encourage mixed-use redevelopment along Kennedy Avenue and throughout the District to foster a vibrant, walkable environment.
2. **Create Great Public Spaces** – Develop parks, plazas, and gateways to enhance civic pride and support community interaction.
3. **Bring in the Arts** – Integrate public art and support cultural programming to strengthen community identity and attract creative industries.
4. **Put the Base in Place** – Upgrade infrastructure and policy tools to support smart growth and enable higher-density, mixed-use development.
5. **Make It Happen with Partnerships** – Engage a broad coalition of public and private partners to implement the Plan collaboratively.
6. **Leave the Car at Home** – Promote multimodal transportation with improved sidewalks, bike paths, and public transit access.
7. **Mix-It-Up** – Support mixed-use, mixed-income development to create a dynamic and inclusive urban environment.

The Plan also addresses subarea-specific strategies across three key zones within the District:

- ★ **Gateway (Rivershore Area):** Envisioned as a vibrant commercial and hospitality hub, with enhancements that reflect Highland's identity and encourage partnerships with the City of Hammond.
- ★ **Corridor (Kennedy Avenue):** Designed as an attractive, tree-lined mixed-use corridor supporting walkability and diverse architectural forms.
- ★ **Downtown:** Positioned as Highland's cultural and social heart, the Plan builds on prior revitalization efforts to create a thriving, family-friendly destination with a strong retail and residential base.

Together, these strategies foster a resilient and vibrant community where people can live, work, shop, and play across all stages of life.

3 Source: Redevelopment District Comprehensive Plan. Hard copy provided by the Town of Highland.

TOWN OF HIGHLAND COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY ACTION PLAN[4]

The Town of Highland Comprehensive Safety Action Plan (CSAP) demonstrates the Town's strong commitment to reducing traffic fatalities and severe injuries through data-driven and community-informed strategies. The CSAP supports Highland's Vision Zero goal of reducing fatal and serious injury crashes by 40 percent by 2040 and is rooted in the Safe System approach, which acknowledges that while mistakes are inevitable, traffic deaths are preventable. The document informs the Comprehensive Plan's transportation and infrastructure strategies by embedding a Safe System approach, prioritizing investments that enhance roadway safety, promote multimodal access, and address equity considerations across Highland's transportation network.

Key components of the Plan include:

- ★ Formation of a safety task force to oversee development and implementation.
- ★ Analysis of crash data and identification of a High-Injury Network (HIN) and hotspot locations.
- ★ Community engagement and equity analysis focuses on underserved populations impacted by traffic incidents.
- ★ Review of current policies to identify opportunities for improving roadway safety.
- ★ A framework for prioritizing and implementing safety projects based on crash data, public feedback, and equity considerations.
- ★ Inclusion of non-infrastructure improvements and stakeholder responsibilities to ensure progress.
- ★ Commitments to transparency, performance evaluation, and ongoing public communication.

The CSAP reflects Highland's proactive stance in creating a transportation network that is safe, equitable, and responsive to community concerns. It ensures that traffic safety remains a top priority while guiding future investment in infrastructure and policy improvements.

4 Source: *Highland Safe Streets for All Comprehensive Safety Action Plan.*

NWI 2050+[5]

The adoption of the regional NWI 2050+ Long-Range Transporation Plan has several direct and indirect implications for the Town of Highland. This comprehensive regional plan emphasizes creating a connected, renewed, united, and vibrant Northwest Indiana, with actionable strategies across key elements like transportation, land use, and environmental sustainability. Below are the specific implications for Highland based on the broader goals and strategies outlined in the plan:

1. **Enhanced Connectivity and Mobility**
   NWI 2050+ prioritizes multimodal transportation systems, including active transportation and transit improvements. As part of the region, Highland may benefit from bike and pedestrian infrastructure enhancements and expanded public transit options, particularly in addressing gaps identified in transit-dependent areas. These efforts could increase accessibility for residents and workers, reduce traffic congestion, and improve overall connectivity to nearby municipalities and employment centers.
2. **Climate Adaptation and Resilience**
   The plan's climate and environmental strategies allow Highland to align local policies with regional goals for sustainability and resilience. Flood mitigation, extreme heat preparedness, and promoting energy-efficient infrastructure can help Highland safeguard against climate risks while contributing to regional greenhouse gas reduction targets. These initiatives align with Highland's ongoing efforts to foster equitable and sustainable growth.
3. **Economic Development**
   With the focus on fostering a vibrant economy through land use and transit-oriented development, Highland could leverage NWI 2050+ to attract investments that support small businesses and mixed-use developments. This strategy can enhance the Town's appeal as a live-work-play community while ensuring that growth aligns with regional and local priorities.
4. **Equity and Inclusion**
   The plan's emphasis on equitable distribution of resources and opportunities highlights the need for Highland to ensure that underserved populations, including low-income households and individuals with disabilities, are integrated into the planning process. Addressing transit deserts, housing affordability, and access to amenities will be crucial for promoting inclusivity in community development.
5. **Strategic Planning and Collaboration**
   Highland can benefit from stronger collaboration with neighboring communities and access to federal and regional funding opportunities. Active participation in regional initiatives will be critical for Highland to effectively implement local projects that align with the overarching vision of the NWI 2050+ plan.

5 Source: *Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission: NWI 2050+.*

NWI 2050 PLAN[6]

The NWI 2050 Plan outlines a transformative vision for Northwestern Indiana, emphasizing a Connected, Renewed, United, and Vibrant future. For Highland, a community with a strong civic identity and strategic location in Lake County, the plan presents both opportunities and responsibilities across several key areas:

1. **Transportation and Mobility**

★ **Complete Streets & Trails**: Highland is encouraged to adopt and implement Complete Streets policies to enhance pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access. The plan supports expanding multi-use trails and improving first-mile/last-mile connectivity, which could more effectively link Highland to neighboring communities and regional assets.

★ **Transit Access**: Highland's proximity to the South Shore Line and regional bus routes positions it well for transit-oriented development (TOD). The plan supports improving transit stops, ADA accessibility, and integrating shared mobility options.

★ **Emergency Vehicle Preemption**: Highland is part of a multi-community initiative to install emergency signal preemption systems, improving public safety and emergency response times.

2. **Land Use and Economic Development**

★ **Main Center Revitalization**: Highland is identified as a key urban center. The plan encourages infill development, adaptive reuse of vacant buildings, and mixed-use zoning to attract residents and businesses.

★ **E-Commerce and Logistics**: With the rise of e-commerce, Highland could benefit from repurposing underutilized retail spaces into logistics hubs or tech-enabled business centers.

★ **Smart Growth**: The plan promotes concentrating growth around existing infrastructure, which aligns with Highland's established neighborhoods and commercial corridors.

3. Environmental Sustainability

★ **Green Infrastructure**: Highland is encouraged to expand its urban tree canopy, adopt green street ordinances, and implement stormwater management practices to improve air and water quality.

★ **Brownfield Redevelopment**: The plan supports leveraging state and federal funds to remediate and redevelop brownfield sites, which could revitalize underused parcels in Highland.

★ **Air Quality**: As part of the Lake County non-attainment area, Highland will benefit from regional efforts to reduce vehicle emissions and promote alternative fuels.

4. **Community Health and Equity**

★ **Health Equity**: The plan highlights disparities in health outcomes across the region. Highland can promote active transportation, park access, and community health initiatives.

★ **Affordable Housing**: Strategies include encouraging diverse housing options near transit and job centers, which could help Highland retain and attract a multi-generational population.

★ **Public Engagement**: Highland is expected to continue participating in regional planning efforts and public outreach to ensure inclusive decision-making.

5. **Funding and Implementation**

★ **Access to Grants**: Highland is eligible for various federal and state funding programs outlined in the plan, including transportation, environmental remediation, and economic development.

★ **Performance-Based Planning:** The Town will be part of a regional framework that tracks progress on key indicators such as commute times, emissions, and infrastructure conditions.

6 Source: NWI-2050-Plan-FINAL_-5.9.2019.pdf

SUMMARY OF PLANS REVIEW

The reviewed planning efforts, at both the county and local levels, reflect a set of cross-cutting themes that will directly inform the Town of Highland's 2025 Comprehensive Plan. These themes include equity and inclusion, public safety, sustainability, quality of life, and regional coordination. The Lake County Comprehensive Plan emphasizes sustainability, the preservation of natural and cultural assets, and the importance of coordinated land use and infrastructure planning across jurisdictions. The Highland Parks and Recreation Master Plan advances goals for equitable access to parks and open spaces, community health, and environmental stewardship. The Town's Comprehensive Safety Action Plan focuses on transportation safety, data-driven decision-making, and addressing disparities experienced by underserved populations. Collectively, these plans position Highland to build a Comprehensive Plan that is aligned with broader regional goals, responsive to community needs, and proactive in promoting a vibrant, safe, and inclusive future.



COMPARISON CONTEXT

This report also reviewed demographic data for "comparison communities." Comparison communities are those similar in population size to the Town of Highland or have similar characteristics, such as proximity to major cities, access to regional transportation networks, and comparable community characteristics. The comparison communities reviewed were the Towns of Griffith, Munster, Schererville, and Dyer, all located within Lake County. The findings will inform the development of realistic and locally relevant goals, policies, and implementation strategies within the Comprehensive Plan.

Some key purposes for including these communities are listed as follows:

- Comparison communities serve as benchmarks against which the Town of Highland can evaluate its performance and progress. By comparing demographic, economic, and social indicators, Highland can identify areas where it excels relative to peers and opportunities for improvement. This benchmarking process can inform decision-making and help set realistic goals for improvement.
- Later in the planning process, when strategies are developed, comparison communities can provide a helpful context on the relative success of activities, programs, and projects. Examining the outcomes of these actions can save Highland time and resources.
- Similarly, understanding the challenges faced by similar communities can guide decision-makers in formulating policies and interventions to mitigate or avoid similar problems.
- Finally, comparison communities help place Highland's conditions and trends within a broader regional context.

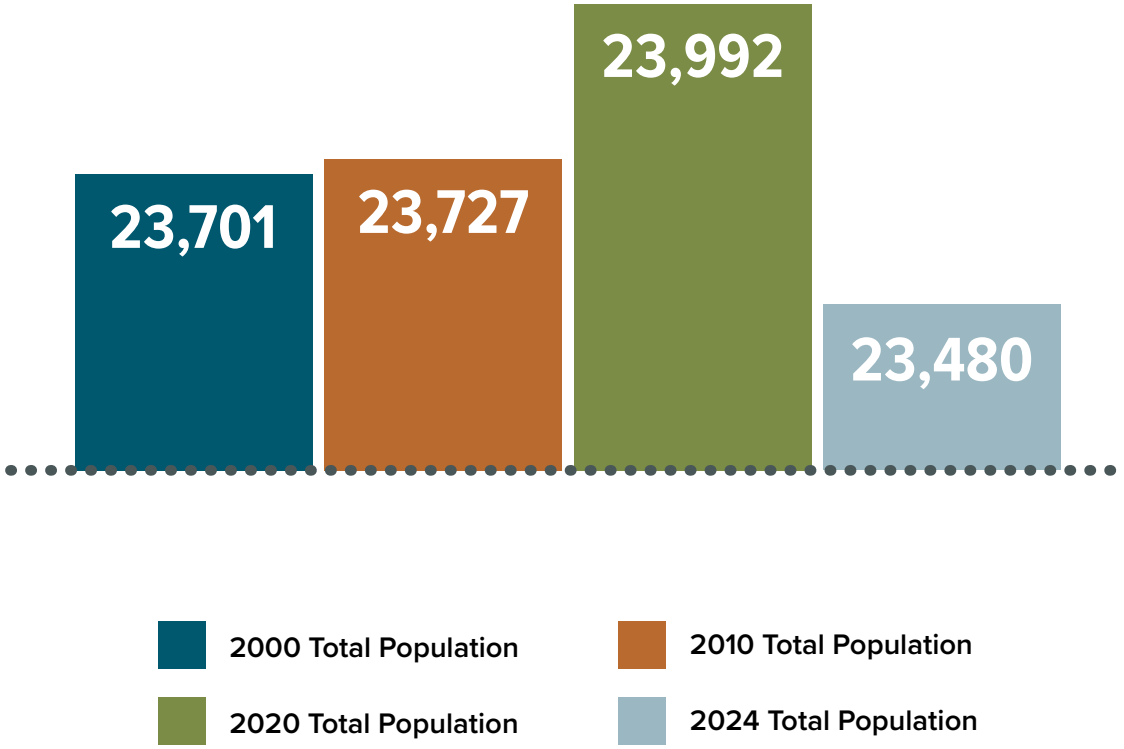


POPULATION

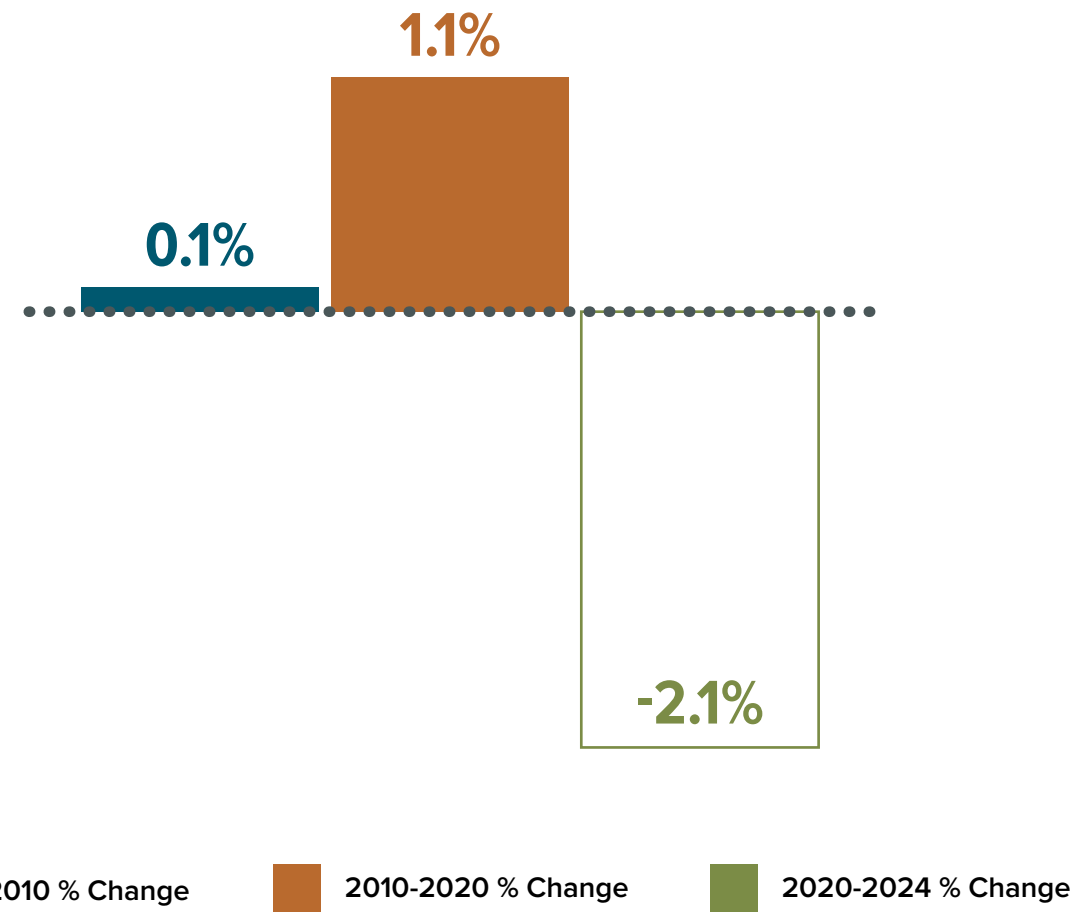
Lake County's population in 2024 is estimated at 501,669, reflecting a 3.4 percent increase since 2000. In contrast, the Town of Highland experienced modest growth over the past two decades, increasing by just 1.0 percent from 2000 to 2020, reaching 23,992 residents in 2020. However, recent estimates suggest a reversal of this trend: Highland's 2024 population is projected at 23,480, below both the 2020 population (23,992) and the 2020 Census count (23,701). That suggests the Town may now be entering a period of population decline.

Highland's experience is consistent with trends in several nearby communities; the Town of Griffith has seen an 8.1 percent decline in population from 2000 to 2024, while the Town of Dyer is also experiencing decline between 2020 and 2024. These local declines contrast with broader County-wide growth, which is being driven by population gains in other municipalities within Lake County.

2000-2024 Total Population Comparisons



Highland Population Percentage Changes



POPULATION PROJECTIONS

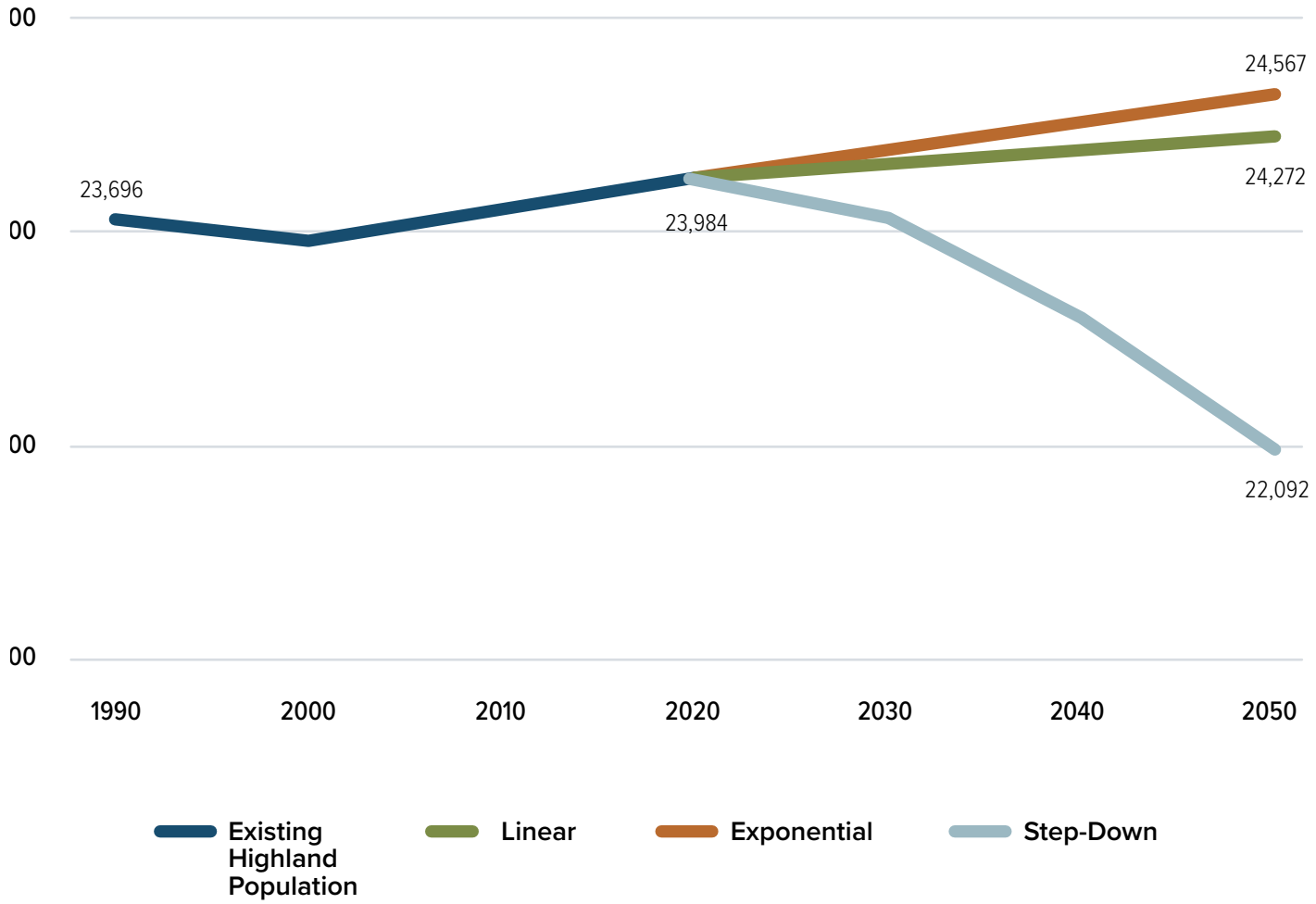
Population projections provide insight into how the Town of Highland's population may change over the coming decades, helping to inform long-term planning decisions. While Highland experienced modest but steady growth over the past several decades, recent trends suggest that future growth will likely remain slow and may fluctuate.

By 2050, the Town's population is projected to range between 22,092 and 24,272 residents, depending on future conditions. To account for uncertainty, three projection scenarios were developed:

1. **Linear Growth Projection (1900–2050):** Assumes continued modest growth in line with historical trends, resulting in a projected population of approximately 24,272 residents by 2050.
2. **Exponential Growth Projection (1900–2050):** Assumes a slightly accelerated growth rate of 0.8 percent per decade, yielding a projected population of approximately 24,567 residents by 2050.
3. **Step-Down Projection (1990–2050):** Reflects the potential for a long-term population decline, based on recent demographic shifts, with the population decreasing to approximately 22,092 residents by 2050.

Given the variability in Highland's growth patterns over the past 30 years, the Comprehensive Plan will adopt the Exponential Growth Projection as its baseline. That provides a balanced and reasonable framework for guiding future planning decisions while remaining flexible to adapt to changing market conditions and demographic trends.

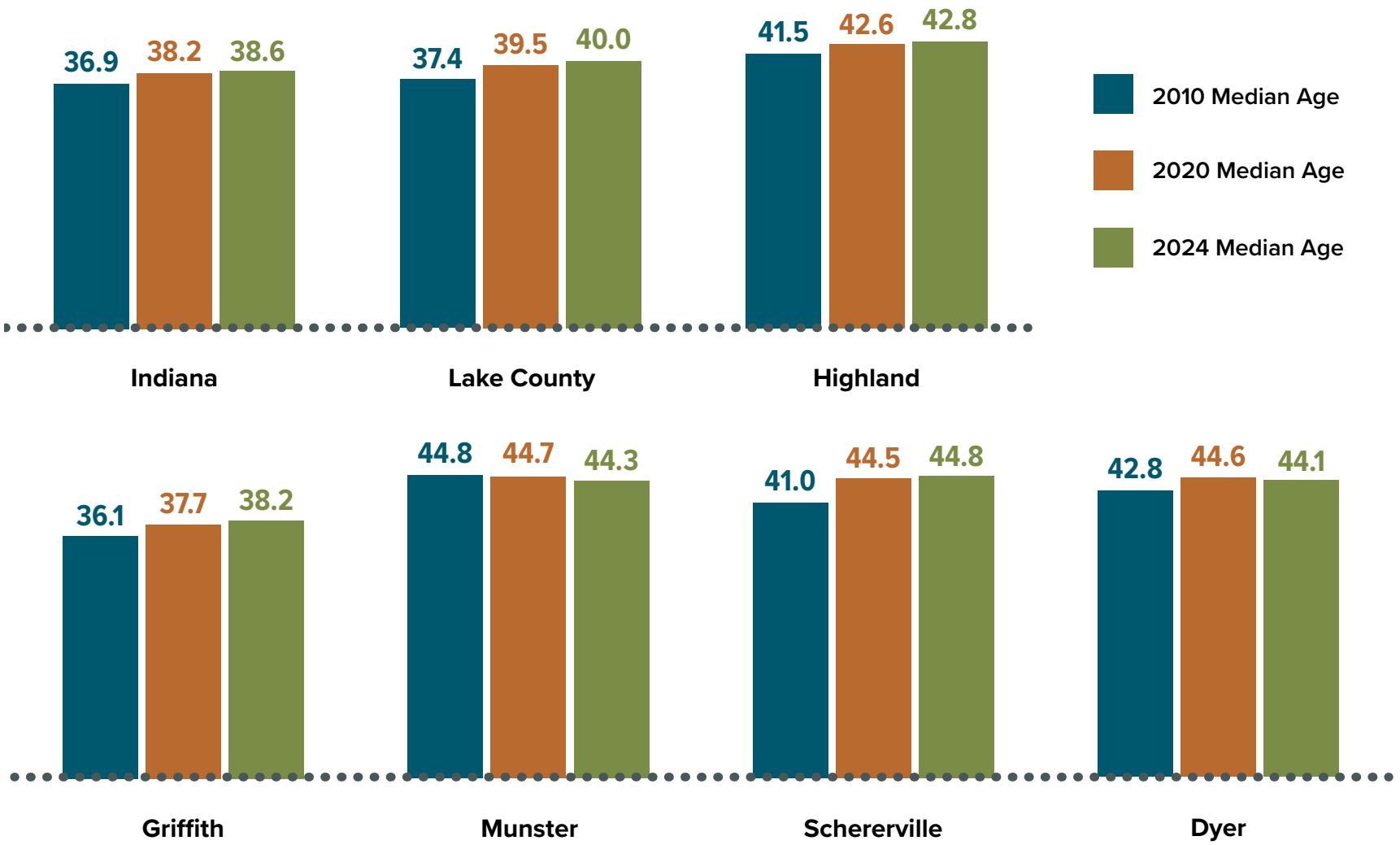
1990 – 2050 Population Projections



MEDIAN AGE

Highland's population is aging. The median age increased from 41.5 years in 2010 to 42.8 years in 2024. That is older than the Lake County median age (40 years) and the State of Indiana median age. However, the Town remains younger than neighboring communities such as Munster, Dyer, and Schererville. That trend suggests a growing need for senior-oriented services, housing, and strategies to retain and attract younger residents and families.

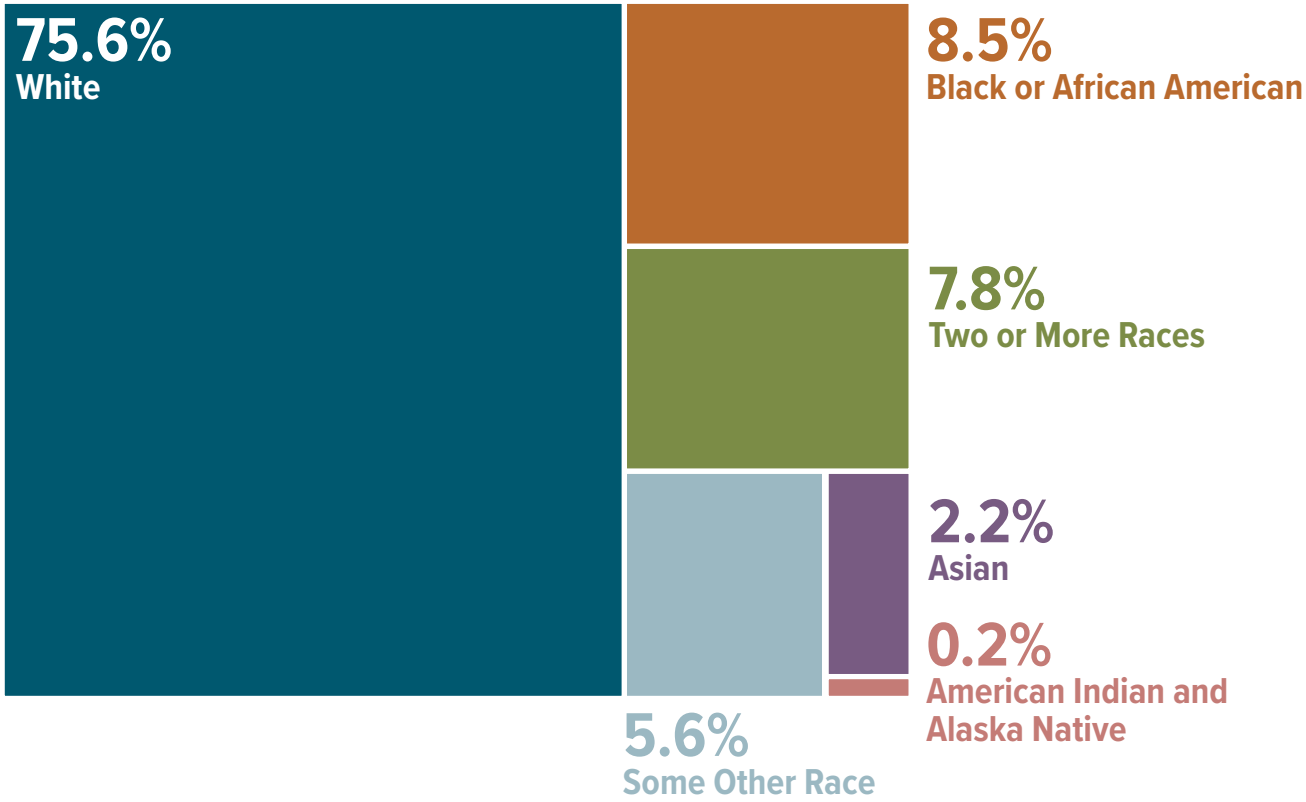
2010 – 2024 Median Age



RACE AND ETHNICITY

The Town of Highland is predominantly White, with 75.6 percent of the population identifying as White alone. Other racial groups in the Town include 8.5 percent identifying as Black/African American, 7.8 percent as two or more races, 5.6 percent as some other race, and 2.2 percent as Asian. It is a moderately diverse population, likely becoming more heterogeneous.

