

# Mount Comfort Corridor Hancock County, Indiana

A Vision for a Developing Rural Corridor

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

January 13–18, 2019





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Urban Land Institute  
2001 L Street, NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036-4948  
[uli.org](http://uli.org)

# About the Urban Land Institute

**THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE** is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 42,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific region, with members in 81 countries.

ULI's extraordinary impact on land use decision-making is based on its members' sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2018 alone, more than 2,200 events were held in about 330 cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at [uli.org](https://www.uli.org). Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

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# About ULI Advisory Services

**THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES** program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies.

Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 100 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

## ULI Program Staff

### **Paul Bernard**

Executive Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Thomas W. Eitler**

Senior Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Deborah Kerson Bilek**

Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Paul Angelone**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Lauren Callaghan**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Jacqueline Canales**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Cali Slepik**

Senior Associate, Advisory Services

### **James A. Mulligan**

Senior Editor

### **Laura Glassman, Publications Professionals LLC**

Manuscript Editor

### **Brandon Weil**

Art Director

### **Thomas Cameron**

Designer

### **Craig Chapman**

Senior Director, Publishing Operations

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A special thank you goes to Thomas Miller, Mike Higbee, and Jack Woods from Thomas P. Miller and Associates, who were indispensable in preparing the briefing materials, organizing the interviews, and helping with the panel logistics.

Finally, the panel would like to thank the more than 70 residents, business and community leaders, and representatives from the surrounding region who shared their perspectives, experiences, and insights with the panel over the week.

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**About the Panel**

# ULI Panel and Project Staff

## Panel Chair

### **Ed McMahon**

Senior Fellow, Sustainable Development  
Urban Land Institute  
Washington, D.C.

## Panel Members

### **Jose Bodipo-Memba**

Director of Sustainable Communities  
Sacramento Municipal Utility District  
Sacramento, California

### **Meredith Byer**

Director of Planning  
Dewberry  
Washington, D.C.

### **Bill Clarke**

Planning, Engineering, and  
Landscape Architect Consultant  
Ross, California

### **Geoff Koski**

President  
Bleakly Advisory Group  
Atlanta, Georgia

### **David Stebbins**

Executive Vice President  
Buffalo Urban Development Corporation  
Buffalo, New York

## Panel Adviser

### **David Leazenby**

Vice President of Development  
Onyx+East  
Indianapolis, Indiana

## ULI Project Staff

### **Tom Eitler**

Senior Vice President

### **Michaela Kadonoff**

Associate, Meetings and Logistics

### **Rebecca Hill**

Associate, Meetings and Logistics

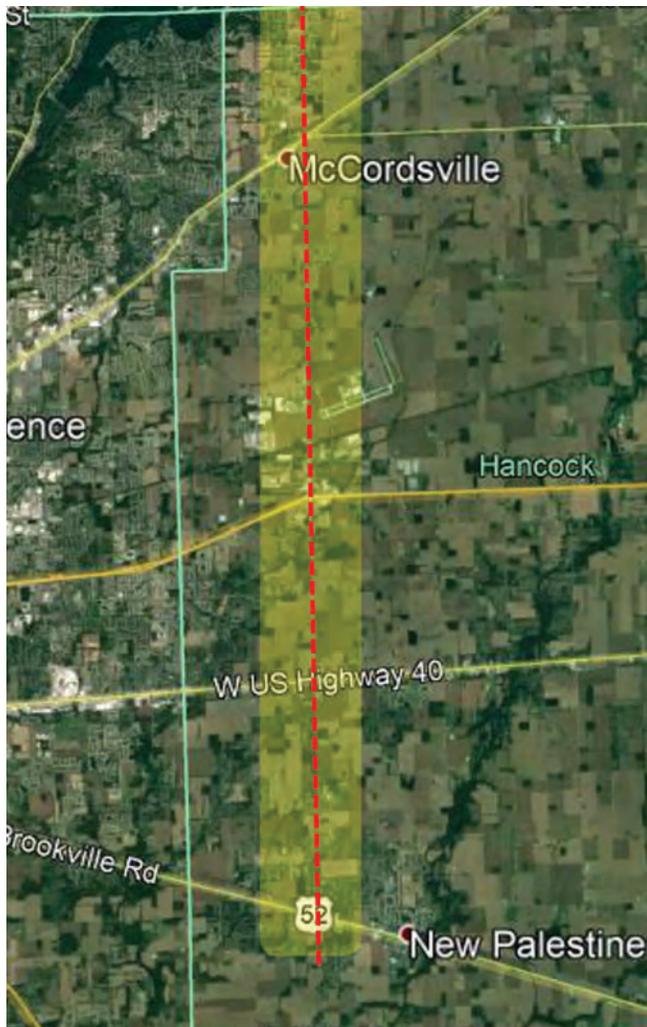


## Background and the Panel's Assignment

**HANCOCK COUNTY IS A RELATIVELY FAST GROWING SEMI-RURAL COUNTY** that abuts the eastern edge of Indianapolis, Indiana. The Mount Comfort Corridor is located one mile east of Indianapolis in western Hancock County and is bisected (east to west) by Interstate 70. The region is anchored by the limits of the towns of McCordsville, Cumberland, and New Palestine. The corridor also includes the Indianapolis Regional Airport, a concentration of logistics-oriented trucking terminals north of I-70, and large expanses of agricultural land. The linear distance from McCordsville in the north to New Palestine in the south is just over 13 miles.

The idea for a Mount Comfort Advisory Services panel grew out of a planning meeting with members of the Mount Comfort Corridor Stellar Communities team. The Stellar Communities Competition requires that entrants develop a regional development plan. The vision developed by the Hancock County towns of McCordsville, Cumberland,

and New Palestine called for creation of a “Corridor of the Future.” The ULI Advisory Services panel was asked to build on this vision to develop an economic development strategy and growth plan for a model corridor that could improve the region’s competitive position while also enhancing the region’s image and quality of place.



The Mount Comfort Corridor is a 14-mile road corridor stretching from McCordsville in the north to New Palestine in the south.

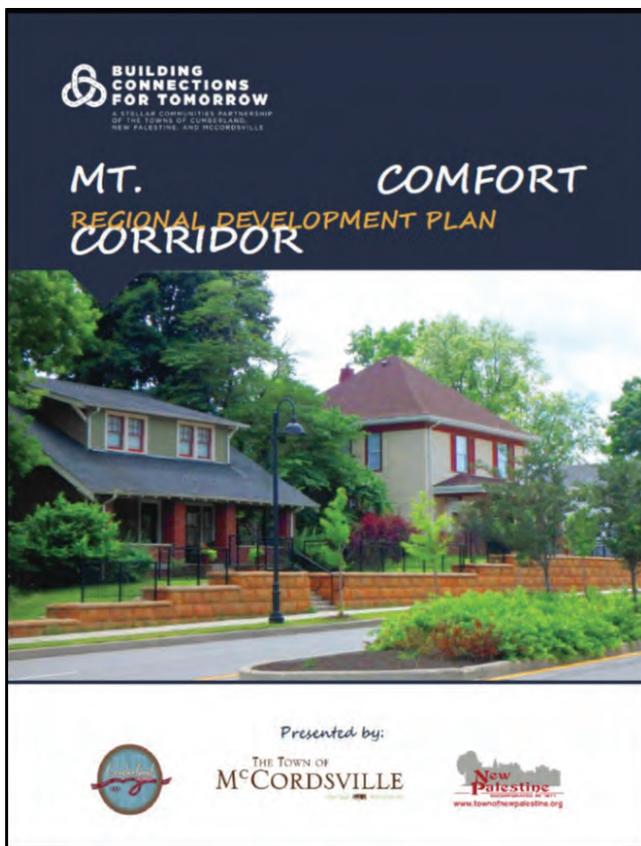
## The Panel's Assignment

The assignment was organized around the following extensive series of questions focused on the aspirational, physical, and organizational requirements necessary for future success:

- What types of technology businesses should we be focusing on? What ancillary businesses are needed to support those?
- If technology is not the right target industry, what should we be focusing on to maximize the gigabit fiber infrastructure, transportation access, location, and Indianapolis Regional Airport?

- What is its short- and long-term economic development role for the airport and what opportunities exist to partner with the Indianapolis Airport Authority in attracting business investment to the corridor?
- What infrastructure needs to be in place to support the desired technology businesses?
- What are the current impediments to the corridor's developing this way?
- How does the corridor compete globally for this technology while maintaining its unique small-town character?
- What type of housing and quality-of-life amenities does the corridor need to support the employees in the target industries?
- How important is it that the jurisdictions along the corridor have a consistent development standard and a unified vision?
- What land use policies should the corridor implement to ensure the desired development outcomes, and should a master plan be developed for the corridor?
- Is there a role for a mixed-use development along the corridor?
- What governance structure will best guide the corridor in the appropriate development direction, and what role should the public sector play in achieving high-quality development? How would implementation of a corridor plan be coordinated along the corridor?
- Are there similar corridors in other parts of the country that we should be looking at as a good model, and is there a regional economic development role for the Mount Comfort Corridor?
- What improvements to the corridor will best serve and encourage future business investment?
- What incentives would the communities along the corridor need to provide (i.e., tax increment financing, tax abatement, etc.)?
- What amenities, such as trails, parks, and open spaces, along the corridor are necessary to achieve the desired outcome?
- What is the most effective way for the towns to market and brand the corridor?

- How do we best maximize assessed value?
- What land use and design recommendations can the panel provide for the corridor?
- If we are successful in attracting more development, what strategies, including financing and sustainability, should we consider for drainage, roads, and other infrastructure that will be needed?
- What strategies, policies, and/or incentives are recommended to protect historic cores from decline while still promoting new development along the corridor?



The Mt. Comfort Corridor Regional Development Plan (September 2018) provided the ULI panel excellent insight on the community's interest in land use, design, and development in the corridor.

## Summary of Recommendations

Using the ULI Advisory Services time-honored process of reviewing extensive briefing materials, listening to presentations from the community, touring the corridor, and interviewing close to 70 community stakeholders, the panel conducted an intensive analysis of opportunities and constraints, resulting in the following high-level recommendations:

### Economic Development

- Use placemaking strategies and quality-of-life amenities to attract labor and talent.
- Leverage the I-70 interchange and Hancock Health's facilities to attract higher-quality business amenities such as a hotel, conference center, and sit-down restaurants
- Formally engage the Indianapolis Airport Authority to explore short- and long-term economic development opportunities such as time-sensitive biomedical deliveries and renewable energy facilities on airport land.
- Focus economic development strategy on key existing sectors: agri-tech, animal biomedical, advanced manufacturing, and agri-tourism.
- Organize for economic development by increasing resources, coordinating existing efforts, and focusing on target markets.

### Infrastructure

- Focus immediate attention on solving the bottle neck at the rail crossing in McCordsville, which is affecting traffic conditions throughout the corridor and should be a high priority for remediation.
- Upgrade the Mount Comfort road corridor from McCordsville to I-70. Consider roundabouts at key intersections, such as 500 and 600 North.
- Allow for multiparcel stormwater retention and management.
- Continue to invest in and expand the trail system and develop pedestrian infrastructure in key locations.
- Work with IndyGo (Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation) to explore extending the blue and purple transit lines into Hancock County in Cumberland and McCordsville, respectively.

## Placemaking and Design

New investment is increasingly seeking locations based on *quality of place*, rather than *utility of location*. Mike Cornett, the mayor of Oklahoma City, says that “economic development is really the result of creating places where people want to be.”

For this reason it is important to do the following:

- Develop consistent design standards for the Mount Comfort Road corridor, including high-quality lighting, landscaping, signage, setbacks, drainage, and trails.
- Beautify and improve town, county, and corridor gateways. First impressions matter, and landscaping, public art, and attractive, high-quality signage can make a difference.
- Consider designing Mount Comfort Road as a boulevard type of road with a median and landscaped rights-of-way. These steps would go a long way toward changing the image of the corridor.

## Land Use and Planning

- Focus new residential, commercial, and mixed-use development in nodes, particularly in the proposed McCordsville town center, downtowns Cumberland and New Palestine, and at the I-70 interchange.
- Encourage a mix of housing types to attract a broader range of residents and talent.
- Consider allowing cluster development, smaller lot options such as cottages and bungalows, and a greater mix of housing types including attached housing, agrihoods, and housing over retail.
- Connect the Buck Creek Trail to the Hancock Health property at I-70.
- Explore a mechanism for creating additional publicly accessible parks and trails in Hancock County and in the Mount Comfort Corridor.

## Organization and Implementation

- Create a multijurisdictional, public/private entity to coordinate and manage the implementation of corridor-wide policies, programs, and initiatives.
- Have a near-term convening of all stakeholders, led by the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), to focus on transportation improvements and resolution of the McCordsville rail-crossing problem.
- Develop an ongoing program to educate residents, officials, and developers on the economic, environmental, and social benefits of higher-quality development and regional cooperation.
- In addition to regulatory changes outlined above, explore the use of incentives to encourage higher-quality development throughout the corridor.

The remainder of this report describes these recommendations in more detail.



## Land Economics and a Vision for the Future

**THIS REPORT BEGINS WITH AN OVERVIEW** of regional and national market conditions and economic indicators that have helped inform the panel's work and subsequent recommendations. Understanding the socioeconomic trends that are affecting the study area can help planners and decision-makers identify the potential and pressure for future land uses. ULI believes that successful urban planning and land use policy can best be described as public action that generates a desirable, widespread, and sustained private market reaction. Therefore, Advisory Services panel reports typically have their foundation in the land economics and market possibilities for a study area.

