



### The Growth Policies Plan Vision

We are all in agreement that communities, like most organizations, require a consensus, at least among their leadership, about their aspirations and vision for the future. Without such a consensus, communities are unlikely to have success in developing in a rational manner that meets the quality of life expectations of their citizens. The current effort within the city to review our 1991 Growth Policies Plan, and to recast our vision for the community's future is both timely and necessary.

Bloomington has much to be proud of over the preceding quarter century. The past 25 years have produced major changes in the Bloomington community. In 1975, Bloomington was still a medium sized southern Indiana community that was blessed with one of the major universities in the world at its heart and a manufacturing base of national corporations. Indiana University continues as an even larger and more complex institution today that still greatly influences the course of life in our city. But Bloomington has also matured over this time span, and IU is less dominant in its impact on community life than it was in 1975. The national manufacturing base departure has led to a new economic base.

In 1975, Bloomington faced many problems that, had they not been dealt with properly, would have had a very negative impact on the quality of life in our community. The central city was dying, as traditional retail establishments collapsed or moved under the pressure of suburban shopping malls and suburban housing. The public and private infrastructure of our downtown was decaying, and it was not at all certain there was the will or the means to save it. The community was suffering from urban sprawl, as ever more new residential housing and commercial properties were built on the east side of town. The impact of public policies and public investment had not been recognized for their long-term impact, leading increasingly to a disappearance of our streetscape, growing traffic problems, and the decay of public infrastructure.

Thanks to an enlightened and determined corps of individuals who provided vision, the public and private leadership of the community joined together to change this dismal outlook. The downtown was restored physically, commercially, and culturally. It was given a new, still developing role as an entertainment and restaurant center and location for single purpose shopping. Government and commercial buildings, such

as the Old County Courthouse, Fountain Square, and the Showers Furniture Factory were restored and given new functions. New governmental offices, parking lots, a city convention center, and private business ventures were established in the near downtown area, and the old Victorian houses along Fourth Street were rehabilitated and took on new functions. The sidewalks and streets were rebuilt, care and cleaning were instituted, flowers planted and festivals held, and the university improved the care and appearance of the campus.

In other parts of the community, new and expanded parks, solutions to the traffic bottlenecks of problem intersections, and the construction of the route 37 bypass on the west side of town took place. The Growth Policies Plan, instigated by a University/City coalition in the late 1980's and adopted in 1991, set the course for the phenomenal growth and development along the corridor and in close proximity to the 37 bypass.

On the lifestyle side of the community, the vision of our leadership over the past 15 years has developed the cultural and intellectual life of the community, separate from its earlier dependence on the University. New activities such as the Waldron Arts Center, the Monroe County Historical Museum, the Wonderlab, the new Monroe County Library, Ivy Tech State College, the Buskirk-Chumley Theater, the Farmers Market, and the increasingly well known Bloomington music life represented by the Bloomington Pops, the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, the Star of Indiana, the home and studio of John Mellencamp, and the lively, talented local jazz scene, all have added immeasurably to the quality of life in our city.

So we can congratulate ourselves. The leadership looked at the direction the community was heading 25 years ago, did not like it, and set forth to change the scenario. They built a consensus on the vision for our community. It is interesting to note that most cities like Bloomington with major Universities have not achieved the quality of life as has this community over the last 25 years. We were fortunate enough to have the necessary leaders in the community to visualize where we needed to go, and the determination and skills to make it happen.

Our successes have led to a vibrant, dynamic, growing community, in many ways successful beyond our dreams, that also has the potential for damaging the quality of life the community rejuvenation has made possible. It does not take great imagination to envision a scenario where Bloomington falls victim to its success



and public policy decisions begin to erode greenspace, exacerbate traffic problems, and traditional American urban problems become a way of life.