Town of Highland – Race Percentages

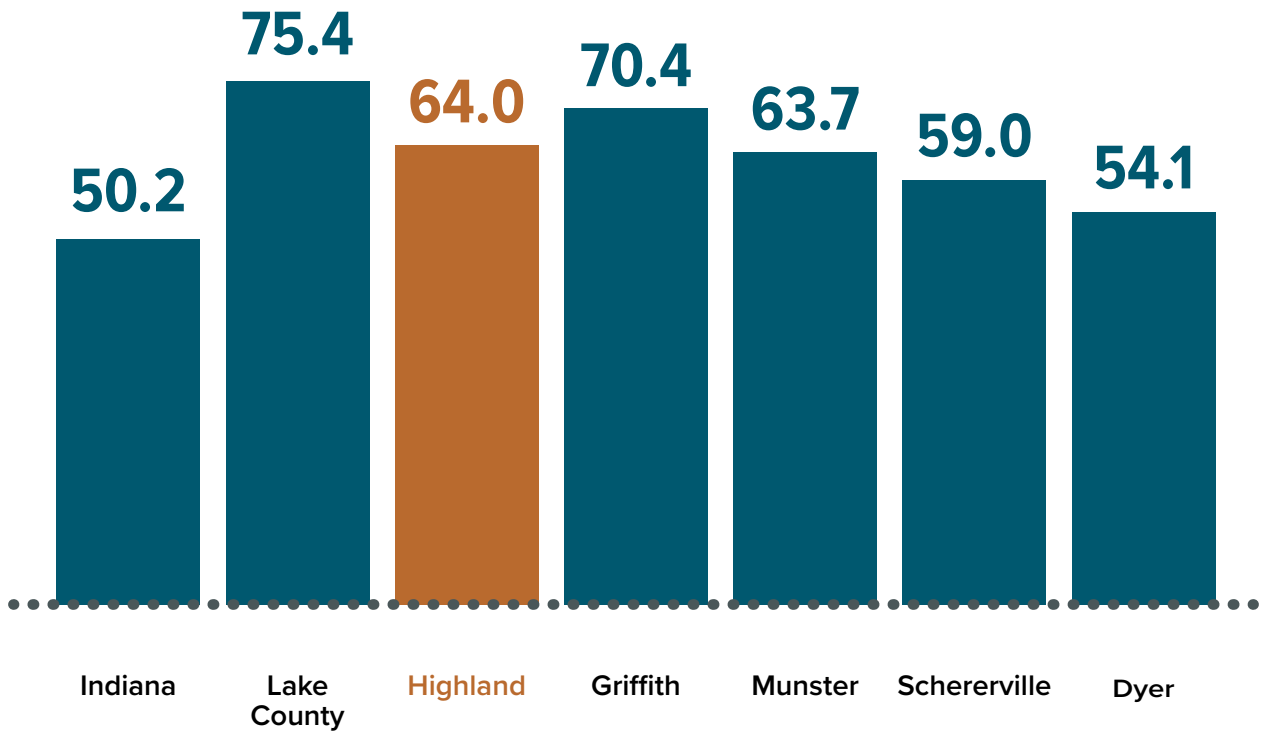


DIVERSITY INDEX

The diversity index measures the likelihood that two chosen individuals belong to different racial or ethnic groups, indicating moderate racial and ethnic diversity in Highland. The Town has a diversity index score of 64, significantly higher than the State of Indiana and other comparison communities such as Dyer at 54.1, Schererville at 59, and Munster at 63.7. Although it is higher than the state and other comparison communities, the Town's diversity index is lower than Lake County's.

A higher diversity index indicates a more diverse community, with more opportunities for multicultural engagement and inclusion; therefore, Highland is fairly diverse.

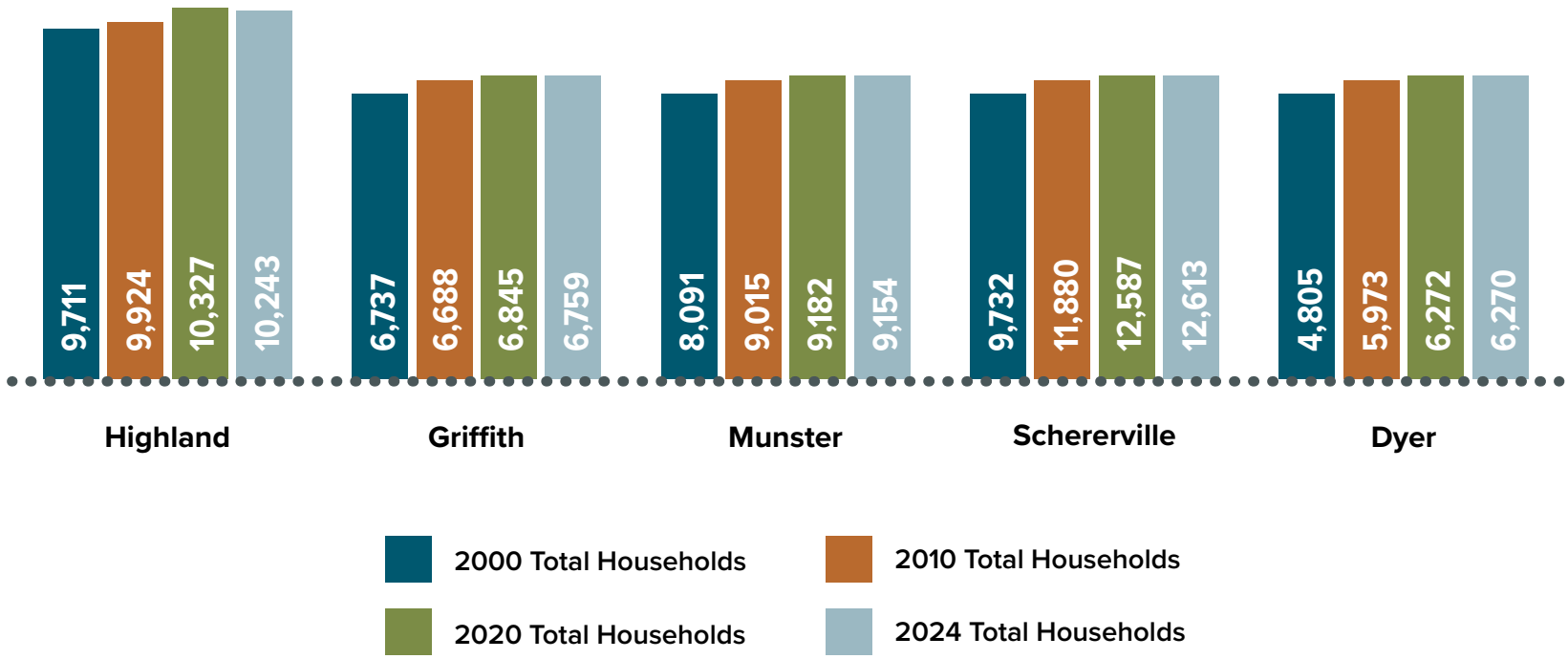
2024 Diversity Index



HOUSEHOLDS

The number of households in the Town of Highland grew from 2000 to 2020. In 2000, the Town had 9,711 households. By the 2020 Census, this number had increased to 10,327 households; as of 2024, the total number of households is estimated at 10,243. The household growth from 2000 to 2020 projected population growth, but the total number of households declined in 2024, reflecting the population decline estimated for 2024.

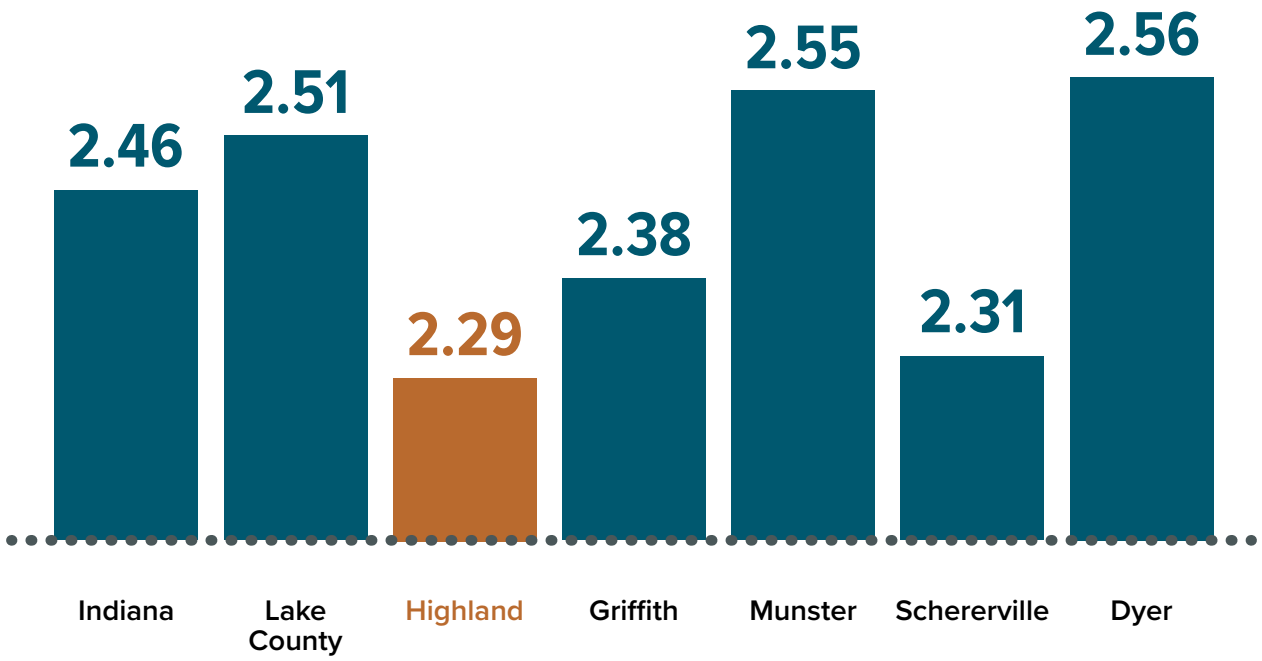
Total of Households



AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Highland's average household size is 2.3 people, which is slightly below the County and State averages. Smaller household sizes may signal an increase in single-person households or aging populations and indicate a growing need for varied housing options, including smaller, more affordable units.

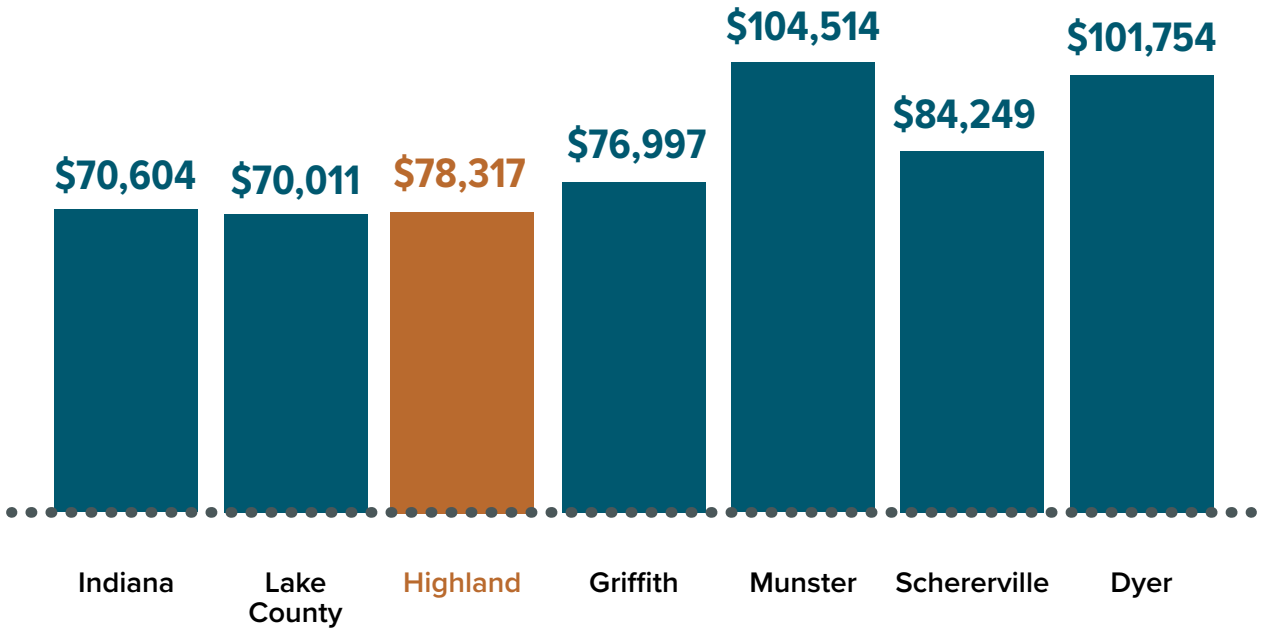
2020 Average Household Size



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The Town of Highland has seen an increase in median household income over the past few years. In 2020, the median household income was $66,079; by 2024, it had increased to $78,317. The 2024 income is above the County's median household income of $70,011 but below several comparison communities, such as Munster at $104,514, Dyer at $101,754, and Schererville at $84,249. Highland reported a higher median household income than the State of Indiana. Although incomes are increasing, the Town still lags behind some neighboring communities in terms of economic prosperity.

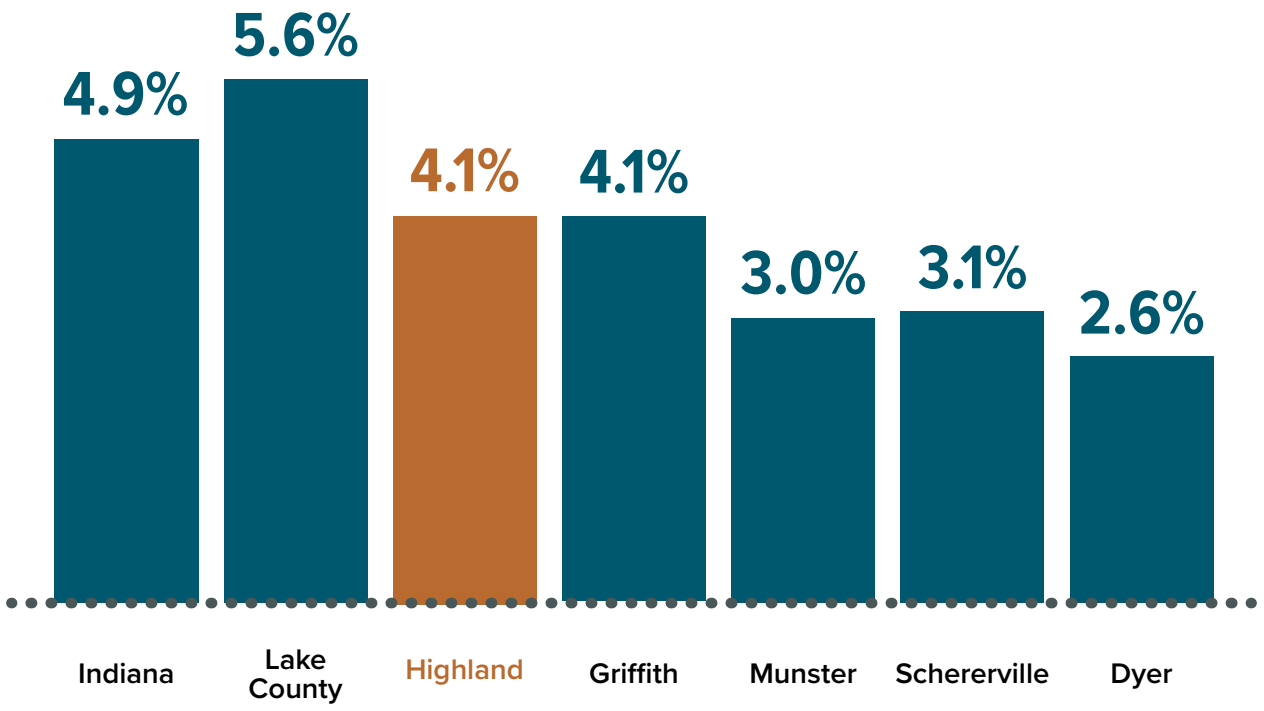
2024 Median Household Income



POVERTY

About 4.1 percent of households in Highland live below the poverty line, lower than the State and County averages. However, other comparison communities have a lower poverty rate; the Towns of Munster, Dyer, and Schererville have poverty rates lower than four percent, indicating relatively stronger economic conditions in those areas.

2022 Rate of Household Income Below Poverty Level

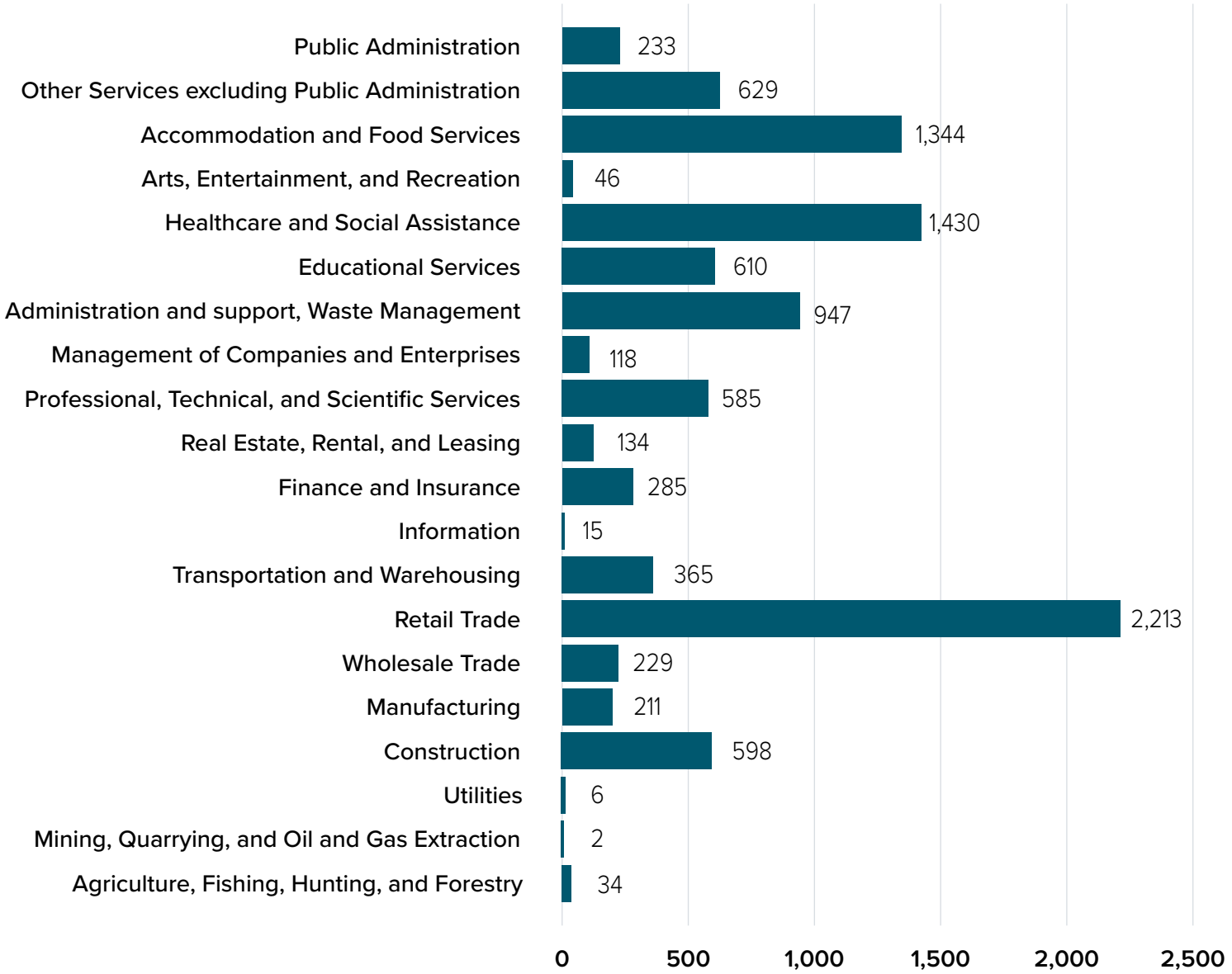




EMPLOYMENT

The Town of Highland's diverse economy has several key industries driving local employment. Retail trade is a key sector in Highland's economy, supported by national and regional retailers such as Best Buy, Kohl's, and Meijer, and employs 22.1 percent of the workforce. Health care and social assistance services come in second, employing 14.3 percent of the local workforce, primarily through institutions such as Highland Medical Center and 219 Health Network.

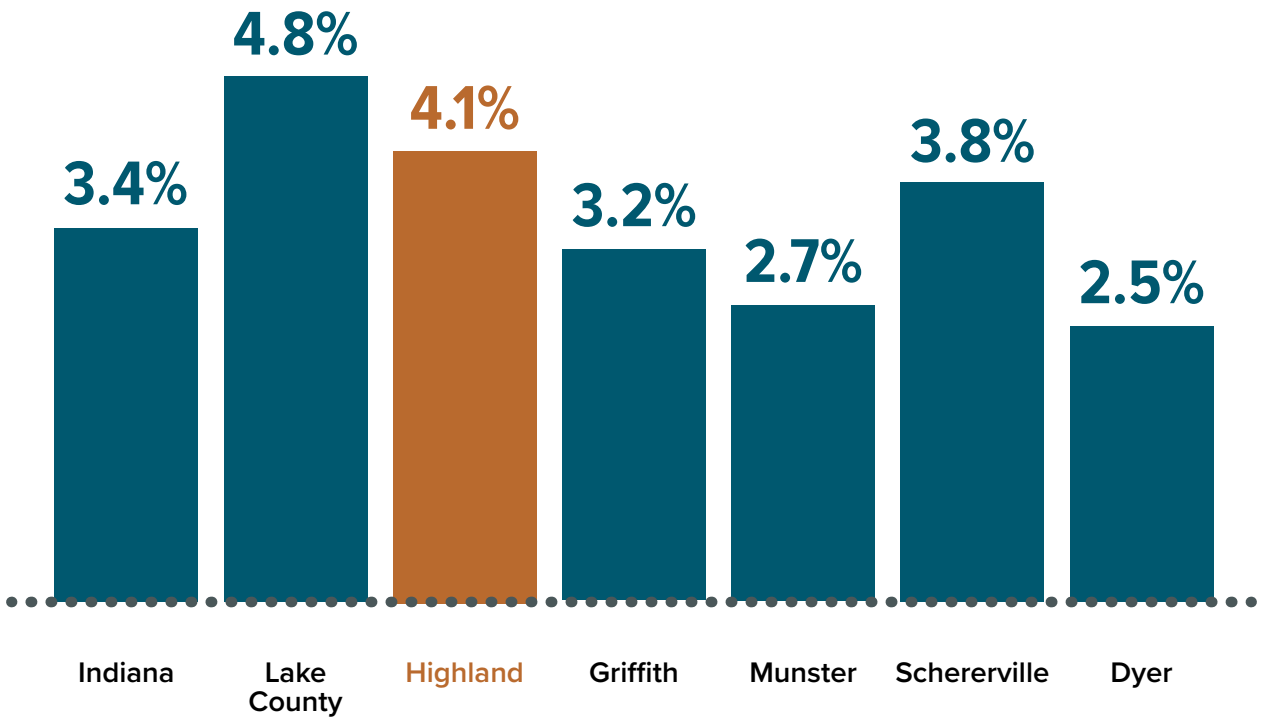
2022 Jobs in the Town of Highland



UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate is an essential indicator of the local economy's health. As of 2024, Highland's unemployment rate stands at 4.1 percent, slightly higher than the state average and in some nearby towns. For comparison, Griffith has a rate of 3.2 percent, Dyer has a rate of 2.5 percent, and Schererville has a rate of 3.8 percent, indicating a relatively strong local labor market in these areas. The higher unemployment rate in Highland compared with surrounding towns potentially reflects challenges specific to the Town, such as seasonal employment fluctuations or structural shifts in key industries.

2024 Unemployment Rate



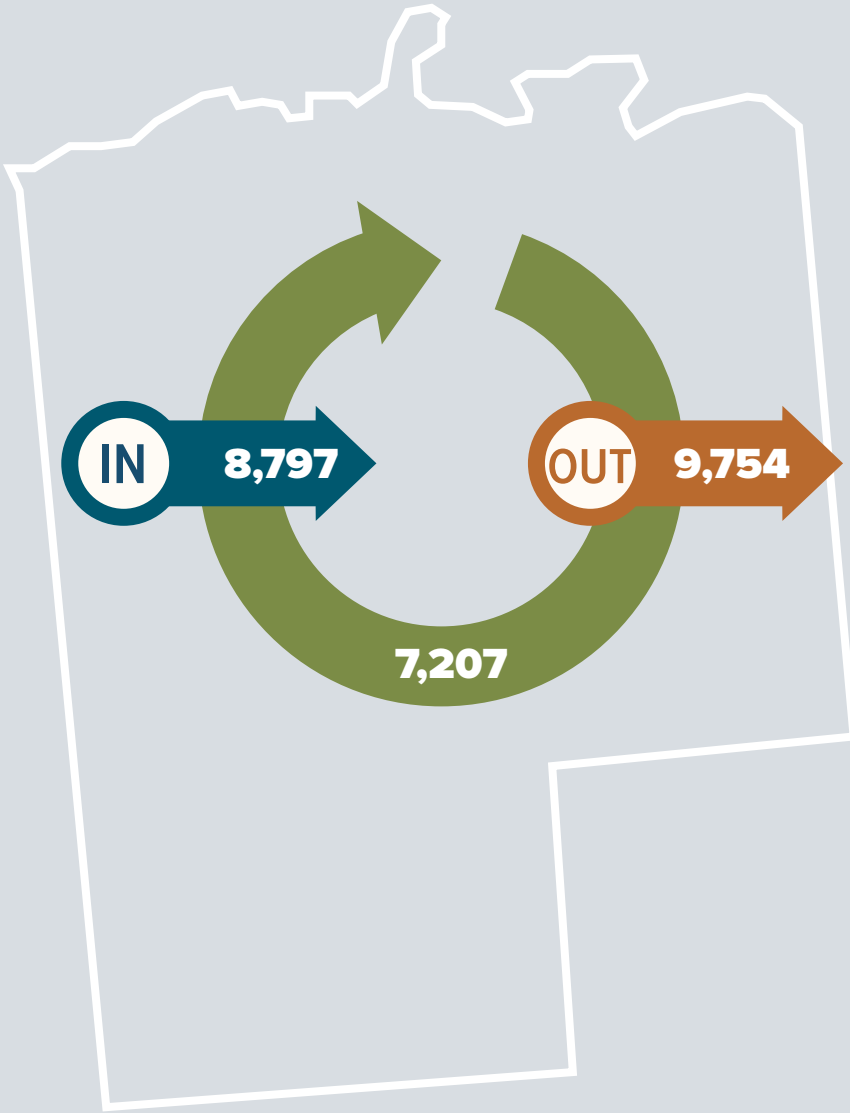
COMMUTER BEHAVIOR

Highland functions as both a residential community and a regional employment center, with significant commuter flows in both directions. Approximately 88.7 percent of Highland residents, or 9,754 people, commute to jobs in other communities. In comparison, 81.1 percent of workers employed in Highland, or 8,797 workers, commute from outside the Town. 1,237 residents both live and work within the Town limits.

The most common commuter destinations for Highland resident workers include the City of Hammond at 9.4 percent of commuters, the City of Chicago at 9.2 percent, and the Town of Munster at 7.0 percent, with about 41.4 percent going to other municipalities. This pattern underscores the importance of Highland's access to major regional transportation corridors.

Of those workers commuting to Highland from elsewhere, the largest origin is Hammond, at 9.2 percent. Other significant worker origins include the City of Gary at 5.6 percent and Munster at 5.0 percent, with about 47.2 percent of people commuting from other municipalities.

Commuter Behavior. Source: OnTheMap.



