

# PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT



# COLUMBIA CITY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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SPRING 2026



1171

COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  
of WHITLEY COUNTY

LITTLE TURTLE WOODS

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Prepared by:



# INTRODUCTION.

## Welcome!

As Mayor of Columbia City, I would like to extend my gratitude to so many individuals who gave opinions, thoughts, and ideas that are now memorialized in this document. Citizens, business leaders, non-profit organizations, and so many others dedicated their time and talents to provide this roadmap for the community's future. I am especially thankful to the Steering Committee members who provided guidance in the creation and direction of this document. Finally, thank you to American Structurepoint for being our consultant in this important endeavor. Your hard work is very appreciated!

This Comprehensive Plan is a blueprint for our city's future. Coming off the tremendous success of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, the goal of this update was to capitalize on the community's success and sharpen our focus towards building a future together. As our community grows and improves, so should our goals and ideals. Residents, businesses, and visitors have found Columbia City to be a place that traditionally punches above its proverbial "weight class". This Comprehensive Plan sets forth ways in which we can continue this tradition. Our hope is that this document is never one that sits on a shelf collecting dust, but rather is consistently active, challenging our community's leadership to strive for more in the years to come.

Once again, thank you to so many who contributed to this plan. I encourage all who read it to be inspired to play their part in growing and improving our community long into the future. Let's make our future goals a reality!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan L. Daniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ryan L. Daniel  
Mayor

# Peabody Public Library



## Executive Summary

The Columbia City Comprehensive Plan Update provides a clear and actionable framework to guide growth, investment, and decision making over the next 10 to 20 years. Building on the foundation of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, this update reflects both the substantial progress achieved over the past decade and the evolving priorities of residents, stakeholders, and community leaders. Columbia City has successfully implemented many past goals, including major investments in recreation, education, downtown vitality, infrastructure, and community identity. These accomplishments demonstrate the City's commitment to using the Comprehensive Plan as an active tool rather than a static document, while also creating momentum for the next phase of growth and reinvestment.

The 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update was developed through a structured, community-driven process organized around three phases: **Educate, Explore, and Empower**. Extensive data analysis, public engagement, and Steering Committee collaboration informed an updated understanding of existing conditions and resident priorities. The plan retains the familiar **People, Places, and Things** framework from the 2015 Plan, ensuring continuity while introducing updated and new goals that respond to current conditions, including housing demand, connectivity, downtown and corridor redevelopment, workforce needs, and long-term infrastructure planning. Resident feedback emphasized the importance of maintaining Columbia City's small-town character while expanding amenities, recreational opportunities, and economic options that support families, businesses, and future generations.

Ultimately, the 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update positions Columbia City to manage growth purposefully, strengthen its identity, and enhance the quality of life for all residents. By aligning land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and community services with shared principles and clearly defined goals, the Plan serves as a living guide for elected officials, staff, partners, and residents. Its implementation will support continued progress, reinforce civic pride, and ensure that Columbia City remains a connected, resilient, and welcoming community well into the future.

*I love seeing the growth in our community. While we are still a small town, there has been a lot of development over the years.*

# INTRODUCTION.

*I want Columbia City to continue to grow while maintaining the small-town values. I want to feel like a small town but still have all the amenities and features of a big city.*

The Columbia City Comprehensive Plan serves as a long-range strategic guide to help the community manage growth, respond to new challenges, and pursue the goals outlined in this document. This Plan evaluates current conditions, identifies the community's future priorities, and presents strategies to support a clear, achievable vision for Columbia City. As a living document, it is intended to be used by public officials, private partners, and community stakeholders as they make decisions that shape the City's future. To remain relevant and effective, the Plan should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect emerging opportunities, changing conditions, and community accomplishments.

As Columbia City continues to evolve, this Comprehensive Plan will provide a consistent framework to guide decisions, strengthen the City's identity, and ensure continued progress and success for years to come.

When asked what Columbia City should look like in the next 10 to 20 years, residents said:

"A vibrant suburb of Fort Wayne, with a distinct identity and community feel. Improvements in infrastructure help to make room for this development. Additionally, things to do around Downtown to keep your community happy and united."

"A small-town city that has defined itself as a caring community that offers everything you need to raise a family, retire peacefully, and live a life that excites you in some small way."

## 2026 Columbia City Common Council

- Dan Weigold, President
- Jennifer Zartman-Romano
- Tad Varga
- Brent Bockelman
- Ryan Adamson

Thank you to former Council members:

- Leslee Robinson
- Jennifer Middleton

## Planning Process

The planning process for the 2026 Columbia City Comprehensive Plan Update was structured around three foundational phases — **Educate, Explore, and Empower** — each intended to build upon the last to create a data-driven, community-supported, and action-oriented document.

The Educate phase established a shared understanding of existing conditions by collecting and analyzing survey responses, stakeholder input, demographic data, land-use patterns, and previous comprehensive plan strategies. This stage ensured that the planning effort was grounded in accurate information and reflective of the lived experiences and priorities of Columbia City residents.

Building on this foundation, the Explore phase involved evaluating a range of potential strategies and future scenarios based on the information gathered during the Educate phase. Through Steering Committee discussions, public engagement, and policy exercises, the project team collaborated with community representatives to assess opportunities, test alternatives, refine preliminary goals and recommendations, as well as update previous goals and objectives to align with the current environment. This phase allowed the community to thoughtfully examine choices and determine which strategies best aligned with Columbia City’s long-term vision. These prioritized goals and objectives underwent a deeper analysis, and Critical Path Strategies were developed from them.

Finally the Empower phase positions the community to implement the Plan’s recommendations. This phase provides the framework, guidance, and strategic direction needed to support informed decision-making, while ensuring that Columbia City retains flexibility to adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities. By placing responsibility for carrying out the Plan in the hands of local leaders, organizations, and residents, the Empower phase ensures that the Comprehensive Plan remains a living document that supports ongoing progress and sustained community stewardship.



## Process

### Steering Committee

- **Ryan Daniel**, City of Columbia City, Mayor
- **Dan Weigold**, City of Columbia City, Council President & Plan Commission Member
- **Jennifer Romano**, City of Columbia City, Council Member & Arts Commission Chairperson
- **Chip Hill**, City of Columbia City, Community Development Director and Plan Commission Member
- **Nathan Bilger**, Whitley County Planning and Building Department, Director
- **September McConnell**, Community Foundation of Whitley County, Executive Director
- **Scott Gabriel**, Parkview Whitley Hospital, President
- **Dale Buuck**, Whitley County Economic Development Corporation, President
- **Jennifer Esterline**, Whitley County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center, Executive Director
- **Laura McDermott**, Whitley County Consolidated School Corporation, Superintendent
- **Brooks Langeloh**, Developer Orizon Real Estate
- **Matt Shipman**, Columbia City Connect, Board Member and Downtown Business Owner
- **Samara Thompson**, Columbia City Redevelopment Commission, Member
- **Bailee Glass**, Youth for Christ Northern Indiana – Columbia City, Director
- **Selah Wagner**, Columbia City High School, Student and Youth Council Member

The Steering Committee played a critical role in guiding the development of the Comprehensive Plan, serving as the project's primary advisory body. Members reviewed draft materials, including the Existing Conditions Report, land use maps, and policy frameworks, and provided informed feedback grounded in their understanding of Columbia City's needs and priorities. Representing a broad cross-section of the community, the Committee offered diverse perspectives and evaluated proposed strategies. It ensured that recommendations were practical, locally relevant, and aligned with community expectations. Additionally, committee members supported the broader engagement process by communicating with residents, participating in discussions, and promoting awareness of the planning effort. Through these contributions, the Steering Committee ensured that the final Plan was both community-driven and grounded in sound, locally informed judgment.

## Achievements from the 2015 Plan

Columbia City sets a high bar for not letting a plan sit on the shelf. Community leaders and staff have achieved substantial progress in implementing priorities outlined in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan. Thanks to these efforts, new recreation, dining, and downtown experiences have become a reality. Education and workforce initiatives have progressed, with the signature achievement of opening the new Columbia City High School in 2020. Infrastructure and connectivity improvements continue to provide pedestrian access to schools and necessary utilities.

These accomplishments demonstrate steady, well-coordinated progress toward recreation, education, identity, infrastructure, housing, and economic development goals, setting the stage for continued community growth and quality-of-life improvements.

## Goals Accomplished from the 2015 Plan

Following a detailed review with City leadership, many goals from the 2015 Plan were identified as completed or in progress. The following summaries reflect that progress, as of spring 2026, and form the foundation for implementing updated strategies in this plan.

## People

Goal: Ensure year-round authentic recreation and leisure experiences		
<b>Play</b>	Downtown test kitchen and restaurant incubator (2015 Plan pg. 34)	The test kitchen and restaurant incubator within the Marshall Community Center is nearly complete. The physical build out is finished, and the City has finalized an agreement with the school corporation for shared use of the facility. In 2026, the partners will determine programming and operational details.
<b>Play</b>	Attract regional and local restaurants and shops (2015 Plan pg. 36)	Columbia City has enhanced its dining and retail environment by contracting with The Retail Coach to lead recruitment efforts. This initiative resulted in several new restaurants opening, contributing to a livelier commercial landscape and entertainment environment.
<b>Play</b>	Encourage food trucks as dining options (2015 Plan pg. 38)	A food truck ordinance has been adopted and refined to better accommodate vendors. The result is a consistent lineup of food trucks during favorable weather and a strong presence at Downtown festivals, broadening dining choices for residents.
<b>Play</b>	Explore a community aquatics center (2015 Plan pg. 44)	The City successfully constructed and opened the Russel and Evelyn Fahl Aquatics Center in July 2018. Building on that success, Columbia City is considering adding additional amenities in the future, such as a lazy river.

# INTRODUCTION.

## Goal: Enhance education opportunities for K–12 and adult learners

<b>Learn</b>	Relocate Columbia City High School (2015 Plan pg. 46)	The former high school was demolished and the land transferred to the City, while a new, modern Columbia City High School was constructed on the south side of town. The new facility opened in August 2020, reflecting a major investment in educational infrastructure.
<b>Learn</b>	Explore a Downtown higher education satellite campus (2015 Plan pg. 48)	Ivy Tech Community College began offering classes at the Marshall Community Center in 2021, expanding access to higher education. While organizational shifts have reduced the number of classes offered, the initiative successfully brought college-level programming into the Downtown.
<b>Learn</b>	Promote higher education pathways (2015 Plan pg. 50)	The City has collaborated with the School Corporation to create internships and apprenticeships within municipal departments, providing students with hands-on exposure to public-sector careers and strengthening local workforce development.

## Goal: Support underprivileged residents and expand community service opportunities

<b>Support</b>	Create a community garden (2015 Plan pg. 58)	Giving Gardens LLC established a community garden and now provides residents with free plants and produce. The City supported the effort by contributing land at the corner of Hanna Street and Towerview Drive, which created a new community resource.
<b>Support</b>	Create a Downtown strategic investment plan (2015 Plan pg. 64)	A Downtown Revitalization Plan was completed in 2024, which outlined a long-term vision for Downtown Columbia City. The City is preparing to undertake a key element of that vision with a major revitalization construction project in 2028.
<b>Support</b>	Maintain and update the Comprehensive Plan website (2015 Plan pg. 68)	The 2015 Comprehensive Plan has remained publicly accessible on the City's website since its adoption, ensuring residents and stakeholders can easily reference the City's long-term goals and progress.

## Places

### Goal: Create and nurture a genuine identity for Columbia City

#### Experience

Expand and strengthen festivals and events

(2015 Plan pg. 104)

Columbia City Connect, the community's Main Street organization, has taken the lead in enhancing local festivals and event programming. First Fridays, street fairs, and other activities have grown and evolved to reflect residents' interests while reinforcing the community's cultural identity and vitality.

### Goal: Increase connectivity for vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian travel

#### Move

Trail extension along State Road 9

(2015 Plan pg. 114)

The City completed a new trail extension along SR 9, linking neighborhoods directly to the newly built school. This improvement provides students and pedestrians with a safe, convenient non-vehicular route to key destinations.

### Goal: Promote safe, quality neighborhoods with diverse housing options

#### Live

Pursue mixed-use housing opportunities in Downtown Columbia City

(2015 Plan pg. 86)

Columbia City has added new, mixed-use development Downtown that integrates residential and commercial space. The City is also working with the private sector to add more mixed-use space north of Walmart on SR 109.

# INTRODUCTION.

## Things

### Goal: Support a diverse local economy

<b>Work</b>	Maintain strong regional and state partnerships (2015 Plan pg. 144)	The City has continued its active engagement with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, and other regional organizations. These relationships help Columbia City stay connected to economic opportunities and broader development initiatives.
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### Goal: Ensure sustainable, efficient infrastructure and emergency services

<b>Serve</b>	Expand utilities to development sites (2015 Plan pg. 150)	In collaboration with the County Redevelopment Commission, the City expanded and strengthened utility infrastructure to strategically positioned development sites, enhancing the community's readiness for future economic growth.
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### Goal: Promote communication and collaboration across government and community stakeholders

<b>Share</b>	Define the brand of Columbia City (2015 Plan pg. 162)	Following the 2015 Plan, Columbia City implemented a rebranding initiative that produced a new logo, color palette, tagline, font system, and promotional welcome video. These elements collectively strengthened the City's visual identity and marketing presence.
<b>Share</b>	Upgrade digital communications and public information tools (2015 Plan pg. 166)	The City overhauled its website in 2016 and has maintained a strong digital presence ever since. In 2023, RAVE, a text alert system giving residents real-time updates on events, programs, emergencies, and public meetings, was launched to further communication. Multiple City departments and the Mayor also maintain active Facebook pages to keep the community informed. All public meetings are being livestreamed as of 2025.

## New and Updated Goals and Objectives

This chapter revisits the goals and objectives established in Columbia City's 2015 Comprehensive Plan and updates them to reflect the community's current conditions, achievements, and future priorities. Each original goal has been reassessed for relevance, progress, and practicality, resulting in a refined set of objectives that strengthen what has worked, modify what needs adjustment, and remove items that no longer align with community needs.

In addition to updating earlier priorities, this chapter introduces several new goals that address emerging opportunities, including development along the US 30 corridor, encouraging housing near the school campus, redevelopment initiatives, and modern approaches to mobility and public services. The resulting framework blends continuity from the 2015 Plan with forward-thinking solutions, ensuring that Columbia City's strategic direction remains responsive, actionable, and aligned with long-term community aspirations.

As in the 2015 Plan, the updated Comprehensive Plan follows the **"People, Places, Things"** chapter structure. The new and updated goals have been assessed by the Steering Committee and placed in the chapters that best align with their subject matter. This structure ensures continuity with the 2015 Plan and builds upon the successes of the past decade.

**PEOPLE.**

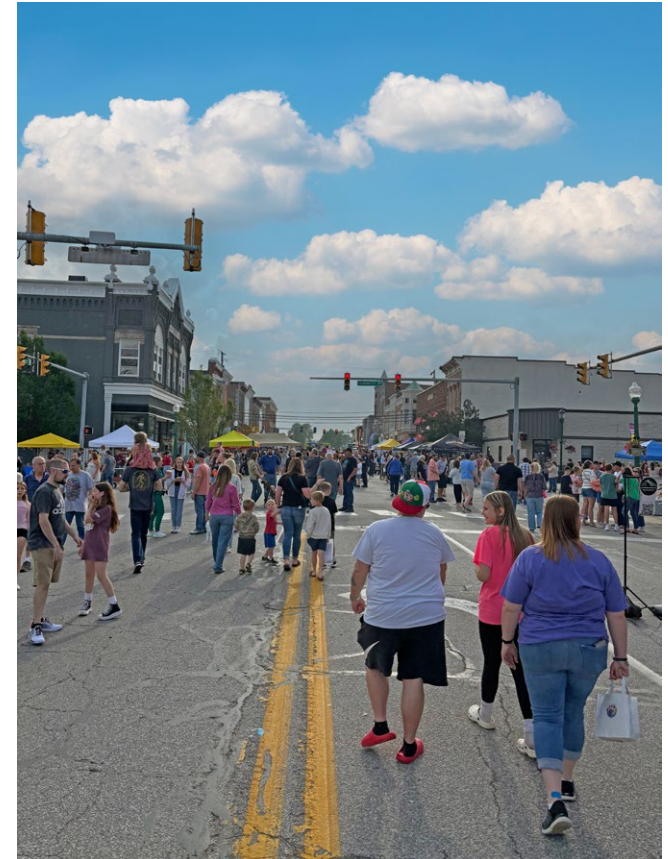
People are the heart of a community; providing systems and services that support the residents of Columbia City invests in the long-term health of the community. The People section of the Plan comprises goals and objectives related to the happiness, education, and leadership of Columbia City and its residents.

## What We Learned

Residents of Columbia City enjoy a robust network of recreational amenities that foster an active, connected community life. The City’s parks system, anchored by Morsches Park, Devol Field, Eagle Park, and the Russel and Evelyn Fahl Aquatics Center, provides residents of all ages with places to gather, play, and spend time outdoors. Eagle Park, the site of the former high school, is being transformed to offer expanded recreational opportunities, with plans underway to increase its use. The Blue River Trail and the growing network of walking and biking paths offer scenic routes for exercise and mobility while linking neighborhoods with major destinations. These amenities play an important role in community identity, supporting both casual and organized recreation as Columbia City continues to grow.

Education also shapes the daily experience of residents, supported by Whitley County Consolidated Schools, which serve as one of the community’s largest institutions and employers. The presence of multiple elementary schools, a middle school, and a recently constructed high school provides families with a strong public education framework. Beyond the classroom, the Peabody Public Library acts as a central hub for learning, digital access, and community programming, offering residents opportunities for enrichment and lifelong education. While the City does not host a traditional college campus, access to nearby regional institutions, like Ivy Tech’s satellite programs at the Marshall Community Center, and broadband coverage ensure that residents can continue learning and developing skills in ways that reflect modern workforce needs.

Residents benefit from a wide range of community services and support systems that contribute to overall stability and well-being. Columbia City maintains a notably low crime index, supported by responsive police, fire, and emergency communications departments that help residents feel safe and protected. Community organizations, food assistance programs, and non-profit partnerships further strengthen the social safety net, helping residents navigate challenges and remain connected to local resources. Together, these systems form a foundation of support that enhances quality of life throughout the City.



## What We Heard

Through public engagement strategies, including a survey and direct conversations with residents, we gained insight into how residents of Columbia City experience daily life. Many of the themes directly tie back to what we know about the community's residents. Survey responses highlight how residents engage with Columbia City and identify several opportunities to strengthen recreation and community life.

- 45 percent of respondents already seek entertainment and activities within the City.
- 39 percent regularly travel to Fort Wayne, showing both appreciation for current amenities and desire for more local options.
- 42 percent say recreational opportunities should be improved.
- 35 percent selected more parks and recreation as a top improvement priority.
- Learning and support also emerged as essential parts of everyday life.
- 13 percent of respondents identified access to educational opportunities as one of the things they value most, reflecting the role of schools, the library, and community programs in meeting residents' needs.
- 94 percent of residents say they enjoy living in Columbia City, with 81 percent specifically citing safety as their top reason, underscoring the importance of police, fire, EMS, and community stability.

At the same time, residents also identified places where more support is needed:

- 40 percent want better transportation and connectivity options.
- 45 percent want to see more community programming.

These insights, combined with the information in the Existing Conditions Report and feedback from the Steering Committee, provided the framework for the following principles, goals, and objectives.

## Principles

The principles of **Play, Learn, and Support** reflect how residents of Columbia City engage with their community in meaningful and interconnected ways. **Play** represents the City’s commitment to recreation, gathering spaces, and shared experiences that bring people together, whether through parks, trails, events, or everyday social interaction. **Learn** highlights the value residents place on education at all stages of life, from K–12 opportunities to career development, skill building, and community-based learning environments that help individuals grow and adapt. **Support** captures the spirit of care and collaboration that runs through Columbia City, seen in the local networks, organizations, and informal relationships that provide a sense of belonging. Together, these principles shape a community where residents can enjoy their environment, pursue personal and professional growth, and rely on one another, thereby strengthening the City’s social fabric.

**Goal: Ensure year-round recreation and leisure experiences for all residents through active, passive, and social spaces throughout the community and its environments.**

**Play** Explore and identify locations for new rectangular and/or recreational athletic fields.  
(2015 Plan pg. 40)

**Play** Expand river access points along the Blue River with accompanying directional signage.  
(2015 Plan pg. 42)

**Goal: Increase access to educational opportunities for K-12 and adult learners aligned with local, regional, and national trends in the workforce.**

**Learn** Explore public transit options tailored to Columbia City residents, with a focus on connections to educational and skilled-trade resources.  
(2015 Plan pg. 52)

**Goal: Provide resources and opportunities that support a spirit of community pride and that support the civic institutions that are integral to Columbia City.**

**Support** Encourage neighborhood beautification projects by partnering with Columbia City Connect, Redevelopment Commission, Tree Board, etc.  
(2015 Plan pg. 56)

**Support** Facilitate information sharing for available support resources with the non-profit community and emergency services.  
(2015 Plan pg. 60 and 62)

**PLACES.**

The residents of Columbia City interact with the community's built environment every day. From housing to roads, infrastructure investments are crucial to Columbia City's growth. Planning for that growth ensures the everyday interactions with the places in Columbia City build on the community's identity and sense of place.

## What We Learned

Columbia City's physical environment is defined by a balanced mix of residential neighborhoods, institutions, commercial districts, and open spaces that together shape residents' experience of the community.

Residential areas make up the largest share of land use, reflecting the City's strong identity as a place to call home. The City has added over a thousand new housing units since 2000, responding to steady population growth and increasing demand. Housing types are diverse, ranging from single-family homes to multi-family developments and mobile homes. That mix of unit types offers a variety of price points and living arrangements for households of different ages and lifestyles. With median home values rising and both ownership and rental opportunities available, Columbia City's neighborhoods continue to evolve while maintaining a stable and welcoming character.

The character of Columbia City is also enriched by its institutional and commercial spaces, which anchor daily life and provide essential services. Nearly a quarter of the City's land area is dedicated to institutional uses, including schools, government buildings, medical facilities, and civic spaces. These settings support education, health care, and public services, reinforcing the City's role as a regional hub. Commercial areas, particularly along US 30 and SR 9, and within the Downtown district, serve both residents and the broader region. Retail activity remains a vital part of the City's economic landscape. Some retail sectors show that residents shop elsewhere, indicating that the City should continue efforts to attract new commercial development. Downtown remains a focal point for community identity, business activity, and civic gatherings. This district's importance is evident in recent planning efforts and ongoing redevelopment activities, which shape its future.

Connectivity and movement also shape how people interact with places in Columbia City. The transportation network is anchored by major corridors, such as US 30, SR 9, and SR 205, which link the community to surrounding cities and regional job centers. Trails, including the Blue River Trail, mountain bike paths in Morsches Park, and recent trail extensions toward the school campus, provide safe and scenic connections for walking and biking. Public transportation through Whitley County Transit expands mobility options for residents who rely on shared transportation for work, healthcare, or daily needs. Together, these systems ensure that residents can navigate their community easily and remain connected to the places that support daily life.



## What We Heard

This plan, informed by feedback from residents, stakeholders, and the Steering Committee, integrates the physical environment with the lived experience of those who interact with it. From housing to transportation infrastructure, and from the arts to retail opportunities, public feedback demonstrated satisfaction and opportunity.

- 45 percent supported adding more single-unit homes.
- 25 percent expressed a need for more multi-unit housing options.

With housing comes sidewalks, roads, and local infrastructure. We heard from residents about the desire for improvements in how they move through Columbia City.

- 40 percent of respondents said the City needs better transportation options, including improved public transit, safer walking routes, and more bike-friendly connections.

These concerns align closely with comments in the open-ended responses, where residents frequently mentioned traffic flow, road conditions, and walkability.

Feedback concerning entertainment, the arts, and local experiences outlined opportunities for improvement.

- 45 percent of residents seek entertainment and dining locally.
- while 39 percent go to Fort Wayne for dining and entertainment instead.

That data, paired with the retail gap analysis, shows the potential for the local economy to grow with restaurants, entertainment, and amenities. These responses paint a clear picture: residents want Columbia City to grow in ways that expand daily experiences. Residents want more local businesses, more places to gather, and smoother ways to move between them.

## Principles

The principles of **Live, Experience, Move, and Grow** capture the multifaceted idea of Place in Columbia City by illustrating how residents interact with and shape their community.

The **Live** principle reflects the City’s focus on creating safe, welcoming neighborhoods with diverse housing options that allow people to build their lives in environments that feel rooted and authentic. **Experience** highlights the character, culture, and daily moments that define Columbia City, from its vibrant Downtown and local events to the natural amenities and shared spaces that give the community its distinct identity. **Move** speaks to the importance of connectivity and mobility, emphasizing trails, streets, and infrastructure that help residents navigate their City safely and efficiently while staying linked to the services that support them. **Grow** represents Columbia City’s capacity for progress through thoughtful development, economic opportunity, and long-term planning that ensures the community evolves while maintaining the qualities that make it special.

Together, these principles define a holistic sense of place where residents can build meaningful lives, enjoy a strong community experience, move freely and safely, and grow alongside their City’s ongoing transformation.

### Goal: Promote safe, quality neighborhoods with varying styles, densities, products, and price points for all stages of life.

<b>Live</b>	Establish capacity-building programming for neighborhood improvement groups to expand their role in community development.  (2015 Plan pg. 88)
<b>Live</b>	Coordinate with housing developers to promote a wide range of housing types and densities within both existing neighborhoods and new developments.  (2015 Plan pg. 92)

### Goal: Increase and encourage quality owner-occupied housing.

<b>Live</b>	Promote and encourage single-family housing and medium-density housing developments in areas around the new school campus.  (New)
<b>Live</b>	Promote and encourage medium-density housing in the blocks surrounding Columbia City’s Downtown district.  (New)
<b>Live</b>	Encourage infill development of affordable micro-units in appropriate areas of Columbia City.  (New)

## Goal: Create and nurture a genuine identity for Columbia City that attracts visitors and potential long-term members to the community.

