



Hancock County
Mt. Comfort Northern Tax Increment Finance
Business Retention and Expansion
Plan of Action
2021

By engaging the business community, we create opportunities that build on existing local efforts, expand partnerships, and develop sustainable strategies.

Cinda Kelley
Kelley and Associate
kelleyandassociate.com
cinda@kelleyandassociate.com



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Introduction

The Hancock Economic Development Council (HEDC) and the Hancock Redevelopment Commission (RDC) work hand-in-hand to attract and retain businesses throughout the county. Local leaders have invested in the infrastructure and put into play a number of strong economic development tools to attract new investment and jobs to the community. These efforts bode well for the county and have resulted in the success of the HEDC's Mission & Vision Focus to *"attract[ing] new jobs, retain[ing] existing jobs, assist[ing] businesses and industry with expansion plans, and create a healthy business climate in which both owners and employees can prosper."*

In addition to laying the groundwork, Hancock County leaders should be credited for remaining engaged and continually evolving alongside the growing business landscape. Several studies have guided the transformation within the last three years, providing a detailed path forward.

The Hancock Economic Development Council Strategic Plan was presented in June, 2020 by Thomas P. Miller and Associates. This plan cited, *'additional resources are needed to implement more comprehensive efforts around ... and building out a full business retention and expansion program'*.

Business Attraction

- Goal 1, Objective #3 speaks directly to the need of building key information not only on sites, taxes and business climate, but workforce availability, and
- Goal 2 also addresses the need to conduct a comprehensive labor analysis.

Business Retention and Expansion

- Stresses the importance of connecting business to talent and business services.

The Summary of this plan highlights labor information at the top in the Request for Information (RFI) Process, while incentives are listed near the bottom. Economic Development efforts have utilized local and state incentives as their 'go-to' tool to attract investments, jobs and growth in the communities they serve. While previously not recognized as an incentive, the area labor market is now recognized as one of the key incentives companies are looking for when determining locations for investment and expansion.

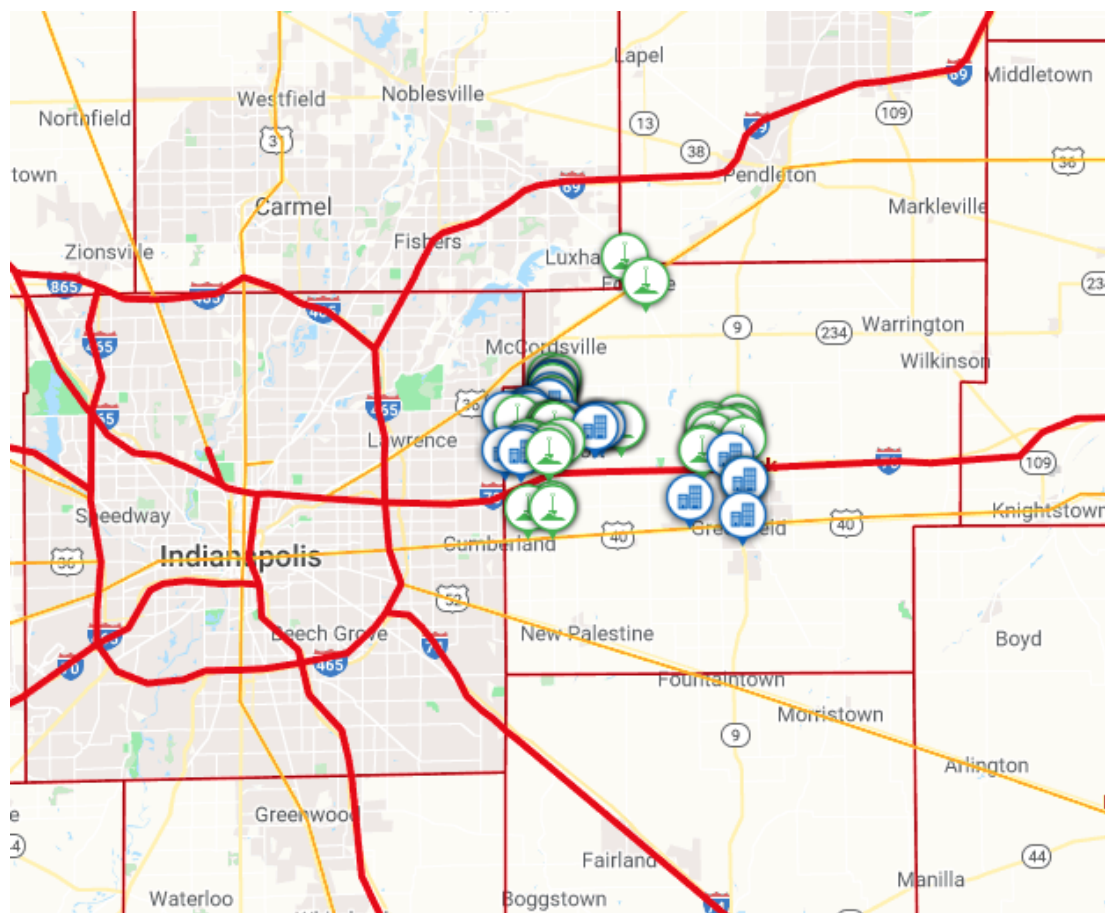
The 2019 Mt. Comfort Corridor Plan framework prepared by the Urban Land Institute says it best; *'Before getting into the details, several topics deserve attention at a macro level... a mix of use types, civic elements, and a good community design is absolutely critical if the corridor is going to compete for the talent that will make this area a success.'*

