2.0 ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction

The character and identity of a city is crucial to the planning process. Those characteristics and factors that individuals associate with a given location provide a frame of reference for future planning and development. A list of present characteristics and factors, as well as a vision of what the future should look like, are essential in order to provide a summary and analysis that addresses the issues and opportunities for the city.

Wisconsin's Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law requires that the Issues and Opportunities Element provide background information about the community, as well as, overall visions to guide future development and redevelopment over a 20-year planning period. Specifically, the Issues and Opportunities Element must include population, household and employment forecasts, demographic trends, age distributions, education levels, income levels and employment characteristics. This chapter presents the overall vision for Evansville, including an assessment of local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The community characteristics and general background information that form the basis for the Issues & Opportunities Element, is included in Chapter 3.

Visioning Process

Rather than solely develop a series of policy statements, the City participated in an extensive visioning process to establish a framework from which to make future land use decisions. The result of this process was a vision statement for each of the nine required plan elements. This process was critical to establish a unified vision for Evansville and provide a direction and focus for the planning effort.

To define its vision, the City of Evansville utilized a process centered on three community-based meetings held in an attempt to identity the essential characteristics of Evansville. What follows is a description of the activities and the major issues and opportunities identified through the planning process.

What is a *Vision*?

Webster's Dictionary, defines a vision as: *(1) sense of sight; (2) something supposedly seen by other than normal sight; something perceived in a dream; (3) mental image; (4) The ability to perceive something not actually visible, as through mental acuteness or keen foresight [a project made possible by one man's vision].*

In planning, the term "vision" is an expression or idea of the desired future.

2000 INTERACTIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING CONFERENCE

The first community-based meeting took place on August 16, 2000, when the Evansville Community Partnership (ECP)—comprised of business and property owners, representatives of city government, community organizations and corporations, professionals, and other citizens—sponsored an Interactive Strategic Planning Conference facilitated by Stitt Facilitations. The meeting, with 54 participants, focused on two areas, Issues and Concerns, and Assets and Resources. The small group sessions produced seven areas of Issues and Concerns:

1. **Planning (e.g., lack of a vision, city services, and an industrial park)**
2. **Finance (e.g., lack of retail businesses and money for capital projects)**
3. **Downtown (e.g., lack of beauty in downtown areas, no quality restaurants, lack of businesses and retail stores)**

4. **Community relations (e.g., lack of respect between new and old timers, little communications, and lack of cooperation between city government and businesses)**
5. **Community identity (e.g., no clear identity, nor attractions, nor promotion of the historical district and the park)**
6. **Lake Leota (e.g., needs cleaning up, no plans for improving the lake or the park)**
7. **People programs (e.g., no teen or senior centers, no service programs for the youth or seniors)**

Then the seven small groups were asked to produce a list of Assets and Resources for the above points. The groups assigned the 'Asset name' to one column, and 'How we can use it' to a second column. The result was an impressive ten pages of responses - too many suggestions to be noted here[1].

What follows is a summary of the issues and concerns identified, organized by smart growth plan element.

Element	Issues & Concerns (real and perceived)
Issues and Opportunities	• Too many people are viewed as "outsiders." • Social division between new and long-time residents. • Newer residents in the City are frowned on for offices and/or board positions. • There is a high teen pregnancy rate in Evansville.
Housing Element	• There is a lack of housing for the elderly like condominiums. • No subsidization options for historic home renovations. • Evansville lacks new upscale housing. • We lack celebration of Evansville. • People lack pride of ownership.
Transportation Element	• The intersection of HWY 14 and CTH M is uncontrolled. • There is a lack of sidewalks on HWY 14 going to and from Piggly Wiggly, McDonalds and Stoughton Trailers. • DOT plans to convert HWY 14 into a truck route. • We need sidewalks and street repair on Main Street. • Narrow rights of way on streets – especially in the winter. • The Union Street and Main Street intersection is a bottleneck. • There is a lack of sidewalks on the southeast side of the City.
Utilities & Community Facilities Element	• There is a lack of activities for youth (and adults) in Evansville. • There is no pool (or place) for adult fun/exercise in Evansville. • The City lacks services, recreation choices, and gathering places for youth (i.e. after school). • Skateboards/roller blades have no place to ride off the streets. • Lack of a Senior Citizen Center or place for seniors to meet on their own, enjoy social activities and senior lunches. • It is hard to find weekend activities in Evansville – especially during the winter months. • Lake Leota Park lacks a focused maintenance program. • Lack of curb and gutters.