- Experience** Utilize the Columbia City Arts Commission to build programming focused on public art.  
(2015 Plan pg. 94)
- Experience** Identify locations around Columbia City for public art installations.  
(2015 Plan pg. 94)
- Experience** Create a City-wide gateway beautification plan.  
(2015 Plan pg. 96)
- Experience** Install gateway signage in high-traffic areas around Columbia City.  
(2015 Plan pg. 96)
- Experience** Implement the 2024 Downtown Revitalization Plan by seeking OCRA Main Street Revitalization Program funding with Columbia City Connect.  
(2015 Plan pg. 100)
- Experience** Investigate and identify publicly-supported paths to adopting a historic preservation ordinance.  
(2015 Plan pg. 102)

## Goal: Support existing businesses impacted by road construction.

- Experience** Coordinate with businesses and transportation partners to establish marketing and signage indicating alternative routes to businesses impacted by construction.  
(New)

**Goal: Increase and enhance vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian connectivity to high-traffic areas and services – valuing safety, increasing freedom of movement, and promoting economic development.**

- Move** Draft an updated Capital Improvement Plan and Program that evaluates updates to transportation infrastructure as a part of all City-wide initiatives.  
(2015 Plan pg. 106)
- Move** Explore, identify, and fill sidewalk gaps in all areas of Columbia City to provide comprehensive pedestrian access.  
(2015 Plan pg. 108)
- Move** Continue connecting Columbia City with the Blue River Trail, including extensions to new areas.  
(2015 Plan pg. 110)

**Goal: Connect new housing developments to the City and to existing pedestrian infrastructure where able.**

- Move** In new developments, connect new sidewalks and bike infrastructure to existing paths, trails, and routes that are adjacent to the development..  
(New)
- Move** Provide safe pedestrian and bike routes from new housing developments to school campuses within Columbia City’s boundaries.  
(New)

**Goal: Ensure the strategic and intentional growth of residential, commercial, and industrial areas for the most benefit, for the most people, in the most ways.**

- Grow** Strategically support voluntary annexation of land outside of current corporate boundaries in areas of planned growth.  
(2015 Plan pg. 118)
- Grow** Expand revitalization efforts from areas of existing investment, including residential, commercial, and green spaces.  
(2015 Plan pg. 120)
- Grow** Extend Columbia City’s Extraterritorial Jurisdictional Boundary.  
(2015 Plan pg. 122)

## Goal: Proactively plan for US 30 redevelopment in order to mitigate the impact on residents and businesses.

- Grow** Create an overlay district in the commercial areas along US 30 to visually enhance the area and encourage consumer activity.  
(New)
- Grow** Define alternative traffic patterns and routes to direct traffic flows when existing routes are closed.  
(New)
- Grow** Promote and encourage commercial activity of all sizes in the planned interchanges noted in the 2025 Indiana Department of Transportation Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) Study.  
(New)
- Grow** Establish growth boundaries on the parcels with well-defined access to the US 30 interchanges to maximize land use.  
(New)

## Goal: Encourage redevelopment in previously underutilized areas near Downtown.

- Grow** Coordinate clean-up of brownfield sites in partnership with the Redevelopment Commission.  
(New)
- Grow** Create a gateway commercial district along SR 9, between Spencer Street and East Chicago Street (East Business 30), south of Downtown.  
(New)

## Land Use

### Summary

For a comprehensive plan, land use reflects the desired type of activity for growth areas and existing neighborhoods. A Future Land Use map was created to guide decision-makers on the type of development to encourage and to provide a basis for zoning code and zoning map amendments. The Future Land Use map will visually represent Columbia City's intent for proactive growth in locations within and around the periphery of its corporate limits, providing space for new development that is desired and compatible with a defined character.

## Planning Area Boundary

The Future Land Use Map shows a “Planning Area” boundary. This boundary is intended to help guide policymakers when developments are proposed outside the City of Columbia City’s corporate boundary. Identified land uses on the portion of the map are designated to illustrate where and how the community should grow, and to help elected officials, volunteer boards, and staff evaluate future development and potential annexations.

## Future Land Use Character Districts

The following Future Land Use Character Districts establish the framework for guiding growth and development in Columbia City. Each district describes the intent, typical uses, and physical form envisioned for development and reinvestment consistent with the City’s zoning ordinance. Below are descriptions of the Future Land Use Character Districts shown on the Future Land Use Map. One critical item woven into these character districts is a description that goes beyond identifying general permitted land uses. Each class description includes a narrative that defines how development should “feel” to both residents and visitors as they walk, bike, or drive through that location.





## AGRICULTURAL / RURAL RESIDENTIAL (ARR)

### Overview

Agricultural and Rural Residential areas define the transition between the City and its surrounding countryside. These areas support working farms, homesteads, and large-lot residential development that maintain the rural landscape. Future growth should preserve natural features and agricultural operations while accommodating limited low-density housing, typically served by well and septic systems.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Agricultural production, farmsteads, and large-lot single-family homes.
- **Secondary:** Agribusinesses, small onsite farm stands, and community facilities such as township fire stations or churches.

### Physical Form

- **Density:** 0.5 units per acre, but large areas may be less dense.
- **Building Placement and Massing:** Buildings should be positioned away from roadways to preserve open views and the rural character. Where development occurs, access should be via shared drives to limit curb cuts.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Maintain hedgerows, tree lines, and open fields. Encourage the preservation of natural and agricultural land.
- **Amenities:** Where feasible, incorporate trail connections or greenways to link rural areas to the City's parks and open space network.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** with existing Agricultural (A-1) and Rural Residential zoning districts.

## LOW-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)

### Overview

Low-density residential areas are among the primary character types of Columbia City's suburban neighborhoods. These areas are characterized by single-family detached homes on larger lots, with landscaped yards and quiet streets. Many of these are already developed neighborhoods. The design aims to preserve the neighborhood's stable character while allowing limited infill that reflects the existing home sizes, lot coverage, setbacks, and materials.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Single-family detached homes, two-family, accessory dwelling units, accessory structures, and small neighborhood parks.
- **Secondary:** Schools, churches, accessory dwelling units, civic uses, small scale commercial under 10,000 s are compatible with residential surroundings.

### Physical Form

- **Density:** two to five units per acre.
- **Building Placement and Massing:** Homes should maintain consistent front and side setbacks and be oriented toward the street. Garages and driveways should not dominate the streetscape. Building heights are typically one to two stories.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Provide street trees and landscaped front yards. Preserve existing vegetation and integrate green buffers where new development meets established neighborhoods.
- **Amenities:** Include sidewalks, lighting, and neighborhood connections to nearby parks or community facilities.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** with existing R-1 Single-Family Residential, R-2 Single-Family, and LB Local Business, in limited instances, zoning districts.





## MEDIUM-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)

### Overview

Medium-Density Residential areas include compact neighborhoods that accommodate a mix of housing types, such as small-lot single-family homes, duplexes, and townhomes. These areas provide transitional density between low-density neighborhoods and more intensive uses while maintaining a walkable, neighborhood-oriented character.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Small lot single-family homes two-family units, accessory dwelling units.
- **Secondary:** Multi-family, limited neighborhood commercial, community facilities such as schools, parks, and local-serving institutions.

### Physical Form

- **Density:** Typical density is four to eight units per acre.
- **Building Placement and Massing:** To enhance walkability, place buildings closer to the street with shallow front setbacks and porches or stoops. Buildings typically have a maximum height of three stories. Off-street parking should be located to the side or rear. Alleys may be appropriate to encourage creating layouts.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Incorporate small greens, landscaped buffers, and street trees to provide shade and visual consistency.
- **Amenities:** Sidewalks, alleys, and shared open spaces create connections within neighborhoods and to nearby parks or mixed-use areas.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** with existing R-2 Two-Family Residential, R-3 Multi-Family, and the LB Local Business zoning districts.

## MIXED-DENSITY / RETIREMENT COMMUNITY (MD/RC)

### Overview

Mixed-Density and Retirement Community areas provide flexible residential environments that blend housing types and incorporate open spaces. These areas often include townhomes, multi-family buildings, and senior living developments designed for accessibility and community interaction.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Townhomes, multi-family buildings, and senior housing communities.
- **Secondary:** Parks, recreation areas, and small-scale commercial uses that serve residents.

### Physical Form

- **Density:** Up to 15 units per acre. Commercial uses are limited to 25 percent of the entire development area.
- **Building Placement and Massing:** Buildings should face internal streets or open spaces with consistent setbacks. Typical height ranges from one to three stories. Designs should emphasize walkability and accessibility.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Integrate open spaces and shared greens throughout developments. Utilize landscaping to soften the building's edges and provide visual variety.
- **Amenities:** Include trails, sidewalks, and community gathering areas such as courtyards or clubhouses.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** R-3 Multi-Family, LB Local Business, and the GC General Commercial zoning districts.





## LOCAL BUSINESS (LB)

### Overview

The Local Business character class is based on the current zoning ordinance designation of the same name. This character class provides an intermediate transition from the core Downtown Central Business District to smaller-scale retail, dining, service, and upper-story residential options, creating an area for Downtown expansion and a buffer between more densely zoned districts and nearby residential neighborhoods. These areas are typically located around the periphery of Central Business District zoned areas and along collector streets. Most importantly, these areas are designed to blend with adjacent residential character rather than compete with larger commercial centers.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Neighborhood retail, small offices, personal services, and local restaurants.
- **Secondary:** Mixed-use buildings with upper-story residential, community facilities, or pocket parks.

### Physical Form

- **Density:** Four to eight units per acre. Commercial uses are limited to 50 percent of any building or structure.
- **Building Placement and Massing:** Place buildings near the sidewalk with parking to the side or rear. Limit height to one or two stories. Entrances should face the street, and façades should include windows and architectural details to enhance walkability.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Provide landscaping between buildings and parking areas, including street trees and planters. Buffer adjacent residential uses with fencing, shrubs, or small green spaces.
- **Amenities:** Encourage pedestrian-friendly amenities such as benches, bike racks, and outdoor seating areas.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** Local Business (LB) zoning district.

## DOWNTOWN (DT)

### Overview

Downtown Columbia City is the community's historic, civic, and social heart. It is characterized by a mix of storefront retail, dining, offices, and upper-story residential uses that define the City's traditional Main Street environment. Development should emphasize pedestrian activity, historic preservation, and high-quality streetscape design to reinforce Downtown as the center of community life.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Retail, restaurants, offices, and upper-story residential.
- **Secondary:** Cultural venues, civic buildings, small lodging facilities, and public plazas.

### Physical Form

- **Density:** Up to 12 units per acre. Commercial uses are limited to 50 percent of any building or structure.
- **Building Placement and Massing:** Buildings should align with the sidewalk and have zero or minimal setbacks. They should maintain consistent heights of two to three stories. Storefronts should include transparent glazing and distinct entrances to activate the street.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Streetscapes should incorporate trees, planters, and pedestrian amenities, including lighting and benches. Pocket parks and plazas provide gathering opportunities.
- **Amenities:** Consistent signage, decorative lighting, and wayfinding enhance identity and walkability. Parking should be located behind or to the side of buildings.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** Central Business (CB) zoning district.





## GENERAL COMMERCIAL (GC)

### Overview

General Commercial areas include larger retail, restaurant, and service developments serving local and regional markets. These uses typically occur along arterial corridors and at key intersections. Design should strike a balance between automobile access and safe pedestrian circulation, while maintaining a consistent and attractive appearance through unified signage and landscaping.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Retail centers, restaurants, hotels, professional offices, medical offices, auto-oriented establishments, and entertainment venues.
- **Secondary:** Civic facilities, healthcare offices, commercial scale manufacturing/light assembly uses, and complementary multi-tenant developments.

### Physical Form

- **Building Placement and Massing:** Buildings should face primary streets with coordinated entrances and façades. Use shared access drives and cross-connections to minimize curb cuts. Building height typically ranges from one to three stories.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Incorporate consistent landscaping along street frontages and within parking lots. Encourage stormwater facilities designed as visual features or utilize rain gardens.
- **Amenities:** Provide sidewalks or multi-use paths along major corridors and pedestrian routes between parking lots and building entrances.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** General Business (GB) zoning districts.

## GENERAL INDUSTRIAL (GI)

### Overview

General Industrial areas accommodate manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, and logistics uses. These sites typically have access to major transportation routes and adequate utility capacity. Design standards should ensure compatibility with nearby residential and commercial areas through the use of appropriate buffering and site organization.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Corporate offices, flex-space, light and heavy manufacturing, distribution, warehousing, and research and development.
- **Secondary:** Institutional uses, utilities, retail and support uses related to industrial activity.

### Physical Form

- **Building Placement and Massing:** Position buildings to maximize efficiency and circulation. Office components should face the public street; loading and service areas should be screened.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** When adjacent to non-industrial uses, provide wide landscaped buffers. Preserve existing tree lines or natural drainage where feasible.
- **Amenities:** Include sidewalks or internal paths that allow employees and visitors to walk between buildings or to nearby commercial areas.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** I-1 Light Industrial and I-2 Heavy Industrial zoning districts.





## INSTITUTIONAL (INS)

### Overview

Institutional areas include civic, educational, and religious facilities that serve community needs. These uses are often focal points within neighborhoods and should be designed to complement their surroundings through compatible scale and landscaping.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Schools, government offices, churches, and healthcare facilities.
- **Secondary:** Parks, community centers, and other public service facilities.

### Physical Form

- **Building Placement and Massing:** Buildings should face primary streets with welcoming entrances and visible signage. Larger buildings should have articulated façades and pedestrian access from sidewalks or shared drives.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Use landscaping to frame entryways and screen parking areas. Preserve existing mature trees and integrate green space for community gathering.
- **Amenities:** Sidewalks, plazas, and pedestrian lighting enhance safety and accessibility.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** Institutional uses permitted in existing zoning districts.

## PARKS AND OPEN SPACE (P&OS)

### Overview

Parks and Open Space areas provide recreational opportunities and preserve the City's natural resources. These spaces include neighborhood parks, trails, greenways, and conservation areas that improve the quality of life and environmental health. Future park development should focus on connectivity and accessibility for all residents.

### Uses

- **Primary:** Public parks, trails, greenways, conservation areas, and recreation facilities.
- **Secondary:** Civic facilities and event spaces that support community gatherings.

### Physical Form

- **Building Placement and Massing:** This varies by site but typically includes small structures such as shelters or restrooms and may incorporate other structures (e.g., sports courts and fields, community centers, amphitheaters) that complement the landscape or the facility's intended use.
- **Landscape and Open Space:** Preserve and highlight natural features, such as streams, woodlands, and slopes. Use native plantings and low-impact stormwater design.
- **Amenities:** Trailheads, signage, playgrounds, and lighting should enhance user comfort and safety.
- **Existing Zoning Compatibility:** Public and Recreational use are integrated into existing zoning districts.



**THINGS.**

The Things that make up Columbia City, its economy, institutions, utilities, and natural resources, are vital to building a community that lasts. By building an opportunity-rich local economy and civic institutions that support Columbia City's residents, the community's identity becomes more sustainable and confident. The goals and objectives in this section aim to enhance the quality and quantity of the Things that make Columbia City successful.

## What We Learned

Columbia City's economic base is characterized by a stable and diversified mix of employers, industries, and commercial services that collectively support the community's long-term economic health. Major institutions, such as Parkview Whitley Hospital, Whitley County Consolidated Schools, and regional manufacturers like, even if not within the City's corporate limits, Steel Dynamics and Sure-Trac Trailers, serve as key employment anchors, contributing to a balanced labor market. These entities draw workers from throughout the region, reinforcing the City's role as an employment center despite slightly higher unemployment than peer communities. Retail analysis indicates areas of both strength and opportunity, with several sectors exhibiting market leakage that may support future expansion or recruitment. Taken together, these economic elements form an essential foundation for future commercial and industrial development.

Columbia City maintains a comprehensive collection of municipal utilities, public services, and infrastructure systems that ensure the efficient delivery of essential services to residents and businesses. Locally managed electric, water, wastewater, and street departments provide high operational responsiveness, enabling the City to plan strategic infrastructure improvements. The community's physical networks consist of more than 52 miles of streets, 65 miles of sanitary sewer lines, water treatment facilities, and a municipally operated electric distribution grid. Public safety services, including police, fire, and emergency communications, offer reliable emergency response and contribute to crime rates significantly below national levels. Widespread broadband availability further supports modern communication, remote work, and digital learning. These systems collectively position Columbia City for sustained growth and future investment.

In addition to its economic and service systems, Columbia City benefits from a range of community facilities and natural resources that enhance the overall quality of life. The Peabody Public Library serves as an important center for cultural enrichment and public programming. At the same time, parks, trails, and recreational amenities offer opportunities for physical activity, environmental enjoyment, and community interaction. Natural features such as the Blue River, associated floodplains, and varied soil conditions influence development patterns and require responsible planning to ensure environmental resilience. Stewardship of these assets is essential to maintaining ecological health, supporting recreation, and guiding land-use decisions. Together, these components form the physical framework that supports community function, reinforces local identity, and provides a foundation for Columbia City's long-term sustainability.



## What We Heard

Survey responses provide valuable insights into how residents perceive the systems, services, and resources that support daily life in Columbia City. In terms of work, residents expressed mixed feelings about the local economic environment:

- 22 percent identified limited job opportunities as one of the things they like least about Columbia City.

That suggests that while the City provides a strong foundation for employment through its existing businesses and institutions, many residents still feel the need for more diverse job options, career pathways, or local employers. Additionally, when asked where they work:

- 43 percent reported that they work in Columbia City.
- Another 28 percent commute outside Whitley County.

That data shows a local economy that supports the population, but leaves room for improvement in offering employment opportunities to a larger share of Columbia City residents. The responses show the importance of maintaining a strong local business base while continuing to expand employment opportunities.

Columbia City's public services received generally positive feedback, with most respondents rating them between "Average" and "Good," resulting in a weighted average score of 3.64 out of 5. Public safety also stands out as a major community strength when asked what they like most about living in Columbia City.

- 81 percent of respondents chose "Safe community," making it the most-selected positive attribute.

Residents also see ongoing service improvements as a priority:

- 24 percent selected enhanced public safety programs (e.g., fire, police, EMS) as one of their top priorities for the future.

Improvements to local infrastructure and valuing the unique identity of Columbia City, an achievement that can be sought through historic preservation and Downtown revitalization, were a theme in the public engagement:

- 48 percent selected “improve local infrastructure” as a top priority moving forward.
- 55 percent of respondents identified the “sense of community” as one of the features that make Columbia City a good place to live.

Overall, public engagement produced a vision of a community that has improved and remains a good place to live. Residents emphasized the need for stronger services, infrastructure, and public amenities to support daily life in Columbia City. They also expressed a desire to maintain and expand shared community assets, particularly parks, recreation spaces, and other places that contribute to community identity and quality of life.

## Principles

The principles of **Work, Serve, Preserve, and Share** reflect the essential elements that make up Columbia City and define how its people and physical assets function together as a cohesive community. **Work** speaks to the businesses, institutions, and entrepreneurial spaces that drive the local economy and offer residents opportunities to build meaningful careers. **Serve** captures the essential services, civic functions, and volunteer efforts that support daily life, from public safety and utilities to non-profits and neighbor-to-neighbor assistance. **Preserve** highlights the City’s commitment to protecting its natural features, historic structures, and long-standing community traditions that anchor Columbia City’s identity. **Share** represents the spaces, amenities, and resources that residents enjoy collectively, including parks, trails, public art, gathering areas, and cultural celebrations. Together, these principles describe the tangible and intangible things that give Columbia City its character and create a community built on productivity, service, stewardship, and shared experience.

## Goal: Support and encourage a diverse local economy that provides opportunities for financially satisfying and intellectually stimulating employment.

- Work** Provide a mix of locational opportunities for commercial growth, from small businesses to industrial sites.  
(2015 Plan pg. 136)
- Work** Create and expand incentive programs for businesses to move to Downtown Columbia City.  
(2015 Plan pg. 142)
- Work** Develop and implement alley maintenance standards for the Downtown business district.  
(New)
- Work** Coordinate program development and build the capacity of the Columbia City Test Kitchen.  
(2015 Plan pg. 34)
- Work** Explore opportunities to promote the local agricultural economy within Columbia City.  
(2015 Plan pg. 146)

## Goal: Expand medical research and advanced manufacturing in Columbia City.

- Work** Promote and expand medical research and device manufacturing by leveraging regional assets and geographic location.  
(New)
- Work** Promote advanced manufacturing in new industrial and commercial areas on West Lincolnway and US 30.  
(New)
- Work** Make infrastructure improvements to meet increased heavy logistics demand in new industrial and commercial areas.  
(New)

**Goal: Ensure environmentally friendly, sustainable, and efficient infrastructure systems and high-quality emergency response services to support the current community and future growth.**

- Serve** Explore paths to further strengthen and build resiliency within Columbia City's energy infrastructure.  
(2015 Plan pg. 148)
- Serve** Remove barriers to the generation of renewable energy for private use.  
(2015 Plan pg. 148)
- Serve** Explore sites and design plans for the relocation of the Fire Department and Police Department headquarters.  
(2015 Plan pg. 154)
- Serve** Increase Fire Department capacity to meet Columbia City growth and need, ensuring adequate fire protection and service to areas north and east of US 30.  
(2015 Plan pg. 154)

**Goal: Ensure protection of the natural and built environments to preserve features unique to Columbia City.**

- Preserve** Review and update the inventory of existing Columbia City structures with local historical value.  
(2015 Plan pg. 156)
- Preserve** Explore the restoration of South Chauncey Street to a brick surface.  
(2015 Plan pg. 158)
- Preserve** Identify potential floodplain areas to develop into green spaces for public use.  
(2015 Plan pg. 160)

**Goal: Promote communication and dialogue between governmental and non-governmental groups through marketing, communications, and collaboration to further highlight Columbia City and the region.**

- Share** Support and highlight the region's rich tourism capacity by partnering with the Whitley County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center.  
(2015 Plan pg. 164)

**CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.**

## Introduction

Critical Path Strategies are guides to specific objectives listed in the Plan. The Steering Committee, in coordination with the Mayor, the Columbia City Community Development Department, and the Plan Commission, selected the following 11 objectives as the most critical for Columbia City's success. Each Critical Path Strategy highlights action items for appropriate local leaders, budget projections, and an estimation of how long the objective will take to achieve. Each Critical Path Strategy includes a case study that shows how another community achieved success by implementing a similar program or project.

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 1

**Encourage neighborhood beautification projects by partnering with Columbia City Connect, Redevelopment Commission, Tree Board, etc.**

### Action Items

- Identify areas for improvement
  - Prioritize based on need and public feedback
- Engage with the public on desired or needed beautification goals
- Match relevant partners with areas and goals that reduce input costs and build off of preexisting strengths and assets
- Identify potential funding sources
- Create scopes of work
  - Pre-package plans for projects to streamline development
- Fast-track any zoning processes needed for projects
- Publicize improvements
- Utilize in-kind help from the public to increase buy-in and long-term success

### Lead Agency

- Community Development
- Columbia City Tree Board
- Whitley County Master Gardeners

### Budget

- Low (less than \$50,000)

### Timeline

- Short range (1-3 years)

## Case Study: Project GreenSpace – Keep Indianapolis Beautiful

Project GreenSpace is a long-running initiative in Indianapolis led by Keep Indianapolis Beautiful (KIB) in collaboration with neighborhood residents, volunteers, non-profits, and local stakeholders. The program's goal is to transform vacant lots and underutilized spaces into community-valued green spaces such as pocket parks, gardens, orchards, and outdoor classrooms. Rather than relying on City departmental funding, this effort has been driven largely by community engagement, grassroots leadership, and partnerships with non-profit and volunteer networks supported by corporate philanthropy.

### Community Engagement and Implementation

Residents and community groups identify vacant lots or blighted parcels that have become eyesores or barriers to neighborhood quality of life. Through the Project GreenSpace application process, selected sites are worked on collaboratively with KIB's technical staff and landscape designers. Volunteers help implement landscape improvements, including installing walking paths, planting trees and native plants, creating pollinator gardens, and adding seating areas, to make these spaces both visually appealing and functional for neighbors. Once established, ongoing maintenance is supported through KIB's GreenSpace Sustainability Program, which provides continued technical assistance and volunteer coordination to keep these green spaces beautiful and welcoming.

### Benefits to Visual Character and Community

The transformations carried out under Project GreenSpace have replaced neglected lots with lush pocket parks and landscaped community areas that enhance the visual character and provide gathering places for neighbors. In some neighborhoods, formerly blighted sites have become places where children play, families gather, and volunteers plant trees or gardens, fostering stronger neighborhood identity and pride. Research connected to these projects has also shown associations between increased greenery and reductions in local crime rates, reflecting broader social and environmental benefits beyond aesthetics.

### Why This Example Matters

Project GreenSpace demonstrates how a small-scale, resident-engaged greenspace beautification program can have meaningful impacts on neighborhood appearance and community well-being without requiring direct municipal funding. Its success underscores the value of volunteer involvement, non-profit facilitation, and partnerships in turning vacant and underused land into assets that enhance community livability and visual appeal; a model that other small and mid-sized cities can adapt to fit local conditions.



Source: [Keep Indianapolis Beautiful](#)

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 2

**Promote and encourage medium-density housing and single-family housing developments in areas around the new school campus.**

### Action Items

- Reduce regulatory barriers by permitting desired housing by right
- Adopt neighborhood design standards that appeal to families and promote walkability, social connectivity, and green space
- Plan for utility infrastructure expansions by allocating funding early in preparation for future developments
- Integrate Safe Routes to School improvements and programs, such as marked crosswalks, pedestrian refuges, and bike paths connecting nearby residential areas directly to the campus
- Offer incentives like density bonuses, reduced impact fees, or expedited permitting for projects that include medium-density housing or workforce- and family-oriented units
- Market the area around the new school campus as a “Family-Centered Growth District,” highlighting proximity to education, parks, and trails to attract developers and homebuyers

### Lead Agency

- City of Columbia City Plan Commission

### Budget

- Medium, depending on infrastructure investments and offered incentives (\$100,000+)

### Timeline

- Short to medium range (1-5 years)

## Case Study: Shafer Farms – Greenfield, Indiana

Greenfield provides a useful example of how a mid-sized Indiana community converted agricultural edge land near a school campus into a successful residential neighborhood. Through the approval of the Shafer Farms Planned Unit Development (PUD), the City rezoned agricultural land to allow a master-planned housing community adjacent to the junior high campus. The PUD framework enabled Greenfield to establish customized development standards, including layout, density, buffering, open space, and infrastructure phasing. City staff reports and council materials emphasized improved roadway connectivity and safer access to the school as key public benefits tied directly to the rezoning decision.

Following rezoning approval, the area transitioned from farmland to active residential development, with hundreds of planned single-family lots and new homes entering the market. That demonstrates a clear link between proactive land use policy and real housing delivery. The Greenfield case shows that targeted rezoning near school campuses can accelerate neighborhood development while maintaining local control over design quality and infrastructure timing.

For Columbia City, this approach illustrates how the transition from agricultural land to residential land through proactive zoning policy can translate into real housing outcomes. The Greenfield model can be adjusted to accommodate Columbia City's desire for mixed housing options and medium-density development as well.

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 3

**Explore, identify, and fill sidewalk gaps in all areas of Columbia City to provide comprehensive pedestrian access.**

### Action Items

- Seek feedback from the public on areas with sidewalk issues
  - Create a dashboard for submitting issues
- Prioritize high-traffic areas and areas with ADA issues
- Coordinate with City services on budgetary needs
- Involve the relevant public stakeholders (neighbors, especially persons with disabilities, seniors, and children) in the design process
  - Allow personalization (concrete stamps, initials, Columbia City branded inlays)
- Update the new dashboard with a map (and potentially pictures) of completed projects to visualize success

### Lead Agency

- Community Development
- Street and Sewer Department

### Budget

- Medium (\$50,000+)

### Timeline

- Short-term, with ongoing projects (1-3 years+)

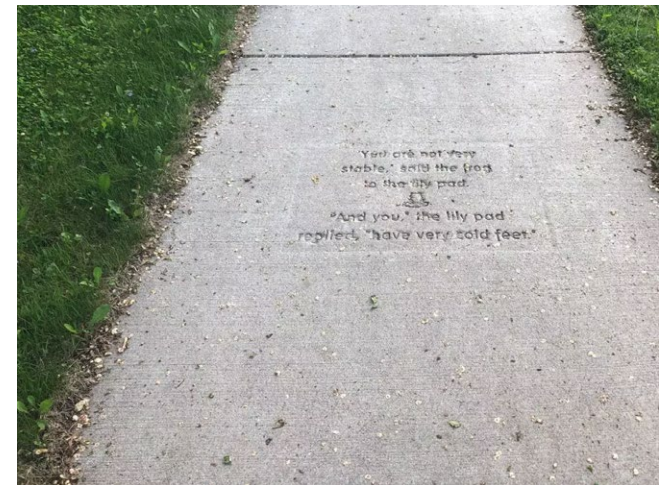
## Case Study: Everyday Poems for City Sidewalk – Saint Paul, Minnesota

The City of Saint Paul partnered with local artists and the nonprofit Public Art Saint Paul to create the Everyday Poems for City Sidewalk program. Instead of installing traditional plain concrete sidewalks, the City began permanently stamping poetry written by residents into the concrete as part of its standard sidewalk maintenance and construction program.

