

*City of Rensselaer  
Comprehensive Plan*

*Adopted June 25, 2007*

## *Acknowledgements*

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*Table of Contents*

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*Preface* ..... 5  
    Comprehensive planning ..... 6  
    Indiana Code requirements ..... 7  
    Organization of the plan ..... 8

*Chapter 1: Vision* ..... 9  
    What is vision? ..... 11  
    Vision statement ..... 11  
    Process of visioning ..... 11  
    Key components of the vision ..... 11

*Chapter 2: Goals* ..... 13  
    Land use/growth management ..... 15  
    Housing ..... 15  
    Transportation and infrastructure ..... 15  
    Economic development ..... 15  
    Quality of life/community identity ..... 15

*Chapter 3: Land Use and Growth Management* ..... 17  
    Existing land use ..... 19  
    Projections ..... 21  
    Future land use ..... 22  
    Annexation ..... 25  
    Policy statements ..... 25  
    Action plans ..... 25

*Chapter 4: Transportation and Infrastructure* ..... 29  
    Functional classification and thoroughfare Plan ..... 31  
    Truck route alternatives ..... 35  
    Railroads ..... 38  
    Non-motorized transportation ..... 38  
    Airport expansion ..... 38  
    Water and sewer ..... 39  
    Electricity and natural gas ..... 39  
    Policy statements ..... 39  
    Action plans ..... 40

*Chapter 5: Economic Development* ..... 43  
    Existing conditions ..... 45  
    Economic development focus ..... 45  
    Policies ..... 47  
    Action plans ..... 47

*Chapter 6: Quality of Life and Community Identity* ..... 49  
    Existing conditions ..... 51  
    Recreation ..... 54  
    Corridors ..... 54  
    Policies ..... 54  
    Action plans ..... 55

*Chapter 7: Implementation Tools*..... 57  
Zoning and Subdivision Control ..... 59  
Overlay Districts ..... 59  
Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction ..... 59  
Parks and Recreation Master Plan ..... 60  
Capital Improvements Plan ..... 60  
Utility Master Plan ..... 60  
Economic Development Tools ..... 60

# *Preface*



Change is a reality in our communities. It may occur slowly, over time, or faster than we seemingly can adjust. We can react to change or to anticipate and direct the changes that occur. When communities engage in a comprehensive planning process they are both responding to changes that have happened or are happening, and planning for changes that will likely occur in the future.

Rensselaer is a growing community that envisions significantly more growth in the coming years. The community has engaged in the comprehensive planning process to plan for the desired growth in a way that protects the community's identity, improves the local economy, and enhances the community as a place to live, work, and play.

### Comprehensive Planning

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A comprehensive plan is not a legally binding and enforceable document like zoning or subdivision control ordinances. Rather, the comprehensive plan is an adopted, legislative document containing official policy statements for effective decision-making in both private development projects and community expenditures.

The purpose of a comprehensive plan is to guide a community into the future. A comprehensive plan is the vehicle with which a community's decision makers are able to control the quality, quantity, and location of their growth. The successful completion of the comprehensive planning process will ensure that future growth will provide a higher standard of quality of life for all in the community.

More precisely, the plan is the policy document that plans for the physical, social, economic growth and redevelopment of the planning area. The plan influences policy decisions in a broad variety of areas, including, but not limited to:

- land use;
- transportation;
- infrastructure and utilities;
- drainage;
- environmental conservation;
- economic development;
- recreation and open space; and
- housing.

An effective comprehensive plan contains policies for growth, public facilities, land use, population densities, and critical resources, as well as a map or maps illustrating the result of the proposed policies. The comprehensive planning process involves the creation of a framework for planned growth, through models in land use development, public services and resources, and public investments in a controlled positive manner.

### Indiana Code Requirements for Comprehensive Plans

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Indiana statutes establish the minimum requirements for a comprehensive plan. As stated in IC 36-7-4-502, a comprehensive plan must contain at least:

1. A statement of objectives for the future development of the jurisdiction;
2. A statement of policy for the land use development of the jurisdiction;
3. A statement of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

This comprehensive plan addresses these elements through the land use and growth management chapter, transportation and infrastructure chapter, and the quality of life and community identity chapter. Each of these plan chapters includes policy statements and objectives.

### *Organization of the Plan*

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The vision and goals are the foundation of the plan. The plan is built on a framework that begins with the vision – what kind of community residents desire Rensselaer to be 20 years from now. Goals, presented in Chapter 2 provide direction as to how the vision may be achieved. The goals are arranged in broad topic areas of land use and growth management, transportation and infrastructure, economic development, and quality of life and community identity.

The topic areas of the plan provide clarity to the goals through objectives, policy statements, and action plans. These chapters are the body of the plan. They will help decision-makers in determining how Rensselaer should grow in order to achieve the community's vision.

The implementation chapter recommends tools for implementing the actions and objectives of the goals.

Appendices to the plan include the existing conditions and a summary of public input to the plan.



# *Chapter 1*

## *Vision*



*What is vision?*

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The vision is a statement, developed through consensus, of what the city of Rensselaer wants to be in 20 years; the characteristics of that future community. It is the umbrella under which the goals, objectives, and actions hang.

*Vision statement*

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Rensselaer strives to be a progressive city that will continue to grow and develop over the next twenty years. The city desires to maintain its small town atmosphere and continue to build on its community identity. This will be accomplished by capitalizing on its history and heritage through downtown redevelopment and encouraging additional residential, commercial, business and industrial growth throughout the city. With this new growth, Rensselaer will protect and preserve its existing viewsheds and natural areas as well as improve the overall the quality of life of its citizens.

*Process of visioning*

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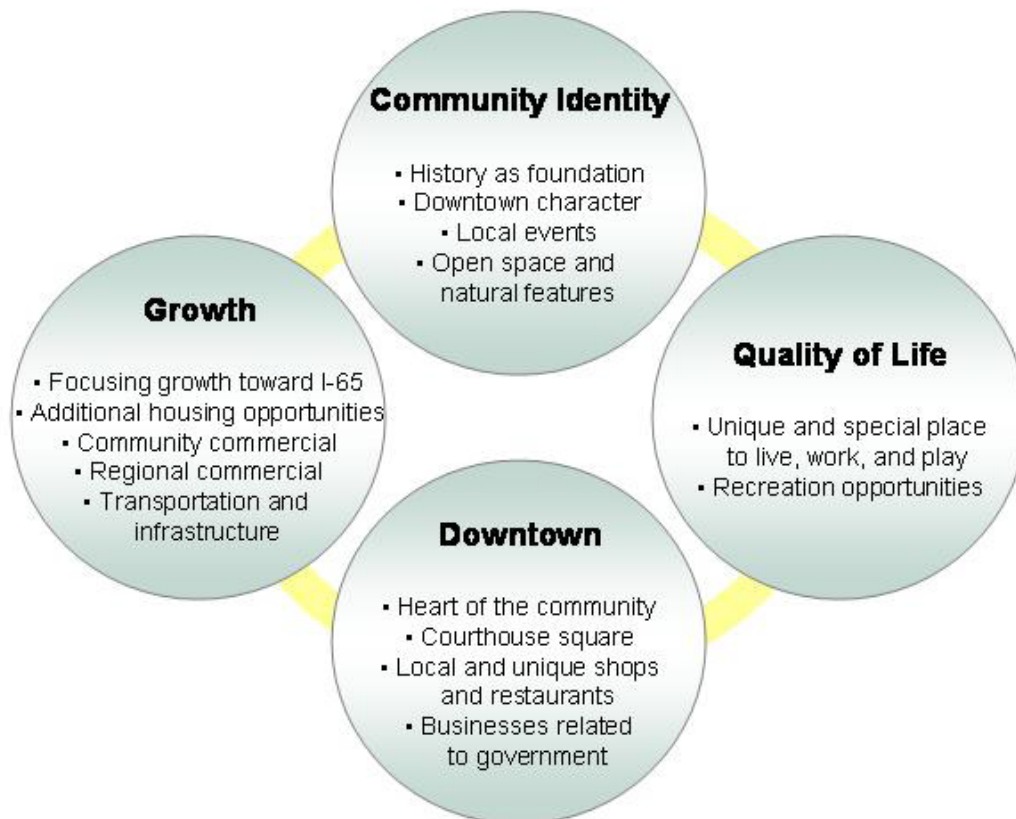
The vision was developed through a number of exercises with the steering committee and the public to determine what was important to the residents of the city.

One exercise asked participants to circle words or phrases that they wanted to see in the community and cross out those which they did not want. There were more than fifty words and phrases to choose from that covered most aspects of community life.

*Key components of the vision*

The four key components of the vision were growth, downtown, quality of life, and community identity. These concepts are reflected in the body of the plan as the plan considers land use, transportation and infrastructure, economic development, and quality of life and community character.

**Figure 1-1: Key Components of the Vision**



### *Growth*

The Rensselaer community wants to grow and is supportive of residential, commercial, and industrial growth. The growth, however, should not change the essential character of the city. Growth should support the community and build a stronger community identity, rather than threaten the historical nature of the community or the small town atmosphere that exists in the community.

Growth encompasses future land uses, transportation and infrastructure, housing, and economic development.

### *Community Identity*

The history and heritage of the Rensselaer community are important foundations for the future development of the community. The community identity, expressed in the downtown, community events, open space and natural features, should be reinforced as the community grows.

### *Quality of Life*

Quality of life is related in some ways to community identity. It is about what makes the city unique and special and ultimately a good place to live. Quality of life focuses on recreation opportunities within the community and maintaining quality open spaces for enjoyment.

### *Downtown*

Downtown is the heart of the Rensselaer community. The courthouse square is intact and has a variety of businesses. Business owners and organizations work diligently to ensure the vibrancy of downtown as an important place in the community. New development should complement, rather than compete with the downtown businesses.

# *Chapter 2*

## *Goals*



*“If you don’t have a plan for yourself, you’ll be a part of someone else’s” - Anonymous*

Goals are broad statements that provide direction as to how the city will reach its vision. The goals are lofty, but attainable with work. The goals will be given a greater level of detail in the action plans that are part of the Implementation chapter after each of the focus areas is discussed in the following chapters.

The goals have been divided into five focus areas: land use and growth management, transportation and infrastructure, housing, economic development, and quality of life and community identity.

#### *Land use/growth management*

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- Provide for a range of land uses in the city that supports the tax base while promoting orderly growth and development.
- Actively pursue the annexation of properties that furthers the growth objectives of the city.
- Provide responsible, consistent and equitable regulations that are flexible, effective, enforceable, and responsive with the intent to be a developer friendly community.
- Preserve and revitalize the historic areas in the downtown and the surrounding areas.