It is clearly time for Bloomington to refocus its vision for the long run. The community has been struggling to articulate a vision that is holistic, all encompassing, and one upon which we can reach consensus. It is our view that we need to state for the record our explicit goals for the next 25 years (It may sound too long a horizon for some, but in our experience, it is not). What do we really want to accomplish? In many ways, this will not only make it easier to reach agreement, it will also be a more useful guide to action. When the goals have been agreed to and clearly stated for the input of the general public, then our leadership can move to setting shorter-term objectives and timetables.

The goals we believe Bloomington should set forth to be accomplished between now and 2025 are:

I. A physical appearance that maintains the historic beauty of our community: this means setting such objectives as uniform streetscapes, tree lined streets with sidewalks, parking lots to the side and rear of buildings and buildings located closer to the streets, and shopping centers that blend with residential neighborhoods and are not located behind a sea of parking from the street.

II. A respect for and adherence to environmental quality in Bloomington and our surrounding environs.

III. A user-friendly and efficient urban transportation network: This should include public transportation (subsidized if necessary); alternative transportation modes such as bike paths, sidewalks, and more extensive pedestrian options; and mechanisms that encourage good traffic flow (fewer cul-de-sacs, more through streets, and more use of planning and street grid systems).

IV. Developing mixed-use neighborhoods that offer social interaction as well as the option of neighborhood services.

V. A thriving city center that offers diverse residential housing, government services, specialized shopping, community-centered activities, and entertainment. More residential housing must be encouraged in the downtown area to insure continued demand for services in the city center. Attractive, quality high-rise buildings, with parking, should be considered. Parking should be consolidated and surface parking reduced and converted

to high density residential uses. Public parks that are safe, well maintained, and offer recreation, sports, and leisure activities for our families should also be encouraged.

VI. An economic base that offers employment opportunities for a well trained and educated workforce and that pays commensurate with their training, skills, and educational attainment.

VII. The integration of Indiana University on all corridors of the county / university interface, to ensure both the beauty and accessibility of the relationship between the city and the campus. We need to avoid an academic fortress in the middle of our city, such as many communities with major universities have developed.

VIII. A cultural and intellectual environment that meets the aspirations, needs, and potential of our citizens, and recognizes the impact on all aspects of our community, including our educational system, our economic base, and the options for our growing population.

Creating a community comprehensive plan to begin to address these goals is a challenging endeavor. As difficult as it is, this plan is the most crucial step in defining the strategies that will carry this community forward over the decades to come. Focusing the input of hundreds of citizens, organizations, and associations into a coherent vision is a daunting initial task.

Planning a trip provides an easy analogy for the comprehensive planning process. We need a starting point and a destination before we can specify the trip details (route, mode of conveyance, stops along the way, etc.). Our starting point is Bloomington 2002 and our destination is Bloomington 2025. To guide the development of a practical, efficient, and successful plan, the vision statement provides a sense of direction and means of travel for this journey. The Growth Policies Plan is Bloomington's road map along the way.

Today's Bloomington results from almost two centuries of growth and development. When we think of our community, it is easy to highlight things that changed greatly, and things that changed little. Which of the many things that we have reflect the Bloomington we wish to preserve? In which things are we dissatisfied? Which things can we work to improve? The answers to these questions shape our community vision and the Growth Policies Plan.



We characterize Bloomington as having consistently low unemployment and crime rates. We have excellent public education opportunities, exemplary libraries, and diverse, beautiful natural surroundings. We have extensive human services with individual support mechanisms. Above all, we have hundreds of dedicated citizens who are willing to participate in civic forums for the betterment of their community.

Entryway signs welcome visitors with the remark “Bloomington - A Beautiful Place to Live.” Perhaps this phrase best states the operating vision of Bloomington residents. Residents do indeed express, with passion, an affinity for Bloomington. If we amplify “beautiful” to all possible connotations - aesthetic quality, choice, superb, pleasing - then, Bloomington ranks high with those who live here.

Throughout the process of creating the Growth Policies Plan, numerous individuals and organizations have weighed in with their own vision for the Bloomington of tomorrow. While none of those visions is the same as another, many common themes and attitudes come to the surface.