### Trends in Successful 21st-Century Communities

Land use patterns are a major determinant of the eventual positive or negative fiscal outcome of local government investments in public infrastructure and services. For decades, overwhelming evidence has determined that more compact patterns of development lead to higher economic returns and reduced local government spending on a per acre and per capita basis in comparison to less compact development patterns.

Well-rounded and resilient communities offer a variety of land use patterns within their boundaries for their citizens to access. In these communities some residents choose automobile-dependent places to live, work, and shop, whereas others choose to spend their time and money in more compact, walkable areas. The key for a successful 21st-century community is to provide the freedom and opportunity for residents to access housing, shopping, employment, and recreation in both walkable, compact and more spread-out automobile-oriented environments. *Both circumstances should be approached from the perspective that attracting and retaining talent is the critical and definitive goal of successful economic development.*

# “Economic development is really the result of creating places where people want to be.”

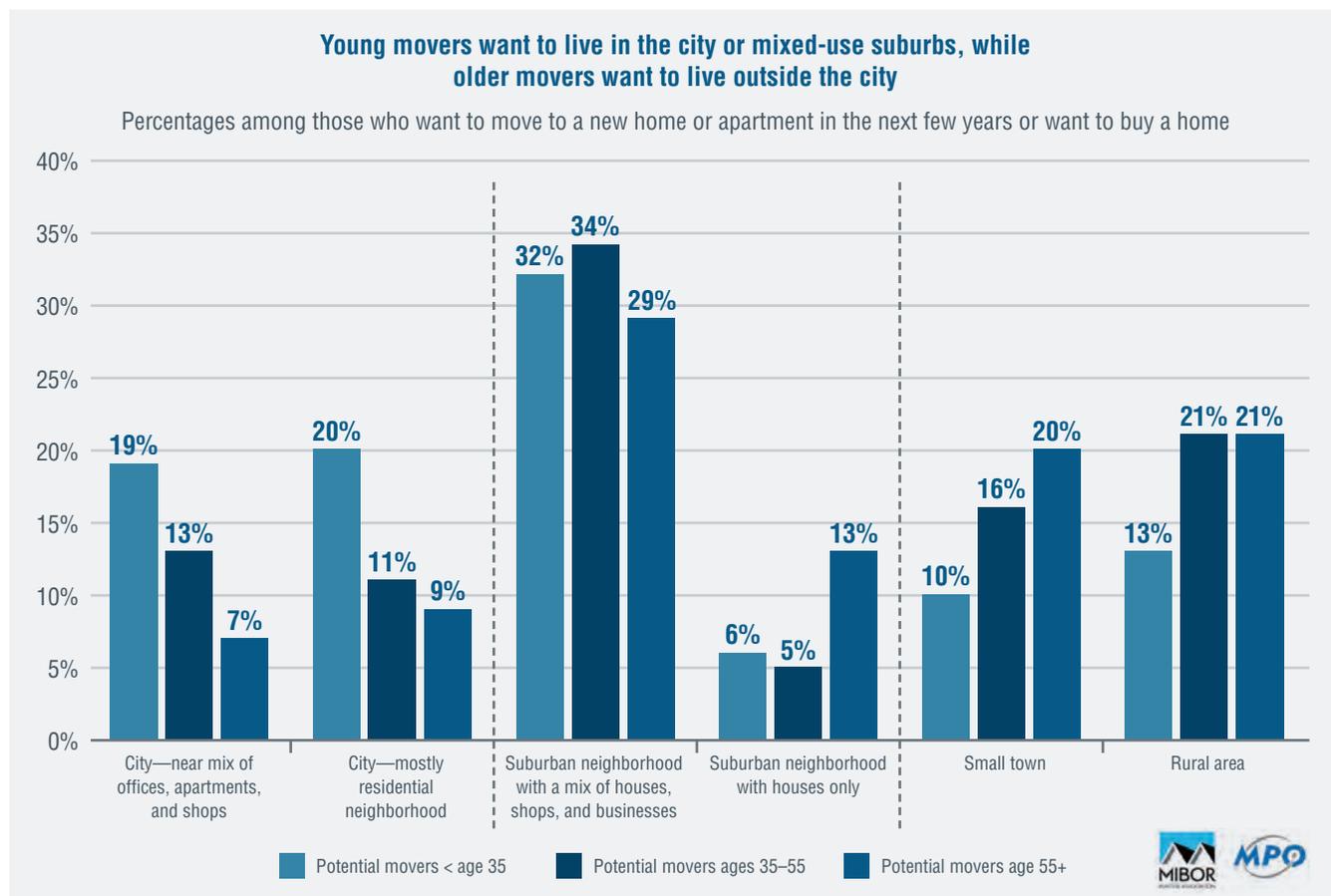
—Mick Cornett, Mayor, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

According to a recent community preference survey of metro Indianapolis residents conducted by the National Association of Realtors, the most preferred community type for local residents is a suburban neighborhood with a mix of housing types, shops, and businesses. The least preferred community type in the survey was suburban neighborhood with houses only. Thus, communities in the Indianapolis area that are

providing limited housing types and few commercial activity options (that is, “bedroom communities”) are drastically reducing their economic viability in the marketplace. This would describe the situation in most areas of the Mount Comfort Corridor.

The Mount Comfort Corridor has previously been planned and developed in a suburban land use pattern that does not typically allow for compact walkable development. Without providing opportunities for more varied and compact land uses, the corridor is hamstrung in competing economically with other areas of the metropolitan region. The opportunity exists for the corridor to become more economically viable and more likely to compete in the Indianapolis economy for high-quality growth only by pursuing a more diverse land use pattern.

## 2018 Central Indiana Community Preference Survey



A central finding of the 2018 Central Indiana Community Preference survey is that residents prefer a mix of housing types, shops, and businesses rather than residential-only communities.

## Population and Employment

The future population and economic growth of the Mount Comfort Corridor are inextricably tied to the growth of the larger Indianapolis region. The region has been growing, adding about 20,000 jobs annually in recent years, which is driving population growth throughout the metropolitan region.

Despite its location adjacent to the urban core county, Hancock County has historically lagged other nearby suburban Indianapolis counties in capturing population and jobs. Whereas current and projected Hancock population growth rates are on par with the region overall, other neighboring counties, particularly Hamilton, have served as the “preferred quarter” of regional growth, capturing greater than their fair share of new residents and jobs.

As the region continues to grow and other preferred areas become more built out, Hancock County, particularly the Mount Comfort Corridor, will become a more likely target for regional growth, assuming the area offers a land use pattern, infrastructure, housing, and amenities consistent with community preferences for potential new residents and employees. In fact, as seen in the accompanying figure, the Mount Comfort Corridor is already attracting population growth at greater rates than the county and region overall.

For the Mount Comfort Corridor to grow in an economically viable way, attracting a wide spectrum of residents and employees, it will need to avoid reliance on a single land use pattern that attracts limited types of housing, commercial options, and industry. Reliance only on automobile-oriented uses can lead to unintended economic, social, and

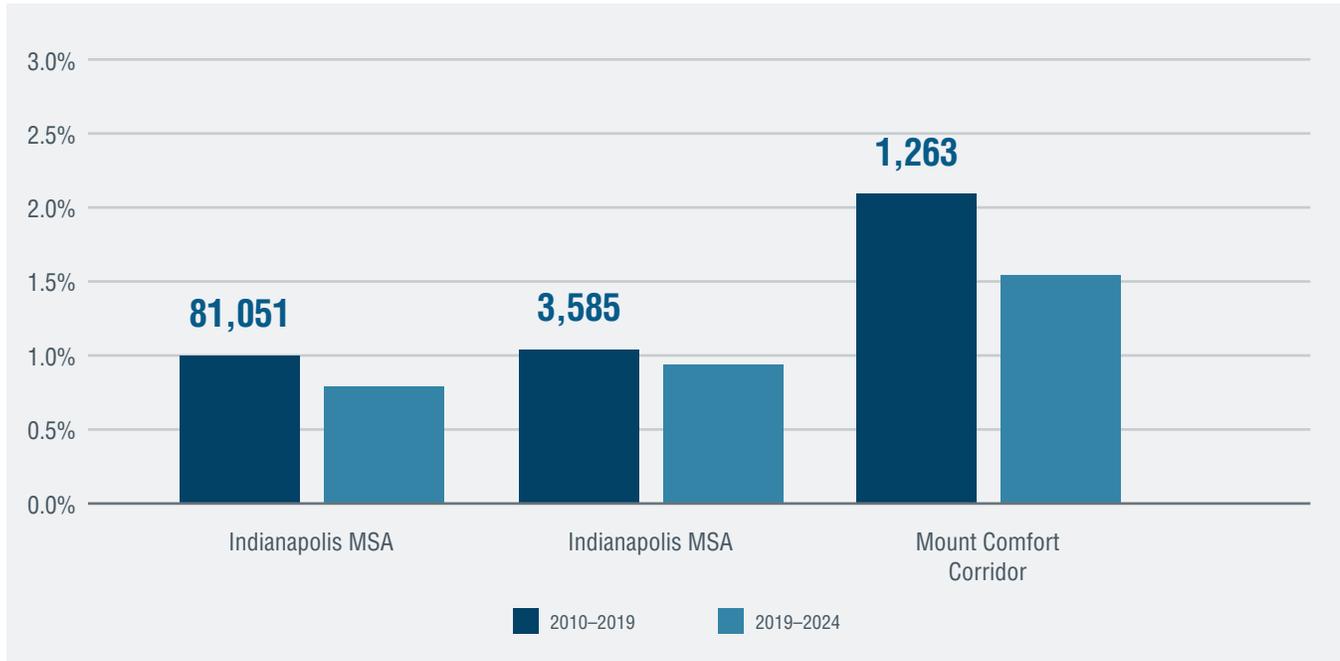
Annual Population Growth for MSA, Hancock County, and Mount Comfort Corridor

	MSA		Hancock County		Mount Comfort Corridor	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population 2010	1,887,887	—	70,002	—	13,900	—
Population 2019	2,068,816	1.00%	76,470	1.00%	16,498	2.10%
Population 2024	2,139,867	0.80%	80,065	0.90%	17,761	1.50%

Sources: ULI; Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization; StatsIndiana; Bleakly Advisory Group.

Note: MSA = metropolitan statistical area.

## Population Growth Forecast for MSA, Hancock County, and Mount Comfort Corridor



ULI AND INDIANAPOLIS METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

**Note:** MSA = metropolitan statistical area.

environmental consequences when the fortunes of the single uses rise and fall. Only by planning for and making the appropriate land use decisions and infrastructure investments that allow diversity in development patterns and uses, including compact walkable uses, to be mixed into the current land use pattern, will the corridor maximize its potential to capture sufficient levels of growth and position itself for a healthy and vibrant future.

### Demographic Trends for Hancock County

Extraordinary and unprecedented changes in demographics and lifestyle choices have altered the housing requirements for the nation as a whole, including the Indianapolis region. The makeup of the nation's households has dramatically shifted over the past 50 years. Since 1970, the portion of U.S. households that include families with two married parents and children fell by half, from 40 percent to 20 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. These demographic

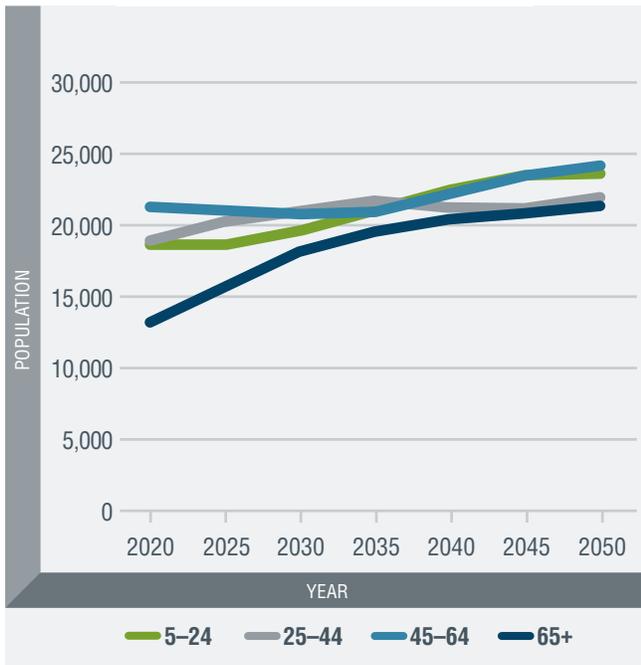
trends point to the need for more varied housing options, particularly those that appeal to an aging population that tends to seek smaller housing types for smaller households.

In Hancock County, households age 65 years or older are expected to grow at a far faster rate than all other age cohorts over the next 30 years. Whereas STATS Indiana forecasts that the county's population overall will grow 26 percent between 2020 and 2050, older households (65 or older) are forecast to grow at nearly three times that rate (61 percent). Currently, the housing stock in Hancock County, particularly along the Mount Comfort Corridor, is ill prepared for the effect of this demographic shift to older, smaller households.

### Real Estate Supply Analysis

Based on current economic and demographic trends and real estate market realities, the panel estimates that the Mount Comfort Corridor has the potential to attract the real estate uses set out in the accompanying figure over the next decade.