The program was fully integrated into routine sidewalk repairs and replacements, so whenever a block of sidewalk was rebuilt, it became an opportunity to add a resident's poem. Community members were invited to submit short poems reflecting their lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and artistic voices. Selected poems, including works in multiple community languages, were then permanently stamped into the concrete during construction.

This approach transformed sidewalk stamping from a decorative feature into a meaningful civic expression, embedding neighborhood voices, culture, and creativity directly into the public right-of-way.

As a result, more than 1,000 poems have been placed throughout Saint Paul's sidewalk network, adding identity and shared storytelling to everyday walking routes. The project intentionally reflects the City's cultural and linguistic diversity, turning sidewalks into a platform for civic expression and allowing residents to literally place their words into the fabric of the City. Because the poems are permanent, contributors see their voices preserved in the public realm, fostering pride, ownership, and a stronger connection between residents and City infrastructure.



Source: [Public Art Saint Paul](#)

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 4

**Create a City-wide gateway plan.**

### Action Items

- Identify high traffic areas
  - Prioritize areas near the City limits
  - Prioritize roads that lead to high-traffic commercial areas like Downtown
- Identify adjacent businesses and organizations for partnerships
- Coordinate with City services on landscaping plans
  - Take their capacity and budget into account
- Coordinate with Utilities on lighting needs
- Draft scopes of work for various-sized lots, tailoring designs to the site size, ranging from wayfinding signs to over-street archways
- Package step-by-step actions for each targeted gateway
  - Forecast costs and funding sources (keeping in-kind sources in mind)
- Start with achievable, short-term successes; a long-term plan for larger projects

### Lead Agency

- Community Development
- Street and Sewer Department
- Redevelopment Commission

### Budget

- Low to medium (administrative costs, potential for traffic study, \$50,000 - \$100,000+ for third-party design and drafting)

### Timeline

- Short range (1-3 years)

## Case Study: Fishers Gateway Master Plan

Fishers, Indiana, developed a Gateway Master Plan & Implementation Strategy that focuses on defining and improving key entry points into the community. Rather than leaving corridor entrances to evolve without guidance, Fishers assessed existing conditions and then established design criteria, wayfinding improvements, and gateway features at multiple strategic locations along primary travel routes entering the City.

### Approach & Key Elements

Fishers' plan identified gateway locations, including major intersections and roundabouts, where design interventions could establish a consistent and welcoming visual identity for the City. The planning process included:

- Inventorying existing signage and corridor elements to understand circulation patterns and decision points.
- Developing design options and unified design criteria that reflect the City's character while maintaining aesthetic cohesion across multiple gateways.
- Integrating landscaped features, coordinated signage, and wayfinding elements that help communicate place identity as travelers enter the City.

Gateway features were not one-off installations but were designed to reflect distinctive attributes of various districts within Fishers while maintaining a consistent visual language that ties all entrances together.

### Benefits to Visual Character and Commerce

The Fishers Gateway Initiative helps shape the City's first impressions. It supports economic development goals by creating visually appealing entrances that convey quality and identity. Cohesive design and improved wayfinding make the community more unique, encourage visitors to explore destinations, and signal that the City values investment in its public perception, which can build confidence among businesses and potential investors considering locations within the City.



Source: [Fishers Gateways Master Plan](#)

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 5

**Coordinate clean-up of brownfield sites in partnership with the Redevelopment Commission.**

### Action Items

- Establish a list of EPA brownfield sites, industrial sites, or environmentally degraded sites within the Columbia City municipal boundary
  - If a site is not a brownfield, confirm brownfield eligibility
- Assess the ownership status of each site
  - Maintain a list of the worst offenders, prioritizing parcels in high-value and high-visibility areas
  - Adjust nonconforming use and nuisance standards and phase out the industrial use over time
- Establish funding and financial support
  - EPA Brownfields Assessment or Clean-up Grants, IDEM incentives, local and RDC financial tools (TIF, non-profit grants, appropriated funds, etc.)
  - Establish a Redevelopment Commission fund specifically for environmental remediation
- Evaluate redevelopment goals and reuse scenarios
  - Gather feedback from the public and impacted neighbors
- Coordinate with the state environmental agency and EPA regional staff to clarify regulatory requirements, available technical assistance, and funding pathways

- Conduct Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
  - If needed, conduct Phase II Environmental Site Assessment
- Prepare clean-up scopes of work and budgets for each site
- Partner with owners of environmentally degraded sites (see list of worst offenders), acquire site control if necessary
  - Assess different ownership pathways, including land banks
- Market the site for redevelopment with the intended Future Land Use
- Publicize the residents of Columbia City to show progress

### Lead Agency

- Redevelopment Commission
- Community Development

### Budget

- High, mitigated by grant funding and third-party support (\$500,000+)

### Timeline

- Long-term (5-10 years)

## Case Study: H.K. Porter Site Clean-Up – Huntington, Indiana

The City of Huntington’s clean-up program is managed by its Redevelopment Commission and the City’s Community Development & Redevelopment department, which focuses on reinvesting in blighted or underutilized areas and partnering with private investors to support job creation and tax base growth. A flagship example is the former H.K. Porter industrial site (about 12 acres), where the City has pursued a deliberate redevelopment pathway: acquire and stabilize the site, complete environmental assessment work, remove hazards, and then prepare the property for reuse. The City boasted that the effort is supported by a nearly \$1 million federal grant and is focused on the clean-up and redevelopment of the former industrial parcel.

Huntington’s Redevelopment Commission has been involved over multiple years with the H.K. Porter property, including early steps after acquisition, such as demolition of outbuildings and removal of underground storage tanks, and continued coordination with state brownfields partners. The City’s public documents describe the grant-supported work plan as including remediation, demolition, and development of a community reuse plan, which is a repeatable framework that a redevelopment commission can apply to other brownfield parcels.

### Evidence of Broader Brownfield Capacity

Huntington has also received an EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant (a \$350,000 award) to continue environmental assessment and plan reuse/clean-up for another large legacy industrial property (the ACF Industries site, cited as 42 acres), indicating an ongoing pipeline of brownfield sites being managed through the City’s redevelopment mission.



Source: [H.K. Porter Site Cleanup](#)

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 6

**Coordinate program development and build the capacity of the Columbia City Test Kitchen.**

### Action Items

- Establish a formal management and governance structure
  - Create a clear operational framework for the Test Kitchen, including roles for the City, Main Street organization, local partners, and volunteers, to ensure consistent oversight, scheduling, and accountability
- Develop a year-round programming calendar based on rotating classes, workshops, and keeping time open for private usage
- Partner with local schools and career programs to create student learning opportunities, culinary training programs, and potential dual-credit opportunities with culinary institutions
- Work with local economic development partners and the Chamber of Commerce to offer business planning assistance, food safety training, and licensing guidance for aspiring food entrepreneurs using the Test Kitchen
- Seek local business sponsorships, foundation grants, and program fees to support staffing, equipment upgrades, and operational costs, reducing reliance on general fund support
- Conduct an annual equipment needs assessment and prioritize investments in commercial-grade appliances, storage, and technology
- Align Test Kitchen programming with Downtown festivals, farmers markets, and community events to drive foot traffic and create cross-promotion opportunities for local restaurants and vendors
- Establish performance metrics such as class attendance, number of entrepreneurs served, business launches, and revenue generation to measure impact and guide future improvements

### Lead Agency

- Community Development

### Budget

- Medium, depending on site needs (\$50,000+)

### Timeline

- Medium range (3-5 years)

## Case Study: Hazleton Kitchen Incubator – Hazleton, Pennsylvania

The Hazleton Kitchen Incubator, powered by the Hazleton Innovation Collaborative (THInC), is a shared commercial kitchen facility located in the historic Hayden Family Center for the Arts in Downtown Hazleton. It was developed to give aspiring food and beverage entrepreneurs in the region a low-risk opportunity to start, test, develop, and scale their businesses without the burden of purchasing and maintaining expensive, commercially licensed kitchen space. The facility serves bakers, caterers, specialty food producers, food trucks, and small-scale entrepreneurs, and it enhances equitable access to professional food production resources for people of varying incomes and backgrounds.

At its core, the kitchen incubator combines access to facilities with business support to foster sustainable growth. Members are part of a larger entrepreneurial ecosystem that includes partnerships with organizations such as the Hazleton LaunchBox and Small Business Development Centers, providing education in food safety, business planning, branding, and market validation. Tenants also receive targeted benefits like flexible use of commercial equipment, cold and dry storage, 24/7 facility access, mentoring on licensing and permits, and opportunities to showcase products through retail pop-ups and farmers markets.



Source: [Hazleton Kitchen Incubator](#)

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 7

**Create an overlay district in the commercial areas surrounding US 30 to visually enhance the area and encourage consumer activity.**

### Action Items

- Define the overlay district boundaries
- Establish a clear vision and intent for the corridor with a vision statement
  - Emphasize visual appeal, cohesiveness, safety, and a more inviting consumer experience while remaining compatible with existing commercial uses
- Engage with property owners and businesses early
  - Conduct targeted outreach with corridor property owners and business operators to explain what an overlay district is, gather input, and build support for gradual improvements and long-term reinvestment
- Adopt enhanced design and aesthetic standards that improve the visual appeal of the district
- Improve site layout and pedestrian infrastructure to make the traffic flows more efficient and enhance walkability
- Implement coordinated streetscape and landscape guidelines that soften large paved areas and create a visually unified corridor
- Establish signage standards to reduce clutter and driver distractions, like large poles and flashing lights, and increase visual appeal
- Create incentive programs for voluntary redevelopment
  - Examples include: façade grants, sign replacement assistance, landscaping grants, and expedited permitting
- Coordinate with transportation agencies on US 30 improvements to preempt construction challenges and learn early about upcoming changes to road infrastructure

### Lead Agency

- City of Columbia City Plan Commission

### Budget

- Low to medium, depending on offered incentives (administrative costs, \$100,000+)

### Timeline

- Short range (1-3 years)

## Case Study: Franklin, Indiana (SR 44 / I-65 gateway corridor)

Franklin, Indiana, used a combination of gateway planning and an overlay district framework to improve the appearance and function of its primary commercial gateway along SR 44 near I-65, an area that historically developed as a typical highway interchange with auto-oriented businesses. The City commissioned plans that treated the corridor as the community’s “front door,” emphasizing coordinated streetscape, gateway features, and redevelopment strategy for the interchange area.

A key tool was Franklin’s Gateway Overlay District, which establishes corridor-specific development expectations for properties visible from the roadway, such as façade standards and other design requirements, so that redevelopment contributes to a consistent visual character rather than perpetuating piecemeal highway-strip patterns. In parallel, the City’s gateway and greenspace planning explicitly linked corridor beautification (gateway monuments, streetscape design, and planted medians) to a stronger arrival experience from I-65 toward the City and Downtown, reinforcing community identity.

Benefits to visual character and commerce were framed and documented in two ways. First, the City’s planning materials describe gateway and corridor investments as a way to create an upgraded, cohesive entrance that can help attract private development and expand the tax base over time. Second, a locally published narrative on Franklin’s SR 44 corridor describes how leadership and financing coordination helped transform the corridor into a more vibrant community gateway, reinforcing the real-world value of pairing design-focused corridor work with an economic development lens.

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 8

**Utilize the Columbia City Arts Commission to build programming focused on public art.**

### Action Items

- Identify publicly-owned lands for sites of potential installations
  - Prioritize based on ease of use and visibility
- Hold ideation sessions with the public to gauge the propensity for various types of art
  - Murals, standalone installations, galleries, pop-ups, interactive, etc.
- Engage with local artists and incorporate their skills in the ideation and in future projects
- Coordinate with the school corporation to engage young people in the process
  - Create programming that utilizes arts education classes and staff
  - Promote art created by students to increase community pride
- Use City branding to create a common visual identity in all projects
  - Doesn't need to be the focus, but should be included
- Create a rotating schedule for installations and locations to increase visibility
- Publicize art created by the community
- Host events centered around community togetherness
  - Can be in the creation of individual projects, community-wide projects, or large, singular projects

### Lead Agency

- Community Development
- Columbia City Arts Commission

### Budget

- Low (administrative costs, \$25,000+)

### Timeline

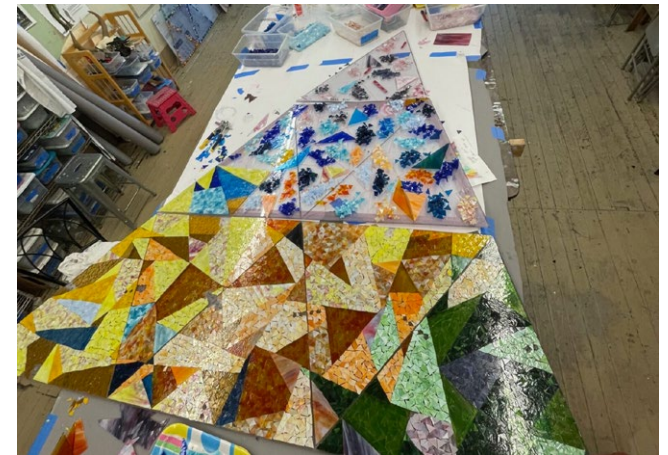
- Short range (1-3 years)

## Case Study: Warsaw, Indiana's Public Art Initiative

Rather than waiting for larger development projects, Warsaw's Public Arts Commission deliberately sought out opportunities to install visual art that would strengthen identity, build pride, and activate public spaces. The initiative grew from an initial recognition that the community lacked visible public art, especially after the City was passed over for a state placemaking grant. In response, City leaders, local artists, and volunteers began strategically installing murals and sculptures throughout Downtown and key corridors to energize and enliven the urban environment.

Effective strategies used in the Warsaw public art campaign included:

- ❑ Securing funding through local and grant sources to support public art installations and artist commissions, building credibility for future investments.
- ❑ Integrating regional artists to create works that reflect local history, character, and identity, bringing visibility to both artists and community stories.
- ❑ Placing art in strategic locations such as high-visibility corridors and gathering spaces to enhance wayfinding, celebrate culture, and encourage foot traffic.
- ❑ Engaging the community as the initiative expanded, so residents could identify with and support the installations, strengthening civic pride and ownership of public space.



Source: [Sculpture as a Spark: This Small Indiana City is Betting on Public Art](#)

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 9

**Implement the Downtown Revitalization Plan by seeking OCRA Main Street Revitalization Program funding with Columbia City Connect.**

### Action Items

- Utilize the Downtown Revitalization Plan as the primary project framework and cost forecasting tool
  - The estimated project cost should be used to calculate the appropriate grant funding request amount, required local match, and overall project scope
- Identify match funding for the project
- Procure a certified grant administrator
  - If using local funds, procure according to the City's process
  - If paying with the grant award, you must use federal procurement guidelines
- Seek public input
  - Solicit community input and collect written feedback in support of the project. Letters of support from businesses and property owners within the project area should be obtained to strengthen the grant application
- Compile clear documentation of issues occurring within the past five to ten years, including photographs, news coverage, and resident testimonials to demonstrate project need.
- Prepare all required materials, design concepts, and approvals so the project can advance quickly upon award
- Coordinate with Columbia City Connect on advertising businesses' hours during construction and, if needed, alternative entrances and online offerings while local businesses face adverse impacts during construction periods

### Lead Agency

- Community Development
- Columbia City Connect

### Budget

- Medium to high, depending on final project scope and third-party support (\$200,000+)

### Timeline

- Medium-range. Projects must be completed within 2 years of the award date

## Critical Path Strategy 10

**Support and highlight the region’s rich tourism capacity by partnering with the Whitley County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center.**

### Action Items

- ❑ Establish a formal tourism partnership agreement by signing a Memorandum of Understanding to define shared tourism goals, responsibilities, marketing coordination, and data sharing
  - Include Columbia City Connection as an informal partner
- ❑ Integrate Columbia City attractions into visitor center promotions
- ❑ Create joint tourism marketing campaigns
- ❑ Expand Downtown visitor-friendly amenities
  - Improve Downtown amenities such as public restrooms, bike racks, informational kiosks, and seating areas to enhance the visitor experience and encourage longer stays
- ❑ Adjust existing attractions based on market data and feedback from patrons
- ❑ Seek out unique and untold stories for fresh, new narratives on City history and culture
- ❑ Host joint tourism training for local businesses
- ❑ Create a “Passport to Whitley County and Columbia City” that can be distributed and stamped at local and regional businesses to increase intra-county tourism
- ❑ Collect and share visitor data and feedback between entities

### Lead Agency

- ❑ Community Development
- ❑ Whitley County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center

### Budget

- ❑ Low (administrative costs, \$10,000+)

### Timeline

- ❑ Short-term (1-3 years)

## Case Study: Visit Wabash County

In Wabash County, Indiana, the County-level tourism bureau, Visit Wabash County, has served as a lead marketing partner, promoting county assets and spotlighting the City of Wabash’s Downtown and cultural offerings. The collaboration is framed as part of a broader “quality-of-life” strategy in which tourism marketing supports not only visitor attraction but also residents as well. Local leadership describes the County’s approach as intentionally “selling the story” of Wabash, with the city’s walkable Main Street, arts venues, and local businesses serving as central featured assets.

The partnership shows up in both funding and coordinated campaigns. The City of Wabash made support for Visit Wabash County a line item in the City budget, explicitly treating tourism promotion as a shared priority rather than a siloed County function. On the marketing side, Visit Wabash County founded a quality-of-place non-profit (“Destination Wabash County”) that includes the City and other local contributors, funds projects and resources behind common promotion goals. Complementing this, Visit Wabash County updates its marketing initiatives, delivered “in partnership with Visit Wabash County,” underscoring that campaigns are treated as cross-jurisdictional projects rather than standalone ads.

What made this work (portable takeaways for a rural city and county tourism agency)

- ❑ Formal buy-in: City budget participation creates consistent support and accountability for County-led marketing.
- ❑ One brand, many channels: a county visitor bureau can market the region while still featuring the city as a “hub” experience (dining, arts, Main Street, events) in visitor itineraries.
- ❑ Partnership structure: a partner marketing and quality-of-place program makes it easier to coordinate messaging, content, and investment across the county and the city.

# CRITICAL PATH STRATEGIES.

## Critical Path Strategy 11

**Create a gateway commercial district along SR 9, between Spencer Street and East Chicago Street (East Business 30), south of Downtown.**

### Action Items

- Formally designate an overlay district boundary covering parcels along SR 9 between Spencer Street and East Chicago Street
- Educate existing businesses about overlay districts to increase buy-in and reduce potential conflicts
- Adopt overlay district design standards that create a cohesive and welcoming entrance to Columbia City
  - Standards should extend the footprint of Downtown, aligning with the design elements of Downtown buildings
- Implement enhanced landscaping and streetscape improvements
  - Continue with sidewalk improvements and Blue River Trail expansion
- Update sign regulations to improve visibility, readability, and corridor aesthetic
- Create a small grant or matching fund program for existing businesses to support façade upgrades, landscaping improvements, outdoor seating areas, and lighting enhancements consistent with gateway design standards
- Proactively recruit restaurants, specialty retail, service businesses, and hospitality-related uses that complement Downtown offerings and strengthen the corridor's role as a transition zone between highway traffic and the Downtown core

### Lead Agency

- City of Columbia City Plan Commission
- Community Development

### Budget

- Medium to high (administrative costs, \$200,000+)

### Timeline

- Long-range (5-10 years)

## Case Study: South Main Street Corridor – Lima, Ohio

The City of Lima, Ohio, prepared a detailed Overlay District proposal for the South Main Street corridor in 2007. South Main Street functions as a gateway from an industrialized area into Downtown. The Plan explicitly called for an Overlay District to encourage pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development, streetscape improvements, and the redevelopment of underutilized properties between the Ottawa River and Downtown. The overlay standards are meant to unify development patterns, support compatible building scale, reduce conflicts between cars and pedestrians, protect historic elements, and foster redevelopment consistent with the corridor's revitalization objectives.

That plan went beyond design guidance and laid out first-year outcomes tied to the proposal's adoption, including overlay zoning adoption with Planning Commission and City Council review, streetscape improvements, attracting new businesses, building improvements, and initiating mixed-use development incentives.

Even with these goals, the City made it clear that the public resources to carry out this plan were limited; therefore, few, if any, subsidies or incentives could be provided. This City leaned on private and non-profit investments to support the Plan's vision. These supports, along with voluntary adherence to the standards by building and business owners, have been crucial in improving the gateway district's visual appeal. Since the adoption of the Plan, results can be seen throughout the district: improvements to building façades, a new amphitheater, road striping and bike lanes, small-scale beautification projects, and new commercial businesses.

While Lima's population is larger than Columbia City's, the Overlay District strategy offers a real-world example of a City using overlay zoning as a policy tool to guide a corridor connecting Downtown and industrial uses toward mixed-use redevelopment. The overlay district in Lima was structured to address design, land-use conflicts, and redevelopment clarity in an area historically dominated by industrial and auto-oriented parcel patterns, a pattern conceptually similar to Columbia City's development.

**APPENDIX.**

**DRAFT**



**COLUMBIA CITY**  
**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
**EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT**

---

**SPRING 2026**



S. Chauncey St.  
W. Market St.

STOP

4-WAY

SPEED  
LIMIT  
20

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Source: What's Up Columbia City Facebook Group

The Existing Conditions Report (ECR) is a comprehensive inventory of Columbia City, Indiana's physical, economic, and social characteristics, assembled from relevant data and key topics that will later inform the Comprehensive Plan, including the Future Land Use Map and other elements. The context provided by this critical first step in the planning process will ensure that the policy recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan have a realistic basis and an informed starting point for action steps, which will decrease barriers to successful Plan implementation.

Columbia City last updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2015, revising the 2003 Comprehensive Plan. The 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update, adopted in August of that year, laid out specific goals and recommendations to enhance the quality of life, foster strategic growth, and bolster community safety and vitality. The 2026 update will build upon this foundation with a new community vision, outlining new objectives and strategies to guide the City's development for the next 10-20 years.

The updated Comprehensive Plan will guide growth, development, and land-use strategies within the City's limits. It is designed to be a living document, evolving as new challenges arise. It should be reviewed and updated annually to reflect the City's changing needs and successes. This ongoing process will help ensure that the 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update remains relevant and responsive to the community, providing a solid framework for public and private decision-making in the coming years. By following this approach, Columbia City will be able to maintain a sense of place, pride, and continued progress as it advances toward its long-term goals.

# INTRODUCTION.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

Columbia City is located in northeastern Indiana, serving as the county seat of Whitley County. It benefits from a strategic location within the Fort Wayne Metropolitan Area, just 25 miles from the City of Fort Wayne, one of Indiana's fastest-growing urban centers. The proximity to Fort Wayne makes the City attractive for businesses and residents seeking a balance between small-town living and access to larger regional opportunities.

Over the past 15 years, Columbia City has experienced substantial growth, adding nearly 1,800 residents, representing an approximate 20 percent increase in population. As part of the Fort Wayne Metro Area, the City is experiencing a demographic and economic shift, with increasing demand for housing, services, and infrastructure to support its expanding community.

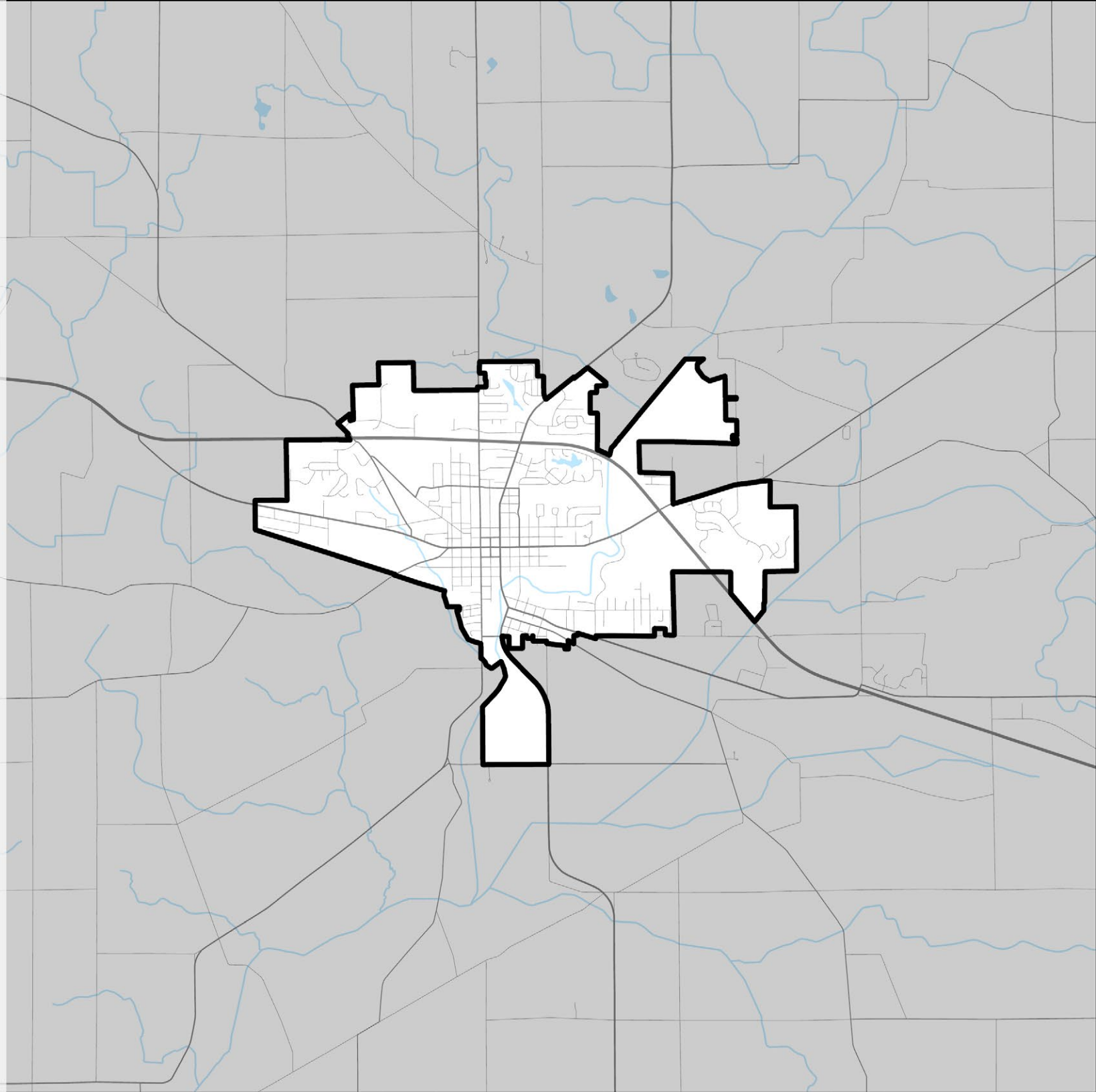
# Legend

 Columbia City



0 1mi 2mi

**Location**  
Columbia City



# PAST PLANNING EFFORTS.

## Columbia City Comprehensive Plan 2015 Update<sup>1</sup>

This document serves as a strategic, long-term guide for the City to manage growth, development, and community well-being. It outlines the existing conditions of the community, defines future goals, and proposes actionable strategies to achieve a shared vision for Columbia City's future. Since its adoption, the Plan has been a key tool for both public and private entities, helping them make informed decisions and ensuring the City's sustainable growth while fostering a strong sense of community identity and pride.