#### *Housing*

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- Encourage diversification of housing choices within the City including a range in type, size, location, and quality to meet the needs of current and future residents.
- Actively pursue the expansion of residential land uses within, and immediately surrounding the City proper, while promoting orderly growth.
- Create mixed-use neighborhoods that provide safe pedestrian connections.

#### *Transportation and infrastructure*

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- Leverage public improvements throughout the city to serve as a catalyst for private investment and address the city’s current infrastructure and transportation challenges.
- Expand and maintain public facilities and spaces within the community.
- Create and maintain an interconnected thoroughfare network for the efficient movement of people, goods and services in and around the community.
- Promote continued development and investment in the Jasper County Airport to increase and enhance air transportation services.
- Develop a multi-modal transportation system throughout the City to accommodate the needs of residents and businesses and to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled.
- Operate and maintain wastewater and storm water management systems that reduce the incidence of flooding and protect, preserve and enhance water quality; and to the maximum extent feasible, preserve the existing natural storm water management systems (i.e. surface drainage systems).

#### *Economic development*

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- Promote a strong, diverse and healthy economy that meets the needs of the local workforce and diversifies the tax base.
- Promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses.
- Foster the startup and development of new businesses.

#### *Quality of life/community identity*

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- Increase walkability within the City to improve and maintain a higher quality of life for all residents.
- Provide sufficient quality parks, open spaces, trails, greenways and recreational facilities and services for the benefit, enjoyment and overall quality of life of the residents of Rensselaer.
- Employ the principles of access management and the use of architectural design and site development standards to reduce congestion, increase pedestrian activity and enhance the identity of the City’s corridors.
- Maintain and improve the visual character of the community to enhance local pride and the experience of visitors.





# *Chapter 3*

## *Land Use and Growth Management*



Land use and growth management are about making choices about how growth occurs in the community over a period of time. Future land uses need to build from the existing land uses without being completely constrained by them.

The future land use map is not the same as zoning. It is a decision-making tool to help the Plan Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and the City Council as they make decisions about rezonings, planned unit developments, special exceptions, and to a lesser extent, variances.

This chapter of the plan presents the existing and future land uses in the community, projections for growth, and policies and actions to help Rensselaer achieve the community vision as it relates to land use.

### Existing land use

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Rensselaer has a significant amount of land within the corporate limits that is currently in agriculture and natural areas due to recent annexations to provide areas for additional growth. However, this category also includes the floodplain areas along the Iroquois River and other natural drainage areas.

The undeveloped land included in this category is predominately located in the area south of the Drexel Industrial Park and east of St. Joseph College. Another large area is located on the northwest side of the city along Matheson Avenue.



Residential uses are the single largest urban land use in the community, which is typical of most communities. Residential neighborhoods surround the downtown area in all directions, though the majority of neighborhoods are east of downtown. Many of the homes in Rensselaer are within a narrow price range that is most suitable for people who are relatively established in their lives, but not significantly expensive compared to other communities.

Industrial uses account for nearly 10 percent of the land within the city limits. Most of the industrial land uses are included in the industrial parks: Drexel Park on the southeast side of the city and the Lintner Industrial Park on the northeast side of the city.



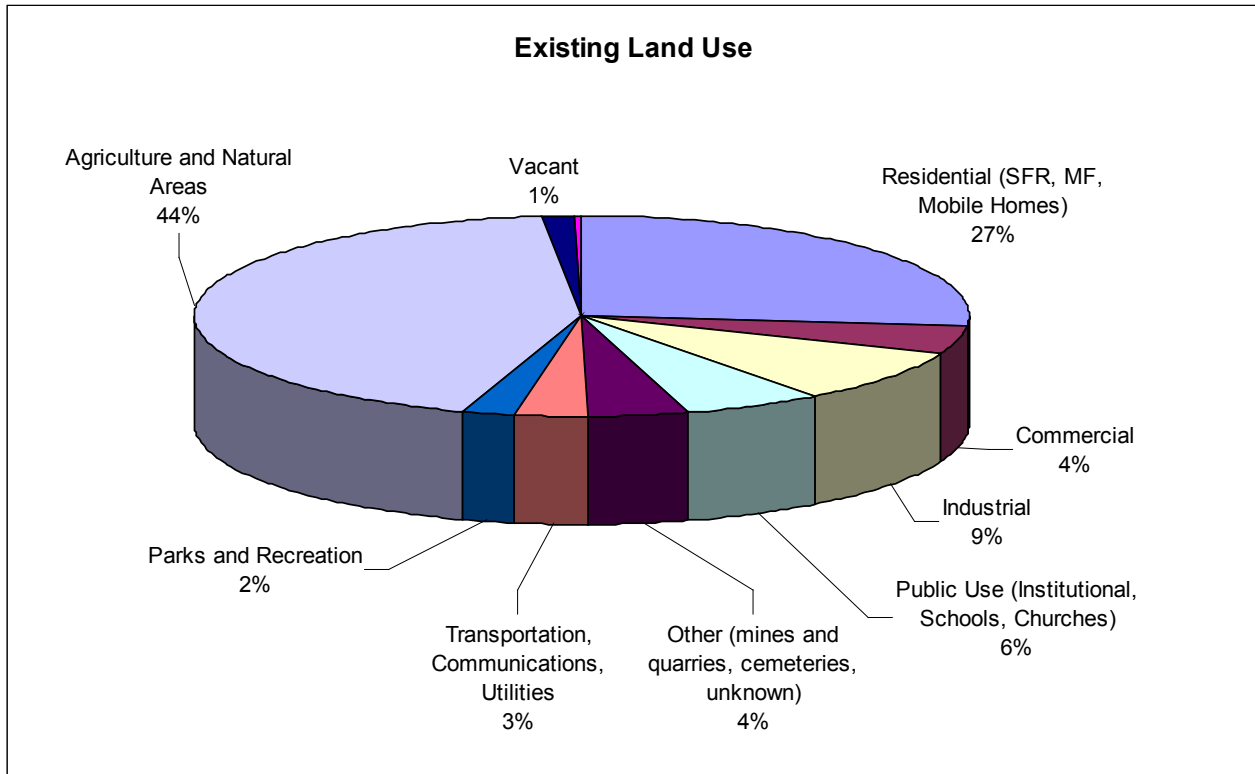
Public uses include government owned facilities such as the city hall, county courthouse, utility buildings, and parks in addition to schools and churches. These uses occupy more than five percent of the land in the city.

Commercial uses occupy slightly less than four percent of the land in the city. The existing commercial areas in the city are primarily downtown and along US 231 near St. Joseph College.

A chart of the existing land uses is available in Figure 3-1.



Figure 3-1: Existing Land Use



Projections

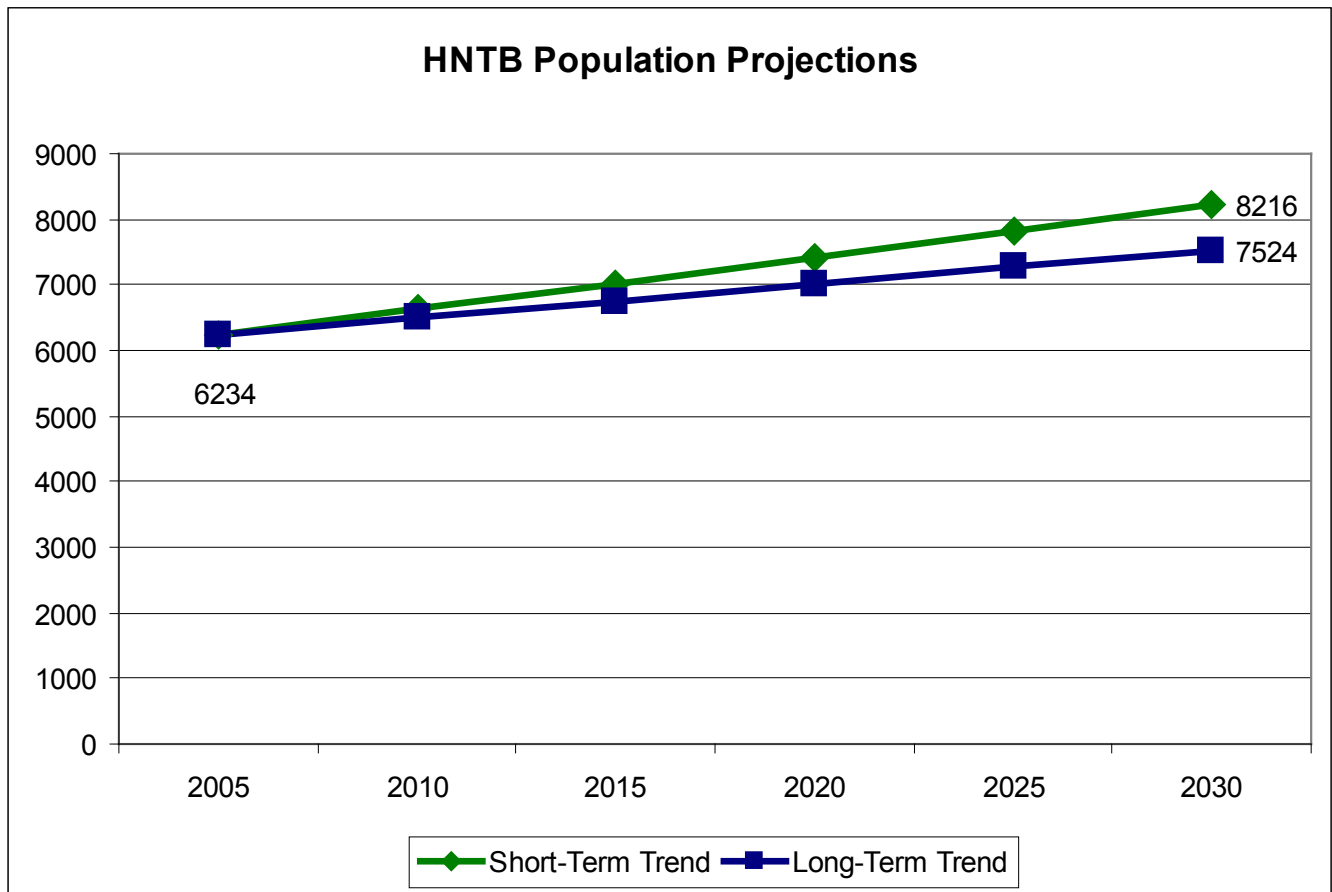
The citizens of Rensselaer have expressed a desire to grow. Population projections generally take into account only the growth that can be projected based on past growth performance of the community. Policy decisions (such as annexation), business locations, and other factors can significantly impact the growth rate of a community. The population projected here is based on both the short term and long term linear growth trends of the community. The projections are not able to capture what the growth may be with progressive development policies or the announcement of a new major business.