### Population Growth by Age, Hancock County



Source: ULI panel.

The status quo development potential projections take into account current corridor, county, and regional growth trends and assume the corridor will continue to capture its current share of development types that would be attracted to the corridor under the current land use pattern. The upside scenario assumes that opportunities for a more varied land use pattern are established throughout the corridor.

Potential market value ranges from \$300 million to \$350 million in the status quo model and from \$850 million to \$900 million in the upside model. Thus, the opportunity to enhance the Mount Comfort Corridor is potentially valued at more than a half-billion dollars in real estate market value.

### Potential Real Estate Uses, 2018–2028

Land use	Status quo model	Upside model
Residential single-family detached	1,500 units	3,000 units
Residential attached	250 units	2,000 units
Retail	295,000 sq ft	450,000 sq ft
Office	100,000 sq ft	250,000 sq ft
Industrial	2,500,000 sq ft	4,000,000 sq ft

Source: ULI panel.

Real estate development potential, through 2030, representing a status quo scenario and an upside scenario. The upside scenario is based on what could be achieved taking into account actions by both the public and private sectors to improve the organizational structures, marketing programs, and incentives governing the corridor.



# Economic Development Strategy

**MODELS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HAVE CHANGED.** Approaches that worked in the 20th century no longer work in the 21st century. A new paradigm for economic development has emerged with a major focus on human resources: attracting, retaining, and training talent for jobs of the future. The accompanying figure highlights some of the differences between the 20th- and 21st-century models.

## Attract Labor and Talent

Workforce—the human resource—has increasingly become a major focal point for economic development. The 21st-century economy is a knowledge-based economy built upon a skilled workforce. During the panel's stay in Hancock County, members heard multiple times about labor shortages and the difficulty that major employers are having in filling open job positions. A foundational strategy for the Mount Comfort Corridor to attract any future businesses is to ensure a ready and able workforce. Multiple strategies can and should be used, but the panel focuses on four that are particularly relevant to the Mount Comfort Corridor.

## More Diverse Housing Choices

As noted in the previous section, the Mount Comfort Corridor needs to provide a wider diversity of housing choices to attract a broader pool of talent for both existing and future employers. In particular, housing choices that are attractive to millennials and gen Z (born from 1995 to 2005), such as apartments in vibrant, mixed-use town centers with a mix of residential, retail, and other commercial uses, are critical to build and retain a skilled workforce.

## 20th- vs. 21st-Century Economic Development Strategies

20th-century model	21st-century model
Public-sector leadership	Public/private partnerships
Shotgun recruitment strategy	Laser recruitment strategy
Low-cost positioning	High-value positioning
Cheap labor	Highly trained talent
Focus on what you <i>don't have</i>	Focus on what you <i>do have</i>
Quality of life unimportant	Quality of life critical
Driven by transactions	Driven by overall vision

Source: ULI panel.

Other housing styles, such as cottages, townhouses, executive housing, and other single-family housing in a spectrum of price ranges, are also important to attract and retain a workforce in various life stages to the corridor, from young families to senior executives.

### Placemaking

Millennials and gen Z, as well as seniors and empty nesters at the other end of the age spectrum, will seek housing locations in vibrant mixed-use town centers. They want to live near amenities, such as restaurants, entertainment, and recreational facilities, and walkable neighborhoods where these mixes of uses are nearby to meet those needs. These types of locations are also likely to attract creative and entrepreneurial individuals who will create home-grown businesses.

Each town in the corridor should adapt and implement placemaking strategies most appropriate to its individual context. The proposed town center in McCordsville is an example of the type of vibrant place these individuals will seek.

### Workforce Training

Most of the industry sectors that have been targeted for the corridor will require some level of specialized training. Advanced manufacturing requires skills beyond a high school degree, as do many other employment sectors.

The Mount Comfort stakeholders should seek out and partner with technical and other postsecondary institutions, such as Ivy Tech Community College, to provide training opportunities within the corridor. This can build on career days currently being offered by Mount Vernon Community School Corporation and Southern Hancock County Community School Corporation.

In the short term, the towns or Hancock Health can make space available in their existing facilities for training programs, career fairs, and other workforce training activities. In the long term, the stakeholders should seek to have one of these training institutions establish a small, satellite facility within the corridor. One or more of the core stakeholders may wish to construct a multipurpose space that can be used for training and other economic development purposes, such as a retail pop-up program. These training facilities need to be located in easily accessible locations, such as the McCordsville town center, the trailhead at Buck Creek Trail in Cumberland, or New Palestine town center. Before launching any specific training program, the stakeholders need to work with existing businesses in the corridor to identify core skills and training requirements to ensure that these programs are meeting the needs of industry and continue to liaise with these and future businesses to ensure that the training programs stay relevant.

## Public Transit Access from Indianapolis and Marion County

Until such time as the Mount Comfort Corridor can develop a large enough pool of workers to meet the needs of existing and future businesses, it will need to import talent from other locations in central Indiana, particularly from Indianapolis and Marion County. Although the corridor is well served by roads and highways, a segment of the workforce depends on public transit.

The stakeholders should work with IndyGo to explore the extension of the proposed Purple and Blue bus rapid-transit lines along State Road (SR) 36 and U.S. 40, respectively, to at least the corridor. Providing additional resources to the Hancock Area Rural Transit organization can enhance transit accessibility from those nodes north and south along the transit routes, as well as enhance quality of life and accessibility to all segments of the community.

## Leverage I-70 Interchange

The I-70 interchange at Mount Comfort Road is one of the key economic development assets along the corridor. It is the commercial and industrial gateway to the corridor. To fully leverage this asset, the stakeholders need to undertake the following:

- Expedite and complete road and infrastructure improvements north and south of the interchange. Much of the work north of the interchange is already funded and scheduled for implementation. Improvements south of the interchange should also be addressed.
- Install gateway signage and other welcoming improvements at the interchange so that visitors and others know they have arrived at the Mount Comfort Corridor. This will help establish the Mount Comfort Corridor brand at this important entrance to the corridor.
- Establish zoning and design standards that will ensure a consistent and attractive environment on both sides of the interchange to create a higher-quality address for future businesses. This aspect is discussed further in the planning and land use section.

The I-70 interchange is an ideal location to establish key business amenities to serve the corridor, especially the industrial and logistics businesses that will be targeted to the corridor near the interchange. These amenities should include at least a limited-service hotel with meeting rooms, a small conference center, or both; good-quality restaurant options; and other business services, such as computing, accounting, and software consulting, to serve businesses and business travelers.



*The I-70/Mount Comfort interchange is a strategic location providing access to both the logistics business and residential development in the corridor.*

The Hancock Health site on the southwest corner of the interchange provides a perfect opportunity for these types of uses. Although the market may not support these uses in the short term, Hancock Health should consider reserving a portion of this site for the right uses and the developer that will meet these needs when the market matures.

## Explore Indianapolis Regional Airport Potential

No clear economic development role for the Indianapolis Regional Airport emerged during the panel's study of the Mount Comfort Corridor. However, the panel found a willingness by the Indianapolis Airport Authority to continue to explore both the short- and long-term potential for the airport. The stakeholders need to continue to meet and work with the airport authority to explore that potential. A representative from the airport authority should become a standing member of whatever entity is charged with implementing the corridor's economic development plan. In the near term, the panel suggests several opportunities.



INDIANAPOLIS AIRPORT AUTHORITY

*The county and towns should pursue strategic partnerships with the airport.*



INDIANAPOLIS AIRPORT AUTHORITY

*The solar array at Indianapolis is one of the largest in the world. Unused portions of the airport property in Hancock County should be considered for similar use.*

### **Biomedical Logistics Hub**

Several existing biomedical and pharmaceutical companies are already located in the corridor, with the potential to attract more. The corridor stakeholders should work with the airport authority to identify and develop the infrastructure required to support development of a secondary, time-sensitive biomedical logistics hub and begin to market this asset and potential use to targeted industries sought for the corridor.

### **Outparcels**

The airport authority owns several outparcels along the corridor that are not required for specific airport aeronautical functions. The corridor stakeholders should work with the airport authority to identify appropriate uses for these parcels and work in partnership to attract or develop those uses. Ground leases can be used for private development, such as logistics facilities or other corridor-supporting, nonaeronautic uses.

### **Solar Arrays**

The stakeholders should work with the airport authority to install ground-mounted solar arrays, similar to those installed at the Indianapolis International Airport. These arrays can be located on the outparcels mentioned previously or another appropriate portion of the airport property. Even if this solar installation does not have a compelling economic or financial purpose, it can begin to brand the corridor as the “Corridor of the Future.”

### **Additional Airport Facilities**

The corridor stakeholders should also work with the airport authority to identify and secure funding for additional airport facilities and infrastructure that can enhance the future value and potential of the airport. These items could include a better understanding of the availability of on-call Customs and Border Protection services, a potential VIP lounge, an additional conference room or multipurpose rooms for administrative services, and better public relations and marketing.

### **Remove Impediments to Development**

The ULI team heard about multiple impediments to development within the corridor. Most corridor stakeholders are aware of these issues, and efforts and plans are in place to correct or remove most of them. These are discussed in more detail in the infrastructure and planning and land use sections of the report.

The panel lists these challenges here because they are critical to implementing the overall economic development strategy:

- Removal of the at-grade railroad crossing in McCordsville.
- Completion of infrastructure improvements throughout the corridor, including road, utility, trail, and other improvements.

- Creation of an area-wide stormwater management strategy and retention facility that can serve multiple commercial/industrial sites along the corridor. The municipal jurisdictions, in particular Hancock County, need to explore this issue. It will expedite development, provide a more rational stormwater management plan, and could provide a recreational amenity for the corridor. The parties should explore potential locations and funding for this facility. Funding options could include federal, state, local, and philanthropic grants, as well as special assessment districts.
- Establishing clear, consistent by-right land use and design regulations. The development community demands a transparent and clearly stated set of guidelines and ordinances that govern development. Clear guidelines allow the development community to know in advance what is expected and provide a level playing field for all parties. The municipal jurisdictions should take the time now to develop an updated economic development plan with a specific focus on the corridor and appropriate land use plans and ordinances to implement that plan. Discretionary, subjective approvals will not attract the highest-quality development.

## Focus on Key Advanced Manufacturing Industry Sectors

The stakeholders need to identify specific target industries and laser-focus their efforts to attract those industries. The industries targeted should be based on the corridor's assets and market demand, not aspirations, and should reflect whatever uniquely separates this corridor from other areas within the region. Additional analysis and coordination with the Indy Chamber may be required to narrow the focus. However, analysis already completed by the stakeholders, the panel's research, and interviews suggest some broad categories of industry sectors:

- Agricultural-based manufacturing and research, including animal biomed;
- Advanced manufacturing;
- Life sciences;
- Digital technologies; and
- Logistics.

## Leverage Agricultural Assets

Hancock County has a rich agricultural history. As the corridor develops, it should continue to embrace its agricultural roots and tie them into the modern fabric of the community. In addition to agri-tech and agricultural research, some of the types of agriculture-related uses that can establish a front door along the corridor, highlight the county's rich heritage, and activate the corridor include the following:

- *Agricultural tourism*, which can include fun/day-trip activities such as "pick your own" and seasonal activities such as fall festivals, Christmas, and a petting zoo. An agricultural-oriented event may even be modeled after Austin's South by Southwest (SXSW).
- *Educational activities* for families and schoolchildren, such as visits to working farms or indoor aquaponics operations (the "alligator" farm), or opportunities for students to work on a farm. Agricultural tourism geared to education, such as Brandywine Creek Farms located in Greenfield, Indiana, and soon to have a location in Cumberland, provides educational opportunities to the suburban schoolchildren, as well as job and training opportunities for at-risk youth. This entity also partners with local hospitals to bring fresh produce to communities in food deserts. The panel observes that this type of organization can bring a lot of value to the community, and any presence that can be brought to this corridor will be a great help.
- The panel observed that residents living in the towns did not have a great connection between the local farms and their shopping experiences. Currently, most farmers in this area produce corn and soybeans sold to larger corporate entities. The panel suggests the support of farms that produce a variety of produce that can be sold locally to the community and local restaurants. This focus can help brand the county as a source for fresh produce that can be sold to the corridor and surrounding communities. The corridor can help provide the buyers for this produce by encouraging and supporting opportunities for *farm-to-table* restaurants and farmers markets.
- Local *restaurant entrepreneurs* can minimize startup costs by using shared kitchen spaces or participating in community event nights ("Food Truck Tuesday").