Efforts supporting these findings resulted in the engagement with Kelley & Associate (K&A) to determine existing labor market needs, develop actionable strategies addressing the needs, and recommend sustainable mechanisms for the funding of proposed solutions.

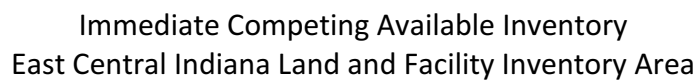
Hancock County, Indiana: Big-city excitement with small-town advantages

Hancock County, Indiana, the eastern door to Indianapolis, has become a fast-growing economic powerhouse for so many reasons. For starters, our population (now 75,000+) has been growing rapidly as people discover the great job opportunities and everything our vibrant communities have to offer...

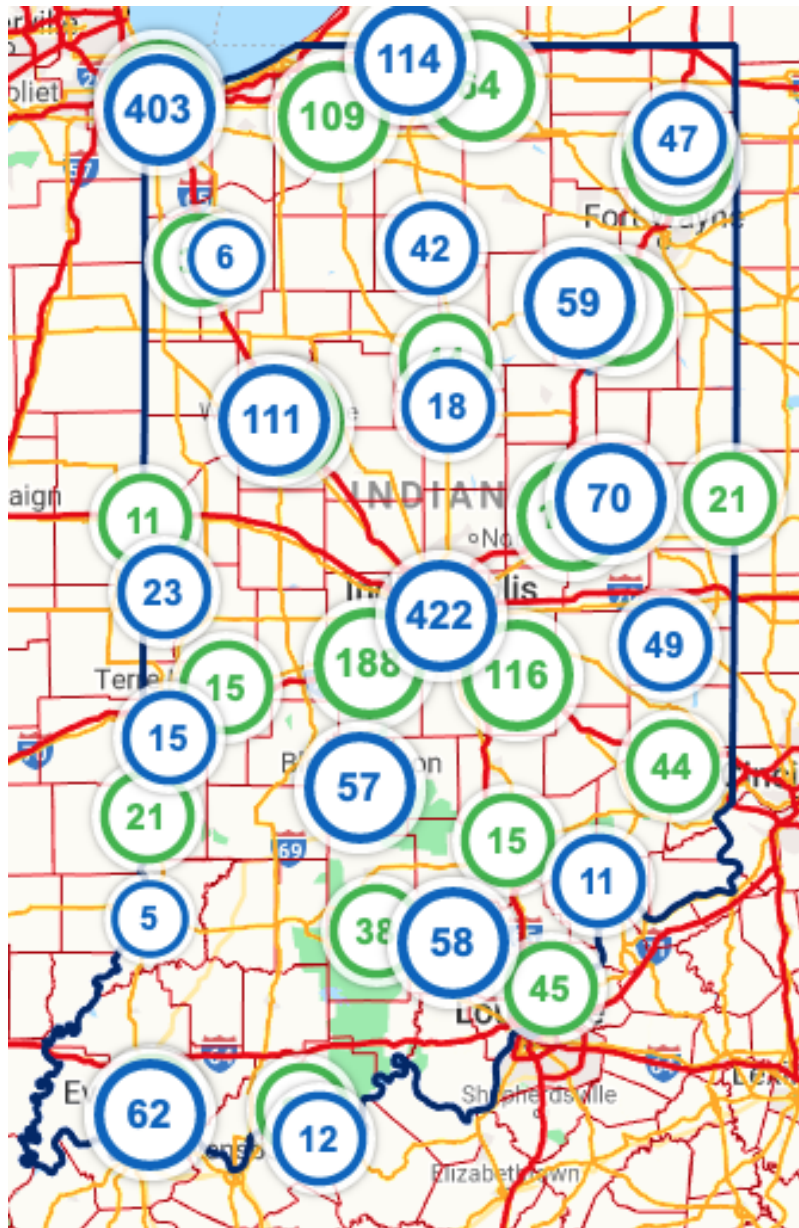
Hancock County Industry Attraction Creating Jobs for Hancock County