The projection based on a short term growth rate shows the population of Rensselaer increasing by approximately 2,000 people between 2005 and 2030 to more than 8,200 people. This would be growth of more than 30 percent during the period.

The projection based on a long term growth rate shows the population of Rensselaer reaching slightly over 7,500 by 2030. This represents approximately 20 percent growth in the community during the period from 2005 to 2030.

Using the city's number of persons per household from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing (2.37), we can assume that the projected population will result in 545 to 835 new households by 2030.

Figure 3-2: Population Projections



Source: Census of Population and Housing and HNTB Corporation

### *Future land use*

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The future land use map is a visionary long term plan for the City of Rensselaer. It anticipates significant growth, more than 20 years worth. It provides guidance for community leaders for a new direction for the city.

The major focus of the future land use map is a shift in the direction of the community employment centers from the east side of the community (where the current industrial parks are located) to the west where businesses will have better access to the interstate and other modes of transportation (air and rail). The airport expansion plays a significant role in the development plan for the SR 114 corridor. The balance between land for the airport expansion and industrial uses will be determined by the final plans for the airport. The industrial uses proposed for the north side of the corridor are primarily those that involve warehousing, distribution, or other logistics services.

Commercial development in the future should be focused on the north and south of the city limits along US 231 and as interstate oriented commercial development at the interchange of I-65 and SR 114. The commercial areas should be developed as nodes or centers, rather than as strip development along the roadway frontage. The commercial areas along US 231 should be neighborhood and community serving in scale and use. They should be designed thoughtfully as key community gateways, and should not compete with downtown businesses.

Residential development also plays a significant role in the future development of the city. Residential development is encouraged on all sides of the existing city, but is focused to the north, south, and west. Development should be encouraged to begin closest to the city and then grow outward as the community expands. This will make most efficient use of the city's resources, particularly public utilities. Subdivisions should not be developed until they are able to access public services including water and sewer.

*“Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” – J. Howard Payne*

Residential development needs to include entry-level housing and housing to allow people to age in place. Entry-level homes are generally smaller and are on smaller lots. They are intended for people, single or married, who are beginning their careers and likely have smaller families and incomes. The development policies for residential uses need to anticipate and provide for this type of housing, while maintaining sound development practices and community character. Housing for aging in place includes a variety of housing types including single family homes and attached single family units such as duplexes and quadplexes. The characteristics of these structures are that they are generally single story with no steps to enter the home or internal to the structure. They are designed with internal features like door handles and bathroom features that work for people with limited mobility or changing mobility. They are typically well lit and require very little maintenance. Many have a homeowners association that maintains the grounds of the development.

(Future Land Use map)





### Annexation

In order for the City of Rensselaer to benefit from the growth that occurs, the city will need to have a proactive annexation strategy. This will need to include voluntary annexations as development occurs, requiring annexation as a condition of utility extension and development approval, which has been the city's operating procedure. The annexation strategy may also include involuntary annexation to provide contiguity to an area that the city wants to annex or encourage development by providing annexation and utility service ahead of development.

### Policy statements

In addition to the future land use map providing direction to decision makers regarding land use in the community, a number of policies are established to provide clarity and support sound development in the community. These policies are:

- New development should be responsible for addressing drainage and stormwater management
- New residential and commercial development should include sidewalks
- Development of neighborhood parks and open spaces is encouraged
- Water, sewer, and drainage should be in place or planned as a part of new development
- Industrial development should be adjacent to a principal arterial
- Encourage creation of walkable neighborhoods with connections to other neighborhoods and places in the city
- Promote natural resources, green spaces, and recreational resources
- Encourage development patterns that build on existing infrastructure and population centers
- Encourage revitalization of historic downtown and neighborhoods
- Minimize the number and frequency of automobile access driveways along key roadway corridors
- Discourage development in environmentally sensitive areas such as floodplains
- Encourage contiguous urban development
- Manage growth by planned extension and expansion of public utilities, facilities, and capital investments

Many of these policies should be carried forward as requirements in the revisions to the City's zoning and subdivision control ordinance to give them additional weight in the development process.

### Action plans

*"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now." – Alan Lakein*

Action plans provide additional detail on how goals should be accomplished, who is responsible for leading implementation, and when an action should be completed.

**Goal: Provide for a range of land uses in the City that supports the tax base while promoting orderly growth and development.**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>        | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Review the zoning districts to ensure they are providing for a range of land uses that are appropriate for the community. | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| As land is annexed into the city, zone parcels in a manner consistent with the future land use map.                       | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Ongoing                   |
| Consider the future land use map when making decisions regarding rezoning of a specific parcel.                           | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Ongoing                   |

**Goal: Actively pursue the annexation of properties that further the growth objectives of the City.**

| <i>Actions</i>             | <i>Responsible Party</i> | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Adopt an annexation policy | City Council             | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i> | <i>Timeframe</i>           |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Develop an annexation strategy for the community, identifying short, medium, and long term annexation areas.   | City Council             | Short term'<br>(1-5 years) |
| Adopt fiscal plans and annexation ordinances consistent with the annexation policy and strategy                | City Council             | Ongoing                    |
| Require annexation of proposed development adjacent to the corporate limits                                    | City Council             | Ongoing                    |
| Require annexation or a remonstrance waiver for proposed development that will be served with public utilities | City Council             | Ongoing                    |

**Goal: Provide responsible, consistent and equitable regulations that are flexible, effective, enforceable, and responsive with the intent to be a developer-friendly community.**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>  | <i>Timeframe</i>            |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| Revise the zoning ordinance to enhance its user-friendliness and consistency with the comprehensive plan                        | Plan Commission<br>City Council   | Short term<br>(1-5 years)   |
| Revise the subdivision control ordinance to enhance its user-friendliness and consistency with the comprehensive plan           | Plan Commission<br>City Council   | Short term<br>(1-5 years)   |
| Develop application forms that are clear and informative  | Plan Commission   | Short term<br>(1-5 years)   |
| Post development regulations, applications, and deadlines on the city's website   | Plan Commission<br>City Webmaster   | Ongoing                     |
| Study impact fees to determine if they would be a consistent and equitable means for development to contribute to the community | Mayor's Office<br>City Attorney<br>Building Commissioner<br>Plan Commission | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |

**Goal: Preserve and revitalize the historic areas in the Downtown and the surrounding areas.**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>   | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| Develop a zoning district or overlay district to ensure future downtown development is compatible with existing development | Plan Commission<br>Main Street Rensselaer<br>Chamber of Commerce<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Establish a revolving loan fund to encourage restoration and rehabilitation of existing buildings                           | City Council<br>Building Commissioner  | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Implement the recommendations of the Downtown Revitalization Plan   | See Downtown plan  | See Downtown plan         |

**Goal: Encourage diversification of housing choices within the City including a range in type, size, location, and quality to meet the needs of current and future residents.**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>        | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Revise the bulk standards in the zoning ordinance to reflect appropriate standards for the various types and character of housing in the community | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Revise the zoning ordinance to encourage housing types such as townhouses and active elderly housing   | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |

**Goal: Actively pursue the expansion of residential land uses within, and immediately surrounding the City proper, while promoting orderly growth.**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>        | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Host a workshop with local property owners, developers, and land use attorneys to explain the revised zoning and subdivision control ordinances | Plan Commission                 | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Approve only rezonings that are consistent with the future land use map   | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |

**Goal: Create mixed-use neighborhoods that provide safe pedestrian connections.**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>        | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Revise zoning districts to allow for appropriate neighborhood commercial uses by special exception | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Revise zoning ordinance to allow for mixed-use development   | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Require pedestrian connections in mixed use and neighborhood commercial development projects       | Plan Commission<br>City Council | Ongoing                   |



# *Chapter 4*

## *Transportation and Infrastructure*



Transportation and utility infrastructure are the lifeblood of a properly functioning community. Without these vital facilities, a community cannot grow and prosper. An important part of this comprehensive plan is an analysis of the existing transportation and utility infrastructure in the City of Rensselaer, and a plan of recommended improvements to address current deficiencies and future growth.

Functional Classification & Thoroughfare Plan

Functional Classification refers to the grouping of roadways into systems, or classes, reflecting their role within a larger network of roadways. The process of defining functional classification requires an understanding of the primary purpose served by roadways with respect to mobility (through travel, long-distance travel) and access (service to properties, driveways, parking lots). Following are definitions of functional classifications that are typically used in small urban settings:

*Principal (or Major) Arterial*

Roadways in this category are those that serve long-distance and/or through trips, extend rural arterial facilities through urban areas, and connect major activity points within the urban area.

*Minor Arterial*

Roadways in this category should supplement the principal arterial network by connecting smaller activity centers, and are generally spaced at intervals such that all areas of the city are within reasonable distance of an arterial highway. Minor arterials are intended to serve medium-distance and intra-city travel and usually have moderate travel speeds.

*Collector*

Roadways in this category serve primarily to connect neighborhood streets with arterial roadways. Collectors are intended to collect traffic from local streets and feed the traffic onto the arterial system. Collectors are generally spaced at intervals such that all developed areas have reasonable access to the system and are usually the major streets within neighborhoods.

*Local Road*

Roadways in this category have the primary purpose of providing access to adjacent development. Travel distances on these roads are generally short, and travel speeds are generally low. All roads that are not classified as collectors or arterials are classified as local roads.

The Federal Highway Administration provides a recommended method for classifying a proposed roadway network in terms of functional classification (FHWA Functional Classification Guidelines, 1989). The recommended steps are outlined below:

1. Determine and map the urbanized area boundary.
2. Map the road network.
3. Perform a preliminary classification of the total arterial system.
4. Classify the final arterial system.
5. Classify the principal and minor arterial street systems.
6. Substratify the principal arterial system.
7. Classify collector and local streets.

The Federal Highway Administration provides guidelines on the typical balance of mileage and travel volumes within each functional class, which are shown in Figure 4-1. A careful review of this table shows that the roadways with a higher functional classification carry greater volumes of traffic despite having less mileage. This highlights the importance of planning for adequate capacity on the arterial network. The functional classification map is shown in Figure 4-1.