- The panel recommends creating momentum and activity through a *restaurant incubator*. The incubator facility would provide space for entrepreneurial chefs without the need for them to make a substantial capital investment. It would be dedicated to early-stage catering, retail, and wholesale food businesses. By covering the capital cost of kitchen facilities, made available on a time-slot basis to embryo operations, the incubator would enable a business to develop to the stage where it can invest in its own kitchen facilities. This will build local and regional followings for a chef or restaurant.
- The incubator space could also be used as a *community kitchen* that provides opportunities for people to cook or learn to cook together. This approach builds community strength through the activity of preparing food as well as lasting individual skills for self-sufficiency. This concept could be combined with the formation of a community garden in support of the broader concept of Mount Comfort's farm-to-table lifestyle.
- Farmland can be adapted to *host large events*, including private events such as weddings and public events such as concerts. Appropriate access, parking, refuse removal, and water and sewer facilities need to be considered in identifying locations for these venues, but several of the ideas mentioned here, such as the food hall, incubator, and educational facilities, could be considered for such uses.
- Honor and celebrate the history of this county by locating historic equipment along the corridor for placemaking. A catalog of equipment and old structures can help instill pride and identity for the corridor. The 2 Silos Brewing Company in Manassas, Virginia, and the Winn Homestead in Weston, Oregon, are two good models of adaptive use for commercial, entertainment, and agricultural purposes.
- An *agrihood* is a housing community that includes a working farm. The purpose is to connect the suburban community to the farm. The farm would typically have some sort of interaction with the community. In some situations, the residents would participate in the farming as a co-op program. In others, a farmer is hired to run the farm and the community buys shares in the farm (for a portion of the produce). Some may have community gardens, workshops, and other group activities. Willowsford in Loudoun County, Virginia, and Harvest in Northlake, Texas, are good examples of agrihoods.



ULI PANEL

*The breadth and variety of agriculture-related opportunities are enormous. Agritourism has expanded far beyond the typical farms and vineyards normally associated with rural areas. Pick-your-own, orchard produce, breweries, distilleries, meaderies, hydroponics, tulip and other flower picking, educational facilities combined with greenhouses, and fish farms all are opportunities for Hancock County.*

## Attract Entrepreneurs—Young and Old

Homegrown companies are the core foundation for long-term economic growth. The corridor needs to put in place the environment and infrastructure to attract and retain young (and old!) entrepreneurs. Such infrastructure includes the following:

- Placemaking and quality-of-life amenities (discussed elsewhere in this report).
- Small business incubators, co-working and maker spaces that provide flexible, below-market-rate space for entrepreneurs to test and grow their businesses. NineStar has already established this type of space near Greenfield with the Idea Co-Op. Replication of this type of space along the corridor would further enhance this entrepreneurial development. Implementation of the proposed maker space at the Buckhead Trail head in Cumberland, as suggested in the corridor's Stellar Community Plan, should also be pursued. Another similar space in or near the town center in McCordsville, possibly more food- and retail-oriented, would also be recommended. These spaces can build on the maker-space room operated by Mount Vernon High School. In all cases, these facilities will require public and private financial support to operate and survive.
- Entrepreneurs and startups need more than space to operate their businesses; they need a nurturing environment that includes patient and flexible financing, mentoring, and business-management training. The corridor stakeholders should explore existing state and regional programs that can provide this support, or work with the local business community to establish the appropriate financing and mentoring programs.

## Leverage Hancock Health Investments and Land Acquisitions

Hancock Health has acquired key sites at key locations along the corridor. Hancock Health can use these sites to attract and stimulate strategic developments that can further the larger economic development strategy. For example, a hotel or conference center at the I-70 interchange is important to the long-term development of the corridor. Entrepreneurial and workforce training facilities might be appropriate at the location in McCordsville. A food hall, farmers market, or community kitchen might be appropriate for the site in New Palestine.

In general, high-quality mixed-use developments at all the sites should be encouraged. In particular, the sites at the I-70 interchange and in McCordsville might be appropriate for two- to three-story vertical mixed-use building with residential above and retail or medical offices on the ground floor.

Hancock should continue and, perhaps enhance, the comprehensive “wellness” programs and businesses at each of these sites, such as the following:

- Connections to local and regional trails;
- Other outdoor recreation facilities (athletic fields, rope courses, adventure recreation, and team-building programs);
- Athletic or outdoor retail; and
- Healthy food opportunities, such as farmers markets, community kitchen facilities, or educational kitchens (cooking demonstrations).

## Leverage Fiber Optic Infrastructure

The corridor has exceptional fiber optic capacity, which is required infrastructure for business and economic development. The corridor should include positive information on this capacity in all marketing and outreach efforts to recruit businesses to the corridor. NineStar and other stakeholders should explore the creation of free wi-fi zones in strategic locations, such as public spaces in each of the

town centers. Millennials and gen Z want to stay connected and these wi-fi zones can enhance the placemaking for these strategic locations, as well as adding to the “Corridor of the Future” brand.

## Construct “Corridor of the Future” Facilities That Reinforce the Branding

To begin branding the corridor as the “Corridor of the Future,” future-focused infrastructure needs to be installed, most of which is described elsewhere:

- Electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure;
- Free wi-fi zones; and
- Solar or other renewable energy facilities.

## Organize for Economic Development

The corridor team needs to organize for economic development. These efforts are described in detail elsewhere, but should include the following:

- Increase resources to the core economic development team;
- Continue coordination and cooperation among all key organizations and municipalities, as already demonstrated as part of the Stellar Communities Plan;
- Focus on the corridor and core implementation activities;
- Inventory, explore, and leverage all federal, state, local, and philanthropic funding that may be available to implement the economic development plan; and
- Speak with consistent branding and messaging—“*One Voice.*”



# Infrastructure Strategy

**TO ENSURE THAT THE MOUNT COMFORT CORRIDOR** is able to “power a community anchored by health technology, diverse economic development opportunities, safe transportation opportunities” while maintaining a small-town feel with a sense of place and authentic character, key infrastructure components must be in place to meet needs now and into the future. The success of the Mount Comfort Corridor will be its ability to back up its desire to be “country connected” with a comprehensive forward-thinking infrastructure network that supports the needs of new business, recreational, retail, and residential uses while allowing incumbent rural and agricultural uses to function in an effective and compatible manner.

## Transportation

The Mount Comfort Corridor comprises the properties parallel to Mount Comfort Road, also known as County Road 600W, bound by 96th Street on the north and the Hancock County/Shelby County border on the south. The road is identified as a principal arterial to the north of I-70 and a minor arterial south of I-70. The primary roadway (Mount Comfort/600W) generally operates well from an engineering design standpoint but often is congested during morning and evening peak periods, providing a level of service C/D during peak-hour periods at most road segments and intersections. This level is expected to get worse over time without road improvements.

Traffic issues exist along the segment in McCordsville of U.S. 36 and Mount Comfort Road because of increased morning and evening daily trips (school, work commute) and train delays at the intersection. Additional traffic safety issues exist between 600 North through the I-70 intersection, through to U.S. 40, because of traffic speeds, truck traffic, and commuter traffic compatibility, and older road infrastructure design. A number of recent road improvements and planned road improvements have improved the corridor from a safety perspective.



THE DAILY REPORTER, GREENFIELD, IN

Traffic along the Mount Comfort Corridor.

As previously mentioned, the corridor operates well from a vehicular level of service perspective. However, the corridor offers limited pedestrian or bike options, and no formal alternative transit options other than 12 senior service vans. No connectivity has been included to the proposed Red, Blue, or Purple bus rapid-transit lines. The multiuse pedestrian/bike pathway offered in McCordsville through to Fishers, the three-mile trail at Buck Creek, and the Pennsy Rail-Trail are good connectivity foundations; however, the corridor lacks trail/pathway connectivity. Although new sidewalks and paths have been added in parts of New Palestine, McCordsville, and Cumberland, no such infrastructure exists along most of the corridor, particularly within the unincorporated county frontage. Moreover, no electric vehicle infrastructure is in place within the corridor, except plans to have one NineStar EV charger in place by June 2019.

## Utilities

The following is an outline of the many companies currently providing utilities to the 13-mile-long corridor. The panel is taking no position on the concept of consolidation of companies or service areas.

## Internet/Wireless Connectivity

The Mount Comfort Corridor has a strong internet and wireless foundation with NineStar Connect, AT&T, Xfinity, and On-Ramp Indiana providing service and infrastructure. NineStar has been installing significant underground fiber infrastructure to ensure that connectivity levels are among the fastest in the greater metropolitan Indianapolis area. Currently no infrastructure is in place for 5G, but completion of the fiber lines would establish the infrastructure necessary to ensure service in the future.



NINESTAR CONNECT

*NineStar Connect provides robust broadband services to the Mount Comfort Corridor.*

## Water and Sewer

Hancock County overall is underserved from a water perspective, and the Mount Comfort Corridor suffers from a similar lack of service opportunity, which affects development, land value, and growth opportunities. The majority of the areas that have access to non-well-water options are provided water by Citizens Water. NineStar has looked into expanding water service along the corridor and has made recent acquisitions to do so.

From a sewer perspective, the corridor has slightly better sewer line connectivity and access. Currently the corridor has the following 10 sanitary sewer providers:

- Cumberland Sewer District;
- Doe Creek Utilities;
- Gem District;
- Greenfield Municipal;
- Municipal Corp;
- Mount Vernon Municipal;
- New Palestine;
- Spring Lakes Utilities;
- Sugar Creek Utilities; and
- Western Hancock Utilities.

Despite the large number of providers and significant sewer capacity, significant sewer infrastructure gaps still remain. These gaps have been reduced by near-term consolidation efforts being made by NineStar, the town of Cumberland, and others.

## Electricity Providers

The Mount Comfort Corridor has six electricity providers:

- Duke Energy;
- Greenfield Municipal Electric Utilities;
- NineStar Connect;
- Henry County REMC;
- Rush Shelby Energy; and
- Indianapolis Power and Light.

Duke, Greenfield, and NineStar Connect are the primary providers of electric service with McCordsville primarily served by Greenfield Municipal Electric and NineStar, Cumberland and New Palestine served primarily by Duke Energy, and the rest of the corridor served by NineStar and Duke Energy. Ninestar is looking to expand its service provision and investment; however, the lack of continuity of the service providers can create barriers to entry for some business development opportunities.

## Gas

Gas infrastructure is provided throughout the county by Vectren. The company has significant infrastructure in place and ample capacity to address the near-term and long-term needs of the Mount Comfort Corridor. In addition, Vectren offers a national corporate partner that is interested in further economic development investment in Hancock County, a strong advantage with corporate support that is not fully tapped into.

## Infrastructure SWOT Analysis

The panel believes a useful tool in approaching infrastructure solutions would be a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis. The following narrative uses the panel's combined knowledge in land economics, urban planning, development, design, government operations, and engineering.

## Strengths

The panel's evaluation of the Mount Comfort Corridor has identified a number of inherent strengths that will allow the region to compete effectively from an access, livability, technology, and business retention/recruitment perspective. One major infrastructure advantage is the corridor's proximity to Indianapolis and existing investment. Currently, the corridor provides an efficient travel pathway to Indianapolis for residents of Hancock County, Hamilton County, and Shelby County.

From 2012 until now, major improvements have included expansion of portions of Mount Comfort Road from two to five lanes, interchange upgrades to the I-70 Mount Comfort interchange, improved roundabout at the County Road (CR) 600 West and CR 300 North intersection, and additional tax increment financing (TIF) dollars allocated for the improvements along Mount Comfort Road, CR 300 North, and at the McCordsville train intersection. In addition, infrastructure is in place to provide better pedestrian and bike connectivity through the approval of the regional bike plan. This would allow the existing McCordsville trail and the Pennsy Trail to align and provide more connectivity and transit alternatives.

Finally, the area has the capacity and industry engagement to support growth from an electricity, gas, and technology perspective. The electricity and gas infrastructure have a maturity level that will accommodate multiple buildout alternatives for the region, giving the corridor the flexibility to grow at varying paces and ability to handle multiple customer types. Moreover, NineStar, Duke, and Vectren offer significant incentives for economic development that have not been fully capitalized on, particularly from the perspective of leveraging national corporate dollars within the region. NineStar has been a stalwart in the county, and its fiber investment and prioritization of the Mount Comfort Corridor offer a unique strength that can be leveraged from a variety of perspectives.

## Weaknesses

Despite the many benefits offered within the Mount Comfort Corridor, some significant barriers remain that could impair the type of growth, development, and design improvements necessary to put the region on a sustainable viability track. At the top of the list are the traffic issues at McCordsville and U.S. 36 (i.e., train tracks). The intersection causes traffic impacts under current conditions that will be exacerbated under future buildout conditions. Although plans exist for a

bridge and road realignment to relieve pressure, the anticipated cost of the project is \$40 million and the current TIF does not appear to be generating enough dollars to ensure project implementation in the near term. While the town of McCordsville is primarily responsible for this improvement, it affects the viability of the entire corridor from a traffic and accessibility perspective.

Moreover, despite \$21 million of investment within the corridor, some design considerations are needed to ensure that the various modes of transportation (bike, pedestrian, commuter vehicles, trucks, cargo vehicles, etc.) can travel in a safe and compatible manner. Another major mobility gap is the corridor's lack of EV and autonomous vehicle infrastructure. Although the panel is aware that NineStar is contemplating these concepts, the region is behind if it wants to be the corridor of the future, because currently no charging stations are in place and no design considerations exist for autonomous vehicles from a roadway design perspective (road widths, vehicle storage, drop-offs/pick-ups) along the corridor. The current frontage designs do not allow for future alternative transportation options and provide limited lighting options as well.

Another infrastructure concern is the lack of infrastructure connectivity and access to water and sewer. Although the panel is aware that Gem Water and NineStar are in the process of expanding and consolidating service, major service gaps remain that limit the development and growth opportunities in the region. Combined with the impact on drainage and flooding concerns, these gaps provide significant obstacles to development.