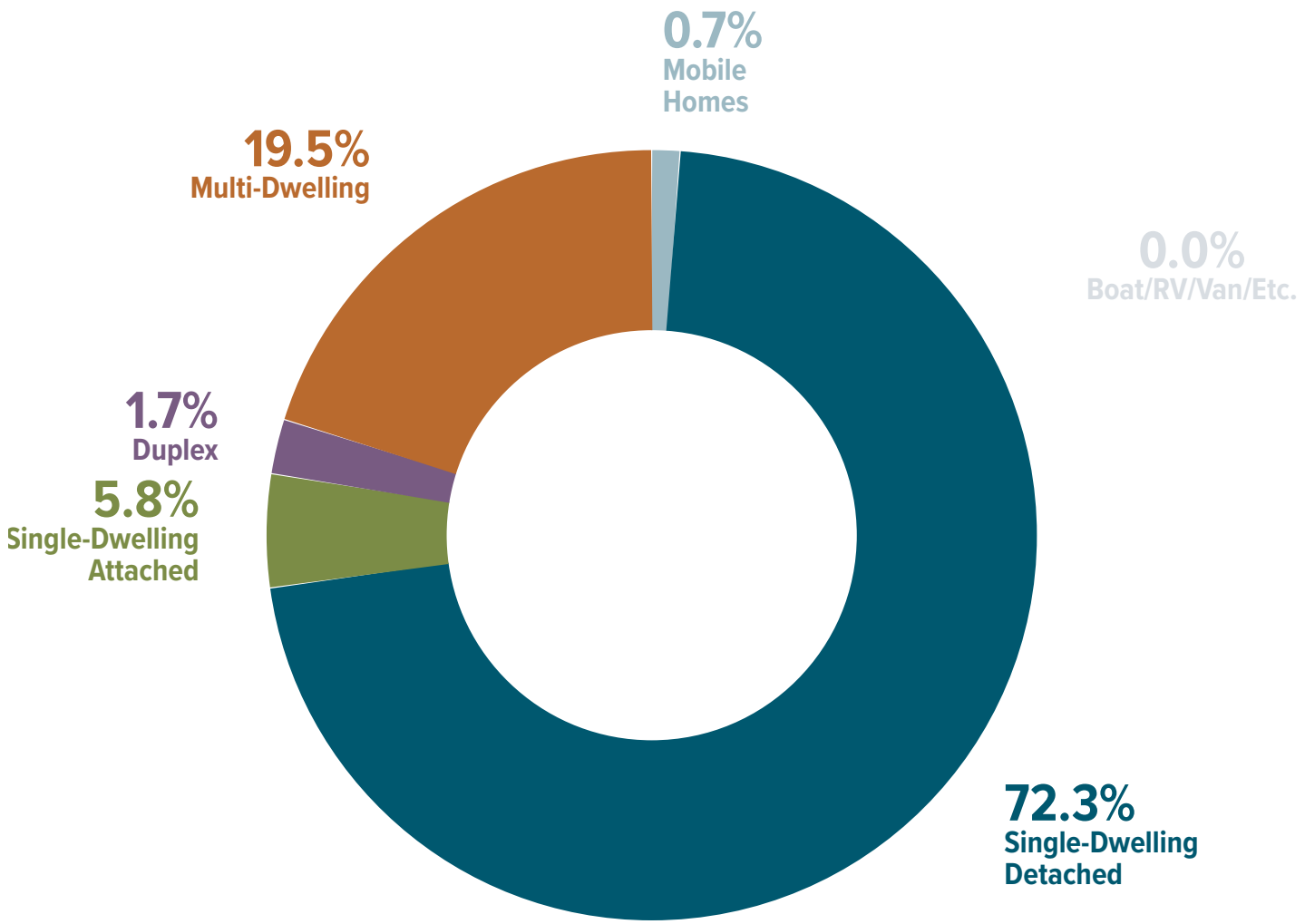


TYPE

The Town of Highland offers a variety of housing types, providing options for diverse preferences and family structures.

1. **Single-Dwelling Detached Units**: The most common type of housing in Highland, these units accounted for 72.3 percent of all housing units in 2022. These detached homes are typically one-family residences on individual lots, providing ample space and privacy for homeowners.
2. **Single-Dwelling Attached Units**: This housing category includes duplexes and townhomes, where individual units share one or more walls. These units make up 5.8 percent of the housing stock in the Town and offer a balance between the space of a detached home and the affordability of multi-family living.
3. **Duplexes**: Representing 1.7 percent of all housing units in Highland, duplexes are designed to house two families, often with separate entrances. This type of housing is particularly suited for multi-generational families or those seeking more affordable housing options.
4. **Multi-Dwelling Units**: Multi-family housing, such as apartment buildings or townhomes with shared walls, accounted for 19.5 percent of the total housing units in the Town in 2022. These units cater to various households, including those looking for rental properties or more compact living arrangements.
5. **Mobile Homes**: Mobile homes comprise only 0.7 percent of the municipality's housing stock. They provide affordable housing options for many residents and contribute to the diversity of housing types available in the Town.

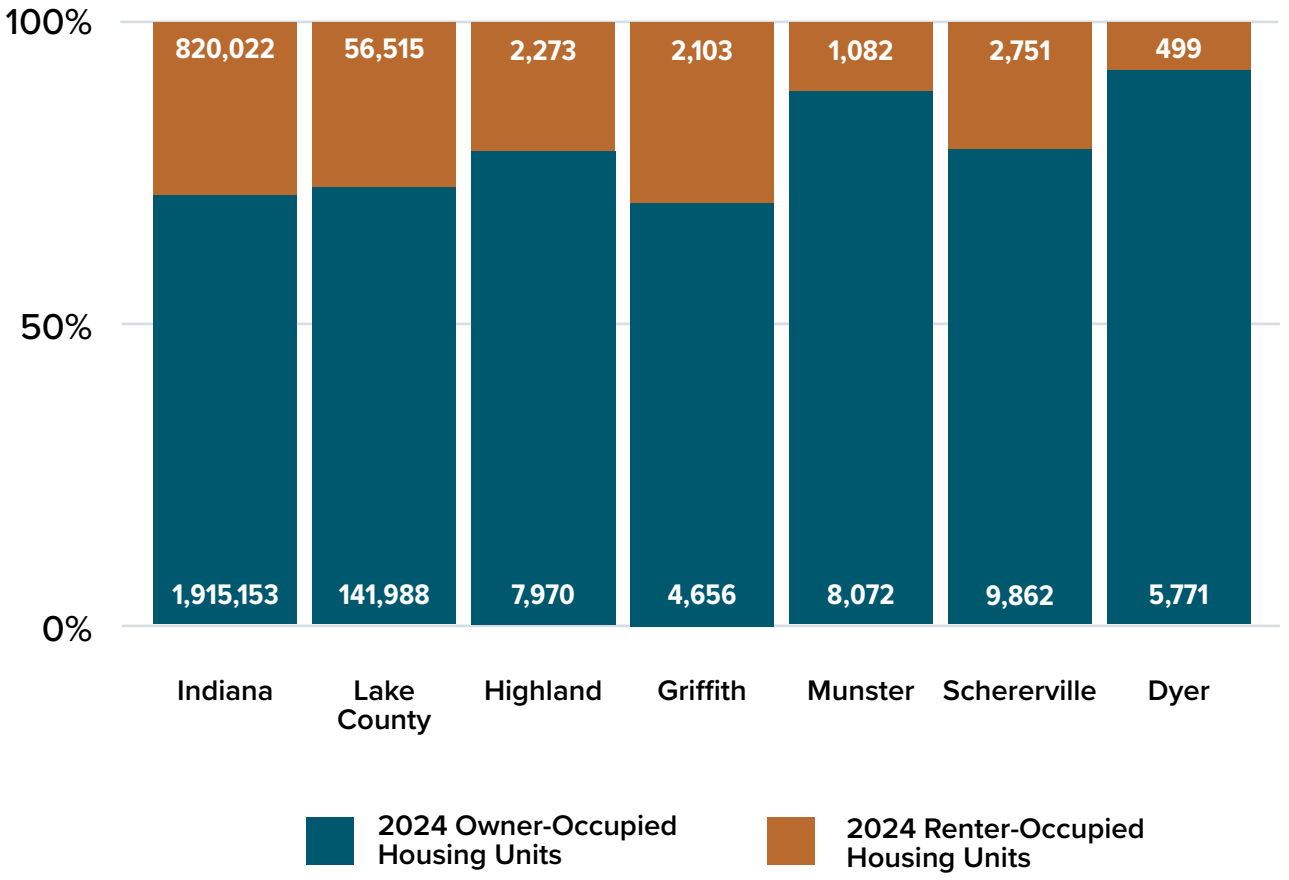
Town of Highland – 2022 Housing Types



OCCUPANCY

Homeownership in Highland remains high, with 78 percent of homes owner-occupied and 22 percent rented. The percentage exceeds Lake County's 72 percent homeownership rate, indicating relative housing stability. However, demand for rental housing may be increasing, especially among younger or more transient residents.

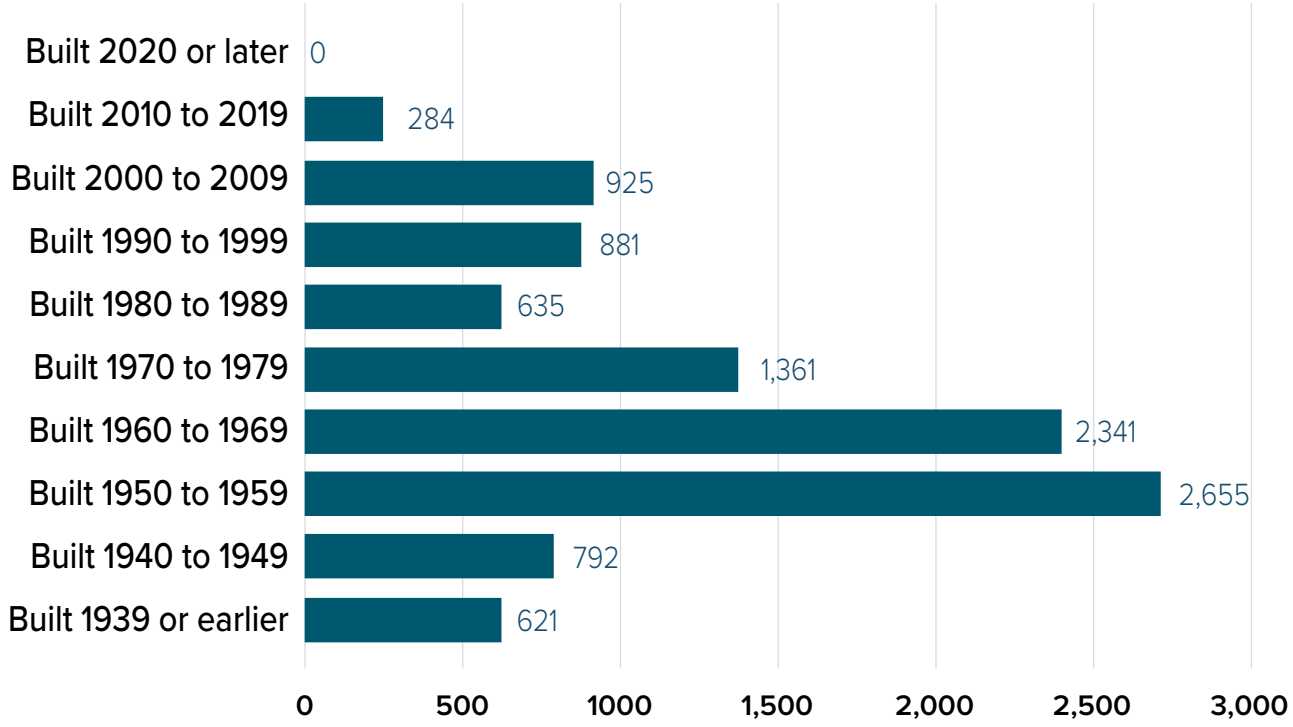
Town of Highland – 2024 Housing Occupancy



AGE AND VALUE

Highland is a landlocked community with no opportunity to annex surrounding land to accommodate new housing development. For the past 15 years, the Town has experienced slow housing growth in its housing stock. Between 2000 and 2020, it added only 1,209 housing units, representing a slow increase in housing. Other communities around Highland are experiencing similar growth in their housing. For example, from 2000 to 2020, Munster added 1,282 new housing units, and Dyer added 1,862. Highland's lack of land for new housing development can be an issue when planning for future generations and population growth.

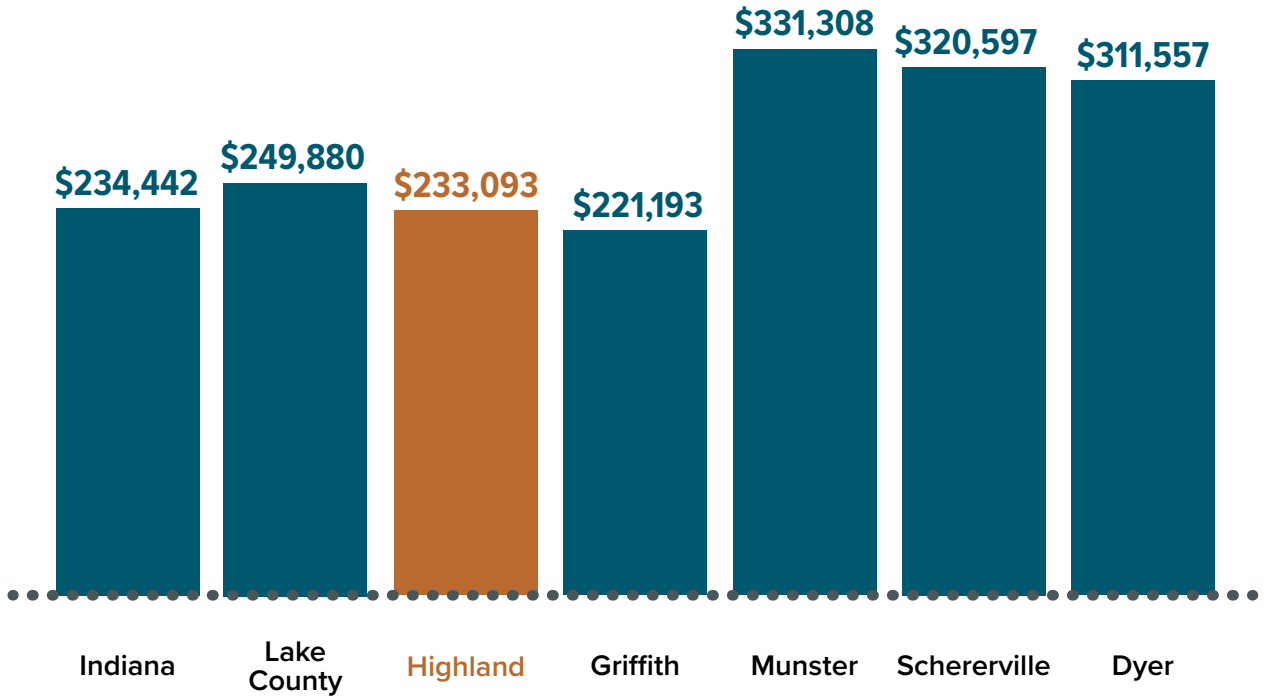
Town of Highland – 2022 Housing Year Built



MEDIAN HOME VALUE

The median home value in Highland has experienced an increasing trend in recent years. In 2022, the median value of a home was $157,300. However, by 2024, it had increased to $233,093, reflecting both market demand and improvements in the local housing market. Compared to other nearby communities, the 2024 home value is higher than that of Griffith, with a median home value of $221,193, but lower than other municipalities such as Dyer, with a median home value of $311,557, Munster at $331,308, and Schererville at $320,597. Highland offers relatively affordable housing options within the regional market, making it attractive for homebuyers seeking value.

Town of Highland – 2024 Median Home Value

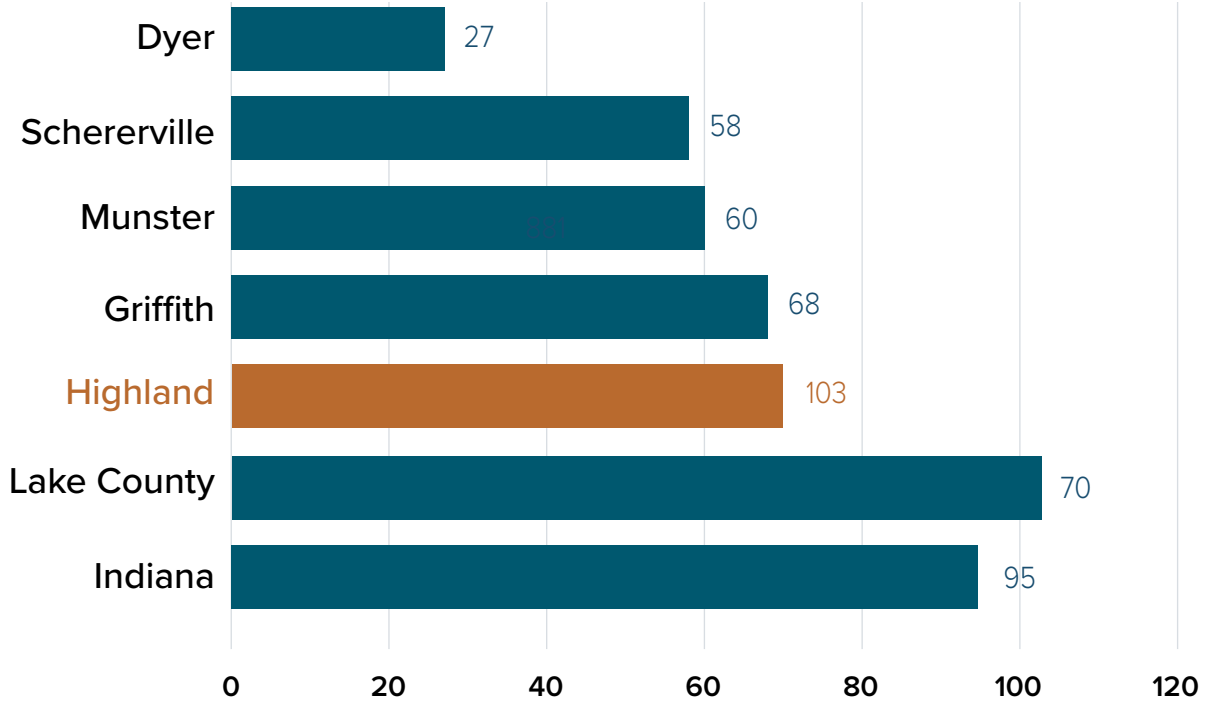




CRIME INDEX

The Crime Index is a valuable tool for assessing a community's relative safety by comparing the rates of various types of crime. It evaluates the likelihood of experiencing seven major crime types: murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. This index uses a scale where the United States average is set at 100. Communities with an index above 100 experience crime rates that are higher than the national average, while those below 100 indicate a lower-than-average crime rate.

Highland's Total Crime Index is 70, lower than the national average and the County but higher than most of its comparison municipalities. The findings support the Town's reputation as a safe place to live and underscore the importance of maintaining public safety through future community planning efforts.





RETAIL GAP ANALYSIS

A retail gap analysis was conducted for the Town of Highland. This analysis compares spending patterns within defined trade areas to identify potential gaps or surpluses across retail categories, helping to inform future economic development strategies.

A retail gap analysis helps to:

- Uncover unmet demand and possible opportunities.
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the local market area.
- Measure the difference between actual and potential retail sales.

"Leakage" and "surplus" are the two categories used in a retail gap analysis.

- **Leakage** in a local market means that people living in a trade area are spending money outside of that trade area. That indicates that additional disposable income could be captured in the trade area but is being lost or "leaking" to competing shopping districts.
- **A surplus (shown in red)** in a local market means more money is being invested in developing local businesses and specialty niches than the trade area's population "should be" spending. A surplus can have multiple meanings:
  - A saturation of the number of businesses that exist in the trade area without enough disposable income to support them all;
  - The trade area is increasing in various retail businesses and services, with additional shoppers beyond the residents' spending power.

The following table summarizes retail gaps and surpluses for Highland's primary (7.5-minute drive) and extended (15-minute drive) trade areas, highlighting where the Town is capturing or losing retail spending.

Town of Highland Retail Gap Information

Retail Category	7.5-Minute Drive Trade Area	15-Minute Drive Trade Area
	Opportunity Gap/ Surplus ($)	Opportunity Gap/ Surplus ($)
Total retail trade, including food and drink	-607,175,860	-1,356,439,820
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	-245,714,939	-410,386,378
Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	-11,114,806	10,975,402
Electronics and Appliance Stores	-33,146,935	-23,520,684
Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers	-35,298,878	-140,873,596
Food and Beverage Stores	-105,152,709	-182,930,582
Health and Personal Care Stores	-85,686,200	-183,828,534
Gasoline Stations	3,286,134	-342,302,588
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	24,676,192	-42,796,741
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, and Book Stores	-57,179,257	-50,646,737
General Merchandise Stores	-169,818,110	-397,685,530
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	-23,445,321	-46,685,922
Non-store Retailers	131,315,244	485,009,461
Food Services and Drinking Places	103,727	-30,767,391

***Surpluses are shown in red.*

TRADE AREAS

7.5-MINUTE DRIVE TIME – PRIMARY TRADE AREA

The Retail Gap of the Primary Trade Area compared to the Extended Trade Area chart shows the reported gap analysis for each major category in the primary and extended trade area, with surpluses (shown in red) and leakages. Highland's primary trade area had a total surplus of -$607,175,860 for all retail trade, including food and drink.

The largest reported surplus within the primary trade area was in motor, vehicle, and parts dealers, which was -$245,714,939. A surplus can indicate that too many businesses exist in the trade area without enough disposable income to support them all or that the trade area is attracting spending from additional shoppers beyond the local residents' power. The large surplus in motor vehicles and parts dealers indicates that many people come to Highland to purchase a car or other auto parts or auto services.

The primary trade area also had high surpluses in the following categories:

- ★ General Merchandise Stores (-$169,818,110)
- ★ Food and Beverage Stores (-$105,152,709)
- ★ Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, and Book Stores (-$57,179,257)

A leakage shows where residents inside the trade area are spending money outside of the trade area. A leakage indicates the opportunity to capture the disposable income spent outside the trade area. Highland's primary trade area showed leakages in the following categories:

- ★ Gasoline Stations ($3,286,134)
- ★ Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores ($24,676,192)
- ★ Food Services and Drinking Places ($103,727)



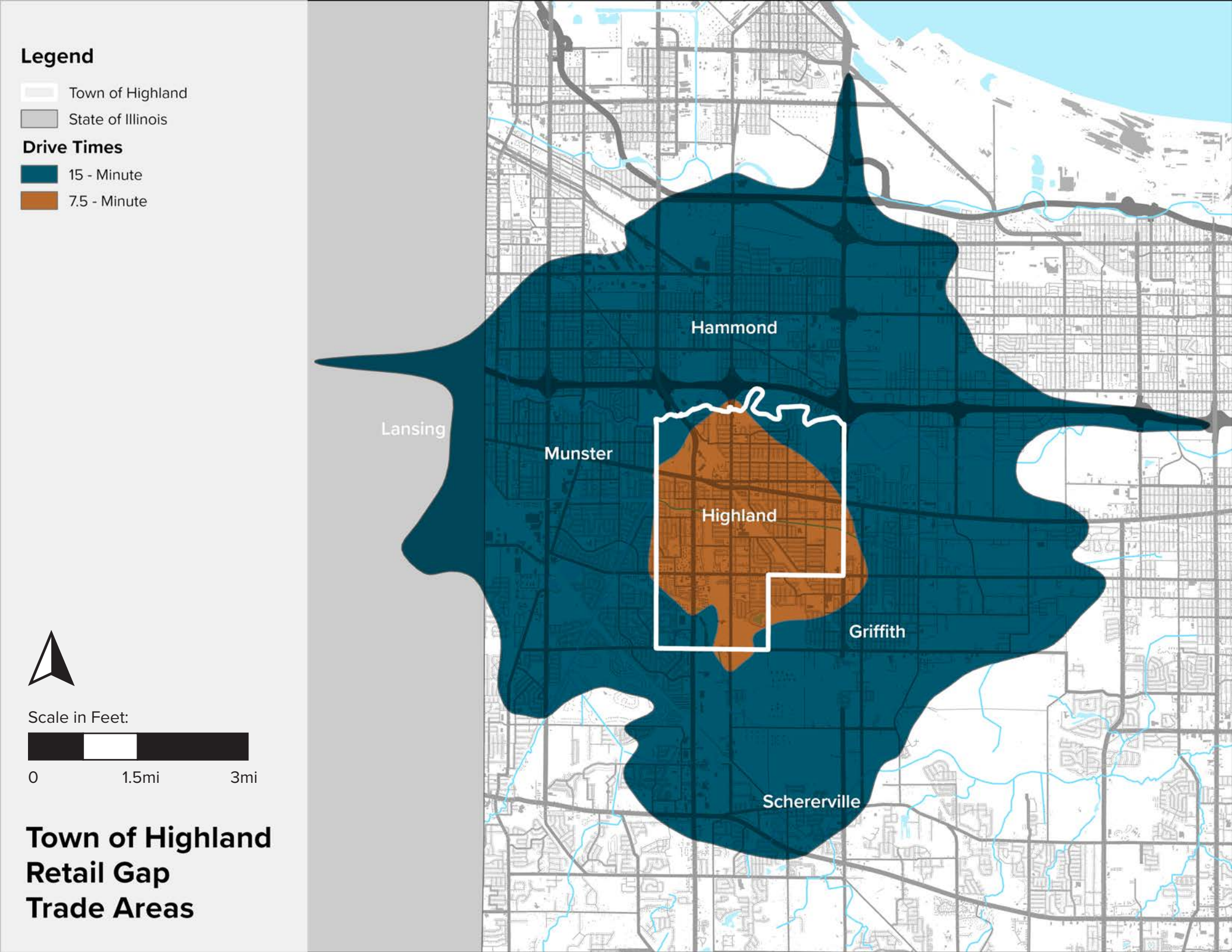
15-MINUTE DRIVE TIME – EXTENDED TRADE AREA

The extended trade area captured spending within a 15-minute drive from the center of the Town. The extended trade area had a total surplus of -$1,356,439,820. Like the primary trade area, the highest surplus was reported in motor, vehicle, and parts dealers, with a surplus of -$410,386,378. General merchandise stores reported a higher surplus than the primary trade area at -$397,685,530.

The extended trade area also had a surplus in the following categories:

- ★ Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers (-$140,873,596)
- ★ Food and Beverage Stores (-$182,930,582)
- ★ Health and Personal Care Stores (-$183,828,534)
- ★ Gasoline Stations (-$342,302,588)

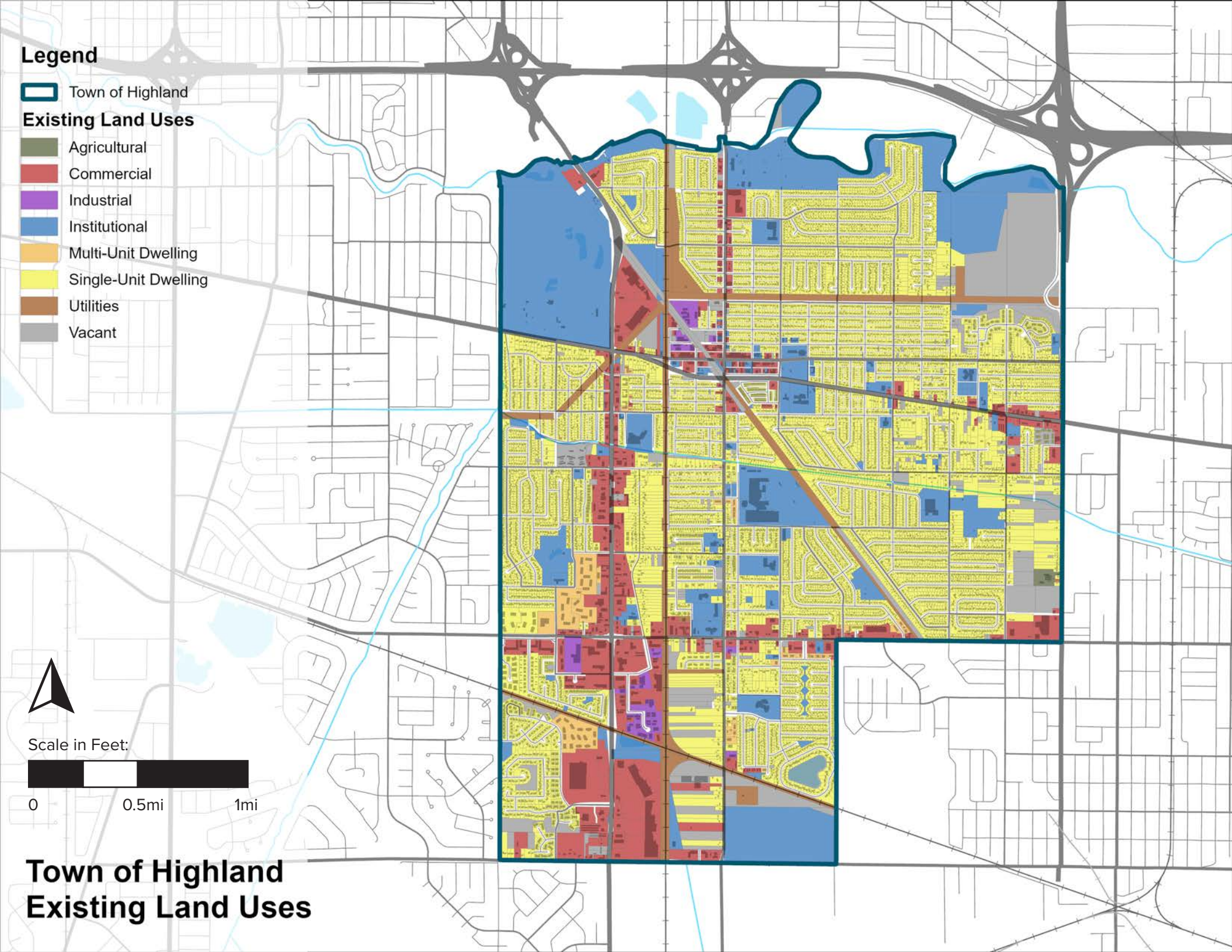
While in furniture and home furnishing stores, the primary trade area reported a surplus of -$11,114,806, the extended area reported a leakage of $10,975,402 in the same category. Another change from the primary trade area to the extended trade area was reported in the non-store retailer, in which the extended trade area had a higher leakage of $485,009,461. The furniture and home furnishing stores and the non-store retailers are the only categories showing leakages in the extended trade area.