[1] To review the complete list of all results, refer to the *Evansville Area Interactive Strategic Planning Conference Summary Report*.

Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources Element	• As a community, we do not honor our history. • Unique farm buildings in the area are collapsing. • Lake Leota needs to be dredged. • Lack of activities on Lake Leota.
Land Use Element	• There is a lack of consistency in the "look" of historical buildings on Main Street. • There is a lack of funding for downtown individual building renovation. • Lack of simplified building codes and municipal ordinances creates barriers to growth and regular living. • Lack of "permitted by right" businesses in City. • No long-term or inadequate planning. • The DOT Plan to turn HWY 14 into a truck route may ruin development on the East Side of the City and residential life. • East Main Street is ripe for renovation. • Industrial area by the VFW & Baker Manufacturing is gravel – unattractive, unsafe and uncontrolled. • Weeds and trash in downtown streets and sidewalks. • Older residents can't walk to basic services. • Downtown alleys lack appeal. • Lack of strength in historic preservation ordinance. Committee has no power.
Intergovernmental Cooperation Element	• There is a need to work better with the School District. • As a community we do not have enough kids completing college. • Lack of cooperation between City Government and township residents over issues of sprawl and development.
Economic Development Element	• There is a lack of stores of meet people's everyday needs – such as clothes, shoes, etc. • Stores have limited hours. • There seems to be a lack of effort to attract new businesses. • There is a lack of good working relationship between the city and local businesses. • The business district has inadequate parking – a problem that has existed since 1920s. This is particularly true for employees. • Local development is oriented more toward low technology (i.e. manufacturing vs. research). • Lack of retail and too many services downtown. • There are too many vacant commercial buildings.

The conference report, written by Stitt Facilitations, stated "By the end of the conference, an emerging consensus developed." Although not clearly stated as such, the consensus was likely the Vision Statement - the result of several participant volunteers using the ideas generated at the conference. That statement represents an envisioned future for Evansville and was the beginning point for several subsequent versions. An overall vision, based in large part on this the Vision Statement developed as part of this conference, is presented at the end of this chapter.

2001 COMMUNITY IDENTITY CONFERENCE

As a result of the 2000 conference, a second meeting was held on May 19, 2001 at the Masonic Temple on Main Street. This meeting focused on Community Identity—one of the seven categories in the first conference, and was facilitated by the Community Identity Work Study Team of the Evansville

Community Partnership. In addressing this one issue, the structure of this conference was very different from the previous conference. The 26 attendees (16--or 62%--had attended the first conference) were asked to respond to four questions:

- When I think of Evansville's identity, I think of ….,
- When visitors think of Evansville, they think ….,
- Benefits of Evansville's identity are ….,
- My greatest concern for defining an identity is …..

Only the first question has relevance for this section. Participants noted 12 categories they believed helped establish an identity for Evansville – the list is ranked according to the 'ratings of importance' assigned it by the participants:

1) **The Grove (Evansville) (e.g., tree-lined streets, well appointed homes, and green space)**
2) **Lake/Park (e.g., beauty, green space)**
3) **Historic factors (e.g., historic houses, downtown, and architecture)**
4) **Industry past/present (e.g., Baker Co., windmills)**
5) **Our home sweet home (e.g., great place to raise children, safety, peaceful, friendly, family oriented, neighborhoods, the people, economic diversity, living together)**
6) **Education (e.g., good schools, teachers, and library)**
7) **Downtown potential (e.g., Main Street, need for revitalization)**
8) **Rural (e.g., farming, prairie)**
9) **Religious (e.g., churches)**
10) **People relationships (e.g., energy, the people)**
11) **Pride (e.g., historic and new homes show pride of ownership, community pride)**
12) **Recreation (e.g., sports, music, golf)**

The three categories with the most 'ratings of importance' (The Grove--Evansville, Lake/Park, and Historic factors) should constitute the core identity for Evansville. The group also discussed the significance of establishing an identity. In an article in *The Evansville Review*, May 23, 2001, about the conference, Kelly Gildner, reporter and participant, recorded what she believed was a complete response by one of the groups:

> *"An identity for Evansville can offer the pattern and design to coordinate our efforts. If consciously implemented, it can act as a common thread that ties together the work of city planning, downtown revitalization, various business areas, and economic development. This common focus can help in the decision making process. We can ask ourselves … is this decision true to our identity?"*

What is the Grove?