The Plan is structured around three primary focus areas: **People, Places,** and **Things.**

**People:** The Plan prioritizes creating year-round, accessible recreational opportunities for all community members, including active, passive, and social spaces. Education is a big focus in this section, aiming to enhance opportunities for K-12 and adult learners, reflecting trends in local and national workforce demands. The Plan emphasizes creating an environment where students can continue to learn in diverse traditional and nontraditional settings. Moreover, it includes efforts to provide support for underprivileged community members and foster volunteerism.

Strategies include:

- Exploring opportunities for a downtown restaurant incubator and higher education satellite campuses.
- Promoting the Blue River as a recreational asset.
- Creating a community aquatics center and other recreational facilities.
- Expanding support for local food pantries and community organizations.
- Updating the Comprehensive Plan's website and maintaining active communication platforms for ongoing community engagement.

**Places:** The Plan aims to create and maintain vibrant, diverse neighborhoods, with housing options catering to all life stages and various income levels. Connectivity throughout the City is another priority, as well as improving safety and access for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, mainly to major destinations. Additionally, strategic and intentional growth of residential, commercial, and industrial areas is emphasized to ensure sustainable and beneficial development.

Strategies include:

- Developing mixed-use housing in downtown Columbia City.
- Expanding festivals, events, and public art projects.
- Developing a comprehensive streetscape and parking plan for the downtown area.
- Creating connections between residential neighborhoods and the Blue River Trail.
- Expanding transportation infrastructure to fill gaps in pedestrian and bicycle pathways.

**Things:** The Plan supports the diversification of the local economy, encouraging the development of new industries and fostering small businesses. Additionally, there is a strong focus on sustainability, with efforts to promote green infrastructure and renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power. The Plan also highlights the importance of efficient infrastructure systems, including expanding utilities to support new growth and maintaining high-quality emergency response services.

Strategies include:

- Exploring potential locations for new industrial parks and promoting agribusiness.
- Supporting the expansion of the EDC Outpost Program for start-ups.
- Strengthening the relationship with regional partners such as the IEDC and Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership.
- Restoring and preserving historic structures in Columbia City, including Chauncey Street's historic brick road.
- Developing a Columbia City/Whitley County Tourism Department and enhancing the City's online presence.

The 2015 Columbia City Comprehensive Plan was designed to guide the City toward a future of sustainable growth, community engagement, and economic prosperity. The 2015 plan outlines a comprehensive approach to fostering a vibrant, connected, and resilient community by focusing on people, places, and things. It emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation and flexibility, allowing it to adapt to changing circumstances while staying aligned with the long-term vision for Columbia City's future.

<sup>1</sup> Source: [City of Columbia City Comprehensive Plan](#)

## Columbia City Downtown Rehabilitation Plan<sup>2</sup>

The Downtown Rehabilitation Plan is designed to provide a clear, actionable vision for revitalizing downtown Columbia City over the next five to ten years. The Plan's two main goals are to guide planning, decision-making, and development in the downtown area and to position the City to take advantage of future funding opportunities. The focus area is the city blocks surrounding the Whitley County Courthouse Square, bordered by Jefferson Street to the north, Vine Street to the south, Walnut Street to the west, and Washington Street to the east. The study area also touches the Blue River at the southeast corner.

The Plan builds upon previous planning efforts, incorporates public input, and analyzes the area's current conditions. Based on these findings, the Plan identifies four key categories, Connect, Attract, Protect, and Inform, to guide development efforts and foster a vibrant, thriving downtown.

### Goals and Strategies

**Connect:** The "Connect" category emphasizes improving connectivity within downtown and surrounding areas.

Strategies for connecting include:

- Connecting downtown to Eagle Park, the Blue River Trail, and the 4-H Grounds.
- Strengthening the link between downtown and the school campus.
- Creating pathways for teens to access the courthouse square easily.

**Attract:** This category focuses on drawing more residents, visitors, and businesses into downtown, particularly in the evening and winter months.

Strategies for attraction include:

- Generating opportunities for fine dining and expanding evening programming.
- Encouraging seasonal outdoor dining and developing indoor attractions to draw visitors year-round.
- Creating a permanent public space for casual outdoor dining and socializing.

**Protect:** The "Protect" category aims to maintain and enhance the integrity and character of downtown's buildings and streetscapes.

Strategies for protection include:

- Ensuring the enforcement of building codes and conducting a structural study of existing buildings.
- Increasing the funding available for the local façade program and seeking additional funding for structural improvements.
- Engaging an architect to develop a façade restoration guidebook and a phased streetscape master plan.

**Inform:** This category focuses on developing a strong community identity and fostering inclusive downtown development.

Strategies for informing include:

- Launching a marketing campaign to promote inclusivity and diversity.
- Creating two distinct districts, Square South and Square North, to define the character and identity of different downtown areas.
- Encouraging temporary art installations and purchasing strategic properties for redevelopment to enhance the downtown area.

The Downtown Rehabilitation Plan lays out a comprehensive framework for revitalizing the downtown area, enhancing its appeal, protecting its architectural character, and building a strong sense of community. By connecting different parts of the City, attracting more visitors and businesses, protecting the downtown's unique features, and informing the community about its growth and identity, the Plan aims to create a vibrant, sustainable downtown for the future.

2 Source: [Columbia City Downtown Revitalization Plan](#)

# PAST PLANNING EFFORTS.

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Northeastern Indiana<sup>3</sup>

Developed by the Region 3-A Regional Planning Commission with support from the Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee, this Strategy outlines clear economic growth and community development priorities. The CEDS will be a long-term economic and community development roadmap for Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, and Whitley Counties. At the same time, NIRCC serves Adams, Allen, DeKalb, and Wells Counties, which are areas served by Region 3-A. The priorities listed in this document focus on strengthening workforce development, improving infrastructure, fostering business and entrepreneurship, and enhancing the region's quality of life. The CEDS provides a framework for action by setting specific goals and objectives and identifying the necessary stakeholders, resources, and partnerships to ensure success.

One of the key purposes of the CEDS is to ensure that the region remains eligible for federal funding from the Economic Development Administration. The CEDS, prepared according to federal guidelines, helps secure investments in public works, economic adjustment, technical assistance, and short-term planning projects. It serves as a tool for immediate and long-term economic resilience and competitiveness.

**Support Workforce Development in the Region:** A skilled workforce is crucial for driving economic growth, attracting new businesses, and retaining existing industries. By enhancing workforce development, the region can meet the evolving needs of employers, improve wages, and ensure long-term prosperity. This goal emphasizes the importance of education, training, and partnerships with local industries to ensure residents are prepared for the job market.

Strategies:

- Increase post-secondary education attainment and certifications.
- Raise regional median income levels.
- Develop stronger partnerships between education institutions, industry leaders, and community stakeholders, especially in healthcare.
- Address housing needs for current and future labor forces.
- Provide early childcare and education services to increase workforce participation.

**Strengthen Infrastructure Across the Region:** Strong infrastructure is the backbone of any thriving economy. Reliable utilities, broadband access, and efficient transportation systems attract businesses, improve residents' quality of life, and boost regional competitiveness. Ensuring that the infrastructure is modern and accessible supports business expansion and improves community resilience.

Strategies:

- Obtain funding for utility infrastructure improvements.
- Ensure broadband is accessible to all residents and businesses.
- Improve transportation access and efficiency.
- Develop shovel-ready sites to attract new development.

**Support Business, Business Development, and Entrepreneurship:** Promoting business growth and entrepreneurship drives innovation, creates jobs, and strengthens the economy. A thriving business environment attracts investment and helps the region remain competitive.

Strategies:

- Grow the manufacturing base and attract new industries, especially in technology sectors.
- Offer services that support entrepreneurship, from research to marketing and product development.

**Expand Quality of Life in the Region:** A high quality of life is essential for attracting and retaining residents, skilled workers, and businesses. Investments in housing, education, healthcare, recreation, and cultural amenities create vibrant, thriving communities. When residents enjoy a strong sense of community and access to essential services, they are more likely to stay, and businesses are more likely to relocate and invest.

Strategies:

- Develop vibrant downtown areas across the region.
- Expand the regional trail network for recreation and transportation.
- Provide amenities that appeal to young professionals, such as entertainment and housing options.
- Enhance tourism opportunities to complement local business sectors.
- Focus on family-friendly initiatives and historic district rehabilitation.
- Improve access to affordable healthcare services.

# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

This section provides an overview of the current demographic landscape of Columbia City, including key trends in population growth, age distribution, race, ethnicity, and income levels. Understanding the composition of the population is critical to developing a Comprehensive Plan that meets the needs of current and future residents. Data for this analysis was sourced primarily from the US Census Bureau and the American Community Survey, which provide reliable and up-to-date insights into demographic trends.

The demographic analysis includes a breakdown of population characteristics, including age groups, racial and ethnic diversity, and income levels. These patterns are analyzed alongside historical trends to project future changes in the City's population. Comparison communities, such as Angola, Auburn, Decatur, and Warsaw, and regional and state-level data provide context for these trends and help to identify broader patterns that may impact local planning.

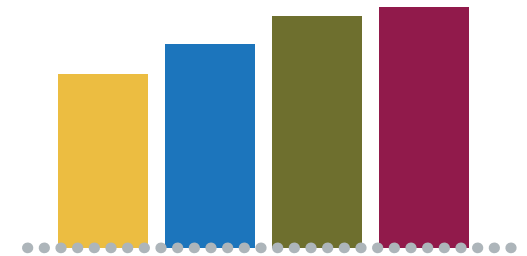
## Key data points include:

- 2024 Population Estimate: 10,104
- 2024 Median Age: 37.7 years
- 2022 Racial Composition: 92.5% White only
- 2024 Median Household Income: \$62,596

## Population

Whitley County's population in 2024 is estimated to be 34,738, reflecting an 11 percent increase since 2000. In comparison, Columbia City's population has grown more rapidly, with a 26 percent increase since 2000, bringing the 2024 population estimate to 10,104. This growth rate outpaces several nearby comparison communities, making Columbia City one of the fastest-growing municipalities in the County with 2085 new persons in the City, which is close to 61 percent of the County's new growth.

2000-2024 Total Population Comparisons



2000 Total Population  
**7,454**

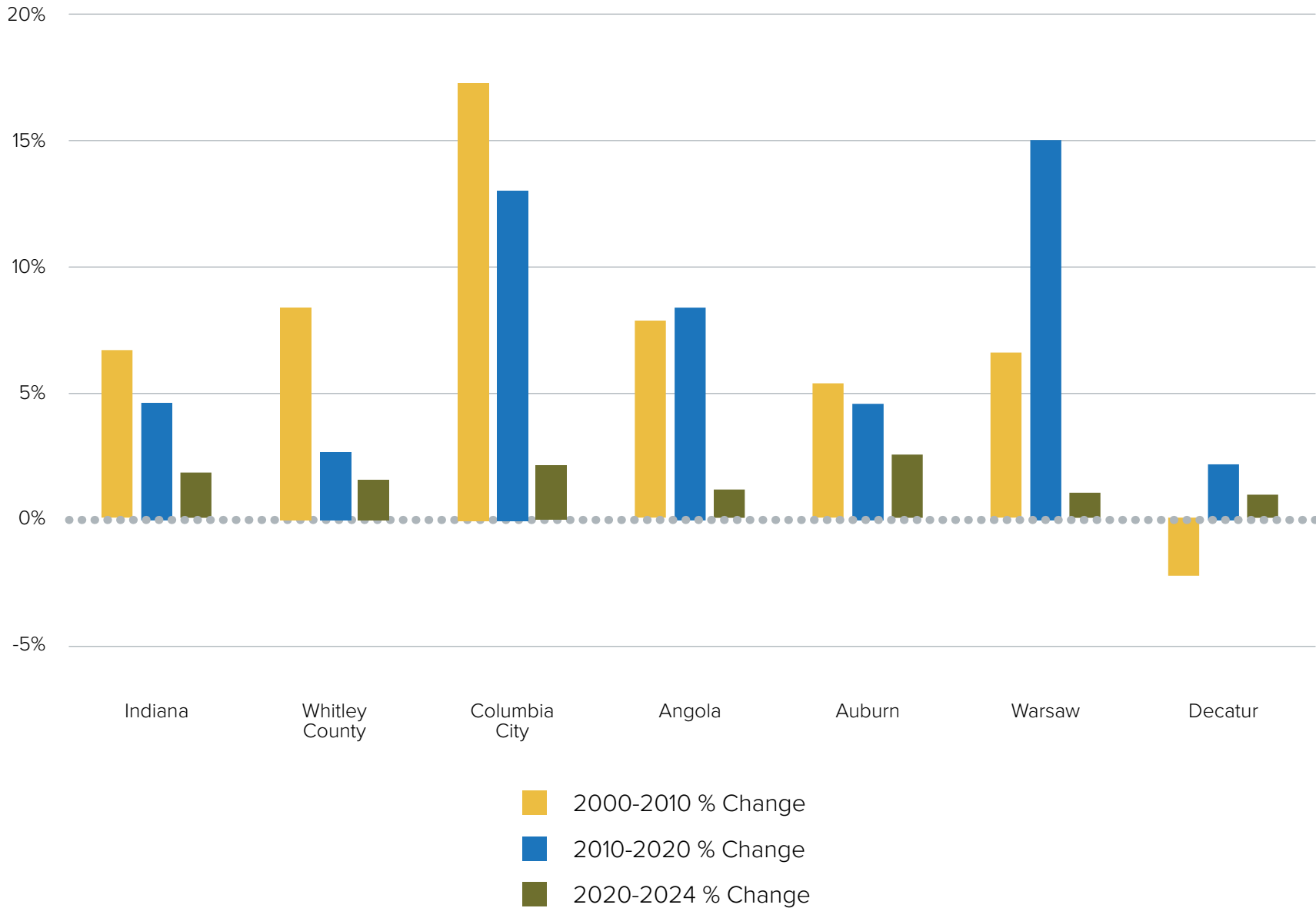
2010 Total Population  
**8,748**

2020 Total Population  
**9,892**

2024 Total Population  
**10,104**

# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

Population Percentage Changes



# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Population Projections

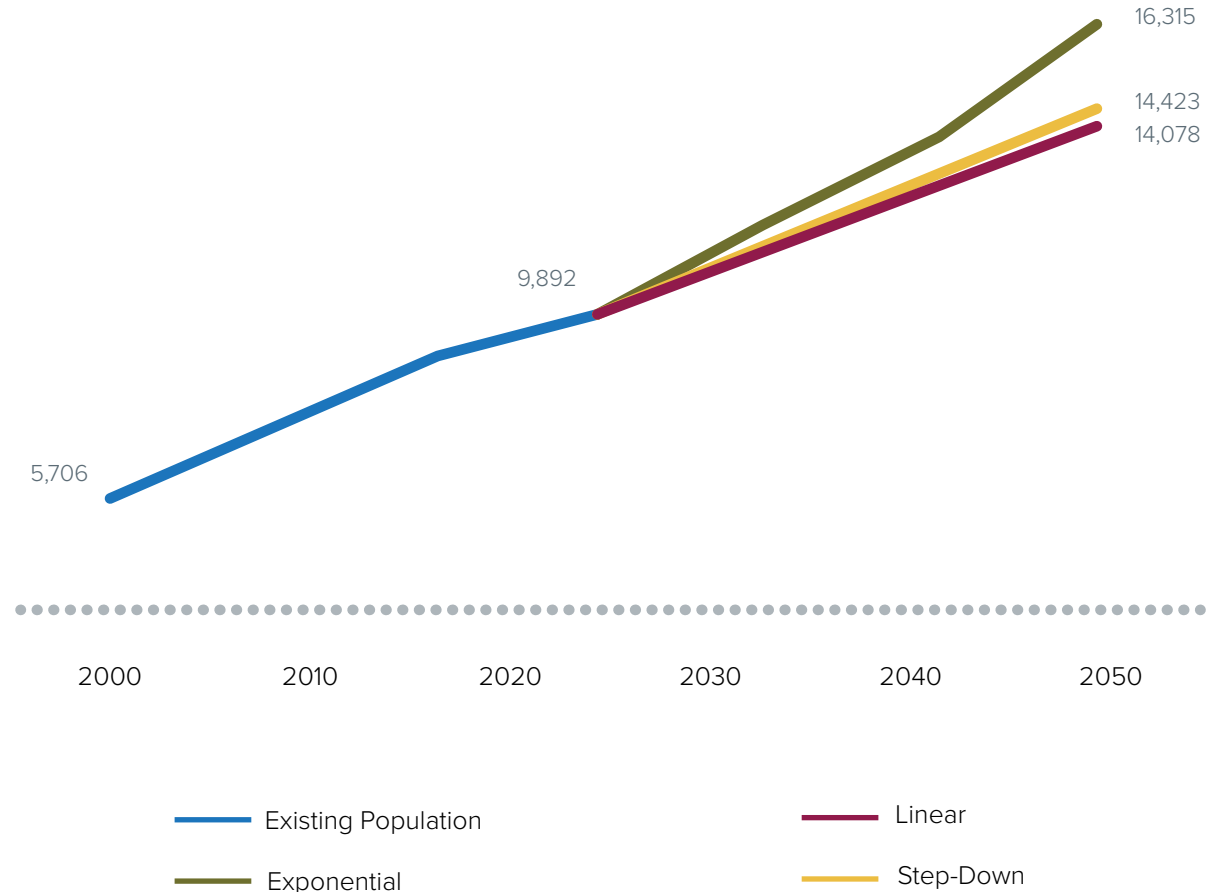
Population projections forecast what future population growth or decline may look like for a community. Columbia City has experienced steady population growth over the past several decades, which is expected to continue. Projections indicate that by 2050, the City's population could reach over 14,000, representing a growth of nearly 4,000 people from the 2020 Census.

The following three population projection scenarios have been considered to provide a range of possible future outcomes:

- 1. Linear Growth Projection (1900-2050):** This projection assumes an average annual population increase based on historical trends. Under this scenario, the population would reach approximately 14,078 by 2050.
- 2. Exponential Growth Projection (1900-2050):** This scenario assumes a faster growth rate, with a 15% increase in population each decade. By 2050, this would result in a population of approximately 16,315.
- 3. Step-Down Projection (1990-2050):** This scenario uses average annual percentage changes over the past several decades. This projection suggests a more moderate increase than methodology #2, closely matching methodology #1. Under this scenario, the population would reach 14,423 by 2050.

Given the fluctuating nature of growth trends over the last 30 years, the Plan will use the Linear Growth Projection as the 2026 Comprehensive Plan update baseline. This scenario offers a reasonable estimate of growth while accounting for potential future changes in market conditions and other influencing factors.

2000 – 2050 Population Projections

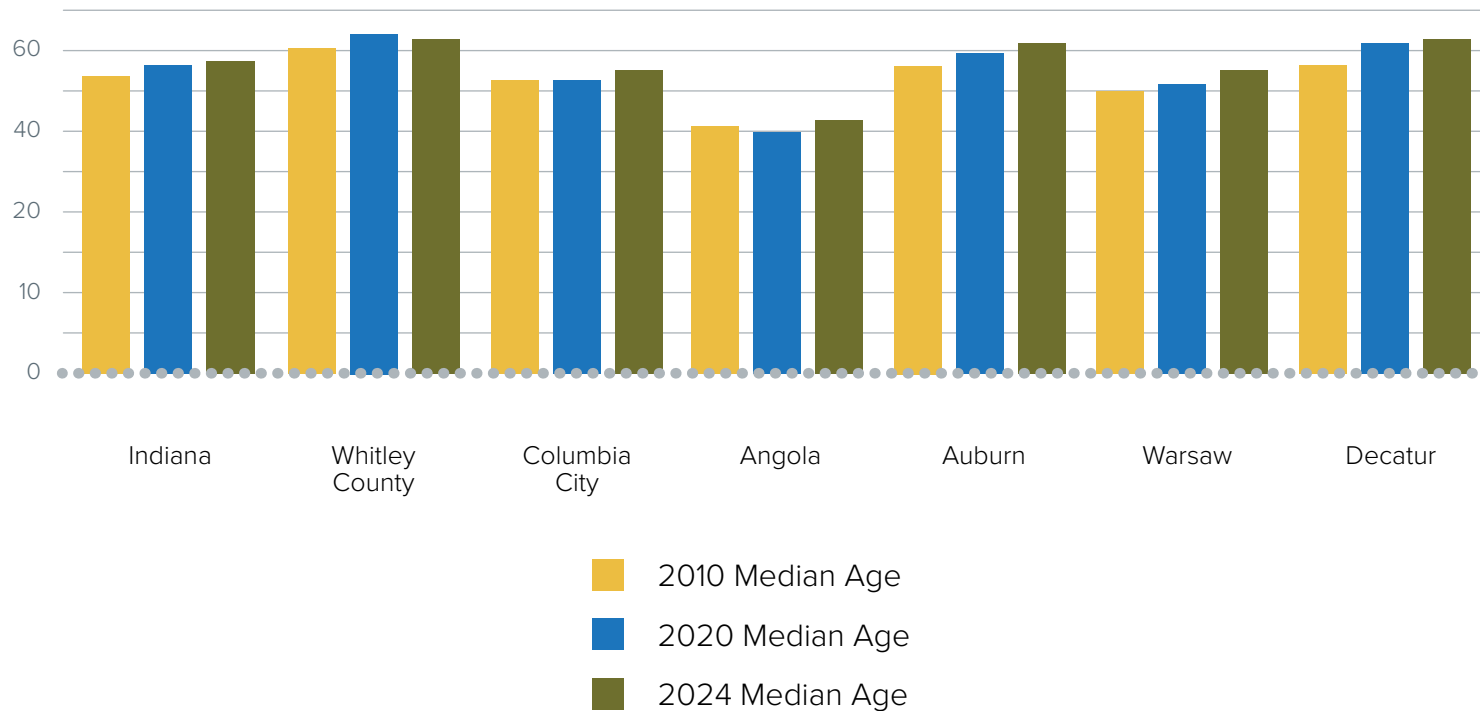


# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Median Age

Columbia City's population is aging. However, the City remains younger on average than Whitley County and other nearby comparison communities. The median age of City residents has increased gradually from 36.3 years in 2010 to 36.4 years in 2020, and the current estimate for 2024 is 37.7 years. While this represents an aging trend, it remains younger than the median age in Whitley County, which is 41.7 years. Compared to other regional communities, Columbia City's median age is also younger than Auburn at 40.6 years and slightly higher than Warsaw at 37.5 years.

2010 – 2024 Median Age



## Race and Ethnicity

Columbia City is predominantly White, with 92.5 percent of the population identifying as White alone. Other racial groups in the City include 5.7 percent identifying as two or more races, 1.0 percent as another race, 0.4 percent as Black, and 0.4 percent as American Indian and Alaska Native. The City's racial and ethnic makeup is relatively homogeneous, with minimal representation from minority groups.

- **American Indian:** Individuals with origins in the indigenous peoples of North or South America.
- **Asian:** Individuals originating in the East, Southeast, or the Indian subcontinent.
- **Black or African American:** Individuals with origins in the black racial groups of Africa.
- **Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander:** Individuals originating in Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- **White:** Individuals originating in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

*Columbia City – Race Percentages*



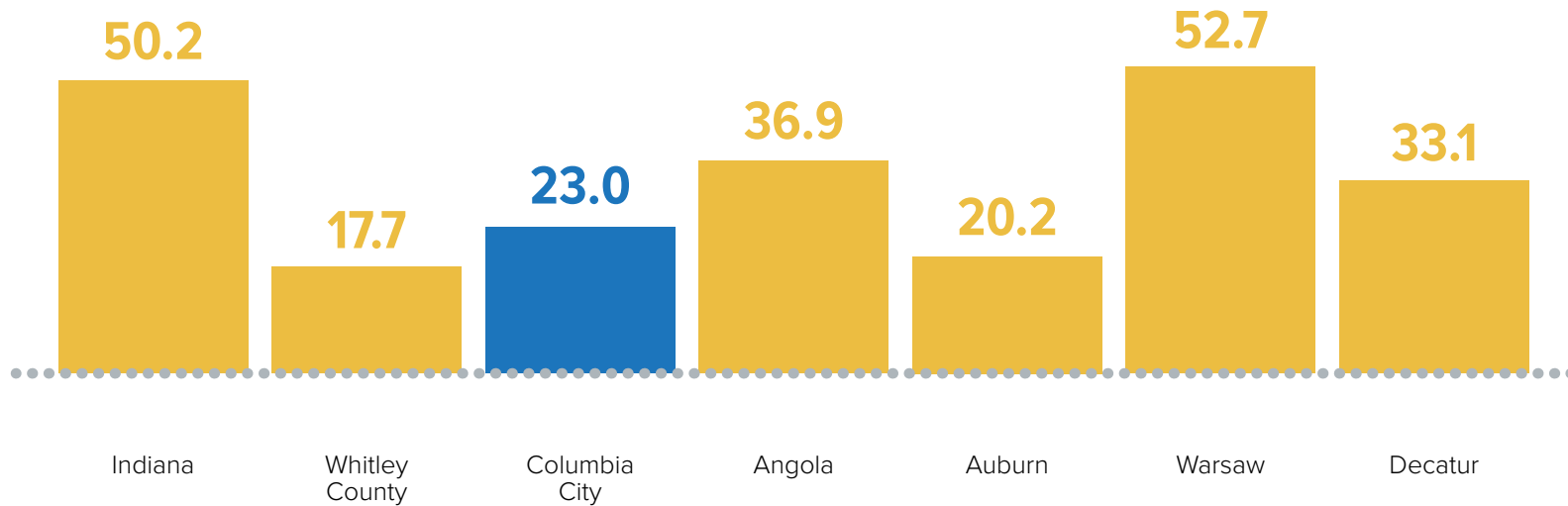
# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Diversity Index

The diversity index measures the likelihood that two chosen individuals belong to different racial or ethnic groups, indicating a relatively low level of racial and ethnic diversity in Columbia City. The City has a diversity index score of 23.0, which is lower than other comparison communities such as Angola at 36.9, Warsaw at 52.7, and Decatur at 33.1. However, the City's diversity index is slightly higher than Whitley County's, which is 17.7, and Auburn's at 20.2.

A higher diversity index indicates a more diverse community, with more opportunities for multicultural engagement and inclusion.