Available Land and Facility Inventory Hancock County, Indiana



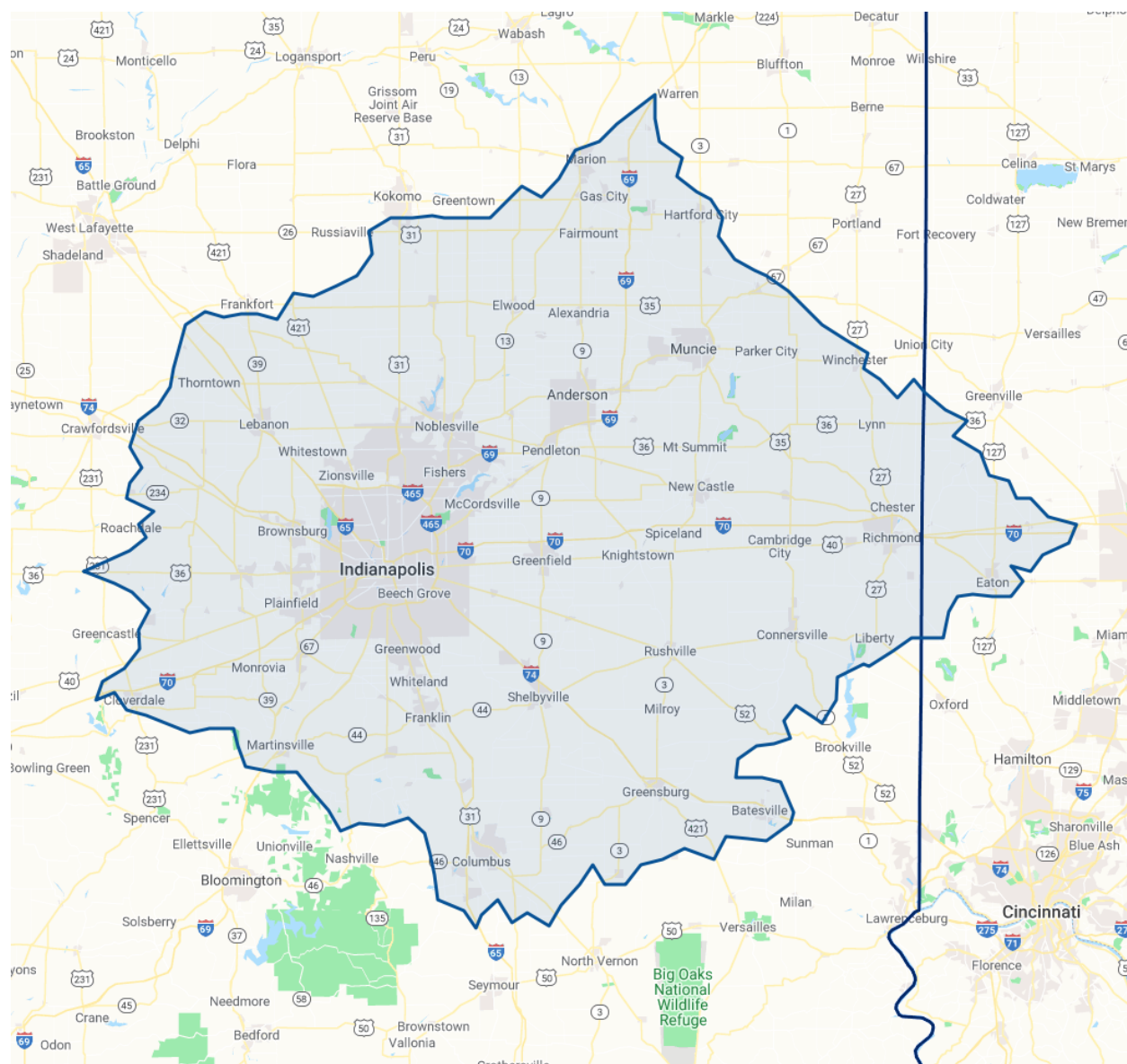
**Hancock County Industry Attraction
Creating Jobs for Hancock County**