Legend
Town of Highland
State of Illinois
Drive Times
15 - Minute
7.5 - Minute
Hammond
Lansing
Munster
Highland
Griffith
Schererville
Scale in Feet:
0
1.5mi
3mi
Town of Highland
Retail Gap
Trade Areas

EXISTING LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

EXISTING LAND USE

Land use refers to the physical utilization of land parcels, regardless of zoning classifications. The analysis of current land use in the Town of Highland is based on parcel-level data from the Property Tax Management System, which assigns a use code to each property. Understanding current land use patterns is essential for identifying development trends, infrastructure needs, and future growth or preservation opportunities.


Legend
Town of Highland
Existing Land Uses
Agricultural
Commercial
Industrial
Institutional
Multi-Unit Dwelling
Single-Unit Dwelling
Utilities
Vacant
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland
Existing Land Uses

LAND USE BY ACREAGE

Understanding how land is currently used helps identify development patterns, future growth opportunities, and areas for preservation or reinvestment. The dominant land use in Highland is single-family residential, which occupies approximately 7,063.9 acres, or 76.9 percent of the total land area. That use is prevalent throughout the Town and reflects Highland's primarily suburban residential character.

Multi-family residential development is much more limited, comprising just 78.7 acres, or 0.9 percent of total land. Notably, no multi-dwelling land uses are northeast of the Erie Lackawanna Trail. The highest concentration of multi-family housing exists in two apartment complexes in the far southwest of the Town, west of Indianapolis Boulevard.

The second-largest land use category is institutional, which includes schools, government facilities, and religious institutions, totaling 779.4 acres or 8.5 percent. Commercial land use ranks third, with 637.1 acres or 6.9 percent, primarily concentrated along key corridors such as Indianapolis Boulevard and Ridge Road. That distribution supports Highland's function as a retail and service hub for both residents and surrounding communities.

Other land use categories include:

- ★ Vacant land: 411.2 acres (4.5 percent), representing potential development/redevelopment or conservation areas.
- ★ Utilities: 173.2 acres (1.9 percent), including infrastructure facilities.
- ★ Industrial: 37.8 acres (less than 1 percent)
- ★ Agricultural: 4.7 acres (less than 1 percent)

Land Use	Area (Acres)	Percentage
Agriculture	4.7	0.1%
Commercial	637.1	6.9%
Industrial	37.8	0.4%
Institutional	779.4	8.5%
Residential	7068.2	76.9%
Multi-Dwelling	78.7	0.9%
Utilities	173.2	1.9%
Vacant	411.2	4.5%
Total	**9190.2**	**100.0%**



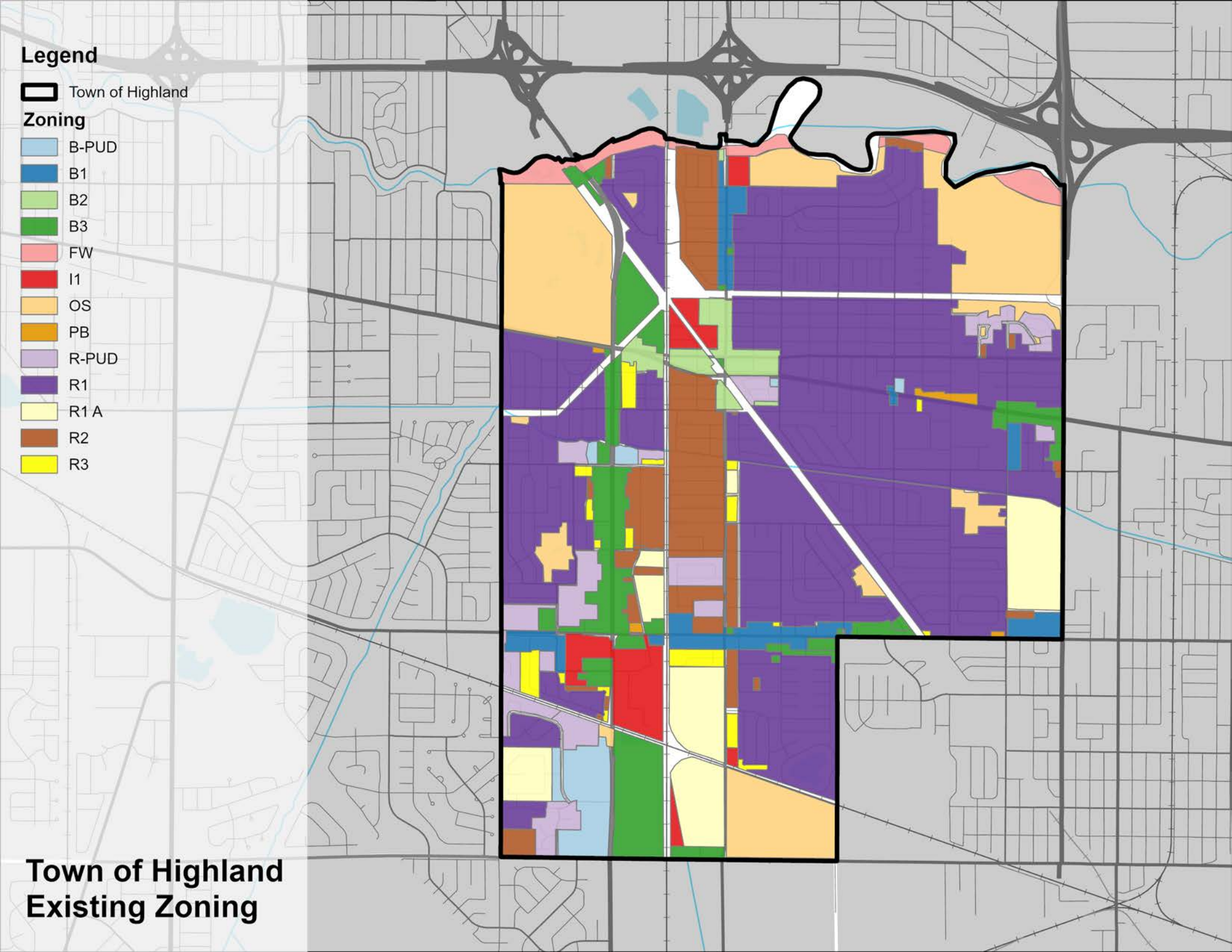






ZONING BY DISTRICT

Zoning determines how land may be developed and used. Highland's zoning framework divides the community into various districts, each with permitted uses and development standards. The Town's zoning structure supports a predominantly residential community with complementary commercial, institutional, and limited industrial uses.


Legend
Town of Highland
Zoning
B-PUD
B1
B2
B3
FW
I1
OS
PB
R-PUD
R1
R1 A
R2
R3
Town of Highland
Existing Zoning

AGRICULTURE

The Town of Highland's zoning for agricultural and open space areas is provided through the Open Space (OS) zoning district. While Highland is a predominantly residential community with limited agricultural land remaining, the OS district plays an important role in preserving the Town's natural amenities, recreational areas, and limited agricultural uses.

The OS district is intended to protect scenic viewsheds, environmentally sensitive areas, and public spaces while allowing development compatible with the District's character. Permitted uses include traditional agricultural activities such as crop and tree farming, orchards, nursery operations, parks, golf courses, open space recreation, and stormwater management areas. Low-intensity residential uses are also allowed, such as single-family detached dwellings associated with agricultural properties.

The OS district helps ensure Highland's limited open lands contribute to the community's livability and environmental quality. As the Comprehensive Plan considers the Town's future land use strategy, preserving and enhancing open space will remain an important priority.

RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

The Town of Highland's zoning framework provides a range of residential districts to support its predominantly single-family character while allowing for a modest mix of housing types to serve different household needs. The residential zoning districts include:

- **R-1A and R-1 Single-Family Residential**
  These districts accommodate low-density, single-family detached housing and related community uses, such as schools, parks, religious institutions, and public facilities. The intent of these districts is to preserve Highland's established residential neighborhoods while supporting high-quality of life and community character. Short-term rentals are not permitted in these districts.
- **R-2 Single- and Two-Family Residential**
  The R-2 district allows both single-family detached homes and two-family (duplex) structures, in addition to the community uses permitted in R-1A and R-1. This District provides for slightly higher residential densities and more housing flexibility, supporting a broader range of household types. Short-term rentals are also not permitted in this District.
- **R-3 Multiple-Family Residential and Planned Unit Development (PUD)**
  The R-3 District is Highland's primary zoning district for multi-family housing, allowing for apartment buildings, assisted living facilities, and homes for older people. The District also accommodates Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), which provide an opportunity for innovative residential design and mixed-use projects through a flexible development process. As with other residential districts, short-term rentals are not permitted.

The Comprehensive Plan will consider whether Highland's residential zoning framework continues to meet evolving housing needs, particularly related to housing diversity, affordability, and life-cycle housing options for residents of all ages.

BUSINESS

The Town of Highland's business zoning districts are designed to support a vibrant mix of retail, service, office, and professional uses that serve both residents and the surrounding region. These districts are located along key commercial corridors and within neighborhood centers to promote accessible shopping, employment opportunities, and economic vitality. Highland's business zoning includes the following districts:

- **B-1 Neighborhood Business**
  The B-1 district provides for small-scale retail, service, and office uses that are intended to serve the daily needs of surrounding neighborhoods. This District helps foster walkable, neighborhood-oriented commercial areas that complement the Town's residential character.
- **B-2 Central Business**
  The B-2 district accommodates a broader range of retail, service, office, and entertainment uses, generally intended for Highland's central commercial areas. This District supports a more intensive level of business activity, promoting the Town's role as a local shopping and service hub.
- **B-3 General Business**
  The B-3 district allows for various retail, service, office, and related commercial uses along major corridors such as Indianapolis Boulevard and Ridge Road. This District supports regional-serving businesses and auto-oriented commercial development.
- **PB Professional Business**
  The PB district provides for professional and administrative offices, health care services, and selected low-intensity retail uses. It is often a transitional area between residential neighborhoods and higher-intensity commercial districts.

Together, these business districts provide a flexible zoning framework to support Highland's economic base while protecting neighborhood character and encouraging well-designed commercial development. As part of this Comprehensive Plan, the Town will evaluate whether its business zoning supports future goals related to downtown vitality, mixed-use development, and commercial corridor enhancement.

LIGHT INDUSTRIAL

The Town of Highland's industrial zoning is provided through the **I-1 Light Industrial** district, which is intended to accommodate a range of low- to moderate-intensity industrial and related uses. The District allows for activities such as production, processing, assembly, warehousing, wholesaling, and supporting retail and service uses that are compatible with surrounding land uses.

The I-1 District is generally located along transportation corridors that provide access to major highways, expressways, and rail infrastructure, supporting Highland's role in the regional industrial and logistics economy. The District also allows for selected public and community services. It permits certain uses subject to special use approval to ensure compatibility with surrounding development.

Highland's light industrial areas contribute to the Town's economic base by providing space for businesses that support job creation and local tax revenues. As the Comprehensive Plan considers future land use strategy and economic development goals, maintaining these areas' viability and ensuring they are well integrated with the Town's overall growth vision will be an important priority.

TIF DISTRICTS

The Town of Highland has four Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts within its limits. A TIF District is a tool that helps fund public improvements and spur redevelopment by capturing future increases in property tax revenues within a designated area. When a TIF district is established, its current assessed property value is set as a baseline. The taxes generated from this base value continue to flow to existing taxing jurisdictions such as schools and municipalities. Over time, as property values rise within the District, the additional tax revenue, known as the tax increment, is captured to fund eligible improvements within the District.

TIF Districts:

1. Economic Development Plan for Highland Acres Economic Development Area
2. Redevelopment Plan for Highland (Downtown) Redevelopment Area
3. Redevelopment Plan for Highland Commercial Corridor Redevelopment Area
4. Economic Development Plan for the Cardinal Campus Allocation Area

Highland's TIF districts will continue to play a key role in supporting targeted redevelopment, enhancing commercial corridors, and funding strategic public improvements that align with the goals of this Comprehensive Plan.



ROADWAY CLASSIFICATIONS[7]

The Indiana Department of Transportation, in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), classifies roadways based on their function and the type of travel they are intended to support. Most vehicle trips progress through this hierarchy, typically beginning on a local road, moving to collectors and arterials for longer-distance travel, and then returning to local roads near the destination. Understanding this roadway hierarchy helps guide transportation planning and investment decisions.

INTERSTATES

While no interstate highway passes directly through Highland, Interstate 94 runs just north of the Town's border, and Interstate 90 lies approximately 2.5 miles to the north. These highways provide crucial regional and interstate access for residents and businesses.

PRINCIPAL ARTERIALS

Principal arterials carry longer-distance, higher-speed traffic, connecting interstates and other major routes. In Highland, Cline Avenue/Indiana State Road 912, US 41, and Ridge Road pass through as principal arterials. US 41 connects north-south to Schererville and Hammond, and Ridge Road connects east-west to Griffith and Munster. Cline Avenue/Indiana State Road 912 connects north-south. It is the Town's eastern boundary, providing access to I-94, Gary, Griffith, and Hammond.

MINOR ARTERIALS

There are four minor arterials in Highland. These roads provide connections for shorter trips and direct traffic onto principal arterials and interstates. The minor arterials in Highland are 45th Street, Highway Avenue, Kennedy Avenue, and Main Street. Kennedy Avenue is the only north-south minor arterial connecting north into Hammond, intersecting Interstate 90 and 94, and connects south into Schererville. Traveling east-west, 45th Street connects from Munster, intersects US 41, and crosses into Griffith to the east. Highway Avenue forks from Ridge Road near US 41 and travels east-west into Griffith, intersecting Cline Avenue. Main Street travels east-west on the City's southern border with Schererville, connecting from Munster to Griffith.

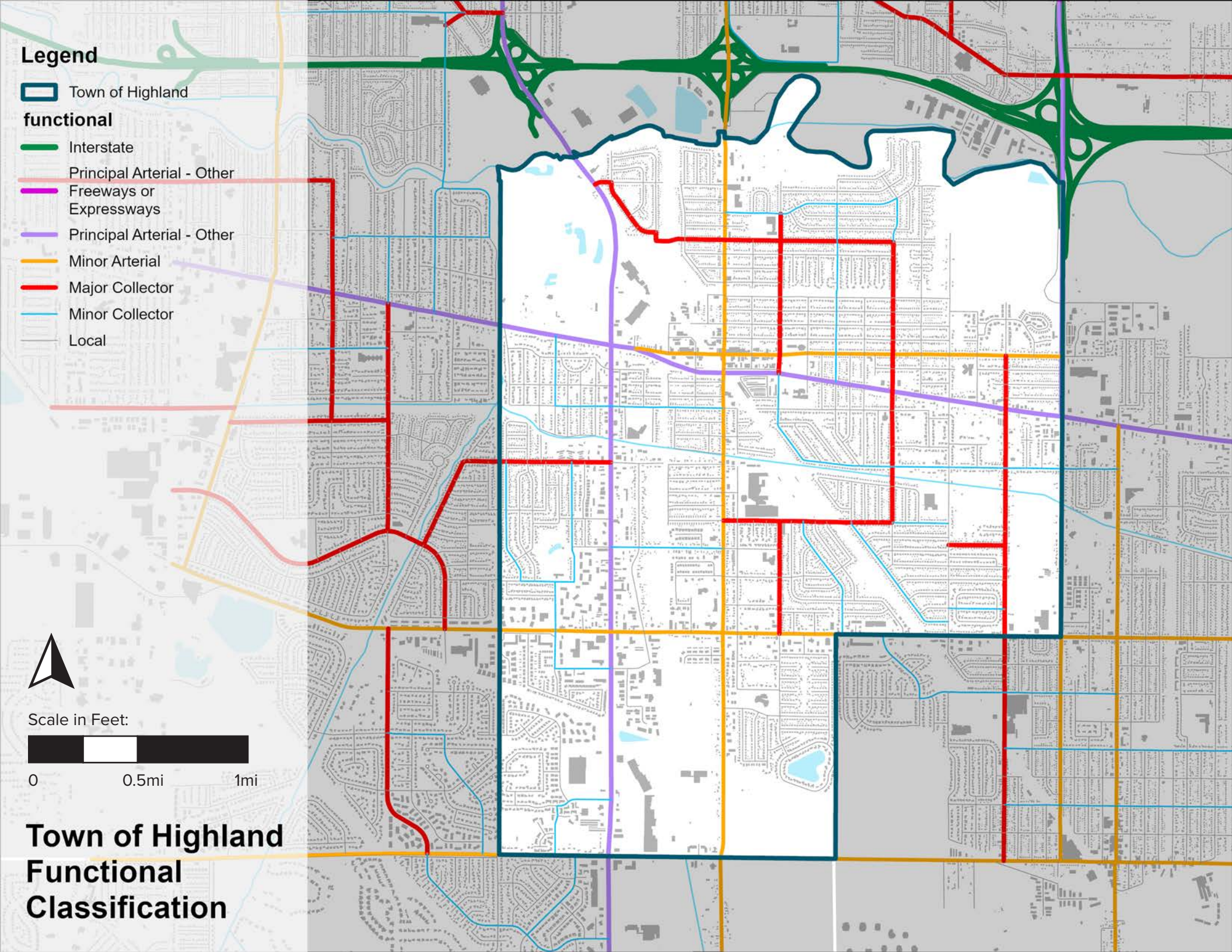
7 Source: *Highway Functional Classifications – FHWA.*

MAJOR AND MINOR COLLECTORS

Major collectors typically direct traffic from minor collectors out of specific neighborhoods onto higher classifications. Minor collectors consist of primary roads entering and exiting neighborhoods. These functions collect traffic from local roads within neighborhoods and route it onto higher roadway classifications.

LOCAL ROADS

Local roads route traffic within neighborhoods on a very local scale. These roads typically lead traffic to major and minor collectors.

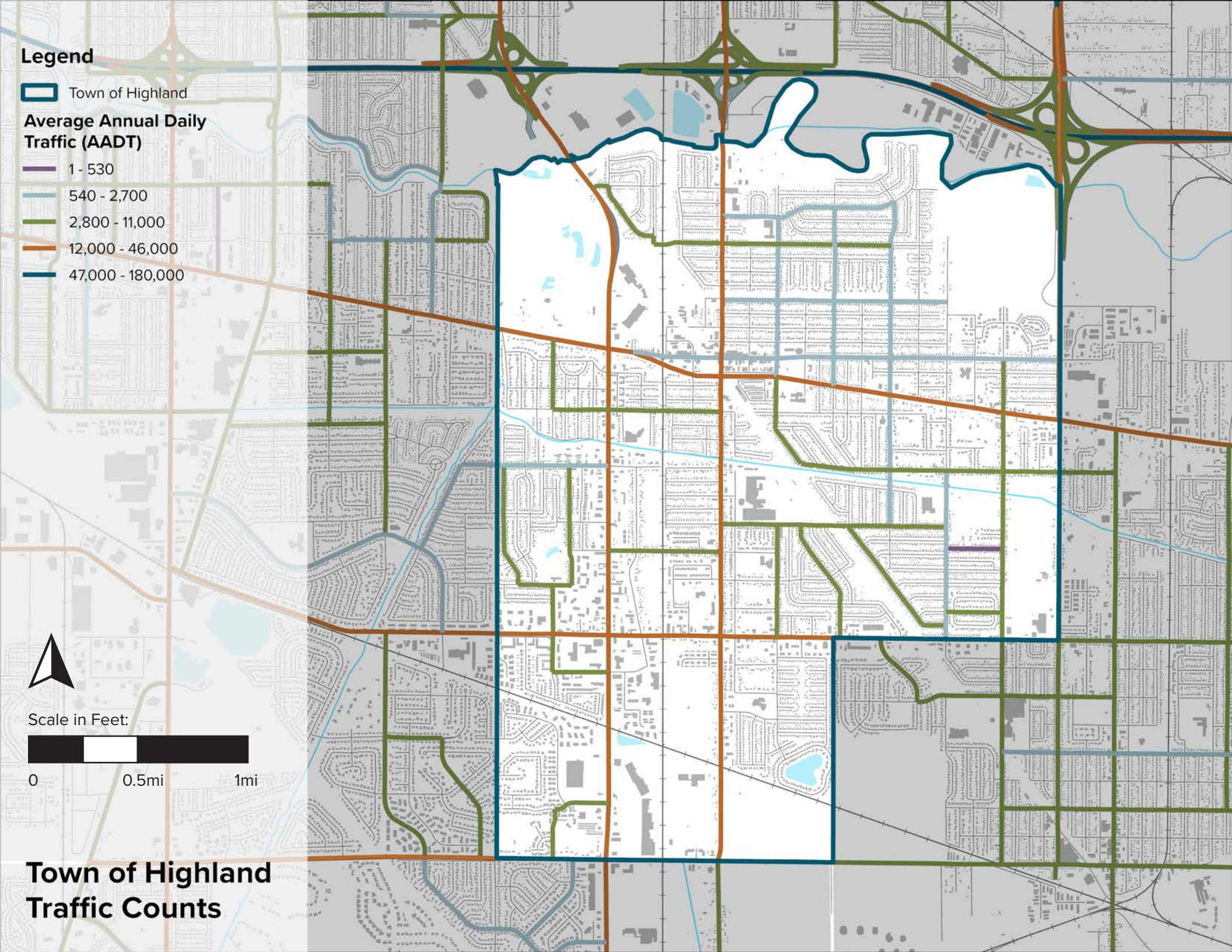

Legend
Town of Highland
functional
Interstate
Principal Arterial - Other Freeways or Expressways
Principal Arterial - Other
Minor Arterial
Major Collector
Minor Collector
Local
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland Functional Classification

TRAFFIC VOLUMES

Traffic volumes in Highland are highest along major arterial corridors such as Indianapolis Boulevard, Ridge Road, and Kennedy Avenue, which carry significant local and regional traffic through the Town. Key roadway segments with the highest average daily traffic include:

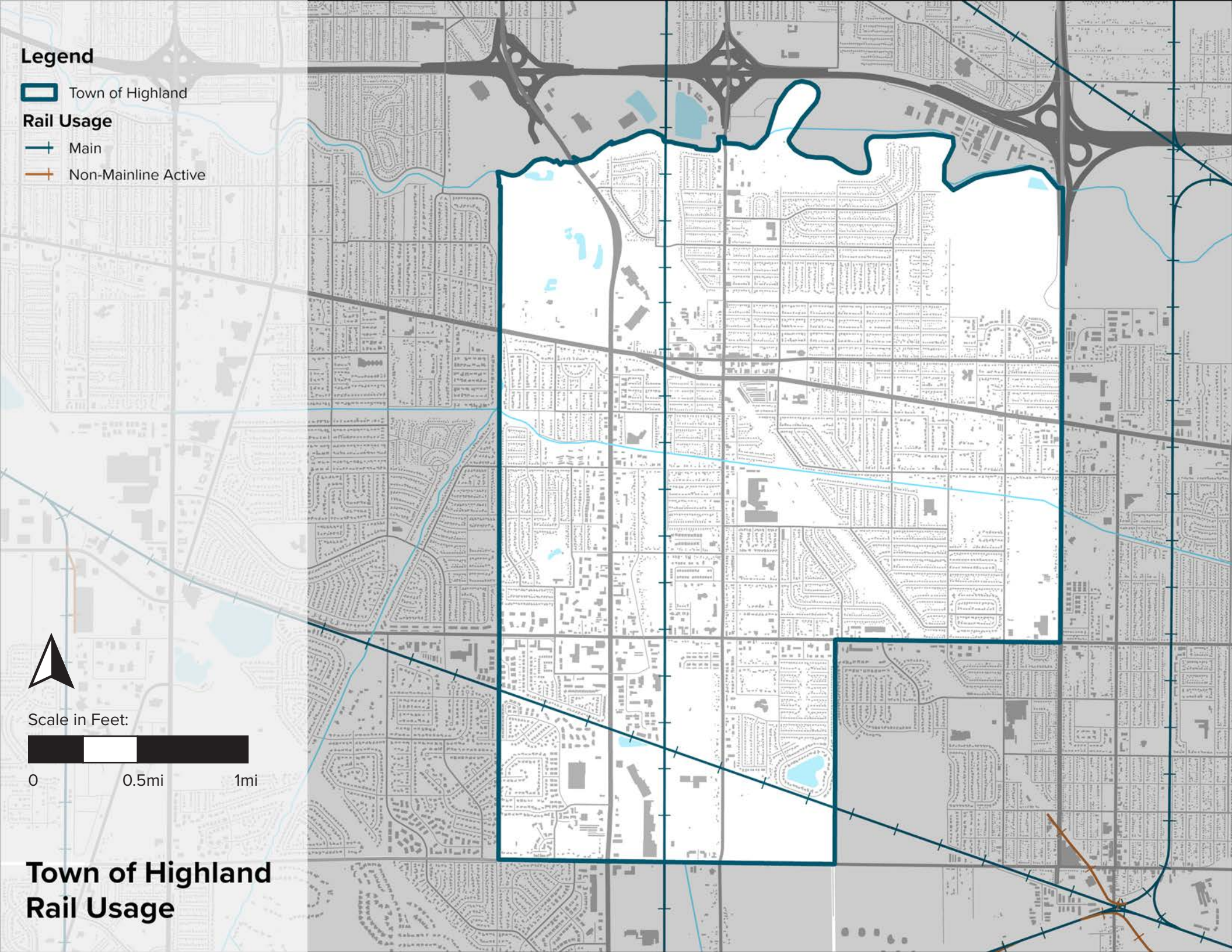
- **Indianapolis Boulevard:** 35,221 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) from I-94 to Ridge Road; over 28,000 AADT south of Ridge Road
- **Ridge Road:** 14,904 AADT (west boundary to O Day Drive); 13,662 AADT (O Day Drive to east boundary)
- **Kennedy Avenue**: 21,473 AADT (north boundary to Duluth Street); 16,010 AADT (Duluth Street to south boundary)
- **45th Street:** 12,044 AADT
- **Main Street:** 19,015 AADT

Other streets within the Town typically experience traffic volumes below 11,000 AADT.


Legend
Town of Highland
Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT)
1 - 530
540 - 2,700
2,800 - 11,000
12,000 - 46,000
47,000 - 180,000
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland
Traffic Counts

RAILS

A Norfolk-Southern line runs north-south through the Town, roughly paralleling Kennedy Blvd and intersecting a large number of trunk lines that head northwest into Chicago. A Canadian National Railway line runs east-west through southern Highland, continuing into Illinois. It intersects another CN line to the east, linking to regional freight and passenger rail networks. While the line currently supports freight movement, its presence may provide opportunities to enhance regional freight logistics. Long-term regional planning initiatives could also explore the potential for future passenger rail access, depending on demand and broader transportation strategies. The Comprehensive Plan will consider regional rail initiatives and support strategies to ensure that Highland's rail infrastructure is leveraged appropriately for economic development and community connectivity.