**Figure 4.1: Recommended Balance of Roadway Network in Small Urban Areas**

| System                     | % Vehicle Miles Traveled | % Roadway Mileage |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Principal Arterial         | 40-65 %                  | 5-10 %            |
| Principal + Minor Arterial | 65-80 %                  | 15-25 %           |
| Collector                  | 5-10 %                   | 5-10 %            |
| Local Roads                | 10-30 %                  | 65-80 %           |

Using the functional classification framework described above, a Thoroughfare Plan was developed for the City of Rensselaer. Based on the anticipated future land use in and around the City, transportation needs were identified and a recommended Thoroughfare Plan map, showing existing and recommended roadway facilities, was developed. The Thoroughfare Plan is presented in Figure 4.2.

Principal Arterial roadways designated on the Thoroughfare Plan are US Highway 231 and State Road 114. These roads serve long-distance travel to, from, and through the City of Rensselaer, and should be designed to accommodate this type of traffic. Access management strategies may be appropriate on these roadways, to maintain effective traffic flow.

Several roadways are designated on the Thoroughfare Plan as Minor Arterials. Some of these are connecting streets within the City, such as Van Rensselaer Street, Grace Street, and North College Street; others serve as circumferential routes, such as the partial loop formed by Airport Road, County Road 400 South, County Road 400 West, and County Road 700 South. These roads should be designed to accommodate moderate levels of traffic.

Collector streets designated on the Thoroughfare Plan include downtown streets such as Front Street, neighborhood streets such as Vine Street, and industrial access roads such as East Maple Street. These streets should be designed to facilitate local access and connect neighborhoods with arterial roadways.



In addition to these roadway classifications, the Thoroughfare Plan shows a recommended interchange at the intersection of Interstate 65 (I-65) and County Road 700 South. This interchange would provide a second convenient access point between I-65 and the City, and would allow County Road 700 South to serve as an alternate route for truck traffic through the City that currently uses State Road 114. Several important factors must be noted, however, regarding this proposed interchange:

- This proposed interchange is located two miles south of the existing I-65 interchange at State Road 114 – this does not meet the standard set in the INDOT Design Manual, which requires a minimum of 5 km (3.1 miles) between interchanges on rural Interstates;
- The future land use map developed as part of this Comprehensive Plan does not show any future development occurring in the area around this proposed interchange;
- The proposed interchange is close to the Iroquois River, and any improvements made at the interchange or along County Road 700 South could have an impact on the river and/or its floodplain.

None of these factors should be considered a fatal flaw of this interchange proposal, but should be taken into consideration as this proposal is advanced over time.



(Insert Functional Classification map)



### Truck Route Alternatives

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One major transportation issue in the City of Rensselaer is truck traffic. A large number of trucks pass through the city, primarily on State Road 114 and US Highway 231. This truck traffic can place a considerable strain on the City's roadway system, especially in the downtown area, where trucks must negotiate several turns. The trucks can damage the infrastructure and landscape improvements at intersections as they negotiate tight corners. They also create safety concerns for pedestrians, which limits the walkability of the downtown. One way to address this issue is to designate specific routes for trucks to follow instead of passing through downtown Rensselaer. Several potential routes have been identified and are discussed below. A map of the potential routes is included in Figure 4-3.

#### *Option 1 – Route trucks through Rensselaer*

This option is essentially a “do-nothing” option. Trucks currently travel through the center of the City, using existing US Highway 231 and State Road 114. Spot improvements could be made along these routes to ensure that trucks can safely negotiate turns along these routes. The main strength of this alternative is that it uses existing roadways and does not require any changes in driver behavior; the main weakness of this alternative is that it requires trucks to pass through the center of the Downtown business district.

A potential variation on this option, utilizing Merritt Street and either Vine Street or Walnut Street to bypass Downtown Rensselaer on the north side, was considered as a potential truck route. Due to the residential nature of the area this route would pass through, it is not preferred as a truck route; however, this route could be considered for future improvements as a circulator for local traffic.

#### *Option 2 – Route trucks around Rensselaer to the north - Preferred Alternative*

This option would post signs directing east-west truck travel to use a route around the north side of the City. The route would use Airport Road, County Road 400 South, and County Road 400 West. Improvements to these roadways, which are all classified as Minor Arterials on the Thoroughfare Plan, may be necessary in order to accommodate heavy truck traffic. This route would add approximately 2.3 miles to truck trips (versus the distance on State Road 114). The main strengths of this alternative are that it uses existing roadways that currently have little development and that it provides access to the areas of northwestern Rensselaer shown on the future land use map as industrial and commercial growth areas; the main weakness is that the route is 2.3 miles longer than the existing route through town and also passes through an area shown as a residential growth area (northeastern Rensselaer).

A variation on this option could utilize County Road 850 West to connect State Road 114 and County Road 400 South (instead of Airport Road). This would provide increased access to the future industrial and commercial areas near I-65, but could also require additional improvements to County roads beyond those required with the Airport Road option. This is the preferred option for addressing truck traffic in the community.

#### *Option 3 – Route trucks around Rensselaer to the south*

This option would post signs directing east-west truck traffic to use a route around the south side of the City. The route would use County Road 400 West and County Road 700 South, and would require the proposed interchange at C.R. 700 South and I-65 to be built. Improvements to these roadways, which are all classified as Minor Arterials on the Thoroughfare Plan, may be necessary in order to accommodate heavy truck traffic. Of particular concern is the limited sight distance caused by vertical curvature along Mount Calvary Road (700 South). This route would add approximately 0.8 miles to truck trips between the east side of Rensselaer and I-65 (versus the distance using State Road 114). The main strengths of this option are that the route passes mainly through undeveloped areas and the direct access to the Interstate; the main weakness is that it requires a new interchange, the feasibility and timeline of which cannot be accurately determined at this point.

A potential variation on this option could utilize County Road 850 West to connect this southern route back to State Road 114 at the existing I-65 interchange. This alternative would allow this southern truck route to function without the presence of the new interchange, but it would require that CR 850 West be extended south from its current terminus at County Road 600 to County Road 700, which would be a significant capital expense. However, this option would add 3.2 miles to the distance trucks must travel between the east side of Rensselaer and I-65, and may not be an attractive option for this reason.

*Option 4 – Route trucks to I-65 at a new interchange with State Road 16*

Currently, there is no interchange at the crossing of I-65 and State Road 16 southwest of Rensselaer. This option would post signs directing truck traffic to use a proposed interchange at this location rather than the existing State Road 114 interchange. Trucks could be routed along State Road 16 and US Highway 231 to the south side of Rensselaer, then along either County Road 700 South and County Road 400 West or along Drexel Parkway and South Melville Street to reach State Road 114. A new interchange at I-65 and State Road 16 would meet the INDOT spacing requirements between interchanges, and is a logical location for a new interchange. This alternative would add 2.7 miles to the distance required for trucks to travel between the east side of Rensselaer and I-65, but would also intersect with the Interstate about 4 miles to the south of the existing interchange. This would make this option seem ideal for truck traffic that may be headed to or from I-65 South, but not as attractive for trucks headed to or from I-65 North.

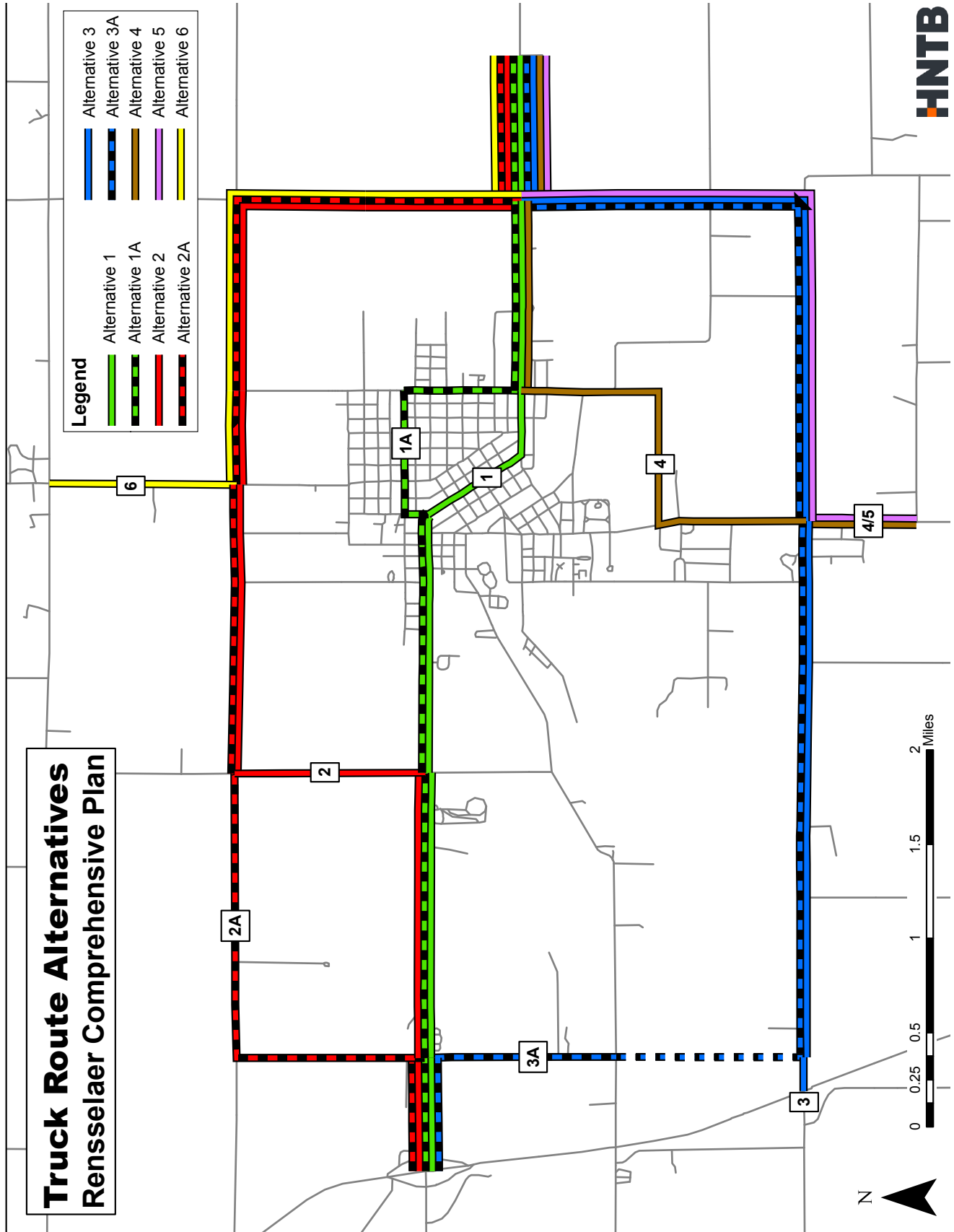
*Option 5 – Route trucks to I-65 at the existing US Highway 231 interchange*

There is an existing interchange at the crossing of I-65 and US Highway 231 south of Rensselaer. This option would post signs directing truck traffic to use this interchange to access I-65 rather than the interchange at State Road 114. Truck traffic could be routed around the southeast side of Rensselaer either along County Road 400 West and County Road 700 South or along Drexel Parkway and South Melville Street. This alternative would add 4.9 miles to the distance traveled between the east side of Rensselaer and I-65, but would also intersect with the Interstate about 10 miles south of the State Road 114 interchange. This would make this option seem ideal for truck traffic headed to or from I-65 South, but is not a viable solution for truck travel to and from I-65 North. It may be possible to use this option in tandem with another option, however, since it requires no major capital expenses.