Indiana Attraction
Land and Facility Inventory

Hancock County, Indiana: Big-city excitement with small-town advantages

... Growth-minded companies have been locating here to take advantage of a labor shed with 1.3 million eager workers living within a one-hour drive.



Talent Attraction Talent Access
One (1) Hour Drive time
Mt. Comfort, Hancock County Indiana

Scope of Work

The team at Kelley and Associate (K&A) brings more than 40 years of combined experience in community and economic development. Our team has worked in both rural and urban communities, in university communities and within certified tech parks. We directly participated in the Central Indiana Certified Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) as developed by Indy Chamber, as well as the 2016 Indiana Thriving Communities -Thriving State Commission. In 2016, our work expanded from county-centric to helping communities statewide identify and address common business concerns. K&A works closely with economic and community organizations, public officials, school corporations, and industry leaders providing sustainable solutions and funding opportunities. Our work varies depending on the unique needs and capacity of the local community; ranging from coaching to managing full scale implementation of Business Talent Retention and Expansion (BTRE) program(s).

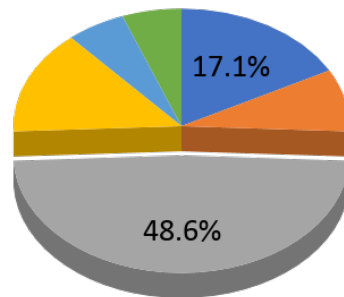
This project's scope of work made use of the Hancock Economic Development Council's Synchronist Suite licensed by Blane Canada LTD. Utilizing this system provided the ability to conduct Covid friendly on-site and on-line business surveys; moving through interview, compilation and analysis stages while maintaining industry standard practices.

This final product provides HEDC and the RDC with business insights, labor information and recommendations for obtainable solutions that will drive decision-making and resource allocations at levels appropriate for the retention and attraction of talent, industry and the sustainable growth of the community.

BRE Insight 1:

With nearly 70% of the Mt. Comfort North TIF companies engaged at some level with the Synchronist Business Retention and Expansion Survey, evidence of a labor market shortage became quickly apparent. While several companies attributed the worker shortage to recent attraction efforts by larger employers, a consistent and clear alignment of concerns around talent quality emerged as well. The charts below are the results of the Synchronist Suite survey reports.