Legend
Town of Highland
Rail Usage
Main
Non-Mainline Active
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland
Rail Usage

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

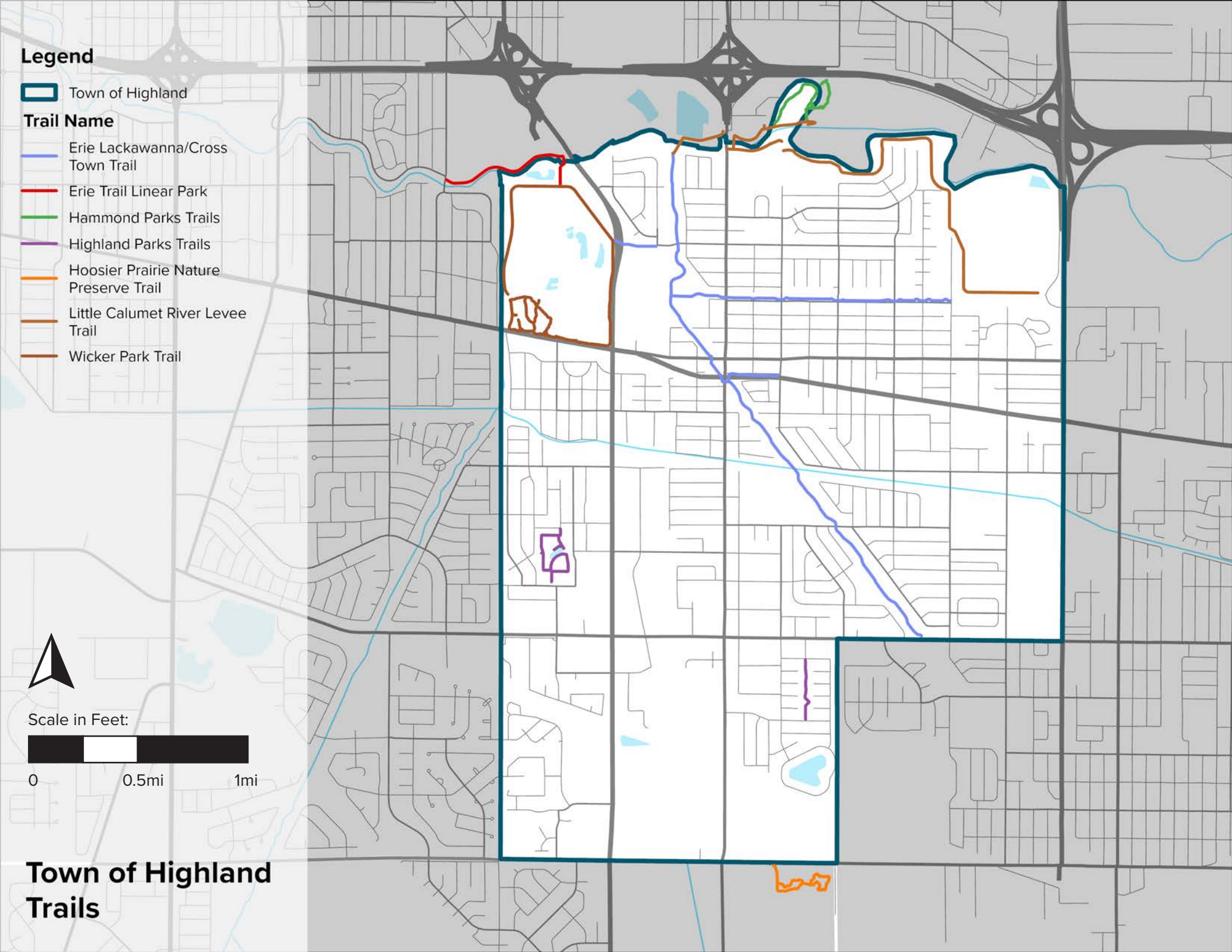
While Highland lacks fixed-route services within its boundaries, residents can access essential bus and rail services with short local trips or by coordinating with regional demand-response programs. Regional and local transit options, including bus and commuter rail, serve the Highland area. These options include Northwest Lake County's EasyGo routes, specifically the R3 and R4 lines, which stop along Indianapolis Boulevard and Ridge Road, with the closest stop at Indy Blvd & Ridge Rd, just under a 10-minute walk from central Highland. North of Highland, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District's South Shore Line provides high-frequency commuter rail service between Munster, Hammond, and Chicago, offering a reliable transit link to downtown Chicago. Additionally, the ongoing West Lake Corridor extension, which is expected to open by fall 2025, will introduce a new branch connecting Dyer and Munster, potentially offering nearby commuter rail access for Highland residents.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Highland has a well-developed and interconnected trail system, contributing to active transportation, recreation, and connectivity:

1. **Erie Lackawanna/Cross Town Trail**: The most substantial trail in the Town of Highland, this trail connects from the southeast of the Town at 45th Street, crossing in from Griffith to the northwest of the Town, connecting into Little Calumet River Levee Trail and Wicker Park Trail.
2. **Erie Trail**: This trail connects to Wicker Park Trail and north into Hammond, providing access to other regional trail systems.
3. **Wicker Park Trail**: This trail loops around Wicker Park and forms a connection from Ridge Road, north along Indianapolis Boulevard, into the Erie Lackawanna/Cross Town Trail and the Erie Trail.
4. **Little Calumet River Levee Trail**: This trail connects from the eastern side of the Town at Highland Heron Rookery, west along the Little Calumet River route, leaving Town limits on the west and connecting into Monon Trail and Erie Trail.
5. **Lakeside Park Trail**: This local trail on the southeast side connects from 100th Street to 97th Place, passing through Lakeside Park.
6. **Meadow Park Walkway:** This walkway system on the west side passes through Meadows Park, connecting Azalea Drive to 41st Place.

These trails are vital for non-vehicular circulation and essential for quality of life, tourism, and community health.


Legend
Town of Highland
Trail Name
Erie Lackawanna/Cross Town Trail
Erie Trail Linear Park
Hammond Parks Trails
Highland Parks Trails
Hoosier Prairie Nature Preserve Trail
Little Calumet River Levee Trail
Wicker Park Trail
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland Trails

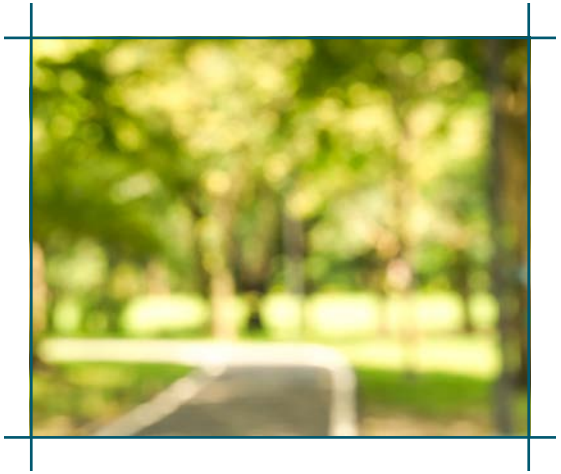
WHAT DOES THE TRANSPORTATION AND MOVEMENT SECTION TELL US?

The transportation network in Highland is defined by a well-structured hierarchy of roads that links neighborhoods to regional destinations. While an interstate does not directly serve the Town itself, its proximity to Interstate 94 and 90, just north of the Town's boundaries, offers strong regional connectivity. Principal arterials like US 41 and Ridge Road carry local and regional traffic, reinforced by a network of minor arterials and collectors that efficiently distribute movement throughout Highland and neighboring communities.

Highland's trails and walkways complement its transportation system by promoting multimodal connectivity. The extensive Erie Lackawanna/Cross Town Trail enhances recreational opportunities, supports active transportation, and contributes to overall community health and livability. Overall, this analysis highlights a well-established transportation framework that supports vehicle mobility while offering growing opportunities for multimodal travel. Future planning efforts should continue to strengthen multimodal options, address high-traffic corridors, and ensure that all parts of Highland remain accessible, safe, and connected.









WATERWORKS

Ensuring long-term water supply resilience and infrastructure maintenance will be key priorities as the Town plans for future growth. The Town of Highland provides potable water to residents and businesses through an interlocal agreement with Hammond, which supplies millions of gallons of treated water daily.

The Town Council appointed the Highland Water Works Board of Directors, which oversees the management of the water system, including the assessment of rates and fees necessary to recover the water purchase, distribution, and infrastructure maintenance costs. Residents and businesses are billed monthly for water, wastewater treatment based on water usage, and solid waste collection.

STREET DEPARTMENT

The Street Department helps maintain public safety, infrastructure quality, and neighborhood appearance. These services include:

- ★ Ice and snow removal
- ★ Seasonal leaf and branch collection
- ★ The Mosquito Abatement Program is a service conducted during summer through targeted spraying to reduce mosquito populations and prevent diseases.

Continued investment in street maintenance and public services will support Highland's livability and economic vitality.

SOLID WASTE DISTRICT

As sustainability goals evolve, future solid waste planning may consider opportunities to expand recycling or reduce landfill use. Solid waste collection in Highland is managed through a contract with Allied Waste. Residential trash pickup occurs every Tuesday for all single and two-family homes and some multi-dwelling units by arrangement. Recycling pickup is provided every other Tuesday. Residents may dispose of large items at the Highland Public Works facility on Kennedy Avenue.

SANITARY DISTRICT

Managing aging sewer infrastructure and meeting stormwater quality requirements will remain important planning considerations. The Highland Sanitary District is responsible for installing and maintaining sanitary and storm sewer pipes. The Town sends its water to Hammond for treatment and pays for the service by the gallon. Highland has separate sewer systems for sanitary waste and stormwater, one of Indiana's nearly 200 Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems. Stormwater is discharged directly into local bodies of water.

INTERNET/BROADBAND

Expanding reliable broadband access is essential to supporting economic development, education, and equity throughout Highland. A range of private service providers provides Internet access in Highland, offering residents and businesses diverse connectivity options. Primary providers include AT&T and Spectrum, which offer broadband and cable services. Additional options include T-Mobile Home Internet, Xfinity, EarthLink, Verizon Home Internet, Starlink, TOAST.net, Easy Internet Now, and Astound. Technologies available in Highland include 5G home internet, cable, DSL, fiber, and satellite, depending on the provider and location within the Town.




NBULANCE

POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Highland Police Department provides the community with comprehensive public safety and law enforcement services. In addition to core policing responsibilities such as crime prevention, emergency response, and patrol services, the department offers the following community-oriented services:

- Animal Control
- Vacation home checks
- Gun permits
- Firearm Licensing

The Police Department also collaborates with the Northwest Indiana Regional SWAT Team to assist with personnel training with other communities involved in the unit. As Highland grows and evolves, continued investment in public safety personnel, facilities, and technology will be important to maintain a safe and welcoming community.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Highland Fire Department operates two fire stations at 2901 Highway Avenue and 2647 45th Street. The Fire Department operates a Safe Haven Baby Box, allowing for the anonymous and safe surrender of newborns by parents in crisis. The department maintains a modern fleet of emergency response vehicles to support fire suppression, rescue, and community safety operations. It operates nine vehicles, with two housed at the 45th Street station and seven at the Highway Avenue station. The Comprehensive Plan will support future planning for fire protection services, facility needs, and response capacity to ensure that Highland remains well-protected.

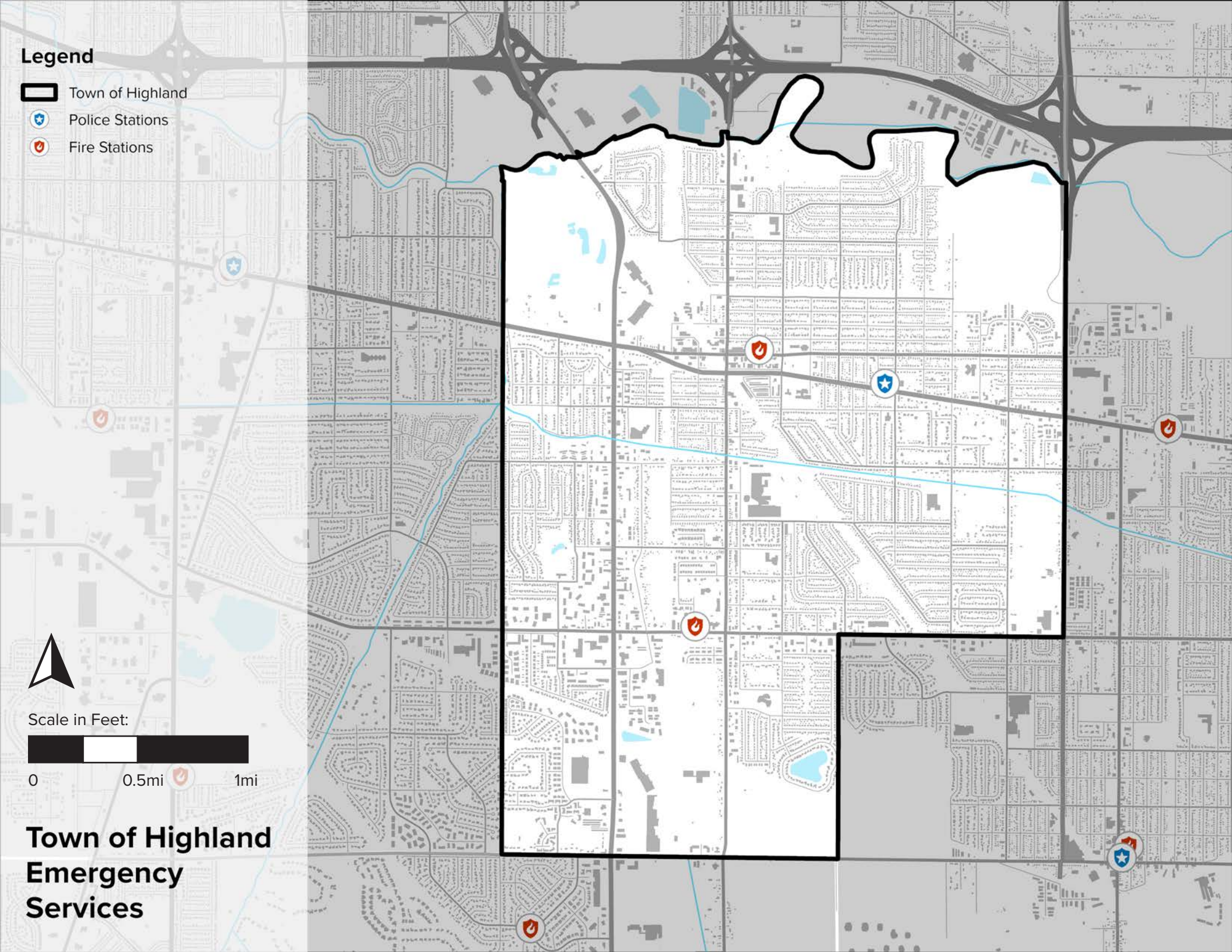
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

The local emergency management agencies are Lake County Emergency Management and Homeland Security. The agency considers risks to the County, develops coordinated response plans, and ensures that appropriate resources are available.

The agency's responsibilities include:

- ★ Hazard and risk assessment (natural and human-made)
- ★ Development and implementation of emergency management plans
- ★ Coordination with adjacent municipalities and state agencies
- ★ Community education on disaster preparedness
- ★ Planning collaboration with schools, medical facilities, and other businesses to assist in developing consistent action plans.

The regional approach to emergency planning ensures that Highland is better prepared to respond to large-scale incidents.


Legend
Town of Highland
Police Stations
Fire Stations
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland Emergency Services



PARKS AND RECREATION

Highland offers a variety of parks and recreation facilities that support active living, community events, and family recreation. Key amenities include the Highland Fieldhouse and Fitness Center, indoor and outdoor event spaces, and an attractive network of neighborhood and community parks.

FIELDHOUSE

The Highland Fieldhouse offers an open gym (free for residents and active military; available for a fee to non-residents), a walking track, and rental courts for basketball, volleyball, and pickleball.

FITNESS CENTER

The Fitness Center features cardio equipment, strength training machines, and free weights, with access available through daily passes or memberships. Personal training services are also offered.

BANQUET HALLS AND ROOMS

The Town offers full- and half-capacity banquet hall rentals and single- or double-classroom rentals. Audio-visual technology is also available for events.

TOWN PARKS

- **Homestead Park:** Located on Highland's north side along the Little Calumet River, featuring athletic fields and the Sharp Athletic Complex
- **Markley Park:** Located in the southeast near the Erie-Lackawanna Trail, with ball fields, a playground, and a gazebo
- **Sheppard Park**: Situated in East Highland with various sports amenities
- **Main Square Park and Gazebo:** A central, landscaped park on Ridge Road often used for weddings and public events

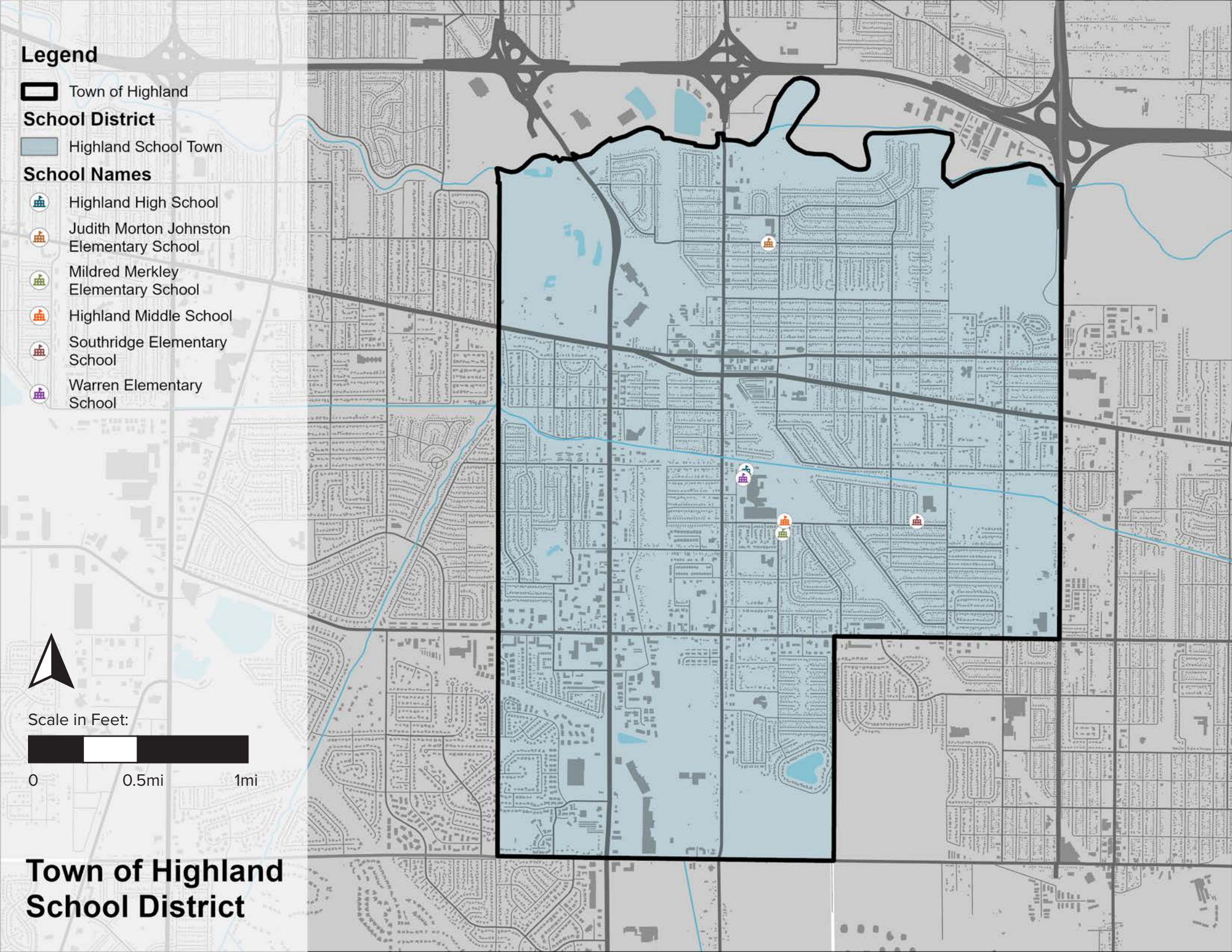
EDUCATION

The local school district, the Highland School Town District, consists of the following institutions:

- ★ Highland High School
- ★ Highland Middle School
- ★ Johnston Elementary School
- ★ Merkley Elementary School
- ★ Southridge Elementary School
- ★ Warren Elementary School

Each elementary school hosts a Dependent Care Program, which provides before- and after-school childcare for Highland children in grades K-5 who attend Highland public schools.

The Town's strong local school system contributes to Highland's quality of life and is an important factor in attracting and retaining families. The Comprehensive Plan will support continued coordination between land use, housing, and school planning to meet future educational needs.


Legend
Town of Highland
School District
Highland School Town
School Names
Highland High School
Judith Morton Johnston Elementary School
Mildred Merkley Elementary School
Highland Middle School
Southridge Elementary School
Warren Elementary School
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland School District



PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Highland Branch of the Lake County Public Library, centrally located on Jewett Avenue between Ridge Road and Highway Avenue, serves as a vital hub for education, culture, and civic engagement in the community. As part of the broader Lake County Public Library system, the Highland Branch connects residents to an extensive range of regional library resources and services.

The library offers a wide variety of programs and amenities, including:

- Programs for children, teens, and adults, supporting early literacy and lifelong learning
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes
- Public computers, high-speed Wi-Fi, and technology access
- Meeting rooms, study spaces, and photo-scanning services
- Unique offerings such as a Seed Library and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which provides free books to young children

As a cornerstone of lifelong learning and community connection, the Highland Branch Library enhances the quality of life and supports civic identity. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the library as a valued community asset. It will continue to support efforts that promote educational access, cultural enrichment, and community engagement for all residents.



HYDROLOGY

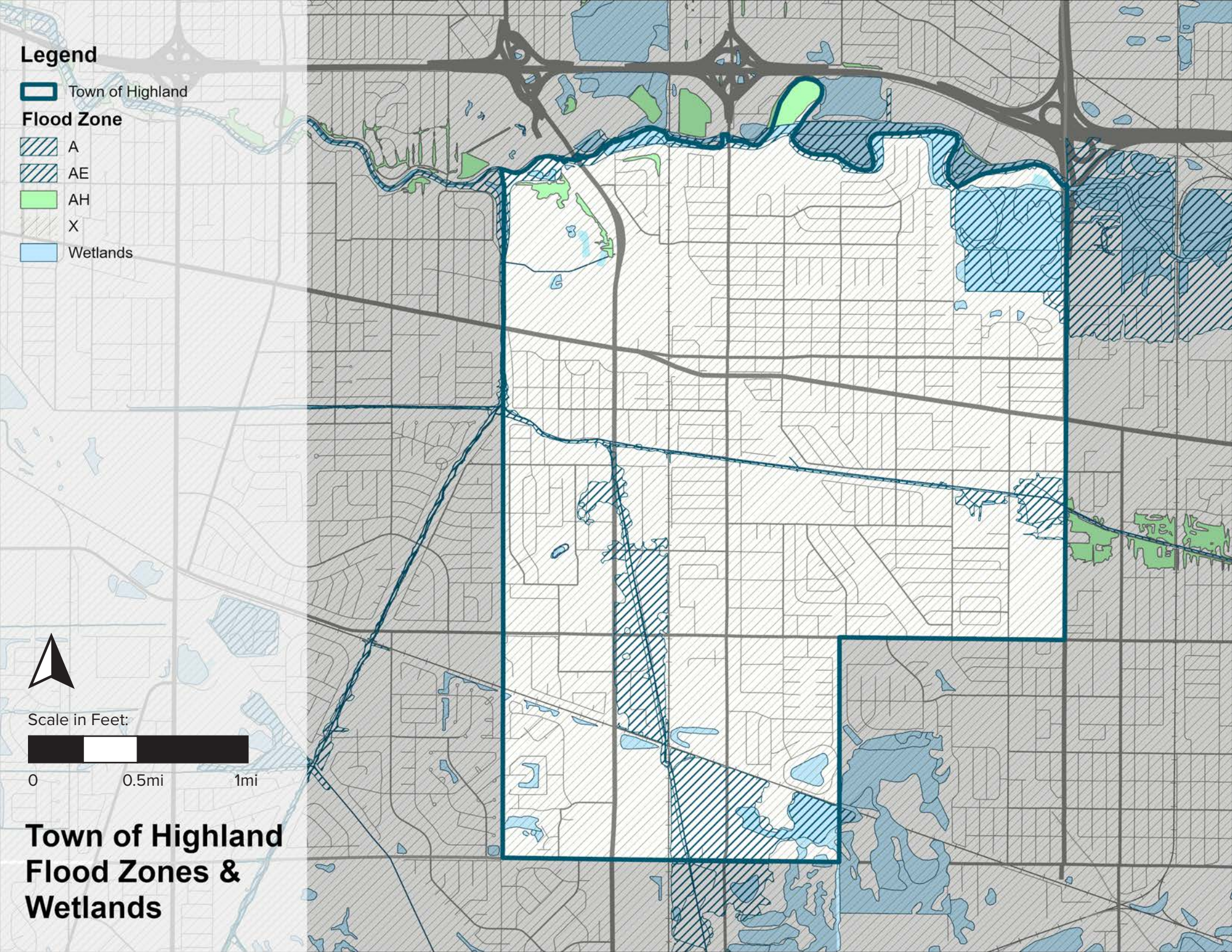
Highland's environmental conditions are shaped by its waterways, floodplains, and wetlands, which contribute to the Town's natural character and influence land use and development patterns.

WATERWAYS

The primary waterway in Highland is the Little Calumet River, which forms the northern border of Highland with Hammond. It flows west into the Calumet River and is a tributary to Lake Michigan. Cady Marsh Ditch also runs east-west through the center of Highland, providing additional drainage and contributing to the Town's hydrological system.

FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS

1. **Zones A and AE:** Zone AE floodplains are areas with a 1 percent annual chance of flooding, commonly known as the 100-year floodplain, for which detailed base flood elevations have been established. These areas follow the routes of the Little Calumet River, Cady Marsh Ditch, Hart Ditch, and associated wetland areas.
2. **Zone AH:** Zone AH floodplains are defined as areas with a 1.0 percent annual chance of shallow flooding, with an average depth ranging from one to three feet. There is a 26.0 percent chance of flooding over the life of a 30-year mortgage in these areas. These flood zones exist to a more limited extent in the north of Town, near Little Calumet River, and within Wicker Park.
3. **Wetlands:** Extensive wetlands follow the northern border of Highland, accompanying the Little Calumet River and Highland Heron Rookery Nature Preserve. These wetlands are labeled as freshwater forested/shrub wetlands. Freshwater forested/shrub wetlands exist in the southeast of the Town around Hoosier State Prairie Nature Preserve. Additionally, there are freshwater pond wetlands scattered throughout the Town.

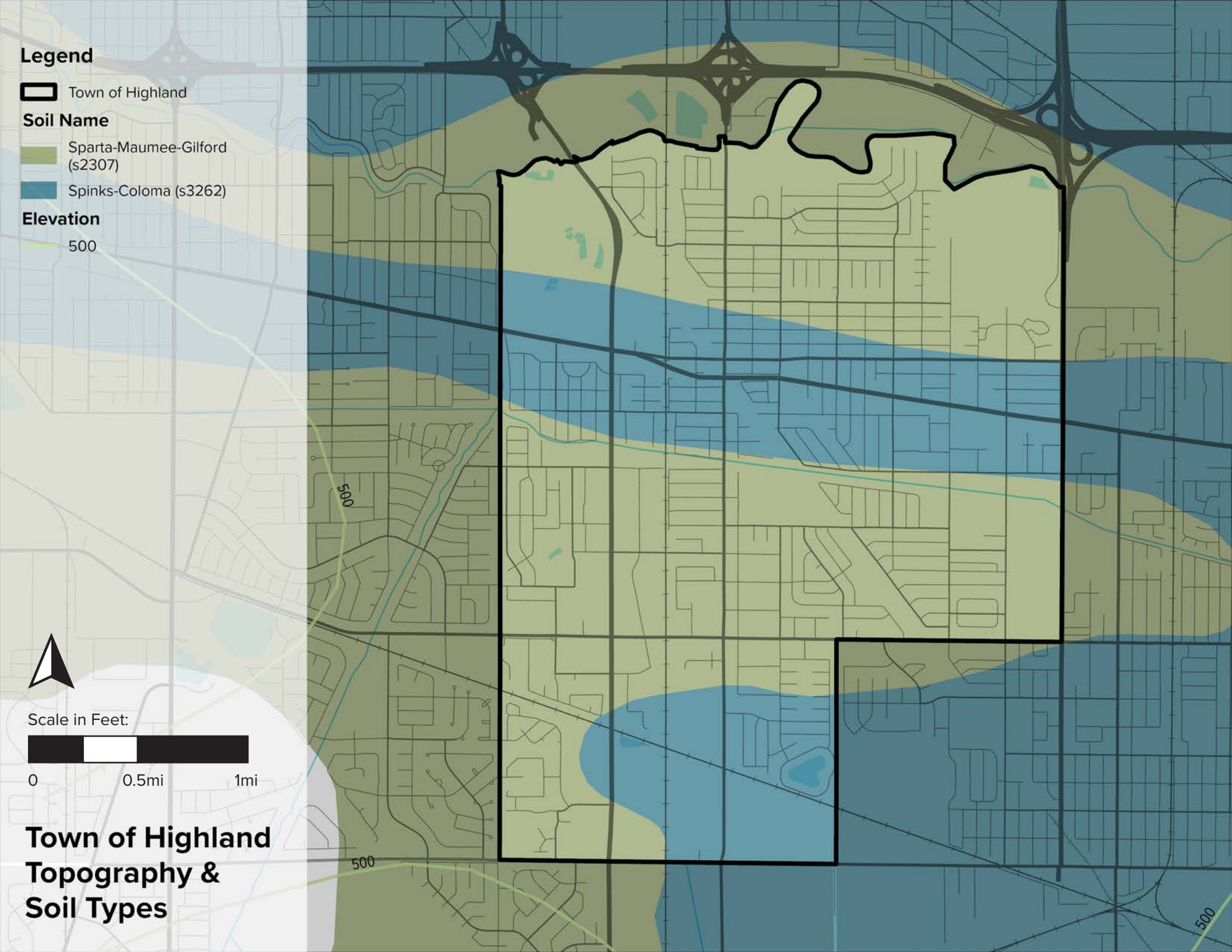

Legend
Town of Highland
Flood Zone
A
AE
AH
X
Wetlands
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland
Flood Zones &
Wetlands

GEOLOGY/SOILS

Two soil types are present in Highland: Sparta-Maumee-Gilford, and Spinks-Coloma.