*Option 6 – Route trucks to I-65 at the existing State Road 14 interchange*

There is an existing interchange at the crossing of I-65 and State Road 14 northwest of Rensselaer. This option would post signs directing truck traffic to use this interchange to access I-65 rather than the interchange at State Road 114. Trucks could be routed along State Road 14 and US Highway 231 to the north side of Rensselaer, then along County Road 400 South and County Road 400 West to reach State Road 114. This alternative would add 8.8 miles to the distance required for trucks to travel between the east side of Rensselaer and I-65, but would also intersect with the Interstate about 5 miles north of the State Road 114 interchange. This would make this option seem viable for truck traffic headed to or from I-65 North, but is not a viable solution for truck travel to or from I-65 South. It may be possible to use this option in tandem with another option, however, since it requires no major capital expenses.

Figure 4-3: Truck Route Alternatives





### Railroads

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Rensselaer is located along a rail line owned by the CSX Railroad, which connects with the Chicago area to the north and Lafayette and Indianapolis to the south. CSX uses this rail line for freight-shipping purposes. Amtrak also operates a passenger train along this track, and has a rail station located in Rensselaer. Daily passenger service to the station is provided by the Hoosier State route, which travels between Chicago and Indianapolis.

Amtrak's Cardinal route, which travels between Chicago and Washington, D.C. via Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Charleston, WV, serves the Rensselaer station three days per week. On days when the Cardinal route is operating, the Hoosier State route runs in tandem with the Cardinal. Between 1996 and 2001, Amtrak boardings

and alightings at the Rensselaer station almost doubled, from 547 riders in 1996 to 1,076 riders in 2001. This freight and passenger rail service is a great asset to the City of Rensselaer, and continued service along this line should be supported in the future.

One potential drawback of rail service through Rensselaer is the safety hazard posed by at-grade railroad/highway crossings. Several roads within the City of Rensselaer that have been designated as Principal or Minor Arterial roadways cross the railroad line, including County Road 400 South, Matheson Avenue, US Highway 231, North Melville Street, and County Road 400 West; several minor local streets also cross the railroad. Improvements to these major railroad crossings, such as flashing signals, bells, and crossing gates, should be considered as growth occurs and traffic volumes grow.

### Non-motorized Transportation

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A quality network of facilities for non-motorized modes of transportation, such as pedestrian and bicycle transportation, is a vital component of an urban environment such as the City of Rensselaer.

One area where this is most vital is in Downtown Rensselaer—in order for this area to continue to grow as a lively and bustling center of activity, adequate sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails for pedestrian circulation must be in place. It is also very important to provide pedestrian access between the downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods, so residents can access the amenities of downtown without driving there. Even in suburban areas on the edge of the City, providing sidewalks and bicycle facilities helps to connect residences, workplaces, shops, and schools. This will also be important in the growing commercial area near St. Joseph's College.



### Airport Expansion

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The Jasper County Airport is in the process of developing plans for a significant expansion. The airport expansion would change the direction of the primary runway. The existing north-south runway would become a secondary runway following construction of a new east-west 7,000 foot runway. This longer runway would open up the airport for larger commercial jet landings.

### Water and Sewer

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The water and wastewater treatment facilities are owned and operated by the City of Rensselaer. Municipal ownership of these utilities gives the city an additional level of control in managing growth because the utility expansion plans can be fully compatible with the growth policies of the community. In this sense, Rensselaer is able to guide development both through land use decision-making and provision of utility service, particularly wastewater collection and treatment.

The existing water distribution system is in good shape. The water distribution system extends as far west as the Jasper County Fairgrounds. This means that future growth along SR 114 toward I-65 will require extension of the water lines. An elevated water tank will also be needed in the western growth area.

The water treatment plant is currently in need of maintenance and repairs due to aging equipment. As growth occurs the capacity of the water treatment plant may need to be evaluated.

A study is currently underway to determine the needs for improvements at the wastewater treatment plant and the main pump station. The wastewater treatment equipment, like the water treatment equipment, is aging. The primary concern at the wastewater treatment plant is wet weather flow. The city's combined sewer overflow (CSO) long-term control plan has not yet been approved by the state, and the state rules governing long-term control plans have changed since the city submitted their plan.

The city will need to consider a new pump station directly to the wastewater treatment plant for future development south of the river. Capacity at the wastewater treatment may become an issue as development occurs.

Storm water is another concern in the community. Currently, the storm water runoff from most of the community enters the combined sewer system. This creates the wet weather flow problems associated with the wastewater treatment plant. It also contributes to the combined sewer overflow events that occur in the community. There are currently nine CSO outlets remaining in the community. These are places where the sewer system dumps directly into the river when the wastewater treatment plant cannot handle any additional flow. New development in Rensselaer should address drainage and storm water as a part of the development plan and should result in zero net increase in runoff from the site.

### Electricity and Natural Gas

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The city also owns and maintains the electrical and natural gas service in the community. These assets can be used to leverage economic development in certain areas of the community.

City ownership of the electric and natural gas utilities also helps to control the price of those services and as a result, Rensselaer has relatively low utility costs.

### Policy Statements

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- New development proposals should demonstrate how they will maintain the existing level of service on roadways
- New developments should provide their own connections to municipal water and sewer, in compliance with Rensselaer's engineering standards
- New development proposals should address drainage and storm water runoff to the extent that they have no net impact on the site's drainage.
- Water and sewer should only be extended to serve development in a manner that is consistent with the future land use map.
- New development should incorporate underground electrical lines, cable, and fiber optics.

*Action Plans*

Action plans provide additional detail on how goals should be accomplished, who is responsible for leading implementation, and when an action should be completed.

**Goal: Leverage public improvements throughout the City to serve as a catalyst for private investment and address the City's current infrastructure and transportation challenges**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>   | <i>Timeframe</i>            |
|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Establish a joint city-county Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district for the SR 114 corridor between the city and I-65                     | City Council<br>Redevelopment Commission<br>County Commissioners   | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Develop a Utility Master Plan to identify what improvements need to be made for water and sewer to serve the SR 114 corridor development | Water and Sewage Department<br>Plan Commission<br>City Council   | Short term<br>(1-5 years)   |
| Install improvements in the SR 114 corridor in a manner consistent with the Utility Master Plan  | Water and Sewage Department<br>City Council<br>County Commissioners  | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Develop, implement, and enforce access management standards for the SR 114 corridor and the US 231 corridor                              | Street Department<br>Plan Commission<br>City Council<br>County Commissioners<br>County Highway Engineer<br>INDOT | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |

**Goal: Create and maintain an interconnected thoroughfare network for the efficient movement of people, goods, and services in and around the community**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>   | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| Revise the subdivision control ordinance to require street connectivity between subdivisions where appropriate | Plan Commission<br>City Council                                      | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Work with INDOT to designate an alternate truck route for SR 114 and US 231 to minimize truck traffic downtown | Street Department<br>City Council<br>Mayor's Office                  | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Encourage new industrial uses to locate in the SR 114 corridor to avoid going through downtown to access I-65  | Plan Commission<br>Industrial Development Foundation<br>City Council | Ongoing                   |

**Goal: Promote continued development and investment in the Jasper County Airport to increase and enhance air transportation services**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>                                 | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| Coordinate with the Jasper County Airport regarding their expansion plans, zoning, and permitting required for the airport expansion | Plan Commission<br>City Council                          | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Integrate airport noise contours and other restrictions into the zoning ordinance to minimize land use conflicts with the airport    | Plan Commission<br>Jasper County Airport<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |



**Goal: Develop a multi-modal transportation system throughout the city to accommodate the needs of residents and businesses and to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>  | <i>Timeframe</i>            |
|--|---|-----------------------------|
| Design and implement an on-street trail system                                     | Park Board<br>Community Recreation Development Corporation<br>Street Department<br>City Council | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Design and implement an off-street trail system                                    | Park Board<br>Community Recreation Development Corporation<br>City Council                      | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Integrate traffic-calming measures into the design of neighborhood streets         | Plan Commission   | Ongoing                     |
| Encourage bike racks at commercial and institutional destinations in the community | Plan Commission   | Ongoing                     |

**Goal: Operate and maintain wastewater and storm water management systems that reduce the incidence of flooding and protect, preserve and enhance water quality; and to the maximum extent feasible, preserve the existing natural storm water management systems (i.e. surface drainage systems)**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>                                      | <i>Timeframe</i>           |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| Require new development proposals to cause no net increase in runoff                    | Plan Commission<br>City Council                               | Ongoing                    |
| Implement recommendations for addressing combined sewer overflow (CSO) problems         | Water and Sewer Department<br>City Council                    | Long term<br>(10-20 years) |
| Require new driveways to obtain permits and demonstrate how drainage is being addressed | Building Commissioner   | Ongoing                    |
| Revise the water and wastewater engineering standards for new development               | Plan Commission<br>Water and Sewer Department<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years)  |



# *Chapter 5*

## *Economic Development*



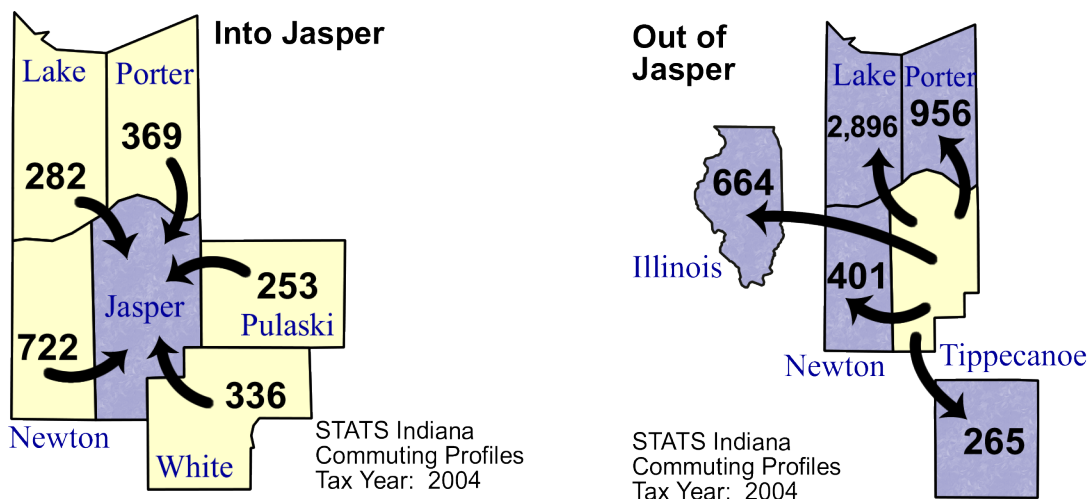
Economic development activities are intended to promote the development of wealth in the community, both for individuals and for the community. Economic development activities include attraction of new businesses, retention of existing business, developing small businesses, improving the skills of the workforce, and improving the community to encourage investment.