### **Growth Management**

Bloomington has experienced growth in most sectors of the community over the last several decades. This growth is evident in the size of our population and the spatial area consumed as development occurs. The pace, location, and quality of our past growth are troubling to many citizens of Bloomington. Now, the community must focus on strategies to manage change in a less troubling manner. We must use our knowledge of built and natural constraints to bound future public expense and enhance the livability of Bloomington.

### **Natural Resource Conservation**

The accumulating impact of Bloomington’s growth and development on the natural environment is significant. To sustain our community, to balance the built and natural environments successfully, we must commit to protection of our natural features. We must integrate future growth into the community while protecting the vital natural structures and systems that surround us.

### **Public Facilities Planning**

Community growth increases demand for community services. New homes and businesses require new storm and sanitary sewers, new roads and sidewalks, more

police and fire protection, schools and parks. Bloomington provides these new services at a cost to taxpayers. In recent years, citizens have questioned whether services and growth are commensurate. To minimize inequitable fiscal impacts, the City must be prudent in infrastructure and service investments while allowing growth at an appropriate pace. We must ensure that Bloomington can provide high quality public services to all of its citizens. One group must not receive an unfair burden or an unfair advantage.

### **Transportation**

It is hard to dispute the rising tide of traffic growth in some areas of Bloomington. As growth and development continue, citizens have an ever-growing array of destinations from which to choose. Most often, the only option that the transportation system provides for reaching those destinations is the automobile. To untangle the traffic knot, we need more transportation options as we continue to make roadway improvements. We must reduce the spatial distance between destinations by integrating land uses. We must expand public transit and implement a broad network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

### **Community Character**

What is the community character of Bloomington? We all have an idea of what this means, but it is ultimately a concept that is quite difficult to quantify succinctly. We can probably never achieve a precise definition of this trait. However, each of us seems to know it when we see it. It’s in the architecture of the Downtown, both historic and eclectic. It’s in the diverse and accessible parks and recreation network throughout the community. Our citizens in the breadth and diversity of public involvement and civic leadership demonstrate it. It’s in the working-class history that we cherish. It’s in the public service of our many federal, state and local government employees. All of these aspects and more are crucial elements of what Bloomington calls its community character. We must work together to protect, nurture, and enhance these characteristic qualities in the future.



### **Economic and Cultural Vibrancy**

Bloomington is no stranger to the recent deterioration in the economic climate of the nation. However, to continue our past success as a community we must not dwell on what we've lost. Now, we must take stock of the quality things that we still possess and enhance those strengths to become a leader in the new economy. Economic development, including retention and expansion of existing businesses, is and should be a major objective to pursue. Additionally, we must leverage the City's community character to attract investment that values a culturally vibrant community like ours. Our high quality of life, skilled work force, and commitment to excellence give us a comparative advantage over others in similar situations.

### **Intergovernmental Cooperation**

The points of view given above do not stop at the City limits. We must address each view into the future at a scale beyond the City of Bloomington alone. Community success depends upon cooperation among local units of government. Positive working relationships with Monroe County and Indiana University are essential. The entire community benefits from compatible policy and process agreement.

As Bloomington's population grows over the next 20 years, the Growth Policies Plan is a blueprint for maintaining and enriching our outstanding quality of life. We must continue to evolve as a community that takes pride in a vibrant downtown and stable neighborhoods. We must take pride in a thriving bicycle and pedestrian environment with more pleasing streetscapes. We must take pride in high quality parks and greenspace. We must take pride in a stable economic foundation. The challenge we face is to generate a continuing reaffirmation of "Bloomington - A Beautiful Place to Live". We must transfer the widely held communal sense of quality of life and livability to a personal one by offering expression and respect to each individual's vision.

We must understand that the Growth Policies Plan (GPP) is a broad policy document. It provides a unified vision for how we should address growth and development issues in the City of Bloomington. We must not confuse this plan with the Zoning Ordinance, which is our primary tool for implementing a comprehensive plan. To maintain the momentum of the GPP, it is crucial for this implementation to begin quickly.