1. **Sparta-Maumee-Gilford:** Sparta-Maumee-Gilford soils cover most of Highland. These very deep, excessively drained sandy soils are well suited for crops such as corn, small grains, and hay. However, irrigation is often required for vegetable production. Native vegetation consists of bluestem, switchgrass, tall grasses, and oak and hickory trees.
2. **Spinks-Coloma:** Spinks-Coloma soils are found primarily along the Town's wetlands and water features. These very deep, poorly, or very poorly drained soils support wetland vegetation. They are sometimes used for corn, soybeans, and wheat crops. Native vegetation is marsh grasses, reeds, sedges, and water-tolerant trees.

Understanding Highland's hydrological and soil conditions is essential for managing flood risk, guiding land use decisions, protecting natural resources, and supporting sustainable development. The Comprehensive Plan will incorporate these environmental considerations into future growth strategies and infrastructure planning.


Legend
Town of Highland
Soil Name
Sparta-Maumee-Gilford (s2307)
Spinks-Coloma (s3262)
Elevation
500
Scale in Feet:
0
0.5mi
1mi
Town of Highland Topography & Soil Types
500
500
500

CONCLUSIONS

Highland occupies a unique role within Northwest Indiana's dynamic and heavily urbanized, polycentric region. Nestled among larger and similarly sized municipalities, Highland benefits from strong regional connectivity while maintaining its distinct identity. The municipality's transportation network, proximity to major arterials and interstate corridors, and access to regional rail and freight infrastructure position it as a connected and accessible community within the broader Chicago metropolitan area. At the same time, Highland faces distinct structural and demographic challenges that will shape future planning efforts.

Since other municipalities and infrastructure surround it, Highland cannot expand outward. That constraint elevates the importance of thoughtful infill development, adaptive reuse, and strategic reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and commercial areas. Land use patterns and zoning policies will need to support continued vitality and resilience within this fixed footprint.

Like many mature urban communities, Highland must contend with aging infrastructure. Roadways, utility networks, public facilities, and park systems require sustained investment to maintain safety, functionality, and quality of life. In particular, water, wastewater, and stormwater systems will require attention to meet regulatory standards and serve evolving community needs. At the same time, the Town's established transportation hierarchy, including its well-connected street grid and regional trail network, provides a strong foundation for supporting multimodal mobility and future investments in active transportation.

Demographically, Highland is an aging community. The median age continues to rise, and housing, transportation, and service needs will evolve accordingly. Attracting and retaining younger residents and families will be important to maintaining a balanced population structure. Providing housing options that serve a range of life stages, incomes, and household types will be critical to meeting this goal, as will ensuring that community amenities and public spaces remain inclusive and welcoming for all.

The Town's role within the regional economy and urban system is defined by its strengths and limitations. Highland is a key retail and service center along Indianapolis Boulevard and Ridge Road. However, competition from surrounding municipalities and regional shopping destinations requires continuous adaptation and reinvestment in commercial corridors. The Town's residential character and high quality of life remain its greatest assets, supported by excellent schools, parks, and civic services.

As Highland looks to the future, it must plan within its existing boundaries, manage aging infrastructure, respond to demographic shifts, and adapt to the dynamics of a complex and competitive regional environment within the greater Chicago megalopolis. That requires strategic thinking, proactive governance, and ongoing collaboration with regional partners.



APPENDIX B: GATEWAY CORRIDORS REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Incorporated by reference, the full Redevelopment Plan is available through the Town and serves as a companion document to this Comprehensive Plan.

APPENDIX C: PUBLIC OUTREACH SUMMARY

C.1 INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

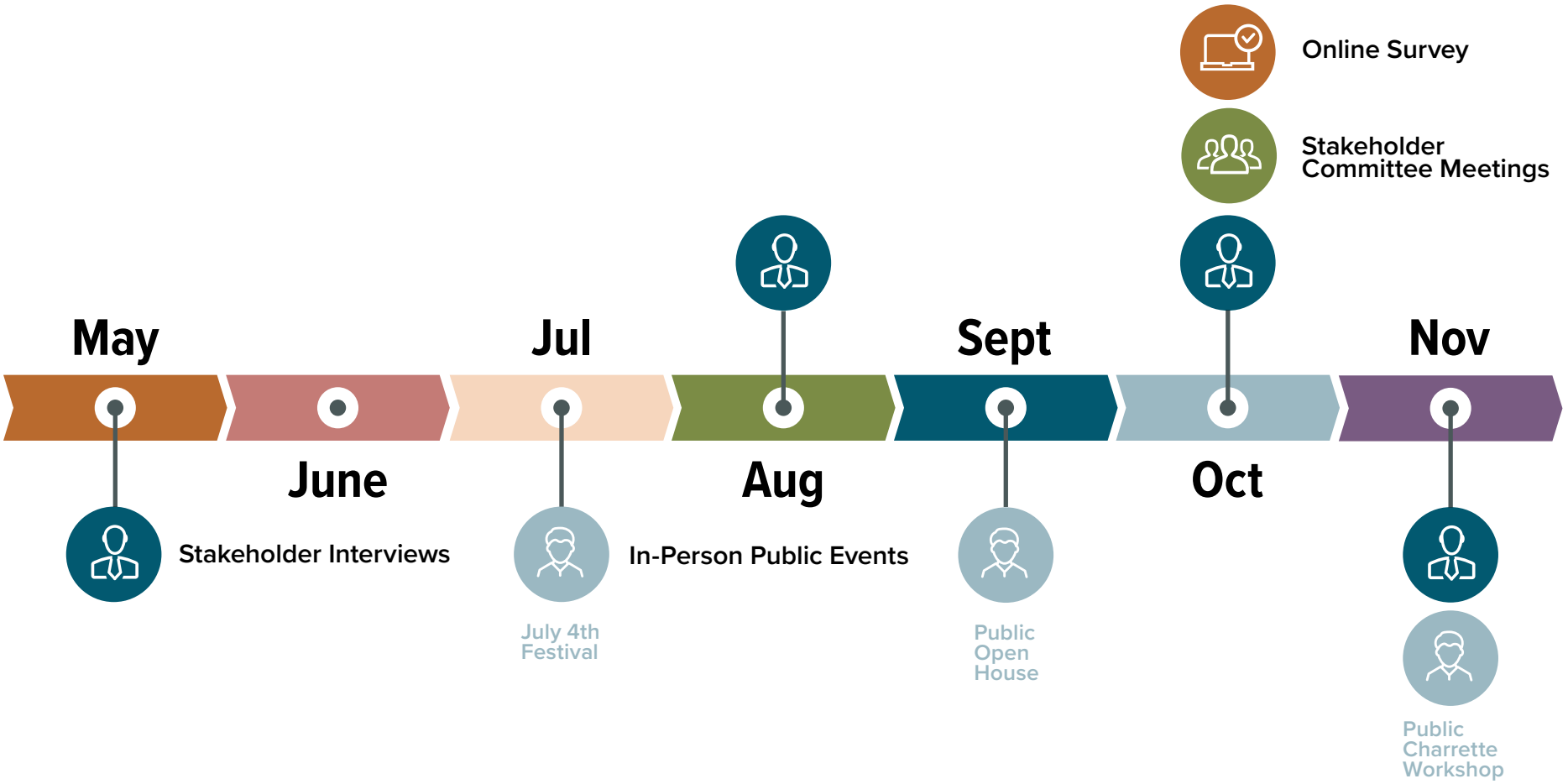
A successful Comprehensive Plan is built on the perspectives, experiences, and priorities of the community it serves. For the Town of Highland, public involvement played a central role in shaping the Plan's vision, goals, strategies, and Critical Path actions. Because Highland is a fully built-out community facing complex issues, such as aging commercial corridors, limited land for expansion, evolving housing needs, mobility and safety concerns, and a desire to preserve its small-town character, broad participation was essential to ensure the Plan reflects local values and realistic opportunities for reinvestment.

The public involvement process for this Comprehensive Plan was designed to be inclusive, transparent, and accessible. It combined traditional and innovative engagement methods to reach residents across different ages, neighborhoods, and interests. Engagement activities included in-person community events, stakeholder interviews, Steering Committee meetings, a community-wide online survey, and dedicated public workshops. Each method provided unique insights into how residents experience Highland today and what they hope to see in its future.

Across all outreach activities, several consistent themes emerged: the desire for safer and more walkable streets; support for strengthening Downtown and the Town's commercial corridors; the need for more diverse and attainable housing options; the importance of well-maintained parks, trails, and public spaces; and strong community interest in transparency, communication, and responsible public investment. These themes directly informed the development of plan goals, the refinement of land-use policies, and the selection of high-priority implementation strategies.

In total, the public involvement process reached several hundred residents, business owners, community institutions, and civic leaders. This appendix documents the methods used to gather input, summarizes the feedback received, and illustrates how community voices influenced the development of the Comprehensive Plan Update. The Town of Highland is committed to continued engagement as the Plan moves into implementation, ensuring that residents remain active partners in shaping the community's future.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



C.2 PUBLIC OUTREACH EVENTS

Public outreach formed one of the most visible components of the Comprehensive Plan engagement process. The project team designed these events to meet people where they already gather, such as festivals, open houses, workshops, and public spaces, ensuring that residents of all ages and backgrounds had opportunities to share their ideas for Highland's future. Each outreach event relied on interactive boards, facilitated discussions, comment cards, and visual materials to make participation easy and engaging. The contributions collected during these events were instrumental in shaping the plan's goals, land use policies, corridor priorities, and quality-of-life strategies.

C.2.1 IN-PERSON COMMUNITY EVENTS

July 4th Festival Engagement (July 3, 2025)

The planning team hosted a booth at the Town's annual July 4th Festival, one of Highland's largest community gatherings. Residents were invited to vote on community priorities, identify areas for improvement, and comment on housing, parks, redevelopment, and mobility.
Key themes included: support for Downtown revitalization, desire for more restaurant options, concerns about traffic safety, and enthusiasm for expanded trails and park upgrades.

Public Open House (September 18, 2025)

The first formal open house introduced the planning process and shared findings from the Existing Conditions Report. Attendees reviewed maps and topic boards, marked priorities on interactive displays, and met with members of the planning team.
Key themes included: a strong interest in improving corridors such as Kennedy Avenue and Ridge Road, support for diverse housing types, and requests for improved communication from the Town government.

Public Charrette Workshop (November 3, 2025)

This hands-on workshop allowed residents to participate directly in shaping redevelopment and land use concepts. Participants used large-scale maps to identify infill opportunities, redevelopment sites, and areas requiring stabilization or reinvestment.
Key themes included: a focus on adaptive reuse of aging commercial buildings, support for mixed-use development near Downtown, and significant interest in improving trail connectivity.

C.2.2 OUTREACH MATERIALS

A variety of printed and digital materials supported public outreach, helping to broaden participation. These included:

- Flyers, postcards, and posters were displayed around the community,
- Advertisements and posts on the Town's website and social media platforms,
- Interactive visual boards used at in-person events,
- Maps highlighting land use, parks, mobility networks, and redevelopment opportunities, and
- QR codes linking residents to the online survey and engagement website.

These materials ensured that residents could easily access information about the planning process and stay engaged throughout its duration.



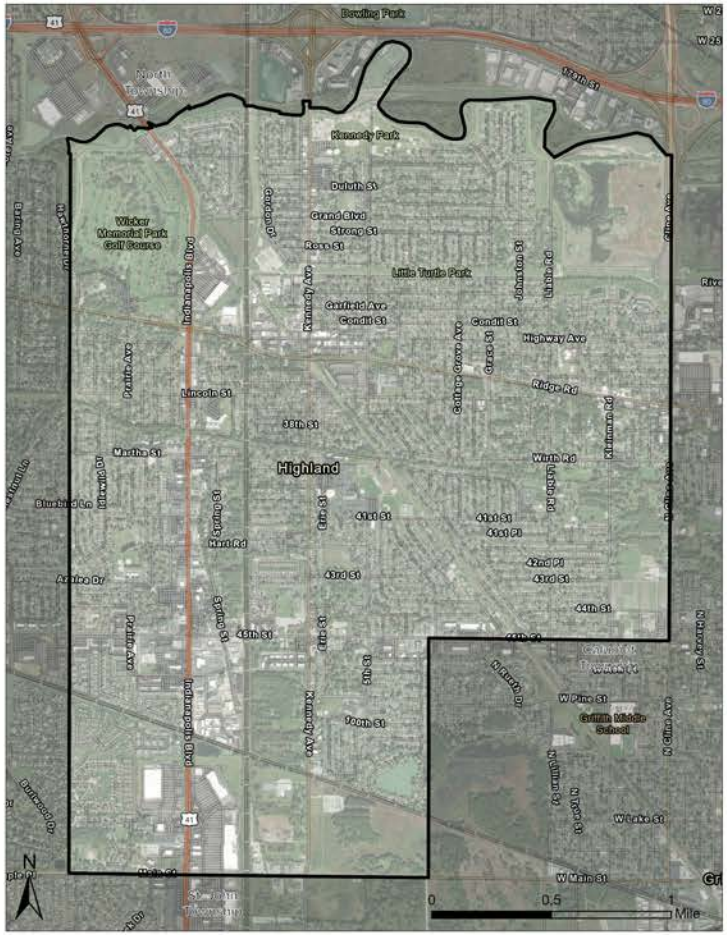
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The Comprehensive Plan will guide the growth and development of the Town over the next 10-20 years with respect to:

- *HOUSING*
- *SCHOOLS*
- *TRANSPORTATION*
- *UTILITIES*
- *JOBS*
- *PARKS AND TRAILS*
- *DOWNTOWN*
- *ENVIRONMENT*

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Place a sticker next to the amenities you want to bring to Highland. (Vote for up to 5.)

Highland Resident Non Highland Resident

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION



Public transportation options

RECREATION



Parks, trails, and green spaces

ENTERTAINMENT



Designated spaces for event and shows

EDUCATION



Spaces for educational resources or activities

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY



Better traffic and road management

HOUSING



Affordable housing options

EDUCATION



Improved schools and educational facilities

RIVER ACTIVITIES



More activities that connect with the river

SUSTAINABILITY



Increased environmental sustainability initiatives

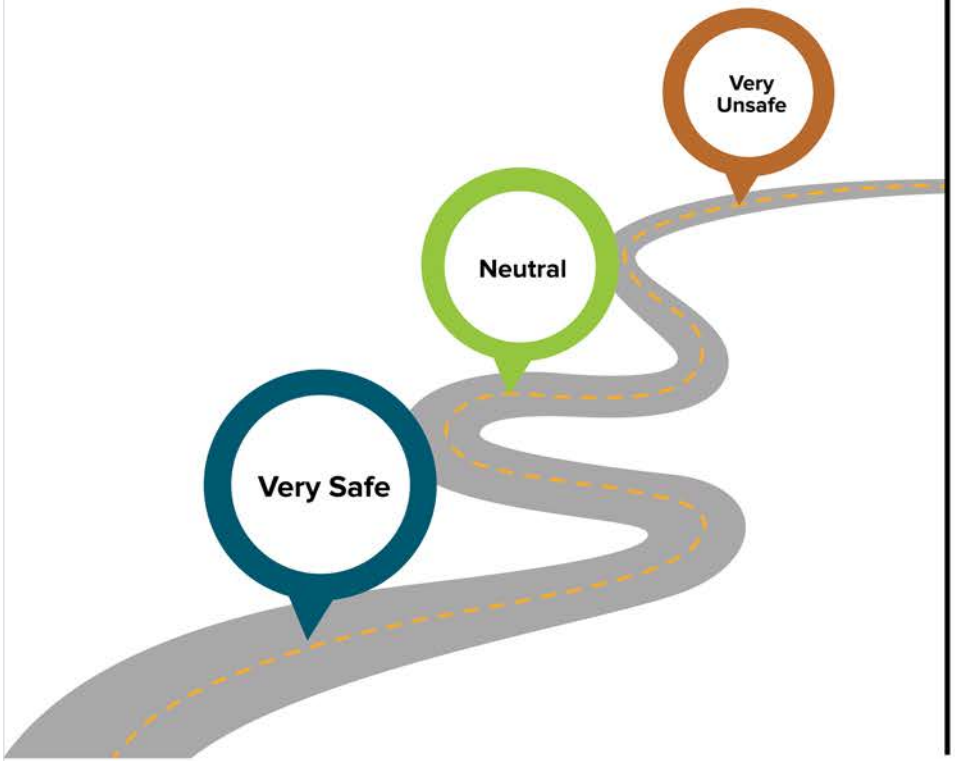
EVENTS



More community events and festivals

RECREATION

I feel _____ walking or biking in Highland.



Are there areas where you would like to see improved pedestrian or bicycle safety?

Separate pedestrian and bicycle paths!

More accessible bike racks, along pathways!







FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

I want to see Future DEVELOPMENT happen in _____.

	Highland Resident	Non Highland Resident
Downtown		
Along Major Roads / Corridors		
Existing Commercial Areas		
Vacant / Unused Properties		
Edge of Town		
Near Transit Routes		

DOWNTOWN HIGHLAND

I envision the FUTURE of Downtown Highland as _____.

	Highland Resident	Non Highland Resident
More vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, with more local businesses.		
Keeping its current character but with minor improvements.		
More commercial districts with larger businesses and services.		
A vibrant mixed-use district with more housing, businesses, and activities.		

DID WE MISS ANYTHING?

GET INVOLVED: Grab a pen and let us know!





STRUCTUREPOINT
TOWN OF HIGHLAND
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
HIGHLAND

C.3 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement provided detailed, topic-specific insights that complemented the broader public outreach activities. Because Highland is a built-out community with complex reinvestment needs, it was essential to hear directly from those who work within its commercial corridors, manage public institutions, operate utilities, develop property, and contribute to economic and community life. Stakeholder discussions helped the project team understand operational challenges, market constraints, regulatory barriers, and emerging opportunities across multiple sectors.

Engagement included one-on-one interviews, small-group sessions, and targeted conversations held in October 2025. Approximately 40 stakeholders participated, representing major employers, business owners, developers, public agencies, institutions, neighborhood leaders, and utility providers. Their perspectives were instrumental in shaping the plan's land use policies, corridor strategies, housing recommendations, economic development initiatives, and infrastructure priorities.

C.3.1 PURPOSE OF STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

Stakeholder engagement aimed to:

- ★ Identify issues and opportunities not easily captured through public events or surveys.
- ★ Understand market dynamics, development feasibility, and barriers to reinvestment.
- ★ Explore operational and infrastructure challenges affecting businesses and institutions.
- ★ Gather expert perspectives on housing, mobility, utilities, stormwater, and redevelopment.
- ★ Ensure that the Comprehensive Plan reflects both community aspirations and practical implementation considerations.

Stakeholder feedback served as a technical and contextual foundation for many of the Plan's Critical Path Strategies.

C.3.2 STAKEHOLDER GROUPS CONSULTED

Participants represented a range of sectors, including:

- ★ **Business owners and major employers** along Indianapolis Boulevard, Ridge Road, Kennedy Avenue, and within Downtown.
- ★ **Developers, builders, and commercial property owners** with experience navigating Highland's permitting and redevelopment processes.
- ★ **Public institutions**, including schools, emergency services, and major civic facilities.
- ★ **Utility providers and infrastructure agencies**, including regional water, sewer, and power providers.
- ★ **Community organizations and nonprofit leaders** serving Highland residents and vulnerable populations.
- ★ **Neighborhood representatives** familiar with housing conditions, safety issues, and quality-of-life concerns.

This diversity of perspectives ensured a comprehensive understanding of Highland's strengths and challenges.

C.3.3 SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS & KEY THEMES

Across all conversations, several consistent themes emerged:

Land Use and Redevelopment

- ★ Strong need to reinvest in aging shopping centers, vacant buildings, and older commercial properties.
- ★ Recognition that parcel depth, parking requirements, and utility placements constrain redevelopment feasibility.
- ★ Opportunities exist for mixed-use and adaptive reuse projects, particularly near Downtown.

Economic Development

- ★ Desire to attract more restaurants, small businesses, and professional services.
- ★ Concerns about regulatory and approval processes that can slow investment.
- ★ Need for targeted incentives and clearer redevelopment pathways.

Housing

- ★ Demand for more senior housing, workforce housing, and small-scale multi-dwelling.
- ★ Aging housing stock requires reinvestment and better code enforcement tools.

Mobility & Infrastructure

- ★ Safety concerns on Kennedy Avenue, Ridge Road, and Indianapolis Boulevard.
- ★ Need for better pedestrian crossings, traffic calming, and multimodal connections.
- ★ Utility and drainage constraints affect redevelopment feasibility.

Quality-of-life & Public Services

- ★ Strong support for improved parks, trails, community events, and public spaces.
- ★ Broad interest in increasing communication and transparency from the Town.

These themes directly shaped the goals, objectives, and strategies in the Comprehensive Plan.

C.3.4 STAKEHOLDER MEETING NOTES (SUMMARIZED)

As noted above, the stakeholder engagement process for the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan involved a diverse set of groups, including utilities, education and nonprofit organizations, transportation and regional agencies, adjacent municipalities, business owners, Town service departments, and faith-based institutions. Together, these conversations provided a deeper, more technical understanding of Highland's opportunities and constraints, far beyond what can be surfaced through general public outreach alone. This section summarizes the most salient insights from these meetings and demonstrates how they informed the Plan's policy and strategy framework.

Utilities Stakeholders

Highland's utility representatives and NIPSCO provided a clear picture of aging infrastructure, rising costs, and long-term capacity challenges. The Town currently invests approximately $1 million per year in waterline renewals and a similar amount in sewer lining; however, these dollars no longer stretch as far as they once did due to a more than 200 percent increase in material costs since 2020. Sewer infrastructure in the north and northeast is the oldest, while newer PVC systems in the southwest remain in better condition. Stakeholders emphasized that while system capacity is generally sufficient for Highland's built-out context, future redevelopment must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, especially in coordination with the Hammond Sanitary District, which treats the Town's wastewater.

A major focus was the federally mandated Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO) Consent Decree. Phase 1, construction of a 60”–24” relief sewer, has already resolved long-standing basement flooding problems. Phase 2, however, is on hold due to litigation between Hammond and Munster, which is delaying the construction of a new $25 million pump station and a long-term $78–$100 million system conversion. Without clarity on this regional dispute, Highland must continue absorbing the escalating costs of maintaining older pump stations. Funding pressure is further compounded by Senate Bill 1, which will reduce the Town’s annual revenues by approximately $550,000, limiting its ability to match state and federal infrastructure grants.

Utility stakeholders also described significant constraints posed by pipelines and rail corridors. Highland contains five to six major pipelines and multiple rail lines; excavation near these facilities triggers mandatory oversight and, in some cases, automatic enforcement or shutdowns. These limitations impact redevelopment feasibility along certain corridors and underscore the importance of coordinating utilities early during the site plan review process. Despite these challenges, the Town maintains a reputation for exceptionally strong public works operations, including snow and ice management and downtown beautification efforts.

Education and Non-Profit Stakeholders

Representatives from schools, the arts community, civic organizations, and regional nonprofits emphasized Highland’s high quality-of-life, strong schools, and well-maintained parks as core community assets. They described Highland as a stable, desirable community that continues to attract in-migrants from Illinois seeking affordability and better schools. Parks such as Main Square and Wicker Park are seen as anchors for community identity, and cultural programming, focusing on festivals, arts events, and volunteer-led initiatives, plays a major role in making Highland feel vibrant and welcoming.

Several participants raised concerns about housing affordability and the limited options available to seniors, working families, and first-time buyers. They noted that reinvestment is already occurring through home remodels, but suggested that Town-supported programs (e.g., low-interest loans for seniors or first-time homebuyers) could help maintain neighborhood stability. Corridors such as Kennedy Avenue and the Town Theater Block were frequently cited as ripe for mixed-use redevelopment, offering opportunities for new commercial activity and diverse housing types.

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of strengthening Highland’s cultural identity. Suggestions ranged from celebrating its Dutch heritage to creating a broader, multicultural brand that reflects demographic change. Public art, maker spaces, murals, and arts residency programs were seen as powerful tools for activating Downtown and attracting younger residents.

Education and nonprofit leaders also emphasized the importance of digital connectivity, access to childcare, and youth programming, particularly as regional job markets shift toward advanced technology fields. They encouraged Highland to continue investing in connectivity, civic infrastructure, and recreational amenities to remain competitive in retaining and attracting families.

Transportation and Regional Coordination Stakeholders

Transportation agencies, including NIRPC, NICTD, and engineering partners, emphasized that Highland’s transportation future is deeply tied to regional systems, especially given the South Shore Line Double Track and West Lake Extension projects. These passenger rail investments are catalyzing redevelopment across adjacent communities and are expected to reshape commuting and economic patterns across Lake County. Stakeholders agreed that Highland has an opportunity to improve connectivity to new rail stations through potential feeder routes, but noted that intermunicipal transit coordination is currently fragmented. Indiana’s updated statutory framework for interlocal agreements may open new doors for joint service planning.

Regarding roadway planning, the Kennedy Avenue corridor emerged as the most strategically important north–south route. Conflicting visions for lane reconfiguration were discussed, with NIRPC and AECOM agreeing to analyze whether a three-lane configuration would be feasible without harming capacity. The Steering Committee opposed lane reduction due to expected future traffic growth. Meanwhile, the upcoming Kennedy Avenue bridge reconstruction, expected to last two years, will significantly disrupt traffic patterns and must be closely coordinated with INDOT and the City of Hammond.

Although Highland is not heavily impacted by freight rail, stakeholders noted that regional freight flows indirectly affect congestion and create pressure for complete streets enhancements and truck routing policies. Finally, the transportation group stressed the importance of synchronizing the Comprehensive Plan with the ongoing Redevelopment Sites Study to ensure coordinated circulation and access improvements.

Adjacent Municipalities (Hammond and Munster)

An inter-municipal roundtable highlighted the shared challenges among Highland, Hammond, and Munster, particularly the difficulty of establishing and maintaining distinct community identities within a densely built-out subregion. Corridor gateways were considered essential branding assets and a shared area where cross-jurisdictional design coordination would be beneficial. Participants also discussed a long-standing boundary discrepancy between Highland and Hammond along the Little Calumet River, which complicates code enforcement, parcel records, and redevelopment reviews. All parties expressed interest in exploring a formal resolution of the boundary.

Additional themes included the growing prevalence of rental conversions, complications with “cut-up” houses and short-term rentals, and the need for clear zoning pathways to manage these trends. Representatives compared experiences with form-based and Euclidean zoning, describing a hybrid approach as more effective for built-out municipalities. Finally, officials discussed shared infrastructure burdens (e.g., maintenance of 179th Street) and emphasized the long-term benefits of synchronized corridor planning, redevelopment incentives, and regional mobility strategies.

Business Owners

Local and regional business owners provided candid feedback on the challenges of doing business in Highland. Several attendees described the Town’s regulatory environment as historically difficult, citing restrictive façade, signage, and design standards that hindered new business formation. In contrast, neighboring communities such as Hammond and Griffith were perceived as more business-friendly and proactive in supporting redevelopment. Participants recommended modernizing signage standards and establishing clearer, more predictable design guidelines.

Business owners also emphasized the importance of corridor redevelopment, noting persistent vacancies on Kennedy Avenue and Indianapolis Boulevard, as well as at legacy sites such as the former post office and the Ultra Foods properties. They encouraged the Town to pursue aggressive land assembly, brownfield cleanup, and catalytic redevelopment strategies, citing Hammond’s Oxbow Landing as a model. Participants supported mixed-use redevelopment, hospitality investments near the interstate, and more consistent activation of Downtown through events and placemaking.