## Opportunities

The Mount Comfort Corridor's location offers a tremendous opportunity for growth and development. Despite the area's rural character, it is relatively close to Indianapolis and offers more direct transit routes than many of the region's larger suburban communities. Particularly, the I-70 interchange at Mount Comfort Road offers tremendous opportunity to be a catalyst for growth and economic development. The county has invested in circulation improvements (2012), thereby putting Mount Comfort in a strong position to handle more users (residential, retail, commercial, agricultural, and industrial). This is a strong selling point for the corridor and a key opportunity area to catalyze development and investment.

A number of other opportunities exist that could position the Mount Comfort Corridor for near- and long-term prosperity from an infrastructure perspective. It is important that the region capitalize on the current momentum and economic conditions to invest wisely in the appropriate infrastructure improvements to truly be a corridor positioned for future economic development needs.

One key infrastructure investment opportunity is positioning the Mount Comfort Corridor to be a key recipient of a portion of the \$40 million Indiana Volkswagen Environmental Mitigation Trust Fund dollars. The Advisory Committee is being chaired by former legislator and current NineStar board member Beverly Gard, offering Hancock County and more specifically the Mount Comfort Corridor a potential strategic advantage in receiving funds. The Volkswagen Beneficiary Mitigation Plan will be administered by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) and would offer communities like Hancock County dollars for vehicle electrification or alternate fuel conversion (school bus, freight trucks, public transit, civic vehicle), EV infrastructure installation and improvements, and projects encouraging sustainability, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting climate change reduction. To capitalize on this infrastructure improvement, the corridor needs to have vehicle conversion and sustainability projects lined up now, while providing a map of opportunity areas for EV infrastructure improvements within the corridor.

In addition, a number of other federal, state, private, and philanthropic dollars are earmarked for infrastructure improvements. For example, companies like Ford, Uber, and Lyft have been investing in rural underserved transit communities to provide low-emission transit alternative fleet options. Although the panel is encouraged by the county's and townships' ability to leverage federal funds for local road improvements, the panel believes a number of grants and other funding mechanisms, particularly those offered by private industry partners and foundations, are available. (The Indiana Stellar Communities grant is a great example.)

Hancock County and the Mount Comfort Corridor have the opportunity to be early adopters by ensuring the infrastructure is in place to address this transportation technology change. Given the local (Hancock Health) and national emphasis on health care and wellness, the region has the opportunity to

capitalize significant dollars available for medical care access, trail and parkway development, and safe pathways to schools improvements. Leveraging these funding opportunities to increase corridor connectivity, add new transit options, and improve multimodal trailways would position transportation infrastructure to address the needs of businesses, commuters, and visitors while adding to the quality of life and wellness of corridor residents. As previously mentioned, such improvements help the region compete for economic development.

The presence of NineStar fiber infrastructure is another important infrastructure advantage and opportunity. NineStar has an aggressive strategy to establish underground fiber infrastructure in most of the Mount Comfort Corridor by 2021. Its strategy of aligning fiber installation in conjunction with other infrastructure improvements, including trail and road development, could provide an opportunity to create “smart corridors” for pedestrian and vehicular use. It also positions the corridor for future 5G development opportunities.

## Threats

Even though the county desires to be future-ready and a technology hub, the corridor may be behind other parts of the region in terms of adopting future-ready technology and transportation infrastructure. The most glaring lapse is the area’s lack of preparedness for EV and autonomous vehicle infrastructure. Although many believe that EVs are only for commuters and urban areas, car companies throughout the world are converting their entire fleets to EVs faster than we think. The following list shows the projected times for phasing out gas-powered engine vehicles:

- GM, phase-out starting in 2023;
- Ford, phase-out starting in 2023;
- Toyota, phase-out starting in 2021;
- Mazda, phase-out starting in 2021;
- Volvo, all electric by 2020;
- Mercedes, all electric by 2022;
- Jaguar Land Rover, all electric by 2020; and
- VW, all electric or hybrid by 2030.

Despite efforts by NineStar and others to jump-start technology adoption in the corridor, competing counties and corridors are already ahead with infrastructure, funding, and talent in place to be future-ready now. In addition, NineStar’s fiber rollout is not limited to just Hancock County. It is currently providing fiber to most of the eight-county region. The corridor must establish conditions for quicker installation and adoption to ensure a competitive advantage over local competitors for residents, retail, and commercial business opportunities.

Another major threat is the uncertainty of the funding for major necessary improvements, including the U.S. 36 and Mount Comfort Road intersection bridge and realignment project. The project is not on pace for near-term construction because of a budget deficit. This is exacerbated by the inability of the county and the town of McCordsville to successfully coordinate on the funding for these improvements. Although the intersection is within the jurisdiction of McCordsville, the failure to proceed with construction will negatively affect the entire corridor and its economic development prospects. Formal coordination among the county, the airport, Cumberland, New Palestine, and McCordsville, as well as industry partners such as NineStar, Greenfield Bank, and Hancock Health, will be essential to eliminate this infrastructure threat.

Finally, the biggest threat to addressing the infrastructure needs of the region is the status quo mentality and assumptions that the corridor will not and should not change. To ensure that the region remains economically viable over the long term, proactive infrastructure improvement implementation must occur that addresses the reality of the agricultural nature of now and the mixed land use design of the future. Failing to do so will provide other regions with a distinct advantage to capitalize on today’s positive economic climate, leaving the Mount Comfort Corridor behind.

## Infrastructure Recommendations

Based on the review of the current infrastructure and the SWOT analysis, the panel recommends the following physical infrastructure improvements to meet the needs of the Mount Comfort Corridor. The panel believes that implementation of these recommendations will establish an infrastructure foundation that will position the Mount Comfort Corridor to control its development destiny rather than react to it.

## Create an Infrastructure Consortium

Leverage an existing forum or establish a new focused public/private multijurisdictional infrastructure consortium that is dedicated to ensuring that the entire corridor has access to transportation, safety, services, utilities, and amenities. Hancock Health could be a great convener of this body, given the alignment with health and wellness.

## Electric Vehicle Planning

Begin positioning the corridor for IDEM Electric Vehicle Mitigation Dollars (\$41 million) by doing the following:

- Mapping out potential EV locations along the corridor;
- Coordinating with NineStar and Duke Energy;
- Working with Hancock Schools, Indiana Airport Authority, and Hancock County Senior Services on a bus/freight vehicle electrification strategy; and
- Aligning corridor goals with statewide sustainability goals to ensure future funding.

## Ensure Road and Parking Lot Design Is Forward Thinking

Incorporate road designs such as bulb-outs along the corridor to accommodate EV charging and autonomous vehicle drop-offs. Parking areas should incorporate signage, wayfinding, parking space standards, and lighting to accommodate the various levels of charging stations. The panel recommends that the consortium review the *Siting*

*and Design Guidelines for Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment 2012*, prepared for New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and Transportation and Climate Initiative ([www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/air/electric\\_vehicle/ev\\_siting\\_and\\_design\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/air/electric_vehicle/ev_siting_and_design_guidelines.pdf)).

## Bus Lines Connection

The stakeholders should explore the opportunities to establish nodes for future connectivity to the Red Line and Purple Line bus connections and work with ride-sharing and car-sharing companies to address last-mile connectivity to transit.

## Collaboration among Utilities

Facilitate consolidation or better coordination among the multiple utilities in the corridor to close the gaps in service related to sewer and water. In addition, better collaboration and consolidation will ensure a more consistent value proposition to developers and businesses across the corridor.

## Naming Rights as a Source of Funds

Leverage corporate naming rights, foundation grants, and regional collaboration efforts to fast-track funding for trail connectivity.

## Strategy for Corridor-Wide Funding

Establish a corridor-wide infrastructure funding plan identifying priority corridors. This should include potential funding collaboration on the strategy to address the McCordsville bridge and realignment project funding gap.



*Electric vehicle charging stations are an important infrastructure component for a “Corridor of the Future.”*



## Planning and Community Design

**THIS SECTION OF THE REPORT PROVIDES RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDANCE** from both a general framework perspective and for specific nodes along the corridor. As with all such ULI panels, these recommendations are based on the panel's combined professional experience in land development and real estate, analysis of the information provided to the panel, amalgamation of the panel's interviews, and deliberations of the panel during its stay.

### General Framework for the Corridor

Before getting into the details, several topics deserve attention at a macro level. As noted in the previous sections of this report, a mix of use types, civic elements, and good community design is absolutely critical if the corridor is going to compete for the talent that will make this area a success.

### Residential Opportunities

Although not universally true, the panel understands that a large proportion of current or recent residential development has been of “executive” or “move-up” homes. By this the panel means large custom homes on large lots priced beyond the financial abilities of the first-time or workforce homebuyer.

A successful Mount Comfort Corridor is going to have to incorporate a wider variety of housing types. These could include smaller homes on smaller lots, attached homes, apartments, and mixed-use developments combining housing with retail or office. Demand exists for such housing types, but some planning and zoning requirements influence sales cost and hamper production.

The panel recommends that all jurisdictions seek to accommodate such housing diversity. This might be done by providing some flexibility in zoning and revisiting development standards that may be driving up the cost of development. As an example, a requirement that 25 percent of each development be devoted to open space contributes to increased land and development costs. With regard to this example, the panel suggests cities including such a requirement revisit it. This particular suggestion is further discussed in the community parks discussion that follows.

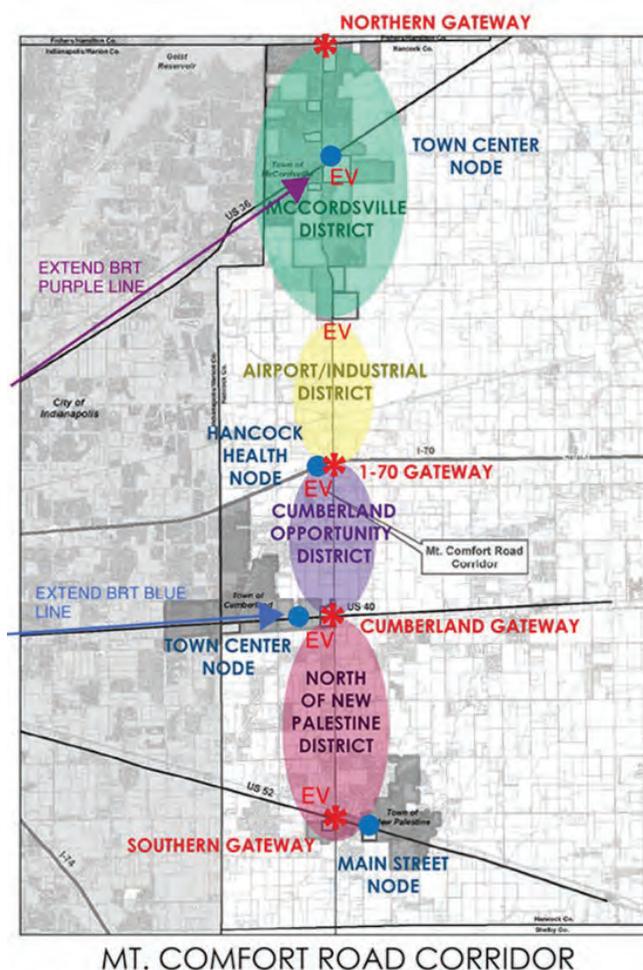
### Mixed-Use Development

The panel recommends implementing a mixed-use zone in key nodes along and adjacent to the corridor. These uses are emphasized at the McCordsville town center, at the Hancock Health Center in the Cumberland Opportunity Zone, at the Cumberland town center site on U.S. 40, and on Main Street in New Palestine.

When the panel discusses commercial mixed use, it means at least two product types. First, mixed use can be a development that includes a small shopping or office building on a site with adjacent higher-density housing. The panel would call this “horizontal mixed use,” which, if encouraged, could develop in the corridor in the near future. A more urban mixed use might be called “vertical mixed use.” Here commercial and residential development would be found in the same building. In the short term, vertical mixed use is unlikely to occur without some type of local incentive. However, if one jurisdiction were to provide such incentives to get a first development off the ground, this would be a sign that might cause other developers to bring a similar product type to the corridor.

### Civic Elements

One way or another, all cities address the public’s needs for a variety of public amenities. Parks and other gathering points, street lights, banners, monuments, signage, and wayfinding features can all contribute to the sense of place for the corridor.



**LEGEND**  
 EV - Electric Vehicle charging stations \* - GATEWAY ● - NODE ○ - PLANNING DISTRICT

The corridor can be divided into several nodes, gateways, and districts to better organize for success.

### Parks and Open Space

Parks are a vital element of any community. Very few park or recreation spaces exist in or near the corridor. Although a township park is west of New Palestine, most areas seem to rely on school facilities for open spaces.

Other states and regions take a proactive approach to parks. As an example, residential developments in some areas are required to provide one park for every 1,000 new residents. A small development would pay a park fee per home developed to fulfill this requirement. In a large development, parkland might be dedicated with a credit against the park fee.

## Agriculture-Related Development

This region can be seen as an overlay zone to complement residential development. The aim of this area will be to connect residential areas more directly to the agriculture that defines this region. This development includes the following:

- Agrihoods, a residential development that is located in conjunction with a working farm;
- Farm stands or stores or agriculture-related retail; and
- Agricultural tourism farms: interactive farms that people can visit to experience or learn about farms.