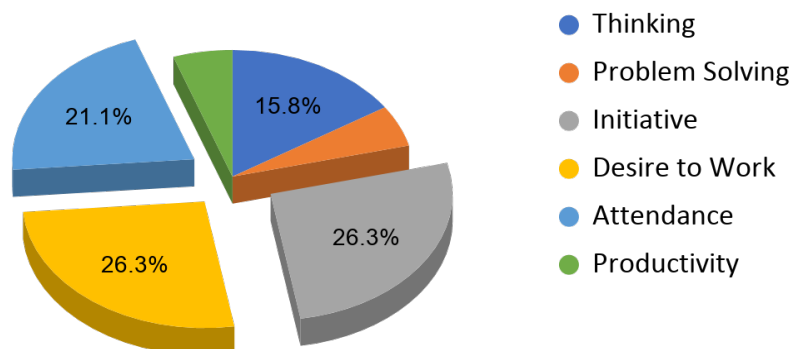
Labor Market Concerns



- Background Checks ● Substance Abuse ● Work Ethic
- Availability ● Cost ● Core Values

(Companies are primarily unable to hire candidates due to challenges within these areas.)

Work Ethic Defined



- Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Initiative
- Desire to Work
- Attendance
- Productivity

Addressing Top Common Labor Concerns Recommendation

1. Expanded Workforce Recovery Team (WRT) to include:
 - a. Trade Organizations,
 - b. Local Industry Sector Reps (leaders, owners, and HR),
 - c. Local Service Club Reps who might offer Youth Work Ethic Opportunities, and
 - d. Others as identified.
2. Expand existing Human Resource (HR) Roundtables to include
 - a. Staffing Agencies, and
 - b. Entities that 'need to hear' or 'provide support': school counselors / clubs, etc.
3. Initiate a Business Roundtable that engages business leaders with utility companies, health entities, schools, higher ed, and trade organizations (industry rep then serves on WRT to maintain communication).
 - a. Continue to identify local skill gaps,
 - b. Define pathways to employment/professions /opportunities for advancement,
 - c. Engage businesses to outline job advancement opportunities,
 - d. Understand and define 'Transferable Skill Sets', and
 - e. Track opening trends/needs/hiring/wages.

Through these strategies, your HR and Business Roundtables become the expanded team for driving change and maintaining the active business community for the Workforce Recovery Team. In addition to immediate local market concerns, these groups should also consider the broader common community concerns addressed later.