Existing Conditions

Employment in Rensselaer is concentrated in the manufacturing sector and in educational, health, and social services. Nearly one quarter of the jobs in Rensselaer are in manufacturing. Manufacturing operations are primarily located in the city's two industrial parks, Drexel Industrial Park and Litner Industrial Park. More than 20 percent of the jobs in Rensselaer are in the education, health, and social services sector. Approximately half of those jobs are in education, which includes the local schools. St. Joseph College employees are not included in those totals as the college is not in the city.

Many people in Jasper County commute to other counties for employment. Nearly 6,000 Jasper County residents left the county for work in 2004. Local commuting patterns are not available on an annual basis. Data from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing suggest that nearly 40 percent of Rensselaer working residents over age 16 commuted outside of the city for work.

**Figure 5-1: 2004 Commuting Patterns**



Source: Indiana Business Research Center

The city has utilized Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts as an economic development tool. Currently the city has one continuous district: Drexel Park, Melville Street, the Austin area, and downtown. These districts allow the taxes on increases in the assessed value of the area to be captured, rather than distributed to the taxing units, and reinvested in the district. The Rensselaer Redevelopment Commission is taking a more active role in the development of the community. Another initiative currently underway is to have a site in Rensselaer declared a "shovel-ready" site by the state.

Economic Development Focus

A significant focus of the comprehensive plan is developing a new employment center for the community to the SR 114 corridor. While the existing industry on the east side of the community would continue and expand in that area, new industrial development would be encouraged in the SR 114 corridor. This corridor provides the opportunity to develop an industrial area that has exceptional access to I-65 without creating excessive traffic impacts on the downtown area.

The economic development focus considers the airport expansion, rail access, opportunities for logistics operations, and the downtown.

### *Airport and Logistics*

The Jasper County Airport is an asset to the Rensselaer community, providing local businesses the opportunity to use air transportation to meet their business needs. The airport is currently planning an expansion project that will create a 7,000 foot runway, a runway large enough for corporate jets.

The airport expansion creates some challenges for the community in terms of flight patterns, noise contours, and height limitations. There are concerns in the community that the expanded runway will reduce the value of some residential areas due to changes in the flight patterns and noise contours.

However, the airport expansion may create opportunities for new development along the SR 114 corridor by promoting businesses that rely on multi-modal transportation (air, train, and highway connections).

### *Logistics*

Logistics businesses are those businesses that are concerned with the efficient movement of goods and the efficient operation of services. Federal Express is an example of a large, well-known logistics company. While some logistics companies move packages around the country and around the world, others are concerned with the warehousing and shipping of goods for other businesses. This includes distribution centers where goods come in from a variety of wholesalers and are then distributed to retail stores in the region. Target is an example of a national retailer with a system of distribution centers. There are also warehousing and trucking operations associated with producing finished goods. This is another type of logistics operation.

Logistics businesses are interested in locations that have access to land for warehousing, easy access to highways and interstates, quality utility services (especially communications), proximity to regional markets and, in some cases, rail access. Rensselaer is in an excellent position to attract logistics businesses with the highway and interstate access that is available and the relatively undeveloped stretch of land between the current city limits and the I-65 interchange. Rail access is available in one location, east of the airport property.

### *Rail-Oriented*

Rail continues to be an important mode of transportation for some industrial operations. Sites that have rail spurs and can use the rail as a direct means of shipping are important to these businesses, especially when that site also has excellent highway and interstate access. The area north of SR 114 between the current urbanized area of Rensselaer and the airport has these qualities.

### *Light Industrial*

The type of industrial development that is envisioned by this plan for the SR 114 corridor is light industrial uses such as warehousing, trucking, assembly, packaging, or research and development that are conducted in enclosed structures.

The City of Rensselaer is planning to revise the zoning and subdivision control ordinances. These revisions will include a complete list of the permitted uses for the industrial district and the standards under which industrial uses would need to operate.

### *Downtown*

Downtown is the heart of the Rensselaer community. It captures, in architecture and spirit, the history of the city and Jasper County. The county courthouse square serves as the focal point of downtown. Many of the downtown businesses serve the people who visit or work at the courthouse or the city hall. Several businesses are attractive to the "regular" downtown crowd as well as visitors.

The city completed a downtown plan in 2005. The plan focused on physical enhancements and market based strategies for enhancing the downtown. The recommendation of this plan is that implementation of the downtown plan be continued.

*Policies*

- Support development of a city-county tax increment finance (TIF) district along SR 114
- Encourage implementation of the Rensselaer Downtown Plan
- Promote events in downtown to celebrate local history and culture and support downtown businesses
- Support participation in programs that give Rensselaer broader exposure to national markets in the site selection process (see the Indiana Shovel-Ready program and the Certified Technology Park program in Chapter 7)

*Action Plans*

Action plans provide additional detail on how goals should be accomplished, who is responsible for leading implementation, and when an action should be completed.

**Goal: Promote a strong, diverse and healthy economy that meets the needs of the local workforce and diversifies the tax base**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>   | <i>Timeframe</i>            |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Increase the visibility of Rensselaer to site selection consultants by participating in the state Shovel-Ready and/or Certified Technology Park program | Mayor's office<br>City Council<br>Jasper County Industrial Foundation<br>St. Joseph College  | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Pursue annexation of land in the SR 114 corridor that is planned for industrial development in the future land use map                                  | Mayor's office<br>City Council   | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Work with the Jasper County Economic Development Organization to ensure the continued success and investment of the existing industrial employers       | Mayor's office<br>Chamber of Commerce<br>City Council  | Ongoing                     |
| Identify programs and projects that support the continued viability of small businesses, particularly in the downtown area                              | Chamber of Commerce  | Ongoing                     |
| Create a TIF District for the SR 114 corridor toward I-65, working jointly with the county  | Redevelopment Commissions (city and county)<br>Mayor<br>City Council<br>County Commissioners | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |

**Goal: Promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>  | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Conduct a retention and expansion (R&E) survey biannually to assess the condition of existing local businesses and identify needs | Jasper County Industrial Foundation<br>Mayor's office<br>City Council                       | Ongoing                   |
| Establish a revolving (low-interest) loan fund to assist businesses downtown with building renovation or restoration              | City Council<br>Main Street Rensselaer<br>Redevelopment Commission<br>Building Commissioner | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Provide tax abatements to existing businesses for expansion when appropriate  | City Council  | Ongoing                   |

**Goal: Foster the startup and development of new businesses**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>                                  | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Establish a frequently asked questions (FAQ) portion of the city website related to starting a business in the city | Chamber of Commerce<br>City departments<br>City webmaster | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Provide workshops on starting a small business for local residents  | Chamber of Commerce<br>Main Street Rensselaer             | Ongoing                   |



# *Chapter 6*

## *Quality of Life and Community Identity*



Quality of Life is related to the experience people who live in a community have with their life in that place. For many people it is related to the park system, natural areas, the ability to walk safely around the community, and the overall appearance of the community.

Community identity is the places, buildings, culture and character in the community that residents and visitors associate with the community. This can include neighborhoods, iconic buildings, festivals or events, tree lined streets, or an excellent trail system.

Quality of life and community character are often seen as the “softer side” of community and economic development, but they can be essential to building and maintaining a positive image of the community, which supports property values and investment in the community.

### *Existing Conditions*

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Rensselaer has a rich base of community identity and a quality of life that residents find attractive. Some of the features that contribute to the identity of the community and the local quality of life include downtown, the county courthouse, parks and recreation, the river, and the streetscape enhancements that have been completed. Walkability of the downtown and the community as a whole is a concern in the community that is directly related to quality of life.

### *Downtown*

The downtown includes several blocks surrounding the courthouse square. The buildings are largely of a historic character and the businesses include a mix of restaurants, law offices, and retail establishments. Most of the buildings in the downtown are currently occupied, creating a vibrant feel to the area.

The streets surrounding the courthouse square remain paved in brick. This contributes to character at the same time that it serves as a traffic calming measure for the square, reducing traffic speeds.

A study of the downtown was completed in 2005. This study recommends projects related to both the physical and economic development of the downtown. The projects in that plan are fully consistent with the goals of the comprehensive plan.



### *County Courthouse*

The county courthouse was initially constructed in 1857, and was damaged in a fire in 1865. However, it was repaired and continued to serve the community until 1895. At that time, a decision was made to rebuild the courthouse. The architects felt a community named Rensselaer needed a French-inspired building, hence the architecture of the current building is a combination of French chateau and Gothic cathedral styles. The courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. It underwent restoration in 1996. The courthouse has maintained its 1895 character and is the symbol of Rensselaer being the county seat for Jasper County.

Today the courthouse is the workplace for county employees, who provide a market for the downtown businesses during the week. The courthouse also attracts visitors with county business, who also serve as a customer base for the downtown businesses.

### *Parks and Recreation*

Parks have been a long-time asset of the City of Rensselaer. The park system was organized in 1935 and managed by the city. The city pool was built in 1948, adding to the recreational opportunities in the city.