2024 Diversity Index

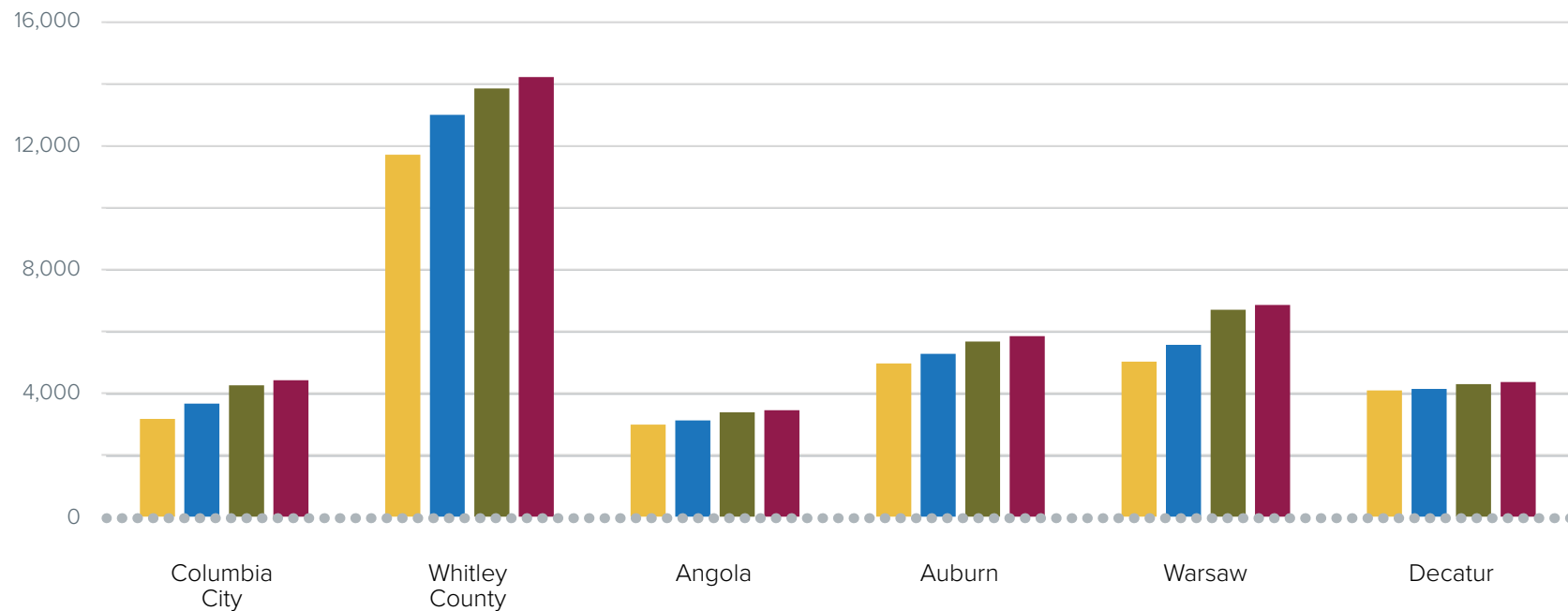


# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Households

The number of households in Columbia City has grown significantly since 2000. In 2000, the City had 3,166 households. By the 2020 Census, this number had increased to 4,250 households; as of 2024, the total number of households is estimated at 4,414. This household growth mirrors population growth and reflects the demand for new housing to accommodate the expanding population.

*Total Households*



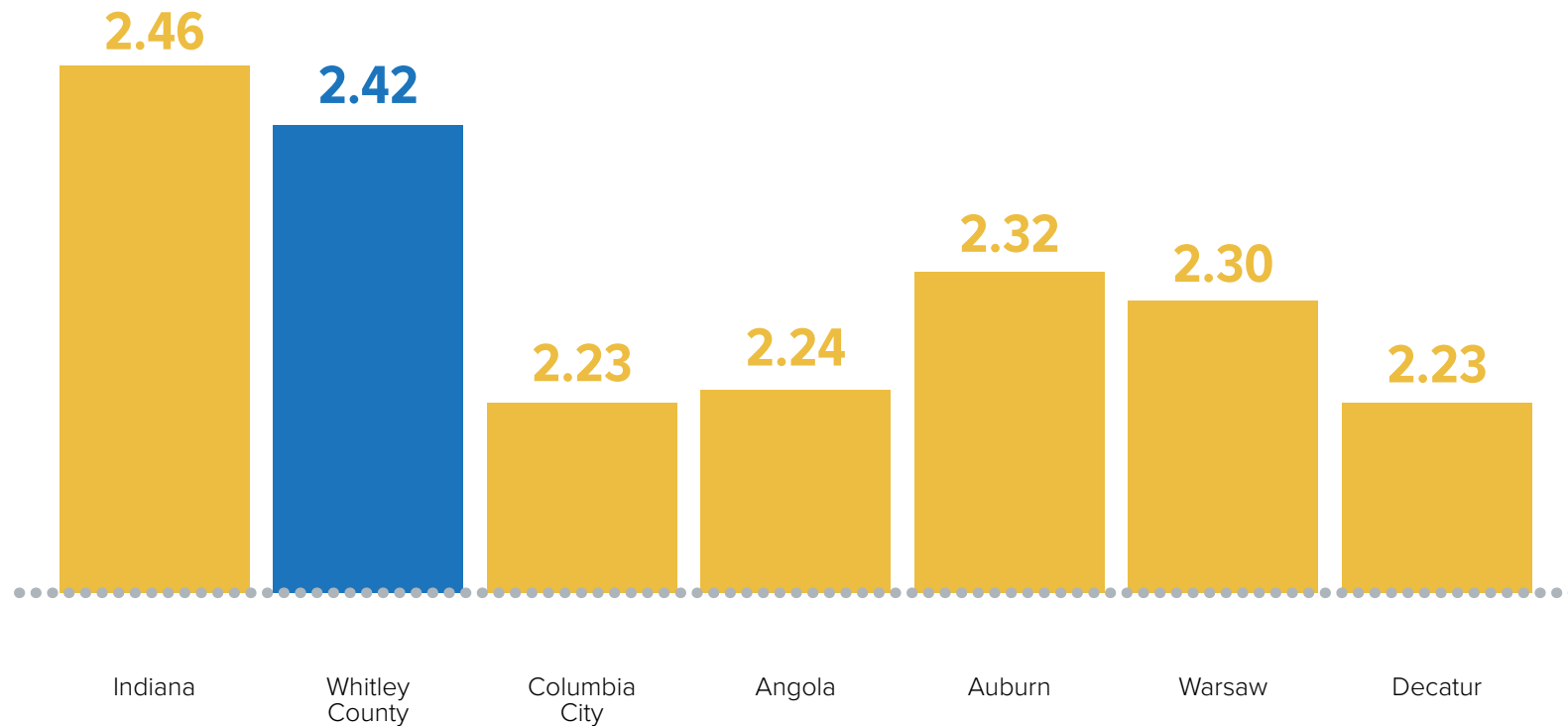
- 2000 Total Households
- 2010 Total Households
- 2020 Total Households
- 2024 Total Households

# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Average Household Size

The average household size in Columbia City is 2.2 people, consistent with the regional trend. This number is lower than the average household size in Whitley County and Indiana, where the average tends to be slightly higher. The number of people per household is important to determining housing needs; with a smaller household size, Columbia City will require more housing units to accommodate future growth.

2020 Average Household Size

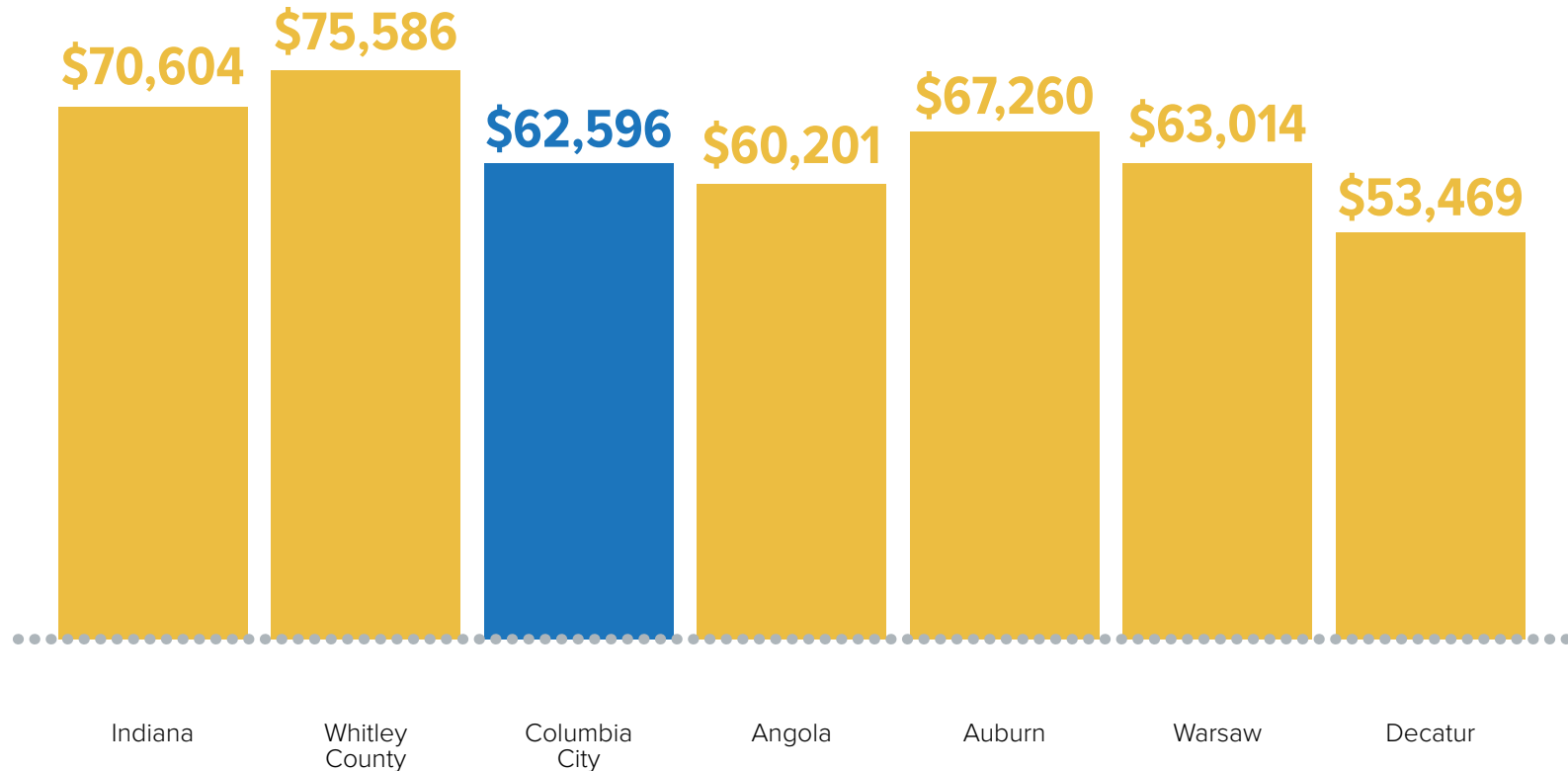


# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Median Household Income

Columbia City has seen an increase in median household income over the past few years. In 2020, the median household income was \$48,690; by 2024, it had increased to \$62,596. The 2024 income is above the median household income of several comparison communities, such as Angola at \$60,201 and Decatur at \$53,469, but still below that of nearby cities like Warsaw at \$63,014 and Auburn at \$67,260. Whitley County and the State of Indiana also report higher median household incomes than Columbia City.

2024 Median Household Income

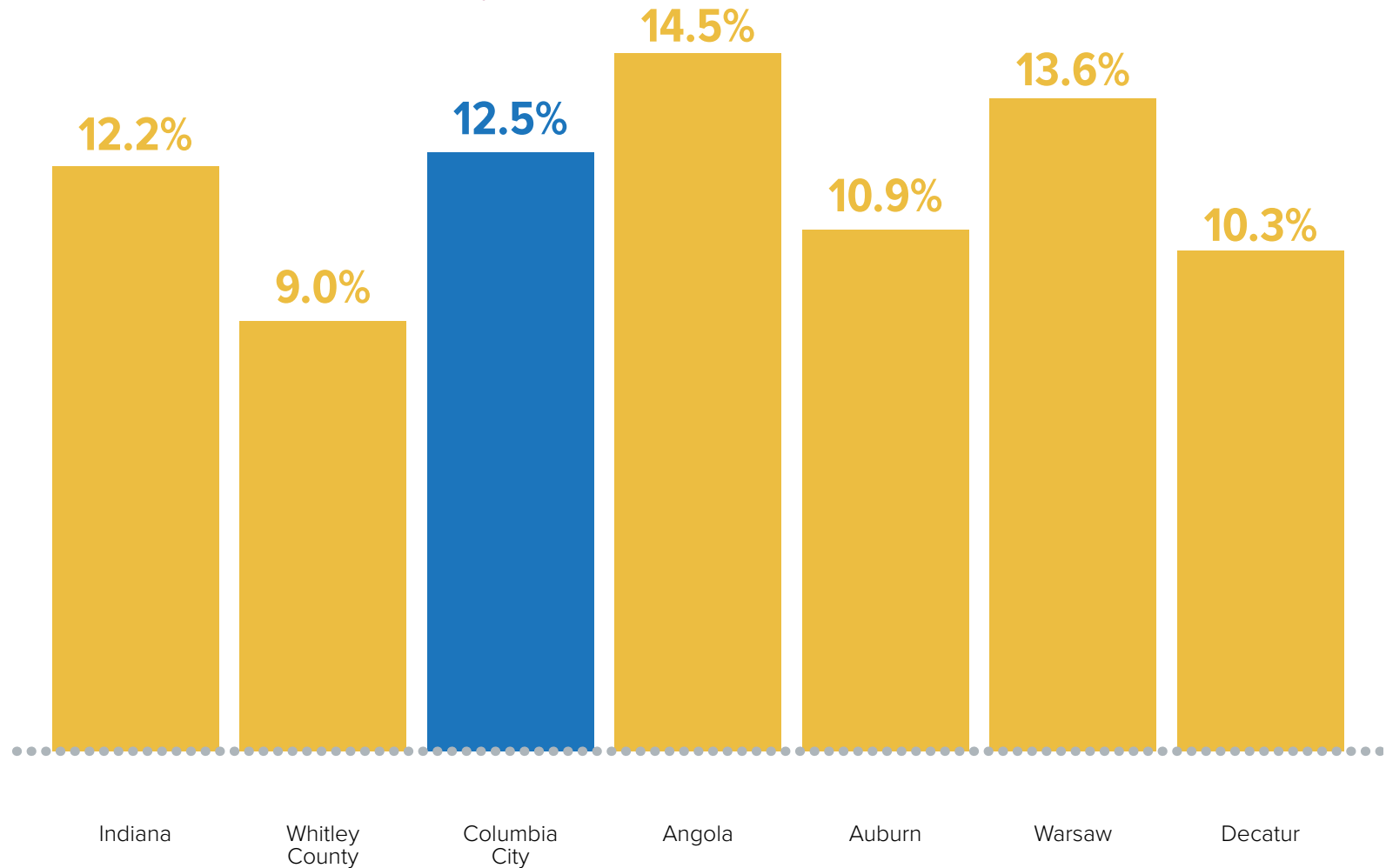


# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.

## Poverty

Approximately 12.5 percent of Columbia City's households live below the poverty line, which aligns closely with the poverty rate for the state of Indiana and most of the comparison communities. However, Whitley County has a lower poverty rate of 9.0 percent, which may indicate better economic conditions in the County's rural areas than in urbanized areas like Columbia City.

*2022 Rate of Household Income Below Poverty Level*







20  
ANNIVERSARY  
YEARS  
2005 2025

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## Employment

Columbia City's diverse economy has several key industries driving local employment. The largest sector is healthcare and social assistance, which employs 17.6 percent of the workforce. This sector is anchored by major employers like Parkview Whitley Hospital, providing vital healthcare services to the community.

Educational services come in second, employing 14.7 percent of the local workforce, primarily through institutions such as Whitley County Consolidated Schools, which plays a significant role in the local economy. Retail trade is also a prominent employer, accounting for 12.3 percent of jobs in the City, driven by retail giants like the Walmart Supercenter.

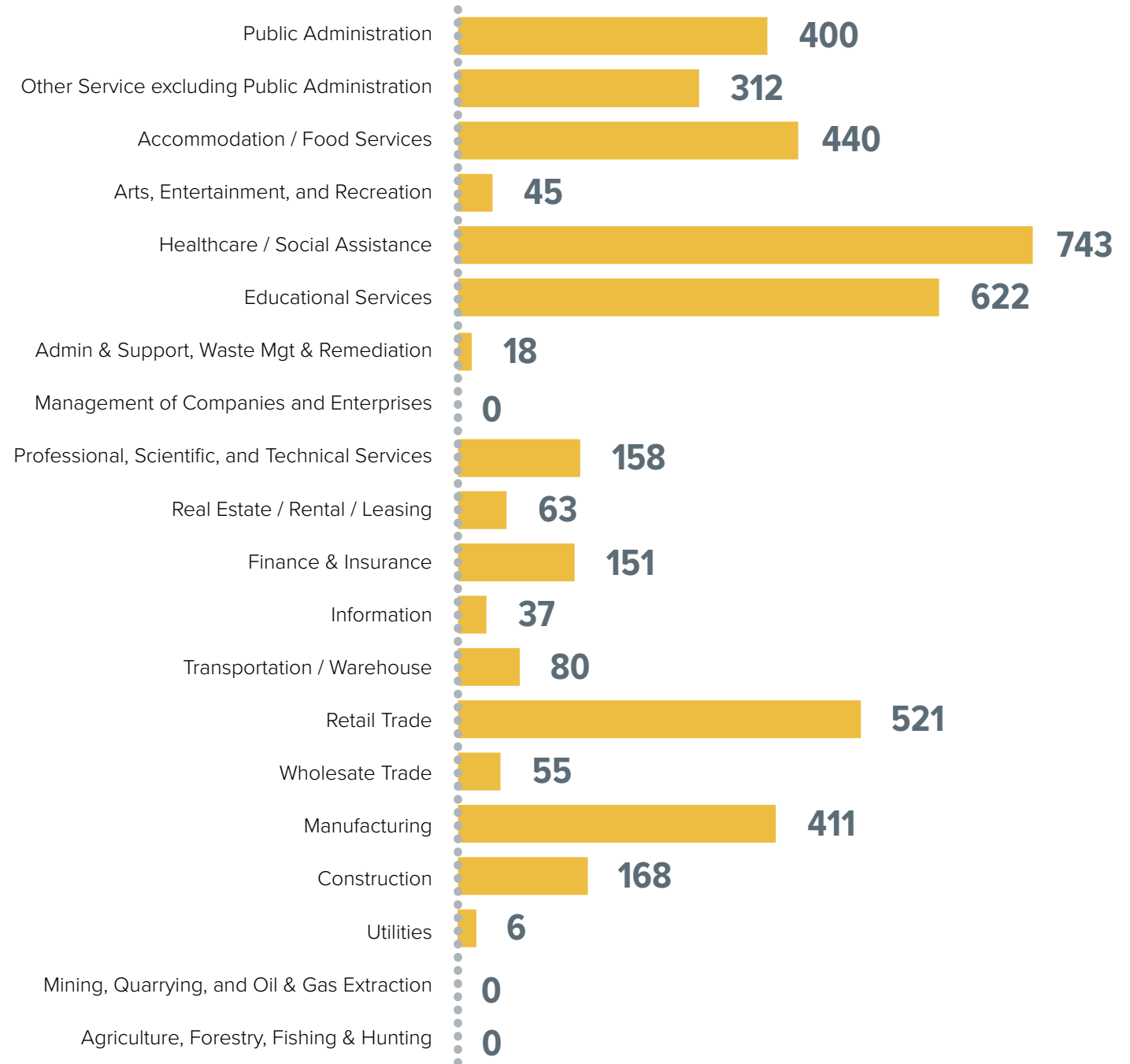
### Major Employers for Whitley County/Columbia City:<sup>4</sup>

1. Steel Dynamics Sales North America
2. Steel Dynamics Structural-Rail
3. Undersea Sensor Systems Inc
4. Walmart Supercenter
5. 80/20 Llc
6. Parkview Whitley Hospital
7. Impact CNC
8. Micropulse Inc

<sup>4</sup> Source: [Major Employers: Hoosiers by the Numbers](#)

# ECONOMY.

## 2022 Jobs in Columbia City

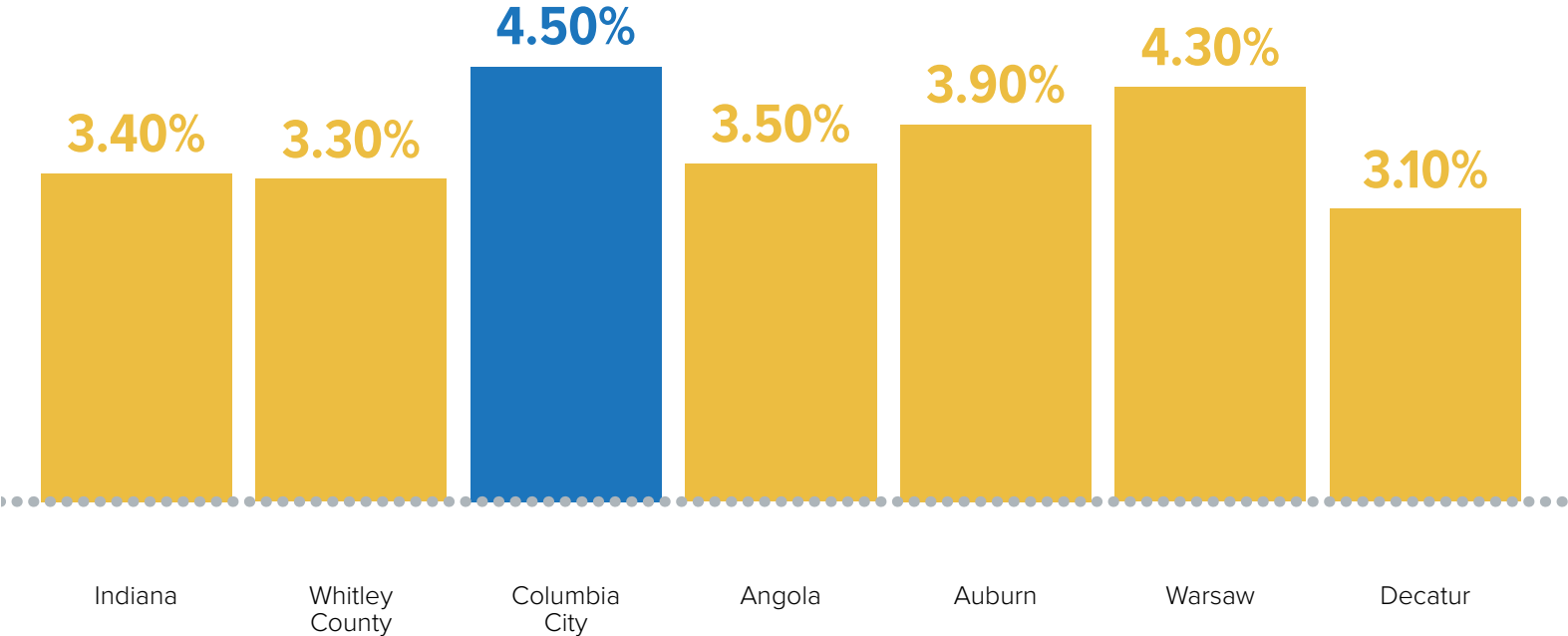


**These employers contribute significantly to the City's economy, providing job opportunities across various sectors, including healthcare, education, retail, manufacturing, and technology.**

## Unemployment

The unemployment rate is an essential indicator of the local economy's health. As of 2024, Columbia City's unemployment rate stands at 4.5 percent, slightly higher than the state average and in some nearby communities. For comparison, Warsaw has a rate of 4.3 percent, while Whitley County has a notably lower rate of 3.3 percent. Other comparison cities, such as Angola and Decatur, report unemployment rates of 3.5 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively, indicating a relatively strong local labor market in these areas. The higher unemployment rate in Columbia City may reflect challenges specific to the City, such as seasonal employment fluctuations or structural shifts in key industries.

2024 Unemployment Rate



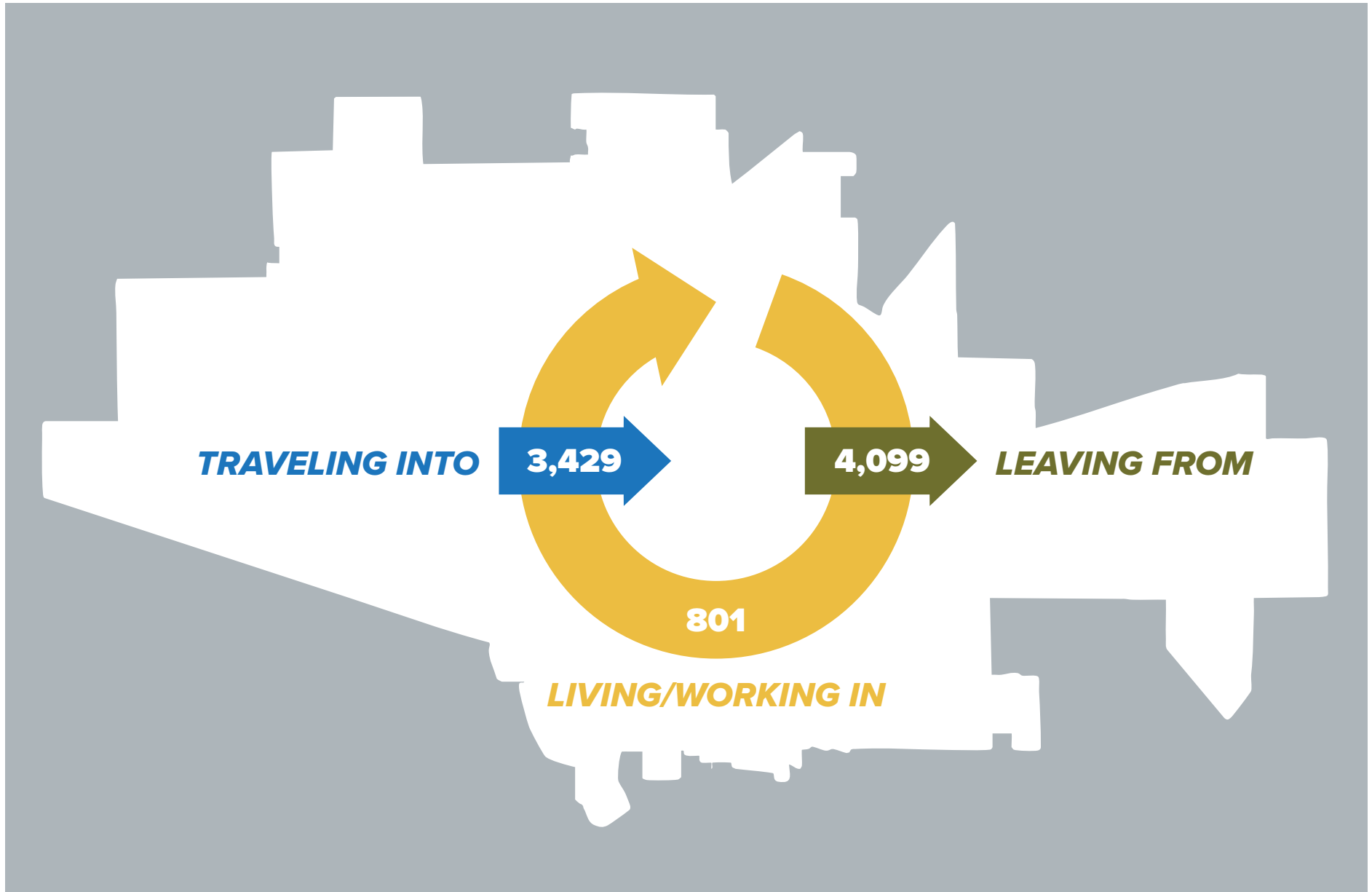
## Commuter Behavior

Analyzing commuter behavior is important for planning transportation infrastructure and addressing the mobility needs of residents and workers. The City experiences significant commuter traffic, both into and out of the City. On an average weekday, 3,429 commuters travel to Columbia City for work. At the same time, 4,099 residents leave the City to work elsewhere. Additionally, 801 residents both live and work within the city limits.