Concerns about leadership continuity and the lack of a professional Town Manager model were also raised. Businesses expressed interest in more consistent long-term planning and project follow-through.

Town Service Departments (Parks, Police, Fire, Public Works)

Town service leaders highlighted the significant capital needs across parks, public safety, and public infrastructure. Parks staff emphasized urgent upgrades to aging playgrounds, the need for inclusive, ADA-compliant equipment, and strategic reinvestment in the Lincoln Center, one of Highland’s most-used community assets. Police and Fire Department representatives cited equipment replacement, facility modernization, and technology upgrades, including cameras and license-plate readers, as major priorities. Fire facilities built in the 1960s are now considered functionally obsolete; the Fire Department is also evaluating a transition to in-house ALS ambulance service.

Public Works reinforced concerns about the upcoming Kennedy Avenue bridge reconstruction and its impact on traffic and trail connectivity. Staff also noted challenges related to boundary ambiguities with Hammond and the need for coordinated capital planning across departments.

Faith-Based Institutions

Faith leaders emphasized Highland's intergenerational stability, strong community values, and the important role churches play in social cohesion and outreach. They highlighted the housing needs of younger professionals and downsizing seniors, expressing support for townhome, condo, and mixed-density options in suitable locations. They also encouraged strategies that maintain year-round Downtown activity, not just festival-driven engagement.

Environmental and civic opportunities identified by faith stakeholders included restoring The Rookery, expanding the urban tree canopy, and strengthening collaboration with schools, nonprofits, and regional partners. Churches described themselves as key connectors between Highland and disinvested neighboring communities, playing a central role in social outreach, youth programming, and crisis response.

Summary

Taken together, the stakeholder discussions provided a multi-dimensional portrait of Highland as a stable, well-managed, and community-oriented town facing challenges typical of a built-out municipality: aging infrastructure, evolving housing needs, aging commercial corridors, and rising expectations for transparency and service quality. The insights gathered from these groups directly informed the Plan's goals and Critical Path Strategies.

C.4 STEERING COMMITTEE PROCESS

The Steering Committee served as the central guiding body for the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan Update. Its members, representing local government, business, neighborhoods, civic organizations, and redevelopment interests, played a critical role in interpreting public input, validating technical findings, and shaping the collective vision for Highland's future. The Committee met four times during the planning process, providing continuity, expertise, and a grounded community perspective at each major milestone of the Plan's development.

C.4.1 ROLE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee was convened to:

- ★ Advise the planning team on key issues, opportunities, and community priorities.
- ★ Reflect the perspectives of residents, business owners, and community institutions.
- ★ Review technical analyses and confirm their alignment with local knowledge.
- ★ Evaluate draft goals, themes, and strategies as they evolved.
- ★ Assist in shaping the public engagement effort and promoting participation.
- ★ Provide constructive feedback on draft deliverables before public release.

In performing this role, the Committee ensured that the Comprehensive Plan was not only technically sound but also rooted in a shared understanding of Highland's identity, needs, and future direction.

Committee members were selected for their broad representation of community sectors and their willingness to serve as active partners in the planning process. Members are committed to attending meetings, reviewing materials, participating in discussions, and encouraging public participation in surveys and community events.

C.4.2 STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Steering Committee included 18 members representing Town leadership, economic development, redevelopment, business owners, civic organizations, and residents:

- ★ Adam Kern
- ★ Alex Robertson
- ★ Blaine Roberts
- ★ Catherine Perrin
- ★ James Kissee
- ★ Lance Ryskamp
- ★ Larry Kondrat
- ★ Mary Albrecht
- ★ Ray Borowiec
- ★ Tom Black

This diversity ensured that the Committee could meaningfully address issues across Highland's land use, corridors, housing, parks, mobility, and investment frameworks.

C.4.3 MEETING SUMMARIES

Steering Committee Meeting #1 – May 2025

The first meeting introduced the planning process, project scope, public involvement plan, and roles and expectations for Committee members. The planning team provided an overview of what a Comprehensive Plan is and how it functions as a decision-making framework for land use, redevelopment, infrastructure, and community investment.

Committee members engaged in early discussions about Highland's strengths, potential challenges, and long-term opportunities. Several key themes emerged early on, including the need to revitalize major corridors, address aging infrastructure, diversify housing options, and enhance communication with residents.

Steering Committee Meeting #2 – August 2025

The second meeting focused on the findings from the Existing Conditions Report (ECR) and the public engagement results gathered to date. The team presented demographic trends, housing conditions, economic indicators, infrastructure issues, observations on natural resources, and constraints related to corridor redevelopment.

Committee members refined the draft goals and helped identify major themes for the Comprehensive Plan: land use and growth management, corridor and downtown reinvestment, mobility and safety, housing choice, quality-of-life, and fiscal responsibility.

A group exercise invited members to draft hypothetical future newspaper headlines describing Highland in 10–20 years. These headlines highlighted aspirations for safer mobility, a revitalized Downtown, stronger commercial corridors, and more family-friendly amenities.

Steering Committee Meeting #3 – October 2025

The third meeting provided a deep dive into the survey findings, in-person public input, and the emerging redevelopment study performed by the Kending Keast Collaborative. The planning team shared a synthesis of public themes, including a strong desire for corridor reinvestment, safety improvements, greater housing diversity, and upgraded parks and public spaces.

The redevelopment consultants presented high-impact opportunity sites and preliminary concepts for repositioning Downtown, the Town Theater Block, the DPW site, and former retail centers. Committee members examined how redevelopment priorities should align with the Comprehensive Plan's goals and provided feedback on feasibility, phasing, and community compatibility.

Steering Committee Meeting #4 – November 2025

The fourth meeting featured an interactive exercise on land use policy. Recognizing that Highland is nearly fully built out, the exercise focused not on redesigning land-use categories but on identifying the strategic functions of places rather than their uses. Committee members used large-format maps to categorize areas by policy designation:

- ★ Major redevelopment opportunities.
- ★ Infill and reuse areas.
- ★ Neighborhood stabilization areas.
- ★ Priority corridors and districts.
- ★ Areas requiring targeted reinvestment to reverse decline.

This mapping activity clarified how different parts of Highland should be prioritized for investment, redevelopment, and preservation. The results directly shaped the **Land Use Policy Map, character district descriptions, and Critical Path Strategies.**

C.4.4 COMMITTEE INFLUENCE ON THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Steering Committee's guidance influenced nearly every component of the Plan:

- ★ **Goals & Objectives:** Committee input emphasized Downtown and corridor reinvestment, senior and workforce housing, trail connectivity, and transparent governance.
- ★ **Land Use Framework:** Their mapping exercise directly informed the policy districts and redevelopment priority areas.
- ★ **Corridor Strategies:** Committee concerns about corridor appearance, vacancy, and safety became a major driver of the Streetscape Master Plan and redevelopment recommendations.
- ★ **Mobility & Safety:** Frequent Committee emphasis on Kennedy Avenue and Ridge Road safety reinforced the need for crosswalk upgrades, complete streets policies, and Vision Zero-oriented improvements.
- ★ **Implementation Priorities:** Members helped shape the Critical Path Strategies, ensuring they addressed Highland's most immediate and structural needs.

The Steering Committee served as an essential bridge between technical analysis and community values. Their ongoing involvement ensured that the Comprehensive Plan is both visionary and practical, rooted in real local challenges and informed by those who know the Town best.

C.5 ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY

The online community survey served as a cornerstone of the public involvement process, providing broad insight into the priorities, preferences, and concerns of Highland residents. The survey was designed to reach individuals who may not have attended public meetings or in-person events, allowing them to participate on their own time and from any device. The planning team launched the survey in June 2025 and kept it open for several months to maximize engagement. A total of 493 responses were received, an exceptionally strong participation rate for a community of Highland's size. All responses were verified as coming from residents of the town.

The survey gathered input on land use, redevelopment, housing, mobility, parks and recreation, Town services, economic development, quality-of-life, and overall community priorities. Results from the survey helped validate findings from stakeholder interviews, Steering Committee discussions, and in-person outreach, ensuring that the Comprehensive Plan reflects the shared values and lived experiences of Highland residents.

C.5.1 SURVEY OVERVIEW

The online survey was developed using a combination of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended questions. Topics included:

- ★ Community strengths and challenges.
- ★ Housing needs and preferences.
- ★ Mobility and transportation issues.
- ★ Park, recreation, and trail usage.
- ★ Long-term community vision
- ★ Desired improvements to Downtown and commercial corridors.
- ★ Economic development and business attraction priorities.
- ★ Quality-of-life considerations.

Survey promotion occurred through the Town's website, social media, printed postcards at public events, QR codes on materials, and Steering Committee outreach.

C.5.2 SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The full questionnaire is included in Appendix C as a sub-appendix. It contained:

- ★ 22 total questions.
- ★ A mix of quantitative (multiple-choice and ranking) and qualitative (open response) items.
- ★ Map-based prompts enable residents to identify areas in need of improvement.
- ★ Visioning questions connecting to long-term themes.

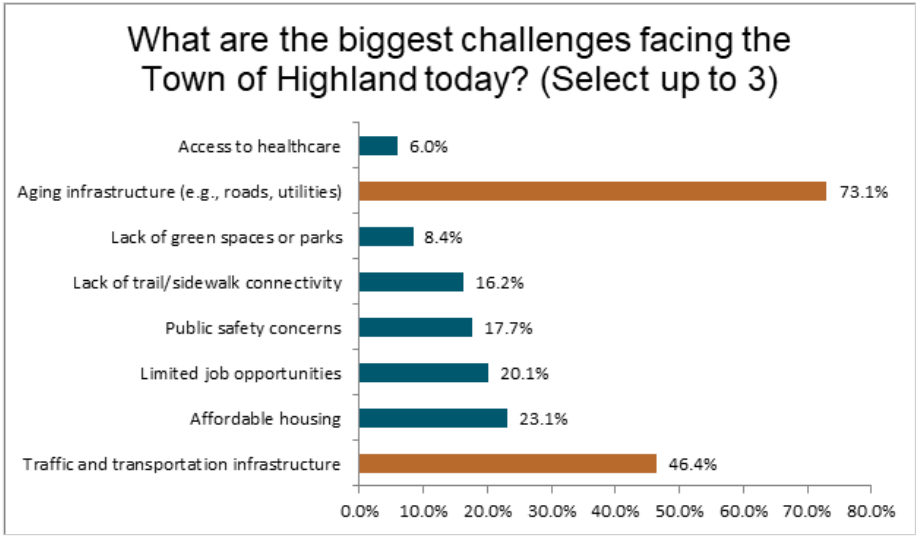
The survey instrument was intentionally concise, taking 8–10 minutes to complete, increasing participation among households with limited time.

C.5.3 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS SUMMARY

Survey responses revealed clear and consistent trends across multiple topic areas.

Top Community Challenges (Select up to 3):

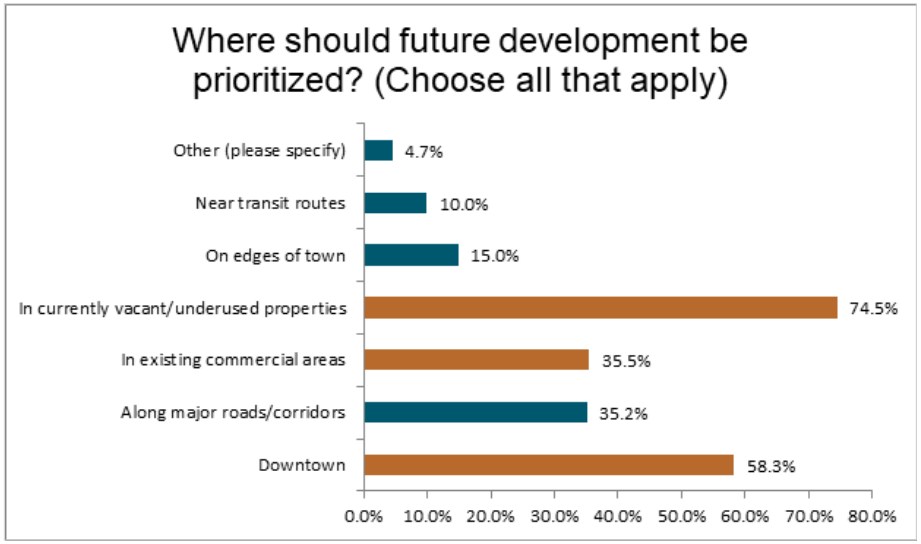
- ★ Aging infrastructure — 73 percent.
- ★ Traffic and transportation concerns — 46 percent.
- ★ Aging or underutilized commercial areas — high frequency in open-ended responses.
- ★ Limited dining and retail variety — especially among younger households.
- ★ Housing affordability and availability for specific groups (seniors, young adults).



Where Should Future Development Be Prioritized?

- ★ Downtown Highland
- ★ Kennedy Avenue
- ★ Ridge Road
- ★ Indianapolis Boulevard
- ★ Key redevelopment sites such as the Ultra Foods property and the Town Theater Block

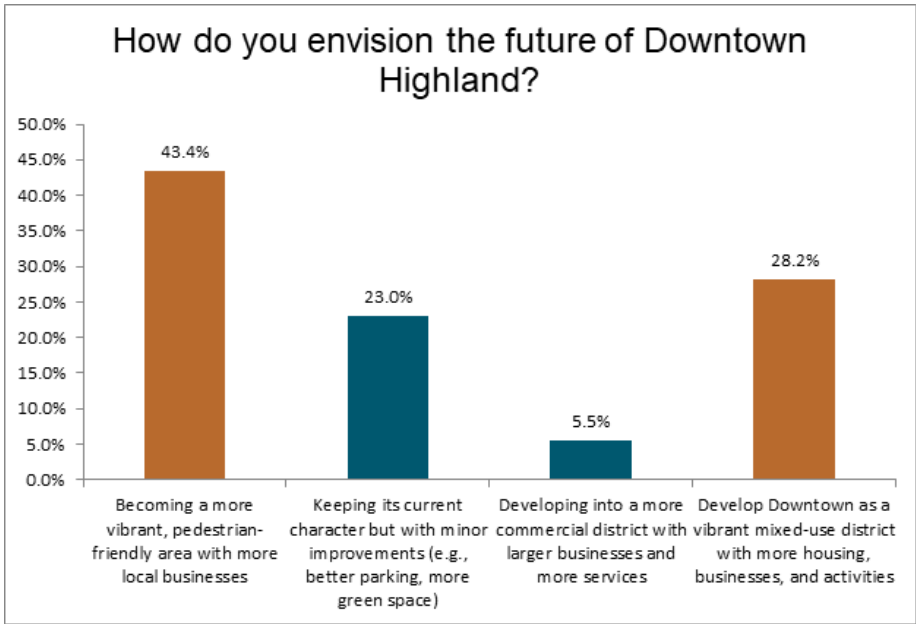
Respondents consistently supported reinvestment over expansion.



Desired Future Mix for Downtown Highland:

- ★ More restaurants, cafés, and small shops
- ★ A vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment
- ★ Mixed-use buildings with upper-story housing
- ★ Community gathering spaces and plazas
- ★ Improved streetscape and lighting

More than **28 percent** of respondents supported Downtown becoming a mixed-use district with new housing.



Mobility and Safety Findings

- ★ Residents expressed strong concerns about pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- ★ The Kennedy Avenue corridor was most frequently named as unsafe for walking or biking.
- ★ Indianapolis Boulevard and Ridge Road were also cited as difficult crossings.
- ★ Many respondents requested the addition of missing sidewalks, especially along Kleinman, Wirth, Johnston, and parts of Ridge Road.

Nearly **44 percent** of respondents described walking or biking as “very safe.”

Housing Preferences

- ★ Strong support for more senior housing and downsizing options.
- ★ Interest in townhomes, duplexes, accessory units, and small multi-dwelling buildings in appropriate areas.
- ★ Desire for more attainable housing for young adults and working families.
- ★ Preference for housing near services, parks, and walkable destinations.

More than **64 percent** agreed that Highland should offer housing options that support residents “of all ages and abilities.”

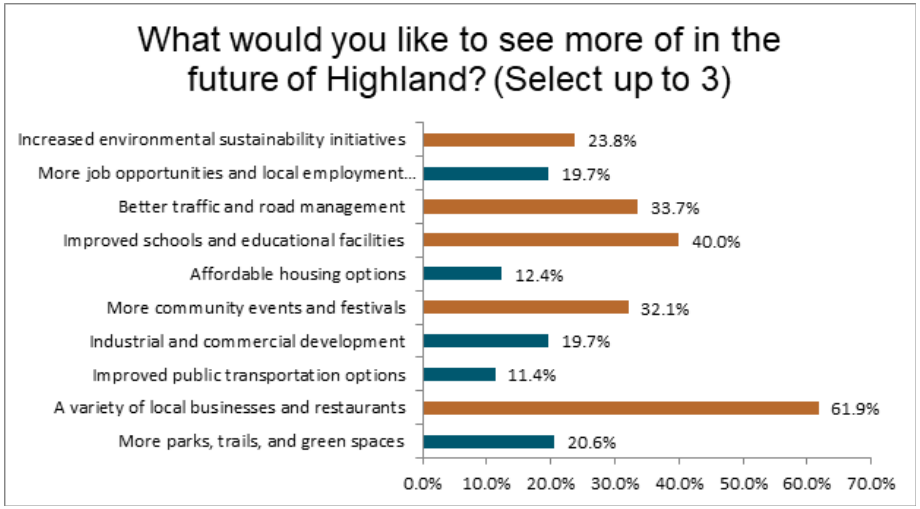
Quality-of-Life Findings

Residents identified the following as Highland’s greatest strengths:

- ★ Strong parks system
- ★ Community events (4th of July Festival, BBQ Fest)
- ★ High-quality schools
- ★ Safe, stable neighborhoods
- ★ Central location and regional access

When asked what they would like to see more of in the future, the top answers included:

- ★ More festivals and community events.
- ★ Expanded trails and better walking/biking connectivity.
- ★ More restaurants and local businesses.
- ★ Upgraded playgrounds and park amenities.



C.5.4 QUALITATIVE THEMES FROM OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

More than 1,200 comments were submitted through open-ended survey questions. Several major themes emerged:

Redevelopment & Business Mix

Residents frequently described certain vacant buildings and strip centers as “eyesores” and strongly supported reinvestment in these properties. Many called for modern restaurant options, small retail, and improved parking and lighting conditions.

Town Identity & Gateways

Participants expressed the desire for stronger gateways and beautification efforts at major entrances. Comments noted that first impressions along Kennedy Avenue, Indianapolis Boulevard, and Ridge Road shape perceptions of Highland’s character.

Traffic and Safety

Respondents cited speeding, distracted driving, and dangerous intersections, especially near schools and older neighborhoods. Many called for better enforcement, sidewalks, and improved crossings.

Communication and Transparency

Multiple respondents asked for clearer, more accessible information about Town projects, investments, and decision-making. This feedback directly supported the development of the Plan’s **Public-Facing CIPP Dashboard and State of Redevelopment and Infrastructure Report.**

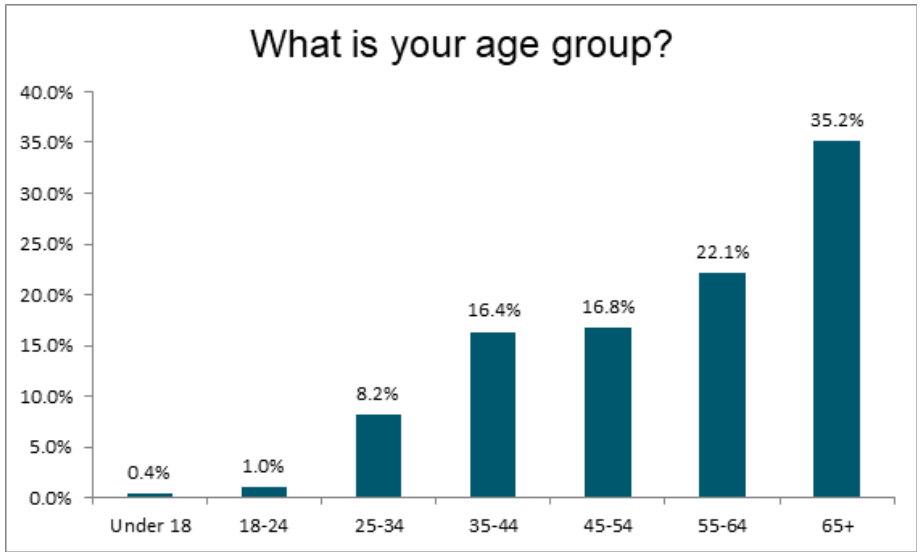
C.5.5 SURVEY IMPLICATIONS FOR PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

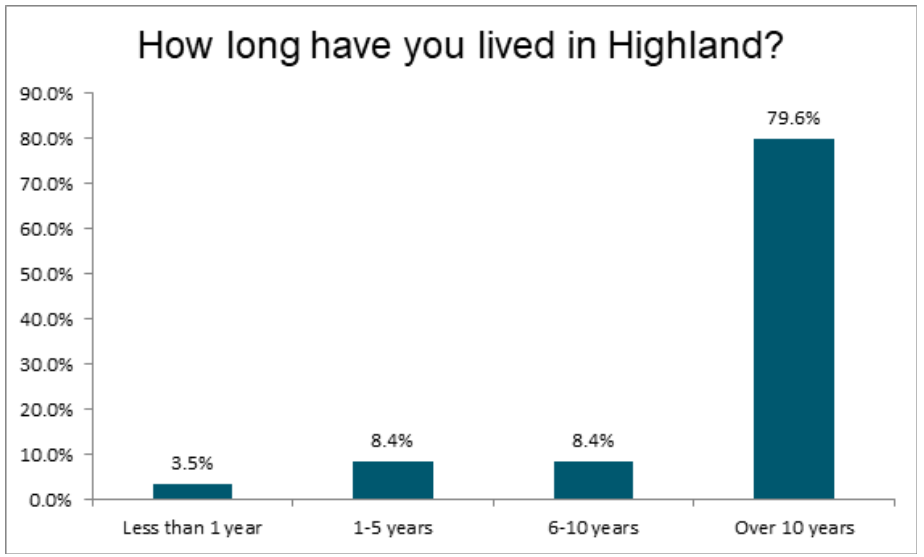
Survey findings directly shaped many elements of the Plan:

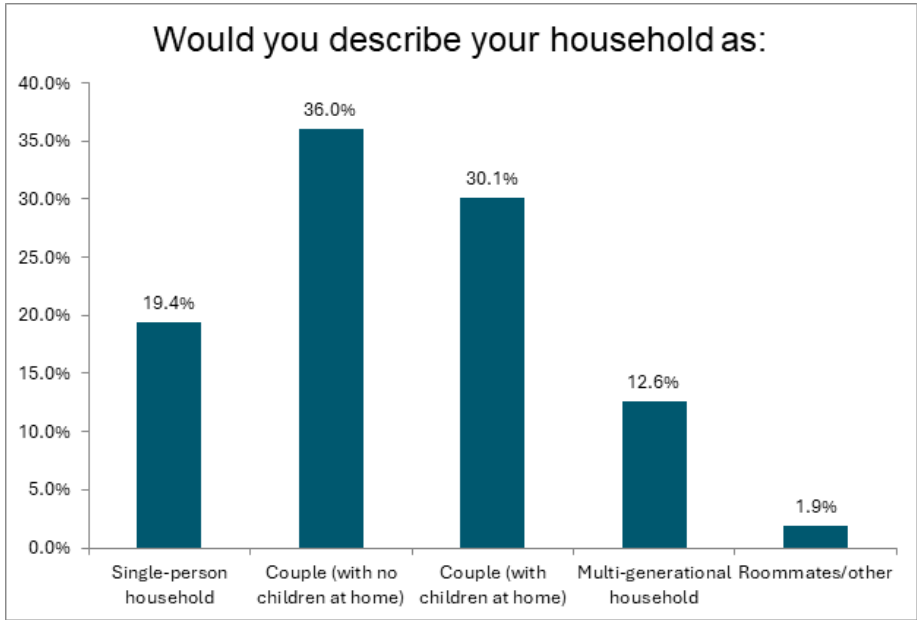
- ★ Confirmed the need for corridor reinvestment and Downtown activation.
- ★ Supported diversification of the housing stock, including missing middle options.
- ★ Elevated mobility and safety as a core Plan theme.
- ★ Reinforced community priorities around parks, trails, and recreation.
- ★ Strengthened the emphasis on transparency and fiscal responsibility.
- ★ Guided the Land Use Policy Map and character district framework.
- ★ Validated the Critical Path Strategies selected for early implementation.

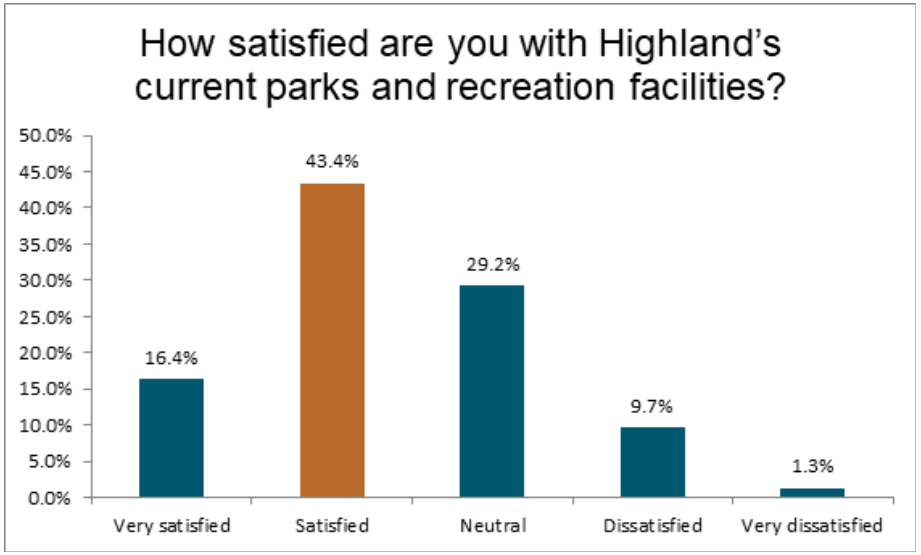
The survey results demonstrate a community that values stability but embraces thoughtful reinvestment, one that seeks to preserve Highland's identity while welcoming opportunities to modernize and adapt.