In 1970, the Park Board formed the Rensselaer Community Recreational Development Corporation, a non-profit organization, to manage the park system under a lease with the City of Rensselaer. The board of the corporation currently has nine members; five Park Board members, one City Council member, and three concerned citizens from the Rensselaer School Corporation.

Imagination City, a large playground complex, was added to Brookside Park recently. It was made possible by a gift from the Imogene LaRue Estate.

### *River*

The Iroquois River begins in Jasper County and flows through Rensselaer before heading through Newton County into Illinois, where it flows into the Kankakee River. The river is relatively shallow, but can be canoed year round. Currently there are few, if any, recreational access points to the river and it does not serve as a focal point for the Rensselaer community in a way that it could. Several studies have recommended development of a recreational trail along the river.

During the planning process, some residents expressed that the river would need to be cleaned up in order for it to serve as a community focal point.

### *Streetscape Enhancements*

Some streetscape enhancements have been incorporated into the gateway corridors and the downtown. The corridors, particularly US 231 from the south have banners that welcome residents and visitors to Rensselaer. These banners continue into downtown. The downtown area also has street furniture such as trash receptacles. Some sections of the courthouse square have incorporated the brick used in the streets into the sidewalk pattern.

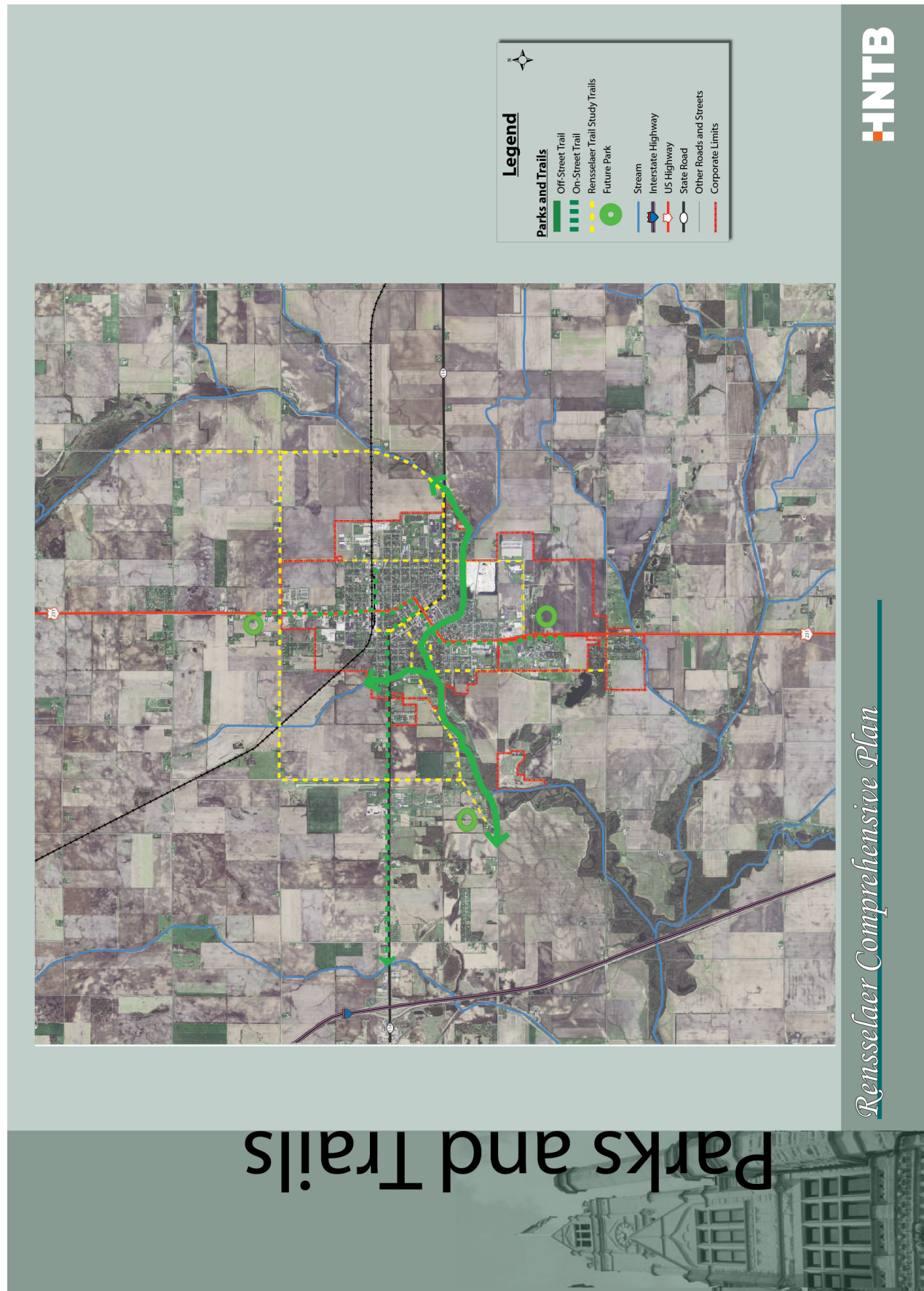
Recommendations for streetscape enhancements were made as a part of the 2005 Downtown plan.

**Figure 6-1: Riverfront Park from Downtown Revitalization Plan**



Source: RATIO Architects and HNTB

Figure 6-2: Parks and Trails



# Parks and Trails

### *Public Buildings*

Public buildings serve as important symbols of the community and contribute to the community identity. This is the reason the historic county courthouses in Indiana were built with such high levels of architectural detail and quality materials. In the same way, the city government buildings should express the community identity. The city hall is a good example of a building that communicates what is important to the community in the sense that it is located downtown, is integrated into the buildings of the courthouse square, is constructed of high quality materials, and is a place where the community can proudly take visitors to the community.

### *Recreation*

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Recreation was the primary quality of life and community identity issue that emerged from the planning process.

A parks planning process is currently underway to develop a Five Year Parks and Recreation Plan for the community. This process will allow the community to inventory and assess the existing parks assets, identify needs, and plan for the parks in the short term.

As a part of the comprehensive planning process, needs were identified for additional park land to the north, west, and south in the long term to serve new development. The potential park locations are identified in Figure 6-2.

A trail system was also identified as a need in the community. This is consistent with the findings of other plans, including the Downtown plan and a trail study conducted locally. The trail system proposed in the comprehensive plan would include off-street trails through the community along the Iroquois River and north from the Iroquois River adjacent to Brookside Park. On-street trails would help complete the system by connecting key destinations in the community. These trails would primarily be along SR 114 from the west side into downtown and US 231 from St. Joseph College to a proposed park on the north side of the community. Another segment would begin at US 231, following Vine Street to the park. A segment that would follow Sparling to the city owned property at the former propane plant was also discussed. Many of these paths overlap with the recommendations from the trail study. See Figure 6-2 for proposed trail locations from both the trail study and the comprehensive plan.

### *Corridors*

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The character of the corridors, particularly SR 114, as they develop was another important issue for quality of life and community character. The SR 114 and US 231 corridors form the gateways, or “front doors,” to the community and should reflect that Rensselaer is a unique community with a proud history and a bright future. This character may be expressed through streetscape elements such as banners and street furniture, inclusion of walking paths in the roadway design, special streetlights and sign standards, more intensive landscaping, setbacks, and/or architectural standards.

The character elements chosen for the corridors do not necessarily need to be the same as in downtown or for both corridors, however, they should be complementary. Different, yet complementary, elements may be chosen to emphasize the unique features of each area and highlight the downtown without trying to replicate the downtown character in the corridors. The same streetscape elements and banners, with different landscape and architectural standards could serve to unite the corridors and the downtown, while recognizing the different characters of each area.

These elements should be included in the zoning ordinance, either as unique districts or as overlay districts. In this way, the expectations of the community are very clear to land owners, developers, and the appointed and elected officials of the community.

Maintaining the transportation function of the corridors is also important. One of the most effective tools for managing traffic function in developing corridors is access management standards. These standards establish the minimum distances allowable between road cuts for intersections (new roads) and driveways. They also determine how signals, medians, and turn lanes should be used to balance access to adjacent properties with traffic flow. Shared driveways and access points between businesses are sound ways to implement access management.

*Policies*

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- Support continued development of the parks department
- Support efforts to develop volunteer and non-profit organizations that will build and maintain a trail system in the community
- Encourage design of public buildings that reflect the character and identity of the Rensselaer community
- Encourage new development to provide pedestrian connections to existing facilities
- Support improvements to the Iroquois River corridor
- Promote the use of pedestrian amenities in development and redevelopment projects
- Support use of TIF revenue to implement quality of life projects that contribute to economic development

*Action Plans*

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**Goal: Increase walkability within the City to improve and maintain a higher quality of life for all residents**

| <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Responsible Party</i>  | <i>Timeframe</i>            |
|--|---|-----------------------------|
| Require sidewalks in all new residential and commercial development projects | Plan Commission<br>City Council   | Short term<br>(1-5 years)   |
| Design and implement an on-street trail system                               | Park Board<br>Community Recreation Development Corporation<br>Street Department<br>Main Street Rensselaer<br>City Council | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |
| Design and implement an off-street trail system                              | Park Board<br>Community Recreation Development Corporation<br>City Council  | Medium term<br>(5-10 years) |

**Goal: Provide sufficient quality parks, open spaces, trails, greenways and recreational facilities and services for the benefit, enjoyment and overall quality of life of the residents of Rensselaer**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>   | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| Adopt a five year parks and recreation plan and secure approval of the plan by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR)      | Park Board<br>Community Recreation Development Corporation                 | Every five years          |
| Identify potential locations for new parks on the north, south, and west sides of the community and secure ownership of those parcels | Park Board<br>Community Recreation Development Corporation<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Design and implement on and off-street trails   | See above  | See above                 |

**Goal: Employ the principles of access management and the use of architectural design and site development standards to reduce congestion, increase pedestrian activity and enhance the identity of the city's corridors**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>   | <i>Timeframe</i>          |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| Develop and adopt access management standards for SR 114 and US 231                         | Street Department<br>Plan Commission<br>County Highway Engineer<br>County Plan Commission<br>INDOT<br>County Commissioners<br>City Council | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Develop an overlay district for SR 114  | Plan Commission<br>City Council  | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Develop an overlay district for US 231  | Plan Commission<br>City Council  | Short term<br>(1-5 years) |
| Develop and implement a streetscape enhancement project for the SR 114 and US 231 corridors | Redevelopment Commission<br>City Council   |                           |

**Goal: Maintain and improve the visual character of the community to enhance local pride and the experience of visitors**

| <i>Actions</i>  | <i>Responsible Party</i>       | <i>Timeframe</i>  |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Expand the community clean-up to include a river clean-up project | City Council<br>Mayor's office | Annually          |
| Implement the Downtown Revitalization Plan                        | See downtown plan              | See downtown plan |



# *Chapter 7*

## *Implementation Tools*



The comprehensive plan is a vision with policies and action plans to achieve the vision. In order to help that vision become a reality, some implementation tools are needed.