"The Grove", refers to the name given to this area by the first settlers, and was initially part of Union Township. By 1850, the name officially became Evansville when the Post Office announced the appointment of the first postmaster for the Village of Evansville.

This statement reinforces the significance of clearly establishing those factors that help to identify the character and identity of Evansville. During this meeting, the Vision Statement for Evansville was revised again to reflect the identity concepts discussed.

2003 SWOT MEETING

On August 21, 2003, the City of Evansville Smart Growth Planning Committee (SGPC), which was created in December 2001 as an advisory group to the Evansville Planning Commission, sponsored the third community-based meeting at the new Evansville High School. The SGPC hired OMNNI Associates to help facilitate the planning process. Amy Emery, AICP, Principal Planner with OMNNI, led the discussion with some 50 people in attendance. The focus of the meeting was to complete a SWOT exercise.

A SWOT meeting is a planning exercise used to get communities thinking about:

- where they have been;
- where they are;
- where they want to be in the future; and
- how they want to get there.

The objective of the exercise was to find out how residents, business owners, appointed and elected officials, as well as, neighboring community residents viewed various aspects of the City. This could include their feelings on physical things such as roads, utilities, etc., and "quality of life" issues. At the meeting, each participant was asked to list the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Each person could write as many items as he/she wished under each category. Next, participants divided into small groups to discuss their answers and decide on the two most important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Prior to adjournment, each small group shared their answers with all participants. Many of the groups had identical ideas. The table on the next page shows the responses to the four areas.

Participants at this meeting were also asked to identify the values that influence people to remain, take pride in, and become actively involved in the community. The complete list of those values is provided in Chapter 1.

What Does SWOT Stand For?

Strength
Something that makes a community standout when compared to other communities. Something that makes you proud to call the community home. A strength can be a physical asset, a program, or an environmental condition (i.e. friendly community atmosphere).

Weakness
Opposite of strength. Problem that needs to be addressed

Opportunity
Something that could be done to improve the community. A potential.

Threat
A threat may be internal or external. A threat can be anything that could jeopardize the future success of a community.

Analysis and Summary of Community-Based Issues & Concerns Meetings

In analyzing the results of the three conferences, there are clearly identified assets that constitute the character and identity of the City. By far, the most prevalent characteristic mentioned at these conferences is the environment of Evansville. The tree-lined streets, small town and rural, agrarian atmosphere, ease of daily living because everything is close by and easy to get to, sense of safety, closeness of the community, relaxed quality of living, quiet streets, and family-oriented community, all characterize the environment of Evansville.

Adding to this environment is the role played by the Leonard-Leota Park and Lake Leota. The park and lake add beauty and green space, host community events and family outings, and provide recreational and sports opportunities.

Strengths	• Public Facilities (School, Library, EMS, Police Department, Fire Department, Nursing Homes) • Location between Madison and Janesville • Quality of Life – Small City, Light Traffic, Safe Community with an Attractive Historic District, Parks and Good Schools • City Government • Community Involvement • Quality Housing Supply • Rail System Access to the South of the City
Weaknesses	• Traffic on STH 14 and CTH M • Economic Development; Lack of Industrial & Commercial Growth • Historic Lack of Plan Implementation • Rapid Development of Small, Unattractive Houses • Lack of Handicap Access on Main Street • Location – Danger of Becoming a Bedroom Community • Lack of Senior Facilities Funding • Inconsistent Zoning Codes Across the City Have Allowed Unattractive and Inconsistent Development
Opportunities	• To Encourage Business and Industrial Growth (Economic Development) • To Establish Bike Trails • Improving Natural Resources (i.e. Lake Leota) • Promoting Unique Parks and Historic District to Attract New Businesses, Executives/Professionals and Tourism • Encouraging Young Families to Move to the City to Support Local Groups (i.e. Churches), Activities, and Schools • Rail System • To Promote Cultural Events
Threats	• Invasion of a Super Store • Growth without Balance • Sprawl; Haphazard Growth Resulting in Traffic Congestion, Higher Taxes, Loss of Downtown Businesses, Unattractive Neighborhoods • Disproportionate Share of Housing versus Business Development, which is Having a Negative Impact on the Tax Base • Plan Commission Not Working Well With Developers • Higher Taxes • Traffic Increases on CTH M, STH 14 and Other Roads

Also strongly contributing to the character and identity of Evansville is the historic nature of Evansville. The clearly identified historic district, with its beautifully maintained Victorian and Early Modern homes and buildings which provide excellent examples of the various architectural styles from the 1840s to the 1940s, is an important asset. The well-appointed and well-kept homes and buildings reflect the sense of history and pride that people have about the community. These three assets, which are tightly interrelated, need to be at the center of any plan for Evansville, and they need to be carefully built upon and maintained as a part of the future growth of the community.