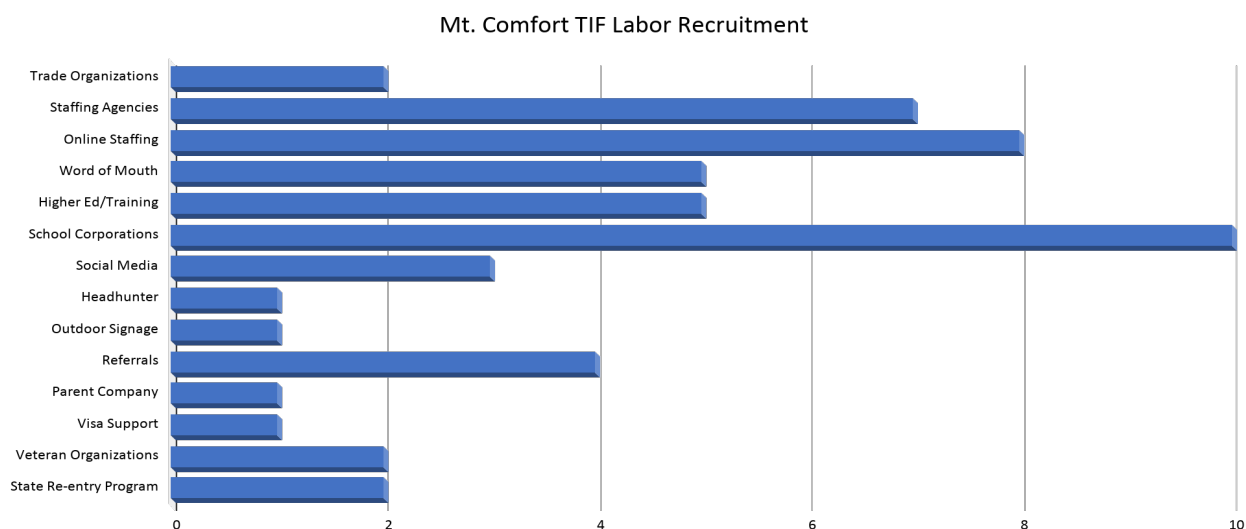
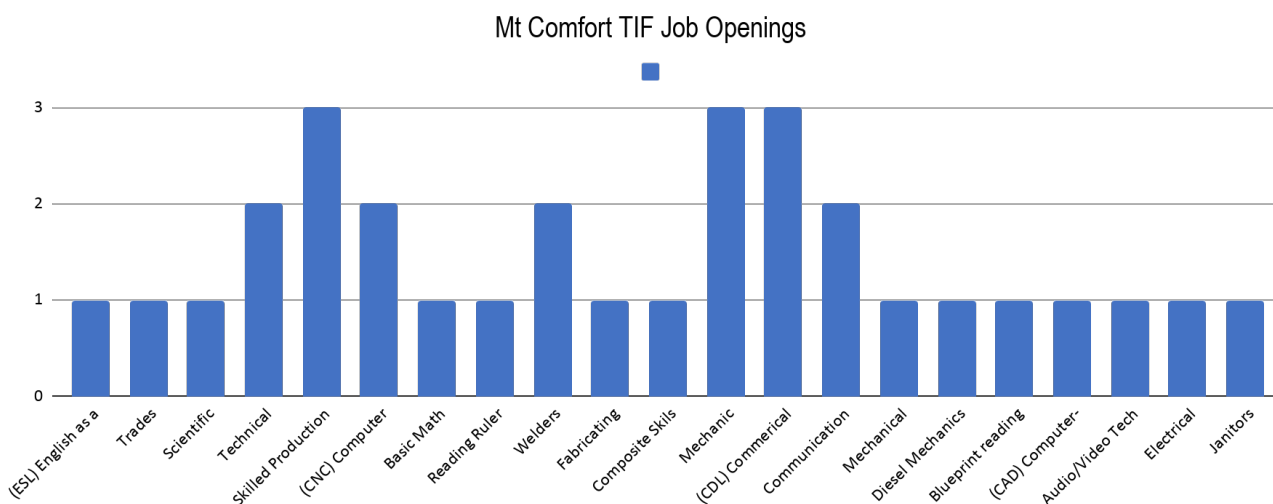
Budgeting Range

1. No additional funding required
2. No additional staffing or funding required or small additional funding based on current location and any costs associated with space and refreshments
3. See estimate below for 6 Roundtables annually

Location	\$0-\$1,000/yr.	Rental
Snack/Drink	\$300-\$1,000/yr.	Coffee/Water/Snacks
Other		
Staffing Prep /Attendance /Follow-Up	\$2500-3500/yr.	(5 hr. x 6 events) x staff/contractual rate
Total	\$3,000-5,500	

BRE Insight 2:

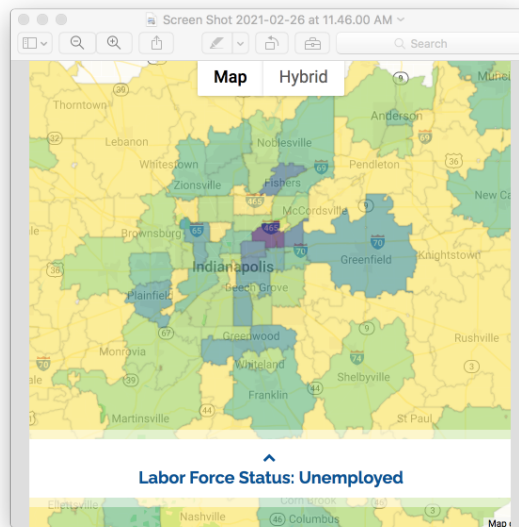
The findings of Synchronist Suite surveys strongly suggest that engagement with trade organizations and training opportunities are needed to address current job openings. Additionally, a strong % of companies indicated they would 'train and retain' individuals who "want to work" (i.e.: attitude and ethic).