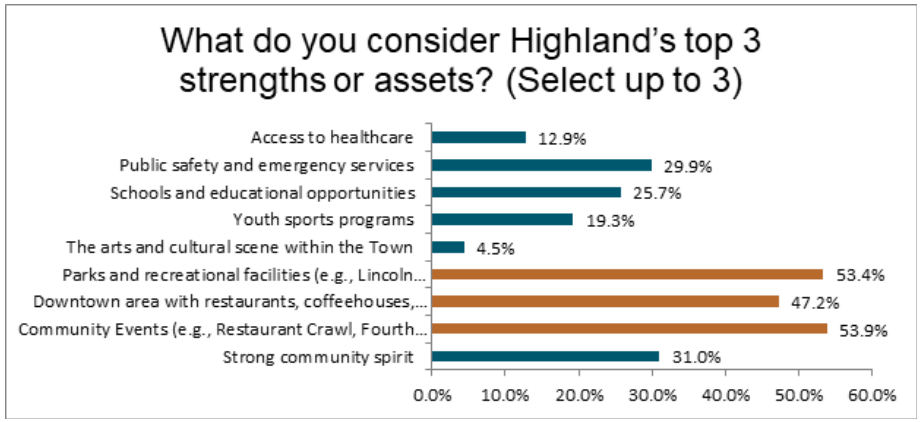
C.5.6 OTHER SURVEY QUESTIONS

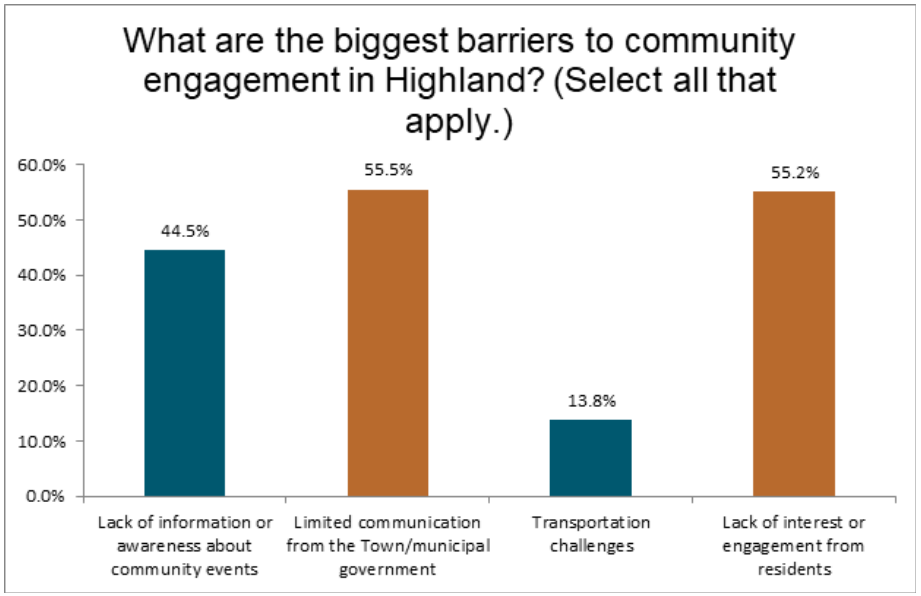


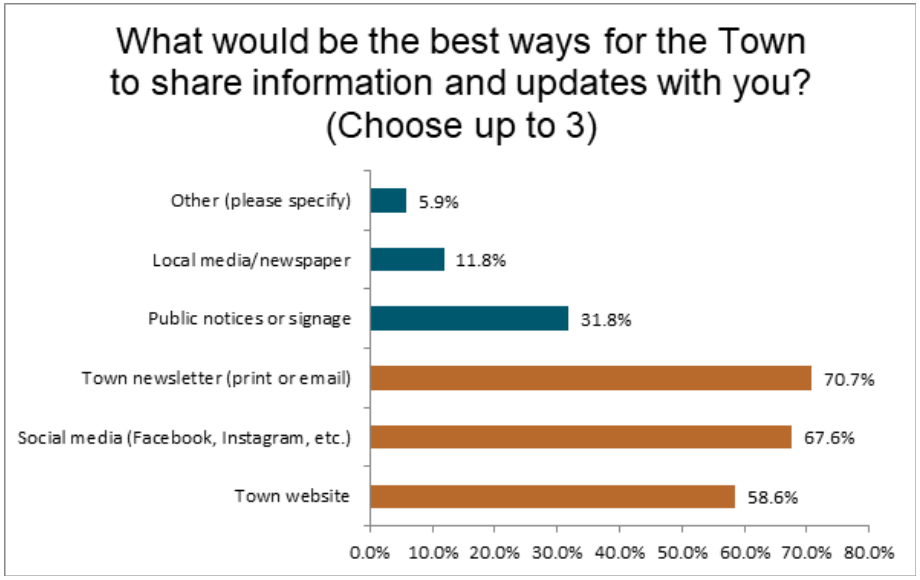


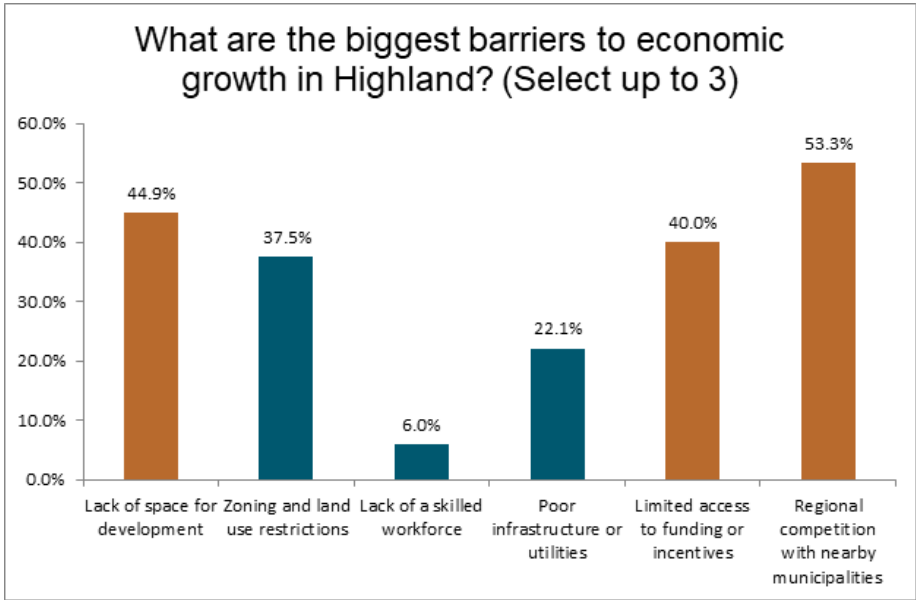

Would you describe your household as:
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
19.4%
36.0%
30.1%
12.6%
1.9%
Single-person household
Couple (with no children at home)
Couple (with children at home)
Multi-generational household
Roommates/other

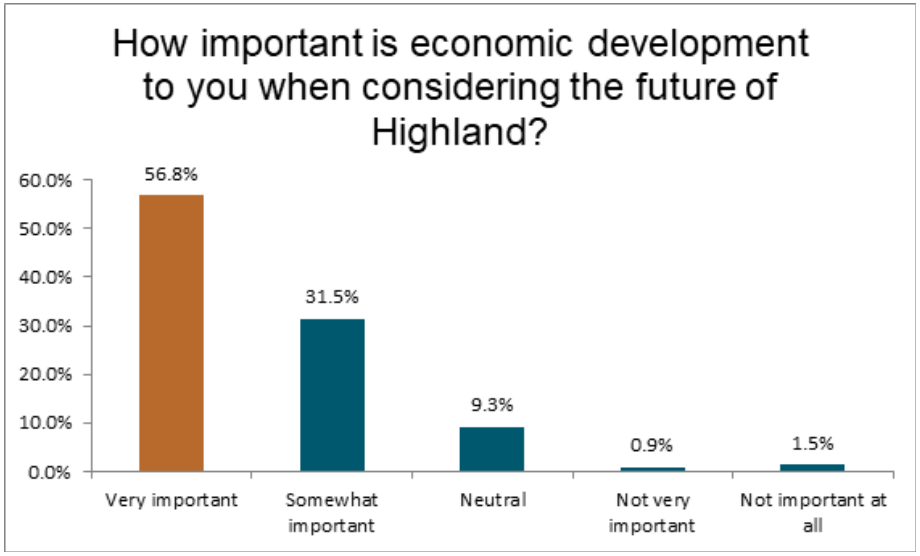

How satisfied are you with Highland's current parks and recreation facilities?
50.0%
45.0%
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
16.4%
43.4%
29.2%
9.7%
1.3%
Very satisfied
Satisfied
Neutral
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

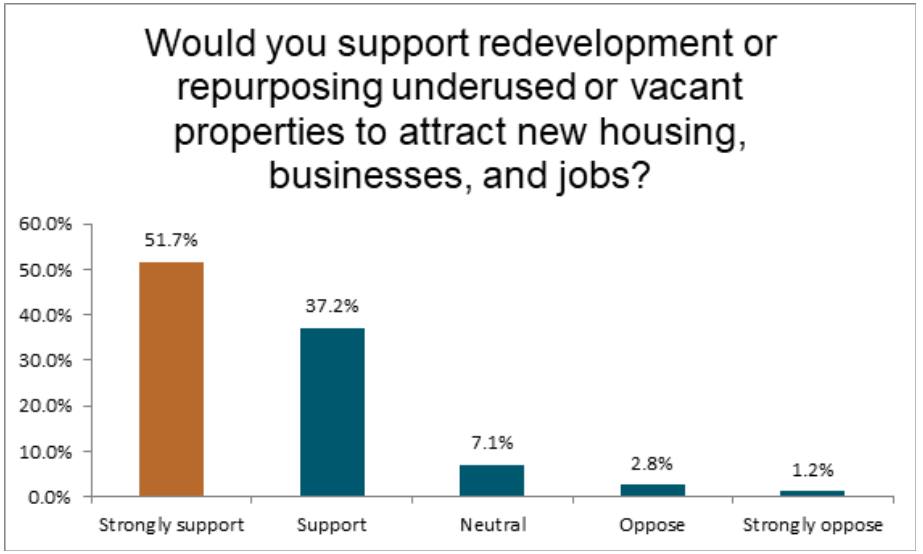

What do you consider Highland's top 3 strengths or assets? (Select up to 3)
Access to healthcare
12.9%
Public safety and emergency services
29.9%
Schools and educational opportunities
25.7%
Youth sports programs
19.3%
The arts and cultural scene within the Town
4.5%
Parks and recreational facilities (e.g., Lincoln...
53.4%
Downtown area with restaurants, coffeehouses,...
47.2%
Community Events (e.g., Restaurant Crawl, Fourth...
53.9%
Strong community spirit
31.0%
0.0%
10.0%
20.0%
30.0%
40.0%
50.0%
60.0%

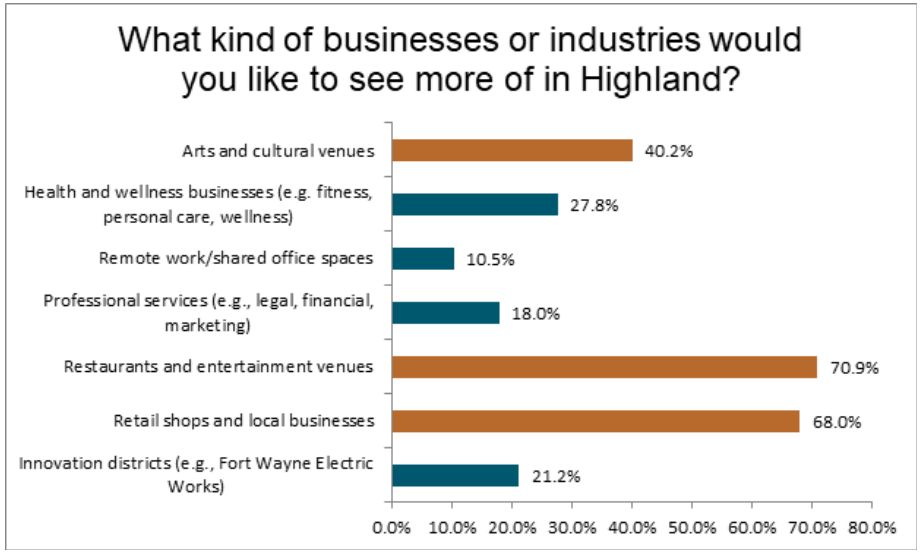

What are the biggest barriers to community engagement in Highland? (Select all that apply.)
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
44.5%
55.5%
13.8%
55.2%
Lack of information or awareness about community events
Limited communication from the Town/municipal government
Transportation challenges
Lack of interest or engagement from residents

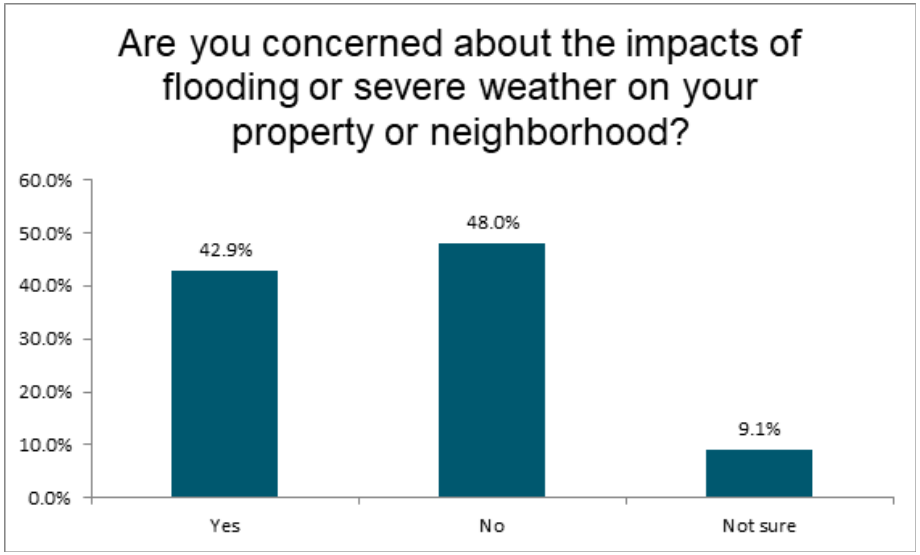

What would be the best ways for the Town to share information and updates with you? (Choose up to 3)
Other (please specify)
5.9%
Local media/newspaper
11.8%
Public notices or signage
31.8%
Town newsletter (print or email)
70.7%
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
67.6%
Town website
58.6%
0.0% 10.0% 20.0% 30.0% 40.0% 50.0% 60.0% 70.0% 80.0%

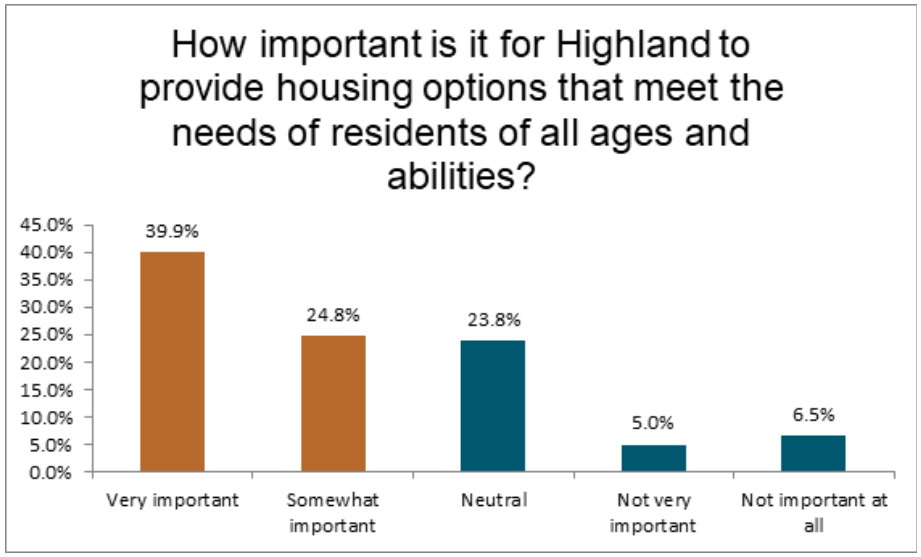

What are the biggest barriers to economic growth in Highland? (Select up to 3)
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
44.9%
37.5%
6.0%
22.1%
40.0%
53.3%
Lack of space for development
Zoning and land use restrictions
Lack of a skilled workforce
Poor infrastructure or utilities
Limited access to funding or incentives
Regional competition with nearby municipalities


How important is economic development to you when considering the future of Highland?
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
56.8%
31.5%
9.3%
0.9%
1.5%
Very important
Somewhat important
Neutral
Not very important
Not important at all


Would you support redevelopment or repurposing underused or vacant properties to attract new housing, businesses, and jobs?
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
51.7%
37.2%
7.1%
2.8%
1.2%
Strongly support
Support
Neutral
Oppose
Strongly oppose


What kind of businesses or industries would you like to see more of in Highland?
Arts and cultural venues
40.2%
Health and wellness businesses (e.g. fitness, personal care, wellness)
27.8%
Remote work/shared office spaces
10.5%
Professional services (e.g., legal, financial, marketing)
18.0%
Restaurants and entertainment venues
70.9%
Retail shops and local businesses
68.0%
Innovation districts (e.g., Fort Wayne Electric Works)
21.2%
0.0% 10.0% 20.0% 30.0% 40.0% 50.0% 60.0% 70.0% 80.0%


Are you concerned about the impacts of flooding or severe weather on your property or neighborhood?
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
42.9%
48.0%
9.1%
Yes
No
Not sure


How important is it for Highland to provide housing options that meet the needs of residents of all ages and abilities?
45.0%
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
39.9%
24.8%
23.8%
5.0%
6.5%
Very important
Somewhat important
Neutral
Not very important
Not important at all

C.6 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT INFLUENCE ON THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Public involvement was not a parallel activity to the planning process. Rather, it was the foundation on which the Comprehensive Plan was built. Across dozens of stakeholder meetings, four Steering Committee sessions, in-person outreach events, and 493 survey responses, Highland residents consistently expressed clear priorities that helped shape every major component of the Plan. This section summarizes how the community's perspectives directly informed the Comprehensive Plan's vision, goals, land-use framework, corridor strategies, housing recommendations, mobility improvements, quality-of-life initiatives, and fiscal responsibility commitments.

C.6.1 INFLUENCE ON VISION, GOALS, AND PLAN THEMES

Public feedback played a decisive role in defining the Comprehensive Plan's six central themes:

1. Land Use & Growth Management
2. Corridor & Downtown Reinvestment
3. Mobility & Safety
4. Housing Choice
5. Quality-of-life
6. Fiscal Responsibility & Transparent Investment

These themes emerged directly from what residents and stakeholders said most frequently and most forcefully:

- ★ Reinforce small-town character while embracing reinvestment.
- ★ Modernize and reposition aging commercial corridors.
- ★ Improve safety and reduce speeding.
- ★ Provide more housing choices for seniors, young adults, and families.
- ★ Maintain parks and public spaces while upgrading aging amenities.
- ★ Improve transparency in spending, capital planning, and redevelopment decisions.

Committee discussions, stakeholder input, and survey priorities all converged to create a thematic framework that reflects the community's shared aspirations.

C.6.2 INFLUENCE ON LAND USE POLICY AND CHARACTER DISTRICTS

The land use policy framework, including character districts, redevelopment priorities, and stabilization areas, was shaped heavily by:

- ★ The Steering Committee's hands-on mapping exercise.
- ★ Stakeholder concerns about obsolete commercial centers.
- ★ Survey responses identified Downtown, Kennedy Avenue, Ridge Road, and Indianapolis Boulevard as top redevelopment priorities.
- ★ Comments citing underutilized sites and corridor "eyesores."

This public guidance led to a land-use approach that prioritizes redevelopment and reinvestment over expansion, recognizing Highland's landlocked status and built-out form. The Plan reflects community preferences for:

- ★ Mixed-use redevelopment in Downtown and key nodes.
- ★ Adaptive reuse of aging shopping centers and underutilized parcels.
- ★ Stabilization policies in long-established neighborhoods.
- ★ Compatible infill development to strengthen existing areas.

The result is a land use framework rooted in community clarity about where change should occur and where it should not.

C.6.3 INFLUENCE ON CORRIDOR AND DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES

Public input overwhelmingly identified the need to reinvest in Highland's major corridors. Kennedy Avenue, Ridge Road, and Indianapolis Boulevard were repeatedly described as:

- ★ Gateways that shape first impressions.
- ★ Areas with vacant buildings and disjointed development.
- ★ Priority locations for beautification, signage, lighting, and streetscape improvements.
- ★ Corridors need safer crossings and traffic calming.

These insights led directly to several Critical Path Strategies:

- ★ **Complete a Streetscape Maste**r Plan for the Three Priority Corridors.
- ★ Establish a Downtown Management District.
- ★ Launch a Vacant and Underutilized Buildings Initiative.

Residents made clear that corridor revitalization and a more vibrant Downtown are essential to Highland's long-term competitiveness and identity.

C.6.4 INFLUENCE ON MOBILITY & SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Safety was one of the most consistent themes in the survey and public events. Kennedy Avenue and Indianapolis Boulevard were repeatedly cited as unsafe or uncomfortable for pedestrians and cyclists.

Residents expressed support for:

- ★ More sidewalks and missing connections.
- ★ Improved crosswalks and intersection lighting.
- ★ Trail connections to the Kennedy Avenue bridge and the Little Calumet River Trail.
- ★ Traffic calming in neighborhoods and school zones.

These community concerns directly shaped mobility recommendations, such as:

- ★ Implement Priority Recommendations from the SS4A Safety Study.
- ★ Adopt a Complete Streets Ordinance.
- ★ Identify and Prioritize Sidewalk and Trail Gaps.
- ★ Create a Connected Network of Trails and Sidewalks.

The emphasis on safety and multimodal access is firmly grounded in the community's expressed needs.

C.6.5 INFLUENCE ON HOUSING STRATEGIES

Survey respondents and stakeholders consistently asked for:

- ★ More senior housing and downsizing options.
- ★ More attainable and workforce housing.
- ★ Townhomes, duplexes, and small-scale multi-dwelling in appropriate areas.
- ★ Stronger oversight of rental properties.

As a result, the Plan includes housing strategies such as:

- ★ Zone for Missing Middle Housing Near Corridors and Downtown.
- ★ Support Adaptive Reuse of Commercial Structures for Housing.

The housing section reflects the community's desire for balance, maintaining neighborhood character while providing modern, diverse options.

C.6.6 INFLUENCE ON QUALITY-OF-LIFE RECOMMENDATIONS

Public outreach confirmed that Highland's parks, festivals, and recreation amenities are deeply valued, but many playgrounds, facilities, and trails need modernization. Residents also expressed interest in:

- ★ A more coordinated community events strategy.
- ★ Better communication about Town projects.
- ★ Riverfront enhancements and additional protections for green space.

These themes informed strategies, including:

- ★ Create a Town-Wide Event and Programming Strategy.
- ★ Develop a Stormwater Resilience and Green Infrastructure Program.
- ★ Implementation of the Parks Master Plan recommendations.
- ★ Strengthening trail connectivity and river corridor access.

C.6.7 INFLUENCE ON FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PUBLIC INVESTMENT POLICIES

Survey and stakeholder comments emphasized:

- ★ Maintaining existing infrastructure before building new facilities.
- ★ Transparent communication about Town finances and capital projects.
- ★ Clear justification for redevelopment incentives and grants.

Which led directly to several implementation priorities:

- ★ **Create a Return on Investment (ROI) Too**l for Incentives.
- ★ Publish an Annual "State of Redevelopment and Infrastructure" Report.
- ★ Develop a Public-Facing CIPP Dashboard.

C.6.8 CONCLUSION

Public involvement was the compass that guided the Comprehensive Plan from start to finish. Residents, stakeholders, and Steering Committee members provided critical input that shaped:

- ★ What the Town should prioritize.
- ★ Where reinvestment should occur.
- ★ How Highland should grow and evolve.
- ★ Which strategies belong on the community's Critical Path.

Supplement:

- ★ The following crosswalk table enables a better understanding of how public involvement and existing conditions findings influenced individual goals and objectives in the comprehensive plan.

Plan Goal / Objective	Public Input Source(s)	Key Themes from Engagement	Relevant Existing Conditions Findings
Goal 1: Land Use & Growth Management	Steering Committee; Focus Groups; Public Survey	Desire for reinvestment over expansion; concern about incompatible land uses; support for mixed-use in targeted areas	Built-out community with limited greenfield land; aging commercial corridors; underutilized parcels in key locations
Promote reinvestment in Priority Redevelopment Areas	Steering Committee; Focus Groups	Revitalize vacant/underperforming properties; improve corridors	Concentration of vacancy and obsolescence along major corridors
Encourage context-sensitive infill development	Public Survey; Steering Committee	Maintain neighborhood character; avoid disruptive development	Stable residential neighborhoods adjacent to commercial corridors
Goal 2: Corridor & Downtown Reinvestment	Focus Groups; Public Workshops; Steering Committee	Improve aesthetics and identity of corridors; support local businesses; enhance walkability	Commercial corridors show signs of disinvestment; inconsistent streetscape and access management
Strengthen corridor identity and design	Public Workshops; Steering Committee	Desire for improved appearance and branding	Lack of cohesive design standards along corridors
Support mixed-use redevelopment in targeted areas	Focus Groups; Public Survey	Interest in walkable destinations and amenities	Market conditions support selective mixed-use infill

Plan Goal / Objective	Public Input Source(s)	Key Themes from Engagement	Relevant Existing Conditions Findings
Goal 3: Mobility & Accessibility	Public Survey; Focus Groups; Steering Committee	Improve safety; enhance pedestrian and bicycle access; address traffic concerns	Crash data indicates safety issues at key intersections; limited pedestrian connectivity in some areas
Improve multimodal connectivity	Public Survey; Steering Committee	Desire for walkability and safer crossings	Gaps in sidewalk and trail network
Prioritize safety improvements	Focus Groups; Public Workshops	Concern about traffic speeds and intersection safety	Documented crash patterns and safety study findings
Goal 4: Housing Options	Public Survey; Focus Groups; Steering Committee	Need for diverse housing types; concerns about affordability; desire to age in place	Limited housing diversity; aging housing stock; increasing housing costs
Expand missing middle housing options	Steering Committee; Focus Groups	Interest in downsizing and alternative housing types	Predominance of single-family housing; limited intermediate-density options
Support housing reinvestment and maintenance	Public Survey; Focus Groups	Concern about property conditions and rentals	Aging housing stock; variability in maintenance conditions
Goal 5: Quality-of-life & Community Identity	Public Workshops; Public Survey; Steering Committee	Strong community pride; desire to maintain small-town feel; support for parks and amenities	Well-utilized park system; strong community events; regional draw for amenities
Enhance parks and public spaces	Public Survey; Focus Groups	Demand for additional amenities and gathering spaces	Existing parks are assets, but unevenly distributed
Strengthen community identity and branding	Steering Committee; Public Workshops	Desire to differentiate Highland regionally	Competitive positioning relative to nearby communities
Goal 6: Fiscal Responsibility & Public Investment	Steering Committee; Focus Groups	Desire for transparency; concern about use of incentives; need for accountability	Ongoing capital needs; importance of strategic investment in infrastructure
Improve transparency in public investments	Steering Committee; Focus Groups	Request for clearer communication of decisions	Need for better tracking and reporting of capital projects
Establish clear criteria for redevelopment incentives	Steering Committee	Concern about fairness and effectiveness of incentives	Limited formalized evaluation framework currently in place

APPENDIX D: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES

PURPOSE

- This appendix establishes a standardized framework for evaluating public investments, redevelopment incentives, and major capital projects. The intent is to ensure that such decisions are:
- Consistent across projects
- Transparent to the public and decision-makers
- Aligned with the goals and priorities of this Comprehensive Plan
- This framework supports, but does not replace, the judgment of elected and appointed officials. Rather, it provides a structured basis for comparison and documentation.

APPLICATION

This evaluation framework should be applied to:

- Redevelopment incentives (e.g., TIF assistance, abatements, grants)
- Public-private partnership projects
- Major capital investments identified through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP/CIPP)
- Strategic infrastructure investments tied to redevelopment

The framework may be used:

- As a screening tool for initial project consideration
- As a comparative tool when prioritizing multiple projects
- As a documentation tool to explain investment decisions

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Projects should be evaluated across the following core criteria:

1. PLAN ALIGNMENT

- Does the project support the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan?
- Is the project located within or supportive of a Priority Redevelopment Area?
- Does it advance identified strategies (e.g., corridor reinvestment, housing diversification)?

2. ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Will the project expand the local tax base?
- Does it create or retain jobs?
- Does it catalyze additional private investment or redevelopment activity?

3. INFRASTRUCTURE EFFICIENCY

- Does the project leverage existing infrastructure capacity?
- Does it minimize the need for costly new infrastructure expansion?
- Does it improve the efficiency or longevity of existing systems?

4. COMMUNITY BENEFIT

- Does the project enhance quality-of-life, including access to amenities, services, or public spaces?
- Does it support neighborhood stability or revitalization?
- Does it address needs identified through public engagement?

5. FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY AND RETURN

- ★ Is the level of public investment proportionate to the anticipated benefit?
- ★ Does the project demonstrate a reasonable return on investment over time?
- ★ Are long-term operational and maintenance costs sustainable?

OPTIONAL SCORING FRAMEWORK

To support consistent application, the Town may utilize a scoring system based on the criteria above. An example structure is provided below:

Criteria	Score (1–5)	Notes
Plan Alignment		
Economic Impact		
Infrastructure Efficiency		
Community Benefit		
Financial Return		
Total Score		

Scoring Guidance:

1 = Minimal alignment or benefit

3 = Moderate alignment or benefit

5 = Strong alignment or benefit

This scoring framework is intended as a guide, not a strict formula. Qualitative factors and context should be considered alongside numerical scores.

PRIORITIZATION GUIDANCE

Projects demonstrating strong performance across multiple criteria—particularly those that:

- ★ Advance Priority Redevelopment Areas
- ★ Leverage significant private investment
- ★ Improve infrastructure efficiency should be prioritized for funding and implementation.

INTEGRATION WITH TOWN PROCESSES

This framework should be used in coordination with:

- ★ Capital Improvement Program (CIP/CIPP): to prioritize and phase public investments
- ★ Redevelopment Planning Efforts: to evaluate site-specific opportunities
- ★ Annual Budgeting Process: to align funding decisions with plan priorities
- ★ Annual Reporting: to document outcomes and refine decision-making over time

ONGOING REFINEMENT

The Town may refine this framework over time based on:

- ★ Experience applying the criteria
- ★ Changes in market conditions or community priorities
- ★ Lessons learned from completed projects

Any updates should maintain the core principles of transparency, consistency, and alignment with the Comprehensive Plan.

RELATIONSHIP TO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This appendix provides the operational structure for implementing the Fiscal Responsibility and Public Investment strategies outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. It ensures that the Town's investment decisions are directly tied to the policy direction established in the Comprehensive Plan.


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