About 83.7 percent of Columbia City residents commute to other cities for employment. The most common destinations include Fort Wayne at 25.4 percent of commuters, Warsaw City at 6.1 percent, Indianapolis at 3.3 percent, and Huntington at 0.4 percent. This pattern underscores the importance of the City's access to major regional transportation corridors, particularly for those working in Fort Wayne, a regional economic hub.

Conversely, 81.1 percent of individuals employed in Columbia City commute from outside the City, with the largest group coming from Fort Wayne at 11.0 percent of commuters. Other significant sources of workers include Tri-Lakes CDP at 1.7 percent, Huntington at 1.5 percent, and South Whitley at 1.3 percent. This commuting trend highlights the City's role as an employment center, attracting workers from surrounding areas.

*Commuter Behavior*



Source: [OnTheMap](#)



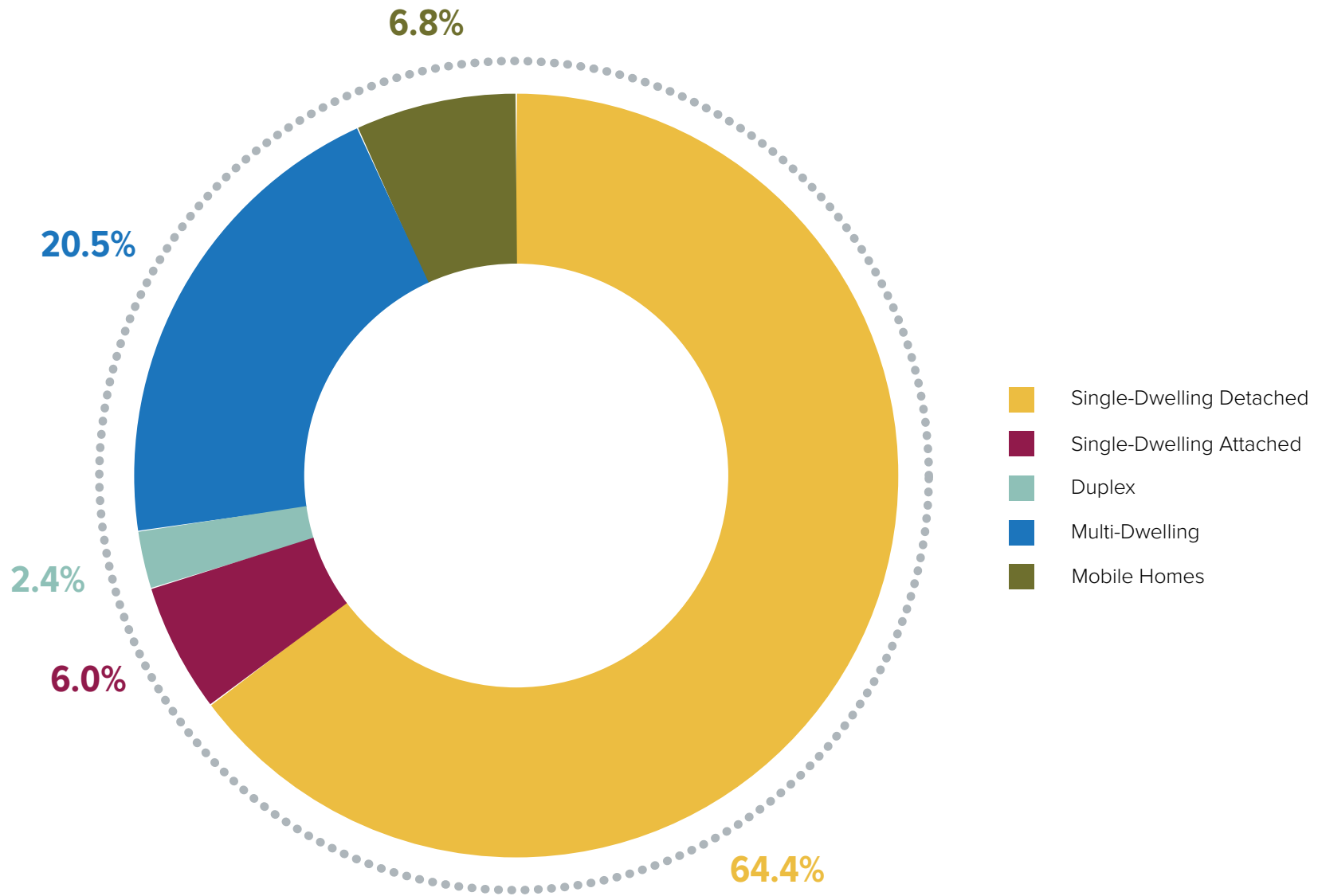
## Housing Types

Columbia City boasts a variety of housing types, providing options for diverse preferences and family structures.

- 1. Single-Dwelling Detached Units:** The most common type of housing in the City, these units accounted for 64.4 percent of all housing units in 2022. These detached homes are typically one-family residences on individual lots, providing ample space and privacy for homeowners.
- 2. Single-Dwelling Attached Units:** This housing category includes townhomes, where individual units share one or more walls. These units make up 6.0 percent of the housing stock in Columbia City and offer a balance between the space of a detached home and the affordability of multi-family living.
- 3. Duplexes:** Representing 2.4 percent of all housing units in the City, duplexes are designed to house two families, often with separate entrances. This type of housing is particularly suited for multi-generational families or those seeking more affordable housing options.
- 4. Multi-Dwelling Units:** Multi-family housing, such as apartment buildings or units with multiple shared walls, accounted for 20.5 percent of the total housing units in the City in 2022. These units cater to various households, including those looking for rental properties or more compact living arrangements.
- 5. Mobile Homes:** Mobile homes comprise 6.8 percent of the City's housing stock. They provide affordable housing options for many residents and contribute to the diversity of housing types available in the City.

# HOUSING.

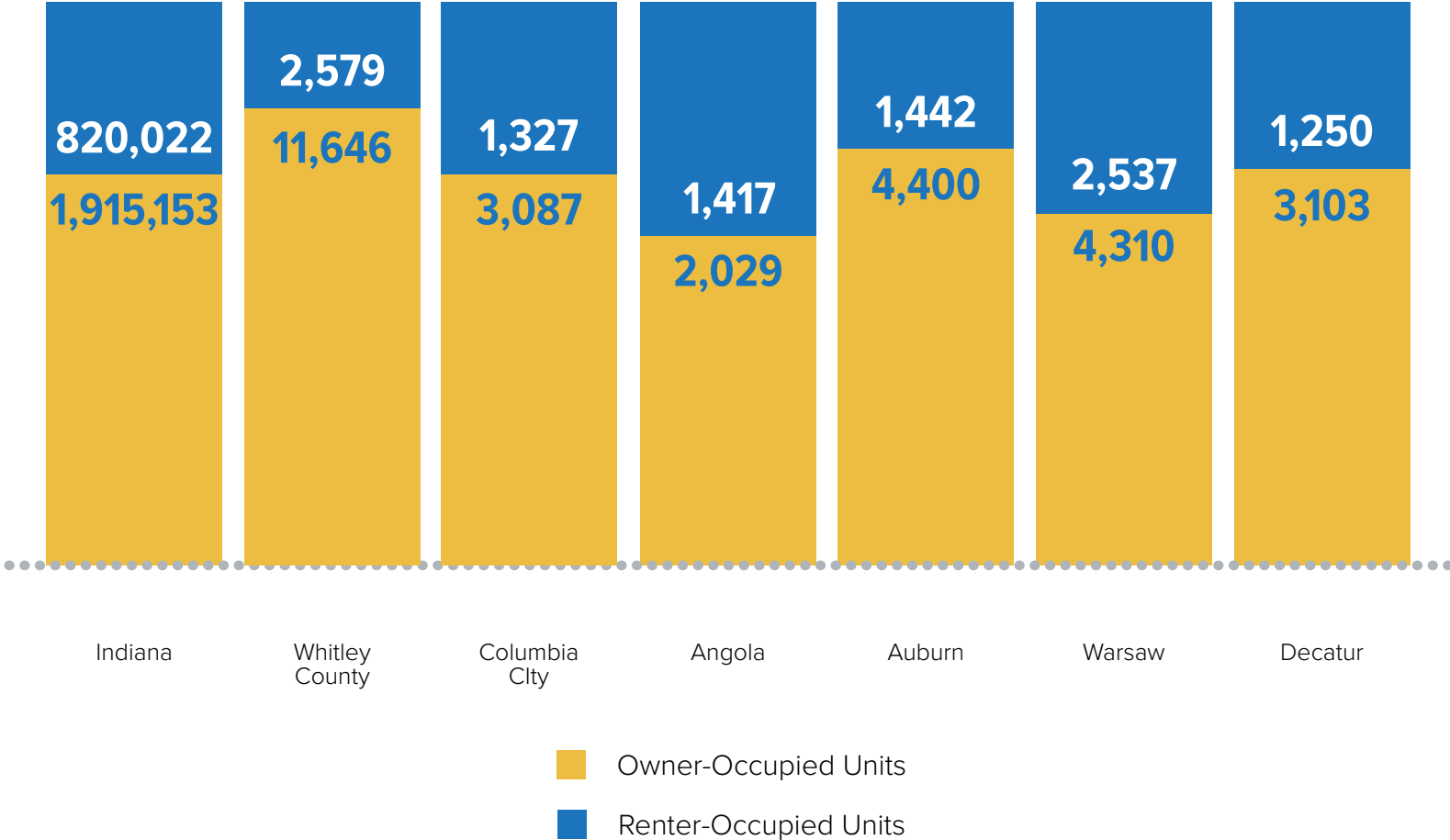
Columbia City – 2022 Housing Types



## Occupancy

Regarding occupancy, Columbia City exhibits a relatively high level of homeownership compared to the rental market. Approximately 70 percent of homes in the City are owner-occupied, while the remaining 30 percent are rental properties. This owner-occupancy rate is relatively consistent with national trends. However, it is somewhat lower than in some surrounding communities like Auburn, with 4,400 units, and Warsaw, with 4,310 units, with higher owner-occupancy rates. The relatively high percentage of rental housing may indicate a greater demand for rental properties, potentially due to younger or more transient residents.

*Columbia City – 2024 Housing Occupancy*



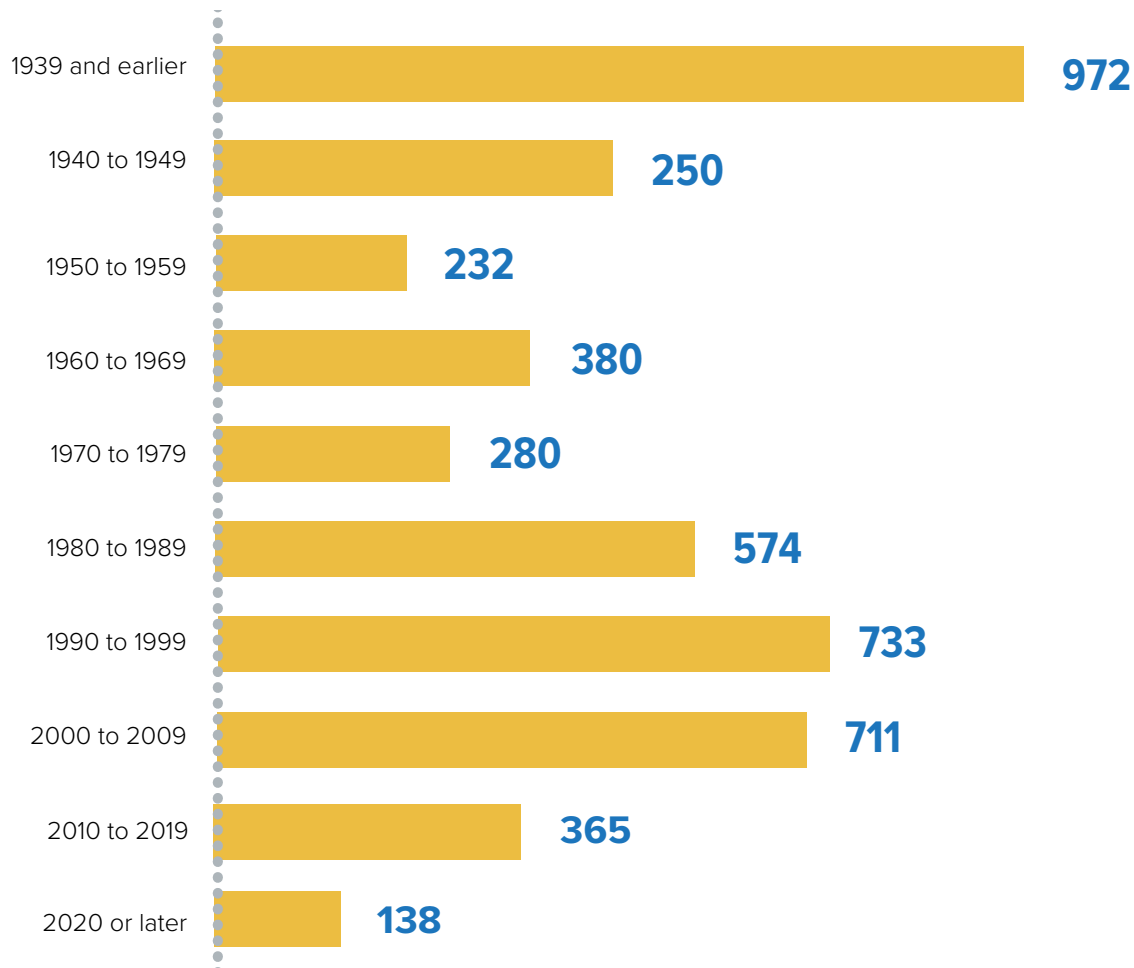
# HOUSING.

## Age and Value

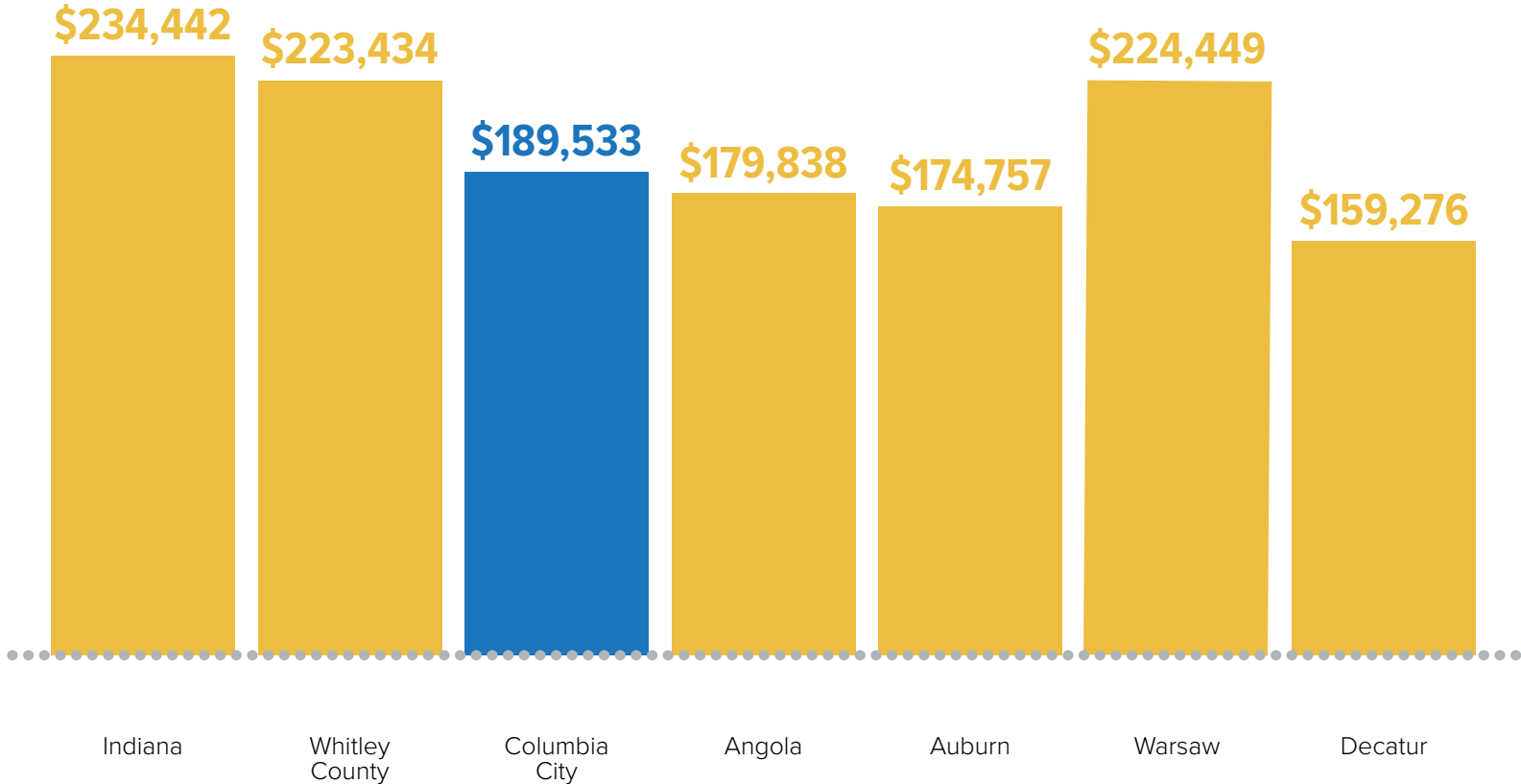
Since 2000, Columbia City has seen significant growth in its housing stock. Between 2000 and 2020, the City added 1,076 new housing units, representing a notable increase in the available housing inventory. This growth outpaces similar communities like Decatur at 423 units, Auburn at 838 units, and Angola at 997 units. This expansion suggests that the City has responded to population growth by increasing its housing supply to accommodate new residents.

The median home value in Columbia City has experienced an increasing trend in recent years. In 2022, the median value of a home was \$157,300. However, by 2024, it had increased to \$189,533, reflecting both market demand and improvements in the local housing market. Compared to other nearby communities, the Columbia City's median home value is higher than Angola at \$179,838, Auburn at \$174,757, and Decatur at \$159,276, suggesting that real estate in Columbia City has become more valuable relative to these cities

*Columbia City – 2022 Housing Year Built*



Columbia City – 2024 Median Home Value





Diabetes  
Management

**BH** BOWEN  
HEALTH  
COLUMBIA CITY

**BH** BOWEN HEALTH

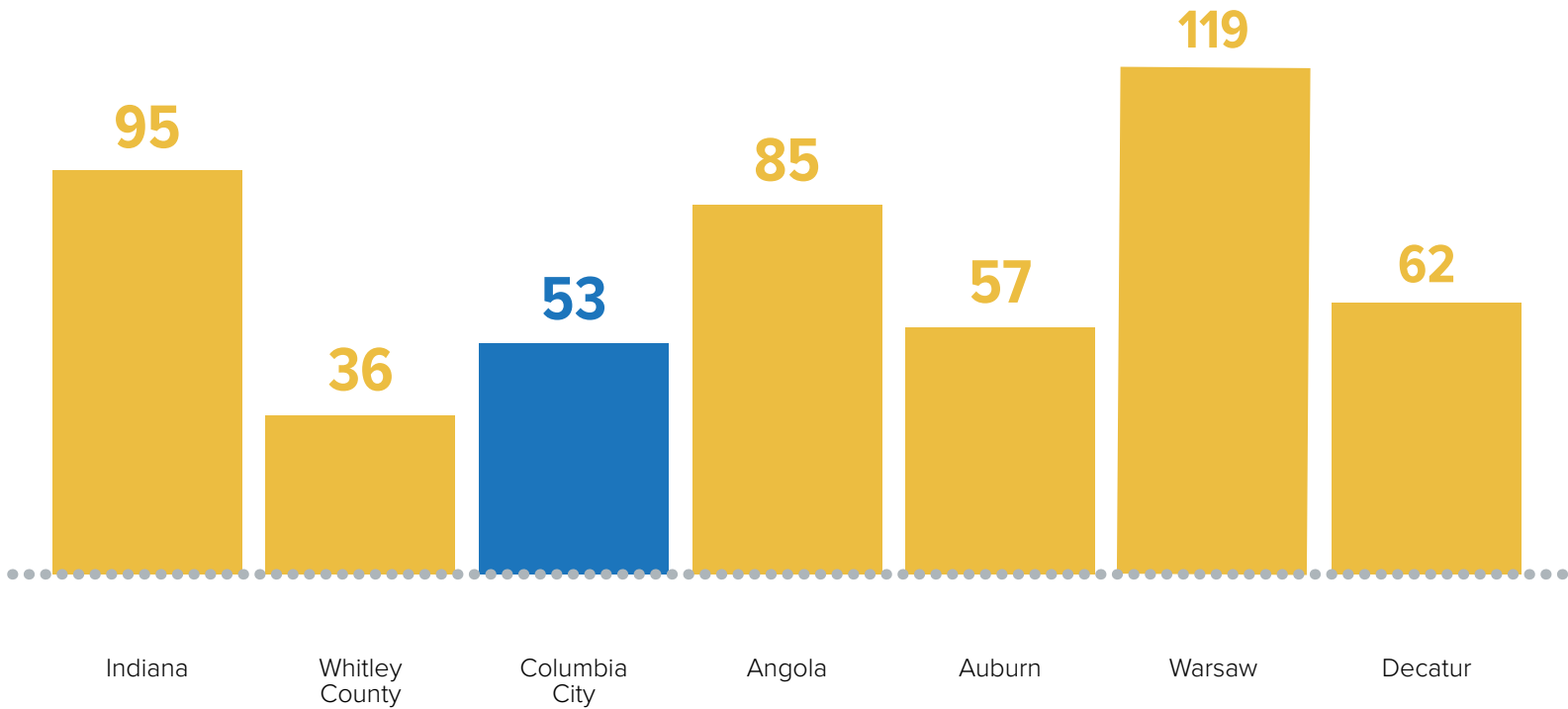
## Crime Index

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

Columbia City's Total Crime Index is 53, significantly lower than the national average and lower than most of its comparison cities. The findings indicate that the crime rate in the City is considerably below the average for the US and the comparison communities, suggesting that the City is a relatively safe community.

# SAFETY AND CRIME.

*Columbia City – 2024 Total Crime Index*







CHROMASOURCE  
WAREHOUSE

## Retail Gap Analysis

A retail gap analysis was conducted for the City. The map below illustrates the three trade areas calculated via drive times from the center of Columbia City. A retail gap analysis demonstrates current sales and revenue generated locally and how much money “should” be spent based on the local population’s disposable income.


### A retail gap analysis helps to:

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

### “Leakage” and “surplus” are the two categories used in a retail gap analysis.


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


# Legend

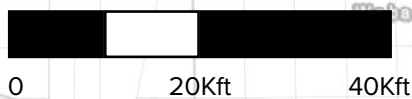
 Columbia City

## Drive Time

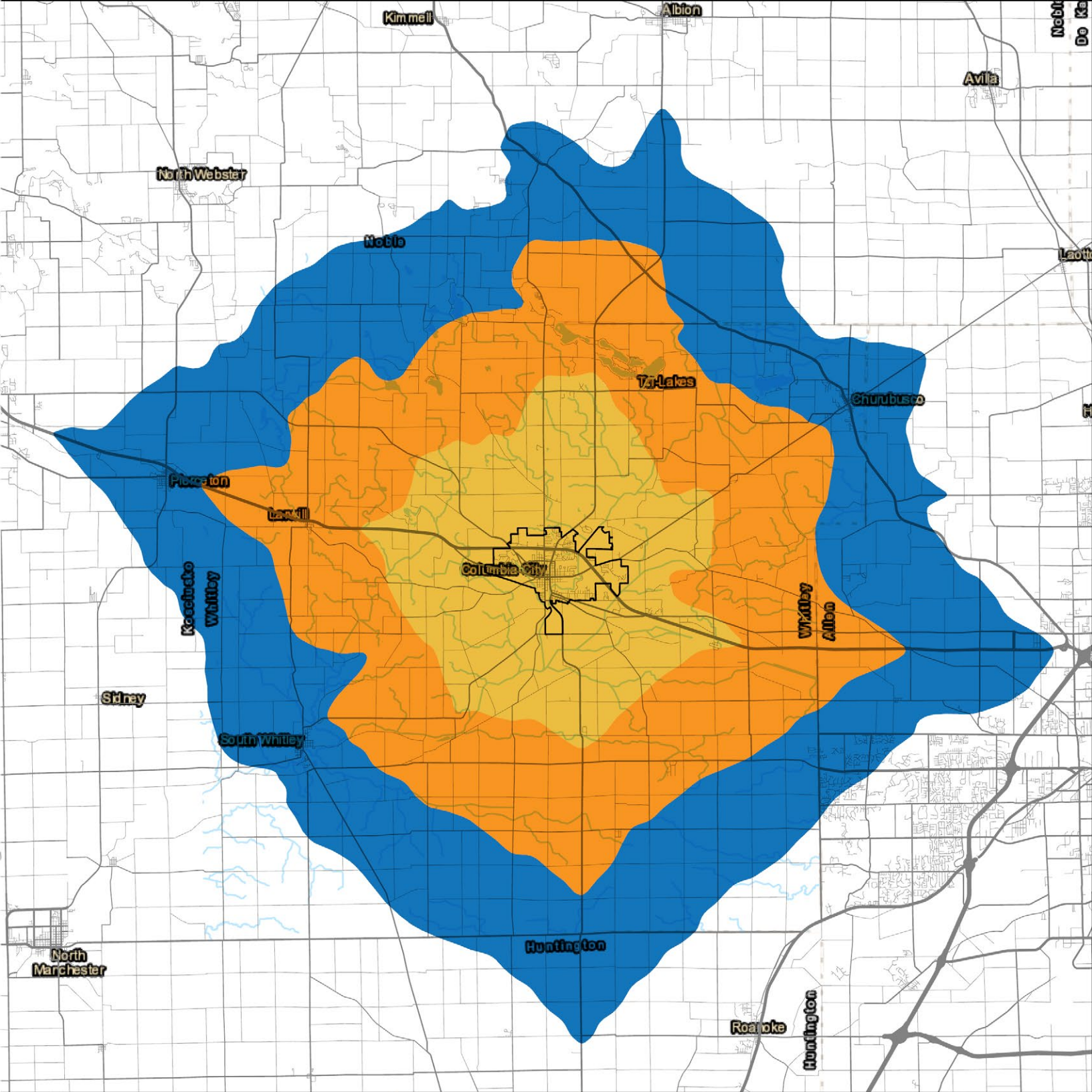
 10 Minutes

 15 Minutes

 20 Minutes



# Retail Gap Trade Areas Columbia City



# ECONOMIC AND MARKET ANALYSIS.

## Trade Areas

For this analysis, three distinct trade areas were defined based on varying drive times from the center of Columbia City. These areas are crucial for understanding the geographic reach of local retailers and consumer behavior:

**10-Minute Drive Time:** This trade area covers the City and the immediate surrounding areas.

**15-Minute Drive Time:** This area includes Larwill and Tri-Lakes, expanding the geographic reach further from the city center.

**20-Minute Drive Time:** This area extends to South Whitley, encompasses most of Whitley County, and includes neighboring areas like Pierceton and Churubusco.