These insights provide the community an expanded opportunity to strategize with area school corporations, higher education, training centers and trade organizations through the WRT (#1), HR Roundtable (#2), and Business Roundtable (#3).

Addressing Top Common Job Openings Recommendation

1. "Growing Our Own" Talent Initiative
 - a. Engage the WRT, Business and HR Roundtables, and school corporations to work more closely with other county-wide organizations to initiate a growth effort from within to develop, retain and introduce local talent into the workforce.
2. Talent Recruitment: Regional/Midwest/National Initiatives
 - a. Initiate a Talent Recruitment campaign that focuses on local job openings and current recruitment options (to be assigned).
 - i. Relocation Factors: Quality of Place, Cost of Living, School Ratings, etc.
3. Utilizing the WRT, HR and Business Roundtable outline optimum opportunities for recruitment, training and challenges of the unemployed and underemployed.



Budgeting Range

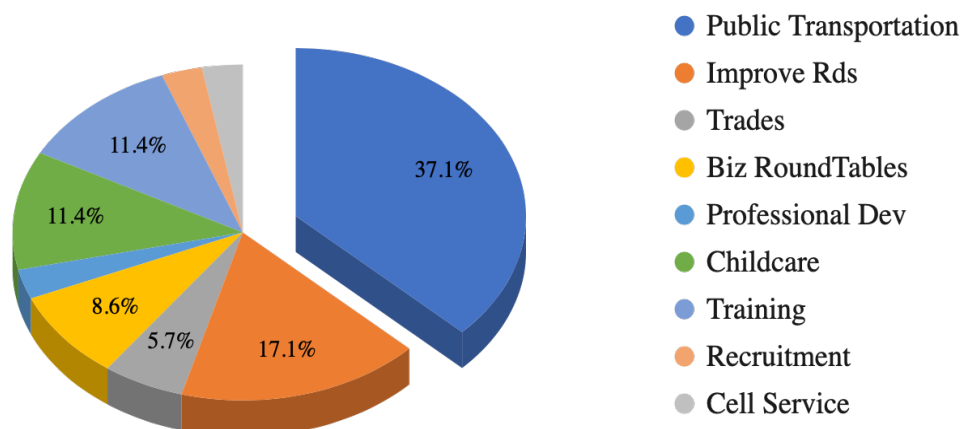
1. No additional funding required outside of staff time engaged in initiative.
2. See budgeting below:

Web Page on existing site		Staff/Consultant
Social Media		Staff/Consultant
Geo-Fencing		Staff/Consultant
Other		
Total	\$35,000-75,000	

BRE Insight 3:

Mt. Comfort TIF companies further expressed concerns around some local utility and community services. Public transportation, road maintenance, employee readiness training (largely work ethic related).

Also noteworthy, the previously conducted Business Roundtables were appreciated by business owners/leaders and now missed. This applied specifically to the Manufacturing and Distribution sectors not usually involved in local Chamber of Commerce activities.



Business Insider, Jan 27, 2018 [Transportation presents a difficult and underreported challenge to low-income workers trying to find jobs and manage daily life in the US without a car.](#)

The problem of getting to work is prevalent in the lower rungs of America's highly unequal income scale, according to Federal Reserve officials and community leaders from different parts of the country.

Some of the solutions available to workers like Keyes include shuttles provided by the employers, arrangements for more frequent bus traffic, and, of course, access to more affordable childcare that's close to home. But these are too piecemeal to make a dent in America's poverty crisis.

Addressing Common Community Concerns Recommendation

1. Expand awareness on existing road improvement timelines
2. Engage Local and Regional Partners to meet immediate needs and plan for mid- and long-term solutions:
 - a. Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority
 - i. [Car and Van Pools](#)
 - ii. [Commuter Connect](#)
 - iii. [Workforce Connector](#)
 - b. Central Indiana and/or Hancock Community Foundation
 - i. [Supporting visionary ideas to improve and support our community and residents](#)
 - c. Metropolitan Planning Organization
 - i. [Central Indiana Transit Plan](#)
 - d. [Conexus Logistics Council](#)
 - i. [Ready to Work](#)

Budgeting Range

1. No additional funding concerns here (media/ newsletters/ etc.)
2. This would include up to .50 Staff or possibly a well-connected consultant coordination hr/fee.