There are also areas that need attention in order to help strengthen the City. There is a need for better programs and services for the youth and for the senior citizens to improve the social setting. Moreover, the community needs to be sensitive to the changing character of its population, the values held by its long-time and farming residents, and the stresses that constant change will produce. In the economic area, there is a need for more retail and restaurant businesses, a need for an industrial park to draw clean industry and high-tech firms, and a need to foster well-planned economic growth to help expand the tax base. Expanding the tax base will in part enable Evansville to strengthen its services and infrastructure.

Cognitive Mapping

Cognitive mapping was another approach used during the development of this plan to appreciate local stakeholder issues, concerns, and desires for Evansville.

At the July 2004 public comprehensive planning meeting, participants were provided two maps of the City of Evansville. On the first map, the individual committee members outlined portions of the City based on their opinion of aesthetic appeal or special memories or experiences they have had. The most attractive places were colored in one shade and not attractive in another color. Areas with special meaning or memories were circled.

On the second map, the individual committee members outlined those areas where they would like to see new commercial/industrial development, new residential subdivision development, new recreation areas and open space.

Participants then worked in small groups to discuss their second map. Common areas, agreed by all group participants, were illustrated on a collective group map. At the conclusion of the meeting, each group presented these maps to all in attendance.

These maps were used in the development of the *Future Land Use Maps* presented later in this plan. This approach helps to provide residents and other stakeholders the opportunity to more clearly reflect community concerns and priorities for the future.

What is a Cognitive Map?

A cognitive map, or mental map, is a map drawn by a person that geographically locates his or her memories, ideas and thoughts of a particular place. Since cognitive maps are based on individual's preferences and opinions there are no "right" or "wrong" maps. Cognitive maps are used to delineate geographic areas of a community people like, dislike, frequently visit, feel are important, travel through regularly, feel safe, etc.

Community Survey

The resident survey was yet another important tool to understand local issues, concerns, and desires. This survey was developed by the SGPC during the spring of 2004. A copy of the survey instrument and results is provided in the appendix. Results from the survey are highlighted throughout this plan to illustrate resident opinions about the future of the City.

Respondents represent a broad cross-section of the community with varying length of residency:

- 10% had lived in the City less than 1 year
- 23% lived in the City between 1 and 5 years
- 13% lived in the City between 6 and 10 years
- 26% lived in the City between 11 and 25 years
- 27% lived in the City more than 25 years

In the survey, residents were asked to indicate what reason(s) they would give to recommend someone move to Evansville? The small city atmosphere, low crime rate/safety, and quality schools were the top attributes listed. These were followed closely by Evansville's location, parks and recreation, and housing opportunities.

Issues & Opportunities Element Vision

Below is the overall vision statement, which represents the broad interests of City residents, elected/appointed officials, business leaders and property owners. Supporting visions for each of the required plan elements are provided at the beginning of subsequent chapters. Supporting goals, objectives and program initiatives are described in Chapter 12 of this plan. The overall vision statement is based, in large part, on the vision developed through the Strategic Planning Conference in August 2000 and the vision prepared at the 2001 Community Identity Conference. (Specific visions expressed at the Community Identity Conference are also highlighted in other Elements of this plan.) This vision has been further refined by the Smart Growth Planning Committee to reflect current objectives.

OVERALL VISION

Evansville is a unique, thriving, and prosperous community that invites opportunity for involvement from all in creating and implementing our shared dreams.

We envision Evansville as a community that values cooperation and harmony among government, the private sector, citizens, civic organizations and surrounding communities. This cooperation creates the continuity vital to economic opportunity that serves the requirements of residents and visitors in our downtown and outlying business districts. We enjoy community support regarding the stewardship of our people, natural, historical and financial resources.

To accomplish this, our community respects different points of view. We are filled with the spirit of neighborliness, compassion, cooperation and mutual respect for all.