## Community Design

The panel believes that one of the keys to the success of the Mount Comfort Corridor economic development initiative is the physical design elements of that corridor. This section frames suggestions for creating a consistent, coherent roadway design along which appropriate, attractive developments can emerge. The corridor is much more than just the features of roadway design. A roadway containing consistent design elements from north to south will cause the traveler and visitor citizen to understand that this is a special place. Among the elements that will accomplish this would be the following:

**Monuments and Signage.** Recognizing that each city along the corridor has, and in the future will want to have, its own identity elements means it is important to design and adopt a set of similar roadside features to define the Mount Comfort Corridor. Such features should be located at key locations, such as the following:

- The north boundary of McCordsville;
- North and south of the I-70 interchange;
- North and south of the U.S. 40 intersection; and
- North of U.S. 52.

The city of Greenfield has already begun such an approach, as evidenced by its gateway features at the State Street I-70 interchange.

In addition, future commercial and industrial signage along the corridor needs to ensure design features are of the same style and size. This signage does not need to be uniform but should represent to a traveler arrival in the corridor.



*The gateway from I-70 into Greenfield is an example of the type of monumental treatment that will enhance the Mount Comfort Corridor.*

**Major Roadway Median and Right-of-Way Features.** These would include median treatments, uniform lighting design, adjacent trails, and drainage features along with major street tree plantings. These should be designed into the cross section of the road, thereby establishing a uniform, easily identifiable north–south image along the roadway.

**Building Setbacks, How Land Uses Address the Roadway.** Each town and the county will have somewhat different building setback standards regarding site development. It is important, however, that developments fronting the Mount Comfort Road right-of-way be standardized. Consistent with final design of the roadway, standards should be developed both limiting the number and spacing of driveways and setting the location of commercial buildings. For example, a commercial building should be required to be set close to the roadway and its parking shielded from view by landscaping or an earth berm. Requiring all new development along the corridor to adhere to this design concept could be an early and easy win for the towns and county.

### Walkable Communities

The panel’s interviews made clear that what is desired in the corridor are attractive communities built for 21st-century homebuyers. For that to happen, everyone needs to recognize what this means. Recent ULI research indicates that homebuying patterns are different from historically typical suburban development. The one-size-fits-all market and product approach will not work for the broad range of groups whose interests and borrowing opportunities make the communities of today. Here in the corridor, this means the plans and communities need to embrace a variety of housing types folded into walkable, compact neighborhoods.

### Specific Planning District along the Corridor

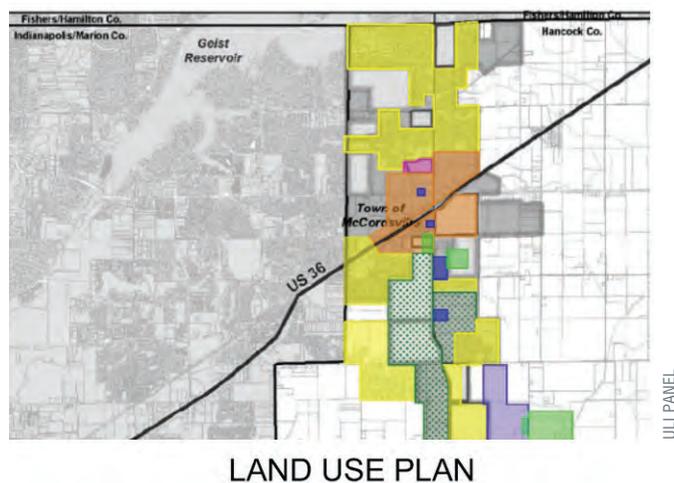
For the purpose of this discussion, the panel has identified several discrete corridor segments, each of which has its own role to play in the economic development initiative for the corridor:

- McCordsville/northern gateway;
- Airport/industrial district;
- I-70 interchange area;
- Cumberland Opportunity District; and
- North of New Palestine, the southern gateway.

### McCordsville District

The McCordsville District anchors the northern end of the corridor. It is currently the district with the most development activity and interest from the development community.

**Mixed Use.** The intersection at U.S. 36 and Mount Comfort Road is a strong location for mixed-use opportunity. All four corners of this intersection appear to be feasible for development. Within this area, the town has proposed the town center. The panel recommends that the northwest corner that was proposed for medical office be expanded to other uses that would complement the town center area. McCordsville has a small area with a defined grid system. The panel recommends extending this grid system throughout the proposed mixed-use area. Multifamily development as well as restaurants would help define this corner. Additional full-service restaurants would help create a destination.



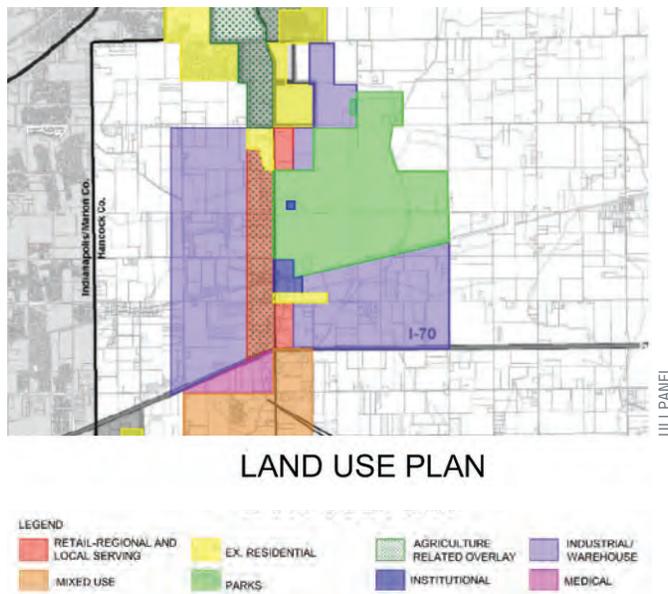
*The McCordsville District should focus on mixed uses, retail space, offices, small-scale multifamily housing, and restaurants. Agricultural opportunities such as agrihoods, agritourism, and ag retail should also be considered.*

**Parks.** The town of McCordsville has an existing park and has identified an area for a new park. These areas are great assets to the town. Pocket parks and other gathering spaces should be incorporated into the mixed-use areas to add to the experience of the walkable community by creating gathering places.

## Airport/Industrial District

This district has four distinct land use types: the airport proper and ancillary uses, amenity retail, industrial/warehouse/logistics, and agriculture-related development. Each land use type is a contributing factor to the overall development framework for the corridor, and each can be compatible and complementary to the other.

**Airport and Ancillary Uses.** The Indianapolis Regional Airport is located on a 1,805-acre property north and east of the I-70 interchange. This is the primary reliever airport for the Indianapolis International Airport and is owned and operated by the Indianapolis Airport Authority. It has two runways of 6,005 feet and 3,901 feet, respectively, with an average of 85 aircraft operations per day, mostly general aviation. The aeronautical property (runway, aprons, fuel, and safety zones) is supported by administration and operations offices, a fixed-base operator, hangars, and site maintenance facilities. Ancillary uses such as rental car, flight training, and aircraft maintenance facilities are located on the site. Emergency fire and rescue is provided by the adjacent Buck Creek Fire Station 71.



*The Airport/Industrial District includes the key features of the airport environs, local and region-serving retail, mixed uses, agricultural uses, and industrial/warehouse uses centered on the I-70 interchange.*

**Amenity Retail.** The area located along the Mount Comfort Road, especially near the I-70 interchange, is designated as amenity retail. This area will help define the road frontage and buffer the warehouse/industrial buildings from the street. These uses will complement the district by providing complementary services to amenitize this growing commercial area. Uses include the following:

- Restaurant, counter service/casual restaurants for surrounding employees (can also include food truck);
- Incubator/small office;
- Big-box retail; and
- Retail to amenitize workplaces.

The county should provide a common design theme for this area, including guidelines for road setbacks, landscaping, entrance features, facade design, and signage. In addition, services areas, loading docks, dumpsters, and truck parking should be screened.

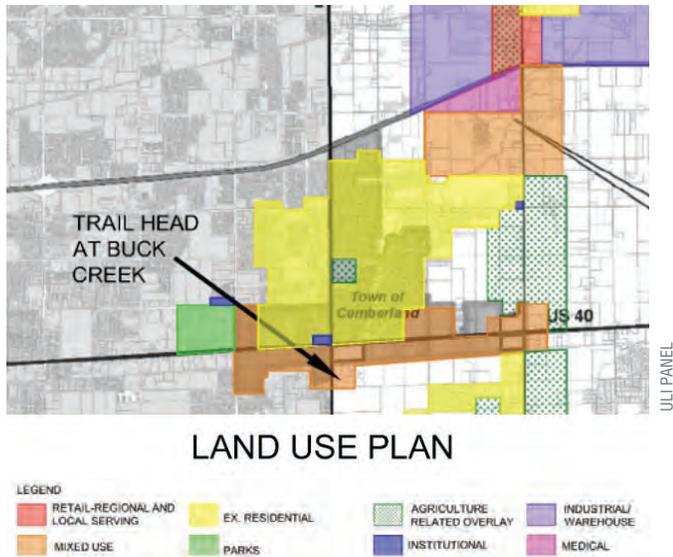
**Industrial/Warehouse/Logistics.** The industrial/warehouse/logistics component of this district is primarily located north of the I-70 interchange. The panel recommends that new development in this area be set back from Mount Comfort Road. Because this development does not create interaction opportunities for the road corridor, encouraging the amenity retail zone between this area and road is important. The panel recommends that these uses be limited to this district, as a consolidated area to allow opportunities for walkable and interactive development along the roadway and in other parts of the corridor.

**Agriculture-Related Development.** Agricultural technology and other nonresidential uses should be focused in the agriculture-related development overlay within the airport/industrial district.

This approach may require some research on the part of county staff and other organizations that will act as the champion for the corridor. The panel suggests coordination with companies currently in the county, such as Elanco and those involved in food production and agricultural industries. AgriNovus Indiana, a nonprofit state initiative that promotes and accelerates the growth of the ag-biosciences community, could be an excellent resource to provide advice about what specific ag-biosciences sectors to exploit and how they might be best located within the corridor.

## Cumberland Opportunity District

Two nodes of mixed-use development are proposed in this region. The first is the area close to I-70 that surrounds the Hancock Health Center. A walkable development with a mix of multifamily, townhouse, and cottage units can be tied together by a trail system. Office or incubator space that is related to the health center can also be located within this node. In addition, retail would complement all of the uses, both commercial and residential.



The Cumberland Opportunity District includes an emerging medical node on the southwest quadrant of the I-70 interchange. This district also includes an extension of the evolving residential development in the town of Cumberland. This location offers an opportunity to explore different residential unit types not currently part of the corridor typology. The panel recommends a strong focus on mixed-use development and the incorporation of multifamily, townhouse, and cottage units in a walkable format.

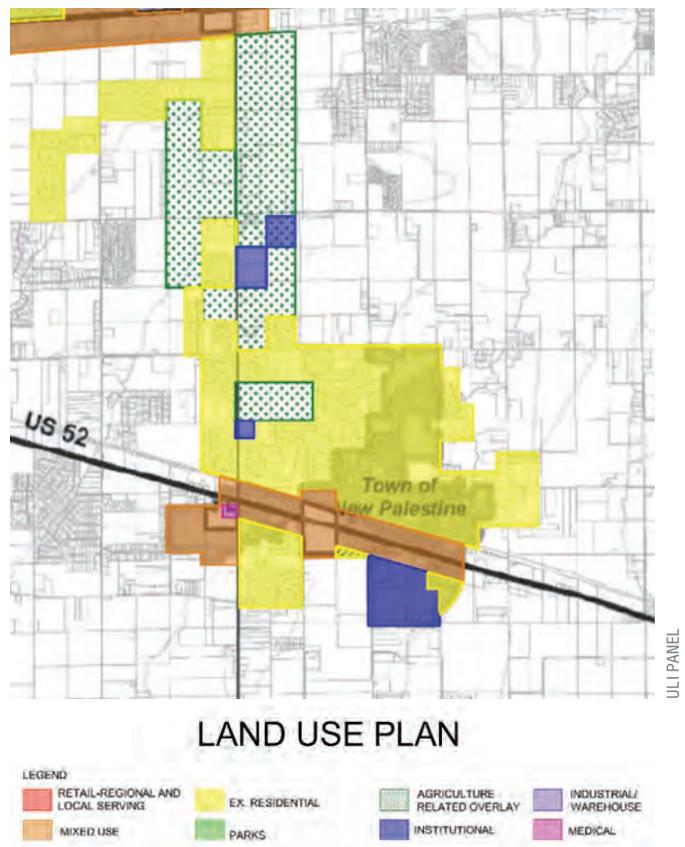
The second node is located at U.S. 40 and Mount Comfort Road. A development with a range of housing types and retail would be a great gateway to the town of Cumberland. Mixed-use development is proposed along the entire U.S. 40 frontage throughout Cumberland. In this location, mixed use may be more retail focused. A town center location has been recommended.

**Agriculture-Related Development.** Agricultural technology and other nonresidential uses should also be the focus of the Cumberland Opportunity District. In addition to ag-bioscience uses, as noted previously, this district may also present an opportunity for an agrihood.

## North of New Palestine District

This district is the southern gateway into the corridor and represents the area north of the town of New Palestine to State Route 40.

**Mixed Use.** Mixed use is proposed at the southern end of this corridor and along Main Street in New Palestine. New Palestine already has a successful walkable town with infill opportunities. Mixed-use buildings with ground-floor retail and multifamily or office would fill in the gaps on Main Street. On the open parcels within this area, a range of housing types would be appropriate. Connecting the sidewalk network should be prioritized.