The implementation tools are specific plans and ordinances that address the issues raised in the comprehensive plan.

### Zoning and Subdivision Control

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Zoning and Subdivision Control Ordinances are the primary implementation tool for the comprehensive plan. They are the legally enforceable mechanism for managing the growth of a community.

Zoning is primarily concerned with the location of land uses relative to one another to prevent nuisance claims arising from incompatible adjacent land uses. Other issues addressed by the zoning include setbacks, building size and height, density and lot size, and character of development.

The City is planning on revisiting the Zoning Ordinance following completion of the comprehensive plan. The revisions will make the ordinance more user-friendly for land owners, developers, and city officials in addition to making the standards consistent with the goals of the comprehensive plan, and updating the standards to meet the needs of the community.

The Subdivision Control Ordinance is primarily concerned with the creation of new parcels of land for development. It addresses transfers of land that create new or revised lots. It also addresses any development that involves new infrastructure and the standards that need to be followed for installation and maintenance of that infrastructure. Issues related to the comprehensive plan such as sidewalks, connectivity, access management, and storm water management are implemented through the Subdivision Control Ordinance.

### Overlay Districts

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Overlay Districts are a special type of zoning district that applies additional standards to a particular area, on top of the standards of the base zoning district. These districts are particularly useful in establishing character areas through heightened landscape and architectural requirements and can be applied to areas such as downtown or specific corridors. A community may have multiple overlay districts.

Overlay districts may be used to protect the character of an existing residential or commercial area from inappropriate new development; establish a character for a new residential, commercial, or industrial area; or improve the character of an existing area (mostly commercial or industrial) that is planned to experience additional development.

Overlay districts are easiest to understand and function most effectively when they add standards to the base district, rather than attempt to modify or reduce the standards of a district. For instance, if the bulk standards (setbacks, height, and size) need to be reduced to accommodate appropriate development in the downtown, an Overlay District would be less appropriate than creating a base district for the downtown.

### Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction

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Under the Indiana planning statutes, communities with planning and zoning authority may exercise extra-territorial jurisdiction in an area up to two miles outside of the community's incorporated area. This authority must be approved by the County Commissioners and allows for the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning, and Subdivision Control ordinances to be implemented in the area of extra-territorial jurisdiction as if the area was within the corporate boundaries.

Rensselaer currently has an area of extra-territorial jurisdiction. This area does not include the entire area for which the comprehensive plan has been adopted. The Jasper County Comprehensive Plan, Zoning, and Subdivision Control ordinances continue to be the official documents for those areas outside Rensselaer's extra-territorial jurisdiction. However, it is important for the city to work with the county in having a joint vision, particularly for the SR 114 corridor, and developing in a way that is respectful of the plans established by both jurisdictions. As the City of Rensselaer annexes land into the corporate boundaries, it should continue to pursue expansion of the extra-territorial area for planning and zoning to ensure development occurs in a manner that is consistent with the city plan.

### *Parks and Recreation Master Plan*

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Five Year Parks and Recreation Plans approved by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources provide a number of benefits to the community. They establish a baseline for understanding the community's park assets and the additional investments that need to be made in order to maintain a specific level of service, they provide direction to the Parks Board and the park staff about priorities for the next five years, they provide the staff the opportunity to communicate needs, and they increase the ability of the community to secure certain grants for improvements related to parks and recreation.

Parks plans typically include an inventory of what parks and recreation amenities are currently available in the community and use that information to determine the current level of service in the community. The level of service is compared to national standards, and surpluses or deficiencies are identified. Projected population numbers are applied to the level of service standards to determine the need for addition parks and recreation facilities. A community survey to identify the needs and wants of local residents is often used in conjunction with the projected needs to determine a list of projects for the planning period. Funding issues are also considered as a part of the process.

When a plan is approved by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the community becomes eligible for certain matching grant programs offered through the DNR.

Parks and Recreation Plans should be updated once every five years.

### *Capital Improvements Plan*

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Capital improvements planning is a mechanism where the community considers all of the capital investments that need to be made, prioritizes them, and determines the order in which their will be completed (with deadlines), the amount of funding that will be needed, and the source of the funding. The capital improvements plan then contributes to the process of determining the annual budget for the community in a manner that is well thought out and consistent with needs and plans for the community.

Capital improvements plans are generally created for a five to ten year period with annual updates that reflect projects that have been completed and add another year worth of projects to the plan.

Capital improvements plans should include departments such as streets, utilities (water, sewer, electric, gas), police, fire, and the mayor's office. This way the plan can include items such as road repairs, new road construction, sidewalk projects, water treatment improvements, water distribution improvements, sewage collection and treatment improvements, police station improvements, fire station improvements or additional locations, and any other significant investments the community is planning on making.

### *Utility Master Plan*

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The city has completed utility master plans in the past, including engineering studies for the north side of the community. This effort needs to be expanded to plan for the utility improvements that will be needed by the community in the short and long term in order to address current issues and to implement the vision of the community over the next twenty years.

The focus of the utility master plan should be on water and wastewater utilities. Other municipal utilities such as electric and gas should be included in the capital improvements plan, but do not necessarily need to have a long range study completed to coordinate with the future land use map.

The utility master plan should address such issues as extension of water beyond the Fairgrounds on SR 114, collection of wastewater in the western expansion area, and treatment of wastewater generated by new development in the community.

### *Economic Development Tools*

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A number of economic development tools are mentioned in the plan as a way in which some of the goals related to the local economy may be achieved. Some of these tools Rensselaer already uses, but may need to expand use of in the future. Other tools are being considered, or should be considered, by the city as a way to encourage economic growth.

### *Tax Abatement*

Tax abatement is a phase-in of taxes on real and some personal property granted by local governments to businesses as a means of encouraging investment in the community. Granting of tax abatement allows companies to phase in the taxes on new investment over a fixed period of time, making it financially easier for the business to make the investment.

Tax abatements are typically tied to some performance standards that the business is supposed to meet, such as addition of a specific number of jobs by a specified date. These performance standards become the benchmarks for claw-backs, which allow the community to end the abatement or demand payment of abated property taxes if the business fails to perform in accordance with the agreement.

### *Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts*

Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts are designated by a local redevelopment commission for either economic development or redevelopment. Economic development areas are those areas which would not develop “but for” the creation of a TIF district. Redevelopment areas are those areas which are not experiencing investment due to blighted conditions. Within an economic development or redevelopment area, an allocation area can be established. When development that increases the assessed value of property in an allocation area increases, the property taxes on that increase in assessed value (known as the increment) are allocated to a special fund. Revenues in the fund may be used to pay for or secure bonds to make improvements in the TIF district.

Typical taxing units in the community such as the county, city, and school district continue to collect taxes on the base value (pre-establishment of the TIF District), but do not receive any tax revenue from the increase in assessed value (increment). The argument for this is that those taxing units wouldn’t have received any additional revenue if the area did not receive any investment and that the investment would not have been made “but for” the district.

TIF districts may be developed by a single jurisdiction, like the district currently in place in Rensselaer which includes Drexel Park and downtown. They may also be the product of a joint effort by a city and county. Such a joint process may be needed to provide the infrastructure needed to support development along SR 114. In order to develop such a district, the city should employ bond counsel and professional accounting services.

### *Shovel-Ready Program*

The Indiana Shovel-Ready Program is a program to improve the marketability of Indiana communities in the site selection process. The program involves having a local commitment from elected officials to expedite permitting, ownership of the designated site being clearly identified (LEDO, city, developer, end user, utility), having infrastructure in place, having current and accurate topography maps, and completing an Environmental Phase I (potentially Phase II) for the property to identify any potential environmental problems with the site. An application and review by the state are also required.

When a site has been admitted to the Shovel Ready Program, it is given a special designation in the state site selection database, which raises its profile within the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and with professional site selectors. Being designated as a Shovel-Ready site is a way to let potential businesses know that the ground work has already been done for them to locate on a particular site and that their startup time and costs will be lower as a result.

### *Certified Technology Parks*

A Certified Technology Park is a tool established by the State of Indiana to support the attraction and growth of high-technology business in Indiana and promote technology transfer opportunities. Establishment of a Certified Technology Park requires a viable business plan, an opportunity for high-tech business, local government financial participation, contribution by an Indiana college or university (in kind or money), and an agreement with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation.

There are a number of tax benefits available to businesses who located in a Certified Technology Park. Additionally, the states Certified Technology Parks are marketed by the state, shifting some of the marketing burden from the local community.

### *Impact Fees*

An impact fee is a charge imposed on new development to defray or mitigate the capital costs of infrastructure that is needed to serve the new development. The infrastructure for which impact fees can be imposed includes sanitary sewer systems, parks and recreational facilities, roads and bridges, drainage facilities, and water treatment, distribution and storage facilities as long as they are owned or leased by a public body.

In order to establish impact fees, a government body (City Council) would need to establish an advisory committee that meets the requirements of the state law. A zone improvement plan must be completed for each zone prior to adoption of an impact fee ordinance. The impact fee ordinance must establish an impact zone (or set of zones) for each type of infrastructure. It must also establish the formulas used to determine the fee for each zone.

Impact fee revenue may be used to provide funds for infrastructure to serve new development in the zone from which the fee was collected and is identified in the zone improvement plan. A portion of the revenue may be used to pay consulting fees related to the development of the ordinance. Revenues may also be used to issue refunds as described in the state code or to pay debt service as described in the state code.

Impact fee revenue may be used to provide funds for infrastructure to serve new development in the zone from which the fee was collected and is identified in the zone improvement plan. A portion of the revenue may be used to pay consulting fees related to the development of the ordinance. Revenues may also be used to issue refunds as described in the state code or to pay debt service as described in the state code.

An impact fee review board must be created when an impact fee ordinance is adopted. The review board must include a licensed real estate broker, a licensed engineer, and a certified public accountant. The review board is established to hear appeals related to the application of the impact fee ordinance.

Most communities that establish impact fees do so with the assistance of a consultant.