## 10-Minute Drive Time Trade Area

Within the 10-minute drive time trade area, several retail categories show significant **leakage**, indicating high unmet demand for specific services:

- Motor vehicle and parts dealers
- Clothing and clothing accessories stores
- Non-store retailers (such as e-commerce and direct-to-consumer services)
- Furniture and home furnishing stores

These categories exhibit a higher demand than what is currently being met within the trade area, suggesting that consumers travel beyond the area to make these purchases.

Conversely, there is a surplus in the following retail categories, meaning more money is being spent in these areas than the local population's disposable income would support:

- Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers
- Food and beverage stores
- General merchandise stores

The surplus in these areas could indicate either saturation of businesses in these sectors or the attraction of shoppers from outside the local trade area.

# ECONOMIC AND MARKET ANALYSIS.

## 15-Minute Drive Time Trade Area

Expanding the analysis to the 15-minute drive time trade area reveals new insights. Retail categories with **leakage** include:

- Non-store retailers
- Food services and drinking places (restaurants, bars, etc.)
- Clothing and clothing accessories stores
- Furniture and home furnishing stores

Covering more of the surrounding area, including Larwill and Tri-Lakes, shows that demand for dining options and retail stores has outpaced local supply, particularly in the restaurant and drinking places sector. While the 10-minute drive time was sufficient for meeting the needs of residents within Columbia City, the expanded area demonstrates an increased demand for these services further from the city center.

As the trade area expands, previously surplus categories such as motor vehicle and parts dealers, building materials and garden equipment, and general merchandise stores show leakage, indicating that residents in the 15-minute drive time area are spending money outside the region for these retail needs.

## 20-Minute Drive Time Trade Area

When further expanding the analysis to the 20-minute drive time trade area, which includes areas like South Whitley and portions of neighboring counties, the majority of retail categories show **leakage**, including:

- Motor vehicle and parts dealers
- Food and beverage stores
- Health and personal care stores
- Clothing and clothing accessories stores
- Non-store retailers
- Food services and drinking places

The most significant leakage in this expanded area involves the total retail trade category, particularly food and beverage stores. The leakage signals a substantial gap in the local market's ability to support the spending needs of residents, and there may be opportunities for new retailers, especially in the food and beverage sector.

## Key Takeaways for Columbia City:

- There is a clear opportunity to attract more retail businesses, particularly in categories showing leakage, such as motor vehicle parts, clothing, non-store retailers, and food services. Expanding options in these areas could capture local disposable income outside the city and county.



- The need for more retail options becomes evident as the trade area expands. Areas further from the city center, especially those within the 15- and 20-minute drive zones, reflected significant gaps in various retail categories. These areas represent potential growth opportunities for businesses looking to expand.

# ECONOMIC AND MARKET ANALYSIS.

## How to Interpret a Retail Gap Analysis?

A Retail Gap Analysis has common traits with Accounting Sheet Interpretation, where credit and debit are converted to a conventional meaning. The black numbers in the chart represent a leakage or loss of dollars spent in trade areas outside Columbia City. Similar to accounting, the red numbers with minus signs represent a surplus of dollars being spent in the city's drive-time trade areas.

Retail Category	10-Minute Drive Trade Area	15-Minute Drive Trade Area	20-Minute Drive Trade Area
<b>Total Retail Trade, including Food and Drink</b>	-48,085,262	37,905,490	308,314,240
<b>Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers</b>	20,547,082	-15,214,493	54,386,390
<b>Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores</b>	3,481,830	6,300,614	13,494,462
<b>Electronics and Appliance Stores</b>	-1,751,889	375,947	5,728,076
<b>Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers</b>	-20,545,480	-14,076,033	6,024,854
<b>Food and Beverage Stores</b>	-14,126,572	4,748,495	34,048,966
<b>Health and Personal Care Stores</b>	-6,431,530	4,649,797	30,137,791
<b>Gasoline Stations</b>	-12,364,953	-2,930,041	9,692,431
<b>Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores</b>	9,917,409	16,953,456	34,932,715
<b>Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, and Book Stores</b>	-1,235,302	812,292	5,598,356
<b>General Merchandise Stores</b>	-28,632,739	-9,994,876	-35,445,024
<b>Miscellaneous Store Retailers</b>	-2,514,417	-1,570,732	-13,075,203
<b>Non-store Retailers</b>	5,862,784	26,769,652	91,535,427
<b>Food Services and Drinking Places</b>	-291,485	21,081,410	71,254,998



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# EXISTING LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT.

## Existing Land Use

Columbia City's current land uses reflect a balanced mix of development types, with residential areas comprising the predominant land use category. Residential uses account for approximately 32 percent of the total land area, highlighting the City's strong residential character.

The second largest land use category is institutional, occupying 24.8 percent of the total area. Institutional land uses include schools, government buildings, religious institutions, medical facilities, and other public or semi-public uses that serve essential community functions.

Commercial uses comprise 14 percent of the City's land area. These areas include retail, service-based businesses, and office uses that support local employment and provide goods and services to residents and visitors. Maintaining and strategically expanding commercial land uses will support future economic development, particularly in areas identified as under-served or showing signs of retail leakage.

In addition to developed land, Columbia City retains areas of agricultural land, particularly on the fringes of the community. Depending on the City's growth objectives and planning priorities, these areas offer opportunities for long-term farmland preservation, open space conservation, or future development.

There are also several vacant and underutilized parcels scattered throughout the community. These sites are opportunities for infill development, redevelopment, or the creation of new housing, mixed-use, or commercial projects in alignment with the City's land use goals. Proactive planning can ensure these sites contribute to the overall vision of a more connected, livable, and sustainable community.

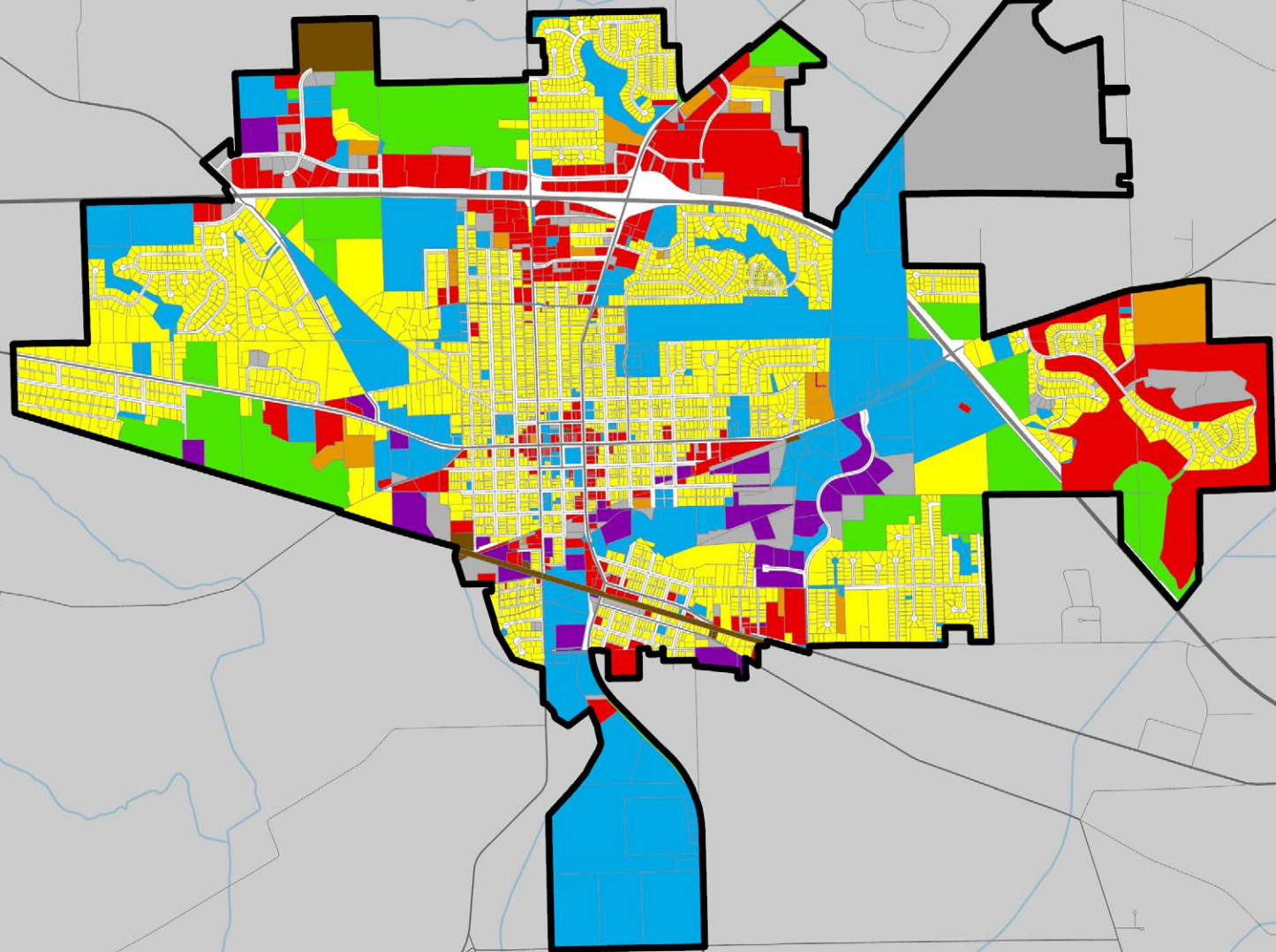
Land Use	Area	Percentage
Agriculture	373.27	10.7%
Commercial	486.77	14.0%
Industrial	117.44	3.4%
Institutional	863.66	24.8%
Residential	1,144.48	32.8%
Multi-Dwelling	84.15	2.4%
Utilities	47.97	1.4%
Vacant	368.51	10.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,486.25</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

# Legend

 Columbia City

## Land Use

-  Agriculture
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Institutional
-  Multi-Dwelling
-  Residential
-  Utilities
-  Vacant



0 3Kft 6Kft

# Land Use Columbia City





## Zoning By District

Columbia City’s zoning distribution reflects a development pattern that prioritizes residential uses while supporting a mix of commercial and industrial activity.

The largest zoning classification is R-1 – Residential Single-Family, which accounts for approximately 36.0 percent of the total land area. This significant allocation underscores the City’s strong commitment to maintaining traditional, low-density neighborhoods and preserving the character of single-family residential communities.

The R-3 – Residential Multi-Family district represents 17.0 percent of the land, highlighting the City’s efforts to diversify housing options and accommodate a broader range of residents, including renters, seniors, and young professionals. Multi-family zoning supports denser residential development, such as duplexes, townhomes, and apartment complexes, which can contribute to housing affordability and walkable neighborhood design.

GB – General Business zoning comprises 16.0 percent of Columbia City’s area. The zoning district supports a variety of retail, service, and office. These districts typically include shopping centers, restaurants, professional services, and other commercial establishments serving residents and the broader region.










The remaining land in Columbia City is allocated to a mix of other zoning districts, including Light and Heavy Industrial. As the City continues to grow and evolve, maintaining a balanced zoning mix will be essential to supporting diverse housing options, economic development, and community character protection.

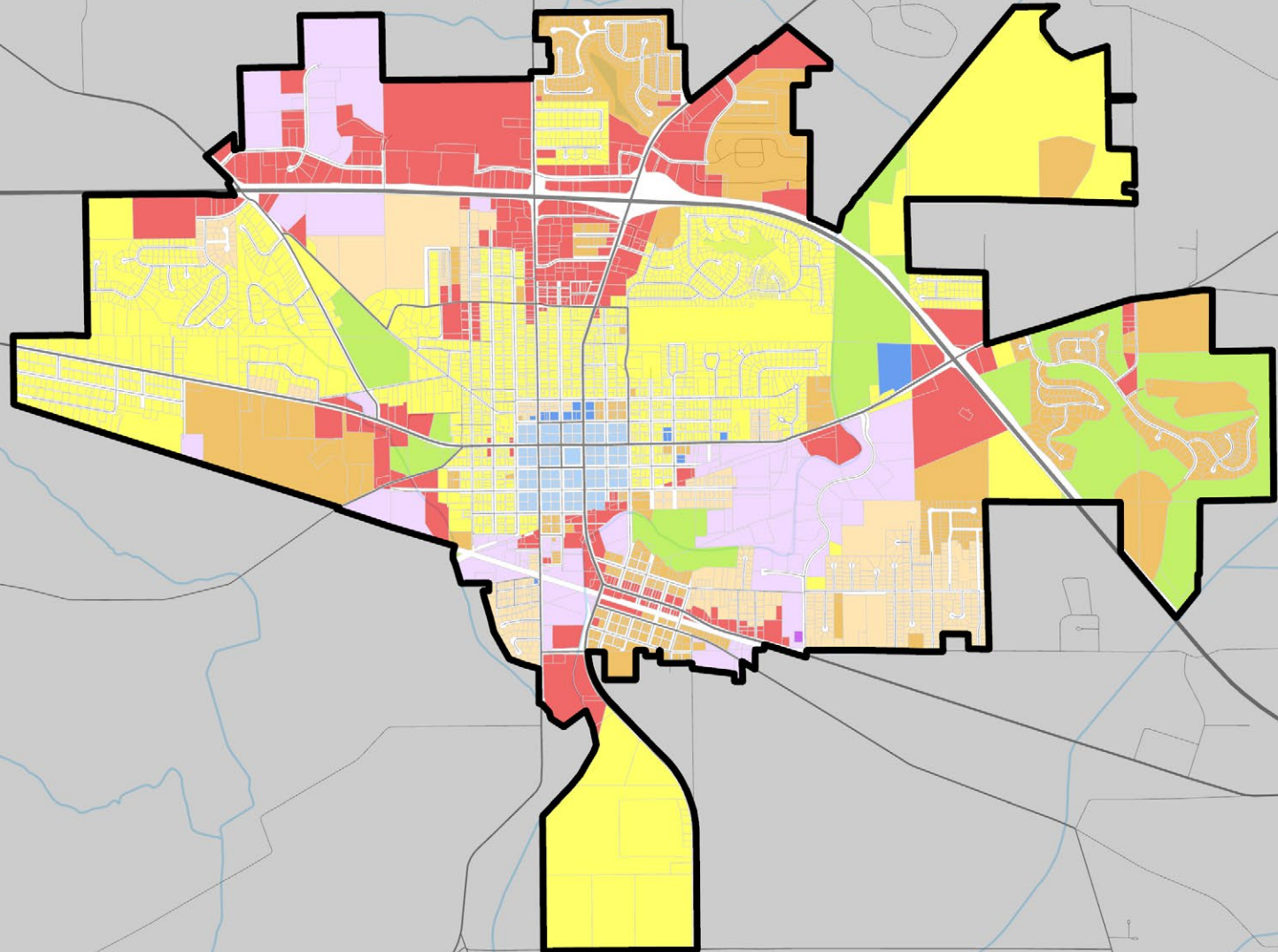
Zoning District	Area (Acreage)	Percentage
A-1 Agriculture	341.1	10%
CBD Central Business District	39.3	1%
GB General Business	553.1	16%
I-1 Light Industrial	365.4	11%
I-2 Heavy Industrial	0.7	0%
LB Local Business	16.7	0%
R-1 Single-Family Residential	1239.3	36%
R-2 Two-Family Residential	283.2	8%
R-3 Multiple-Family Residential	568.7	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3407.3</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Legend

 Columbia City

## Zone District

-  A-1 Agricultural
-  CBD Central Business District
-  GB General Business
-  I-1 Light Industrial
-  I-2 Heavy Industrial
-  LB Local Business
-  R-1 Single-Family Residential
-  R-2 Two-Family Residential
-  R-3 Multiple-Family Residential



0 3Kft 6Kft

# Zoning Columbia City

## Agricultural

### Permitted Uses:

- A. Accessory Uses
- B. Agricultural Uses:
  - a. Crop farming, including cropland research or test plots
  - b. Dairies
  - c. Egg production farms, forestry (including Christmas tree sales)
  - d. Greenhouses, nurseries, and plant sales included
  - e. Hatcheries (e.g., fish, poultry, and game birds)
  - f. Livestock, pasturing, and grazing
  - g. Orchards
  - h. Riding stables
  - i. Roadside stand (e.g., temporary, seasonal)
  - j. Veterinary hospitals
  - k. Wineries
- C. Residential Uses
  - a. Single-family dwelling
  - b. Certain manufactured home types
  - c. Cultural and recreational facilities (e.g., churches, parks and recreational facilities, libraries, museums)
  - d. Home occupations, non-traffic generating
  - e. Permanent utility structures for essential services
  - f. Developmental disabilities residential facilities.
  - g. Residential accessory uses
  - h. One guest house, servant's quarters, or non-commercial apartment subordinate to the principal dwelling structure

- D. Open land uses:
  - a. Private or public beaches
  - b. Conservation clubs
  - c. Forestry and wildlife areas and nature preserves
  - d. Hunting and game preserves
    - i. Parks and playgrounds
    - ii. Non-commercial recreational facilities
    - iii. Transportation rights-of-way

## Residential Districts

### Permitted Uses In All Residential Districts:

- A. Agricultural uses include crop farming, forestry, residential greenhouses, livestock, orchards, and wineries.
- B. Single-family detached dwelling.
- C. Certain manufactured home types
- D. Cultural and recreational facilities (e.g., churches, parks and recreational facilities, libraries, museums)
- E. Permanent utility structures for essential services.
- F. Home occupations, non-traffic generation.
- G. Model home, including information center.
- H. Developmental disabilities residential facilities are permitted in any district where dwellings are permitted, provided that the licensing and regulation of such facilities shall be accomplished through the Developmental Disabilities Residential Facilities Council of the State of Indiana.
- I. Single-family attached dwelling, if constructed before the effective date of this Ordinance.

## Business

### Permitted Uses:

- A. Residential uses, including:
  - a. Single-family dwelling
  - b. Two-family dwelling
  - c. Manufactured Home Type I
  - d. Cultural and recreational facilities (e.g., churches, parks, recreational facilities, libraries, museums, zoos)
  - e. Home occupations, traffic, and non-traffic generating
  - f. Permanent utility structures for essential services
  - g. Public or private primary or secondary schools
  - h. Developmental disabilities residential facilities.
  - i. Residential accessory uses
- B. Local business uses
  - a. Business services
  - b. Clinic
  - c. Clothing services
  - d. Equipment services
  - e. Food service
  - f. Funeral home
  - g. Personal services
  - h. Pet shop or pet grooming
  - i. Recreational uses
  - j. Restaurants, excluding drive-through windows and drive-ins
  - k. Retail services
  - l. Studio businesses

## General Business and Central Business

### Permitted uses:

- A. Residential uses
  - a. Single-family dwelling
  - b. Two-family dwelling
  - c. Manufactured Home Type I
  - d. Cultural and recreational facilities (e.g., churches, parks, recreational facilities, libraries, museums, zoos)
  - e. Home occupations, traffic, and non-traffic generating
  - f. Permanent utility structures for essential services
  - g. Public or private primary or secondary schools
  - h. Developmental disabilities residential facilities.
  - i. Residential accessory uses
- B. Local business uses
- C. General business uses
  - a. Automobile services
  - b. Business recreational uses
  - c. Farm implementation and construction of new or used service building
  - d. Food services
  - e. Hotels and motels
  - f. Medical services
  - g. Restaurants, including drive-throughs
  - h. Retail stores
  - i. Storage warehouses
  - j. Truck services
  - k. Wholesale establishments

## Light Industrial

### Permitted uses:

- A. Accessory uses
- B. Essential services
- C. Greenhouses and nurseries
- D. Light manufacturing
- E. Offices
- F. Parking lots
- G. Public utility buildings
- H. Research and testing labs
- I. Warehouses (including mini-warehouses or self-storage)
- J. Wholesale businesses

## Heavy Industrial

### Permitted uses:

- A. Light Industrial District
- B. Agriculture
- C. Contractor's office
- D. Electronic communication tower
- E. Grain elevators
- F. Heavy manufacturing
- G. Recycling center and transfer station
- H. Supply yards
- I. Truck and railroad terminals



STAR



## Roadway Classifications<sup>5</sup>

Roadway classifications are crucial for understanding the transportation system within a city, as they determine how roads are used based on their function and capacity. The classification system divides roads into categories: Interstates, Principal Arterials, Minor Arterials, Collectors (both Major and Minor), and Local Roads. The Indiana Department of Transportation determines these classifications and follow guidelines set by the Federal Highway Administration. Understanding these classifications is essential to assessing movement efficiency within the City and identifying areas for potential improvement or expansion.

### Interstates

Interstates are the highest classification of roadways, designed primarily for long-distance travel and high mobility. These roads accommodate large traffic volumes and are typically constructed to allow for the fastest and most efficient travel between major cities and regions. While no interstates are running directly through Columbia City, the nearest interstate is I-69, located to the east. I-69 connects Fort Wayne to Indianapolis and extends southward to Evansville, providing residents and businesses access to larger regional and national transportation networks.

### Principal Arterials

Principal arterial roads are designed to handle significant traffic volumes and provide high mobility within metropolitan areas. These roads are the primary routes for cross-community travel, connecting major city centers and rural areas. In Columbia City, the principal arterial is US Highway 30, which runs through the northern part of the City, crossing through Main Street. This highway connects the City to nearby communities like Pierceton and Fort Wayne, making it a key route for local and regional traffic.

### Minor Arterials

Minor arterials provide connectivity for trips of moderate length and serve smaller geographic areas than principal arterials. They also link directly to the larger arterial network. The minor arterials in the City include State Road 9, State Road 205, and East Chicago Street. State Road 9 runs through the middle of the City, linking it southward to Huntington. State Road 205 connects Columbia City to South Whitley and Churubusco in the northeast.

5 Source: [Highway Functional Classifications](#)

# TRANSPORTATION AND MOVEMENT.

## Collectors (Major and Minor)

Collector streets play a crucial role in the overall transportation system by directing traffic from local roads and directing it to arterial roadways. Major collectors tend to be longer, with higher traffic volumes, fewer driveways, and faster speed limits. They are spaced further apart and often have more lanes than minor collectors, which typically serve more localized traffic and are shorter. In Columbia City, Line Street is an example of a major collector that helps bridge the gap between arterial roads and local roads, serving primarily local traffic within the City.

## Local Roads

Local roads make up the largest portion of the City's roadway network, providing direct access to properties and residential areas. These roads are not intended for long-distance travel and typically have lower speed limits and smaller traffic volumes than other roadways. While local roads are essential for neighborhood connectivity, they generally handle more localized, residential traffic rather than serving as through routes.

## What does this tell us?

The roadway classification data for Columbia City reveals a transportation network structured to support a range of travel needs, from regional connectivity to local access. The City's reliance on US Highway 30 as its primary principal arterial demonstrates this corridor's critical role in facilitating regional traffic flow and economic activity. This highway links Columbia City to nearby urban communities like Fort Wayne and Warsaw. It is a strategic asset for attracting commercial and industrial development along its corridor.


Minor arterials like State Roads 9 and 205 indicate corridors for mid-level development and mobility improvements, while major collectors such as Line Street identify where infrastructure upgrades could ease congestion and improve access between neighborhoods and arterial routes. Although outside City limits, the proximity to Interstate 69 underscores opportunities for regional collaboration and future transportation investments that enhance accessibility and attract businesses.

The current roadway classification system supports Columbia City's existing development patterns. It offers clear guidance for where to prioritize future transportation investments. Aligning future land use, development intensity, and multimodal infrastructure improvements with this classification system will be essential in achieving the City's long-term transportation and growth objectives.


# Legend

 Columbia City

## Functional Class

 Principal Arterial -  
Freeway or Expressway

 Minor Arterial

 Major Collector

 Minor Collector

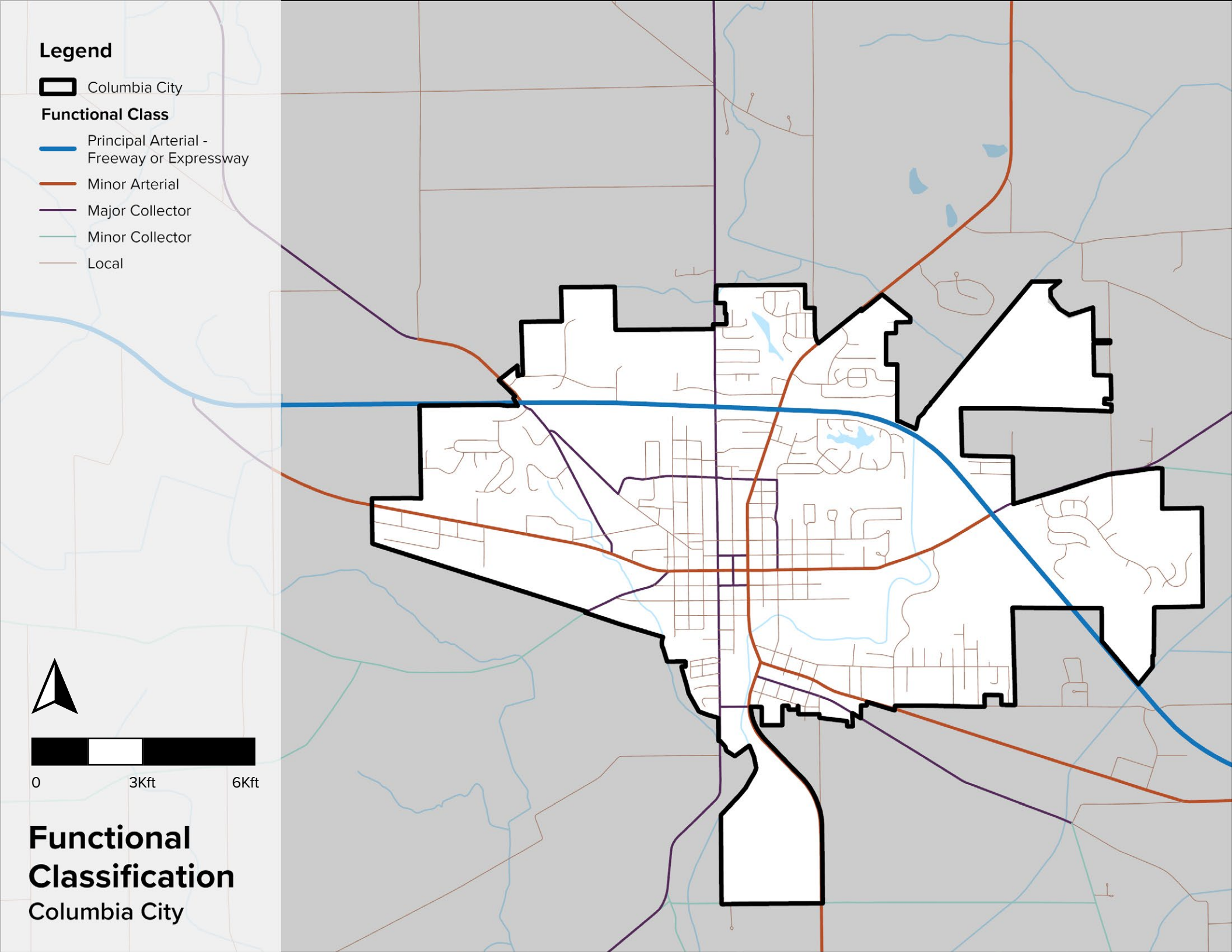
 Local



0 3Kft 6Kft

# Functional Classification

Columbia City



# TRANSPORTATION AND MOVEMENT.

## Golf Cart Community

Columbia City is recognized as a Golf Cart Community, meaning residents can operate golf carts on public streets within the city limits. However, all golf carts must be inspected before use to ensure safety and compliance with local regulations. The inspection process involves taking the cart to City Hall or contacting the dispatch center for an officer to inspect the golf cart at the owner's home. This feature promotes a unique and alternative mode of transportation for residents, contributing to the community's overall mobility and quality of life. As the City continues to grow and evolve, ensuring that golf cart use remains sustainable and beneficial for all residents will be key to the success of the City's transportation network.