The northern part of the New Palestine District focuses on residential development transitioning to mixed uses at the intersection of U.S. 52. This district also should retain agriculture-related uses.

**Agriculture-Related Development.** In this district, the panel recommends a focus on agriculture-related development that ties into the residential fabric. This includes agrihoods, agriculture-focused retail, and agritourism.



## Branding and Marketing

The panel's research and interviews made clear that although many branding and marketing efforts have taken place in the Mount Comfort Corridor, no clear brand recognition exists within the corridor, nor is a consistent marketing message being sent to potential investors. The panel surveyed several stakeholders both in Hancock County and in the surrounding areas and found that although the Mount Comfort Corridor name did not have significant brand recognition in the Indianapolis region, it had tremendous value within the three towns and Hancock County. Moreover, the town's branding efforts had not met anticipated targets from a community/business development perspective. As a result, the panel believes the Mount Comfort Corridor needs a modified branding and messaging plan to reach its long-term collective development goals.

When discussing branding, the panel means more than a name, a symbol, or a tagline. The panel believes the corridor truly has to have a consistent message about where it is and where it wants to go to truly get the type of development and investment it wants and needs. Starting from the name of the main corridor road, to the goal and characteristics of the lifestyle desires in the corridor, the region appears to be

sending an inconsistent message. When the messaging gains consistency, the design standards along the corridor can and should reflect that unified vision, while allowing each town and township to demonstrate its unique community offerings and character.

## Naming and Messaging

To understand how the region and the corridor see themselves, the panel began evaluating the current messaging being provided to represent the area. Following are just a few examples:

- Mount Comfort Corridor: Building Connections for Tomorrow
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Life, Well Run
- Cumberland: Stay Connected
- Next Stop . . . McCordsville

In addition to these formal taglines, the panel also heard the following informal descriptors of the corridor:

- “Health and wellness is the future”;
- “Not Fishers”;
- “Not Olio Road”;
- “Hard on crime”;
- “Airport anchors the corridor”;
- “Future regional technology hub”;
- “Prime location for business incubators”;
- “Ready for fast residential and business growth”;
- “Large executive housing center with country living opportunities”;
- “Farm and agricultural has always and will always drive the county and corridor.”

All of the preceding goals and descriptors are aspirational and, in many cases, not mutually exclusive, but from a branding and marketing perspective they create a very broad and potentially unattainable to target. The Mount Comfort Corridor cannot be all things to all people. Instead it needs a consistent “corridor brand” used among the various stakeholders that speak on behalf of the corridor.



*The Mount Comfort Corridor needs to create a branding message that speaks with one voice, incorporating a unified corridor vision and its unique town and agricultural identity.*

By providing targeted messaging and talking points that resonate with current residents and business interests and by sending a cogent message to prospective developers, investors, and other stakeholders, the Mount Comfort Corridor can better position itself to grow and develop intentionally with an effective plan vision. An excellent way to generate collaborative energy along the corridor and get public buy-in for this branding concept is to have a public branding and logo design contest. Leveraging the Idea Co-op would be an excellent way to roll out this concept. A number of communities of all sizes have used this strategy successfully. It can be a great way to encourage engagement from all ages and demographics while reducing costs. This design contest concept could be used for entryway signage and monuments as well. Some key concepts to consider when discussing branding follow:

- Define yourselves by what you are and what you have to offer that is unique, not just by what you are near.
- Remember that having a unified corridor vision and unique town characteristics are not mutually exclusive.
- Capitalize on natural amenities and relationships that add value.
- Be consistent in your messaging.
- Leverage signage, art, and multimedia.
- Diversify engagement.

## Recommendations

The panel believes that developing a uniform and consistent brand is key to the success of the Mount Comfort Corridor. The first recommendation is to make Mount Comfort Road the consistent name of the road segment from the Shelby County/Hancock County line all the way north to the Hancock County/Hamilton County line. Implementing this recommendation would require a change in road signage along the road segment. In addition, use signage at key corridor gateways, including the following:

- Northern gateway (96th Street and Mount Comfort Road);
- U.S. 36/Mount Comfort gateway;
- I-70 Mount Comfort gateway;
- U.S. 40/Mount Comfort gateway; and
- U.S. 52/Mount Comfort gateway.

In addition to signage and gateways, approved traffic circles (roundabouts) can include art and monumentation that reflect the desired corridor brand identity and naming demarcation. The roundabouts in Fishers offer a great example of blending art and traffic infrastructure to create unique monuments and demarcations of place. The goal would not be to repeat what is being done in Fishers but to come up with a design authentic to the Mount Comfort Corridor. The layout of the corridor would provide each township with an opportunity to contribute unique visual art and design, while remaining consistent with the overall corridor design standards and unified brand identity. Amador and Yolo counties in California, both of which share agricultural characteristics with Hancock County, have accomplished this successfully.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



ED MCMAHON

*Large-scale or oversized iconic sculptures are an excellent method to brand and advertise a location.*

In addition to the formalization of the corridor street name, inclusion of new signage, and the development of character-defined brand identity, the corridor needs to improve its messaging on a consistent basis. The Stellar Communities Program offered an excellent opportunity to define a unified tagline and brand for the Mount Comfort corridor to be used for advertising, recruiting, and marketing. The panel believes that a regional corridor authority, with input from residents and stakeholders, should define a formal tagline that is used universally. The panel believes the Mount Comfort Corridor's commitment to a brand identity supported by real and measurable action is a key to the region's success.

Concepts could be used such as leveraging the airport, the technology opportunities, the farm-to-table movement, affordability and quality of life, unique outdoor lifestyle opportunities, and land availability, as well as the overall natural beauty of the Mount Comfort Corridor. Following are some additional taglines that may also resonate with current and future residents alike:

- Mount Comfort Corridor: Safe for Families;  
Great for Business
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Back to the Future
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Open for Business
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Ready for Takeoff
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Positioned for Prosperity
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Grounded in Tradition;  
Positioned for the Future
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Building Connections  
for Tomorrow . . . Today
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Life, Well Run
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Country Wellness Capital
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Country Cool
- Mount Comfort Corridor: Family Friendly;  
Business Friendly

Although the panel has provided recommendations for branding, the panel encourages the Mount Comfort Corridor to leverage residents and businesses to get energy and support behind the concept. Coordination and collaboration are key to ensuring that the brand permeates the entire corridor. Further, testing the ideas for viability of the brand messaging with prospective receptors from the residential and business sectors representing all age, race, gender, and socioeconomic demographics, is essential to ensure that you are truly marketing a city that is future powered.

Often branding efforts can become so insular that the "echo chamber" created by the abundance of local knowledge can result in a poor external message. Leveraging the many active community and business partners engaged in this ULI study will allow Mount Comfort to achieve success in its branding strategy both internally and externally. Finally, allow the towns and townships the opportunity to create unique brands that align under the umbrella of the corridor. Creating alignment between the jurisdictions, the local and regional design/signage guidelines, and the timing of the branding/messaging communication plan rollout is key to successful implementation. In addition, creating a regional event celebrating and revealing the brand and marketing campaign can add to the effectiveness of the campaign.

A photograph showing two men in business attire sitting at a table. The man on the left, wearing glasses and a white shirt with a red tie, is looking down at a document. The man on the right, wearing a dark suit, has his hand to his forehead in a gesture of stress or concentration. There are glasses and a pen on the table.

## Organization and Implementation

**A SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE** should have an underlying organizational structure that is laser-focused on the vision, goals, and action strategies of that initiative. That organization should also have the financial resources and decision-making authority to implement the vision. The ULI panel believes that for the Mount Comfort Corridor to be successful, a new organization needs to be created.

The entities that currently have responsibility for implementing a new economic vision for the corridor include a variety of elected and selected bodies and private organizations. These bodies include the Hancock County Board of Commissioners; the Hancock County Council; the Town Councils for McCordsville, Cumberland, and New Palestine; the various planning commissions; the departments of the county and towns; the Hancock County Redevelopment Commission; and the Hancock County Economic Development Council. The School Board also plays a role in supporting the corridor.

A number of regional organizations, such as the Indianapolis MPO and the Indianapolis Airport Authority, also play a role. And finally, a number of private-sector groups and companies such as NineStar Connect and Hancock Health are involved in the corridor's future.

Although on the surface each of the entities may appear to be working well together, the research and interviews conducted as part of this visit left the panel convinced that a lack of coordination, accountability, and focus is preventing success. The panel believes that the importance of this corridor requires a more efficient and effective body to ensure fulfillment of the corridor's objectives.

## Examples of Successful Corridor Development Organizations

All around the United States, local governments have recognized the need and advisability of the creation of economic development organizations that can organize, manage, and implement strategies more efficiently than is possible with local governments. Some examples include the following:

- Buffalo Urban Development Corporation in New York state;
- Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization in Arlington, Virginia;
- North Carolina's Southeast Regional Economic Development Partnership Military Corridor;
- 495/MetroWest Partnership in Massachusetts; and
- Central Corridor Anchor Partnership in Minneapolis.

Each of these organizations has found its niche in the structure of the jurisdictions in which it operates. The Buffalo Urban Development Corporation is the city of Buffalo's not-for-profit development agency. Although closely tied with the city government, it has the freedom to operate without the same restrictions as a governmental department. In contrast, the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization is a completely separate nonprofit, and although it has Arlington County officials on its board, it is truly an organization of the willing that has achieved great success in advocating for the citizens and businesses in the Columbia Pike corridor.

## Mount Comfort Corridor Economic Improvement Organization

The panel suggests that Hancock County and the three towns consider creating a new entity, a nonprofit public/private development corporation focused solely on serving the needs of new and existing businesses in the corridor. This organization would have representation from the county, each of the towns, the Indianapolis Airport Authority, and the private sector.

The entity is charged with creating and implementing a vision for the corridor, creating near- and long-term goals and objectives, including identifying appropriate land uses and infrastructure that is consistent with the county's and towns' comprehensive plans and strategic plans.

### Option 1: Creation of an EID

Economic improvement districts (EIDs) are public/private partnerships in which local property and business owners elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development, and promotion of their property. Nationally, there are about 430 EIDs, but the trend has only recently caught on in Indiana. Most notably, both Evansville and Fort Wayne adopted EIDs for portions of their downtown districts.

EIDs provide a unique and straightforward economic and community development tool for municipalities, developers, and property owners because they allow targeted control, financing, and development of projects without creating an additional financing burden on taxing units. EIDs also allow taxing units to avoid some debt caps that might otherwise limit bonding or borrowing.

With the passage and adoption of Indiana House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1278, signed by the governor on March 25, 2018, establishing an EID in Indiana communities becomes more difficult. HEA 1278 requires that an EID petition garner signatures from 60 percent of property taxpayers *and* 60 percent of the assessed valuation in that area. Previously the threshold had been 50 percent. HEA 1278 also caps the time to accomplish the EID petition process at 120 days. Some requirements for the EID's relationship and coordination with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and other local governmental bodies have also been imposed.



*Public/private partnerships are organizations of the willing with significant flexibility and faster startup time than a formal state-sanctioned development economic entity. Such an organization can act as the voice and leader for the entire economic development initiative for the corridor.*

## Option 2: Creation of an Economic Development Partnership

The basic function of economic development partnership would be to manage, administer, and champion economic development and growth in the Mount Comfort Corridor. This partnership is an organization of the willing without the legal and administrative requirements of an EID.

A new model of economic development involving public/private partnerships (PPPs) is helping drive economic revitalization, create jobs, and transform aging central cities into vibrant, livable hubs of activity that attract new business, private investment, and people. Across the country, successful PPPs (or P3s) are emerging as an alternative path to economic success for traditional state-run economic development agencies and departments of commerce.

Although PPPs vary from state to state, they typically involve public and private partners working in collaboration to leverage the funding, talents, technologies, expertise, and convening power necessary to attract new business investment to the region. For local governments under fiscal restraints, PPPs have become powerful tools to help facilitate a range of economic development projects that would not otherwise have happened without private-sector investment.

However, they are not without significant challenges. Some see privatized economic development models as a public/private power grab—because they emphasize the private side to the extent that transparency and credible metrics for job creation get lost in the equation.

But when coupled with the right set of policies and institutional environments, PPPs can be powerful catalysts for economic growth. The best PPPs bring together a high-powered team of business leaders and economic development specialists who leverage the assets of a region to establish a coherent strategy for development and brand the location as a prime site for new business.

## Vision and Mission Statement

The vision and mission of the entity, whether an EID or a PPP, is to organize, market, and champion the future development vision for the Mount Comfort Corridor. Developing a vision and mission statement is crucial to the success of any community initiatives. This statement explains the group's aspirations in a concise manner, helps the organization focus on what is really important, and provides a basis for developing other aspects of the strategic plan.

## Matrix of Initiatives, Activities, and Responsibilities

Initiative	Goal	Time frame	Responsibility
Create PPP	Create entity to drive economic development goals of county and towns	Near term	Towns, Hancock County, and Indianapolis Airport Authority
Convening on McCordsville railroad crossing	Establish northern gateway	Near term	PPP with town of McCordsville, Hancock County, and MPO
Create corridor vision	Establish PPP mission	Near term	PPP with three towns, county, HEDC, MPO
Create strategic plan	Incorporate individual jurisdiction and private-sector objectives	Medium term	PPP with three towns, county, HEDC, MPO
Inventory properties in corridor	Acquire knowledge and understanding of corridor	Near term	PPP with county, three towns, and MPO

**Source:** ULI panel.

**Note:** PPP = public/private partnership; MPO = municipal planning organization; HEDC = Hancock Economic Development Council.