Experienced and connected staff	Part-time staff (estimated 20-25/hr weekly)	\$35k-50k/yr.
Consultant	Hourly	\$10,000-15,000/ yr. estimated
Total	\$10,000-50,000	

Sustainability and Resource Allocation Recommendation

1. Create a BRE Public Transportation Entity to support a long-term planning and funding solution.
 - a. Option 1: Expand an existing nonprofit organization with funding from public/private sectors, along with potential grants.
 - b. Option 2: Establish an Economic Improvement District (EID,
 - ii. Establish funding via landowners and beneficiaries of a proposed district, and
 - iii. Works in conjunction with RDC and HEDC to manage Strategic Plan, Budgeting and Annual Reporting as required by Indiana Code.
 1. Any or all requirements can be handled by staff or contract agreement.
 2. Funding flows via tax bills to the county.
 - c. Option 3: Create a hybrid public/private nonprofit organization that incorporates EID funding to focus on common business concerns:
 - iv. Drive decisions and strategies that address insights,
 - v. Allocate resources,
 - vi. Identify opportunities through public/private partnerships, along with outside grants as needed, and
 - vii. Facilitate annual management, implementation and reporting

Budgeting Range

Option 1	PT Staffing /yr.	TBD	PT Person (likely .50)
Option 2	Full Time Staff Person or Contractual agreement	FTE would be determined by the hiring organization. Contractual estimated at \$40,000	FT Person/Benefits (would then assume responsibilities outlined in all Recommendations)
Option 3	4-month Contractual Agreement	120 Day start/finish per Indiana Economic Improvement District Code. Estimated \$40,000	Contractual
Total		\$40,0000-65,000	

Final Thoughts

Thank you for the opportunity to work with local leadership on this project. While there are common synergies between central Indiana communities, every community is autonomous and provides unique opportunities for those who live, work or play there. Please allow me to end this document of findings and recommendations where we began: Hancock County has seen industrial growth along the Mt. Comfort Corridor and the opportunity for continued growth holds strong potential. As local leaders, you are visionaries planning for future generations; establishing the legacy you'll leave. Thank you for taking on this great responsibility.

Companies located in the Mt. Comfort North TIF recognize the strength and potential of doing business here. Several have shared their plans for expansions, as well as their immediate need for recruiting talent. Key findings included three specific areas that we have addressed: access to talent, 'soft skills' and training needs, and transportation as a barrier to employment. One company considered shuttling new employees as a solution. They quickly discovered a single shuttle is too expensive for one company. We would like to note we addressed each common concern as a county-wide initiative. Although emphasizing specific needs within the Mt. Comfort North TIF, we recognize the demand is not unique to this TIF. Therefore, these recommendations should be considered a call to action for greater Hancock County.

We applaud HEDC for their current efforts with the Workforce Recovery Team and HR Roundtable as these provide the foundation for future growth and success. Key to our recommendations is inclusion of county-wide business sector representation seeking actionable goals and responsible progress. While requiring little additional revenue, these efforts demand time and energy that could stress existing staff. For best practice, these initiatives should be acted upon by a combined partnership of entities assuming all contribute time, talent and financial resources.

We encourage strong consideration of a hybrid organization as it brings together the larger community of local leaders, landowners and companies within the district. Successful implementation of such a model will require a team familiar with for-profit and not-for-profit entities, and Economic Improvement Districts (EID).

We are honored by the opportunity to work on this project. We stand ready to assist should you decide to approve implementation of the proposal. At leadership's discretion, we are prepared to offer simple advice, funding sustainability coaching, and/or complete execution of the hybrid model formation process.

Sincerely,

Cinda

Cinda Kelley, President
Kelley and Associate