## Traffic Volumes

Traffic volume is a key indicator of how heavily certain roads are used and can provide insights into areas of congestion or potential infrastructure needs. The roads with the highest Average Annual Daily Traffic in Columbia City are US Highway 30, State Road 9, and State Road 205, all of which experience substantial daily traffic volumes. Other significant routes include North Street, Old Trail Road, and Line Street, which also see high traffic volumes but on a more localized scale. These heavily traveled routes are crucial to the City's transportation network. They may warrant ongoing monitoring and potential upgrades to meet growing demand.


## Railroads

Columbia City is served by rail lines operated by CSXT, a Class 1 freight carrier. These rail lines are located in the southern part of the City, providing significant access to freight transport.

# Legend

 Columbia City

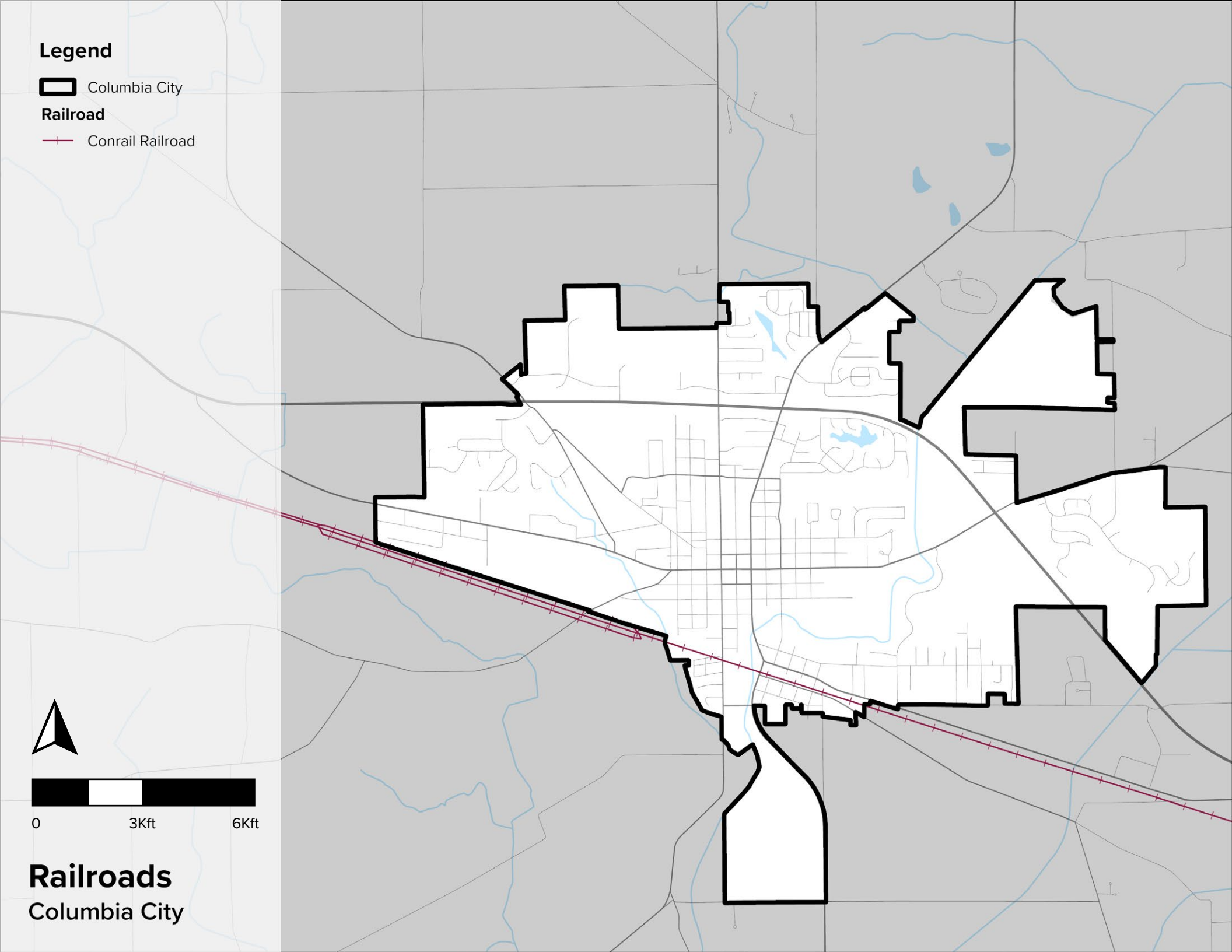
## Railroad

 Conrail Railroad



0 3Kft 6Kft

# Railroads Columbia City



## Public Transportation<sup>6</sup>

Columbia City does not operate its public transportation system. Residents have access to services provided by Whitley County Transit, which the Whitley County Council on Aging oversees. Whitley County Transit serves residents of all ages, offering transportation for various needs, including work, school, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other essential trips.

Whitley County Transit is the only public transportation provider in the County, with generous funding from various sources, including government programs, donations, and grants. Residents aged 65 and over can travel for a donation of their choice, ensuring that no one is turned away due to an inability to pay. This service ensures that all residents, regardless of age or financial situation, have access to essential transportation options.

The availability of Whitley County Transit as a public transportation option is an invaluable asset for Columbia City residents. The City's partnership with the Whitley County Council on Aging ensures that public transportation needs are met and residents can live, work, and thrive within the community. As the City continues to develop, it will be important to continue supporting and enhancing these transportation services to ensure they remain accessible and effective for all residents.

## Trails and Walkway Infrastructure

Columbia City has several recreational trails and walkways, offering residents and visitors opportunities for outdoor activities, fitness, and scenic exploration.

### Blue River Trail

The Blue River Trail is a key feature of Columbia City's trail network. The Blue River Trail spans approximately 4.6 miles. The route passes by significant landmarks such as the Fire Museum and YMCA, and it continues through Morsches Park, providing a peaceful environment for walking, running, and cycling.

In 2013, the trail was expanded by an additional 0.8 miles, reaching from Morsches Park to the DeMoney and Grimes Funeral Home. This extension was made possible through the generosity of Steel Dynamics, which donated steel for the new bridge over the Blue River. In 2022, the Next Generation Trails grant was received and planned to extend a 1.17-mile addition to the Blue River Trail. The northern portion of the addition has been completed for Vine Street to Chauncey and Spencer Street before crossing Main Street to connect to the trail. The current construction of the southern section will run along Vine Street and connect to the Columbia City High School located on Indiana State Road 9.

### Mountain Bike Trail

The Mountain Bike Trail offers over 7 miles of thrilling, minimally groomed single-track. The mountain bike trail is designed for off-road cyclists, runners, and hikers, and the trail winds through scenic, technical paths in Morsches Park. The park's southern side features about 3.5 miles of trail and the northern side, which passes under US 30, offers another 3.5 miles.

<sup>6</sup> Source: [The Woodlands, Council on Aging Guidestar, Whitley County Seniors](#)


# Legend

 Columbia City

## Trails

 Blue River Mountain Bike Trail

 DeVol Field/Kid's Dreamland pathways

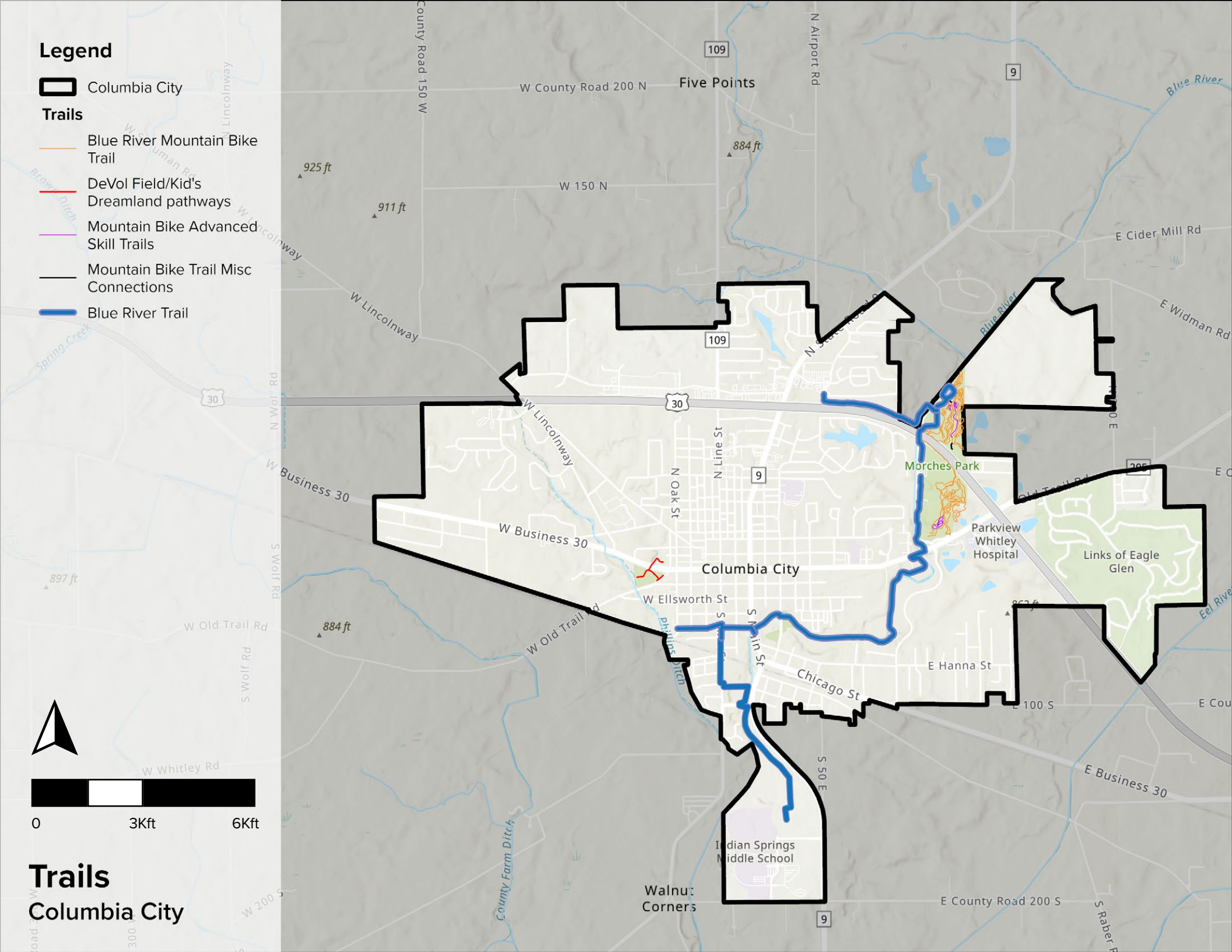
 Mountain Bike Advanced Skill Trails

 Mountain Bike Trail Misc Connections

 Blue River Trail



# Trails Columbia City





# Columbia City Solar Park

Powering An IMPA Member Community



**WARNING**  
High Voltage  
KEEP OUT!

## Water Department

The Columbia City Water Department has provided residents with clean, affordable drinking water since 1895. The department is responsible for installing and maintaining the City's water infrastructure, including water pipes, wellheads, and the Water Treatment Facility at 920 East Van Buren Street. The City continues to prioritize the delivery of safe, reliable water to its residents, ensuring a high quality of service for the community.

## Street/Sewer Department

Columbia City Street Department is responsible for maintaining the City's 52 miles of streets and 15 miles of alleys. The department also manages 65 miles of sanitary sewer lines and 15 miles of forced sewer mains.

Key functions of the department include:

- Street resurfacing
- Sidewalk and curb repair and construction
- Snow removal
- Street sweeping
- Leaf collection
- General sewer maintenance

The department also provides limb pick-up, street sign maintenance, and other essential services to keep the City's infrastructure in good working order.

## Electric Department

Columbia City Electric Department serves residential and commercial customers, providing reliable electric service throughout the year. The department serves approximately 5,000 customers within its service area. As a member of the Indiana Municipal Power Agency and the Indiana Municipal Electric Association, the City benefits from a network of resources that help ensure stable and affordable electricity for residents and businesses.

## Internet/Broadband

In the post-COVID era, internet connectivity has become vital for individuals and businesses. According to the Indiana Broadband Coverage Map, Columbia City is fully covered by broadband internet services. Providers in the City include Spectrum, AT&T, Viasat, T-Mobile, Surf Internet, Brightspeed, and Mediacom ensuring that residents have access to high-speed internet with speeds of at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. This level of coverage supports remote work, education, and digital access for the community.

The City of Columbia City also provides free public Wifi in the following areas:

- Morsches Park
- Downtown Columbia City
- Every Kids Dreamland
- The Russel and Evelyn Fahl Aquatics Center
- Eagle Park



COLUMBIA CITY  
FIRE DEPARTMENT



INDIANA  
81040

## Police Department

The Columbia City Police Department was established in 1922 and has since been dedicated to protecting the lives and property of its citizens. The department currently employs 22 full-time officers and two civilian staff members. The department's mission is to reduce crime, improve public safety, and provide a safe environment for residents to live, work, and play.

The police department also plays a vital role in emergency response, handling after-hours dispatching for municipal electric, street, sewer, water, water pollution control, and parks departments. Additionally, the department monitors security cameras throughout the City, ensuring public safety in key locations.

## Fire Department

Columbia City Fire Department consists of 23 volunteers and 15 full-time firefighters equipped to handle various emergencies.

The department's fleet includes:

- 2 Class A engines
- 175' aerial
- 1 grass rig
- 1 hose truck
- 1 command vehicle
- 2 thermal imagers

The Fire Department's mission is to provide exceptional life safety services to the community, enforcing modern fire prevention codes, educating the public on fire safety, and effectively extinguishing fires. The department also provides emergency medical services.

In addition, the Fire Department operates a non-tax-funded fire museum showcasing antique fire trucks, such as the 1917 Seagrave, 1934 Howe Reo, and 1953 Seagrave. This museum preserves the history of the Columbia City Fire Department and serves as an educational tool for future generations.

# EMERGENCY SERVICES.

## Communications Department

Columbia City Communications Department manages all 911 calls within the city. It dispatches emergency services to the Fire Department, Police Department, and Utility Departments after hours. The department also monitors the SCADA system, overseeing essential infrastructure such as wastewater lift stations, water towers, and electric substations. The Communications Department is also responsible for activating tornado sirens during severe weather events and monitoring security cameras throughout the city.

## Emergency Management Agency

The Whitley County Emergency Management/Department of Homeland Security is in Columbia City. The agency coordinates emergency services and programs to ensure the County's readiness for various emergencies. The Whitley County Hazardous Materials Response Team and Auxiliary Communication (AUXCOMM), made up of local amateur radio operators, are critical components of the County's disaster response efforts.

The county is a Storm-Ready Community, and first responders and the general public participate in annual weather spotter training. This training prepares individuals to report weather observations to the Whitley County Emergency Operations Center and the National Weather Service, ensuring timely and accurate communication during severe weather events.





## Education

Whitley County Consolidated Schools serves the City of Columbia City and surrounding areas. The district offers a comprehensive K-12 education, with various schools catering to students of all ages.

Schools under Whitley County Consolidated Schools include:

- Columbia City High School
- Indian Springs Middle School
- Coesse Elementary School
- Little Turtle Elementary School
- Mary Raber Elementary School
- Mary Raber Montessori School
- Northern Heights Elementary School

These schools offer diverse programs, extracurricular activities, and athletic opportunities, ensuring students receive a well-rounded education.

## Parks and Recreation

Columbia City's Parks and Recreation Department is key in creating vibrant outdoor spaces that promote active living and community engagement. The department is dedicated to maintaining beautiful parks and recreational facilities for people of all ages.

The Parks and Recreation department also offers a wide range of rental options, such as pavilions, other outdoor spaces, and well-equipped indoor facilities. In addition, the department organizes various athletic programs throughout the year for all age groups, including softball, baseball, football, and more. These programs foster both recreational and competitive opportunities for residents.

## City Parks

Columbia City boasts a rich variety of parks, each offering unique amenities and experiences:

- Morsches Park
- Devol Field
- Russel and Evelyn Fahl Aquatics Center
- Every Kid's Dreamland
- Southside Park
- Kenneth Wright Park
- Mayor's Park
- Eagle Park
- Patriotic Park








Source: Peabody Public Library Facebook Group

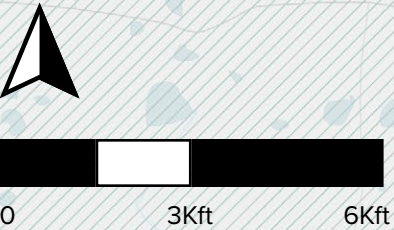
## PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Peabody Public Library, located at 1160 IN-205 in Columbia City, is a central cultural and educational resource for residents. Established in 1901 through the philanthropic contributions of Leigh Smith J. Hunt, the library serves as a cornerstone for the community. The library's mission is to foster community, encourage intellectual exploration, and connect residents with information and resources.

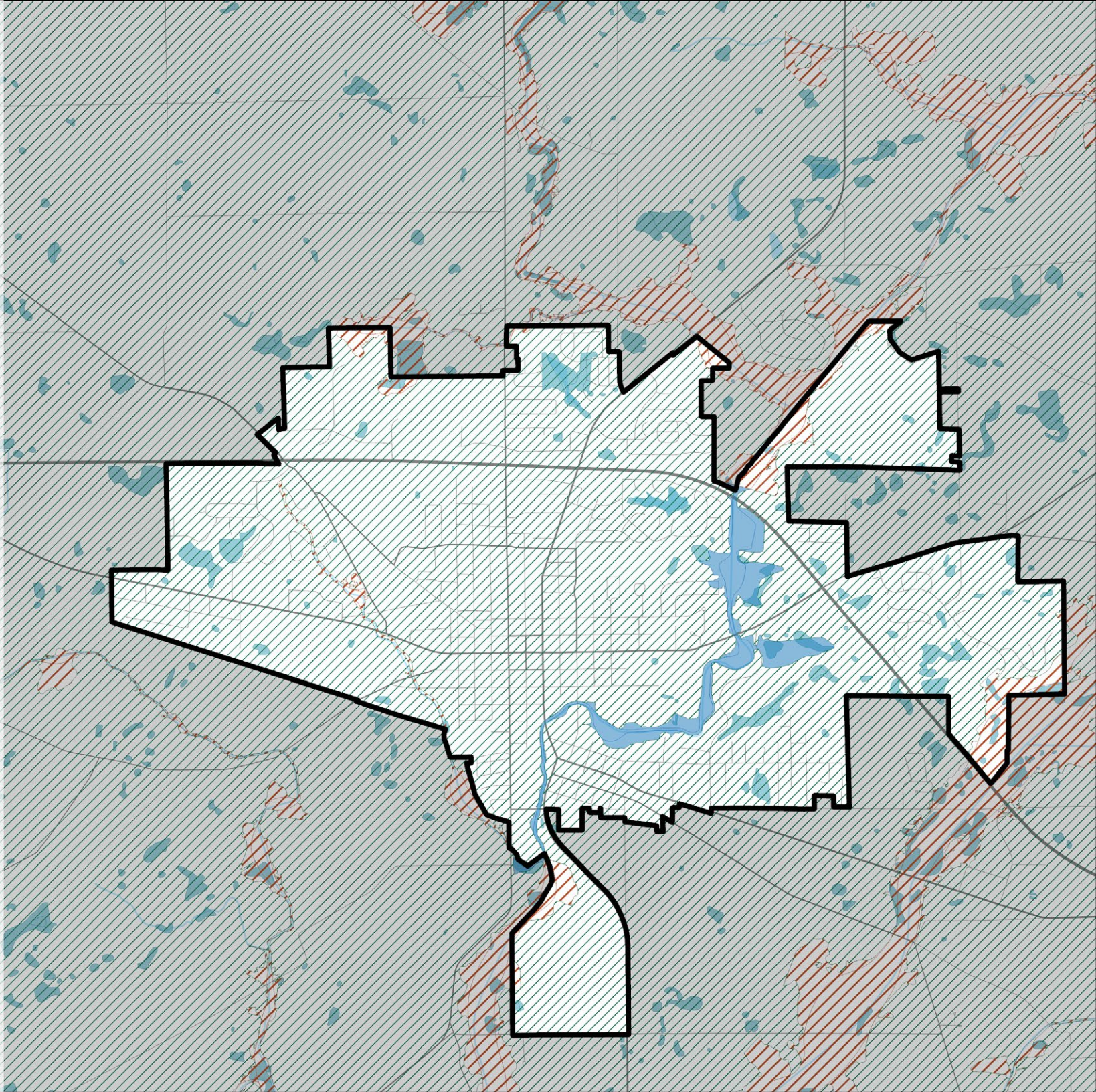
The Peabody Public Library is supported primarily through property taxes from Columbia City, Columbia Township, and Thorncreek Township. The library provides access to books, digital resources, educational programs, and community events, ensuring that all residents access vital information and learning opportunities.

# Legend

-  Columbia City
- Flood Hazard Zone**
-  Zone A - Approximate Floodway
-  Zone AE - Floodway
-  Zone X - Area of Minimal Flood Hazard
-  Wetlands



# Flood Zones and Wetlands Columbia City



## Hydrology

### Floodplains and Wetlands

Floodplains are land areas susceptible to flooding, often divided into two main sections: the floodway and the floodway fringe. The floodway is the river itself and the immediately surrounding land. In contrast, the floodway fringe extends beyond the floodway and has the potential to flood in certain conditions. Areas in the floodway fringe may be designated as 100-year or 500-year flood zones by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

A 100-year flood zone has a 1 percent chance of flooding in any given year, while a 500-year flood zone (or Flood Zone X) has a 0.2 percent chance of significant flooding each year. Understanding these designations is important for land development, as it helps identify areas at higher risk of flooding and areas that may be more suitable for development.

The Blue River is the primary water source impacting Columbia City, running through the City's eastern section. Several river branches create floodplains that extend into the City, with most of the affected land being industrial. Identifying floodplains is essential for urban planning, ensuring that development avoids high-risk areas and that ecologically sensitive regions are protected.


Properly managing floodplains and understanding their potential risks can also guide decisions regarding land use, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation efforts within the community.

# Legend

 Columbia City

## Type of Soils

 Houghton

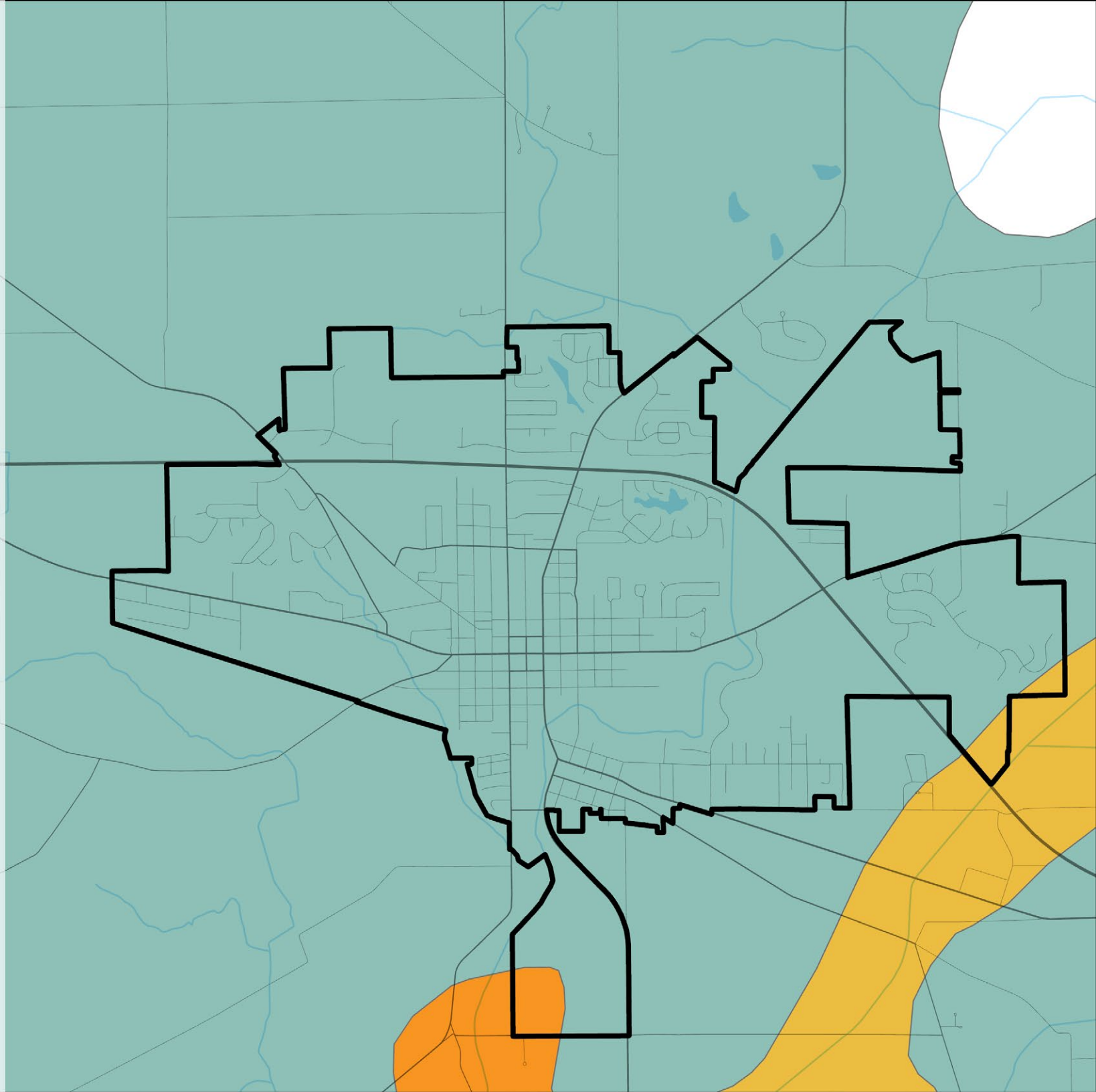
 Pewamo

 Spinks



0 3Kft 6Kft

**Soil Types**  
Columbia City



## Geography

### Soils

The dominant soil types in Columbia City are part of the Pewamo and Houghton series, with the Pewamo series being the most prevalent. These soils are characterized by their deep and poorly drained nature, typically formed in glacial till, near-shore zones, and lake plains. The Pewamo series, in particular, consists of very deep, fine-textured soils that are naturally poorly drained, which can present advantages and challenges for land use and development within the City.

# CONCLUSION.

Columbia City is a thriving community with a stable economic base, strong educational institutions, diverse recreational opportunities, and a solid infrastructure for public services. However, challenges remain in workforce development, housing diversity, and public transportation accessibility. Addressing these areas and further expanding recreational and green spaces can help enhance the quality of life for the City's residents and provide a solid foundation for sustainable growth.

In the Comprehensive Plan Update, it is important to prioritize investments in workforce development, expand housing options, improve public transit, and continue to protect environmentally sensitive areas. By addressing these key areas, Columbia City can strengthen its position as a regional employment, recreation, and quality living center.





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