*An example of an implementation agenda that provides the community with a focus for action.*

Although this entire ULI Advisory Services report has suggested and hinted at some of the elements of that vision (attracting and retaining talent, a unified urban design, unique character, branding, focus on agricultural assets, exploring new residential unit types, access to transit), it is in fact only a framework to begin to consider a true vision statement. The new Mount Comfort Corridor organization must initiate, create, test, and refine the vision and mission statement.

After creation of the vision and mission statement, the organization should consider addressing the following areas of responsibility:

- Convenings;
- Public relations and marketing;
- Amenities for the corridor;
- Incentives for attracting the target industries;
- Incentives for attracting a greater variety of housing types;

- Creating an action plan with the following:
  - Near-term goals (one year);
  - Medium-term goals (two to four years);
  - Long-term goals (five years); and
- Identifying funding and financing.

### Initial Action

The panel suggests some initial steps toward this end:

1. Establish the organization.
2. Create and adopt an interim vision and mission statement (it can be refined over time).
3. Conduct a convening (perhaps with the initial help of the MPO) on the McCordsville railroad crossing. This will be a good initial task to build trust and bona fides within community.
4. Create an action matrix that acts as the organization's rolling agenda for initiatives, activities, and responsibilities.

The matrix above outlines a suggested approach to creating a rolling agenda of initiatives, activities, and responsibilities.

# Conclusion

**THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL** was asked to develop an economic development and land use plan for a model corridor that could improve Hancock County’s competitive position while also enhancing the region’s image and quality of place. The panel made detailed recommendations related to economic development, infrastructure, placemaking and design, land use and housing, branding and marketing, and organization and implementation.

In every case, the panel’s recommendations were grounded in the recognition that both growth and economic development are based on choices. There is no doubt that the Mount Comfort Corridor will grow and change; the real question is how. In other words, the Mount Comfort Corridor can grow by chance or choice. The leadership of the region can shape the future it wants or simply accept whatever comes along.

The panel heard almost the same thing from all 70 interviewees during the ULI panel week: “ensure that the Mount Comfort Corridor is an economic and community-building triumph for the towns, the county, and the citizens.” The panel is convinced that the partners that made this panel possible already exhibit the commitment, drive, and energy to make this new organization a success.

Models for successful economic development have changed. Approaches that worked in the 20th century no longer work in the 21st century. Today communities and regions are in a global competition to attract and retain a talented workforce. In a world where capital is footloose, new investment is increasingly seeking locations based on quality of place rather than the utility of location.

The panel believes that using placemaking strategies, adding quality-of-life amenities, developing consistent design standards, diversifying housing choices, and leveraging the corridor’s existing assets can differentiate the corridor and attract new businesses and talent.

Making the recommended improvements to the corridor will take time and money, but the panel believes that its recommendations will also create up to an additional \$500 million in economic impact by 2030.



*A tableau of the Mount Comfort Corridor, including agricultural, residential, industrial, institutional, and commercial uses.*

# About the Panel

## Ed McMahon

### Panel Chair

Washington, D.C.

McMahon holds the Charles E. Fraser Chair on Sustainable Development at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C., where he is nationally known as an inspiring and thought-provoking speaker and leading authority on economic development and land use policies and trends.

As the senior fellow for sustainable development, McMahon leads ULI's worldwide efforts to conduct research and educational activities related to environmentally sensitive development policies and practices. He is also chairman of the board of the National Main Street Center and a senior adviser to ULI's Healthy Places Initiative.

Before joining ULI in 2004, McMahon spent 14 years as the vice president and director of land use programs for the Conservation Fund, where he helped protect more than 5 million acres of land of historic or natural significance. He is also the cofounder and former president of Scenic America, a national nonprofit organization devoted to protecting America's scenic landscapes. Before that, he taught law and public policy at Georgetown University Law Center for nine years and served in the U.S. Army, both at home and abroad.

McMahon is the author or co-author of 15 books and over 500 articles. His books include *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities*, *Better Models for Development in Virginia and Conservation Communities: Creating Value with Nature*, *Open Space and Agriculture*. McMahon also writes regularly for *Urban Land* magazine, *Planning Commissioners Journal*, and other periodicals. During the past 30 years McMahon has worked with more than 600 communities in all 50 states on a wide variety of land use and economic development issues.

McMahon has served on numerous advisory boards and commissions, including the Chesapeake Conservancy, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Maryland, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Home Depot Foundation, and the Orton Family Foundation.

He has a BS from Spring Hill College, an MA in urban studies from the University of Alabama, and a JD from Georgetown University Law School.

## Jose Bodipo-Memba

Sacramento, California

Bodipo-Memba is the director of sustainable communities for the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD). He has spent over 18 years managing development projects associated with the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. He is the program manager for SMUD's Long Range Asset Management Plan and the environmental compliance coordinator for the 5,000-acre Solano Wind Project in Rio Vista, California.

Bodipo-Memba's development projects have covered a range of technical areas, including greenfield specific plan development, infill development, school and facilities planning, site feasibility analysis, wind energy, and infrastructure improvement. Some of his more notable projects include the Sacramento Railyards Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR), the Lincoln High School Complex (San Diego) EIR, San Diego State Medical Health Center project, the Country Club Estates Specific Plan EIR, and the California Lottery Headquarters Plan. With direct project experience throughout California, Bodipo-Memba has shown the versatility needed to address the variety of environmental and planning issues cities face.

He is active in the community, serving on the Sacramento Planning and Design Commission, the Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Board of Directors, vice chair of ULI Sacramento, and as a member of the ULI national Public Development Infrastructure Council. Bodipo-Memba was a 2010 recipient of the *Sacramento Business Journal* 40 under 40 award, the 2012 Drexel University Oxholm Award for Community Leadership, and the 2015 Drexel University 40 under 40 Distinguished Alumni award.

He holds a BA in history from the University of California at Berkeley and an MBA from Drexel University.

## Meredith Byer

Washington, D.C.

Byer is the director of planning for Dewberry's Washington, D.C., region. Dewberry is a multidisciplinary consulting firm with civil engineering, land planning, landscape architecture, and surveying. Her role is often project manager, supervising several teams of planners, landscape architects, engineers, and surveyors to provide clients with comprehensive services from initial concept and feasibility through entitlement and construction phases of a project. She has guided the development team, consisting of in-house engineers, architects, outside landscape architects, traffic engineers, utility consultants, and attorneys through the plan approval processes for local jurisdictions within and around Washington, D.C.

Her project experience ranges from traditional single-family residential to urban mixed use and town center design. One ongoing project that Byer started working on over 10 years ago is the development of the Innovation Corridor at the University of Maryland. She worked with several different

consultants and university liaisons in the master-planning efforts to transform the East Campus of the University of Maryland into a vibrant center for residential, retail, and institutional uses. This district is located along the U.S. 1 corridor, which has a sector plan to ensure that redevelopment along this corridor improves the appearance and functionality of this corridor. Byer led the development and construction of a hotel and conference center as well as a WeWork, which used an existing university building for its shell. Currently, she is working on the development of a restaurant "hall" that will have space for different chefs to set up restaurant stalls.

Byer has a BS in landscape architecture from Cornell University and is a registered landscape architect in Maryland.

## Bill Clarke

Ross, California

Clarke is licensed as both a civil engineer and as a landscape architect and has over 40 years' experience in planning, design, and construction projects. Now retired, he was a consultant for developers, other planning and design firms, and public agencies on issues ranging from new community plans to site planning and infrastructure.

In recent years, Clarke's work has centered on the planning and implementation of a variety of projects. Among these projects has been an 11,000-acre residential development near Livermore, California, for an 800-acre commercial/industrial plan in Tracy, California, and a 300-acre business park in Livermore. He was also part of a team preparing a resource management plan for the country of Palau. He also worked on the implementation of a town center for the new community of Mountain House, California.

For over 20 years, Clarke was with two of the largest landscape architecture firms in the country. As a principal at the SWA Group in Sausalito, California, he worked on projects including the Weyerhaeuser corporate campus outside Tacoma, Washington; the engineering planning for the Woodbridge new community in Irvine, California; and for Aramco compounds in Saudi Arabia.

As a principal at EDAW, Clarke led a team that won a design competition for a government complex in Doha, Qatar; prepared two specific plans for over 6,000 homes and 800,000 square feet of office industrial land in Tracy, California; and prepared construction documents for Washington Harbour in Washington, D.C.

Clarke has participated in ULI Advisory Services panels and participated in the ULI UrbanPlan educational outreach program for over 10 years.

## Geoff Koski

Atlanta, Georgia

Koski is Bleakly Advisory Group's president and leader of the eight-person firm. He has 15 years of experience researching, analyzing, and reporting on real estate and community development trends across the United States. Bleakly Advisory Group is a specialized real estate and economic development consulting firm that assists public and private sector clients to maximize the value and impact of their land and buildings.

He joined Bleakly Advisory Group in 2012, bringing with him extensive experience in assessing the market and financial potential of various real estate product types and mixed-use developments. He has helped identify opportunities for hundreds of urban mixed-use projects and made redevelopment recommendations for downtowns and corridors, ranging from the large cities to historic small towns. Before joining

Bleakly Advisory Group, Koski was director of consulting at Robert Charles Lesser & Company (RCLCO).

Recent ULI Advisory Services experience includes participation on a panel for Georgetown, South Carolina, helping identify long-term market and economic development opportunities for a 150-acre former steel mill on a highly visible waterfront site, and a panel for the Colorado Health Foundation and the Montbello Organizing Committee, assessing the feasibility of implementing a community-focused development plan in the Montbello neighborhood of Denver.

He is a member of ULI and an alumnus of ULI Atlanta's Center for Leadership, past president of the Atlanta chapter of the Congress for the New Urbanism, and a member of the Decatur, Georgia, Historic Preservation Commission. He has a graduate degree from Western Carolina University and spent many years teaching history, government, and economics at the secondary and collegiate levels.

## David Stebbins

Buffalo, New York

Stebbins is executive vice president of Buffalo Urban Development Corporation (BUDC), a nonprofit development entity which specializes in urban redevelopment. BUDC is currently redeveloping a 35-acre, 700,000-square-foot former industrial complex on Northland Avenue in Buffalo. This complex will be the future home of the western New York Workforce Training Center, Buffalo Manufacturing Works, and a small business center.

Previously, Stebbins helped create the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park, a 275-acre reclamation of the former Hanna Furnace Steel Mill and Union Ship Canal; and RiverBend, a 260-acre site of the former Republic Steel in South Buffalo along the Buffalo River and home to the High-Tech Manufacturing Innovation Center (Tesla/Panasonic). His

responsibilities also include coordination and assistance of redevelopment and infrastructure projects in downtown Buffalo in conjunction with the city and other downtown stakeholders. Before his tenure with BUDC, Stebbins worked for several public and not-for-profit organizations in the Buffalo area with responsibilities for waterfront planning, economic development, small business assistance and real estate development, including multitenant industrial buildings, downtown mixed-use, urban infrastructure, brownfield redevelopment, and business park projects.

Stebbins is also an adjunct instructor in the University at Buffalo's School of Architecture & Planning, teaching a graduate course in real estate development in the inaugural master of science degree in the real estate development program at the school. He is an active and full member of ULI, serving as assistant chair of ULI's Urban Revitalization Council, and chair of the ULI Western New York regional satellite of ULI New York. He has served on 10 ULI Advisory Services panels, chairing two.

Stebbins has 40 years of diversified experience in urban planning and development, with a BA in environmental design from the University at Buffalo and an MA in city and regional planning from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. He qualified as a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners in May 1986.

## David Leazenby

### Panel Adviser

Indianapolis, Indiana

Leazenby is a cofounder and vice president of development for Onyx+East, a residential developer and builder with operations in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida. He has executed roles as developer, owner, and consultant throughout his real estate career, primarily focused on redevelopment of urban properties for multifamily residential,

condominiums, and townhouses. He applies his 20 years of experience in site selection, design, entitlements, and marketing to create optimal value for land, neighborhoods, projects, and investors. Working closely with municipalities and neighborhoods on new plans, Leazenby finds creative solutions for including housing in mixed-use environments. His project experience includes the planning and development of over 12,000 residential units and 500,000 square feet of commercial space comprising \$1.5 billion of total investment.

He cofounded Milhaus in 2010, which has become one of the fastest-growing multifamily companies in the United States. At Milhaus, Leazenby led the predevelopment, entitlements, and marketing while developing strategies to expand the company's operations outside of Indianapolis. He now develops new business and projects for Onyx+East, a related company targeting the growing for-sale residential market in urban areas in Indianapolis and Florida. He leads the land acquisition, entitlements and product design for a portfolio that leads the Indianapolis market with over 280 attached, for-sale units in development and construction in eight different urban-infill projects. Onyx+East currently has about \$80 million invested in downtown Indianapolis and in Carmel, Indiana. The company is known for its premier site selection, its premium interiors, its ability to drive high sales prices per square foot, and its custom approach to urban design. In 2018, the company conducted unit sale lotteries on two of its most high-profile projects in Indianapolis.

Leazenby holds bachelor's degrees from Ball State University in urban planning and development and in environmental design.







Urban Land Institute  
2001 L Street, NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036-4948  
[uli.org](http://uli.org)